THE PARTICIPATORY COMPLEX

Participation as Ideology in the Neoliberal Era

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Participation has a particular ideological function in the context of digital networks. Approaching participation as a complex of values rather that a particular form of decision making or organizational structure, this dissertation analyzes a range of contemporary practices that embrace participation as an ideal. Such practices include social movements, open conferencing events in the knowledge and IT industries, and social practice art. Through these sites I seek to clarify the way that participation operates in terms of what Slavoj Žižek refers to as a mode of "enjoyment." While in all cases participation is presented as a path towards progress or emancipation, this widespread assumption has led to the restructuring of social relations in a fashion that is not incompatible with capitalist exploitation. The dissertation explores the paradox that exploitation presents to social actors who place their hopes in participation as a primary principle in their vision of social transformation. I argue that our attachment to participatory values is an impasse to radical political organization and our capacity to build democratic power. In contrast to the conflation of participation with democracy in the radical imagination, I argue that participation today operates as a complex of values that has become uncoupled from direct democratic practices. The "participatory complex," as I define it, includes: a valuation of activity over passivity; the privileging of procedure or structure over ends; a desire for immediacy and anti-representational attitudes; the privileging of face-to-face encounters or bodily co-presence; an orientation towards inclusiveness and pluralism; a will to consensus; and discourses of empowerment through personalization.

RÉSUMÉ

La participation détient une fonction idéologique dans le contexte des réseaux sociaux numériques. Cette thèse étudie la participation comme un complexe de valeurs et non comme une façon de prendre des décisions ou comme une structure organisationnelle. Ainsi, je m'emploie à analyser une série de pratiques contemporaines qui prônent une vision idéalisée de la participation. Parmi les pratiques qui idéalisent la participation on peut compter : les mouvements sociaux, les conférences ouvertes au public dans les industries du savoir et des nouvelles technologies (TIC) ainsi que l'art engagé. L'étude des diverses conceptions que l'on se fait de la participation au sein de ces domaines permet d'observer comment la participation opère selon les modalités de ce que Slavoj Žižek appelle la « jouissance ». Si dans tous ces cas de figure la participation représente le progrès et l'émancipation, une telle conception de la participation contribue néanmoins à une restructuration des relations sociales qui n'est pas sans rappeler la logique d'exploitation du capitalisme. Cette thèse examine le paradoxe que pose l'exploitation pour les acteurs sociaux qui avaient misé sur la participation en tant que principe fondateur du changement social qu'ils envisageaient. Je soutiens que notre attachement aux valeurs participatives représente une impasse pour la constitution de mouvements politiques radicaux et entrave notre capacité de bâtir un pouvoir démocratique. A l'opposé de l'imaginaire radical qui présuppose un amalgame entre participation et démocratie, j'affirme qu'aujourd'hui la participation opère selon un complexe de valeurs qui sont détachées des pratiques démocratiques directes. Ce que j'ai nommé « complexe de participation » comprend : une valorisation de l'activité au détriment de la passivité ; un intérêt marqué pour les procédures ou les structures plutôt que pour les fins ; un désir d'immédiateté et l'adoption d'une posture non-représentationnelle ; une valorisation du face-à-face et de la co-présence physique ; un

mouvement vers l'inclusion et le pluralisme ; une volonté d'établir des consensus ;

l'établissement de discours d'émancipation fondés sur le principe de la personalisation.

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PREFACE AND CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

This thesis represents original scholarship. All chapters were written by the author and all research was carried out by the author. The concept of the "participatory complex" is the author's own and represents an original contribution to knowledge. The concept of participation has largely been approached in scholarship as a problem of social practice. This thesis treats it rather as a problem of ideology. The resulting arguments represent a unique and valuable contribution to discussions around democracy, politics, and social life in the context of digital networking technologies and the values and practices they promote.

INTRODUCTION: THE PARTICIPATORY COMPLEX

Participer, c'est defender toute la culture.
- Les Journées de la culture advertisement, Montreal 2012

The concept of participation has recently been doing a great amount of work in our culture. The proliferation of the term can be found in widely disparate spaces ranging from official government communications, advertising, management literature, the entertainment industries, artist projects and events, academic disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, activist, non-governmental and civil society organizations, as well as the Web 2.0 culture that defines much of our online experience from the latter half of the 2000s. From highly specialized intellectual milieus to the quotidian memes of popular culture, from the powerful institutions of capitalism and state to the spaces of resistance that would counter them, participation is continuously proffered and demanded. The extensiveness of its use indicates that participation is a very alluring concept, one that has the power to move people and draw them into a wide variety of activities. But if this is the case, in what consists the promise of participation?

The term is attached to such a disparate set of contexts and practices that it would seem to hold very little meaning apart from the particular activities it purports to describe. Yet, no matter where it appears, participation consistently carries with it a positive connotation. Participation is something we want, need, or feel compelled to enact. In many cases, the positive connotation attached to participation implies that it is a good in itself, regardless of the nature of the practice we are encouraged to take part in. In this sense, it operates as a highly ideological term that covers over political antagonism or social division. What is clear is that participation is a contradictory concept. On the one hand, participation promises collective emancipation and

individual self-empowerment; on the other, it incorporates energy, creativity and labour into the reproduction of existing institutions and power structures.

Along with transparency, formal equality, and accountability, participation is a value that is historically associated with democracy. It is especially prominent in theories of direct democracy, whose main impetus is to increase participation in democratic politics to a higher degree than is typically found in existing systems of representative democracy. The importance of participation to direct democracy is so strong that the term often stands in for the very concept of democracy. According to this line of thought, direct participation is the only way that 'rule by the people' can be said to actually take place and it is therefore posited as a solution to many of the problems identified with representative or liberal democracy. Through active self-education, people are expected to be better able to participate in politics and become responsible for decisions, and thereby to diminish the need for rulers or representatives who may wield power over them in a way that is contrary to their interests.[1] Some advocates of participatory democracy argue that participation should not be relegated to the political realm alone, but should extend to all areas of society including the workplace, family life, educational institutions, cultural production, and so on. The idea of participatory democracy is therefore invested with the radically transformative potential to remake society from the ground up. Its advocates might very well be encouraged by the participatory culture that is today developing in a number of domains. Yet, at the same time, the radical intentions behind participatory democracy do not appear to be a significant constraint on the adoption of participation as a concept by institutions that are far from democratic.

The typical response to the contradiction between the democratic promise of participation and its use by nondemocratic institutions is to maintain participation as an ideal by distinguishing

genuine participation from the mere appearance of involvement.[2] A classic example is Sherry Arnstein's article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," in which the author provides a typology for categorizing citizen involvement in decision making.[3] The eight levels of the ladder range from manipulative and tokenistic involvement at the bottom, to limited influence in the mid-range, to full citizen control at the top level. While this typology allows for a pragmatic critique to be leveled at controlling and manipulative practices that deign to be otherwise, it nevertheless leaves the top layer unexplored as an ideal. Arnstein's approach to participation leaves us constantly comparing decision-making practices to the ladder to see whether or not they are really *it*. We are left with the task of forever "fine tuning" our practices without recognizing the inherent limits of participation itself. What interests me in this thesis is not so much the concrete practices of participatory decision making, which vary widely and differ in effectiveness from context to context, but on the moments when participation is accepted as an ideology and the negative consequences of this for radical organizing. What this thesis plans to explore is the broader context of a participatory complex that encompasses the domains of work, culture and politics. In a context in which participation is restructuring social relations in a variety of spaces that at the same time are not incompatible with the core elements of capitalist exploitation, the status of participation as a radical concept must be interrogated.

Regardless of whether or not participation involves democratic control, the concept implies a particular structure of enjoyment that maintains similarities across disparate practices. While 'participation' in the electoral system or reality entertainment implies very different practices and levels of control over a process than does, say, participation in an Occupy Wall Street general assembly, all three practices mobilize similar values in the production of desire. Striving to make activities more participatory may not acknowledge the type of subjectivity that is constructed

when participation operates as ideology. Rather than attempt to delineate a specific range of practices that constitute participation, to the exclusion of others that could be deemed false or inauthentic, I will consider participation as a concept that implies a certain set of values that are manifested differently in a variety of at times contradictory practices.[4] What is of central importance is the *desire for participation*, and how this desire is articulated in actual practices. Rather than relate to participation as a future, unrealized ideal, I will focus on how it functions in its very operative assumptions as a way to organize social relations. Rather than consider participation as an innocent or transparent category, this thesis will seek to understand participation as an ideological complex. Taken in this way, the ubiquity of participation ceases to be an obstacle to meaning. I will therefore confront the 'empty' nature of participation as primary evidence of its ideological status, and hence, as a paradoxical guarantor of meaning.

Over the past ten years there has been an explosion of writing about participation. In certain fields, like development studies and management theory, the interest in participation begins earlier, with a significant wave of writing in the 1990s on participatory methods.[5] In the 2000s, this focus on participation has intensified with titles published in multiple fields including contemporary art and architecture, music, religious studies, psychology, science and technology studies, media and communications, and the study of social movements.[6] Since the 1960s, there have also been a number of thinkers in political theory that either defend or dismiss the feasibility of participatory organizations.[7] These authors tend to focus on the problems of representative democracy and posit participation as a solution. Alternately, they describe the pragmatic limits faced by participatory organizations, which includes: the inevitability of the charismatic influence of a few individuals, a lack of accountability in decision making, mediocrity deriving from consensus, the inability to manage large-scale decision making

processes, the large amount of time/commitment required, the difficulty of sustaining interest over time, and differences in skills amongst participants leading to particular demographics being overrepresented in more active roles, etc.[8] The constraints inherent in the concept of participation that will be addressed in this thesis are not of this pragmatic and structural nature. Critiques of this kind are sometimes oriented towards dismissing any attempt at transforming current conditions by characterizing radical experiments as impractical or impossible. Following Alain Badiou, my position is that 'possibility' is something that must be created, and is not something that is defined by the existing state of the situation. We are compelled by fidelity to an event towards political transformation, not by the possibilities defined by current conditions.[9] Building accountable organizations and institutions that enable some degree of broad, meaningful, effective involvement in governance is one fundamental aspect of social and political transformation. Close attention to the limits of participatory procedures and methods of overcoming them are necessary, but not in order to dismiss these experiments or weaken the will towards change. The limits to participation that I will address are of a historical and ideological nature. My interest is not in how society might or could operate in the future, but about how participation is being articulated in the present in ways that are compatible with or serve as subjective support for the economic and social processes of neoliberal capitalism.

Participation as a set of procedures for organizing society could certainly be made possible, while participation as an object of fantasy, like all ideologies, covers over the impossibility of society as a harmonious social whole. The possibility of participation as a social procedure does not correspond seamlessly with participation as ideology. What is the effect of characterizing social transformation primarily as one of increasing participation? This is an important question to ask, in particular, in the current context of economic neoliberalization and austerity. What

kinds of subjects are excluded in the fantasies of participation? This question and the former are particularly important for contemporary anticapitalist actors who have placed their faith in participation as the new central idea of political struggle. While I endorse the need for a radical anticapitalist politics, I question why participation has in and of itself come to stand in as an organizational and ideological principle.

While participation rose to prominence in the 1960s as a part of New Left struggles, its more recent popularity is linked to the integration of everyday life with digital network technologies. This thesis will predominantly focus on sites of participation that have taken place in the past fifteen years, a period that corresponds with the widespread adoption of digital networking technologies and the rise of the social web. The rise of online participatory culture has been celebrated as containing the potential to strengthen democracy. The widened ability of people to contribute to culture through the platforms of blogs, social networking sites, video and image sharing sites is seen as an empowering development.[10] The ability to share files widely and quickly through peer-to-peer networks, the decentralized structure of network communication, and the ability to collaborate collectively over these networks to produce content or software, are all highlighted as dimensions of the web that exhibit democratic potential. This structure of the net has created opportunities for particularly politicized groups such as the free/open source software movement, Anonymous and WikiLeaks to confront state and corporate power. However, these groups should not be taken to exemplify the qualities of online social relations in general in the place of much larger groups of more conventional users.

In spite of emancipatory hopes, the spread of participatory culture has not been unambiguously liberating. Scholars have pointed to new forms of 'participatory' exploitation, sophisticated forms of self-exploitation that contribute to the devaluation of labour and increased

inequality. For example, Mark Andrejevic has described how new 'interactive' technologies result in unprecedented degrees of data surveillance over consumer habits, exploiting the labour of attention to a greater degree than ever before.[11] Others have revealed the extreme inequities of online exposure, demonstrating how the ability to express oneself does not translate into being heard or having any effect.[12] While the initial freedom of the Internet in its early stages is debatable, it is undeniable that it has since been increasingly closed down and monopolized in many ways. This has resulted in a participation that is circumscribed largely within the boundaries set by platform providers and major players, limits that may appear invisible or unquestionable to users.[13] Jodi Dean has reflected on the effects of online publicity for political subjectivity and argues that it can result in interpassivity, the sense of being active when one is in fact staving off effective action.[14] These arguments raise the question as to whether online participation in the current context is more integrative than resistant to new forms of domination and exploitation. The same technology that allows us to 'take part' in social life more easily, that helps us overcome distance and mediation, that forms the infrastructure of participatory communication, is also what opens us up to unprecedented levels of scrutiny, surveillance, exploitation and control.

Digital network technologies form the general setting of participation as ideology today, yet I do not plan to reduce participation to the Internet. My primary interest is to explore how online technologies mediate and transform social relationships conducted in actual space. While the Internet offers endless opportunities to 'participate' in politics, the economy and cultural production, I'm less interested in the specific interfaces and devices that directly mediate these online interactions than in the way that the idea of participation experienced online extends into offline spaces and relationships. None of the sites that I will explore in this thesis take place

primarily online but rather involve people in physically proximate spaces that are nonetheless supplemented by and integrated with digital network technologies.

Digital network technologies are not the first example of participatory structures oriented towards capitalist reproduction. Participation has a history as a corporate management technique that precedes its intensification by digital technologies, and this history will inform my discussion of exploitative dimensions of participation as an ideal. In the context of the industrial workplace, where workers have been alienated from the product of their labour and from the integrity of the production process, gaining the willing compliance of workers has long been a problem faced by management. In order to lessen the degree of employee sabotage, absenteeism, slow-downs and strikes, workers and their unions have been placated by not only material rewards, but with psychological encouragement and participatory working methods. There are particular segments of the corporate workplace that have been substantially transformed due to the introduction of participatory structures. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe how the level of management itself has since the 60s been reorganized in a way that reduces hierarchy within companies to a minimum.[15] Operations have been markedly decentralized as more and more functions once relegated to an internal division of a corporation are more cheaply contracted out. Many white-collar workers find themselves working in small temporary teams or self-employed rather than in long-term positions for a single company. Yet, the greater autonomy and flexibility gained in this shift has also led to the anxieties of insecurity and isolation as well as to competition resulting from a breakdown in collective working conditions and company loyalty. Similar trends can be seen at the level of the factory floor, with the new methods of production that allow for more worker initiative within the bounds of the work team along with a reduction in job security.[16]

There is something intensely paradoxical about the integration of a concept that suggests the spontaneous, unpredictable element of democracy, with the domination of capitalist reason or technological rationality. Participatory methods that include an emphasis on time-consuming dialogical encounter, consensus and inclusion, are often perceived to run counter to the need for efficiency. Yet even so, it appears that the market enacts its own discipline and the greater motivation and compliance on the part of workers that come along with participation makes any initial inefficiency worthwhile in the long run. While participation is typically combined with socialism in the radical activist imagination, recent trends indicate that it may be possible for a participatory capitalism to emerge. If participation is so easily incorporated into institutional and corporate organizational structures, does its value diminish as a critical concept for transforming contemporary conditions? I will address this question by unpacking the values indicated by participation as an ideological concept.

In chapter one I outline the approach to ideology that will form the basis of my investigation into participation. I situate Slavoj Žižek's concept of enjoyment in relation to other critical theorists who have sought to introduce psychoanalytic concepts into their approach to ideology. First, Louis Althusser's idea that ideology constitutes an "imaginary lived relation" to one's material conditions and second, Herbert Marcuse's concept of repressive desublimation. Both thinkers provide helpful starting points, but Žižek's concept of enjoyment is more suitable for understanding contemporary ideology under neoliberalism and presents a more convincing theorization of the subject of ideology. Enjoyment helps us to make sense of a context in which many traditional disciplinary institutions have been transformed by late-capitalism into dispersed mechanisms of control and of a permissive society where a concept like "repression" no longer resonates.

In chapter one I also present a discussion of David Harvey and Wendy Brown's differing approaches to neoliberalism (which provides the appropriate context for the rise of participation as ideology). Harvey offers an empirically rich account of neoliberalism's rise as a response to a crisis of capitalism and as a project of class restoration. Harvey's approach is historically grounded and politically astute but does not develop a theory of the neoliberal subject that could allow us to understand why neoliberal doxa was accepted so readily. Brown's approach enables us to see ideology as more deeply imbricated with everyday life and experience. Brown conceives of neoliberalism as a governing rationality that configures subjects as human capital. Her account of neoliberal rationality resonates strongly with a wide rang of contemporary attitudes and practices wherein the social world is viewed through the logic and metrics of capital appreciation. At the same time, the limits of her Foucauldian approach result in her leaving no room for the subjective agency required to enact significant social transformation. I contend that a focus on the contradictions and irrationalities of neoliberalism and its symptoms is a more productive approach for thinking through the modes of enjoyment that ensnare us in ideology.

It is in the context of neoliberalism that I situate participation as ideology and argue that participation today is more a symptom than a site of resistance to neoliberalism. Rather than simply a conscious rationality or explicit set of dogmas I consider participation to be a complex of often contradictory values. In the remainder of chapter one I describe seven values of the participatory complex that tend to be implicit in principles and practices of participation. Drawing on a range of critical theory and contemporary examples of participatory practices I illustrate these values and point to some of the internal limits and contradictions of participation that they make apparent.

Sites of Analysis

In order to adequately reflect the extensiveness of participation as ideology in contemporary culture I will anchor my analysis on a number of sites that can be located across multiple domains, comprising politics, the workplace, and culture. These sites exemplify the transformation of social relations in light of participation as ideology. Drawing on the elements of the participatory complex that will be described in chapter one, I will seek to articulate the particular fantasies of participation that frame each of these sites, along with their symptoms, in order to clarify the limits of participation as a discourse of radical transformation. All seven values will not be discussed in each case, but rather the most pertinent of these values will be developed in relation to the chosen site. Any site of participation involves its own combination of the values of the participatory complex, which configure an ideological fantasy supported by particular practices. I look for ideology not simply in the expressed principles of these participatory projects but in the gaps and contradictions between the stated values in manifestos, rules, and official proclamations, and the breakdowns and impasses confronted in practice. I interpret these gaps, impasses and breakdowns as symptoms of ideology and as such they indicate a particular organization of enjoyment. I try to specify what attaches people to a particular ideological fantasy formation.

I avoid sites that use participatory rhetoric in a purely misleading or manipulative way and instead focus on those that take participation seriously as an ideal. The reason for this is to avoid sliding back into the predominant way of approaching participatory practices as either genuine or false instantiations. I have included sites that exemplify a spectrum of consciousness in relation to social transformation, from hegemonic understandings of participation to more radical articulations. All of the sites nevertheless exhibit a belief that participation contains some kind of

emancipatory or progressive dimension. To really put participation to the test I've chosen what could be considered the best rather than the worst examples of participation in practice. They are sites that those on the radical, or at least progressive, left tend to take seriously as genuine attempts at radical social transformation in spite of the various critiques that may be otherwise directed at them.

In chapter two I will analyze three sites of social movement organization: the adoption of the Port Huron statement by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the early 60s, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) general assemblies of 2011, and the role played by the Coalition Large de l'Association Syndicale pour une Solidarité Étudiante (CLASSE) during the 2012 Quebec student strike. These three sites involved participatory decision-making structures and were guided to varying degrees by participation as an ideological principle.

The emergence of SDS exemplifies the "origin" of participation as a central idea of political transformation in the North American postwar imaginary.[17] It will therefore serve as a useful starting point and comparison of how participation transformed over time and came to function ideologically. I argue that participation in SDS began as a core democratic principle but gradually transformed into an attitude or pose towards institutions that came to undermine democratic practice. Working with Žižek's discussion of the vanishing mediator, I argue that direct democracy in SDS came to function as a vanishing mediator, spurring personal and cultural transformations while shedding the felt need for and belief in direct democratic practice. As a result, up to the present participation as a complex of values is widely accepted while democratic decision-making is a marginal and rare experience for most people. This context raises questions as to the radical potential of participation in contemporary social movements such as OWS that represent a resurgence of interest in participatory democracy.

Both OWS and CLASSE speak to the contemporary configuration of participation in activist culture. A comparative analysis of these two sites will allow for finer distinctions to be made in terms of how participation as ideology is mobilized and manifested in organizational structures. In the case of OWS I explore competing interpretations of its significance, those that focus on the general assembly (GA) as a space of dialogue, participation and a revitalized democracy, and those that emphasize the tactic of occupation and the movement as a reintroduction of antagonism into the political field. The space of the GA ultimately incapacitated the movement, not because direct democratic procedures were impractical, but because participants valued participation in a way that undermined their willingness to exercise democratic power.

I present the 2012 Quebec student strike as a counter example of a recent social movement that succeeded in organizing through direct democratic methods, and yet managed to build a strong democratic culture capable of bringing the neoliberal state to a temporary heal. Of particular interest in my analysis of CLASSE is the influence of revolutionary syndicalism on student organization. In contrast to participatory democracy, syndicalism incorporates a different complex of values, including principles of solidarity, militancy and self-management that alter how direct democratic practice is understood and realized. I argue that the distinct radical history that informed the student strike helped to temper absolutist approaches to participation and ultimately produced a movement where democratic practice sustained belief in the transformative potential of collective struggle rather than contribute to movement paralysis.

Such a comparison demands clarity as to the stakes and standards of success according to which political organization is being assessed. Ultimately, in a context of widespread cynicism the most significant question is whether or not a movement contributes to sustaining belief in radical political alternatives. Placing importance on belief does not mean a choice of idealism

over pragmatism. In fact, "concrete" victories can inspire belief to a greater degree than utopian proclamations that are incapable of impacting existing realities. In recent decades, the successes of the left and anticapitalist movements have too often been symbolic in nature. Movements like the antiglobalization movement raised awareness about global political and financial institutions, destructive trade deals, and structural adjustment programs, and introduced questions as to the justice and viability of capitalism into the mainstream media discussion. Yet this movement did not achieve material gains for people affected by the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization nor build sustainable organizations aimed at long-term struggle. What guides my critique of SDS and OWS, and what makes CLASSE significant and distinctive, is the ability to sustain a mass movement over time and retain organizational capacity after an intense period of struggle like a strike or occupation. Rather than oppose idealism to pragmatism, my position is that belief is a fundamental factor in organization and that pragmatic capacities and concrete victories are not simply important in themselves (as a reformist view may argue) but important for the way they sustain belief in the value of collective struggle and how they justify the energy required for direct democratic engagement. Without a clear demonstration that socialist alternatives can influence power and improve people's lives why would anyone engage in the risk and bother of political organizing? In the case of the CLASSE, the syndicalist organizational structures did not stifle the initiative of students, but rather served as a platform that made action meaningful while it offered a degree of protection and support to smaller groups.

Participation can in fact lead not to a politicization of democratic life, as social movements intend, but to a replacement of politics by new forms of management and new technologies. In chapter three I explore the history of participation in workplace organization in order to provide context for the emerging phenomenon of participatory meeting formats and conferencing events

such as bar camps. Bar camps are an open conferencing format that began in the IT industry in 2005 and that foregrounds participatory values and practices as a way to spur innovation, social connections and collaboration.

Bar camps allow me to address a number of recent trends in workplace organization that bear the influence of digital culture and ideas of participation central to the political vanguards of the online world: the open source software movement and creative commons. Bar camp organizers proudly characterize their events as an extension of the principles and values of Free and Open Source Software (F/OSS) to face-to-face conferences, workshops, and discussion spaces. In the process the limits of this approach to social change becomes apparent. The orientation towards knowledge production, innovation, entrepreneurialism, collaboration, flexibility and openness central to bar camps upholds participatory ideology as set of values appropriate to an increasingly decentralized working environment. New modes of exploitation arise that are made invisible by the lack of organizational hierarchy. I draw on Boltanski and Chiapello's concept of the projective city and theorists of digital labour to explain this shift in workplace organization. The predominant dimension of participation as ideology in this domain is an image of social and economic transformation that bypasses or contains outright antagonism and conflict in favour of personal growth, education, and communication.

Central to chapter three is the role of enjoyment in attaching subjects to the ideology of participation surrounding bar camps. The demand to enjoy and to participate are part of the formal "rules" of bar camp engagement. I deconstruct the subversive narrative that accompanies this demand by drawing attention to the obscene underside of bar camp enjoyment. It is in the implicit rules and contradictions that underlie its official narrative that ideology is made operative. To approach the excess enjoyment that drives participation in bar camps I explore

three contradictions through which the anxiety, repression and guilt provoked by participatory formats are apparent. These include: the demand for passion and enthusiasm, the emphasis on instrumental activity and a flexible relation to time, and the possibility for refusal within consensual spaces. These contradictions reveal an approach to participation that has more to do with extending and supporting the ideologies of digital capitalism than it does with politicizing knowledge production or establishing a meaningful intellectual commons.

In chapter four I turn to the rise of participatory values in art. In relation to cultural events broadly speaking, participation is a concept that indicates a blurring of the lines between production and consumption, audience and performers, spectatorship and exhibitionism. This elision results in new notions of audience as the crowd itself becomes central to the meaning and enjoyment of the event. Here, participation generally indicates an opportunity to contribute, to express oneself, or the chance to integrate into a network or community. Within popular culture, participation is so widespread that it pertains to most post-millenial, post-internet culture, and also has a number of antecedents like Reality Television. The dynamic of exploitation and non-transformative forms of empowerment that are rife within popular culture is relatively easy to acknowledge and critique. In contrast, artists often intend participation to offer an alternative to the destructive dynamics of neoliberalization. The participatory ethos of certain aspects of contemporary art are a productive site from which to explore the limits of ideologies of participation, particularly because they appear to offer a more genuine form of emancipation than the highly controlled platforms that make up online sharing sites, software, technologies, or televisual forms of participatory spectatorship.

It is for this reason that I choose to focus on social practice art, which is one of the most highly politicized areas of contemporary art practice. Socially engaged artists want their work to have

some kind of direct social, political or ethical impact on the world. This desire is in part influenced by the avant-garde ambition of sublating art into life, of overcoming the aesthetic distance that is a product of art's limited autonomy. Participation becomes a method of disrupting the boundaries between art institutions and the outside, between the artist and the audience, and between the work as a discrete object or commodity and the social relations that sustain it. However, the way in which the political status of participatory art should be understood is contested. I begin this chapter with a comparison between two leading theorists of participation in art, Grant Kester and Claire Bishop. The differing approaches of these two writers set up a productive tension between participation as ethical interaction based on dialogical process and participation as a disruptive intervention that treats social relations as an aesthetic medium.

Once again, the main concern that I raise in this chapter is the question of how participation as ideology organizes enjoyment. Drawing on Žižek's discussion of ethics in psychoanalysis I have chosen three examples of social practice art that I argue correspond with an ethics of the demand, of desire, and of drive. I begin with the work of the Danish artist collective Superflex, who have strived to produce "market utopias," appropriating branding and business strategies in ways that enhance the self-organized power of marginal groups, as well as regularly contesting the limits of copyright and corporate control of intellectual property. Superflex's work transcends many of the criticisms made of the kind of participatory work that is overly conciliatory to the status quo or that renounces its critical edge in the name of ceding aesthetic autonomy to the community of participants it engages. Nonetheless, I argue that their approach ultimately gets caught in an ethics of the demand, allowing western art audiences to enjoy a form of "ethical" consumption while upholding the market as the primary mechanism for social amelioration.

I then turn to two examples of socially engaged art that both exit official art institutions to participate directly within existing social movements. PublixTheatreCaravan, whose participatory and nomadic caravan was organized as part of the "no borders" and alter-globalization movements of the late-nineties and early two-thousands, represents a participatory practice that exemplifies an ethics of desire. Here, transgression becomes paramount as a carnivalesque theatre carves out temporary zones of playful rebellion for activists who are engaged in practices of what Gerald Raunig calls "deterritorialization."[18] In contrast, my final example of social engaged art practice attains an ethics of drive. Chilean artist Francisco Tapia produced a work based on the theft and burning of student debt papers during a prolonged student uprising and the occupation of University del Mar. The participatory nature of this intervention is ambiguous. I argue that the work is significant not only for its pragmatic result of lifting student debt, but for how it contributes to upholding belief in radical systemic social transformation. By living up to the mass scale of the movement that it was a part of and interpellating its audience to engage in political struggle, the work offers a mode of enjoyment that escapes the trap of participation as an ethical model of social relations.

In ending on Papas Fritas' intervention this thesis comes full circle back to the importance of popular mass movements and the kinds of ideological support that is required to sustain them. Participation is compromised by the ease with which many of its elements can be appropriated by existing neoliberal logics and institutions. Participation as an organizational principle (and not as an ideology of an ethical subject or ideal social relation) can contribute to the belief in collective struggle – but only if such a struggle directly questions the basic presumptions that sustain the existing order and if it is articulated to substantial political antagonisms that unsettle

the operations of power. Otherwise, my sites demonstrate how ideologies of participation enable the renewal of market logic while keeping open desires for social transformation.

The ultimate purpose of elaborating this critique of participation is in order to dispel false promises and open up the necessary space for imagining a break with this depoliticizing impasse. Through the exploration of the above sites I will seek to produce a provisional description of the possibilities for resistance that emerge in relation to participatory conditions. In a culture where participation is constantly demanded – in order to be a good citizen, a good worker, an active consumer, and a self-realized or a "networked" individual – how can meaningful political action be differentiated and cultivated? What constitutes a political act if participation, interaction and inclusion are necessary to the reproduction of current configurations of social and economic power?

In order to clarify the anti-political operation of participatory tropes and to suggest an alternative framework for interrogating the ideological foundations of networked culture, I select sites within each chapter that function as counterexamples to participation as ideology. These are closely related projects that bear some participatory principles or practices but that do not get caught up in a fantasy of participation, instead channeling enjoyment in directions that are more troubling to the existing order. These are the Quebec student strike, the moments of refusal or subtraction from bar camp activities, and the interventionist act of Papas Fritas. These three cases could be understood as examples of an "act" in contrast to the empty and meaningless activity often designated by participation. Action as the primary category for understanding political life is taken up by a number of theorists. For example, Richard Day contrasts a liberal "politics of the demand" with an anarchist influenced "politics of the act."[19] Greg Nielsen and Engin Isen argue for an understanding of citizenship as a series of acts rather than a legal status.[20] Hannah Arendt

privileges action in the public realm as the site of human freedom in contrast to the necessary constraints of labour and work, and Alain Badiou insists that political acts are singular events that must unfold in accordance with what he calls a "truth procedure."[21] These theoretical positions suggest the possibility of action as a viable alternative to participation, one that avoids reproducing the drive towards inclusivity that is central to the depoliticized character of neoliberal politics.

In an age of participation as ideology, an insistence on a politics of division, antagonism, or refusal may be the most productive way to confront the pacification and delegitimation of anticapitalist struggles through "democratic" inclusion. Against some of the limits that can be found in participation as ideology – including the occlusion of structural antagonism, a broad rejection of mediation/representation often leading to ineffectiveness or utopianism, localist tendencies that risk resorting to traditionalism and conservatism, satisfaction with a therapeutic activity in place of action, an unwillingness to risk the publicity of politics by retreating to the privacy of the particular and refusing to stand for broad social principles, and a reduction of critique to within the liberal ideological bounds of democratic theory to the exclusion of economic inequality – I will posit the existence of an already emerging politics that is global, cosmopolitan, divisive, and aimed at confronting the structural limits of neoliberal capitalism. While participatory decision making structures may serve an important function in radical political organizing, participation as a central idea of social transformation is anemic since to a large degree it reflects the already given state of social, economic and political life.

Notes

¹ See: Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University, 1970); Dimitrios Roussopoulos and C. George Benello, eds. *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005); Terrence Cook and Patrick Morgan, eds. *Participatory Democracy* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1971); Chris Spannos ed. *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century* (AK Press, 2008).

² For a critique of the dichotomizing tendency apparent in attempts to define participation see Nico Carpentier, "Power as Participation's Master Signifier," in *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, eds. Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne, and Tamar Tembeck, pp. 3-19 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

³ Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969)" in *The Participation Reader*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, pp. 3-18 (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011).

⁴ While Carpentier likewise critiques this division between authentic and inauthentic participation, in my view he ends up reproducing it in his own distinction between "minimal" and "maximal" versions of participation. He continues to uphold participation and "democratic renewal" as his primary horizon of social change. See Carpentier, "Participation's Master Signifier," p. 8.

⁵ In development studies the debates that took place around Participatory Rural Appraisal in the eighties and nineties have been published in a number of edited collections and the discussion continues up to the present. See for instance: Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari eds. *Participation: the New Tyranny?* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001); Andrea Cornwall and Garett Pratt eds. *Pathways to Participation: Reflections on PRA* (London: ITDG, 2003); Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan eds. *Participation, from Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2004); Andrea Cornwall ed. *The Participation Reader* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011). In management see: Lorne Plunkett and Robert Fournier, *Participative Management: Implementing Empowerment* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 1991); and Ervin Williams ed. *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation* (Atlanta, Georgia: College of Business Administration, Georgia State University, 1976). The shift in management ideology towards privileging participatory modes of organization is analyzed in Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

⁶ In art see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012); Claire Bishop ed. *Participation* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006); Rudolf Frieling, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (New York and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Thames & Hudson, 2008). In architecture see Markus Meissen and Shumon Basar eds. *Did Someone Say Participate?: An Atlas of Spatial Practice (*Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 2006); Markus Meissen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2010); and Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till eds. *Architecture and Participation* (London and New York: Spon Press, 2005). In music see Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). In religious studies see Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman eds. *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (Albany: State University of New York, 2008). In psychology see Morten Nissen, *The Subjectivity of Participation: Articulating Social Work Practice with Youth in Copenhagen* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In science and technology studies see Karl Rogers, *Participatory Democracy, Science and Technology: An Exploration in the Philosophy of Science* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Noortje Marres, *Material Participation: Technology, Environment, Everyday Publics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In media and communication studies see Brian D. Loader and Dan Mercea eds. *Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in Participatory Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York and London: New York University, 2006); Anders Ekström ed. *History of Participatory Media: Politics and Publics 1750-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson eds. *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* (New

York and London: Routledge, 2013). And in the study of social movements see Catherine Corrigall-Brown, *Patterns of Protest: Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements* (Stanford University, 2012).

[7] See Cooke and Morgan, *Participatory Democracy*; Roussopoulos and Benello, *Participatory Democracy*; Pateman, *Participation*; Spannos, *Real Utopia*; and Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, *Power and Empowerment: a Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1992).

[8] Some of these issues are addressed by Rich Rothstein in relation to his experiences of participation in Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s. See Richard Rothstein, "Representative Democracy in SDS," *Liberation* 16:9 (February 1972): 10-17; 27-31. On the Yugoslav experience of workplace democracy see Pateman, *Participation*. For a discussion of the limits of informal decision making in the women's movement of the late 60s and early 70s see Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-3): 151-65.

[9] "What is important to note here is that an event is not the realization of a possibility that resides within the situation or that is dependant on the transcendental laws of the world. An event is the creation of new possibilities. It is located not merely at the level of objective possibilities but at the level of the possibility of possibilities. Another way of putting this is: with respect to a situation or a world, an event paves the way for the possibility of what – from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world – is strictly impossible." Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), pp. 242-3. Slavoj Žižek echoes this logic in his description of the excessive expenditure of a revolutionary act as something that is not opposed to strategic political decisions. He writes: "The point is not simply that, once we are thoroughly engaged in a political project, we are ready to risk everything for it, inclusive of our lives, but, more precisely, that only such an "impossible" gesture of pure expenditure can change the very coordinates of what is strategically possible within a historical constellation." Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 205.

[10] See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[11] Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

[12] See Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University, 2009). See also Jodi Dean's discussion of how search engines distribute content according to highly unequal powerlaws in *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 138.

[13] On the politics of code and its invisibility to users see Graham Longford, "Pedagogies of Digital Citizenship and the Politics of Code," *Techné* 9:1 (Fall 2005): 68-96.

[14] Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University, 2002).

[15] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 217-72.

[16] Steve Babson ed., *Lean Production: Empowerment and Exploitation in the Global Auto Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1995).

[17] Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement," in James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, pp. 329-74 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). I refer to SDS as the "origin" of post-war participation because this is the role that has been ascribed to it in popular culture and scholarship. SDS may be the highest profile instance of the rise of interest in participatory democracy in the sixties, however it is not actually the earliest. Francesca Polletta describes how consensus decision making and decentralized organizational structure was first associated with SNCC in the early sixties and contributed to SDS's interest in participatory organization. See Francesca Polletta, "How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice" *Field: a Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 1 (Spring 2015): 215-54.

[18] Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century,* trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

[19] Richard Day, "From Hegemony to Affinity: the political logic of the newest social movements," *Cultural Studies* 18:5 (September 2004): 716-48.

[20] Engin F. Isen and Greg M. Nielsen eds. *Acts of Citizenship* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2008).

[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

CHAPTER ONE: PARTICIPATION AS IDEOLOGY

In everyday speech ideology tends to be used as a term of derision directed at ideas that are thought to be willful distortions of reality, as in propaganda, or else inflexible and dogmatic, as adopted by the fanatic, or overly simplistic representations of a complex reality, as accepted by the naive consciousness. Instrumental, false, biased, manipulative, and easily detected by any reasonable person with healthy skepticism, ideology is something to be dispelled and avoided. While in the history of ideology critique a certain degree of distortion is accepted as an inherent aspect of any ideology, the common perception of it as simply false ideas or baseless illusions does not capture how highly integrated ideology is with everyday life. Ideology always has a substantial role to play in the structuring of experience. The notion of ideology as false consciousness does not adequately address the ways in which ideology is materialized in our built environment, technologies, and social relations in a way that is far too extensive to be strictly instrumentalized or controlled by those in positions of power. We are all subjects of ideology, even as we contribute to its ongoing constitution.

The imbrication of ideology with everyday life is partly indebted to the work of early Cultural Studies and its core thinkers, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.[1] The influence of these thinkers, who draw on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony to examine the ongoing co-determination of meaning and the politics of domination, have contributed to a conception of politics that is contingent and relativistic. Building on this approach to ideology as hegemony, post-Marxist thinkers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe conceive of a constant battle to occupy the empty place of power that occurs in a pluralistic field of equivalence.[2] While I agree that politics and the content of ideology is historically contingent, I draw on psychoanalysis to push against the view that the field of politics is a pluralistic field of

equivalent struggles. Ideology revolves around an ahistorical kernel of enjoyment that serves as its symptomal point or Real. This point cannot be relativized and in the current context, class struggle names the symptomal limit of democratic politics. Here I will briefly outline the approach to ideology that will be used in this thesis. The Marxist psychoanalytic approaches of Louis Althusser, Herbert Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek will inform my conception of participation as ideology.

An Imaginary Lived Relation

In his essay "Marxism and Humanism," Althusser describes ideology as an organic part of every social totality.[3] As something that mediates our experience of our real conditions of existence, ideology is not something that can be simply dispelled. It is a fundamental aspect of any human society, and, Althusser makes a point of saying, it would even be present in a communist society. While ideology itself is eternal, particular ideologies have histories, distinct effects, and can be transformed. A key aspect of Althusser's conception of ideology is that it refers not to the direct relation between humans and our conditions of existence, but a secondary relation. He writes: "In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an '*imaginary*', '*lived*' relation."[4] Ideology expresses a will, a hope, or a nostalgia rather than describing a reality.[5] While this imaginary relation implies a certain distortion of objective conditions it is not an insubstantial illusion since it works on those very conditions at the same time. Ideology is important to Marxist political practice as a tool of political consciousness because it also suggests how people might live and

understand their relation to the world as one of class struggle. A change in the imaginary relation also works to transform how we relate to our real conditions.

A Marxist approach to ideology typically understands it as highly integrated with material conditions, including technologies and social structures. In this sense, ideology is thought of less as a consciously adopted system of representations than as practices, institutions, and structures that mediate our experience of the world. Rather than a deeply held set of beliefs, ideology has a strangely external, social existence. Accordingly, Althusser describes ideology as having more to do with structures that are confronted unconsciously as objects of the world than as conscious forms of thought.[6] In his well-known essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser turns his attention to the concrete institutions through which ideology is acquired, produced and reproduced.[7] Aside from emphasizing the character of ideology as a lived imaginary relation to conditions of existence, Althusser also insists that ideology has a material existence. According to typical bourgeois ideology, the actions of an individual follow from his beliefs. His beliefs derive from the ideas conceived by a free consciousness and therefore have a spiritual existence.[8] Althusser reverses this. Institutions, rituals, and practices precede, construct, and constitute beliefs. While it appears that it is the subject who freely acts, the subject is in actuality enacted by a particular system of ideological apparatuses that prescribes material practices that are governed by material rituals.[9] Ideology has the function of constituting concrete individuals as subjects.[10] The ideological state apparatuses that Althusser mentions include religious organizations, educational and cultural institutions, family structures, the media, political parties, voluntary associations, and trade unions.

If we treat participation as ideology, we must first consider it to consist of a lived relation to real conditions of existence. This overdetermined relation demands an analysis of both the

material practices organized by ideological institutions in the name of participation, and an account of the structure of desire that constitutes the imaginary dimension of participation. In order to address the question of how subjects are confronted by participation as a material practice organized by institutions, governed by rituals, and manifested in practices, this thesis will explore a number of sites that exemplify broader domains, including collaborative knowledge work, political activism and aesthetic practice. It will become clear that 'institutionality' today is at times less formal than when Althusser was writing, consisting of dispersed mechanisms of control rather than clearly delineated institutional spaces.[11] Also, in order to address participation as a structuring of desire, I will unpack a set of values implicit in the concept that works to articulate different narratives of participation as a solution to social divisions. This latter task requires going beyond Althusser's structuralism, which, while pointing to a kind of external "unconscious" in the form of institutions and practices, does not address the level of enjoyment that attaches us to ideology.

Consumer Capitalism: Participation as Desublimation

The imaginary relation described by Althusser is indebted to a psychoanalytic approach to the subject that is more substantially elaborated by other theorists of ideology such as Herbert Marcuse and Slavoj Žižek. Marcuse is helpful for considering participation as ideology today as he, more than Althusser, confronts the then emerging reality of consumer society. The increasing marketization of institutions formerly understood as a part of the public sphere or the state, such as universities, public utilities, government services, intelligence agencies, military and police, requires that we ground our understanding of ideology in market relations rather than the strictly "superstructural" RSAs and ISAs discussed by Althusser.[12]

Marcuse's critical theory tries to account for the condition in which marginally rising levels of material satisfaction succeed in attenuating subjective experiences of alienation, despite the continued existence of domination, war, and exploitation. He turns to psychoanalytic categories in order to explain how pleasure can be oriented towards reproducing systems of domination. His solution is the concept of repressive desublimation, which describes a situation in which a partial satiation of libidinal needs adapts people to a generally repressive environment.[13] The direct satisfaction of needs provides justification for the system as a whole and does not need to rely on any explicit ideology.[14] At the same time, Marcuse insists that despite the appearance of effectively meeting needs, consumer society still counts as repressive because it permits only a narrow set of gratifications in place of more expansive expression of libidinal energies and a deeper fulfillment of human needs.

With the rise of neoliberalism, the contradictions of consumer society have only grown starker. As the promises of consumer capitalism have intensified, the foundations of the mid-century welfare states that once allowed for a wider distribution of material goods are increasingly undermined. Consumer society is still with us, but it is now buoyed on an unsustainable system of personal debt. The contradiction of having access to immense amounts of cheap consumer goods while also experiencing less freedom due to debt slavery and precarity must have ideological as well as material consequences. In this context, Marcuse's analysis of repressive desublimation may be more pertinent than ever. In particular, I will ask whether in some cases, participation may function as a contemporary form of desublimation, granting us a narrow set of activities in which to experience empowerment (as a kind of enjoyment) as a surrogate for more expansive involvement in political struggle. This possibility requires us to drop the category of repression and replace it with a more updated concept of enjoyment.

Enjoyment: Participation as point-de-capiton

In the work of Slavoj Žižek the extra-discursive functioning of ideology present in the
Frankfurt School critiques of consumer capitalism and the culture industries is articulated with
the Lacanian category of enjoyment. Marcuse argues that ideology operates through the direct
material effectiveness of consumer capitalism delivering satisfaction of a narrow range of needs.
Similarly, Žižek describes a cynical false consciousness in which we are aware at the level of
consciousness that we are compromised by our investments in the current system, yet we
continue to behave as if we don't know better. Ideology operates at the level of what we do, not
the conscious ideas we hold or awareness of the contradictions of our position. Rather than
understand this unconscious investment in terms of Freudian drives, Žižek introduces the
Lacanian category of enjoyment. Drive for Žižek does not represent a biological need that can be
partially met and reduced, but is rather a psychological descriptor that designates our 'stuckness'
in a particular structure of the symbolic network that is grounded in fantasy.

One way that Žižek differs from Althusser's version of ideological interpellation and subject
constitution is that he insists that this process of interpellation never fully succeeds. Althusser
describes subject constitution as the most primary ideological operation. It takes place through a
simultaneous process of recognition/misrecognition when one recognizes oneself in the hailing
by some other Subject in a position of authority.[15] At the same time, in order for interpellation to
be successful, there must be a misrecognition of the very process of identification whereby the
subject experiences themselves as always-already the subject that was hailed. This is the illusion
that sustains subjectivity and also describes how people become subjects of ideology, or are
positioned in the symbolic network of social relations defined by various ideologies. Žižek
argues that it is in fact through the very failure of the process of interpellation that we become

ensnared by ideology.[16] To Althusser's analysis of ideology at the level of imaginary and symbolic identification, Žižek adds the element of the nonsensical kernel of enjoyment. The failure of interpellation results from the fact that enjoyment can't be symbolized. Signification is therefore articulated around a fundamental impossibility or lack. The lack of certainty that we are in fact the subject that we recognize ourselves as in any particular ideological hailing is what keeps us questioning, fascinated and fantasizing. It is the anxiety and doubt produced by this failure to fully identify that causes us to generate an ideological fantasy that covers over the horrifying fact that the big Other does not exist, that our position in the symbolic network really is arbitrary, or that society is inherently impossible.

Žižek refers to the signifier that fixes and sustains a given ideological field as the quilting point or point-de-capiton. This is the figure that organizes the arbitrary elements of social experience into an ordered totality. Despite the fact that there are often struggles to fix the essence of a particular ideological term in one direction or another, Žižek argues in an anti-essentialist direction that its role is purely structural or performative. The point-de-capiton is highly self-referential and tautological.[17] This is the reason that attempting to define a few essential characteristics of participation, to attempt to fix its meaning from the outset, would be to miss the way it functions ideologically as a support for particular fantasies of the social. Instead, participation must include anything that names itself as such. It is the signifier itself that constitutes the kernel of the object's identity. Approaching participation in this way will enable us to identify how our desire for it produces particular fantasy formations as well as particular symptoms.

To think through participation as ideology it's important to situate it historically in relation to its conditions of emergence as well as other fantasy formations that it supports. The embrace of

participation precedes and parallels the ascendance of neoliberalism. As the dominant ideology

of global capitalism in the twenty-first century, neoliberalism and the struggle against it

constitute the condition of participation as ideology today. What is neoliberalism and how do the

particular conditions it fosters shape subjectivity? Is participation as ideology a reaction to, or a

symptom of, neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism and subjectivity

David Harvey describes neoliberalism as a set of beliefs that upholds the market as the central

ethical principle of social life.[18] Neoliberal theory contends that the removal of constraints on the

market and the limitation of state intervention increases wealth and productivity, decreases waste

and inefficiency, and enhances individual freedoms and general prosperity. Individual freedoms,

competition and accountability for one's choices are considered its core values. A very limited

role is afforded to the state, namely to secure and defend private property rights, to maintain the

sanctity of contracts, and to protect basic market mechanisms and open up new markets where

they are lacking.[19]

The reality of neoliberalism in practice is however highly contradictory. According to Harvey,

neoliberalism began in force in the US and UK in 1979 and entailed extensive privatization,

deregulation, austerity and cutbacks to public services, attacks on unions and an increased

financialization of the economy.[20] In the developing world the IMF administered structural

adjustment programs that saw indebted nations unable to default on their loans no matter the

devastation caused to local populations and the environment.[21] In the US and UK, as well as

other Western nations, neoliberal policies resulted in rising unemployment, deindustrialization,

increased inequality and the restoration of class power to wealthy elites. Flexibility became

touted as a solution to corporate and trade union bureaucracy, and in the process normalized

short-term work contracts, the loss of benefits and job security for workers and a decline in union

power.

Harvey highlights the contradictions between neoliberal theory and practice.[22] One of the

major contradictions concerns the role of the state. In theory the state is supposed to not

intervene in the market and to allow those who take risks to assume the losses of those choices.

Yet in practice the state has intervened heavily in support of capital interests and places the

viability of financial institutions as a primary goal even if the consequences are disastrous to the

population or environment.[23] This points to a central political contradiction at the heart of

neoliberal theory. While individual freedom is held up as primary, the imposition of neoliberal

reforms and the maintenance of such policies is often anti-democratic, relying on experts and

elites to draft policy and influence government and to crack down on social movements that are

attempting to influence the state in the direction of bolstering the welfare state.[24] Harvey also

notes that neoliberalism in practice breeds its ostensible nemesis: growing authoritarianism and

populist nationalism.[25] Harvey's book is prescient for how Western governments responded to

the 2008 financial crisis – bailing out the banks to maintain the solvency of finance while

allowing the population at large to assume the losses of their bad loans – as well as pointing to

right-wing reactions as a symptom of neoliberal globalization, examples of which have since

only increased, most spectacularly in the Brexit referendum and the rise of Donald Trump in the

US.

Harvey argues that the contradictions of neoliberalism can be accounted for by understanding

its dual aims: to sustain capitalism in the face of the crisis of inflation in the 1970s and also as a

project to restore class power.[26] The actions of neoliberal states make clear that when these two

aims come into conflict it is the latter that prevails. The drive to restore class power therefore twists and distorts neoliberal theory to make it serve this agenda.

But why and how did neoliberalism prevail if its effects are so disastrous? Why were the socialist left and working class movements unable to stop this onslaught? This is where neoliberal ideology becomes important. While in the developing nations neoliberalism was largely imposed through military or financial coercion, in the West it was necessary to win consent.[27] Drawing on Gramsci, Harvey argues that consent must be constructed through strategic uses of civil society institutions, but also must resonate with common sense experience.[28] He points to the active political strategy of neoliberal theorists to legitimize their thinking through research institutes, universities and media influence. Yet, Harvey notes that such propaganda efforts only work if they draw on values that people are deeply and genuinely attached to. Neoliberal values had to resonate with common sense assumptions in order to be convincing. In the case of neoliberalism, Harvey argues that its ideology gained acceptance through the individualism and criticism of state bureaucracy that are apparent on both the right and left in the postwar period.[29] Values that resonated strongly included freedom of personal expression, lifestyle choices, advancement and inclusion of diverse identities, and the dignity that derives from individual responsibility and accountability. Unfortunately, Harvey argues that neoliberal advocates were successful in separating these values from the distinct calls for social justice out of which they had emerged on the Left.[30]

It is primarily this latter dimension of neoliberal ideology that I examine in my analysis of participation – the everyday lived relation to our conditions of existence rather than the explicit propaganda circulated by advocates of neoliberalism. Harvey effectively argues that neoliberalism came to predominate through a combination of coercion and consent, but he does

not elaborate further on the subjective conditions and effects required for this consent. Is there such a thing as a neoliberal subjectivity? If so, how is it structured, what drives it, and how can it be resisted?

In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown puts forward one attempt to characterize a neoliberal subject that is distinct from earlier versions of the capitalist subject.[31] Brown defines neoliberalism as "an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices and metrics to every dimension of human life."[32] Here, neoliberalism is not a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology. Brown presents a critical reading of Foucault to support her interpretation of neoliberalism as a mode of governing rationality that configures subjects solely as economic actors no matter the sphere of activity they are engaged in. Her main concern is that neoliberal rationality undermines the ideals of human flourishing and common good that drive democratic political engagement. Neoliberalism not only transforms economic and political institutions, it undermines the subjective basis for democratic society and culture.

Neoliberalism functions through a process of economization, extending a market rationality to previously non-economic spheres of human life. Brown identifies what is specific about neoliberal economization, differentiating it from previous stages of capitalism such as the classical economic liberalism theorized Adam Smith, Nassau Senior, Jean-Baptiste Say, David Ricardo and James Steuart.[33] These thinkers carefully delineated the political from the economic, believing that these were and should remain separate realms with their own values. In contrast, today's neoliberalism configures all domains in terms of economic values, metrics and rationality. It is not simply that the political sphere has minimized its purview or become corrupted by capitalist interests, it is that the possibility of understanding the political as a

distinct dimension of human life with its own logic and set of values is disappearing or made unintelligible by the ubiquity of economistic thinking. Brown adds two further qualities that distinguish neoliberalism from earlier modes of economization: this economic subject takes shape as human capital rather than as a figure of exchange or interest, and further, it is modeled on financial or investment capital, and not only on productive or entrepreneurial capital.[34] Rather than being modeled on a figure of exchange, as subjects were in the age of mercantilism, or as cost-benefit maximizers in the age of utilitarianism, or even as entrepreneurs at the dawn of the neoliberal era, today the ideal neoliberal subject is one modeled directly on capital.[35] We see ourselves and are treated by others as a firm that requires self-investment and the attraction of outside investors in order to enhance its value. Brown emphasizes the role of financialization in contributing to this new understanding of human activity, where every decision or action is interpreted as enhancing or diminishing one's competitive value on a market, even if direct monetization of one's activity is not at issue.

Brown's approach enables us to understand a kind of neoliberal subjectivity that extends far beyond monetized market exchange and typifies a kind of everyday common sense that influences all human interactions and activities. It is this more extensive basis and reality of neoliberal subjectivity as a mode of relating to the world that provides the foundation for the acceptance of neoliberal ideology in its more official forms. The combination of neoliberal dogmas propagated by the media and other institutions with the real material pressures created by neoliberal conditions (experienced by the subject as precarity, insecurity, overwork, flexibility and constant mobility) produces a particular kind of subjectivity that consists of perceiving ourselves and others as human capital. Neoliberalism is therefore more pernicious than a particular set of state policies or an easily recognized ideology that could be accepted or rejected.

It has a stronger hold on us as it comes to define our self-understanding, our daily practices and our social relations. As I will argue at length below, these are the fields in which the participatory condition takes hold most firmly.

Brown's description of life as human capital is compelling and resonates with Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's argument that "activity" has become the general equivalent in the economy of late-capitalism, something I will develop further in chapter three.[36] However, while her characterization of the content of neoliberal subjectivity is astute and insightful, her Foucauldian approach, focusing on neoliberalism as a rational order that discursively configures subjects, opens up her argument to a number of significant critiques. First, is the question as to whether it is accurate or politically productive to consider neoliberalism primarily a normative order of rationality rather than a historical material shift in how capitalism functions. In a review of Brown's book, Annie McClanahan argues for the value of a more materialist reading of neoliberalism, associating Brown's "normative reason" with a superstructural or ideological reading.[37] She contends that Brown's theory of human capital overstates the degree to which "interest" as a category has become materially irrelevant to capitalist subjects and fails to acknowledge the political importance of this concept for organizing labour.[38] By rejecting the category of interest and labour in favour of human capital, Brown succumbs to the individualizing rhetoric of neoliberalism and dispenses with concepts we need for characterizing the collective subject that could organize against this neoliberal order. McClanahan effectively argues that in remaining ambiguous on neoliberalism's status as a material force, Brown cannot recognize the political counterforce it is producing in the form of proletarianized and hopelessly indebted subjects, a surplus of people who are beyond capitalization and have no illusions of themselves as human capital.[39]

McClanahan makes a very compelling argument to counter Brown's fear that economization is threatening previously "non-economic" domains. She argues that the opposite is the case: under capitalism, when domains are claimed to be "non-economic" this is to disguise their true economic function as a domain of exploitation that capitalism relies upon.[40] Here she refers to housework and reproductive labour, and the intellectual work of students in the post-war period. To counter Brown's somewhat idealized image of higher education prior to neoliberalism, McClanahan argues that the mid-century university was economically necessary to a form of capitalist development that relied on an increasingly educated workforce. Today, the fact that education and other domains are measured according to explicitly economic standards is not a sign that we have lost some domain of autonomous political freedom, but that their economic functionality is itself threatened as Capital needs fewer educated workers. Higher education no longer guarantees upward mobility or a higher salary or steady career path. The limited economic payoff that it offers students ironically opens up this space to possibilities for new, freer and more resistant subjects.[41]

Secondly, critics have taken Brown to task for not adequately critiquing liberal democracy, instead holding it out as the basis for previous democratic breakthroughs as well as the necessary foundation for more radical democratic gains. Patchen Markell points out that liberal democracy has historically been deeply anti-democratic and it was only through resistance and organization against it that a degree of popular sovereignty and social welfare in the developed counties came about.[42] Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo likewise argues that it is the anti-political and anti-democratic nature of liberal democracy itself that paved the way for neoliberalism.[43] He puzzles over the fact that this misplaced nostalgia for liberal democracy seems to contradict Brown's earlier work in *States of Injury*. Brown is clearly aware of these potential objections as she is careful to mention

the real limitations of liberal democracy and its imbrication with capitalism, yet she nonetheless is compelled to hold up the liberal democratic imaginary as her standard.[44] This seems to be a misstep, given not only the historical limitations of really existing liberal democracy but also because it erases competing alternative conceptions of social transformation that focus on the abolition of exploitation, relegating these to simply a more radical extension of the liberal democratic imaginary rather than acknowledging the completely different premises that ground a communist critique of capitalism. Given the diverse history of pro-democracy and anti-capitalist movements it seems unnecessarily limiting to maintain liberal democracy as the only or primary reference for democratic ideals.

Thirdly, Brown's characterization of neoliberal rationality could be considered "totalizing." In spite of her assertion that neoliberalism is differentiated, context-bound and has developed unevenly across cultures, her lack of attention to forms of resistance and the internal inconsistencies of neoliberal rationality contributes to a dystopic tone in which there is no outside. Not only are democratic practices and institutions threatened, but even the existence of democratic imaginaries, desires or subjects capable of harbouring them. Neoliberalism appears to be all-encompassing and "air-tight," leaving little room to imagine resistance or change. For my part, I appreciate Brown's emphasis on the core characteristics of neoliberal rationality. There is an obvious benefit to bringing a degree of coherence to our understanding of the dispersed practices of neoliberalism. Furthermore, as a phase of capitalism there is a global logic at work in neoliberalism that should be recognized for having the nature of a "concrete universal," a phenomenon of abstraction that exceeds its particular manifestations. Nonetheless, her lack of attention to the inconsistencies and irrationalities of neoliberalism is a problem. As a mode of rationality that produces subjects in its own image, Brown's characterization leaves no space

from which to comprehend the existence of a subject with any degree of agency or a possibility of radical political transformation.[45] In the abstract, Brown mentions the existence of competing discourses, but these remain unspecified in their content beyond the figure of a liberal democracy that is everywhere slipping away. Likewise, Brown does not attempt to describe the process through which a subject becomes interpellated by one set of discourses or another and what it is that makes neoliberalism ascendant as a governing rationality. Because she de-emphasizes the material force of neoliberalism as a phase of capitalism or its status as a project of class restoration, it becomes unclear why governing rationality and subjectivity would arbitrarily shift in such a direction. It follows from her Foucauldian premises that identifying the characteristics of a discourse is presumed to create distance and therefore space for awareness that things could be otherwise. As I specified in the preceding section, my approach to ideology differs significantly. Simply recognizing neoliberal discourse as a rationality that threatens democracy is not enough to unsettle its functioning. In fact, according to Žižek, late-capitalist ideology captures us all the more powerfully when we posit a cynical, distanced stance towards its Cause.

From Žižek's Lacanian perspective Brown is imbuing the Symbolic order with far too much solidity, ignoring both the role of the Imaginary and the Real in either sustaining or disrupting neoliberal ideology.[46] In other words, by focusing on neoliberal rationality she underemphasizes neoliberal irrationality. I argue that to the extent that neoliberal ideology shapes subjectivity as a kind of ubiquitous common sense, our attachment to its values is driven not by the conscious rationalizations it offers subjects but by an unconscious mode of enjoyment. This mode of enjoyment is made possible by the very failure of the Symbolic order to paper over its inherent inconsistencies. Subjects of neoliberal ideology know very well that market fundamentalism

contradicts basic democratic values, that its economic policies are hypocritical, corrupt and do not live up to their stated ideals. Nonetheless they choose to ignore. Why?

Part of the answer to this enigma can be found in participation, the very concept that many consider to be a solution to the anti-democratic and exploitative consequences of neoliberalism. Participation is a coping mechanism for navigating the precarity, insecurity and inequality that define people's daily lives under neoliberalism, but one that reinforces rather than disrupts a number of neoliberal premises. In this sense participation functions as a substitute for different collective forms of solidarity and protection – replacing public provision with spaces for collaborative entrepreneurialism, value appreciation of "human capital," mobility, and the promise of increased employability. In the process certain kinds of enjoyment are unleashed, bypassing the need for collective decision-making and action, and opening up opportunities for contribution, self-expression and easy social connection. Considering the desire for participation to be a symptom of neoliberalism helps to explain why a political project that is quite obviously against the interests of the majority has managed to gain such widespread support, in spite of our cynical awareness of its consequences. It is not simply that people are ignorant or duped, nor that people have been consciously persuaded of the benefits of neoliberalism, it is also that in spite of what we know, we continue to act as if we don't know. We are invested on an unconscious level in the ideological enjoyment gained through participation.

What is the specific nature of the enjoyment that attaches us to participation? This depends on the particular practice under examination and which values of participation that it foregrounds. However, a few generalizations can be ventured as a starting point. First, participation tends to be a way of evading class struggle or the inherently divisive nature of politics. In many cases ideologies of participation are explicit in their promises of harmonious consensus or of fostering

inclusivity with no remainder or excess. In this fantasy, participation and politics are strictly opposed, with the latter characterized as undesirable, destructive and pathological.[47] This dimension of participation as ideology accords well with the shift from governance to management that Brown describes as an important condition for the rise of neoliberal rationality. However, beyond an escapist fantasy where politics and social division are relegated to history, participation offers another kind of enjoyment. Particularly relevant to projects that are aimed towards fostering collective and democratic decision-making spaces, this is the enjoyment produced by the inevitable inadequacy of decision-making spaces relative to absolutist participatory principles. Here participation can function as an ever-receding object forever beyond reach. When desire repeatedly misses its object the subject can gain a secondary level of enjoyment as this desire transmutes into drive. The failure to achieve *genuine* or *true* participation leads to scapegoating and infighting, usually aimed at any perceivable vestiges of hierarchy, hidden corruption, or privilege. The calling out of power or those perceived to be in power allows enjoyment to enter into the endless circling of drive – as activists enjoy their position of marginality, distance from power, and occasional transgressions. Enjoyment as drive can represent a stuckness in ideology that functions as an impasse to leftist political organization – nonetheless, in other circumstances it might also open up into a revolutionary drive that circles around a lost Cause.

The extent to which participation is a symptom of neoliberal ideology can be determined by exploring its own particular symptoms – the impasses and blockages confronted by emancipatory projects, whether political, economic or aesthetic, and that draw on the values of the participatory complex to propel their desire for social transformation. As a starting point for

understanding the particular fantasies produced by participation I outline the complex of values that are invoked in any such project.

The Participatory Complex

Despite its close association with democracy, participation does not indicate a formal process involving equal power or control, but simply 'taking part.' People can be included in an activity or process in a variety of ways without actually sharing power. The source of the positive connotation attached to the concept of participation is largely due to its association with direct democracy in political theory and with experiments with participatory organizational structures in postwar social movements. However, as the concept has proliferated across social space over the past 15 years participation has predominantly become uncoupled from collective democratic decision making. In daily use, participation often indicates some opportunity for individual expression or contribution, yet it rarely has anything to do with collective decision making processes or structures of self-governance. While participation continues to connote emancipation or empowerment, rather than refer to direct democracy specifically, it also encompasses a broad complex of values. These may include: a valuation of activity over passivity; the privileging of procedure or structure over ends; a desire for immediacy and anti-representational attitudes; the privileging of face-to-face encounters or bodily co-presence; an orientation towards inclusiveness and pluralism; a will for consensus; and discourses of empowerment through personalization. These values will be explored in a bit more detail below as they will recur in my analysis of the particular instances of participatory ideology at play in the domains under consideration. The purpose here is to map out what is often left implicit in various uses of the idea of participation. The values delineated are not neatly separable as they

often overlap. Furthermore, various dimensions of these values may be in direct contradiction and do not constitute a smoothly functioning whole.

Activity, Passivity, Interpassivity

Participation is implicitly equated with activity. To participate is to be involved, to be involved is to be active, and to be active is to be empowered. This is one of the primary sources of the belief that participation is an inherent good. The valuation of activity always implies its opposite, passivity. In relation to politics, the privileging of activity over passivity is a shared obsession of both activists attempting to mobilize people against current power arrangements and parliamentary institutions that require a modicum of legitimacy be conferred on the state by the electorate. According to this dichotomy, to be passive is to be apathetic, disempowered, or an instrument of others. The disparagement of 'passivity' has also acquired theoretical elaboration in certain strands of Marxist critical theory. The concept of reification, as developed by Georg Lukács, refers in part to a process in which the worker is transformed by industrialization from an active agent over the product of her labour to a partial mechanism embedded in a larger system over which she exercises no control.[48] Relegated to a passive position in the machinery of production, the worker is objectified and loses contact with a dimension of active subjectivity.

Reification and alienation have been taken up by theorists of mass and consumer society. The most significant of these theorists today is the Situationist figure Guy Debord. Debord's critique of the spectacle, understood as a relation mediated by images, describes a world in which direct lived experience is increasingly vicarious, secondary to, and integrated with circulating representations.[49] In the wake of this critique, and under the influence of postmodern critiques of enlightenment, 'passivity' becomes a charge laid against multiple kinds of visual media and

spectatorial relationships, and even the sense of vision itself.[50] Problems arise when critiques of

the totality of social relations that we find in Lukács or Debord are themselves reified by being

attached to practices that are not articulated to the whole, but are seen as independent. This can

lead to a reductive appropriation of the concept of 'activity' that is applied to isolated practices

that are deemed inherently good antidotes to passive, spectacular contemplation, rather than

situating them within a broader system of social relations. In contrast, it is easy to see how

practices that are participatory and active (when approached in isolation) can involve people in

reproducing spectacular relations. For instance, a recent series of circulating online videos

produced under the meme heading 'Harlem Shake' can be described as a kind of participatory

spectacle. A workplace joins in on the meme by producing their own video showing employees

dancing to the 'Harlem Shake' song. The employees in these videos are not inactive. They are

not sitting alone, isolated in their homes in front of a television, or anonymous and invisible in a

darkened theatre. They are out in the street, the mall, or at their workplace, having fun with a

team of colleagues or friends, dancing for the world to see. Yet, if our standard for what

constitutes activity remains tied to Lukács' notion of workplace organization, where people are

consciously organized to gain control over the machinery of production, these practices clearly

do not measure up. Harlem Shake is closer to an updated version of corporate team building

exercises like company softball teams and paintball tournaments than a radical transformation of

social relations. Instead of challenging the spectacle we are all offered the chance to be part of it,

to co-produce it and behold ourselves as an image within it.

When participation is applied to any activity that involves doing something (rather than

watching something, reading about things, or thinking) regardless of the nature of the activity or

its effects, it can better be described as interpassive than active. Interpassivity is a term Žižek

uses to refer to practices that have the guise of pragmatic actions but in effect stave off actual change.[51] Rather than being active through the Other, which Žižek associates with Hegel's "cunning of reason," interpassivity describes a situation where I am passive through the Other, as I "concede to the Other the passive aspect (enjoying) of my experience, while I can remain actively engaged."[52] This is a tactic to appease one's guilty conscience without the risk of destabilizing one's position in the intersubjective network. In some cases, participation as a kind of interpassivity may also carry with it an underlying element of compulsion. For example, in the case of the Harlem Shake videos and similar projects, like the Gangnam Style dance, participating may seem to be something that is merely formally permitted, not required or expected. But what are the consequences for not taking part? Is there a price to be paid by the employee who prefers to do the job when at work and then retire home to watch a movie in the evening, rather than participate in a making a group video with her more 'active' colleagues?

Boltanski and Chiapello offer a way to understand the importance of social links and seemingly arbitrary projects as a method of securing future benefits and employability in a decentralized corporate environment. They describe what could be understood as an economy of participation, in which the predominant system of determining just distribution is that of the project or network.[53] The person best positioned to succeed in this system is someone who is mobile and who has contacts across multiple networks, especially if they function as a crucial link between otherwise separate networks. In the "projective city," activity is the general equivalent according to which the status of persons and things are measured.[54] Whether projects are remunerated or not, whether they are categorized as 'work' or 'personal' projects, becomes less important than the number of networks one is integrated in through these projects and whether or not involvement will increase one's future ability to integrate into new projects. If a

person counts themselves out of participatory opportunities too often, they risk losing potential contacts and being perceived as dead weight in projects. In this system, a person's personal hobbies and social relations are completely integrated into this opportunity structure and cannot be dismissed as something outside of formal work relations.

The dualism of activity and passivity are clearly not adequate for assessing the political nature of a practice. In this thesis, action (rather than activity or participation) will be the category put forward to describe practice that is transformative of social conditions and this may include in its purview practices typically understood as 'passive' or non-participatory.

Structure, Procedure, Process

In the participatory complex, the reification of activity in general is at times accompanied by an insistent focus on organizational structures. A participatory structure or process is thought to be good because it involves a kind of opening up of exclusive activities or decision-making power to a broader group. The organizational form of participation may be that of a network, a contest open to all and judged by all who are interested, an event in public space open to all comers, an open-ended discussion group, consensus decision-making, some other form of deliberative democracy, or various voting systems. When participation operates ideologically, the particular organizational structure or process, if properly adhered to, is thought to either guarantee a beneficial or legitimate outcome, or else, the process or structure itself is understood to be more important than any eventual decision or consequence. A confusion of means with ends can follow from an obsession with process and result in the undermining of effective practice oriented towards bettering social conditions.

In recent years, the network has come to the fore as the communication structure associated with openness, decentralization, and hence freedom of expression and democracy. Attention to the politics of networks has been a productive site of contestation over the status of open code, intellectual property and traditionally public infrastructures like communications systems.[55] However, the work to politicize networks at times rests on liberal assumptions about the nature of freedom, which privileges choice and personal expression over collective struggle. If the end goal of the struggle over networks is simply for them to remain relatively transparent and free from regulation, and if it is assumed that this very openness and decentralized structure serves as a guarantee of freedom and democracy, then the actual content of political struggles is reduced to questions of access and collective will is imagined as nothing more than an aggregate of individual preferences. Battles over the open status of networks may prevent or reverse the capitalization and control of the infrastructure, but this merely sets a limit on a market system that is otherwise accepted and compatible with existing liberal democracy.

The focus on organizational procedures can risk positing democracy as the horizon of politics, at the expense of a substantial critique of social and economic inequality, exploitation, or environmental destruction. While democratic organizations may be an important tool for involving people in social struggles, the democratic procedures themselves are not the ultimate end and will not automatically produce critical outcomes. The liberal commentator Rick Salutin makes a similar point in relation to the struggle for proportional representation in Canada. While a more proportionately representative government may deliver fairer outcomes in the short term, the crises of governance afflicting Europe in the wake of economic restructuring, where proportional representation is the norm, signals a deeper structural problem that cannot be solved by minor technical procedural changes.[56] The obsession with perfecting procedures betrays a

desire to solve the problems of democracy with more democracy. There is no perfect set of procedures or structures that will guarantee the impossibility of domination or social conflict and organizational breakdown. This procedural emphasis can end up paradoxically reinforcing the very technological rationality that a focus on means rather than ends is intended to avoid, insofar as a technical solution is sought for an essentially political problem.

Immediacy, Anti-representation

Participation often carries with it a desire to dispense with leaders or representatives altogether in order to make decisions directly without chances of distortion or manipulation. Forms of direct decision making can range from completely informal "consensus" to more formally structured methods. The former has been criticized by Jo Freeman in her well known essay on the destructive informality of decision making processes in the women's movement in the late 1960s.[57] What Freeman describes as the 'tyranny of structurelessness' is a situation where a lack of clear rules results in unchecked power dynamics controlling an organization. In the case of the women's movement, a lack of formal leaders or representatives was initially assumed to dissolve the problem of unequal power. However, since natural leaders and charismatic individuals tend to emerge automatically this informality resulted in no accountability, a lack of transparency, and cliquish behaviour rather than direct democracy.

The desire for immediacy has long fueled the embrace of new communication technologies as a solution to the problems of representation. One common fantasy that accompanied the spread of the Internet was that of direct democracy through online polling and referenda. In this line of thought, online access solves the problems of scale long seen as a fetter on involving masses of people in decision making. It could potentially reduce or eliminate entirely the need for

representatives as majoritarian public opinion would become immediately transparent. In *Speaking Into the Air*, John Durham Peters explores how the emergence of distant communication facilitated by the postal service, telephone, and radio fueled fantasies of direct spiritual communion that were founded on idealist conceptions of communication.[58] He critiques these idealist conceptions as repressing the material reality of mediation, especially the body as the ground of communication and guarantee of presence and authenticity.[59] The material reality of mediation inevitably contradicts the fantasy of a 'perfect' disappearing medium that could provide direct contact with another across time and space, and this is seen most clearly in moments of breakdown and interference that make this materiality apparent. The fantasies of digital democracy for example have come up against problems of security and authentication, technical bugs, and a lack of trust due to the opacity of software.

The longing for immediacy remains a value of participation when it is understood as a way to bypass interference or distortion in order to perfectly reflect the intentions or desires of the people. The privileging of immediacy and avoidance of representation, whether it be political representation or symbolic representation, is based on a lack of acknowledgement of the nature of subjectivity. According to psychoanalytic thought, mediation and distortion are not something merely extrinsic to the individual subject but are constitutive of subjectivity. As Jodi Dean persuasively argues in her analysis of Occupy Wall Street, this internal division prevents the people as political subjects from knowing beforehand the nature of their desire.[60]

In the case of Occupy Wall Street, Dean addresses the perception that this movement exemplified an anti-representational politics. Two implicit assumptions circulating around OWS were first, that it is not legitimate for someone to speak for another because it deprives the person spoken for of autonomy, and second, no one can speak for the movement because this would

reduce its potential to what is already given.[61] Dean counters that these claims disavow division both within persons and between them. Rather than understand the fact of hierarchy or plurality as a negative limit on representation, she claims that it is a positive condition of it.[62] One of the principal contributions OWS has made to the possibility of a new form of leftist oppositional politics is the creation of a new politics of representation that insists on division. The content of this division is encapsulated in the phrase "the 99%," which Dean points out is not a label that designates a movement of literally 99% of the population against 1% of the population, as a truly non-representational politics would require. Rather, it is a movement made up of a group of committed activists mobilizing in the name of the 99%.[63] Dean urges the movement to let go of its ideological attachment to horizontality and autonomy at the expense of solidarity and collectivity by recognizing occupation as a movement based on two lacks: the openness of history and its own non-knowledge of its desire. Since we don't know what we desire we can never fully and immediately present this desire to others. On the contrary, the desire for collectivity and what this might look like is something that must be continually made present to ourselves through the vehicle of the party form. The value of immediacy present in ideologies of participation draws on fantasies of internal wholeness and self-knowledge as well as fantasies of spiritual communion across the impossible divides of space and time. Following a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity, this thesis understands these values as symptoms that block rather than enable participation from functioning as a transformative political practice.

Physical Presence: Face-to-Face and Bodily Co-presence

The value of immediacy is also apparent in participation that privileges face-to-face interaction and dialogue. The value of face-to-face interaction is often presented as a rejection of

the previously described fantasy of direct connection with others facilitated by communication technologies. It is a reaction to the gaps, breakdowns, interference and disembodiment that necessarily accompanies mediation, and an attempt to find a solid foundation for social relations in the intimacy of physical presence. The face-to-face has a long history in the participatory imagination as a form of interaction that is attached to instances of participatory decision making that are often cloaked in nostalgia, such as town hall meetings and other locally based, small-scale community associations. These modes of interaction are at times seen as an antidote to the problems of online anonymity, including lack of commitment, empathy, or appreciation for shared context that can result from technologically mediated communications.

Against the common idealization of face-to-face dialogue as the most authentic and ideal form of interaction, Peters refers to Plato's *Phaedrus* to elucidate how even this most intimate form of communication can be subject to distortion or tyrannical control.[64] Peters argues that dialogical communication, understood as an intimate/erotic meeting or communion of two souls has come to form the standard against which all forms of communication are measured. According to Peters' interpretation, the *Phaedrus* contrasts dialogue with dissemination, with the former indicating a reciprocal relationship that is specifically addressed and the latter referring to a mode of distribution that is unidirectional and indifferent to the receiver.[65] An important point that Peters makes is that for Socrates this division between dialogue and dissemination is not simply mapped onto different techniques of communication, with dialogue referring to interpersonal communication between two people, and dissemination referring strictly to writing or to public address. The negative qualities of dissemination can occur in face-to-face interactions and there are methods of public address that include the positive qualities of dialogical communication. Peters then furthers his critique of the privileging of dialogue by

offering a counterexample of dissemination as a mode of communication favoured by Jesus. Rather than the sender-oriented communication that Socrates privileges, in which 'cultivation' of the receiver can also be understood as an attempt to control the meaning of the message, the dissemination of parables in Jesus's teaching is receiver-oriented in the sense that it depends on the receiver for interpretation and is offered to everyone equally.[66] Here, dissemination is presented as more inclusive and egalitarian than the necessarily exclusive dialogical form. Peters' ultimate argument is that all forms of communication involve gaps and distortion, and that the image of dialogue as direct spiritual communion ignores the fact of embodiment and the value of distant communication.

The value of the face-to-face in participation regularly comes up against the problem of scale. There is a limit to how many people can meaningfully interact in a face-to-face setting. Certain kinds of participation bypass this constraint by instead privileging bodily co-presence as the guarantee of commitment and authenticity. In reaction to the disembodied nature of online participation, bodily co-presence is put forward as a method to substantiate political commitment and collective ties by putting one's physical body on the line in public space. In contrast to the convenient kinds of online participation that have been dismissed as 'clicktivism,' being physically present increases the risk and inconvenience incurred by the participant and is therefore more meaningful as a sign of solidarity.

At times, simply the presence of bodies in space may be taken as carrying with it an implicit politicization, such as when festival spaces, riots, or other spontaneous crowd formations are interpreted as 'subversive' simply by virtue of their unpredictability and ability to disrupt the existing order. While bodily co-presence can serve as a ground for solidarity in political struggle, it is important to avoid fetishizing the transgressions of crowds as inherently political.[67] There is

a difference between putting one's body at risk for a thoroughly politicized public claim, as in many street demonstrations, and taking part in a depoliticized crowd that assumes the form of a public body but actively avoids the risk inherent in ideological commitments.[68] For example, on October 31, 2010, an event was organized by the television satirists Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. Titled the *Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear*, this event was organized in reaction to a political rally organized a few months prior by Fox News disinfotainer Glen Beck. The political nature of the comedy programs, the pre-election timing of the event, and the fact that it was a reaction to a right-wing political rally, produced the appearance of a somewhat progressive social movement. However, the clearly satirical nature of the event and the lack of any divisive ideological content resulted in a rally that put forward no political stakes and led to no further mobilization on the part of the 250,000 people who attended the rally in Washington D.C. The bodily co-presence was not enough to politicize a crowd who were solicited to approach the event as a rejection of political division and an assertion of inclusive commonality.

Inclusion, Pluralism

A primary value of any participatory structure is inclusion. Room is made for everyone who wants to take part, although the terms of this inclusion are not always transparent or open to negotiation. The desire for inclusiveness is one that may derive from a genuine concern for those social groups who have historically been and continue to be marginalized from dominant institutions and social spaces. However, the underlying logic of inclusion assumes a pluralistic social field that Žižek argues rests on the denial of fundamental antagonisms or social divisions that cannot be incorporated into the political space. Rather than effectively make room for difference, a politics of inclusion often prevents fundamental antagonisms from being expressed

within political space by defining them out of existence as totalitarian or antidemocratic. This often becomes apparent when non-western cultural norms are rejected as incompatible with western notions of tolerance. With this in mind, it is important to be aware of how notions of inclusivity can carry with them an implicit consensus concerning the boundaries of the social space being produced that may define certain political differences out of existence before the interaction even begins.

Žižek's critique of the notion of political space as a pluralistic field containing multiple equivalent struggles is aimed at liberal democratic capitalist ideology as well as postmodern identity politics and radical democracy. He argues that what all of these approaches to politics share is a resignation to capitalism as a system with no viable alternative and the exclusion of class struggle from the political field.[69] Žižek relies on Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony as an example of radical democratic theory. For Laclau and Mouffe, since the place of power can never be fully occupied and since any particular element occupying it can never represent the fullness of society, we are better off if the precarity of power is formalized in a democratic system.[70] Democracy allows the impossible place of power to become a condition of legitimacy rather than an obstacle to it. Against this assertion of the equivalence of multiple elements articulated in a political sequence, Žižek argues that there is always one element in a series that also serves as the structuring principle of the entire series.[71] In reaction to the common claim that to posit class as the element serving as the structuring principle of other struggles would be to essentialize class, Žižek points out that in Laclau and Mouffe's theory it is democracy itself that operates as the structuring principle of radical democracy. They conceive of all political struggles following the democratic invention as an extension of democracy to ever more domains, such as race, gender, and the economy. Following Laclau's own logic, Žižek argues

that what appears to be an internal difference of elements in the democratic political space (that between gender, race, class, etc.) is in fact the distorted image of an external antagonism that represents democracy's other. In this case the other of political democracy is that which is posited as non-political: the economy.[72] Democratic struggle gains its meaning through the exclusion of the economic domain. Žižek argues that postmodern politics avoids repoliticizing capitalism because the very form of the political in which it operates is grounded in the depoliticization of the economy.[73]

If class struggle tends to be effectively excluded from the horizon of radical democratic politics we should pay close attention to the way that calls for political participation either exclude the economy entirely from their political imaginary, or include it in various forms that may not question the fundamental structure of exploitation, such as workplace democracy, 'shared' capitalism, or participatory management. Participatory management and its limits will be discussed in chapter three.

Consensus

A sixth value of participation that closely overlaps with inclusivity and pluralism is consensus. Consensus is similar in that it expresses a will towards a process that supposedly encompasses all differences, but it also expresses a more specific desire for agreement in which differences are overcome. Consensus decision making attempts to create a space of discussion and compromise that ensures that everyone's concerns are somehow addressed, yet at the same time, this method doesn't formally recognize division. The fantasy of completeness that is present in consensus has already been discussed above under the heading of immediacy as a method for disavowing division in the social space as well as the internal division of subjects. Yet beyond this,

consensus also bears criticism of the way its emphasis on forging agreement can stifle individuality and impose an implicit group-think on participants due to the social pressure to conform and move forward. Consequently, the valuation of consensus may end up reinforcing normative solutions rather than create space for questioning them, and may result in mediocrity rather than innovation and originality.

In *The Nightmare of Participation*, Markus Miessen presents a challenge to what he sees as a politics of consensus that facilitates traditional power relations that exist in the profession of architecture.[74] Miessen sees democratic invitations based on bottom-up models as heavily defined by the existing power structures of the client/service-provider relationship.[75] These compromised methods, although bottom-up in structure, are so imbued within a force field of existing interests that there is little room for movement or change. The solution Meissen offers is the critical spatial practice of the 'cross-bench practitioner.' He argues that progressive transformation is more likely to occur through purposeful disruption and the instigation of antagonism on the part of an outsider who is not invested in the existing relations of power.[76] By sidestepping into alien fields of knowledge an individual can drive political change more effectively than working strictly from within a consensus-based democratic process. There is reason to be critical of the way Meissen focuses his critical spatial practice exclusively on the individual, yet at the same time, his vision of politics operating through disruption, rupture and antagonism, rather than majoritarian representation through democratic methods, could be productive if articulated in relation to collective political struggle.

Personalization as Empowerment

A final value of the participatory complex that I will outline here is personalization as a mode of empowerment. Personalization refers to a particular mode of contemporary consumption and branding, as well as a normative form of self-expression that places value on opinion, preference, and lifestyle as significant factors in political discussion. Over the past three decades there has been a shift away from mass production that results in large amounts of identical products, towards more flexible, just-in-time methods that allow for greater customization and variety in order to better meet customer demands. This shift towards customization has been driven by increasingly refined systems of market research and data gathering methods that place potential customers in highly gradated categories, which allows for more finely targeted marketing, branding and product design. It has also been propelled by postwar cultural shifts that place greater emphasis on expressions of individuality and originality as signs of distinction in contrast to more standardized indications of status.[77]

Examples of personalization can easily be found in marketing. For instance, it is now possible to purchase shoes with personalized inscriptions, M&Ms printed with one's initials, or the same pair of American Apparel pants in 50 different colours. Many companies also offer customers ways to participate in the production process through new technologies. For example, in 2008, Nike launched a campaign called photoiD that encouraged people to upload a photo from their mobile device into its software program.[78] The program finds the two dominant colours in the photograph, finds the closest matches in the Nike colour palette, and then produces a shoe design that combines those two colours. This "personalized" shoe can then, of course, be ordered through an online ordering system. An image of the shoe is turned into "wallpaper" for the customer's cell phone that can also be sent to friends. Through this interactive process, Nike

hopes that the individual experience that the customer felt at the moment of taking the photo will be attached to the Nike brand. It is through marketing techniques like this that brands attempt to capture the labour, affect, and creativity of the consumer. The companies thereby associate themselves not only with a set of standard qualities aimed at particular demographics but with the specific experiences of individual customers. The hope is that this will result in a stronger affective attachment that gets beyond the cynicism and wariness of the contemporary postmodern subject towards commodification.

When personalization is a central value of participation, to participate tends to indicate an opportunity for self-expression or some kind of recognition of unique identity or experience. While predominant in consumer relationships, personalization as a value also extends to public and political spaces.[79] An example of political personalization could be seen during the Quebec student strike of 2012. The red square was a symbol that was widely adopted by supporters of accessible, tuition-free higher education. Red squares made of felt were affixed to clothing and bags and became a highly visible symbol that circulated all over the city of Montreal and helped to make the strike a constant presence to supporters and critics alike.[80] Over time, a small sub-phenomenon arose in which different coloured squares were worn by a few individuals scattered throughout the protests. The black square, the only alternative to gain any wide adoption, signified a rejection of the anti-protest Bill 78 passed by the provincial Liberal government of Jean Charest in an attempt to squash the daily student demonstrations. People who chose to wear the black square nevertheless almost without exception wore it alongside the red square, which remained the dominant symbol of solidarity. The other coloured squares that could occasionally be seen included white, orange, green, blue and possibly others. These squares were meant to

specify the wearer's particular position on tuition increases with the white square, for example, indicating support for a tuition freeze but not a reduction.

Some may interpret this proliferation of coloured squares as a positive sign of the democratic nature of the strike and the variety of viewpoints on education funding that it made room for. Yet to reduce a symbol of solidarity to a sign representing one particular viewpoint among others would be to misinterpret the nature of this struggle. The point of the strike was not to encourage democratic debate as a good in itself, although this was one result of the events, but to introduce a division into the daily consensus of a democratic pluralism that rejects anything other than a slower or quicker shift towards privatized tuition-financed higher education. While there never was a singular unambiguous political position designated by the red square, its common adoption represented a will towards solidarity and recognition of what was common among those who identified with the movement. The uneasy attempts to personalize the square, on the contrary, signified a lack of faith in collective struggle and an attempt to impose a pluralistic politics on what was ultimately a universal principle of equality in education. Simply the fact that some individuals had an opinion and participated in democratic debate, regardless of the political content of the contribution, is not a fact worth celebrating. Fortunately, in the case of the Quebec student strike, the tendency towards personalization remained insignificant in comparison to this universal principle. In the following chapter I will take the strike as one of my first counterexamples of a political practice whose success was predicated in part on a tempering of participatory values.

The values of the participatory complex break down the ambiguity of participation into more manageable parts, enabling greater specificity when attempting to unpack how it is functioning ideologically in its various manifestations. As I turn to an examination of participation-oriented

projects across social movements, the knowledge economy, and social practice art, I will be attentive to the particular ways that values of participation galvanize desire and organize enjoyment in directions that support the status quo of participation as an ideological prop for continuing our attachment to neoliberalism. In chapter two the most relevant values I explore are inclusivity and pluralism, as well as structure, procedure and process over ends and anti-representational attitudes. In chapter three I focus on activity over passivity as a value that upholds productivity and contribution under neoliberal working conditions while staving off anxiety. I also look at personalization as a form of individual autonomy that minimizes collective autonomy. In chapter four I explore a different angle on anti-representational attitudes, a rejection of aesthetic mediation in favour of what are seen as more authentic participatory relationships. The value of process over ends and the embrace of immediacy through a diminishment of artistic authorship also are relevant to this discussion. As I develop my critiques of participation as ideology and the values that support it, I will offer counter-examples of projects and practices that may seem to share some of the values of the participatory complex but that nonetheless organize enjoyment differently. Ultimately, I use such counter-examples to argue that emancipatory politics and direct democratic practices need not be dependent on participation as ideology and that there is good reason to distance radical leftist politics from its logic.

Notes

[1] See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 1977) and Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, pp. 227-40 (London: Routledge, 1981).

[2] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: *Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1985).

[3] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1977), p. 232.

[4] Ibid., p. 233.

[5] Ibid., p. 234.

[6] Ibid., p. 233.

[7] Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).

[8] Ibid., p. 41.

[9] Ibid*.,* p. 44.

[10] Ibid., p. 45.

[11] See Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations*, pp. 177-82 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[12] The decline of effectiveness of ideological institutions such as the family, church, political parties, and nation is referred to by Žižek as the collapse of the big Other under the conditions of late-capitalism.

[13] Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964), (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), p. 72.

[14] Ibid., p. 12.

[15] Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, p. 46.

[16] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 124-128.

[17] Ibid., p. 99.

[18] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3.

[19] Ibid., p. 2; pp. 64-7.

[20] Ibid., pp. 22-6.

[21] Ibid., pp. 28-9.

[22] Ibid., "The Neoliberal State," pp. 64-86.

[23] Ibid., p. 73.

[24] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

[25] Ibid., p. 81.

[26] Ibid., p. 19.

[27] Ibid., p. 40.

[28] Ibid., pp. 39-41.

[29] Ibid., pp. 41-3.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

[32] Ibid., p. 30.

[33] Ibid., p. 33.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., pp. 32-34.

[36] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

[37] Annie J. McClanahan, "Becoming Non-Economic: Human Capital Theory and Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos*," *Theory & Event* 20:2 (April 2017): 510-9.

[38] Ibid., p. 513-4.

[39] Ibid., p. 518-9.

[40] Ibid., pp. 511-2.

[41] Ibid., p. 517.

[42] Patchen Markell, "Neoliberalism's Uneven Revolution: Reflections on Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos*," *Theory & Event* 20:2 (April 2017): 520-7.

[43] Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo, "Refurbishing Liberal Democracy?: On Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos*," *Theory & Event* 20:2 (April 2017): 528-36.

[44] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, p. 44.

[45] Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner argue that this lack of agency is one of the central weaknesses of Michel Foucault's conception of the subject. They characterize the problem in this way: "[Foucault] conceptualized discourse formations as autonomous, self-sufficient systems, the functioning of which could be explained without reference to some system-external outside. In this context the subject was conceived as an effect of discourse and would amount to little more than a mirror image of the subject positions produced within a given discursive regime." Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner, *Žižek Beyond Foucault* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillon, 2007), p. 99.

[46] For a more detailed discussion of Foucault's evasion of the Real see Vighi and Feldner, *Žižek Beyond Foucault*, pp. 20-24.

[47] Darin Barney embraces the metaphor of politics as pathology, noting its disruptive, destabilizing and burdensome nature, but nonetheless defending it against the apolitical impetus of publicity, figuring the latter as a kind of inoculation against outbreaks of politics in the context of contemporary liberal democracies. See Darin Barney, "Publics without Politics: Surplus Publicity as Depoliticization," in *Publicity and the Canadian State: Critical Communications Perspectives,* ed. Kirsten Kozolanka, pp. 70-86 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014).

[48] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968), p. 89.

[49] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2005).

[50] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denegration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California, 1994).

[51] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), pp. 25-6.

[52] Ibid., p. 26.

[53] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 103-63.

[54] Ibid., p. 109.

[55] For instance Lawrence Lessig conceptualizes open code as a check on government control. See Lawrence Lessig, "the Limits in open code," in *Code: Version 2.0* (Basic Books, 2006), pp. 138-53.

[56] Rick Salutin, "Democracy Disconnect Part Two: Correcting Canada's Democratic Deficit," *The Star,* July 14, 2012. http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2012/07/14/democracy_disconnect_part_2correcting_canadas_democratic_deficit.html. Salutin sees the party form as constraining the democratic nature of parliamentary systems, yet he doesn't explicitly mention the contradictions confronted by democratic systems which operate in contexts of massive economic inequality produced by capitalism. For an argument for the inherent incompatibility between capitalist property and democracy see C.B. Macpherson, "A Political Theory of Property," in *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, pp. 120-40 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[57] Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurlessness," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-3): 151-65.

[58] John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1999), p. 180.

[59] Ibid., pp. 184-5.

[60] Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 207-50.

[61] Ibid., pp. 225-6.

[62] Ibid., p. 229.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, p. 34.

[65] Ibid., p. 37.

[66] Ibid., p. 53.

[67] In her analysis of contemporary crowds Jodi Dean argues that while the crowd constitutes a collective subject that can function as a ground for politicization, it does not itself constitute a politics. See Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

[68] Alain Badiou offers a helpful categorization of how different kinds of riots relate to and may come to constitute political events, naming immediate, latent, and historical riots as the primary forms. See Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

[69] Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, please!" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 95.

[70] Ibid., pp. 92-4.

[71] Ibid., p. 96.

[72] Ibid., p. 94.

[73] Ibid., p. 98.

[74] Markus Meissen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 13-14.

[75] Ibid., p. 17.

[76] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[77] For a discussion of how rebelling against "conformist" cultural consumption drives consumerism rather than counters it, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997) and Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't be Jammed* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2004).

[78] The Nike campaign is described in Jai Boem Kim, Yoori Koo, and Don Ryun Chang, "Integrated Brand Experience Through Sensory Branding and IMC," *Design Management Review* 20:3 (2009): 72-81.

[79] Dean addresses the problematic overlap between contemporary ideologies of individualism and leftist politics. See Dean, *Crowds and Party*, pp. 31-72.

[80] For a discussion of the meaning of the red square see Marc James Léger, "The Quebec Maple Spring, the Red Square and After," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (October 2012): unpaginated. www.eipcp.net/n/1350583322; Darin Barney, "Why I Wear the Red Square: A List," *Wi Journal of Mobile Media* 6:2 (Spring 2012): unpaginated; and Olivier Asselin, "Red Square: a Coloured Form's Political Destiny," trans. Laura Baladur, *Theory & Event* 15:3 special supplement (Summer 2012): unpaginated.

CHAPTER TWO: PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVISM

Students for a Democratic Society, Occupy Wall Street, and La Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante

Horizontality, bottom-up movements, grassroots activism, decentralized structures, networked affinity groups, rhizomatic connections, undirected 'intelligent' swarms, spontaneous convergence, consensus process, general assemblies, and direct, genuine, participatory democracy – these are some of the terms used to describe the organizational structures and political ethos of social movements critical of neoliberalism from the 1990s to the present. This proliferation of organizational ideas reflects an intense embrace of participation on the part of significant segments of the radical left as a central, if not the most important principle in its vision of social change. This recent interest in participation as a political ideal finds its inspiration and origins in an earlier wave of participation as ideology. In 1962 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) introduced the concept of "participatory democracy" in its founding document, the *Port Huron Statement*. This student manifesto set the tone for what became known as the New Left and the conception of participatory democracy articulated within it continues to be an important influence and touchstone for contemporary approaches to radical democracy. When we speak of participation in relation to activism and social movements in a North American context the idea is inextricably linked to participatory democracy.

In contrast to this close conflation of participation and democracy in the radical imagination, I argue that participation today operates as a complex of values that has become uncoupled from direct democratic practices. Distinguishing between participation as ideology and democratic practice enables us to better consider the extra baggage that participation carries with it as a widely accepted value while direct democracy continues to be a marginal practice. The gap

between ideal and practice cannot be closed by making our practices "more participatory" and insisting ever more strongly on participation as an ideal. Even genuine practices of participation exhibit internal limitations and contradictions. It is my contention in this chapter that the limitations of participation cannot be addressed solely by adjusting decision-making structures or procedures but that the very ideal of participation must be questioned and tempered in relation to other more substantial political goals and principles. What concerns me are the moments when participation is accepted as an ideology and the negative consequences this may pose for radical organizing at the level of political subjectivity and not so much the internal procedures of participatory decision making, which vary widely and differ in effectiveness from context to context. It is therefore important to differentiate between democratic decision-making structures, with which participation is often conflated, and participation as an ideology that consists of values that exceed these practices. In order to further clarify this distinction I will present a comparative analysis of two contemporary political events: Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the 2012 Quebec student strike. In relation to other North American political movements over the past decade, both of these events have displayed periods of marked success in terms of massive and enduring popular mobilization. Both also involved direct democratic decision-making structures and were guided to varying degrees by participation as an ideological principle. Despite a similar reliance on general assemblies as the privileged decision making instance, important discrepancies exist in how participation as an ideal is interpreted in these movements. Drawing on the values of the participatory complex, I will seek to articulate the particular values of participation that fueled each of these events, along with their symptoms, in order to clarify the limits of participation as a discourse of radical transformation.

The aim of this chapter is to present conflicting histories of participation as ideology within activism, the first situated in democratic theory and fueling both SDS and OWS, and the second situated within syndicalist thought and motivating the practices of CLASSE (La Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante). I will argue that in the case of OWS particular participatory values produced an understanding of politics that was primarily dialogical rather than antagonistic. The result was a movement with an intense symbolic power, but with an inability to mobilize an enduring organizational counter-power. In the case of the Quebec student strike, participation remained a core component of organization, yet at the level of ideology, it was overshadowed by syndicalist principles of direct action, solidarity, organization based on distinctly defined common interests, and the maintenance of a permanent relation of force with the state. These principles appear to have tempered participation as ideology enabling CLASSE to pose a significant challenge to the politics of austerity. The more highly politicized student movement was able to achieve real political concessions and expand its organizational and mobilizing capacities to enable long-term struggle.

Before developing this comparison I will begin this chapter with a brief analysis of the meaning of participation in SDS and examine how the ideals it popularized contributed to the status of participation as a value on the Left. While a comparison of today's movements helps to clarify the operations of ideology in the present, a comparison across time allows us to think about the origin of participation as ideology and how these earlier stages continue to affect today's value structures. Drawing on Žižek's interpretation of the function of the vanishing mediator in historical transformation I will argue that the mid-century ideological shift towards participation should be understood as two distinct moments of transformation rather than as a singular moment of rupture between the Old and New Left. In this light, participation as

ideology appears as a renewal of liberal democratic ideology internal to its own unfolding contradictions and not an ideal that substantially threatens or undermines the existing ideological horizon of liberal democratic capitalism.

Postwar Participation and the Vanishing Mediator of Direct Democracy

The *Port Huron Statement* raises a number of themes that are characteristic of theories of participatory democracy and that will be reiterated in some of the basic assumptions of OWS. Like today's Occupy movement, SDS understood itself as defending a "truly democratic alternative" to the existing political system that they perceived as failing to live up to its own democratic ideals of freedom and equality.[1] Theirs would be a democracy of individual participation allowing the individual to share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of their life, encouraging independence, and providing the means for this common participation.[2] Unlike many of today's pro-democracy movements critical of austerity and corporate power, these participatory ideals arose in a context of widespread material prosperity, at least on the part of the writers of the statement, who defined themselves as "people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit."[3] These participatory democrats were motivated more by struggles of conscience provoked by the apparent hypocrisy of American life than by personal material struggles. The particular political issues that they named as embodying this hypocrisy were firstly, the ongoing injustice of racial discrimination, which undermines the assertion in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, and secondly, the United States' role in continuing and aggravating the Cold War rather than making genuine moves towards disarmament. In addition, SDS expressed concern with ongoing inequality and poverty in the

face of material prosperity, meaningless work and idleness, and what they sensed to be a deep seated apathy in relation to meaningful democratic engagement.

One of the most striking dimensions of SDS's early manifesto is its articulation of an existential unease and sense of alienation in the face of mass consumer society and bureaucratic organization. Beyond the precise political problems discussed in the statement are complaints concerning a lack of personal meaning and authenticity in contemporary modes of living. SDS characterizes some of the symptoms of this condition to include isolation, alienation, apathy, emptiness, and the feeling that one is an object of manipulation rather than an active agent who can influence the shape of one's life. For instance, they write: "The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with an image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic; a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values".[4] The statement comments on a felt lack of community as "[l]oneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today."[5] In opposition to this condition, SDS believes that participatory democracy will promote humanistic values following the assumption that human beings "have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity."[6] Participatory society would encourage people to question status values, be open to new possibilities, and be curious and willing to learn, and this, against what they characterize as existing tendencies to conform to preconceived habits and roles. In order to realize human potential and to enable people to find personal meaning SDS privileges public dialogue and rational discussion as a means of decision making that fosters community and political engagement.

In SDS's emphasis on meaningful participation in the public sphere we can see the influence of the critique of mass society of C. Wright Mills.[7] Mills argued that a genuine democracy depends on a society of publics that is based on rational-critical discussion free from state interference, where the number of people expressing opinions is roughly equal to the number of those receiving them, where meaningful and timely responses to public opinion is possible, and where the formation of public opinion leads to effective action on the part of prevailing authorities.[8] Mills characterized existing mass society as failing to provide the grounds for genuine democratic control and instead consisting of a political system carefully managed from above. Significantly, he emphasized the continuities in this regard between the liberal democratic capitalism of the U.S. and the state socialism of the Soviet Bloc. Despite ideological and economic differences, both are seen as manifestations of the bureaucratic state management of mass societies. One of the most telltale characteristics of mass society, according to Mills, is the decline of voluntary associations as spaces for public opinion formation and the rise of bureaucratic organizations that replace politics with administration.[9] SDS's ideal of participatory democracy sought to remedy the lack of participation in mass society through a revitalization of the public sphere, beginning with the creation of a decentralized national student organization that is accountable to delegates from local chapters. These local chapters were to provide a space of face-to-face discussion and decision-making that could directly influence the directions of the national organization.

It has been pointed out by early SDS members that participatory democracy was not intended to refer to a particular decision making process. Robert Ross describes it rather as an American vision of socialist democracy in which people are engaged in the political process and have real influence.[10] It stood for a society-wide vision of democracy rather than an internal decision

making mechanism. Richard Rothstein describes how the organization was initially structured according to a traditional representative model that consisted of a President, Vice-President, a National Executive Committee supported by a fulltime staff, and a National Council made up of delegates from each local chapter.[11] SDS used Robert's Rules of Order as a decision-making process, but with an emphasis on open communication and consensus. Internally, it was not so much the procedures used where participatory values were evident but rather in an inclusive and encouraging attitude towards new members and a supportive rather than combative culture of deliberation.[12] Up until the mid-sixties this understanding of participatory democracy seems to have been implicit and accepted by members. However, by 1965 when SDS's membership exploded following the rise of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the march against the Vietnam War in Washington, participatory democracy became an area of tension and conflict between old and new members. By the end of the sixties SDS had lost all measure of transparency and accountability to the broader membership when the informal leadership clique that was based in the national office staff took over the 1968 national convention and imposed its will.[13] How did this break down in internal democracy occur?

Contrary to the popular assumptions of the time, Rothstein argues that the demise of democratic practice within SDS was not due to representative structures but to their progressive dismantling in the name of "participatory democracy."[14] He describes how the extreme hesitancy on the part of the natural leadership to assume formal responsibility led to a high rotation of elected leaders.[15] Rather than disperse power, this created a situation of informal and unaccountable power being exercised behind the façade of figureheads, who, being less experienced and articulate than the original executives, were consequently less influential. Furthermore, the eventual elimination of the roles of President, Vice-President and the Executive

Committee, due to a rejection of "hierarchy" and "elitism," resulted in power being concentrated in the unelected staff of the national office.[16] Attempts to "decentralize" power to the local chapters resulted in them being controlled by regional leadership cliques since this decentralization occurred before a strong democratic base had been established in these chapters.[17] What Rothstein refers to as the "democratic mystique" also negatively affected the National Council. Limiting speaking and voting rights in the National Council to SDS chapter delegates was perceived as "bourgeois" and "elitist."[18] However, once these rights were extended to anyone present at the meetings the democratic control of the Council by the local chapters was undermined as they were soon outvoted by non-delegate participants. Rothstein remarks how this denial of formal roles went so far that community organizers in SDS felt that the function of organizing was itself hierarchical and elitist, leading to a denial and misunderstanding of the organizers' own practice. He claims that this "led organizers to pretend (at times even to themselves) that 'the people' were deciding issues that only organizers knew about, let alone understood."[19] Rothstein's account reveals how active attempts to avoid any level of representation beyond an imaginary "people" or "the membership" actually destroyed the condition for mutual accountability between the various organizational units of SDS.

In practice, 'participatory democracy' in SDS seems to have signified a particular attitude or pose towards formality and institutions rather than refer to a specific democratic process. Francesca Polletta argues persuasively that the conflict that emerged in SDS was not one between idealistic purity and pragmatic efficacy so much as a displacement of other antagonisms onto questions of organizational structure and formal roles.[20] The antagonisms faced by SDS were based in regional differences, disagreements over the value of community versus campus organizing, competitive desires for radical prestige, and an overall lack of program. Most

significant was a felt power imbalance between the "old guard" and the "new guard" which Polletta argues derived from the fact that original members used friendship as an associational model.[21] While friendship produced a sense of trust among the earlier cohort it is an inherently exclusive model of association that did not work for a mass organization once SDS grew in size. Not gaining easy access to these friendship networks among the old guard caused new members to feel excluded from influence. The question remains as to why this antagonism was displaced onto organizational structures in such a way as to remove the formal structures of the organization when the influence of the old guard occurred not through formal roles, which they had at this point vacated, but rather informally through friendship networks.

I agree with Polletta that in SDS the choice of participatory democracy as an organizational decision need not have undermined its pragmatic goals. But rather than treat it as an organizational decision that would enhance strategic goals and uphold core democratic principles it became an often empty rhetorical gesture, meant to display the radical authenticity of whoever invoked it and to justify organizational changes that were in some ways participatory (insofar as they drew on values of participation) but not necessarily democratic. It is apparent that participation increasingly became an ideological concept that signified more than the broad democratic socialism intended at the outset of the movement. Rather, participation referred to a set of values related to the broader shift designated by the counterculture.[22] Participants and Scholars of SDS characterize this shift towards a culture of participation in a variety of ways. Rothstein describes how the dismantling of representative structures in SDS was fueled by a strong moralistic critique of leadership and bureaucracy. The moral hegemony of the participatory democratic position, as manifested in an anti-hierarchy attitude, was so strong that even opponents of the anti-democratic structural changes being pursued were easily cowed into

accepting them for fear of being identified as complicit with the existing system.[23] Rothstein and Polletta locate the moral prestige of the anti-hierarchy position with the influence of SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) and of SDS's community organizing project ERAP (Economic Research and Action Project) since they were based in poor, black, or racially diverse communities and were consequently perceived to be removed from the bourgeois values that SDS was so eager to distance itself from.[24] Kenneth Keniston likewise remarks on the intense ambiguity towards positions of power and leadership displayed by young radicals in SDS.[25] He describes how one young man, given increased responsibilities at the national office and a formal title, was the "object of merciless teasing from his friends" due to the bureaucratic implications of this position.[26] Keniston goes on to write that he "sometimes felt that too little distinction was made between the rational use of authority based on competence and the irrational and authoritarian exploitation of leadership roles."[27] He continues, "similarly, power based on capacity and role sometimes seemed confused with domination and sadistic control."[28]

Norm Fruchter argues that the participatory democratic critique of organizational structure actually expressed a deeper ambivalence towards role and ambition.[29] He describes the importance of new lifestyles being developed at the time and the perceived need for balance between personal experience and political work. The significance of the former reflected new values that could not find adequate expression in political organization alone and led to the negative attitude towards formal roles and responsibility as "too serious."[30] The fact that a new organizational form that would reflect these new values had not yet been developed, caused leaders in SDS to cover over this gap between their values and their practice through "rituals of anti-authoritarianism, humility, and the renunciation of power."[31]

The above accounts lend support to my argument about the need to distinguish participation as ideology from democratic practice. It is by understanding the emergence of participation as a complex of values that are distinct from democratic practice that we can begin to treat participation as an ideology with its own effects on the political practices of those who are interpellated by it. In the case of SDS, the ideas of Herbert Marcuse are helpful in articulating both the malaise that was experienced by students and explaining what motivated their embrace of participation as a value. Marcuse's work also helps to account for the failure of the participatory critique to build the kind of democratic power that could challenge capitalist hegemony.[32] According to Marcuse, the great power of postwar ideology is the fact that the existing system appears to succeed in satisfying basic material needs and even allowing for a greater degree of sexual permissiveness, spurring an endless cycle of consumer desires that are never fully satisfied.[33] The concern that the writers of the Port Huron Statement expressed vis à vis the lack of meaning or authenticity in modern life could be accounted for with Marcuse's concept of "repressive desublimation."[34] As deep needs are placated by materialistic consumption, the ability of the system to meet a narrow range of needs through consumer items and leisure activities becomes the rationalization for the repression of the more authentic human needs for self-development, sociality, and creative exploration. It is especially important to note that in Marcuse's analysis it is not only the direct manipulation of information and lack of access to political influence that leads to alienation, but the very success of the system in creating and fulfilling human needs and thereby undermining in advance any meaningful space of opposition. This system is deeply ideological because, prior to any explicit political manipulation, it is the space of everyday life and consumption itself that reinforces submission to the status quo.

The values expressed in the Port Huron Statement, calling for creativity, community, and personal development would seem to be written from a similar position as that of Marcuse, condemning the existing society for its narrow status ideals and shallow consumerism at the expense of broader forms of human sociality. However, once participatory values became separated from a clear grounding in democratic practice it is possible to interpret the attitude of participation as articulating new needs that could in fact be adapted by the capitalist system without ultimately questioning the structural inequalities that inhere in it. Against the initial intentions of SDS, participatory democracy as an attitude, pose, or complex of values could be addressed at the level of culture, technology and economic reorganization within capitalism, rather than in the political sphere proper. In Marcuse's words, this would entail a continuation or extension of the paradox of repressive desublimation in which technological society "extend(s) liberty while intensifying domination."[35] While the decline of SDS contributed to the delegitimation of direct democratic practice in the popular imagination (based in part on an erroneous understanding of this decline), the anti-representative and anti-institutional attitude of participatory politics was retained and grew even stronger in the following decades as it became bolstered by the right-wing anti-government ideology from the 80s to the present. SDS left a significant imprint on the postwar imaginary, contributing to a more generalized acceptance of participation as a value or good in itself. While SDS believed that participatory democracy was necessary, but insufficient, for individuals to discover personal meaning in life, they did not consider the possibility that participation as a value, along with future network technologies, might deliver on some of the desires for creativity, personal expression, and social connectivity, but without the need for direct democratic influence in the formal political sphere.

Žižek's discussion of the vanishing mediator provides a useful way to understand the separation between direct democratic practices and participatory values.[36] Following on the work of Fredric Jameson, Žižek uses the examples of Protestantism and Jacobinism as necessary mediators between feudalism and secular capitalism that nonetheless became unnecessary once that transformation had been realized. To explain the necessity of the vanishing mediator Žižek turns to dialectics, arguing that these social changes occurred in two stages, first as a transformation of notional "content," and second, as a purely formal act. These Hegelian concepts can be understood to roughly correspond with the traditional Marxist concepts of economic base and ideological superstructure. According to him, the initial passage occurs as a transformation of the basic content of social life but in the name of a radicalized version of the old form.[37] In the case of Protestantism, its adherents sought to make Christianity the organizing principle of everyday life and to extend the reach of religious practice beyond the sacred domain of the Church with its specialized caste of ascetic monks and priests and to open it up to the laity. The paradox of the vanishing mediator is that its realization at the level of social content actually prepares the ground for its own dissolution. In the case of Protestantism, this very attempt to universalize religious practice prepared the ground for its retreat to the private sphere and the consequent secularization of the state, thereby both realizing and undermining the intentions of its actors. Žižek argues that:

> The first passage concerns "content" (under the guise of preserving the religious form or even its strengthening, the crucial shift – the assertion of the ascetic-acquisitive stance in economic activity as the domain of the manifestation of Grace – takes place), whereas the second passage is a purely formal act, a change of form (as soon as Protestantism is realized as the ascetic-acquisitive stance, it can fall off as form).[38]

This mediator was initially necessary because changes at the level of the "base" or civil society needed to be legitimated by the old form until they were adequately embedded in everyday life

as to no longer be open to question. Once the notional content of Protestantism (acquisitiveness and the private nature of religious practice) had become the organizing principle of society the old religious ideology could be cast off in favour of one that legitimates the new social relations more directly: secularism, or bourgeois liberalism.

If this dialectical movement of historical transformation is applied to mid-twentieth century participatory democracy we confront a similar paradox. In this case, SDS's initial intention is to radicalize the existing form of democratic politics. They argued that rather than a specialized domain inaccessible to the average citizen, democratic practice based on ideals of participation should become the organizing principle of everyday life. The radicalization of the old liberal democratic form ushers in transformations at the level of content, shaking off vestiges of traditional hierarchies as found in the nuclear family, greater room for experimentation in lifestyle, sexuality and cultural consumption, as well as personalization and consumer niches against mass conformism and standardization, greater autonomy and flexibility in the workplace over stifling bureaucracy and job security, and eventually, new modes of personal expression and communication through ICTs. The shift at the level of "content" or the private spheres of family, sexuality, work and consumption, results in individuals adapted to a more atomistic yet 'connected' lifestyle, with greater tolerance of difference, change, and mobility, and driven towards self-actualization and self-expression, precisely the traits required under conditions of increasing marketization, globalization, and economic precarity. The second shift at the level of form is the casting off of direct democratic practice as the no longer necessary vanishing mediator. Participatory democracy as an attitude within SDS helped paved the way for a participatory culture that does not require democratic practice in the political sphere.[39]

In relation to participation, the question raised by the vanishing mediator is to what degree participatory culture has been successful in reorganizing social life. If, as I argue, participation now forms a significant part of the existing symbolic network, its status would no longer be that of an autonomous political idea that creates room for truth in a moment of political contingency. Instead, its success at the level of notional content would indicate that it has attained the status of simple fact and, in Žižek's words, has become a part of the "ruling universal Lie."[40] On the surface level, the 60s rejection of the dominant values of mass society was simply a passing moment that like Protestantism or Jacobinism, arose in a moment of social antagonism only to vanish without realizing its project. But from the dialectical perspective that I am adopting we can see how this vanishing mediator is retained as a structuring principle of late-capitalism.[41] In this case, we could adapt Žižek's phrase and recognize that we are all participatory democrats today, but without the positive political form.

I turn now to an analysis of some recent cases of participation as ideology within social movements to consider the kinds of problems that this ideology raises in a context where participatory values are readily accepted (or have now become gentrified by the existing symbolic network). Has participation become the source once again of fresh antagonisms within the dominant form of liberal democracy under late-capitalism? What space does participation open up for the radical contestation of capitalism in the present? Does the repetition of the participatory critique of the 60s reflect an impasse within leftist movements? Today's democratic movements are fighting for the return of genuine democracy, but they at times seem to misrecognize the success of their own discourse of participation and how it may in fact stand in the way of democratic practice. Ultimately, even if it is qualified as "participatory," "genuine," or "real," democracy under liberal democratic capitalism is limited as an ideology of radical

transformation. Confronting the root of the problem requires a substantial critique of the "content" of life under capitalism, one that OWS attempted to provide. Nevertheless, this attempt was partially undermined by the ideology of participation which, as in SDS, motivated the internal resistance to democratic practice and the power that it entails.

The Radical Implications of Participatory Democracy

In the aftermath of the first wave of participation in the 1960s a number of theorists began exploring the antecedents of participation in democratic theory and the limits of participation in theory and practice. Before turning to participation in Occupy Wall Street it is worth articulating the relation between participation and democratic theory in order to clarify the radical potential and limits of participation as an ideal. Movement theorists and practitioners typically define participatory democracy in opposition to representative democracy and contend that participation is the necessary characteristic of a genuine democracy. For example, Carol Pateman describes a split in classical democratic theory between those who consider participation to have a narrow protective function and those who understand participation to be fundamental to democratic culture.[42] For James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, the peoples' participation in politics through voting and discussion is an important check on government power because it is thought to ensure protection of the private interests of each citizen and therefore the universal interest.[43] Here, democracy is understood merely as a method of choosing leaders rather than a system that develops citizens' capacities for self-government. In contrast, Pateman describes how theorists such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and G.D.H. Cole, place a much stronger emphasis on the role of participation in democracy.[44] For these thinkers democracy does not refer simply to a system of government but to a broad democratic culture wherein participation is

extensive and habitual. The ultimate aim of participatory democracy is not only the protection of individual freedoms, but also the development of uniquely human qualities, capacities and potential.

Pateman ascribes three primary functions to participation in theories of participatory democracy. The first and most fundamental role of participation is education.[45] In order for citizens to develop the necessary democratic attitudes, skills, and psychological qualities that would allow for and sustain a meaningful democracy, they must have access to democratic spaces where these traits can be learned and exercized. For instance, she points to Rousseau's argument in the *Social Contract* that democratic skills and attitudes need not pre-exist the space of participation because the participatory process itself is designed to develop responsible, individual social and political action.[46] Rousseau thought that in a deliberative space where every participant enjoys equal influence, no single individual would be able to impose inequitable demands on the rest. Individuals would therefore be compelled to take into consideration the broader public interest if they were to gain the cooperation of others.[47] Participation is therefore thought to be broadly educative in that it develops a sense of collective justice as well as the skills required to articulate its meaning. The second function of participation described by Pateman is that it enables collective decisions to be more easily accepted by the individual, enhancing cooperation. This is because, on the one hand, the individual has the opportunity to engage in and influence the outcome of decisions, but also, because it fosters interdependence among the participants.[48] Thirdly, participation has an integrative function. Taking part in collective decisions helps individuals to feel like they are a part of the community and deepens their sense of attachment to society.[49]

In order for participation to effectively play the roles ascribed to it, access to participatory decision-making must be far more widespread than it is under existing electoral regimes. Participatory democrats contend that participation in the political sphere would be supported and enhanced by participation in other social institutions, such as education, culture, the family, and the workplace.[50] This last institution is particularly important to Pateman as it is in the workplace that adults spend most of their time and is a primary site where local relations of authority condition workers into roles of subservience.[51] Furthermore, all of the theorists of participatory democracy recognize that for it to function as desired, a substantive degree of economic equality is a necessary condition. Formal participation in decision-making structures is not enough to guarantee an equal share in power over decisions. Every participant must enjoy a high measure of economic security and independence if they are to maintain their autonomy in the decision-making space and if they are to enjoy a roughly equal ability to develop their human capacities. Rousseau, for instance, based his theory of participation on an economic system of small peasant proprietors, one where "no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself."[52]

For most classical liberal democratic theorists, property rights were held to be a fundamental guarantee of individual independence and freedom. According to C.B Macpherson, what separates a thinker like Rousseau from others like James Mill, Bentham and J.S. Mill is that these latter thinkers all attempt to reconcile the egalitarian ideals of democracy with a continued acceptance of capitalist market relations. Macpherson argues that in a market society where unlimited individual appropriation of property is allowed, resulting class divisions undermine the egalitarian principles that serve as a moral justification for this system.[53] This contradiction between democratic ideals and class division is particularly acute in relation to what Macpherson

calls theories of "developmental democracy."[54] Political thinkers, such as J.S. Mill, A.D. Lindsay and John Dewey, primarily understood democracy to be a means of individual self-development. They believed that the existing democratic system, along with education, communication, and social knowledge, were the means to human progress.[55] They were dismissive of the significance of class division, arguing that class was being replaced by pluralistic social groups and that the redistribution of wealth would occur gradually through voluntary cooperation between employers and workers.[56] Macpherson warns that recent attempts to revive participatory democracy, as was seen in the New Left of the 1960s, must be careful to not repeat the mistakes of these thinkers.[57]

Participatory democracy is a radical politics not only because it entails widespread changes in social relations in the political sphere, but also because in order to function as desired it entails fundamental economic transformation. For this reason, participation may be an attractive if somewhat deceptive way to sneak in an anti-capitalist politics under the broadly uncontroversial mantel of "democracy." In a cultural context like the United States, where democracy is ideologically equated with free markets, and socialism is often equated with Stalinism or totalitarianism, participation may seem to be the most effective way to get people to question current economic arrangements.[58] However, the prospect that economic equality should be considered a condition of meaningful participation raises the question as to how the transformation away from a vastly unequal capitalist economy can be achieved and whether the idea and practice of participation on its own is enough to effect such a transformation. The values of education, compromise, integration, deliberation, individual empowerment and self-development that are central to participatory democracy in a post-capitalist context do not necessarily point a way forward for a struggle that necessitates a confrontational politics, a

commitment to collective interests, and a willingness to engage in divisive class conflict in the present. To rely on the former set of values alone would be to depoliticize this struggle and bring it too close to the progressive but unrealistic presumptions of the developmental democrats. On the other hand, participatory relations could also be put in the service of confrontational political struggle if the educative, cooperative and integrative functions it performs are used to mobilize a broad base of the population behind a common political goal that is understood to exist within a field of deeply opposed interests.

OWS, a movement that centered itself on participatory democracy and was motivated by a critique of money in politics and growing inequality, would seem to be the perfect example of a radical and participatory politics aimed at challenging capitalism at a systemic level. However, as I will argue below, the values that participation was imbued with in OWS came to undermine its attempts to build a radical movement for social change.

Occupy Wall Street: Genuine Democracy or Class Division?

Occupy Wall Street was the most successful leftist social movement in the United States since the alter-globalization movement of the late 1990s. What began as a small encampment of a few dozen people had within a week ballooned into a camp of 600. Within a month it became a nation-wide and even global movement as similar camps were set up in over 500 cities. Something about Occupy clearly struck a chord. Although the camps themselves were violently evicted in November in what appeared to be a nationally-coordinated effort by police to repress the movement, and although the movement never did determine a unifying demand and make concrete gains, it has been argued that OWS had a lasting ideological effect on Americans' political horizons. David Graeber, an anarchist scholar and one of the original organizers of

OWS, argues as much in his book *The Democracy Project*, where he emphasizes the profound

opening of the radical imagination that the movement produced.[59] Graeber especially privileges

the experience of deliberative democracy that participants encountered in the Occupy general

assemblies (GAs) as the key to this transformation of the imagination.

The camp that was set up in Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011, began with a GA. Its initial

purpose, based on the question posed by *Adbusters* magazine, which launched the "Occupy Wall

Street" meme in April, was to determine the movement's one demand. However, as the

assemblies progressed, the OWS camp avoided making a single demand and this avoidance

strategy became one of its central characteristics. Even without a single demand, and in spite of

the media's disingenuous confusion about the movement's purpose, the main concern of Occupy

Wall Street was clear: the power of corporations to undermine genuine democracy in America.[60]

The economic crisis of 2008 and the bail out of the banks emphasized the stark inequalities that

had long become the norm.[61] The individuals responsible for the crisis remained unpunished

while the homes of the poor were foreclosed. The lack of justice was acute, but whether or not it

would lead to a movement for economic justice based in redistributive politics or a critique of

capitalism in its entirety remained to be seen.

The alternative to the systemic domination of politics by corporations that was proposed by

the movement turned out to be neither welfare state redistribution of wealth nor the socialization

of property but rather participatory democracy as modeled by the GA. At OWS the daily GA was

the highest decision-making body of the movement. The work of maintaining the camps,

organizing direct actions, producing research, doing media outreach, and resolving all kinds of

internal problems was delegated to voluntary working groups (WGs), which were supposedly

approved by and answerable to the GA. The GAs were formally open to anyone present and

operated through a consensus process. The procedures of the GAs were widely publicized and included a system of hand signals. Further, the 'mic check' technique was used to amplify a speaker's voice in a large crowd.[62] The WGs of the New York occupation organized various marches in collaboration and in solidarity with various community groups and labour organizations. They also spent plenty of time organizing the logistics of the camp and defending it against political, legal, and police repression. Beyond the direct actions and the pragmatic concerns produced by the tactic of occupation, the WGs engaged in discussions oriented towards confronting the issues of corporate power and democracy that had attracted people to the GAs in the first place. A substantial amount of documentation and proposals came out of these WG discussions that reflect a diverse set of concerns, from the housing crisis, student debt and unemployment, to campaign finance reform, alternative economics, and the NYPD's Stop and Frisk program.[63] While the WGs generated a number of actions and campaigns, some of which continue to this day, the diversity of issues that they addressed made achieving consensus within the GA on many WG proposals extremely difficult.

Marina Sitrin, one of the initial organizers of OWS, claims that what was most important in this movement was opening up a space for conversations, for "real, direct, and participatory democracy."[64] Rather than make demands of those in power, the assembly movement sought to strip the existing system of legitimacy by creating the most open and participatory space possible. This space would stand in stark contrast to the broken system of parliamentary democracy that was incapable of defending the public interest against the interests of the 1%. The avoidance of presenting a single demand to those in power underlined the movement's autonomy and made it clear that OWS aimed at a deeper, more systemic challenge. But to what

degree or in what sense is the process of deliberation, conversation and participation disruptive to the existing power structures or to the dominant ideology of democracy in America?

In his analysis of Occupy, Graeber contrasts the democracy of public assemblies during the American Revolution, in South African and Indian village councils, on pirate ships during the colonial era, and in the general assemblies of OWS, with the republican system of elite power that is called representative democracy.[65] He argues that democracy has always been a destabilizing concept, threatening to those in power due to its rejection of systems of hierarchy. Essentially, for Graeber, OWS reconfigured political horizons by offering an example of genuine democracy in contrast to the false democracy of the existing system. Yet, Graeber pays relatively little attention to the way democratic power can effect changes in the face of anti-democratic forces, focusing instead on the functionality of participatory processes and the non-coercive way that public assemblies can come to collective decisions. But then, how does such a democratic space defend and extend itself? The only option appears to be the power of persuasion that results from setting an example. This would belie, however, the real collective power that supported the existence of the camps in the form of mass mobilization.[66] Clearly, democratic assemblies are a threat to inequitable systems because they have the potential to unleash a collective power that would actively contest elite rule. The internal functionality of a participatory process demonstrates the possibility of organizing political life differently, but the power to compel such reorganization lies in sustained direct action.

Jodi Dean offers an interpretation of OWS that locates its most compelling dimension in the naming of a fundamental division and an affirmation of collective power.[67] She insists that what was radical about OWS was not that it embodied genuine democracy, but rather its insistence on a politics of division that was encapsulated in the slogan "We are the 99%." This statement

politicized an economic fact and in the process produced a collective identity based on a class

relation rather than substantial identity based in race, nationality or religion.[68] OWS should

therefore be seen in contrast to the kinds of political gestures that presume society to be both a

coherent unity and a pluralistic field of difference.[69] Dean argues that the collective subject that

emerged in this political rupture cannot be reduced to the real multiplicity of individuals and

opinions that were integrated through democratic process. The collectivity is not simply an

expression of an aggregate of these individuals but an idea that transforms its participants by

changing how they relate to their setting.[70] Dean characterizes the relation that OWS adopted as

one of antagonism towards processes of proletarianization. For Dean, it was the confrontational

tactic of occupation and not the GAs per se that were effectively threatening to those in power.[71]

The difference in emphasis between Graeber's focus on internal process and Dean's focus on

class-consciousness illustrates the tension that existed within Occupy's own self-understanding. I

would argue that the significance of the camps was the space they opened up not for

conversation but for organization, and this is what the ideological emphasis on participation

occludes.

Participation as Ideology

It is important to insist on the difference between direct democratic practices and the set of

values that shape the ideology of participation. If a problem of participation is apparent, the

solution is sought out through continuous procedural amendments that seek to establish the

perfect and unassailable organization that would live up to our conception of a true, genuine

democracy. Yet, it may be the case that the source of conflicts and inconsistencies lies within the

very ideal against which we would seek to measure our practices. If participation is interpreted to

mean total inclusion, a very high degree of individual autonomy, a high value placed on self-expression, and an avoidance of divisive political stances, it is possible to see how this set of values may in fact contradict or stand in the way of meaningful democratic practice. Attending to this division between democratic practice and an ideology of participation allows us to imagine an organization that functions democratically while it nevertheless foregrounds other core principles and substantive political aims beyond the space of deliberation. Secondly, it helps to clarify how the problems of participation may not be solved by procedural changes alone but also require that we confront the ideological blockage that lies at their source. In some cases a charge that a process is not participatory enough may disguise a more substantive political difference.

One example of an approach to participation that places a bit too much weight on procedures can be found in Graeber's emphasis on consensus as the source of democratic cultural transformation. In a similar fashion to proponents of participatory democracy, Graeber argues that achieving a genuine democracy entails more than a change in the structure of government, it requires the creation of a democratic culture. He likens the potential shift to a deep moral transformation similar to the kind of cultural change initiated by feminism in the 1970s.[72] For Graeber, consensus is transformative because it is based on listening and compromise rather than a contest between fixed and pre-existing interests. However, L.A. Kauffman points out that it is precisely the assumption "that division results from differing views (which can be reconciled) rather than competing interest (which often cannot)," that leads consensus to be adopted with an uncritical reverence by many segments of the activist left.[73] Kauffman is concerned that consensus, deriving from the Quaker tradition, has become an article of faith within movements

like Occupy. Rather than a matter of faith, we could just as easily understand the absolutist interpretation of participation to be a matter of ideology.

In chapter four of his book, Graeber addresses a number of perceived problems or criticisms of consensus process.[74] It is interesting that Graeber regularly dismisses failures of process as resulting from a lack of experience or improper use of procedures. This is his rationalization for the problems of historical uses of consensus process in Students for a Democratic Society, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s, and the recent experience in OWS. While it is certainly true that few people have extensive experience with any kind of direct democratic decision making process and that this kind of experience is crucial, the examples of failures of process in OWS that Graeber raises are more illustrative of an absolutist interpretation of participation than they are of the authoritarian or hierarchal attitudes that he associates with majoritarian methods of democracy. It is more pressing that we differentiate between democratic culture and participatory culture than focus on distinguishing democracy from authoritarianism. I will explore a few of the examples he raises in the remainder of this section.

Structure/Process/Procedures over Ends

A typical trait of participation as ideology is a fetishization of organizational structures and processes as goals in themselves. When participation operates ideologically, the particular organizational structure or process, if properly adhered to, is thought to either guarantee a beneficial or legitimate outcome, or else, the process or structure itself is understood to be more important than any eventual decision or consequence. A confusion of means with ends can follow from an obsession with process and result in the undermining of effective practice oriented towards bettering social conditions.

As mentioned above, in OWS the GA and its procedures were held up as vitally important to the meaning of the movement and not just a method of collective decision making. Initially, the satisfaction of achieving consensus on anything among a very diverse group of participants and the necessity of maintaining the camp was enough to propel continued participation. However, eventually, the fetishization of the GA and the consequent inability to cohere around a broad actionable idea of social change beyond the GA itself, undermined peoples' commitment to that space. The first-hand anecdotes from the *Occupy* collection register a shift from feelings of exhilaration to feelings of frustration and futility. For instance, Keith Gessen describes the underwhelming experience of a Russian friend who after participating in the NYGA remarked somewhat cynically that he "managed to catch the entire discussion about whether they [the GA] should buy some shelves."[75] For many, meetings themselves, regardless of whether they are participatory, are tedious. The purpose of engaging in them is not to achieve a world in which we spend all of our time in GAs, but to achieve a more equal and just society. While these ends cannot be neatly separated from the process, neither can they be completely collapsed. The meaning and efficacy of democratic spaces are dependent on their ability to build and channel collective power. Agreeing to achievable goals external to deliberation itself contributes to the momentum required to maintain democratic institutions.

In Graeber's guide to consensus, he repeatedly acknowledges the need for a democratic group to come together around common goals/principles or interests.[76] He also claims that these principles of unity and common goals should be kept simple and general. Yet, there is a difference between simplicity and abstraction. OWS's lack of ideological coherence and extreme openness contradict this warning and this can be seen most clearly in the principles of solidarity document that was one of the few statements to be formally adopted by the GA during the

occupation.[77] This document was intended to be a 'living document' that would develop over time. However, the fact that the very basis of the existence of the group was to be clarified by the group through consensus points to a tautological problem. Those attempting to determine the basis of their collectivity did not have an agreed upon basis according to which their attempts at consensus could be measured. It is therefore unsurprising that the core principles of solidarity intended to define the purpose and contours of OWS are self-reflexive, vague, and so general as to risk undermining the critical impetus that drew people there in the first place.

A self-reflexive tendency is apparent in the way that most of the principles attend to the internal relations of the group, rather than common experience or interests that bring them together. The first principle is procedural and declares that they will engage in "direct and transparent participatory democracy." The second, "exercising personal and collective responsibility," is meaningless without further elaboration, as is the fifth: "redefining how labour is valued." The third and fourth principles contain references to privilege and oppression, but the emphasis in both cases is on individual interactions and personal empowerment, with the third recognizing an "individual's inherent privilege and the influence it has on all interactions." The fourth is "empowering one another against all forms of oppression." In these two cases, rather than refer to concrete historical systems of discrimination and inequality, such as a clear rejection of colonialism, sexism, or class inequality, the substantial political content is depoliticized through generalization. Furthermore, while the concept of privilege is intended to make us sensitive to the power differentials that exist within the 99%, focusing too much on individual interactions can end up undermining our ability to act collectively to confront these inequalities. If social change is seen to rest entirely on individual moral transformation meetings can degenerate into moralizing critiques when the preferred outcome would be for solidaristic

collective action against, for instance, racialized policing policies. The remaining two principles, "the sanctity of individual privacy," and "the belief that education is a right," are basic and uncontroversial liberal assumptions formally endorsed by the United Nations and most liberal democratic states.

Nothing in these principles of solidarity or points of unity describes a common condition of injustice or exploitation, nor does it gesture towards a positive vision of collectivity. For instance, given the list of grievances that Occupy released in its Declaration, it is surprising that the GA did not see fit to find some basis of unity in defense of the commons or an expansion of the public sphere. The principles of unity passed by the NYGA are so open to interpretation that anyone could feel comfortable agreeing to them. They avoid any divisive political content that would clearly demarcate this movement from reactionary, populist, individualistic, and market-based ideologies. This is not true, of course, of the movement as a whole, whose concept of the 99% asserted a degree of class-consciousness and whose various working groups exhibited a strong degree of political consciousness in relation to social and economic inequalities. The WGs in many cases created documents rich in supporting detail and numerous concrete proposals for action. However, the proposals from different working groups were often derived from extremely divergent political assumptions. Consequently, few proposals managed to achieve consensus at the GA during the occupation aside from those that dealt with the pragmatics of daily existence.

Inclusivity or Openness

One of the most difficult obstacles confronted by the OWS GA in its attempts to come to substantial and actionable collective decisions was its policy of inclusiveness. Inclusivity is a

basic principle of any direct democratic process because the very concept of direct democracy

indicates an opening up of decision-making spaces to those with some kind of concrete stake in

the issue at hand. Inclusivity becomes a dimension of participation as ideology when it is treated

as a value independently of its basis in a specific collective problem, or when the purpose or

common interests of the group are poorly defined.

When discussing the issue of implicit and explicit boundaries to participation, Graeber

describes one particular conflict in a New York spokescouncil meeting that to my mind is

indicative of the absolutist approach to inclusion that characterized OWS from the beginning:

> I recently attended a Spokescouncil in New York where everyone had been engaged in a
> long debate over whether there should be a "community agreement" and a shared principle
> that if anyone violates that agreement, they should be asked to voluntarily leave. The
> proposal was meeting concerted opposition when, suddenly, someone noticed one of the
> delegates was holding a plaque saying "Aryan Identity Working Group." He was
> immediately surrounded by people – many of those who had just been loudly insisting such
> a rule was oppressive – who successfully forced him to leave.[78]

Graeber raises this example for the sake of insisting that even inclusive groups need to maintain

certain boundaries. What interests me here is not the fact that a community agreement was

ultimately passed, but that the very idea of enforcing boundaries on the movement was seen as

"oppressive" at all. Graeber also notes that during the occupation even when people would

declare that their purpose was to disrupt a meeting they were nonetheless allowed to take part,

but he does not comment on the ideological premises of this absolutist attitude towards

inclusion.[79] These are clear instances where what stands in the way of democratic practice is not

a readiness to issue commands or an inexperience with democratic process, but an unwillingness

on an ideological level to politicize the boundaries of the movement. This rejection of

politicization is enforced through the vehicle of participation as an ultimate principle above all

others.

Anti-representational Attitudes

The aim of participatory democracy is to disperse decision-making power as widely as possible so that everyone has an equal influence over matters of public concern. Representative power, understood as a temporary decision-making authority vested in an individual or group, is therefore limited as much as possible to avoid unequal concentrations of power and the possibility of corruption. For coordination at higher levels, or for the execution of the collective will, delegates are typically preferred over representatives. Delegation is a more limited form of representation in which a person is authorized to present the views of a group to others or to act as they are mandated, but not to make independent decisions that contradict these views or mandates. A delegate can be recalled at any time and any agreements made by a delegate with other parties are not considered legitimate until the local group validates them.

Both Pateman and Macpherson acknowledge the need to delegate power and even presume the necessity of a minimal amount of representative power in the context of large-scale industrialized nations. Pateman relies on the theories of guild socialism developed by G.D.H. Cole in order to clarify the acceptable role of representative power in a participatory democracy. According to Cole, democracy is only real when it is conceived in terms of the principle of function and purpose.[80] The problem with existing forms of representative power under the parliamentary system is that it is assumed that an individual voter can be adequately represented on every issue. After the representative is elected the elector no longer has control over them and cannot recall them. In contrast, under a system of guild socialism that is built on functional associations that operate through participatory democracy, representatives would have a far more limited and precise mandate and would be subject to continuous advisement, criticism, and

immediate recall by the local association that elected them.[81] In this context of widespread participation where executive power is based on specific functions and subject to popular oversight, Cole did not think that limited amounts of representative power would undermine the equality of participation.

It is evident that many participants in OWS exhibited an extreme aversion to representation that goes far beyond the critique developed by participatory democrats. This reflects a longer trend that results from the anti-"big government" campaigns of the right since the 1980s, as well as the rejection of hierarchy within the New Left social movements of the 1960s. A total rejection of representation leads to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand the initiative and autonomy of each participant can be severely limited if out of an effort to avoid 'representing' anyone else they believe they do not have the authority to act on behalf of or in the name of the collectivity without constant and explicit approval. This was the case in an example given by Graeber that occurred in a GA prior to the establishment of the camp. A conflict emerged when the Outreach WG brought a two-line description of the nature and purposes of the Occupy movement to be used in flyers to the GA for approval.[82] The statement was met with continuous objections no matter how minimal and uncontroversial the wording chosen by Outreach. Graeber argues that the problem was the presumption on the part of the WG that they needed approval from the GA for such minute details since they had already been empowered to do outreach. This would therefore be an instance where an anti-representational principle was inflexibly applied to the most basic of tasks, thereby undermining the autonomy of what we could consider de facto executants or representatives of the collective will. However, I would argue that Graeber's solution in this case to simply assume the power to act without gaining further approval is also inadequate if it operates outside of a formal means of accountability on the part of WGs to the

GA. The fact that members of the WGs were unelected volunteers and could not be recalled or expelled by the GA does open up a potential for abuse (or in this case, inability to act and feelings of frustration and demobilization) to an even greater extent than the limited representative power described by Cole. Graeber's argument that formal power is somehow more pernicious than informal power is not convincing as he conflates all 'representative' power with the traditional form criticized by participatory democrats and does not distinguish this from more limited, recallable, and local forms. There is also no good reason offered as to why the existing powers of working groups as de facto executives could not be more clearly defined and limited and a process of recall instituted.

Conversely, rather than an overly subservient relationship to collective oversight, the rejection of representation can also lead to an extremely individualistic or atomistic refusal of any kind of collective authority. We might understand the over-readiness to "block" proposals that one only mildly disagrees with as an example of this. Graeber insists that blocks should only be used in cases where a proposal contradicts a group's fundamental principles of unity or shared purpose.[83] Here I would again assert that the extremely vague principles of OWS made it difficult for participants to agree on which blocks were appropriate. A more specific example could be found in the controversy that emerged when the drum circle was asked to limit its playing to certain hours.[84] Apparently impervious to the way that the drums were undermining community support, the ability of the movement to communicate, and the comfort of campers in an already difficult circumstance, the drummers defended their resistance to these requests by arguing that they had a right to freedom of expression. One drummer was quoted on NPR saying: "They've [those in the camp who opposed their drumming] turned into the government that we've been trying to protest!"[85] Here is an instance where those participating in the camps did not necessarily

participate in the GAs or recognize the authority of that body, understanding the camps as a space of individual or subcultural expression that recognized no higher level of representation. With no will to compel the drummers to stop, the "solution" to this problem was essentially to ignore it.

Occupy or Reject Power?

OWS signaled a powerful rejection of corporate power, class inequality, discrimination, and the representative system of government. When it came to articulating a positive vision of social transformation the movement relied on an ideology of participation. The result of this ideology of participation was a lack of shared political principles, an overemphasis on organizational structure as the key to equality, and anti-representational attitudes. All of these traits speak to a deep rejection of power. While the desire was to undermine illegitimate hierarchies, it also led to an inability to recognize and catalyze legitimate democratic power, insofar as the GA was tentative in defining and defending the boundaries of the decision-making body with reference to common interests and political goals. The GA balked at politicizing its boundaries because doing so would entail making the kinds of strong political statements that would lead many people to exclude themselves from the movement. Participation therefore acted as the fulcrum on which competing definitions of democracy rested. On the one hand democracy was interpreted as an inclusive and pluralistic process of deliberation; on the other it was an antagonistic practice oriented towards channeling collective power in the direction of class struggle.

The most lasting element of OWS was not the space of the GA but the campaigns started by some of the WGs. Their more limited functions made them more ready to assume the power to act autonomously and contributed to a renewal of a more confrontational leftist politics in the

U.S. The legacy of Occupy is an emboldened left and a series of campaigns based on the concrete struggles and needs of the 99% as exposed on sites like the "We are the 99%" tumblr.[86] One of the most compelling campaigns to emerge out of the Occupy working groups was Strike Debt. What is particularly promising about a movement around student debt is that it focuses on mobilizing a specific demographic who in spite of their many differences have a clear common interest in relation to issues of educational policy, tuition fees, and youth unemployment. The basis in a specific common problem and common interest may lend direct democratic practices a greater functionality than that seen in the Occupy camps. In the following section I will turn to an analysis of the Quebec Student Strike of 2012 in order to consider the potential of direct democratic practices when they are driven by an ideology that is less enthralled to participation and more heavily influenced by syndicalist principles.

Participation in the Quebec Student Strike

On February 13, 2012, after two years of protests, petitions, occupations, and one-day strikes, students across Quebec voted to go on an unlimited general strike against the provincial Liberal government's plan to increase tuition fees by 75 per cent over five years. The strike declaration sparked a social movement that while focused on the issue of tuition fees was also understood to be part of a global resurgence of leftist resistance that could be seen in movements like the Indignados in Spain, the movement of the Squares in Greece, and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Similarly to these movements, the Quebec students articulated their demand for tuition-free education alongside a critique of neoliberal policies, the failed logic of austerity, and the weakening of democratic institutions. While the central participants in the struggle were students, this broader social critique attracted a diverse array of citizens, activists and

organizations to its cause, resulting in a broad-based movement that for a time became the center of political struggles in Quebec.

Like other recent movements, the student strike was an example of direct democratic organization. Within activist circles, much has been made of the spontaneous nature of recent democratic uprisings. In contrast, although the student strike was the context for a spontaneous citizen uprising in the form of the '*manif des casseroles*,' it was itself highly organized and carried out according to a particular understanding of democratic practice influenced by syndicalist ideology. While discussions in general assemblies were fundamental to the strength of the movement, direct democracy cannot be reduced to the space of these meetings. The 'combative syndicalism' of the student associations, with its emphasis on collective direct action, lent deliberative democracy a confrontational energy and an ability to generate a meaningful counter-power in the face of the neoliberal state.

In the following I draw on the founding documents and meeting minutes of the leading national student organization ASSÉ as well as on the history of Syndicalist ideology in the workers movement in order to articulate the distinctive set of values that informed the students' understanding of democratic practice. In contrast to the ideology of participation that was seen in SDS and OWS, the student organizations offer an example of direct democracy that avoided succumbing to the fantasy of inclusion, the fetishization of organizational structure as an end in itself, and the avoidance of power that can accompany an extreme anti-representational attitude. Although CLASSE embraced bottom-up organizational structures, local autonomy, and direct democratic procedures, this version of 'participation' was embedded in a different radical history that also placed high value on solidarity, collectivity, and combativeness. The interpretation of democratic power that emerges from this set of values showed itself to be far more difficult to

incorporate into hegemonic liberal democratic pluralist discourse, and more highly functional over the long term for sustaining the organizational capacities required to resist the attack on public services.

CLASSE: The Organization Behind the Strike

Along with the cessation of studies during the course of the strike, students picketed classrooms, took to the streets daily, and engaged in various forms of civil disobedience and direct action. In this way the students effectively shut down teaching activities at the French universities and CEGEPs, pressured the government to the negotiating table, forced the issue of post-secondary funding to the center of public discussion, and influenced the calling of an election.[87] The 22nd day of each month became a massive day of action that attracted hundreds of thousands of demonstrators. Nightly marches of thousands to tens of thousands occurred from late April until September. In May, citizens nightly took over the streets of their own neighbourhoods to bang pots and pans in opposition to an anti-protest law that the Liberal government passed in an attempt to squash the daily student protests. In June, the students targeted the Montreal Grand Prix events in an attempt to undermine the city's tourist economy and to launch a feminist critique of the commodification of women's bodies. These various protest actions were complemented by intensive symbolic production on the part of protesters that included social movement and student media, memes and information circulated on social media, lipsynched music videos, nude protests, masquerades, marching bands, costumes, graffiti, posters and stickers, protest mascots, elaborate banners, placards and puppets, and the colour red on every imaginable surface.

The street demonstrations, negotiations, and corresponding debates in the media about the proposed tuition increase were the most visible dimension of the struggle. What was less visible was the intensive organization and impressive democratic decision making behind all of the students' actions. The large numbers, duration and creativity of the street mobilizations depended on a particular organizational infrastructure that as in OWS demanded hours spent in a general assembly (GA) multiple times per week. There are three primary student federations in Quebec who are organized to represent the interests of CEGEP and university students at the provincial level. These include the *Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec* (FEUQ), the *Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec* (FECQ), and the *Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (ASSÉ). For the duration of the most recent strike, ASSÉ formed a temporary coalition, *La Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (CLASSE). What distinguishes ASSÉ or CLASSE from its more conventional counterparts is its commitment to the principle of free post-secondary education, combative syndicalism, and direct democracy. The FEUQ and FECQ are regularly criticized by members of ASSÉ for their corporatist approach to organization, their close relationships with the dominant political parties, and their reliance on lobbying as a primary tactic. In this chapter I will only reflect on CLASSE as it was the national student coalition that led the movement towards the unlimited general strike and because it represented the majority of the striking student associations. The acronym ASSÉ, incidentally, resembles the French word *assez*, meaning enough, or *ya basta!*

On the 3rd and 4th of December, 2011, the CLASSE was founded during an ASSÉ congress at CEGEP Valleyfield.[88] CLASSE extended the decision-making space of ASSÉ to include student associations that were not affiliated with ASSÉ but that were committed to fighting against the proposed tuition hike through direct action tactics. CLASSE acted as the primary decision-

making body of the strike and a mechanism for coordinating collective action at a national level. As of late August, 2012, CLASSE included 67 student associations comprising 102,284 students.[89] According to its founding documents, the core principles of the coalition were, first, for a quality education that is free, accessible, public, non-discriminatory, and free from private interference, and second, for student syndicalism that is democratic, combative, feminist and independent.[90] The conditions of affiliation were less demanding than those for ASSÉ and consisted of a position against any increases in tuition fees, an affirmation of the GA as the highest decision-making body of the association, and that the association adopt a mandate for an unlimited general strike or at least consult their members on the subject. The affiliation process was enacted through a simple vote on the part of the association and confirmed by a vote on the part of the CLASSE congress. Aside from the conditions of affiliation and more limited principles, aims, and the expected duration of CLASSE, the organizational structure and internal procedures of ASSÉ and CLASSE were identical.

One of the key aspects of CLASSE's organizational structure is the principle according to which major strategic decisions are made through direct democratic procedures. The congress was the name given to the national GA where delegates from each association convened to make decisions for the coalition as a whole. These delegates were expected to act at the congress in accordance with the specific mandates given to them from their local association's GA rather than exercise the power of traditional representatives. Deliberation was encouraged, resulting in time-intensive meetings. A typical ASSÉ congress lasts for two days from 9am until 9pm each day, although during the strike period the congresses were limited to a single day. The bottom-up structure privileged the initiative and actions of the local associations. It also compelled members to aim towards consensus to ensure that mandates were widely endorsed and could mobilize

active support. However, voting rather than a strict consensus was the procedure used during congresses. While the congress provided a space for the student movement to strategize at a national level, individual associations maintained their autonomy and were not constrained by the decisions of the congress so long as they continued to live up to the conditions of affiliation.[91] For example, if a local association was to hold a strike vote that does not pass they could continue to be a part of CLASSE even if the congress had endorsed a general unlimited strike on the part of its members. In this way CLASSE attempted to coordinate collective action according to shared principles while allowing the associations to maintain their own initiative within certain limits. If an association were perceived to act contrary to the basic principles of CLASSE the congress could expulse it through a vote. CLASSE also elected students to an executive council and working groups who were expected to carry out the mandates set by the congress and the day-to-day tasks of coordination, mobilization, and communication. These executants could be immediately recalled by the congress if they acted in contradiction to its decisions. Instead of representatives, CLASSE had spokespeople who relayed the decisions of its membership to the government and the public.

Another of the key characteristics of CLASSE's decision-making structure is the frequency and regularity of the GAs. Congresses were held weekly throughout the duration of the strike and each association was expected to hold their own weekly GA in order to determine how delegates were to vote at the congresses. CLASSE had a number of committees working full time to support the strike and to meet the mandates of congress. These included the Committee to Maintain and Enlarge the Strike, the Media Committee, the Negotiation Committee, the Legal Committee, and the Women's Committee. Clearly, to simply organize the logistics of these meetings and to participate in them required a considerable amount of time, labour, and

commitment. Nevertheless, this organizational structure proved to be highly functional, effectively managing the day-to-day logistics of the strike as well as engaging students in direct action and inspiring strong feelings of solidarity. Although not an easy process, and not free from internal conflicts, this model successfully organized a six month-long strike and exposed participants to an intensive experience of direct democracy and syndicalist-inspired collective action. In order for this method of decision-making to function, the students needed the time afforded them by the strike, financial resources, highly developed organizational capacities, and political intelligence. Such a commitment of time and energy also required strong ideological convictions in the methods, principles and aims of this struggle. These principles were drawn primarily from syndicalist ideology and history.

Syndicalist Ideology in the Student Movement

ASSÉ was founded on February 25, 2001, in Sherbrooke, Quebec.[92] It represents the reformation of the syndicalist tendency of the student movement that has been active in Quebec in various organizational manifestations since the 1960s. ASSÉ also bears the influence of the global justice movement as its formation coincided with mobilization of students and others against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) summit meeting in Quebec City in 2001. Student syndicalism in Quebec therefore draws on both the particular militant history of student unionism in the province and more recent activist movements critical of globalized capitalism. On an organizational level tension exists between syndicalism and the affinity-based models favoured by global justice activism. So far, however, ASSÉ has managed to strike a balance between them. The strength of this movement lies somewhere between the mass appeal and

democratic practices of student unionism, and the dynamism and radicalism of anti-capitalist affinity groups.

The impact of the global justice movement on ASSÉ can be seen most directly in relation to the FTAA protests in Quebec City in 2001. The build-up to this summit protest coincided with the formulation and adoption of ASSÉ's statutes and regulations, which include in its core principles a position against any form of globalization that places the primacy of profits over the well-being of the population.[93] In the aftermath of the protest, the newly created ASSÉ decided to engage in a campaign against the adjustment of education to the laws of the market. The action plan adopted at the first annual congress of ASSÉ in 2001 pushed for a continent-wide general strike against the FTAA. A number of meetings followed that brought together students opposed to the FTAA. At one notable meeting a split was evident between those who were critical of neoliberal globalization and those who simply wanted educational institutions to be exempt from the FTAA.[94] The orientation of ASSÉ is marked by this struggle against capitalist globalization.

The preamble to ASSÉ's core principles cites the first article of France's 1946 'Charte de Grenoble' as forming the basis of student syndicalist organization.[95] The first article of the Charter defines students as young intellectual workers and goes on to describe a series of rights and responsibilities that pertain to students. The Charter characterizes the rights of students as a right to work and live under the best possible conditions of material, social, and personal independence, guaranteed by the free exercise of their rights of association.[96] It also stipulates the responsibilities of students to society as being the defense of truth through the propagation of culture and history, and the defense of liberty against all forms of oppression. The Grenoble Charter led to the creation of the Union National des Étudiants Francais (UNEF), a student union

that represented a politicization of student organizations in France and that was central in the events of May 68. In a pamphlet published by ASSÉ about the history of the student movement in Quebec, Benoit Marsan notes that the phrase "student syndicalism" first appears in the writings of the student associations in the 1960s.[97] In 1964, inspired by UNEF as well as the militant workers' movement in Quebec, students formed their first syndicalist student union, the Union General des Étudiants du Québec (UGEQ). Marsan argues that prior to this period students were not considered to have a distinct political role in society and student associations existed for the sole purpose of organizing extra-curricular leisure and sporting activities and for providing student services.[98] This is still the case for the majority of Anglophone student associations in North America.

The significance of the Grenoble Charter was that it laid the ground for a politicization of student organizations. In defining students as young intellectual workers it associated them with the workers' movement, which led the student associations to model themselves on union structures and modes of action. In fact, the concept of 'combative syndicalism' that ASSÉ regularly refers to in its documents is taken from the Quebec workers' movement of the 1970s and the phrase appears to be unique to this context. In his writings from the early 1970s, Jean-Marc Piotte defines combative syndicalism as a brand of worker organization that is confrontational, involves an understanding of worker struggles as class struggle, and is led by the base of workers themselves.[99] The adjective 'combative' is used by Piotte to differentiate this brand of unionism from more bureaucratic and business friendly unions that he describes as 'syndicalisme de boutique' or 'syndicalisme d'affaire.'[100] The attributes that Piotte ascribes to combative syndicalism are essentially those of revolutionary unionism.[101]

The core principles of worker syndicalism could be distilled as follows: class solidarity and organization based on shared interests (rather than explicit political ideology); direct action and a rejection of parliamentarism, representatives or other intermediaries; and worker self-management that privileges local autonomy and initiative.[102] The student movement in Quebec reflects these principles through their organizational structures, chosen tactics, and rejection of parliamentary modes of action. The idea of the general strike in particular is one of the defining concepts of syndicalist ideology. The general strike is a strike that spreads across industries to the point that all work is suspended and the normal functioning of society is paralyzed.[103] It is by means of the general strike that syndicalists believed a final revolutionary transfer of power would occur as the workers would have control over the instruments of production.[104] In the longer term, ASSÉ includes amongst its aims the democratization of educational institutions through self-management. In the short run, the aims of the student movement are not quite as radical, however, and the method of the general strike has proven to be the most effective tactic for winning substantial concessions from the government. Eight general strikes have occurred in Quebec between 1968 and 2005 and six of these ended in success for student demands.[105] While students are not capable of shutting down capitalist production in the direct fashion of workers, the removal of their intellectual labour nevertheless can significantly disrupt institutional functioning. This removal of participation from the educational system combined with active economic disruption through street demonstrations formed the basis of student power during the 2012 strike and made the movement a real force to contend with.

Although there is plenty of emphasis on autonomy, self-management and direct action within syndicalism, the concept of "participation" is rarely used. This is most likely because in contrast to participatory democracy, syndicalism understands organization at the point of production

within syndicalist unions to be the primary locus of resistance to capitalist, bourgeois, and parliamentary modes of power. Whereas participatory democrats tend to locate resistance to representative forms (rather than capitalism per se) in a political sphere based on organizational units formed by local, neighbourhood, municipal or regional assemblies. In the latter case, membership is inclusive of the entire community and consists of adults from all class backgrounds and occupations. From a syndicalist perspective, political units requiring class collaboration such as political parties will tend to favour bourgeois interests and undermine class consciousness amongst the working class while highlighting political differences based on a plurality of identities rather than class inequality.[106] Parties represent a fragile unity of multiple classes whose association is based on political choice, syndicalists reasoned, while unions consist of a single class whose association is one of necessity. This critique of party politics might also be extended to participatory assemblies that are not organized on the basis of a clear common interest and corresponding ideological coherence. The syndicalist version of democracy is one that is not fixated on dialogue and the exchange of personal opinions so much as on identifying the collective interests of the exploited class, forming collective decisions based on class consciousness, and then acting together to enforce these decisions. In contrast to a political space open to all political positions, syndicalists acknowledge the existence of fundamental social division that represents unreconcileable differences. It is their recognition of class division that prompts sydicalists to adopt confrontational tactics.

However, in transferring syndicalist principles from the workers movement to the student movement they are also transformed. Interestingly, the application of syndicalist ideology to student organization disrupts the pure proletarian class subject imaged by the early syndicalists. For instance, in relation to the principle of class solidarity and organization, the identification of

students as intellectual workers implies that, like workers, students shared a particular set of common conditions and interests that their organizations should strive to defend. As Marsan points out, in comparison to a union local, student associations are composed of a heterogenous class base, which would distance these organizations from embodying the pure class subject that was originally presumed by early syndicalists.[107] Nevertheless, Marsan goes on to argue that students do share a set of common interests that transcends some of their political differences, and furthermore, regardless of class background most experience a period of at least temporary proletarianization while undertaking their studies.[108] Their common interests are therefore adequate to justify and support a broad-based movement, and furthermore, the intellectual status of their occupation may orient them towards progressive social change. In the remainder of this chapter I analyze how these syndicalist principles were interpreted during the strike.

Democracy Beyond Deliberation: Cohesion, Combativeness and Solidarity

Limits on Inclusion: common interests and ideological coherence

The democratic decision-making structure of CLASSE was an important dimension of the student strike and can be credited with inspiring commitment and solidarity among the participants. However, this success was the result of an interpretation of democracy as combative and collectivist, rather than a practice based primarily on dialogical exchange and the pluralistic expression of opinion. The ability to engage in a democratic practice that effectively arrived at decisions and actions that masses of students felt willing to stand behind was in part enabled by limits on participation. Unlike the more spontaneous popular assemblies that were open to everyone, as in OWS, Greece and Spain, in the student strike there were clear boundaries limiting who could take part in decision-making in CLASSE congresses and local GAs.

Membership was based on those students who had a direct stake in the strike and tuition increase and who agreed at the outset to the core principles of CLASSE.

Like syndicalist unions, the student associations of ASSÉ organize their members on the basis of their fundamental shared interests and only secondarily on explicit political ideology. In making their reason for existence the defense of the material and moral interests of students, syndicalist student unions achieve a broad appeal, bringing members together on the basis of common interests in relation to educational policy, tuition fees, loans and bursary programs, student housing, curriculum, tax policies and so on. In this way ASSÉ avoids the narrow sectarianism of groups organized on a directly ideological basis. And yet, with this basic commonality as a starting point, these unions aim to function as spaces where members are politicized through experiences of collective action and democratic decision-making. While ASSÉ's primary aim, as stated in its Statutes and Regulations, is to defend the interests of their members regardless of political, philosophical, or religious belief, and while it maintains a neutral stance in relation to official political parties and elections, it is nevertheless a highly politicized organization.[109] ASSÉ includes among its core principles and aims a number of strong political stances, and moreover, many individuals active within the organization identify with various leftist or anti-capitalist ideologies.[110]

A deliberative democracy that is completely open from the outset would have much more difficulty in finding common ground among the extremely divergent political positions and experiences of participants. This inclusiveness, along with the novelty of genuinely democratic spaces, lead many GA-based movements to value the diverse expression of opinion and ongoing deliberation as an end in itself. However, ultimately, deliberation is made worthwhile if it leads to corresponding decisions and actions that can credibly result in concrete gains. Otherwise, such

meetings risk turning into spaces for personal expression and lose the collective energy and purpose that could sustain them. While the GAs were undoubtedly a cornerstone of the student strike, they were not seen as ends in themselves. The deliberative nature of these spaces existed within the confines of existing principles, aims and specific demands. We could conclude that part of CLASSE's strength came from a relatively higher degree of ideological consistency when compared to other GA-based movements and that this derived in part from membership criteria based on common interests and shared principles.

Combativeness was an important qualifier of democratic practice during the strike and prevented democracy from being reduced to meetings. Student democracy consisted of a dialectic between deliberative meeting spaces and collective direct action that channeled people's energies in purposeful directions, built feelings of solidarity and commitment, and demonstrated the power of concerted efforts. This latter dimension of democratic practice is particularly important because not everyone who took part in this struggle participated in GAs. The legitimacy of the strike was defended not only through rational discussion and votes but also by those who put their bodies in front of classroom entrances and in the streets to prevent the collective will from being ignored. At the national level tactics were chosen according to a logic of steady escalation in the face of resistance on the part of the government. The lack of response to less confrontational methods, such as petitions and one-day demonstrations, helped to reinforce the legitimacy of the more coercive methods of the general strike, picket lines, economic disruption, and civil disobedience. Once the possibility of persuading the government of the rightness of the students' arguments was shown to be ineffective the lines of the struggle became visible. Democracy in the student movement was understood not as a consensual practice but as a form of popular power that existed within a field of opposing forces. While for

the most part particular tactics were left up to each association, acceptance of the general strike as a strategy was a formal criteria of affiliation with CLASSE.

A collectivist rather than individualistic interpretation of democratic practice was particularly important in the context of this struggle because the proponents of the tuition increase built their arguments around an understanding of education as an individual investment. Students had to insist that their actions be considered a strike in the face of media coverage that characterized it as a boycott, thereby reinforcing the idea that students are simply consumers of an educational product rather than intellectual workers whose knowledge contributes to the public good. Furthermore, some students opposed to the strike took the concept of the 'right to education' to mean an individual right that supersedes the collective decisions of the student associations. On this basis, a number of institutions and students filed court injunctions that forced professors to teach classes no matter how few students were in attendance and that banned strikers from picketing or assembling on campus.[111] One notable instance of collective consciousness was displayed in the documentary *Carré Rouge sur Fond Noir*. The scene takes place during a confrontation between picketing college students and an individual student attempting to cross the line. After this student complained that his 'right to education' was being disrupted the picketing students erupted into a spontaneous chant of '*Moi, Moi, Moi!*' in mockery of this student's individualistic attitude.[112] As ASSÉ's chosen name suggests, solidarity is a core ideological principle that guides the actions of its members in a context where the only recognized social relation is a market relation.

Dialogue as a path to Decision: The Destabilizing Potential of a Non-Negotiable Demand

The general unlimited strike was organized around a specific, concrete, realizable demand. Some militants may feel that a specific demand automatically leads to reformism or a narrow base of support. Richard Day argues that movements oriented towards making demands of those in power reinforce the authority and legitimacy of existing institutions.[113] This ignores, however, the extremely destabilizing effect that a demand can have if it is fundamentally incompatible with dominant assumptions. While a massive confrontational movement that lacks any specific demands can be very threatening to existing power relations, if this same movement lacks a unifying idea and an organizational base that is capable of replacing existing arrangements, there is little hope that it will be capable of effecting meaningful change. In the case of the student strike the demand became a unifying element for a diverse and wide-ranging critique of not only the privatization of education but also of neoliberal governance more generally. The demand was merely a focal point that channeled resistance in a way that made actual change conceivable and possible. The minimal and non-negotiable version of this demand was a rejection of the proposed tuition increase and a freeze at the 2012 level. However, unlike other recent movements that have adopted a defensive or reactionary stance against attacks on existing rights or welfare state programs, CLASSE took the offensive by conceiving of the tuition freeze as a first step within the larger aim of tuition free post-secondary education.[114] While this stance appeared almost utopian from within the hegemonic worldview supported by the mainstream media, CLASSE pushed the issue of free tuition onto the public agenda, which reflected its combative stance and marked this struggle as one with a truly progressive vision.

Alain Badiou has argued that the limit of recent democratic uprisings such as the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and the Maidan uprising in Ukraine in 2014 is that they brought people

together around a purely negative demand that rejected existing power arrangements without unifying around a common vision of an alternative way of doing politics.[115] The result was a return to an old division amongst the protesters between traditionalism and capitalist Modernity that left no room for the invention of new political organizations. In contrast, the decision of the student movement to construct a demand that was based on a positive conception of social change is one of the elements that made genuine transformation possible even if it was not yet realized in the 2012 strike. CLASSE pushed for the realization of their ultimate demand by proposing that the government introduce a small 0.7 per cent tax on banks that would cover the costs of tuition for all of Quebec.[116] The students defended their position by arguing that higher tuition diminishes accessibility to education and results in larger amounts of student debt. Rather than treat education as an individual consumer investment, the students insist that education is a social good that should be paid for through a progressive tax system.[117] The students avoided trying to win favour through publicity or tailoring their demands to fit dominant opinion. On the contrary, they attempted to inject their own vision of education into mainstream discourse.

The combative syndicalism of ASSÉ leads it to be very skeptical of negotiations as an effective way to win concessions from the government.[118] The state is not regarded as a neutral entity but one that is influenced by political parties, bosses, pressure groups and corporations. It is therefore a relation of force and not persuasion that compels the government to take student demands seriously. With this in mind ASSÉ evades negotiations as far as possible, until they feel they have asserted an adequate degree of pressure through collective action. They also aim to set the agenda of negotiations. For instance, in the 2012 strike the minimal demand was presented as non-negotiable. CLASSE agreed to enter into negotiations but with the mandate to push for a plan to move towards free tuition and to not negotiate the terms of the proposed tuition increase,

which it utterly rejected. Meanwhile, the government likewise approached its tuition increase as non-negotiable, initially refusing to even meet with student representatives. When they did agree to meet they claimed that it was only to discuss the loans and bursaries program.

Darin Barney provides an insightful interpretation of the non-negotiable stance of the students as a necessary characteristic of a politics based on radical equality.[119] Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, Barney argues that the student strike should be understood as an exceptionally political moment because it was 'unintelligible' and inherently 'unreasonable' within the logic of the neoliberal discourse that formed the basis of the government's position. Only by treating their political convictions as matters of opinion, rather than truth, and their demands as if they were a matter of informed self-interest, rather than social ideals, could the students even begin to be considered reasonable partners by the government. Barney concludes that the students' uncompromising position formed the radical truth of the events.

If negotiations between the students and the government were bound to fail due to the deep incompatibility between the arbiters of dominant opinion and the uncompromising commitment to a politics of equality, why would one take part in the process at all? I would argue that even though legitimacy within the public sphere is secondary to the coercive power of direct action, by showing itself capable of addressing power and presenting concrete realizable plans to support their demand for free tuition, CLASSE made it very difficult for the government to ignore their claim. By way of contrast, we could consider the politics of the *Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes* (CLAC). CLAC has a very strong presence in grassroots anti-capitalist organizing in Montreal and they tend to favour tactics based on civil disobedience and direct action that include damaging corporate property, defending protesters against police attacks, forming black blocs and at times courting conflict with the police. The idea of negotiation is

antithetical to CLAC's radical position of waging war on capitalism. CLAC contributed to the student strike by participating in many street actions and the relationship between CLAC and CLASSE seems to have been convenient and mutually beneficial. CLAC is an example of the autonomous affinity group model of political action that contributes to the dynamism of more organized political movements like the student strike and may produce a radicalizing influence on participants. Furthermore, some of the actions of CLAC participants would have been too controversial to be openly endorsed by CLASSE and yet helped to increase the pressure on the government. The autonomous nature of these actions meant that CLASSE could benefit from this situation without bearing the blame or recrimination of those opposed to more confrontational methods.[120]

The explicit anti-capitalist position of CLAC, the confrontational tactics it favours, and its similarly non-negotiable stance may lead us to conclude that they represent a more radical position than CLASSE. However, I would argue that the limits of the anti-capitalist vision of CLAC is that on its own it can too easily be dismissed as impossible and utopian. According to Žižek, the 'great art of politics is to insist on a particular demand that, while thoroughly realist, feasible and legitimate, disturbs the core of the hegemonic ideology.'[121] While CLAC's tactics provoke a police response, they do not force those in power to take them into any further account, whereas the CLASSE presented a position that was truly impossible both to grant and to ignore. Their demands were completely incompatible with the 'necessity' of neoliberal markets, yet at the same time were so modestly and concretely possible within the terms of a social imaginary that values the well-being of people.[122] It was this latter dimension that made them truly compelling and a serious problem for the existing power structure. It was this that prevented them from being credibly dismissed as 'mere noise' even though the government and

the mainstream media certainly tried.[123] Ultimately, showing itself capable of meeting those in power and presenting demands that were conceivable and yet non-negotiable was more disruptive than dismissing the process entirely.

The negotiations between the students and the government served as a staging ground for the students' alternative conception of politics. CLASSE disrupted the negotiation process by simply being unable to conform to its model while nevertheless maintaining its direct democratic procedures and insisting (with the force of over 100,000 of its members on strike) that it be included. The negotiations were stalled at times since CLASSE's negotiating team did not have independent decision-making power and so had to consult the congress before moving forward in negotiations. While the government tried to paint this as an example of the students' intransigence, the delays served as an opportunity for CLASSE to highlight its own democratic structures and contrast these to the government's way of functioning. Furthermore, it gave CLASSE a platform to contest dominant interpretations of the events. For example, immediately prior to the initial round of negotiations the government tried to exclude CLASSE by demanding they renounce all 'violence on the part of protesters' before negotiations would begin. Rather than reinforce the government's presumption that CLASSE was 'violent' by refusing to comply, or rather than weaken the movement and reinforce internal divisions by renouncing a portion of the protesters who chose more confrontational tactics, the congress passed a more specific motion that renounced deliberate physical violence against persons except in cases of legitimate self-defense.[124] The motion therefore differentiated between harm to individuals and property destruction and applied equally to the police as well as protesters while demonstrating that most of the violence was instigated by the police. A second motion was also passed at the same meeting which affirmed CLASSE's support for civil disobedience and denounced police

120

repression of protestors as well as the systemic violence that inheres in an educational institution that excludes people on the basis of their socio-economic status.[125] In this way, CLASSE refused to undermine their principles or ideals yet refused to be ignored or excluded. They insisted that their confrontational tactics be treated as legitimate – avoiding both collaboration and utopianism.

Neighbourhood Assemblies and the Difficulty of Expanding the Movement

Within the student milieu CLASSE was very effective in mobilizing students to support the tactic of the general strike and its vision of public education. However, at a certain point it became evident that if the students were to achieve their ultimate aims they would require the active support of the non-student population as well. Three months into the strike, CLASSE began to publicly call for a social strike. While major unions issued statements of solidarity with the student cause, in the end they did not commit to meaningful action, such as a one-day strike, which would have increased the pressure on the government. A proliferation of grassroots citizens' groups did mobilize around the student cause and later against the anti-protest law known as Bill 78. These included *Mères en Colère*, *Profs Contra la Hausse*, CLAC, *La Coalition Opposée à la Tarification et la Privatisation des Services Publics*, and *Occupy Montreal*. The protests also attracted civil rights activists, anti-police brutality groups, environmental activists, Quebec nationalists, opposition party supporters, and in one notable demonstration, 400 lawyers critical of Bill 78. The high points of this support for the movement could be seen in the massive marches on the 22nd of each month that attracted crowds of hundreds of thousands, the extensive spread of the red square symbol in storefronts, on

121

balconies, and affixed to people's clothing, and the *manifs des casseroles* that broke out for two weeks in May.

The *manifs des casseroles* in particular captured the imagination of many due to their spontaneity, carnivalesque atmosphere, and decentralized emergence. However, the intensity of these two weeks could not last indefinitely, and the politicization that the experience may have provoked among city residents required some form of organization for these localized movements to become the basis of ongoing mobilization. An encouraging development in this direction occurred when some casseroles participants began to form neighbourhood general assemblies. The most active of these assemblies organized their own autonomous demonstrations once the *manifs des casseroles* died down. While in the short term these kinds of neighbourhood initiatives lent political urgency to the student cause, they soon shrank in size until they consisted of only a core group of the most committed participants. A similar dynamic appears to have occurred in other contexts where struggles became localized. For example, Héloïse Nez discussing the Indignados movement remarked on how a shift from the central plazas to neighbourhood assemblies in Spain likewise resulted in a general demobilization of the broader population who had been attracted to the original site, leaving them to be sustained by a few of the most radical and dedicated participants.[126] OWS also succumbed to this dynamic once the central camp was evicted by the police and it was unable to regain a broad mobilized base through smaller neighbourhood camps.

One of the reasons for the decline of this kind of neighbourhood organization is the fact that assemblies are exceptional political instances that occur apart from everyday activities and relationships. Student associations, in contrast, exist for reasons that are not strictly political but also serve the particular needs of their members. They provide social, academic, and professional

resources on an ongoing basis and are integrated with everyday lives, activities and spaces used by students. Regardless of whether or not an urgent political struggle demands attention, students feel compelled to maintain the student associations. Neighbourhood assemblies, on the other hand, require people to actively step out of their everyday routines and participate in a political project. The shared interests of a neighbourhood are generally more tenuous, less cohesive, and more difficult to organize.[127] Massive horizontalist movements are more likely to be effective and sustained over time if they are based in workplaces, cultural associations, churches, or other community organizations that already congregate people on a regular basis and serve particular economic, social, or cultural needs. In order to be politically significant these kinds of existing institutions would need to understand themselves as having distinct political concerns beyond their original purposes.

A final difficulty faced by spontaneous neighbourhood assemblies is that total autonomy and decentralization can leave each assembly unmoored and isolated from the larger movement. The student movement is able to sustain momentum within a fairly decentralized structure by also working to coordinate at a national level. While syndicalism privileges local autonomy and initiative and the ideal is for local associations to take the lead in self-organizing direct actions, in reality this can only be approximated by the most highly politicized associations or during periods of intense mobilization. For this reason, ASSÉ argues for the importance of national coordination and an organizational structure that can bring associations into a more permanent relation with one another. This kind of coordination can provide resources and greater momentum to smaller or less politicized associations and give them access to a broader network of support. If meaningful democratic spaces are not felt to exist, as in OWS, then neighbourhood GAs can be valuable in themselves. However, democratic practice can also become undermined

if they lack a connection to a sizable movement that makes collective action effective and gives purpose to the time and energy committed to direct democracy. The ephemeral nature of many neighbourhood assemblies speaks to the limits of the strong anti-institutional attitudes that can be a key value of participation. In attempting to avoid any level of bureaucracy movements like OWS are often unable to sustain mobilizing capacities over time.

The Movement Today

The 2012 student strike ended on September 5, one day after premier Jean Charest was voted out of office and the incoming Parti Quebecois leader Pauline Marois followed through on her election promise to cancel the tuition increase and annul Bill 78.[128] Many considered this victory – while only temporary and partial in light of the larger demand for tuition-free education – to be a direct result of the student mobilization. On the other hand, the election is also blamed for demobilizing students before they had achieved deeper institutional changes in the funding models of the education system. A parallel with May 68 in France can be made in this regard as an election was similarly used to undermine the legitimacy of the movement through majoritarian parliamentary democracy. ASSÉ's annual campaign for 2012/13 in the post-strike period was appropriately centered on pushing for free education in order to make clear the limited nature of this success.

Perhaps the more significant success of this movement in the longer term is that in the aftermath of the general strike ASSÉ doubled its size from 35,000 to 70,000 members. In the two years following, it continues to grow with 80,000 members as of April 2014.[129] This increase in affiliations was primarily a result of the experience of the student associations who joined CLASSE and were introduced to the practices of combative syndicalism. The massive

mobilization, endurance, and ultimate cancelling of the tuition increase that this struggle enabled served as a powerful endorsement of student syndicalism. The increase in affiliations has further strengthened ASSÉ's ability to create a permanent relation of force with the state. Even during the post-strike period of low mobilization ASSÉ continued to expand its base and managed to mobilize thousands for a one-day strike and boycott against Marois' education summit in spring 2013 due to the refusal of the PQ to include free tuition as a topic of discussion. On April 3, 2014, ASSÉ organized a national day of action against austerity that saw 60,000 participating in a one-day strike and tens of thousands demonstrating in what was the largest demonstration outside of a general strike period in the history of student syndicalism in Quebec. This mobilizing capability allows the students to define the terms of their struggle rather than be dependent on the actions of those in power, ensuring that future conflicts occur according to a timing that benefits the movement.

Conclusion: The Role of Participation in Social Movements

SDS marks a moment in which participation became a predominant value within leftist social movements. As participatory values came to exceed participation as a democratic decision-making practice, participation began to function ideologically. Participation as a pose or attitude towards institutions, roles and authority came to displace democratic practice and accountability rather than extend or deepen them. New SDS members that were critical of representative structures did not set up a viable alternative that would respond to the critiques of existing power structures. Participation as ideology exerted pressure on SDS's organization to fulfill a fantasy that it was ultimately unable to credibly enact.

SDS's experiment with participatory democracy could be understood as a vanishing mediator. I have suggested that in many ways participation has been successfully incorporated into the existing symbolic network. SDS spurred anti-establishment attitudes while paradoxically undermining belief in the functionality of direct democratic decision-making structures. In the decades following SDS's decline participation as a set of values has proliferated across multiple social spheres, leading to transformations in family relations, management methods, and modes of personal expression and consumption. At the same time, direct democratic practices and spaces of popular collective autonomy have been cast aside or diminished.

Like SDS, Occupy Wall Street gestured towards participatory democracy as an ideological vessel for the radical hopes of struggling Americans. Yet the embrace of participation as a radical principle did not seem to adequately recognize the widespread influence of the existing participatory culture. In the context of participation as ideology, the emphasis on participation undermined the ability of the GA to build and sustain democratic power. The principle of inclusiveness was interpreted in a way that depoliticized Occupy's central decision-making space. Procedural values were highlighted as a basis for unity rather than substantive political claims, betraying a politics of pluralism rather than a politics aimed at confronting fundamental antagonisms. Anti-representational attitudes undermined the legitimacy of any common decision making space and in some cases prevented the movement from resolving internal stalemates (as was seen with the drumming circle).

There were other currents and tendencies within OWS that departed from this participation-based fantasy. Many working groups used the existence of the camps as a basis for organizing against inequality and oppression while foregrounding a systemic critique of capitalism. The potential for organization that was apparent in Occupy requires a willingness to draw political

boundaries, to articulate shared experiences of exploitation and social oppression, and to stake out a path towards the actualization of a political project that has a chance at transforming people's lives. What Occupy made clear was that participation alone cannot be relied upon to provide or lead to a systemic critique of neoliberal capitalism. Participation cannot stand in for such a critique and elide the political antagonisms and battle over consciousness that it requires. In my reading, participatory democracy names a desire to arrive at an anti-capitalist critique organically and from the grassroots up. What this approach confronts is a reality in which these grassroots are already ideologically burdened by a version of participation that is heavily inflected by neoliberal values. The individualism, personal choice, tolerance and pluralism that participation connotes for many can easily be channeled into traditional representative institutions or end in an apolitical deadlock and disillusionment with direct democratic practice.

The critique of participation that I have developed in response to both SDS and OWS does not lead me to dismiss direct democratic organization. The Quebec Student Strike illustrates one instance where direct democratic organizational structures were in place, and yet, participation did not dominate the movement's self-conception and goals. These organizational structures were brought into the service of a clearly defined political campaign. The demand for free tuition drew its strength from mass coordination, something that was made possible by limiting participation to an institutionally defined membership with shared interests. These shared interests were only made politically meaningful as a result of extensive educational work undertaken by the most active members. Significantly, direct action, decentralized initiative and local decision-making were not regarded as incompatible with clearly defined political principles, coordinated action, and decision-making at the national level. These organizational practices were established through partial adherence to a historical model of student

organizations in Quebec, which were inspired initially by worker syndicalism. The values of the participatory complex were tempered by other values drawn from this syndicalist imaginary and applied to the student milieu.

Furthermore, a combative and militant stance was not perceived (by most) as incompatible with negotiations with the government. The insistence that the student associations be taken seriously as a legitimate actor in the political field did not depend on the associations adopting traditional representative forms or top-down lines of authority. Nor did it require them to abandon their principles and settle for a slightly diminished tuition increase. Rather, through the broad democratic legitimacy fostered autonomously within these associations they built the organizational strength and numbers to compel the existing political powers to bend and accommodate their way of doing democracy as well as respond to the pressure of their demands. Democratic power wasn't build by striving for openness, pluralism, and all-encompassing inclusiveness, nor by striving for pure horizontality and decentralization. Its success depended on acknowledging the need for mass politics and an organizational capacity that could support it. Participation does not contain the combative and collectivist imaginary that syndicalism made available to students in the Quebec context. The syndicalist imaginary situated the core principles of self-management and local initiative within a revolutionary critique of capitalism. This radical framing made possible a more highly politicized and confrontational self-understanding that exceeded the tuition issue. At the same time the tuition increase enabled a targeted demand that in its concreteness and plausibility helped to sustain collective actions that would otherwise not appear worthwhile.

Participation in activism is where we see participation as ideology in its best aspect. It is within social movements that participation as a democratic ideal is pushed to its most radical and

emancipatory conclusions. However, movements that seek deep and systemic change of capitalist parliamentary democracy should not consider participation to be an unqualified good. The tradition of participatory democracy in activism and theory offers a welcome critique of the inadequate nature of representative systems for developing a democratic culture. However, as I've argued throughout this chapter, even under circumstances where participation is intended to offer a radical critique of the inequality that exists within representative politics and capitalist society, the set of values that it invokes often undermines effective democratic power within movements. Participatory democracy was intended to support education, integration, cooperation, listening, and self-development. Yet after the rise of participation as ideology, participation foregrounds a slightly different set of values – inclusiveness, pluralism, tolerance, self-expression, and personal choice. These values risk undermining the necessarily oppositional and confrontation politics required to dismantle corporate class power, preventing movements from politicizing their boundaries for the sake of a desire to embody an inclusive ideal. Participation as a principle within activism should be heavily qualified to reflect more substantive political principles. The organizational principles that participation may indicate – the emphasis on member autonomy, direct democratic control by the base, direct action – can work in the direction of building democratic power if they are accompanied by a strong sense of solidarity based on common interests, ideological coherence, shared demands, and a willingness to engage in confrontational tactics. When participation is interpreted in an absolutist fashion or raised up as the central principle of a movement's politics beyond any goals outside of formal decision-making structures, this participatory complex may actually stand in the way of democratic practice.

Notes

[1] Students for a Democratic Society, "The Port Huron Statement," in *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, James Miller (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987), p. 331.

[2] Ibid., p. 333.

[3] Ibid., p. 329.

[4] Ibid., p. 332.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] C. Wright Mills, "The Mass Society," *The Power Elite* (Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 298-324. Mills had a direct influence on SDS's founders. This influence is detailed in James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987). A particularly influential essay was Mills "Letter to the New Left" where he emphasizes the potential revolutionary role of the "young intelligentsia." See C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," in *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, ed. John H. Summers, pp. 255-66 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[8] Ibid., pp. 302-304.

[9] Ibid., p. 306.

[10] Robert Ross, "The Democratic Process at Port Huron and After," in *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto*, eds. Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 132-33.

[11] Richard Rothstein, "Representative Democracy in SDS," *Liberation* 16:9 (February 1972): 11.

[12] Francesca Polletta, "Participatory Democracy in the New Left: 1960-67," in *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (University of Chicago: 2002), pp. 128-9.

[13] The convention is described in detail in Tom Milstein, "'New' vs. 'Left' in the SDS," in *Participatory Democracy*, eds. Terrence E. Cook and Patrick M. Morgan, pp. 199-205 (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1971).

[14] Rothstein, "Representative Democracy," pp. 10-11. The new members who felt animosity towards the existing representational structures are described in Polletta, "Participatory Democracy," pp. 138-145.

[15] Rothstein, "Representative Democracy," p. 12.

[16] Ibid., p. 13.

[17] Ibid., p. 15.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 17. A defense of the use of consensus within some ERAP projects for empowering community members can be found in Jennifer Frost, "Putting Participatory Democracy into Action," in *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto*, eds. Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, pp. 148-60 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See also Polletta, "Participatory Democracy," pp. 131-37.

[20] Polletta, "Participatory Democracy," pp. 145-6.

[21] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

[22] On the influence of counterculture on SDS and the importance of "personal transformation" and "authenticity" fueling political engagement at the time see Grace Elisabeth Hale, "The Romance of Rebellion," in *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto*, eds. Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, pp. 65-80 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[23] Rothstein, "Representative Democracy," p. 16.

[24] Ibid. Ironically, SNCC during this period transitioned away from participatory democracy and towards traditional centralized structures. For an analysis of the ideological shift in SNCC that lead to this transition see Francesca Polletta, "How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice" *Field: a Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 1 (Spring 2015): 215-54.

[25] Kenneth Keniston, "Young Radicals and the Fear of Power," in *Participatory Democracy*, eds. Terrence E. Cook and Patrick M. Morgan, pp. 184-90 (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1971).

[26] Ibid., p. 186.

[27] Ibid., p. 187.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Norm Fruchter, "SDS: In and Out of Context," *Liberation* 16:9 (February 1972): 28.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

[33] Ibid., pp. 71-78.

[34] Ibid., pp. 71-74.

[35] Ibid., p. 72.

[36] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 182-188.

[37] Ibid., p. 187.

[38] Ibid., p.185.

[39] Žižek acknowledges a tragic dimension to the vanishing mediator in the sense that the radical projects it heralds appear to be quickly overtaken by the determining forces of the base in spite of the temporary autonomy that they enjoy (Ibid., pp. 187-8). However, against an interpretation of dialectics in which we penetrate the surface play of contingencies and reach the underlying rational necessity which "runs the show" behind the back of the subjects, he claims that the "proper Hegelian dialectical move is almost the exact inversion if this procedure: it disperses the fetish of 'objective historical process' and allows us to see its genesis: the way the very historical Necessity sprang up as a positivization, as a 'coagulation' of a radically contingent *decision* of the subjects in an open, undecidable situation" (Ibid., p. 189). He insists that the seeming "necessity" of the vanishing mediator is in actuality a retroactive effect or necessary illusion of perspective. The vanishing mediator only appears necessary in retrospect

from the perspective of the now "successful" existing symbolic network that it facilitated. The existing symbolic network effaces the contingency of the act of the subject by narrativizing a causal chain of events leading to the decision, making it appear that no other decision was possible. By asserting the contingency of class struggle, Žižek avoids a simplistic determinism that would render the acts of social movements futile.

[40] Ibid., p. 196.

[41] Žižek argues that rather than a mediator that completely disappears after a one social formation is transformed into another, the vanishing mediator vanishes because it is incorporated into the new social formation or symbolic network. Drawing on Alain Badiou, he explains that the vanishing mediator can no longer function as the pure ideological "truth" that it was when its status was that of "the event" that ruptured with the preceding social formation, yet it nevertheless remains as the "gentrification" of a forgotten excess of negativity (Ibid., p. 188; 196).

[42] Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge, 1970), pp. 17-18.

[43] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[44] Ibid., "Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and G.D.H. Cole: a participatory theory of democracy," pp. 22-44.

[45] Ibid., p. 42.

[46] Ibid., p. 24.

[47] Ibid., p. 25.

[48] Ibid., p. 27.

[49] Ibid., p. 27.

[50] The possibility and meaning of participatory social relations in these social spheres and others are treated in turn in Chris Spannos, ed., *Real Utopia: participatory society for the 21st century* (Oakland, California; Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 2008).

[51] Pateman, *Participation*, p. 34. The presumption perhaps undermines the importance of the domestic sphere for conditioning subservience to authority, as a majority of adult women at this time spent a significant portion of their day engaged in domestic labour.

[52] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (public domain: 1762), book II, Ch. 11. Quoted in Pateman, *Participation*, p. 23.

[53] C. B. Macpherson, "Democratic Theory: Ontology and Technology," in *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, pp. 24-38 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[54] C. B. Macpherson, "Model 2: Developmental Democracy," in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*, pp. 44-76 (Oxford; New York; Toronto; Melbourne: Oxford, 1977).

[55] Ibid., p. 49.

[56] Ibid., p. 71.

[57] Ibid., p. 48.

[58] Jodi Dean argues against this reductive equation of communism or socialism with Stalinism in her chapter "Our Soviets," in *The Communist Horizon* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 23-38.

[59] David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, A Crisis, A Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), pp. xix-xx.

[60] Occupy released a list of grievances that are mostly aimed at corporate power and inequality. See Occupy Wall Street New York General Assembly, "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City," released September 29, 2011, *http://www.nycga.net/resources/documents/declaration/*.

[61] For a general account of this crisis see chapter one, "The Disruption," in David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-39.

[62] The 'mic check' was a method of amplifying the voices of those speaking during general assemblies in a context where loudspeakers had been banned by the city. Those gathered would repeat in unison the words of the speaker so that those further away could hear the message. See Lilian Radovac, "Mic Check: Occupy Wall Street and the Space of Audition," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11:1 (March 2014): 34-41.

[63] A large amount of documentation of working group discussions, research and proposals can be found on the Occupy Wall Street New York General Assembly web site on the "documents" page: http://www.nycga.net/documents/.

[64] Marina Sitrin, "One No, Many Yeses," in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, eds Astra Taylor et al. (London and Brooklyn: Verso and *n+1*, 2011), p. 8.

[65] Graeber, *Democracy Project,* pp. 150-207.

[66] Here I would note that coercive should not be equated with violence, but that physically occupying space is an assertion of power.

[67] Dean, *Communist Horizon,* p. 210.

[68] Jodi Dean, "Claiming Division, Naming a Wrong," in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, eds. Astra Taylor et al. (London and Brooklyn: Verso and *n+1*, 2011), p. 88.

[69] Dean, *Communist Horizon,* pp. 218-19.

[70] Ibid*.,* p. 220.

[71] Dean, "Claiming Division," pp. 89-90.

[72] Graeber, *Democracy Project,* p. xx.

[73] L.A. Kauffman, "The Theology of Consensus," in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, eds. Astra Taylor et al. (London and Brooklyn: Verso and *n+1*, 2011), p. 49. It should be noted that this embrace of consensus is not necessarily representative of the majority of those who identify as leftists, but that the consensus position nevertheless exercises a strong moral hegemony within recent movements. Those who pushed for consensus in Occupy were the most active organizers of the initial camp and therefore determined its decision-making procedures and continued to exert a strong influence on the camps as they developed. Although there appears to have been plenty of criticism and frustration expressed by OWS participants in relation to consensus process, even those who complained continued to use it. The "Demands" working group for instance, while upset that their "Jobs for All" proposal with a 2/3 majority still failed to reach the 90% support needed for consensus, nevertheless used this process within their working group and continued to engage with the GA. The very fact that within this system such a high degree of support would be required to reject consensus means that a very small minority can continue to insist on it. The only remaining options for those who disagree would be to adapt to this procedure against their better judgment or to become autonomous from the GA by acting without its approval, creating an alternative decision making body and inviting others to take part, or leaving the movement entirely.

[74] Graeber, *Democracy Project*, pp. 208-70.

[75] Keith Gessen, "Laundry Day," in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, eds. Astra Taylor et al. (London and Brooklyn: Verso and *n+1*, 2011), p. 200.

[76] Graeber, *Democracy Project,* pp. 203; 217.

[77] Occupy Wall Street New York General Assembly, "Principles of Solidarity," adopted September 23, 2011. *http://www.nycga.net/resources/documents/principles-of-solidarity/.*

[78] Graeber, *Democracy Project,* p. 220.

[79] Ibid.*,* p. 219.

[80] Pateman, *Participation*, p. 37.

[81] Ibid., p. 40.

[82] Graeber, *Democracy Project,* pp. 227-29.

[83] Ibid.*,* pp. 215-17.

[84] Mark Greif describes the conflict in his essay "Drumming in Circles," in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, eds. Astra Taylor et al., pp. 55-62 (London and Brooklyn: Verso and *n+1*, 2011).

[85] Gessen, "Laundry Day," p. 206.

[86] "We Are the 99%", *http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/.*

[87] CEGEPs (Collège d'enseignement general et professionnel) are publically funded pre-university colleges in Quebec. For a detailed chronology of the strike see Cayley Sorochan, "The Quebec Student Strike: a Chronology," *Theory & Event* 15:3 (2012, Supplement), unpaginated.

[88] ASSÉ, "Annex D : Annex H; La Coalition large de l'ASSÉ." *Cahier de preparation pour les délégations: Congrès de fondation de la CLASSE*, December 3-4 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2011), pp. 63-67. http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Cahier-Congres-CLASSE-decembre-2011.pdf.

[89] Bloquons la hausse: http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/laclasse/membres/.

[90] ASSÉ, *Statuts et règlements de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ)* (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2013), pp. 32-36. http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/statuts-et-reglements-derniere-mise-a-jour-avril-2013.pdf.

[91] ASSÉ-solidarite: http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/presentation-2/.

[92] ASSÉ-solidarite*:* http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/asse/historique/.

[93] ASSÉ, *Statuts et règlements*, p. 5. Also see Moyan-Lapointe, Héloïse, (2005, pp. 102-107). Héloïse Moyan-Lapointe, "L'ASSÉ depuis sa creation," In *Recueil de textes sur l'histoire du mouvement étudiant québécois*, pp. 102-7 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2005). http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/histoire-du-mouvement-etudiant-hiver-2005.pdf.

[94] Moyan-Lapointe, "L'ASSÉ depuis sa creation," p. 106.

[95] ASSÉ, *Statuts et règlements*, p. 5.

[96] Benoit Marsan, "Pourquoi le syndicalisme etudiante?" in *Recueil de textes sur l'histoire du mouvement étudiant québécois*, pp. 48-71 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2005), p. 50. http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/histoire-du-mouvement-etudiant-hiver-2005.pdf.

[97] Ibid., p. 49.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Jean-Marc Piotte, "Syndicalism de Boutique, Syndicalism d'Affaire, et Syndicalism de Combat," in *Du Combat au Partenariat*, pp. 21-28 (Quebec: Nota Bene, 1998).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Since in all unions are referred to as 'les syndicats' in French the term syndicalism does not automatically carry the same revolutionary connotations, hence the need for the qualifier.

[102] For a helpful synthesis of the central ideological and organizational principles of syndicalist thought and practice based on its peak period of influence in the early 1900s to 1920s see Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis* (Hampshire, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008).

[103] Ibid., p. 40.

[104] The capacity of the capitalist state to violently repress such a transfer of power is a central area of contention in syndicalist theory. According to Darlington, the unrealistic nature of this scenario is partly what led to the decline of syndicalism in the interwar period as militants became convinced of the need for a Communist Party to defend the revolution and witnessed the success of Leninism in Russia.

[105] Bloquons la hausse: *http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/verslagreve/historique-des-greves-generales/* A more detailed description and analysis of the first six general strikes can be found in Benoit Renaud, "Six grèves generals," in *Recueil de textes sur l'histoire du mouvement étudiant québécois*, pp. 17-47 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2005). http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/histoire-du-mouvement-etudiant-hiver-2005.pdf.

[106] Darlington, *Syndicalism*, p. 26.

[107] Marsan, "Pourquoi le syndicalisme etudiante?" p. 61.

[108] Ibid., p. 62.

[109] ASSÉ, *Statuts et règlements*, p. 4.

[110] During ASSÉ's Orientation Congress in May 2013 members considered a proposition that would have ASSÉ adopt a clear anti-capitalist stance among its core principles. The motion was ultimately rejected due to concerns that it would alienate too many student associations who were less radicalized. For the time being, it was decided that the already existing principle 'against any form of globalization that places the primacy of profits over the well-being of the population' [my translation] would suffice as a critical stance against capitalism. The fact that this question has been raised in ASSÉ numerous times does speak to a strong anti-capitalist tendency within the organization. On the other hand, while ASSÉ does not endorse any political party, amongst the members there is active support for the social democratic party Québec Solidaire, which has made tuition-free post-secondary education a part of their platform.

[111] "Crisis UQO as riot police enforce injunction; 161 arrested," *Mediacoop.ca,* 18 April 2012. http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/tuitiontruth/news/crisis-at-uqo-riot-police-enforce-injunction-160-arrests/.

“UQAM gets injunction against striking Montreal students,” *Montreal Gazette*, 4 April 2012. *http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/montreal/6409104/story.html*.
“Judge grants injunction against striking students at Laval U,” *Toronto Sun*, 3 April 2012. *http://www.torontosun.com/2012/04/03/judge-grants-injunction-against-striking-students-at-laval-u.*

[112] *Carré Rouge sur un Fond Noire*, film, dir. Santiago Bertolino and Hugo Samson (Montreal: Productions Multi-Monde, Télé-Québec, and les Films de 3 Mars, 2013).

[113] Richard Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity: the political logic of the newest social movements” *Cultural Studies* 18:5 (2004): 716-48.

[114] ASSÉ is explicitly critical of adopting a merely defensive stance, believing that only offensive struggles have the ability to win and preserve real gains. See Lazlo Bonin, “Passer à l'offensive pour la gratuité scolaire,” in *Cahier de congress*, April 26-27, pp. 7-17 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2014), p. 10. http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/typedocument/instances/congres/.

[115] Alain Badiou, 2014. “'A present defaults – unless the crowd declares itself': Alain Badiou on Ukraine, Egypt and Finitude,” Trans. David Broder, *Verso Blog*, unpaginated. http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1569-a-present-defaults-unless-the-crowd-declares-itself-alain-badiou-on-ukraine-egypt-and-finitude

[116] 'La proposition de la CLASSE: taxer les banques pour financer la gratuité scholaire,' *Radio Canada*, 3 May 2012. *http://www.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/societe/2012/05/03/002-classe-gratuite-taxe.shtml*
A summary of the CLASSE's proposal can be read on the website:
http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/2012/05/contre-offre-de-la-classe-pour-une-universite-qui-fait-honneur-a-sa-mission-fondamentale/

[117] A compilation of the arguments with which CLASSE defended their position is available here: *http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/argumentaire.pdf* For a good English summary of the students' arguments see Andrew Gavin Marshall, “The Québec Student Strike: From 'Maple Spring' to Summer Rebellion?” *Andrewgavinmarshall Blog* (2012), unpaginated. http://andrewgavinmarshall.com/2012/04/30/the-quebec-student-strike-from-maple-spring-to-summer-rebellion/

[118] A brief summary of these arguments on negotiations and combative syndicalism is presented in a flier produced by AÉCS (*Association Étudiante du Cégep de Sherbrooke*) and circulated during the 2012 strike. See *Syndicalism de Combat*: *http://latotale.info/sites/latotale.info/files/documents/aecs/tract-le-syndicalisme-de-combat/syndicalismedecombat.pdf*.

[119] Darin Barney, “The truth of *le printemps érables*,” *Theory & Event* 15:3 (2012, Supplement), unpaginated.

[120] At least this was the case prior to the passing of Bill 78, which included a clause that holds student leaders and student associations responsible if they do not adequately prevent their members from breaking it. In this way autonomous actions by particular individuals and groups could be used to criminalize the student strike and student organizations. Bill 78 can be read online: *http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Document-explicatif-Loi-78-v2.pdf*

[121] Žižek, Slavoj, (2012, unpaginated). Slavoj Žižek, “Why Obama is More than Bush With a Human Face,” *Guardian*, November 13, 2012. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/nov/13/obama-ground-floor-thinking

[122] The 'reasonableness' of the students' position was further emphasized by the way that CLASSE proposed, in a satirical reflection of the five-year tuition increase, that its plan to tax banks be introduced in intervals of 0.14% over five years to allow the banks time to adjust.

[123] Barney, “The truth of *le printemps érables*,” unpaginated.

[124] CLASSE, *Résumé des mandats*, Congress meeting, April 22 (Montreal: ASSÉ, 2012), p. 2.
http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Resume-des-mandat-Congres-CLASSE-22-avril-2012.pdf.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Héloïse Nez, "From Globilization to Localization of Collective Action? The Relation to the Territory of the Indignados of Madrid," *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity: From the Indignados to Occupy*, Conference at the University of Montreal, February 21, 2013.

[127] The breakfast program organized by the Black Panthers in the 1960s are an interesting counter example of a highly politicized organization that found a way to serve a distinct need in their communities and thereby broaden their base of support.

[128] Marois would later hold an 'Education Summit' on February 25-26, 2013, that was strongly criticized by ASSÉ and boycotted for excluding any discussion of a tuition free system. The summit resulted in a decision to index tuition costs to inflation. Since student income, scholarships and aid were not likewise linked to inflation this resulted in a slight tuition increase. While much smaller than that proposed by the preceding Liberal government, the increase reveals the degree to which the PQ is committed to the same neoliberal tendencies of its predecessors and only cancelled the original increase out of opportunism, not due to any commitment to social democratic principles of free education.

[129] Bonin, "Passer à l'offensive," p. 12.

CHAPTER THREE: PARTICIPATION AT WORK

Self-Organized Collaboration: Bar Camp Ideology and the Labour of Enjoyment

Participatory democrats have pointed out the contradiction that in liberal democratic societies most people spend their time in work relations that are basically authoritarian.[1] Freedom at work is limited to the decision to accept a contract or to quit. For the duration of time spent at work, one is bound by the provisions of the contract and the authority of management.[2] For thinkers like Carol Pateman, participation in daily decisions at work should be considered a step towards workplace democracy, which can involve either the direct ownership of the corporation by the workers or democratic decision-making structures that enable workers to take part in major decisions over how the corporation is run and how work is organized.[3] However, in spite of the dream for workplace democracy as a central dimension of socialism, participation and open collaborative structures are not only accommodated by non-democratic firms in today's knowledge-based economy, they are demanded as a competitive necessity.

Participation has a long history as a value within the capitalist workplace that provokes skepticism of its democratizing potential. David Noble locates the beginning of participation at work as arising in the mid-twentieth century in response to labour unrest and reactions against Taylorism.[4] Under the broad banner of participatory management, various organizational shifts occurred that aimed at increasing employee autonomy, responsibility and investment in the vision of the company.[5] The embrace of participatory values in the sphere of industrial labour emerged in the 1980s within the auto industry and has been critiqued from a labour perspective for undermining job security and unionization.[6] Participatory management was also adopted extensively in white-collar professions. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's study of management

literature from the 1960s to 90s in France reflects an ideological shift that draws heavily on participatory values and is aimed at maintaining support for capitalism among middle managers.[7] By the 90s, the participatory ethos had become particularly central within the digital media industries, whose workforce Andrew Ross describes as "no collar" due to their subversive anti-corporate workplace culture and desire for authentic work and social relations.[8]

With the rise of the knowledge economy and digital networks, new forms of participatory labour and self-exploitation have arisen that make participation a ubiquitous fantasy. Far beyond the boundaries of traditional paid work, participatory practices on the Internet are now recognized by theorists of digital labour to contribute to the production of surplus value.[9] This production is often poorly paid, or depends on the perception of users that their activities are simply leisure or hobbies, or part of their need to enhance their employability on the market even if they must willingly work for free to do so.[10] Optimistic assessments of online collaboration see it as an open commons that reflects a sharing economy in resistance to proprietary control of culture.[11] For others, such as Tiziana Terranova, who extends Maurizio Lazzarato's concept of immaterial labour to online activities, participation and collaboration are seen as yet another way that upward capital accumulation occurs and drives inequality to new levels.[12]

Given the history of the instrumentalization of participation at work it is tempting to contrast such schemes to more far-reaching experiments in workplace democracy and to declare the former "inauthentic" or false instantiations of what participation *really* is. However, in keeping with the aims of this thesis, I will rather take participation seriously to explore the limits of participatory ideology. Within corporate firms, participation is real insofar as those who contribute to participation-based projects enjoy a greater degree of autonomy than under previous management regimes and have a genuine influence on the direction and outcomes of the

particular task assigned to them. This measure of participation, however, is always disciplined by the market. Unlike democratic process, these decisions are not made collectively through representative structures. Rather, particular people who are thought (by management) to have some kind of knowledge or know-how to contribute to a particular problem or issue are brought together, usually on a temporary basis, to make decisions within the purview of each separate instance or project.[13] Sometimes the decisions made by a group are binding, and in other cases they are merely consultative. Participation in this form should be considered genuine insofar as these groups typically enjoy total autonomy that is only limited by the original task set for them (which may be very specific, or in cases where creative problem solving are required, quite open) and the limits placed on them by budgets or market competition. Even so, it is apparent that this form of participation leaves out the most important aspects of democratic decision-making, namely, the collective control over the aims and goals of the firm, the structure of its operations, and the distribution of its risks and rewards.

When participatory methods of production occur within the organizational structure of a traditional firm or institution the continued presence of a boss, owner or manager comes to stand in for remaining traces of hierarchy and domination that prevent participation from being *genuine*, *authentic*, or *real*. No matter how lenient these traditional authority figures might be, no matter how communicative, open and understanding, no matter how supportive and willing to cede control, according to a broad ideology of participation, problems at work will be interpreted as a result of lack of adequate participation. This is how the fantasy of participation is installed ideologically even as it is denied materially. In order to sidestep the ongoing tendency to see hierarchy as the primary blockage standing in the way of worker emancipation (and not relations of exploitation that are inherent in neoliberal capitalism), this chapter will focus on a site that

exemplifies participatory values in the knowledge economy and yet takes place largely outside of traditional work organizations. One such instance of participatory and creative knowledge production is the open-conferencing phenomenon known as "bar camps."

In close association with online cultures that are based on the ideals of non-proprietary sharing, bar camps have emerged as experiments in face-to-face participatory knowledge production. Bar camps are a technology-focused workshop phenomenon loosely modeled on the participatory structures used in Free/Open Source Software (F/OSS) production. Also referred to as unconferences, bar camps are "user-generated" conferences or workshops that rely on the engagement of all participants to produce the themes and content of the discussions. Bar camps are particularly interesting in relation to participation as ideology due to the fact that they are applied in such a wide range of contexts and in relation to very diverse subjects. As an abstract organizational form its meaning changes according to the context of its application – as part of a professional association, within a corporation, library, university, or alternative art space – and the content it aims to generate – to improve a piece of software, as a method of employee self-training, a trade show for geeks, entrepreneurs and knowledge workers, to exchange information and generate buzz, or to stimulate critical discussion on a range of topics. In all the cases mentioned, bar camps could be understood as a kind of knowledge work and social networking that is increasingly important in a postindustrial economy. It is largely as a site of labour, a productive activity and an extension of work that I address them in this chapter.

The easy uptake of bar camps by a range of actors and institutions exhibits how widespread participatory ideology has become, essentially functioning as a kind of common sense among a broad segment of society. As an abstract organizational form, bar camps exhibit participation as ideology at its purest. Seemingly removed from any particular content or context, participation

as manifested in the bar camp circulates widely based on the presumption that participation is inherently good. Nonetheless, the history of bar camps does allow us to place them in a particular context that is far from neutral in spite of how their advocates present them. Heavily influenced by the Free and Open Source Software movement (F/OSS), open space technology, and participatory management, bar camps disseminate a way of thinking about knowledge, productivity, social relations and public space that adapts subjects to neoliberal conditions.

While bar camps often do not take place within the confines of a single corporate firm, institution or workplace, the collaborative networking activity that they organize is seen to be increasingly central to the production of value within a knowledge economy. Following the insights of theorists of immaterial and digital labour, I approach bar camps as work spaces, or as necessary supplements to productivity and survival in a precarious market economy. While semi-autonomous from the control of any particular capitalist organization, bar camps and similar conference events are nonetheless understood as important to research, innovation and surplus value production for corporations, entrepreneurs and freelance workers alike due to the social connections they establish. Furthermore, in the contemporary context of wireless connectivity and social media platforms, social spaces once considered "offline" or "face-to-face" are integrated with the dynamics of digital labour.[14] In the case of bar camps, digital platforms are used for organization, communication during the event, and documentation.

As an extension of open source structures to various face-to-face social spaces that are nonetheless integrated with digital networks, bar camps raise interesting questions as to how the particular ideology that drives them may shape knowledge production and collaborative practices. Under current conditions of digital capitalism, participation, spontaneity, flexibility and collaboration are attractive and influential concepts. The promises of autonomy, personal

fulfillment and social connections that they proffer galvanize desire in the direction of network-style organization. I argue that the ideology of participation involved in bar camps consists of two levels: an explicit set of rules and an implicit obscene underside that consists of a mode of enjoyment that sustains exploitation. This implicit enjoyment disavows the inequalities that structure the field of encounter by demanding passion from its subjects. This passion is contained and directed towards small-scale projects, social detachment, individual preference and short-term temporalities, while upholding a consensus that disallows a space of refusal from which to legitimately reject the terms of participation.

I begin by presenting a history of participatory management to establish the broader context for participation at work that precedes bar camps. While often presented as subversive of hierarchical and traditional institutions, the predominant values of bar camps also overlap significantly with those of participative management techniques that emerged in the late 1950s and early 60s and have become a regular feature of workplace restructuring since the 80s. I apply Boltanski and Chiapello's theory of the projective city to bar camps in order to characterize the emerging dynamics of status and exploitation that exist within a predominantly networked world and to counter the bar camp presumption that hierarchy can be undermined through participatory structures alone. I also consider the influence of F/OSS and argue that its principles, when applied to bar camps, instrumentalize discussion and undermine collective spaces that make claims grounded in an emancipatory universalism. I contend that the impasse between neoliberal pragmatism and the traditional idealism of the liberal public sphere can be overcome through refusal of participation and the underlying structures of enjoyment that sustain it.

The Emergence of Participation at Work: Participation, Motivation and a More Humane Capitalism

If chapter two dealt primarily with participation as a method of democratic decision-making, this chapter addresses participation as a form of personal contribution for which the primary goal is some form of production. Within a capitalist economy, the direct goal of production is to generate surplus value as opposed to meeting human needs. What is compelling about participation at work is that it nonetheless holds out the promise of a transformation of burdensome labour into a kind of self-actualizing work. In this fantasy, participation is the method through which the interests of capitalists and workers are reconciled, where worker enthusiasm, passion and self-development serve rather than hinder the corporate aims of efficiency and increased productivity. This embrace of participation as ideology encourages employees to self-identify with the vision and goals of management, or to see themselves as small-business owners contributing to their own self-valorization rather than as workers who contribute surplus value for someone else. Furthermore, the ideology of participation at work often draws on capitalist values of hard work, individual initiative and the belief that those with the most merit ultimately succeed. In this way participation functions to renew and validate structures of exploitation and inequality.

The rise of participation as a central value of work organization emerged as a refinement of earlier attempts to control workers through external discipline. Gaining the compliance of workers on the job and increasing their productivity has been the task of management since its inception.[15] In the early twentieth century the Fordist style of mechanized factory lines made the "human element" all that more obvious as a dimension of work that, unlike the machinery itself, could not be completely controlled or predicted. Taylorism, or scientific management, became the most infamous attempt to increase productivity under Fordism by isolating the physical

movement of workers, studying it and prescribing the most efficient method for performing each task.[16] By controlling every movement in this fashion, management could shave valuable seconds from the time it took to produce each product. While scientific management was also intended to make work less physically arduous, it nevertheless became associated with the most inhuman drudgery due to its breakdown of work tasks into the most unthinking, rote and repetitive elements, objectifying workers as if they were themselves nothing more than machinery. Under the Fordist system, everything was organized from the top-down in a highly hierarchical system of control. One of the primary limits of this system was that it tended to provoke high levels of worker resistance and agitation. The efficiencies gained on the factory line could easily be lost through worker sabotage or strikes. In order to overcome the problems of worker unrest and combativeness, management drew increasingly on the field of psychology. By mid-century a significant shift in management theory and practice was underway as it became obvious that the human element could be made more compliant through participation than by direct external control.[17]

Participative management theory emerged in North America in the 1960s. The central obsession of this body of thought was how changes in managerial practice could improve employee performance. Connections were sought between employee motivation, identification with company values and goals, participation in various kinds of decision-making and performance outcomes.[18] The fantasy underlying this shift towards participative management is one in which a company functions as a "corporatist" whole dedicated towards a common shared purpose and where the underlying class division between workers and managers/owners has been overcome. Every worker in every distinct function, no matter the nature of the task, could become more satisfied and fulfilled by their job if a dimension of participation was added to it.

Participation allows managers to work towards performance and profit maximization with a clear conscience in the knowledge that their success does not come at the expense of, but rather to the greater benefit of the employees who will gain access to self-esteem and self-actualization. Moreover, this increased employee well-being and empowerment is not a threat to the power and control of management since it increases control and unity within the organization.[19] This presupposed overcoming of contradictions and conflicting interests between workers and capitalists is one that is believed to be brought about through the market system rather than against it.[20]

Participative management was heavily influenced by the application of developmental and social psychology to problems of work organization. A new understanding of human psychology and human relations opened up these areas to the influence of managerial objectives. For instance, Abraham Maslow's notion of a "hierarchy of needs," which posits distinct human needs for sustenance, security, love and acceptance, self-esteem and self-actualization, became a standard reference for understanding how to better influence employee behaviour.[21] Beyond the threat of punishment or strictly economic and material rewards, Maslow's theory contributed to participative management's focus on employee self-esteem as a significant area of motivation. Keith Davis characterizes four approaches to management that correspond to Maslow's hierarchy.[22] The key insight of Davis' argument is that while a materially satisfied employee will be content and cooperative with management, satisfaction does not lead to greater motivation and work performance.[23] It is the self-esteem deriving from greater participation at work that leads to improved performance.

The presupposed link between participation, self-esteem and motivation has precipitated a deep transformation in management philosophy and workplace organization. A central pillar of

this shift is the contrast drawn between the autocratic and supportive manager. In his 1960 book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, Douglas McGregor, a particularly influential thinker, differentiated between classical leadership theory and modern leadership theory.[24] He advocated for "Theory Y," in which it is assumed that humans like responsibility and are broadly capable of creativity, self-direction and self-control. Theory Y leads to a leadership style that is based on subordinate participation, joint decision-making, and the design of challenging, rewarding and self-directed work tasks.[25] McGregor suggests that managers who operate according to theory Y will achieve greater overall performance and satisfaction in their enterprise.[26] Similarly influential has been Rensis Likert's 1961 *New Patterns of Management*, which built on McGregor's ideas and presented a slightly more nuanced range of management styles labeled Systems I through IV.[27] In System IV, the manager is not a directive and controlling boss but an employee-oriented supervisor who offers psychological support to employees and encourages them towards superior performance. [28] Traditional management is thought to lead to employee passivity and resistance, while a supportive environment creates space for greater responsibility and enthusiasm. The supportive manager is more ready to delegate tasks and particular decisions to their subordinates and thereby creates a relationship based on trust rather than surveillance. Since the manager trusts that his employees are capable individuals she or he refrains from closely directing their activity and instead offers them the resources necessary to perform to the best of their abilities.

In the years preceding participative management, differing leadership styles began to be referred to as "authoritarian," "laissez faire" or "democratic."[29] The use of the term "authoritarian," more commonly associated with a disparaged form of political organization, gave traditional hierarchical management an intensely negative connotation. The concept of the

supportive manager enabled managers to live up to demands for a seemingly more democratic style of leadership while at the same time maintaining control over the organization. Underlying this shift in management theory was a fantasy of corporate unity that had broader political valances in the context of the Cold War. Driven by competition with the Soviet system of material redistribution, as well as by fears of a lingering fascist threat, the language of democracy, humanism and individual flourishing set the capitalist system apart while insisting that it could adapt to a broader sense of human welfare than that which is strictly material. Participation became a way to conceptualize an overcoming of class struggle through capitalist production rather than against it.

In spite of a politically inflected language of "democracy" in the workplace, it is clear that supportive styles of management that were becoming fashionable were compatible with the control desired by management. In a study comparing different leadership styles in several Yugoslavian factories, Mozina et al. argue that control in an organization cannot be equated with decision-making power.[30] They note that an autocratic manager can make a decision, but in order for it to be carried out he relies on the compliance of his subordinates. He can only be said to exercise control to the degree that his decisions are actually executed. This distinction between decision-making and execution means that in reality, control, or the ability to influence the behaviour of employees in desired directions, cannot be determined through formal decision-making power alone.[31] In their study, Mozina et al. demonstrate how plants that adopted a leadership style in accordance with supportive management, in which there was less explicit emphasis on orderliness, discipline and supervision, were in fact more orderly and disciplined.[32] These plants exhibited better performance outcomes and greater control throughout the organization, whereas those adopting autocratic styles and supervision exhibited less control.

Mozina et al. argue that the reason for this is that power and control are not fixed quantities that diminish on the part of management when responsibility is delegated to employees.[33] When management empowers employees, they simultaneously increase their own control and the control present throughout the organization. Examples such as this function as empirical support for the shift away from what Michel Foucault theorizes as disciplinary society towards what Gilles Deleuze refers to as "control society."[34] External discipline becomes less apparent and replaced by dispersed methods of control that rely on self-organized groups.

The 1980s: Participation Is Disciplined by the Market

In spite of the enthusiasm towards participation as an ideal, the 1960s appear to be a transitional stage where managers were not yet entirely convinced that participation is practical and workable. The focus on participation as a humanistic ideal provided a strong motivation to engage with novel and untested practices, yet it would require the pressure of competition from the successful use of "Total Quality Management" by Japanese auto manufacturers for North American corporations to seriously commit to participative management throughout their organization. In spite of the surge of interest in participative management in the 1960s, it was not widely integrated into management practice until the 1980s. Lorne Plunkett and Robert Fournier describe the motivations behind the implementation of participative management in the 1980s as due firstly to a reduction of market size due to quality standards, an unhappy militant workforce and competition.[35] Secondly, Plunkett and Fournier point to the rise of the knowledge worker due to technological advances. The result was the need for a different skill set from workers, which included innovation, responsibility and customer focus, as opposed to the skills desired during the 50s and 60s, such as dependability, physical strength, experience and loyalty.[36]

According to Plunkett and Fournier, participative management is a "philosophy that demands that organizational decision making be made in such a way that *input* and *responsibility* are extended to the lowest level appropriate to the decision being made."[37] In order to achieve more effective and efficient decision-making, a more diverse array of individuals and work teams are integrated in decision-making instances than would have been the case under traditionally hierarchical management systems. Plunkett and Fournier consider empowerment and involvement to be the primary means through which participative management functions.[38] Particular individuals or teams are vested with greater responsibility and invited to take part in processes for which they are believed to have valuable knowledge to contribute. One major difference from the 1960s is that it was mostly upper and middle management that incorporated changes in the direction of "supportive management," whereas in the 1980s, the reorganization of work increasingly involved a more substantial integration of shop-floor level workers and supervisors into participatory structures.

In concrete terms, the implementation of participative management results in a modification of work processes, organization and roles. One significant change is the inclusion of more diverse people in consultation meetings and day-to-day decision-making. This is thought to result in better integration of knowledge and information across functional divisions and levels, reducing unnecessary mediation, speeding up communication, and better utilizing existing knowledge resources within the organization.[39] This heightened involvement in decision-making is thought to also increase feelings of identification with the company since it increases employee responsibility and status. Another major change is the reorganization of various branches of the organization into more highly integrated work teams.[40] So for instance, rather than a separate maintenance division, each team may become responsible for maintenance tasks in their own

section. Teams are invested with different levels of autonomy, from those that are highly self-directed, to those that are partially guided or supported by management. In some cases workers may gain greater control over the organization of work tasks and processes. The team structure may lead to the rotation of job tasks within the team unit and the performance of more varied tasks than the previous functional divisions. The team structure also results in a dynamic of peer pressure that can be more effective than top-down control or supervision as workers identify more with one another and so are more highly motivated to perform for the sake of their peers. By allowing work teams more autonomy to make changes on the shop floor, management can rely on the lived knowledge of workers on the job to improve productivity. A final significant change entailed by participative management is that management is encouraged to adopt the "supportive" model of employee relations. Managers are expected to lead through example to motivate people to enact the new participative methods and to ultimately fulfill the vision of the organization.[41]

In comparison with the theorists of the 1960s, Plunkett and Fournier show far less concern with ideas of the humane workplace and are explicit in promoting participative management as a strategic business decision rather than a human resources issue. Empowerment may be a means by which participative management functions, but it is in itself merely a process and a fringe benefit, not the ultimate end. While the end goal of increasing productivity was equally present in the 1960s, Plunkett and Fournier are more blatant about this fact and are explicit in distancing participation from workplace democracy.[42] The structural changes entailed by participative management are ultimately about efficiency and doing more with less. Processes are therefore justified in terms of "better integration" and "fewer levels of mediation," and so "greater employee responsibility and participation" can involve significant layoffs and elimination of

redundancies. If employees can be made to internalize degrees of self-management there is less need of middle managers and supervisors. If an operations team incorporates maintenance practices into its daily tasks, then the former maintenance division can be downsized or given fewer hours. Plunkett and Fournier's advice to managers faced with an employee who is resistant to working in teams or engaging in participation is that such an employee should adapt to participation or be fired.[43] Participation is now considered a part of the job description and is not optional. This indicates a significant change from the custodial model of the 1960s that emphasized job security above all else. An interesting contradiction is apparent in this imperative to participate. While the successful manager should effectively sell participation to workers in such a way as to win their genuine consensus, being empowered is not optional for those who wish to keep their jobs.

From a labour perspective, participative management has been criticized for undermining class consciousness and union power.[44] The team structure encourages teams to compete with one another and to identify with the goals of the corporation rather than with other workers outside of their team. Participatory structures that are organized by management can channel worker energy away from union activity and towards spaces that are oriented towards company goals. When compiling a list of forces that either help or hinder the implementation of participative management, Plunkett and Fournier include union agreements and contracts among the hindering forces.[45] The further acknowledge the use of participative management to bust unions.[46] For instance, they give as a positive example the use of participative management at Esso Chemicals, which enabled the company to complete a project during a construction strike that would have otherwise delayed it.[47] For Plunkett and Fournier, unions are the negative result of a lack of trust between management and workers. If appropriate trust is developed through a process of

participative management, employee interests are served and unions become redundant.[48] Here again we see the myth of participation as a means for reconciling opposed interests.

The history of participative management allows us to draw a few provisional conclusions about participation at work. First, *participation is not new*. Participation has been a significant feature of management theory for more than half a century. The intensive focus on participation as a value in recent phenomena like bar camps is the outcome of a long trajectory and, while perhaps intensified by digital networks, is not a significant break or paradigm shift. Bar camps operate in a context that had already embraced participation as an ideal and had already integrated participatory work structures into many aspects of corporate management and employee activity. Secondly, *worker participation and management control should not be seen as opposed concepts*. On the contrary, participation is understood by firms as a way of increasing control throughout an organization. Control is more effective when it arises through the internalization of corporate values and objectives, or through employee peer pressure than through direct surveillance, punishment and external authority. Thirdly, *participation is disciplined by the market*. The implementation of participative management was conditioned by market competition. The empowerment and responsibility vested in employees is a requirement in a lean firm that has reduced its workforce while seeking to increase its productivity.

The shift in management ideology towards participation lead to a proliferation of meeting styles oriented towards empowering and involving employees in daily decisions. Some of these approaches include Open Space Technology, World Cafés, Conversation Cafés, Sustained Dialogue, Bohemian Dialogue, Study Circles, Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry and Birds of a Feather. [49] To these we could add new presentation styles and social networking events such as speed networking, Pecha Kucha, Lightening Talks and Dork Shorts. It is out of this

normalization of participation at work and at conferencing events that precedents for bar camps became established. And yet, bar camps are presented as a meaningful break with the past and a rejection of hierarchy, essentially reiterating the core tenets of participatory management.

A Brief History of Unconferences

The first bar camp took place in 2005 in Palo Alto, California. It was organized by IT workers and enthusiasts who were seeking to capture the spontaneity and stimulating discussion that could often be found during the breaks of professional conferences, but that were typically lacking from the scheduled lectures themselves. A few have proposed that the "bar" in bar camp refers to the fact that engaging with colleagues around the bar or during breaks was experienced as the best part of a conference and therefore that these kinds of interactions should actually be at the centre of such events.[50] According to a blog post by Andy Smith, one of the organizers of the first camp, BAR stands for "Beyond All Recognition."[51] This initial bar camp was a reaction to another participatory networking event started by Tim O'Reilly and his media company in 2003 in Sebastapol and known as Foo Camp (standing for Friends of O'Reilly).[52] At Foo Camp, 200 people were invited to O'Reilly's estate to camp out over a weekend and engage in a series of informal workshops and showcases. Foo Camp embraced the informal and participatory ethos that bar camp would likewise adopt. However, this highly regarded invite-only event resulted in some people feeling excluded, leading them to organize the first bar camp as an event open to everyone.

In the aftermath of the original event, "bar camp" became a conferencing template that could be picked up by anyone and not an event organized or associated with a single organization or group of people. The web site barcamp.org was created as a space to propagate the basic

principles and ideas behind the bar camp meeting format. Anyone who adopts the bar camp idea can post a link to online information surrounding their event. In this way the site is also a repository of links and documentation of past and upcoming bar camp events.

Spontaneity, accessibility and active participation are highly valued dimensions of bar camps and these values are reflected in their organizational process.[53] Organization is kept as minimal as possible so as to not over-determine the event beforehand. A typical bar camp requires only a few weeks to a few months to organize. The organizers select a general theme, book a venue, secure wi-fi access, set up a wiki and advertise the event. Occasionally, they will also seek out sponsors to provide the space, food, technology and swag. In order to maintain accessibility, participation is generally free, or at least much cheaper than a regular conference. Most bar camps tend to be smaller than an average conference with between 50 and 150 people, so as to enable interaction amongst participants. However, a few very large bar camps have been organized, for instance a bar camp in Yangon, Myanmar, in 2013, which included 6300 registered participants.[54] The determination of the schedule and the particular session themes are left up to the participants. Sometimes these are decided on the wiki ahead of time, but most often they are left open and final decisions are not made until the morning of the event.

What occurs during a typical bar camp is as follows. The bar camp begins with a meeting in which the daily schedule is decided upon by the participants. A large bulletin board or wall is used to present the available time slots to the group, and individuals fill in their suggested topics. If there are more suggested themes than time slots, various methods of voting are used to determine the most popular topics. In the breakout sessions the person who suggested the topic will often give a short presentation of five to ten minutes where they introduce the session theme, pose questions or problems they would like to address, or demonstrate a particular technology.

Those present in a session are asked to introduce themselves using no more than three words that represent their interests. The majority of the time is then dedicated to open discussion of the topic by those assembled. The preferred seating arrangement tends to be circular or cluster formations rather than front-facing rows. Alongside these open discussion or workshop sessions, bar camps also host speed-networking events where participants are given as short as a minute to as long as five minutes to present their idea, start-up, or application. Unlike Foo Camp, the participants do not actually camp out, but the bar camp can take place over several days and sessions can go on late into the night if the participants choose and if the venue allows it. Bar camps are often highly integrated with online networks as participants record and share their experience in real time by posting comments, photos and discussion minutes to the event wiki, social networking sites or blogs. At more technologically savvy bar camps, those who are not able to attend in person are able to interact virtually in real time. Information discussed during the event is freely shared and archived online along with post-unconference commentary on the event itself. The conversations that began at the bar camp are sometimes continued after the event in an online forum or on the wiki.[55]

Since their inception, bar camps have occurred in hundreds of cities around the world. The barcamps.org web site lists hundreds of events since 2005 and there have likely been many more that are not documented on that site.[56] The first bar camps were mostly for software developers and the majority continue to have an obvious interest in digital technology.[57] In most cases the themes are left entirely open but in others a particular topic is chosen, such as podcasting, blogging, mobile technology, online video or gaming. Occasionally, particular start-ups will host a bar camp themed around their own product for the purpose of testing and improving software that is still under development. Alongside the more generic bar camps that treat digital

technologies as their primary object, the unconference model has also been used to consider the integration of digital technologies into a wide variety of institutions or fields of practice, including education, regional development, healthcare, law, finance, business, government, professional development, urban planning, dating, food, universities and libraries.[58] In other cases digital technology plays no explicit part in the themes. Camps have occurred around independent film, art, life management, job searching, environment and sustainability, finance, start-ups, business models, budgeting, skepticism, motherhood, literature, fashion, single life, unemployment, freelancing, queerness, music, gender, church, space and life sciences, marketing, cupcakes, history and management.

Some bar camps are organized outside of a particular institutional milieu, drawing a diverse crowd of amateurs, enthusiasts and professionals, while others are implicitly or explicitly associated with or organized by particular organizations, such as a corporation or start-up company, a library, art gallery, professional association, or an academic association, department, discipline or research institute. Bar camps have been used within organizations as a method of employee self-training, knowledge sharing and event organizing. They have also become popular in the business world as a way to bring together knowledge workers, venture capital and entrepreneurs to network, exchange ideas and find investment for promising start-ups. One example of this is Innovation 2009, a business unconference described by Leigh Buchanan.[59] Within the academic world, unconferences have become particularly popular in the digital humanities and library sciences. THATCamp (The Humanities and Technology Camp) applies the bar camp model to the digital humanities. The first THATCamp took place in 2008 at George Mason University and dozens more have been organized since then.[60] The first library camp took place in 2006 at Ann Arbor District Library and the concept soon spread to dozens of other

libraries. In 2009 the American Library Association organized its first unconference in conjunction with its large annual congress.

As events based on knowledge production and exchange in an economy that is increasingly based on non-productive labour, unconferences clearly cannot be understood as pertaining to only a single field of practice, such as the software development field in which they began. Just like the digital networks that initially inspired them, these kinds of events permeate the fabric of social and economic relations beyond any singular sphere of activity. Bar camps occur amongst amateurs and professionals alike. While relatively ad hoc and informal, their affiliations range from totally autonomous to longstanding institutions like the America Library Association. Discussion topics range from radical anti-capitalist themes, as could be seen in the Radical Library Camp in Bradford, U.K., in 2013, to sites for capitalizing on new start-ups and sharing business strategies, as was the case at Innovation Camp 2009.[61] As a formal technique of social engagement they can be applied to any area that involves knowledge production, exchange or collaboration.

Bar camps are one example among numerous formal organizational mechanisms that have been developed over the decades that draw on participation as a central value. They are highly and "genuinely" participatory in most cases and therefore, when considered in terms of their internal power relations, can be seen as a good in itself. However, when situated in a broader economic context of marketization and precarity, this sort of participation appears to serve as support for current arrangements. As knowledge production becomes adapted to digital entrepreneurial pressure and traditional institutions become increasingly marketized under neoliberal policies, new techniques of social engagement like bar camps have arisen to fill the

gaps created by underfunding and profit seeking and offer a platform for workers looking for

employability or "self-development" under conditions of precarity.

The Rules of Bar Camp

   The participatory values of bar camps are apparent in the central rules or principles that

organizers and participants regularly refer to on bar camp wikis. The barcamp.org website offers

a list of rules that encourage spontaneity and flexibility, and that emphasize participation:

> 1st Rule: You do talk about BarCamp. 2nd Rule: You do blog about BarCamp. 3rd Rule: If
> you want to present, you must write your topic and name in a presentation slot. 4th Rule:
> Only three word intros. 5th Rule: As many presentations at a time as facilities allow for.
> 6th Rule: No pre-scheduled presentations, no tourists. 7th Rule: Presentations will go on as
> long as they have to or until they run into another presentation slot. 8th Rule: If this is your
> first time at BarCamp, you HAVE to present. (Ok, you don't really HAVE to, but try to
> find someone to present with, or at least ask questions and be an interactive participant.).[62]

Rules one and two encourage the values of transparency and the open distribution of

information. Those who are not able to attend in person should be able to benefit from the

knowledge generated at the event. Accessibility is reflected in rules three, four and five, which

try to ensure adequate opportunities for many people to present and propose time limits on

individual contributions. Rules six and seven emphasize flexibility and spontaneity. The sessions

should emerge and evolve according to the interests and engagement of the participants and not

be overly constrained by a strict schedule. Finally, rules five, six and eight encourage and even

demand participation, activity or interactivity. If you are present you are expected to contribute

in some way and discouraged from simply listening or acting as a spectator to the discussions.

   Bar camp organizers also regularly refer to four principles that have been adapted from

management guru Harrison Owen's Open Space Technology, a meeting format intended to

generate creative problem solving.[63] The four principles are as follows: whoever comes is the

right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could have, when it starts is the right time, when it's over it's over. These principles are complemented by the "Law of Two Feet," which encourages participants to get up and move to a new session if they find themselves bored and understimulated. Open Space Technology is primarily about respecting the initiative of participants and exercising minimal external control over outcomes. Spontaneity and flexibility are foregrounded. The Law of Two Feet in particular offers autonomy and responsibility to individuals over their own learning. Enthusiasm and initiative are encouraged as key ingredients to making the event fun, valuable and worthwhile.

Beyond these stated rules, a few other central values of bar camps can be clearly discerned in the events. Firstly, drawing on programming skills and "geek culture," bar camps place a strong emphasis on hands-on, instrumental problem solving. Many bar camps are more about doing and demonstrating than abstract reflection and discussion. Programming and hacking are time and labour intensive activities that can benefit from the contributions of a skilled community. The functionality of proposed fixes or improvements can be assessed immediately. Non-technology-based camps often pick up on this orientation towards instrumental activity and information sharing, yet as I will explore further on, these tendencies may clash in some instances with the valuation of abstract and critical reflection. A second value motivating the practices of bar camps is that of keeping up with the pace of new technologies. One of the primary critiques of traditional technology conferences coming from bar camp participants is that they take so long to organize that by the time the conference occurs the session themes are already out-of-date. In contrast, a bar camp that is organized within a few weeks can bring people together to immediately respond to new issues and ever-changing emerging technologies. A third value of bar camps is an underlying ethic of informality and fun. By doing away with the formal

protocols of professional conferences, some pressure is relieved and a freer atmosphere is created for people to express themselves. The only kind of seriousness that is encouraged is a serious passion and enthusiasm for the topics being treated. And lastly, there is a dimension of subversive imaginary that characterizes bar camp activities and that is apparent in the narrative of its origins. The idea of existing outside of the reach of official institutional gatekeepers is complemented by an anti-hierarchal rejection of the division between speaker and audience.

The subversive dimension of participation as ideology is apparent in much of the writing surrounding bar camps. Commentators use traditional conferences as a foil and characterize them as boring, commercial, hierarchal, elitist, mind-numbing or overstimulating. In her coverage of a business bar camp, Innovation 2009, Leigh Buchanan quotes Mitch Joel, president of a digital marketing firm, who compares the event to 60s style communalism: "They [the bar campers] wanted to bring back more of a '60s communal aspect, with people getting together in the spirit of democracy, instead of conferences organized from the top down, where everything is mapped out and marketed."[64] This democratic spirit is also emphasized by Mark Ingebretsen, who describes the participatory agenda-setting found at bar camps as a "democratic ideal."[65] Ingebretsen quotes computer science professor Greg Wilson who describes DemoCamp (a "show and tell" style bar camp where developers demonstrate their applications) as a level playing field where you can see "undergrad students giving demos to millionaire entrepreneurs and being taken seriously."[66] In a section on unconferences from his book on informal learning, Jay Cross summarizes the differences between traditional conferences and unconferences in a two-column table.[67] Beneath the column labeled "Old School" we find "Talking at us," "Control," "Keynotes," "Audience," and "Follow the Rules." Beneath the column labeled "New School" we find "Talking among ourselves," "Connection," "Interview," "Participants," and "Push the

Boundaries." For Cross, unconferences are an example of "extreme learning" that is now required in a confusing and high velocity world. Writing for *Business Week*, Scott Kirsner exhibits an aggressively subversive attitude in the title for his article on bar camps: "Take Your Powerpoint and…"[68] For Kirsner, traditional conferences are "plodding and predictable" and powerpoint presentations "drone on and on."[69] The subversive nature of bar camps extends to the clothing of attendees whose "neckties and heels are noticeably absent."[70]

While we have come to expect business and technology publications to couch any seemingly novel practice in an exaggerated language of democracy, innovation, revolution and world changing possibilities, the characterization of unconferences and network structures in general as subversive are also made by some authors in library science and the digital humanities.[71] Michelle Boule's book *Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences and Trashing the Talking Heads*, one of only two full-length treatments of bar camps, is the most blatant example of the inflation of the contribution of bar camps to the subversion of existing institutions.[72] While Boule makes a point of saying that unconferences should not entirely replace other modes of learning and knowledge exchange, she at the same time cannot resist characterizing unconferences as a subversive practice that will change the world by challenging the control of traditional institutions.

Boule is an advocate for the educational virtues of unconferences. She argues that the emergence of the re-writable web has produced self-organized democratic learning communities. The ability to quickly share information and creative ideas online, she argues, has democratized learning by bypassing traditional gatekeeping and vetting processes. In this regard, her argument is directly reminiscent of Internet advocates like Clay Shirky, who in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, defends the democratic nature of the web and its ability to enable expression beyond

the control of traditional media gatekeepers.[73] Boule applies this argument to the professional

conference circuit, claiming that, like the participatory structure of the Internet, unconferences

subvert traditional power structures and unleash the creativity of the masses or the mob. For the

most part, Boule's more tempered critiques of the limitations of traditional conferences are easy

to accept, as is her argument that unconferences offer a solution to some of these problems,

though I would add they are certainly not the only or best solutions. However, in spite of her

claims to not be entirely dismissive of traditional conferences, her text is peppered with disdain

for experts and academics that she regularly refers to as "talking heads" and who her book's title

suggests should be "trashed." She employs an exaggerated rhetoric that paints the average

conference and lecture as oppressive and stifling, in contrast to the "world-changing" freedom of

unconferences. For instance, she compares lecturers and audiences to feudal lords and peasants:

"The feudal systems of most conferences ensure that the peasants stay peasants and that those in

power keep their manors by limiting participation from the masses."[74] Whereas unconferences

can "refresh" and "energize," conferences cause one to be "beaten down with information."[75]

The system of communication she criticizes is one that is based on a profound lack of

opportunities for expression and participation. Prior to Tim O'Reilly's FOO Camp, she writes,

"[i]nformation was passed on to a passive learner from the talking head within these traditional

models; no other models were sanctioned as valid."[76] The audience members are "silent cogs"

and "passive vessels" for the ideas of a privileged few.[77] In contrast to this oppressive situation,

the participation entailed in bar camps unleashes a creativity that has "infinite power" and can

"do anything."[78] Boule refers to the mob power of bar camps as a movement and throughout the

book she repeatedly insists that it opens up "world changing" possibilities.

The language that Boule uses to characterize traditional modes of knowledge dissemination leaves the reader with an impression of a deeply repressive system that has enslaved knowledge workers to the whims of evil lecturers who may turn out to be (gasp!) "boring." In this repressive system most participants' ability to express their ideas is extremely limited, that is, if we ignore their own likely chance to present at the conference and ask questions, as well as their blogs, twitter accounts and constant social media broadcasting that thankfully give them reprieve from the "oppressive boredom" of the hour-long keynote address. In Boule's world there does not appear to be any such thing as an engaging and stimulating lecture or keynote. In her attempt to make bar camps sound exciting and innovative she exaggerates the drudgery and boredom of typical conferences. At the latter, a large auditorium and powerpoint presentation "kills passion and motivation," and speakers "drone on and on."[79] The privilege of speaking more than others, whether as a keynote or a lecturer on a panel that is not predominantly discussion-based, is never legitimate, earned or worthwhile to audiences. The only kind of knowledge that is valuable is "useful, applicable information" that can be shared in under five minutes. This of course leaves no room for critical, counterintuitive arguments that require sustained exposition.

The above vision of a repressive power dynamic between lecturer and audience fuels a subversive imaginary. In her description of the unconference-inspired events she organized to coincide with the American Library Association's (ALA) annual congress, Boule claims that the first of these, a "Social Software Showcase," was "born of rebellion" and a desire to subvert an outdated system.[80] Characterizing the events in this way creates the impression of a marginal, disempowered outsider who introduces a change that is resisted or opposed by existing institutions. Contrary to this impression, Boule then recounts how she organized the event from her position as a member of the ALA Blogs, Interactive Groupware, Wikis Interest Group

(BIGWIG) which later became the Social Software and New Media Interest Group of ALA's Library and Information Technology Association (LITA).[81] Rather than marginal and disempowered, Boule, like many bar camp organizers, is an empowered professional with a recognized status within the interest group of her association. Furthermore, her unconference was not confronted with any official or even unofficial opposition. Her own account describes the first event as being very popular and welcomed by library professionals.[82] In the following years, the Social Software Showcase became an annual event that was included in the printed and online program of the ALA annual congress. Boule went on to organized the official ALA Unconference in 2009, which was followed by two others in subsequent years.

Since the unconference appears to be a change that is generally welcomed by traditional institutions like the ALA, why is it necessary to characterize such events as Boule's ALA BIGWIG Social Software Showcase and ALA Unconference as a subversion of power or a rebellion? Bar camps do seem to respond to some real limitations of traditional large conferences and are generally experienced as enjoyable events. As an experiment in better integrating the digital tools that attendees are already using into the official proceedings, unconferences have something valuable to offer.[83] My intention is not to dismiss them but rather to insist that the ideology of subversion and democratization surrounding them is perhaps more harmful than helpful. Characterizing unconferences as subversive suggests that they are more distanced from institutional power than is actually the case. The rhetoric of unconferences obscures the extensive normalization of such participation-based formats and the broader power dynamics that sustain them. Rather than a "subversion" of existing hierarchies, participation-based knowledge exchanges, for better or worse, have become increasingly integrated into institutions. Their history did not begin with bar camps but with the participative management that for

decades has been rearranging work processes and organization along the lines of participation, teamwork and projects. Digitization has further accentuated these longer standing trends. Participation is the new normal and some of what it imagines itself to be subverting are in fact valuable infrastructures: structures of support, security, expertise, counter-intuitive ideas that require more time to explain and convince, and a degree of intellectual autonomy from market pressures.

Bar camps can be seen as an alternative to such large conferences that is not as dependent on institutional status, affiliation, or educational credentials, and is more economically accessible. Bar camps can present networking opportunities that are not so heavily tied to career prospects and therefore create space for freer intellectual exchange. However, the distance may not be quite so large as bar camp advocates present it. The bar camp emphasis on participation, speed, passion and applicable information could be seen to contribute to some of the very problems apparent in typical conferences that have become increasingly instrumentalized for purposes of job market competition. Moreover, the resources to sustain engagement in bar camp events must come from somewhere. The intellectual production that they help facilitate must also be supported by some other kind of paid employment. Ultimately, bar camps offer a band-aid solution by attacking symptoms like unequal speaking time rather than the cause of inequality that increasingly determines differential access to collaborative spaces, namely, the casualization of knowledge work.

By attacking institutional power, as represented by the lecture format and the intellectual authority that it implies, bar camp ideology fails to recognize that the vast majority of knowledge workers today are subjected to the authority of the market far more than they are to the authority of a hierarchical organization. In the following section I draw on Boltanski and Chiapello's

"sociology of critique" in order to articulate the relationship between the participative

management championed by the lean firms of late-capitalism and the decentralized, networked

or horizontalist forms of organization that are often idealized for undermining older forms of

hierarchy. The dominance of the network as a model of work organization has resulted in an

extension of entrepreneurial logic to many kinds of social relations that exceed the strictly

defined work sphere of the past. For this reason, the relations of exploitation that may inhere

within firms through an ideology of participation are also significant for the social spaces that

may previously have been considered removed and autonomous from relationships of

domination at work or from market exchange. Bar camp ideology must be considered within the

context of networked social relations and the power differentials of the "projective city."

The Projective City: From Institutional Hierarchy to the Ideology of the Project

The transformations in management philosophy from hierarchical to more participative

models that I outlined earlier is conceptualized by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello as a

widespread ideological shift that has ramifications for how capitalism is legitimated.[84] They

argue that a new ideological system has arisen in support of late-capitalism and offer a schema

containing three phases to what they call "the spirit of capitalism," or the ideological supports

that capitalism relies upon. Ideology for Boltanski and Chiapello is not a set of false ideas that

disguise the truth of capitalist relations. Capitalist ideology acts as a real constraint on

accumulation and must offer genuine benefits to its subjects (managers, bourgeoisie, the middle

class, etc.) in order to secure their cooperation, consent and loyalty to the market system.[85] While

the general capitalist dogmas remain unchanged, the specific justifications for capitalism in the

local contexts of capitalist firms change from period to period and it is these latter that the

authors examine in detail. Boltanski and Chiapello name three ideological needs that must be met at any time if the existing system is to maintain relative stability and commitment from its subjects. The ideological system must offer security, a sense of freedom, autonomy or excitement, and a convincing claim to serve justice or the common good.[86]

Boltanski and Chiapello then turn to a comparative analysis of management literature from the 1960s and 1990s in order to discern the significant ideological differences. The 1960s literature is characterized by an emphasis on security, a steady career path through a meritocratic hierarchy and rational methods for the evaluation of employee performance. The latter were intended to diminish the personal nepotism of the preceding "paternalistic" era of corporate culture. The embrace of rational "management by objectives" was put forward as a solution to the bureaucracy in large centralized firms. The 1990s management literature continues this critique of bureaucracy, yet it also targets the rational management style for not being flexible enough.[87] Flexibility, competition, constant technological change, consumer demand and networks are the central ideas raised in these 1990s texts. Rather than a steady career path, they emphasize the liberation and excitement that comes from work when it is organized into temporary projects that demand increased autonomy and responsibility from managers. The new emphasis on autonomy in the 1990s corresponds with a diminishment of career guarantees and a normalization of redundancies as a competitive necessity.[88] In accordance with participative management and lean production in the 1980s, large layers of hierarchy, mostly from middle management, are downsized and those remaining must constantly prove themselves and adapt in order to maintain their job. The previously large firm is whittled down into a small central core while any operation not pertaining to its central business is subcontracted.[89] The firm's links to suppliers, subcontractors, service providers and temporary workers makes it operate as a network.

Boltanski and Chiapello summarize the result of these organizational changes as follows: "*lean* firms working as *networks* with a multitude of participants, organizing work in the form of teams or *projects*, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilization of workers thanks to their leaders' *vision*."[90] In this case, relations of domination between supervisors and employees are outsourced onto market relations between employees and customers. Managers must motivate through charisma and vision rather than through direct authority.[91] Personal relationships and authenticity are also motivators in this new spirit as opposed to the impersonal rationalization of the 1960s. In the 1990s literature the fairness of rational criteria of evaluation and the integrity of personal life as a separate sphere is perceived to be an inhuman expression of organizational structure and bureaucracy.[92] In contrast, the entire personality and life of the employee is expected to be present and integrated with their work. Aside from being considered more human and "authentic," this expectation is thought to bring new efficiencies and knowledge into the work sphere. A person's social connections, family life, and hobbies may be the source of hidden and valuable capacities on the job.

In summary, Boltanski and Chiapello note that the 1990s literature more strongly supports autonomy, but that security is comparatively minimal and the overall sense of justice is still vague and unconvincing.[93] They hypothesize that this is because we are in the midst of the development of a new "city" or system that determines a just distribution of status, which they call the projective city. The system of determining relative status in the projective city occurs through "projects." Drawing on new norms of work organization within firms in the 1990s, Boltanski and Chiapello describe how a project "temporarily assembles a very disparate group of people, and presents itself as *a highly activated section of a network* for a period of time that is relatively short, but allows for the construction of more enduring links that will be put on hold

while remaining available."[94] Projects are the reason or occasion for connection in a network world; they are the mediating activity that is used in the creation or extension of networks; they temporarily stabilize flows of capital and therefore make accumulation possible; and they are also a system of constraints placed upon a network.[95] In the third spirit of capitalism, social life is envisioned as a series of encounters and temporary connections operated at a distance.[96] The desire and ability to connect is presumed to be a universal trait of human nature and can therefore claim to operate as a just form of equivalence.[97] Within the projective city, mediating activity, the process of enabling encounters and creating links is considered a good in itself apart from the substantive qualities of the entities involved or the goal of the project.[98]

A person of high status within the projective city exhibits personal traits of flexibility, mobility, adaptability, tolerance, enthusiasm and detachment.[99] This person may also have access to the most highly valued links, those that are rare and bridge a vast distance. Their status depends upon the degree to which they share their links with others, enhancing opportunities for fellow participants in the project, as opposed to selfishly or opportunistically hoarding access for themselves.[100] Traits that are devalued are immobility, fixedness, authoritarianism, rigidity, intolerance, rootedness, communitarian ties and uncompromising attachments to particular persons, places, causes or ideas (aside from a general embrace of pluralism and tolerance).[101] Equally disparaged are the institutions and values of the preceding era, or "industrial city" of the 1960s. Status that is bound up with institutions, positions within an organizational hierarchy, predetermined structures and bureaucracy are strongly rejected.[102] Impersonal relations and the division between private life and work life are considered artificial, inauthentic and inhuman.[103]

Boltanski and Chiapello's theory of the projective city clarifies how power functions in a system that is relatively devoid of traditional relations of hierarchy and status. What is

particularly significant in this new mode of work organization is the degree to which the domination and authority that previously defined relationships between superiors and subordinates within a firm have been displaced onto the market. The ultimate authority that employees must yield to is the authority of customer demand. In situations where functions that were once kept in-house have been subcontracted, the former relation between the employees and their boss is transformed into a market relation between the employee and the client or customer. The managers who remain within the firm are consequently thought of as coaches or mentors whose primary function is to serve the needs of their employees as they attempt to satisfy the customer. In being transformed into a market relation, the relationship of domination and subordination that was once apparent takes on the appearance of a pure market transaction between equals. While on the one hand the greater autonomy and opportunities for participation and independent decision making in carrying out tasks are genuinely increased, the remaining authority that is vested in customer demand and the need for a competitive edge in the market results in ever narrower limits and constraints on this autonomy. Participation is real, yet the potential actionable choices that could be seriously considered in any instance are evermore prescribed by "economic necessity." In light of this transformation towards the projective city, analysis of new organizational forms should be careful to consider not only formal organizational status in its assessment of the fairness and equality of these forms, but also the underlying dynamic of exploitation that defines its relationships.

A second important insight of Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis is the status of projects or activity as a general equivalent. The consequence that follows from this assertion is a leveling of distinctions between formerly separate spheres of activity. A project need not be directly tied to the market in order to operate as a method of enhancing personal employability, connections,

skills and opportunities.[104] They assert that even explicitly anti-capitalist activities can function within this system of status distribution as projects that accrue status and resources for participants. The relations between projects and the market are therefore complex. While we cannot collapse all activity into a reductive account of individuals maximizing their value in a market, neither can we view non-profit-oriented projects as strictly autonomous and removed from an entrepreneurial opportunity structure. In this light, bar camps must be carefully assessed to understand the degree to which they function as projects that subjectively support the new spirit of capitalism and the degree to which they act as a constraint on markets, offering participants excitement, security and justice.

Most considerations of bar camps use traditional hierarchy as a foil in order to characterize these new practices as founded on freedom and equality. The main problem with Boule's presentation of bar camps, and of the subversive dimension of bar camp ideology more generally, is that it conceives of these events as a solution to problems of institutional hierarchy when the actual conditions that professionals must confront are those that are generated by institutions whose hierarchies are being reformatted according to network, market and project-based forms of work organization.[105] These conditions include casualization, insecurity or precarity, inequality, poverty, lack of institutional affiliation, minimal or nonexistent access to institutional resources and support, constant demands for reskilling and upgrading of qualifications, demands for total availability and a willingness to uproot oneself on short notice.[106]

In arguing that a crisis in capital accumulation demands new forms of justification in order to win consent from its subjects, Boltanski and Chiapello help clarify how explicit neoliberal ideology in the form of management texts arise in response to the conditions of late capitalism.

But what they don't address is the unofficial side of this ideology: the enjoyment that binds subjects to it even when its promises don't deliver and the face of its obvious contradictions and irrationalities. The authors treat subjects as rational individuals making conscious decisions about whether or not capitalism meets their needs, and yet they find the projective city inadequate when it comes to offering security and justice to employees. Does this mean that 'excitement' alone is enough to ensure adherence to this ideology? If so, in what does 'excitement' consist of on an unconscious level? Boltanski and Chiapello push this problem aside by arguing that the projective city is still under development, but after almost forty years of neoliberalism, this claim is unconvincing. Clearly this ideological system produces something more than excitement and an outlet for creativity – it produces excess enjoyment.

Bar Camps and the Projective City

Bar camps or unconferences are an organizational form that exemplifies the mediating activities and values of the projective city. As a networking format that can function in relation to a very diverse set of institutions and subject themes, the purpose of a bar camp is determined by its participants. Regardless of the particular theme, its main purpose is to facilitate the sharing of information, to enable encounters, to initiate collaborations, to forge links and to bring together diverse sources of knowledge and experience, sometimes with the intent to solve particular problems. Making connections and exchanging knowledge are central activities of the projective city. While most bar camps are oriented towards solving a precise problem during the event qualify as projects, others are more open-ended and can be understood as spaces for initiating future projects. Often they are both of these things, a project that itself generates future projects.

In terms of their value structure, bar camps clearly reject traditional forms of status or inequality, such as those based on credentials, fame or institutional position, and instead privilege sociability, communication skills, passion and enthusiasm. Elements of the "industrial city," such as pre-determined structures, planning and expertise, are devalued in favour of flexibility, spontaneity and openness. Furthermore, personalism and casual sociality are preferred over professional distance as the events encourage affectivity, fun, informality and personal authenticity. In addition, the kinds of status privileged in the "reputational city" are undermined in a rejection of famous speakers and big names. Nevertheless, bar camps do embrace online mediation and the informal networks that may generate a positive reputation and publicity. In comparison to the reputational power garnered by participation in mass media and academic institutions, network publicity is thought to be more transparent, authentic and fair. As in the projective city, the mode of engagement that characterizes bar camps is a mixture of enthusiasm and detachment. Passion for the event and session themes is the central attribute demanded of participants, and yet, since time is perceived to be a scarce resource, easy detachment from redundant or useless engagements is also required. Bar camps are spaces where existing but untapped knowledge, skills and enthusiasm within an organization or a broader field of interest can be corralled together and made productive. They have been used for employee self-training, self-management or temporary task allocation, such as creative problem solving or special event organizing. They rely on self-organization and self-control in the process of project generation, discussion, problem solving and the execution of plans.

Whether or not bar camp practices are considered empowering and democratic depends on whether we consider knowledge production to be an activity of self-expression, which is its own reward, or a form of labour that requires material compensation. The relationship of bar camps or

unconferences to paid employment and participative management structures is ambiguous. On the one hand, methods like open space technology and similar participative meeting structures are integrated into daily operations at work. Yet, in spite of corporate or institutional sponsorship and the participation of professionals, most bar camps take place beyond the direct purview of a particular firm or organization and involve participants from across an industry or field of practice. While Boltanski and Chiapello focus their analysis on the ideology propagated by management within corporate firms, they insist that the projective city harnesses all kinds of collaborative activity into the capitalist system of value creation regardless of whether this activity is materially compensated or understood as "work."

The ability of capital to exploit knowledge, affect and the creativity of voluntary labour has instensified with the rise of digital networks and the vast user participation that sustains them. In her well-known essay, "Free Labor," Tiziana Terranova draws on the autonomist writings of Maurizio Lazzarato to argue that online communication practices contribute to surplus value creation and therefore, regardless of their unwaged, voluntary, and enjoyable nature should be considered a form of labour.[107] If understood in this way, the gift economy that forms a significant portion on online interactions should be considered an integral part of the development of digital capitalism, and not a separate realm that is at risk of commodification but is otherwise untainted by the dynamics of capital. Terranova argues that the gift economy forms a necessary pool of collective affect and intelligence, which requires open collaborative structures in order to produce creativity, innovation and knowledge. However, in the postmodern culture economy, knowledge is collectively produced but selectively compensated.[108] She gives the example of Open Source software to show how even when code is rewritable and freely shared, profit is made from complementary products.[109] It follows from Terranova's analysis that

despite their free and open structures, events like bar camps cannot be considered independent of the dynamics of exploitation that structure the field of production.

A central pillar of the bar camp claim to serve the common good is a politics based on the idea of an intellectual or cultural commons. Critical of overly restrictive copyright regimes, the Open Source Software movement argues that previous cultural and intellectual production should be freely available as a resource to help support ongoing creation and collaboration. Following from this principle, knowledge produced at bar camps is supposed to be made freely available via online platforms. Yet, while there are no formal barriers to participating in a bar camp, and everyone has free access to the online traces of the event, not everyone is equally positioned to exploit or capitalize on this knowledge. In a context in which tapping common and shared sources of knowledge has become a competitive necessity, these kinds of events offer substantial value to corporations as well as smaller start-ups seeking a marketable output. The externalization of research and development has become common in a world of digital networks where collective dispersed labour can often be more efficient and effective than in-house research. Encouraging one's employees to participate in bar camps, and sponsoring these events, could be seen as yet another way that those with the most capital are able to harness crowd intelligence for their own goals. Furthermore, the project-based ideology of bar camps and their network structure tends to privilege an entrepreneurial orientation towards knowledge regardless of whether or not one is a member of a corporate firm, a non-profit organization, or an independent contractor. What is most important at such an event are the connections one makes and the degree to which one is able to enhance one's status and future employability. Network valorization replaces institutional status as the measure of success or failure.

The Influence of F/OSS Ideology on Bar Camps

Whenever people with shared interests, and not simply shared passions, congregate there is a potential that they will recognize their common condition and invent new forms of struggle to confront collective problems. Bar camps may present an opportunity for participants to develop new complicities and found alternative institutions that would help us confront conditions of precarity and marketization.[110] However, the predominant dimensions of bar camp ideology and organization tend towards pluralism, small-scale localized action, punctual temporalities, short-term connections, the accommodation of personal selection and preference, and a fundamental belief in technology as a progressive force that is shielded from questions of collective decision-making, politicization and class struggle. Participation as ideology in bar camps fundamentally accepts the liberal progressive vision of education, self-development and technological innovation as the path towards the collective good, rather than a confrontational and divisive attachment to truth and collective struggle.

However, because bar camps are primarily intended to be spaces of knowledge production and exchange, it is not necessarily fair to assess them according to their ability to self-organize politically. Unlike social movement participation, the standard against which we should assess bar camp participation is not its ability to organize people politically, but the degree to which they support an autonomous space of knowledge production, serve as a ground for open debate/disagreement, and engage people in a way that is subjectively and critically transformative. However, insofar as bar camp ideology implicitly imbues these presumably "neutral" processes of collaboration, connection, knowledge enhancement, communication, self-development and technology as a path towards social progress, bar camps must be critically

assessed as a kind of politics, one that reflects the technological, economic and social conditions of their emergence.

One fundamental influence on bar camp ideals is the F/OSS movement. In her analysis of F/OSS culture, Coleman argues that F/OSS's liberal politics highlight the contradictions that inhere in liberal theory and can be understood as generating new political potentials in spite of its limitations.[111] F/OSS practitioners and advocates draw on liberal principles to rationalize and support their activities, including those of free speech, individual autonomy, and meritocracy, with value placed on individual initiative and self-development fostered within a community based on rational critical debate and brought together through the sharing of code. Coleman argues that the concept of freedom within these hacker spaces is understood primarily as a productive freedom, or the freedom required to produce technology (and to produce oneself in the process by enhancing one's skills and exercising capabilities) rather than the freedom to consume finished products.[112] While thoroughly liberal, the hacker association of code with speech comes into conflict with another fundamental liberal principle: the sanctity of property.[113] In this case, intellectual property regimes which would seek to restrict the circulation of code by treating it as a technological product that can be privately owned and controlled rather than considered a form of expression.

Coleman addresses the apolitical nature of this politics, noting that hacker liberalism is based on presumptions of the neutrality of technology, a disavowal of a broader political critique beyond the narrow goals of F/OSS, and a preference for meritocracy and technological expertise over democratic decision-making.[114] Yet, she contends that the productivist bent of the hacker ethos achieves a greater political effectiveness precisely because it evades a clear association with right-left politics, instead presenting itself in a cloak of neutrality and fighting its battles by

directly producing code (including legal "code" through GPL licences) that works for its users.[115] In spite of F/OSS practitioners' high regard for rational argument and debate, they nonetheless privilege the "hack" over the "yack," or the direct demonstration of effective code rather than a rhetorical strategy of persuasion. Coleman emphasizes the strategic value of this approach, noting how effective code can bypass the scrutiny of the broader public sphere, along with the media spin that can undermine those who go up against established interests, in order to transform intellectual property regimes through a kind of direct action.

In spite of its relative success in spreading free software, and fostering a copyleft culture in relation to digital production, the F/OSS movement also reinforces central tenets of liberal ideology that pose an obstacle to further politicization. The tendencies towards an apolitical posture among hacker communities which Coleman critiques can also be seen in bar camps. In the latter case, the collaborative and participatory ethos is removed from the practical common interests that hackers have in open code (and the potential for direct action that it brings with it). The face-to-face encounters that make up conferences are already considered to belong to the category of speech, ideas, or critical thought, and not objects of proprietary code. If anything, the values of bar camps seem to reconfigure these encounters in the opposite direction, conceptualizing discussion and critical thinking as "information exchange" or "knowledge production," imbuing face-to-face communication with an instrumentalist and economistic language. When it comes to the textual traces of the events (the tweets, blog posts or audio/video recordings) bar camps do not particularly privilege non-proprietary platforms, sometimes using non-proprietary wikis and at other times relying on corporate platforms like Twitter, Instagram and so on. More significantly, regardless of the emphasis on accessibility, sharing and openness of bar camp principles, the online traces for the most part are not helpful to someone who did not

participate directly in the event. The traces are either too scanty in comparison with the arguments and ideas found in fully realized essays and articles, and more rarely, too excessive in the unedited abundance of content that must be sifted through in order to find what one is looking for. Often the real importance of a conference lies less in access to information than in the embodied feelings of connection and the establishment or reinforcement of a particular professional community that occurs in the process. In spite of the rhetoric surrounding them, bar camps do not ultimately have much to do with intellectual property, paywalls or the sharing of "information." What they accomplish is the establishment of connections, which is the vital activity of a networked world. In the process of facilitating connections and building networks, the values of bar camps reconceptualize face-to-face networked discussion as an activity that takes on the instrumental and productivist language of neoliberalism.

The result of the extension of F/OSS ideas to events like bar camps is a form of small-scale collaboration that reinforces technological, entrepreneurial and market based approaches to social problems. In her article on a Delhi hackathon, Lilly Irani argues that events like hackathons represent an extension of an entrepreneurial citizenship from the tech industries to broader public domains.[116] Entrepreneurial citizenship is the idea that individuals and small groups can solve social problems through a combination of new technologies and short, intense collaborations based on voluntary labour. These rehearsals of entrepreneurial citizenship favour quick and forceful action with socially similar collaborators over the contestations of mass democracy and coalition across difference.[117] Irani notes that they also support a middle-class ideology in India that is critical of government development projects and foreign corporations but in favour of small-scale entrepreneurialism as the path towards social progress.[118] Irani's case study is a workshop on "open governance," which was one of many sponsored by the Open Lab

Design Studio in Delhi in the week leading up to its conference. The working group decided on the goal of producing a software demo intended to make the process of drafting bills in parliament more accessible to the public. Irani details how they were unable to come up with a viable demo and more meaningful forms of action were discounted due to the hackathon's manufactured urgency, which precludes approaches to problems that exceed the confines of the design studio.[119] Rather than produce a project that the problem demands, which in this case would involve extensive work forging relationships with activists groups or working with non-internet technologies like kiosks and radio (in a country where only 10% of the population has regular Internet access), the group decides to do what the conditions of the hackathon allow: produce a software demo. In the end, and due to time constraints, the group was not able to do even this and instead presented slides of design mock-ups for the site. With no further investment or resources committed to the project, it ended up going nowhere. However, it did create or reinforce relationships between the collaborators.

The simplistic dualism between action and debate that bar camp ideology constructs as its "hack over yack" ethos is not a helpful framework for assessing the political impact of these practices. This dualism upholds either a traditional liberal public sphere of rational debate, coded as ineffectual or slow, or a form of direct action whose impact is predicated on the cascading effects of network technology and driven by the interests of small self-selecting groups. If the latter appears radical it is only a market radicalism that imagines social life being driven by an accumulation of individual decisions rather than the development of meaningful collective standards through democratic practice. In chapter two I suggested that participation functions as a form of repressive desublimation, allowing for new forms of personal expression and connection but foreclosing spaces of direct democratic decision making. Bar camps exemplify

this tendency by foregrounding collaborative social relations, while disallowing claims at the level of a broader collective interest. At issue is not simply the problematic reliance on software development as the answer to complex social problems, as seen in hackathons, but the underlying structure of collaboration that is foregrounded in bar camps, which precludes the possibility of actors making claims on behalf of and building a universal emancipatory politics.

Enjoyment: The Unwritten Rules of Bar Camp Ideology

Žižek describes how every community or society functions through a split law.[120] On the one hand there are the formal explicit rules the community claims to adhere to, which represent the Symbolic order. On the other, there are the unwritten rules that govern when and how community members should transgress the official law, which represent the obscene underside or superego injunction. This obscene underside, far from being an aberration marking a community out as pathological, is a necessary aspect of social relations, making both community and society possible. What happens when an ideology of participation attempts to repress, abolish or collapse this split by insisting on a single plane of social relations based on transparency, personal authenticity and the subversion of the "official rules" as the official rule? I contend that getting rid of the formal trappings and rules of a typical conference does not actually collapse this split, it simply produces a new one. By attempting to foreground what Boule calls the "backchannel" of typical conferences through participation, bar camps attempt to collapse this split between the official and unofficial spaces of engagement. However, by trying to enforce openness and participation, the result may be an even more repressive dynamic that further atomizes participants and displaces collective action with empty activity. While official bar camp ideology understands itself as freeing participants from the constraints of hierarchy, bureaucracy,

officialdom, formality, institutional status and reputation, what is disavowed in the process is an underlying structure of enjoyment that binds people to relations of inequality, fragmentation and disconnection. The "fun ethos" of bar camps, the explicit demand for passion, enthusiasm and personal authenticity is driven by a paradoxical underlying anxiety. The "unwritten rules" continue to exist in spite of the desire for radical transparency.

To approach the excess enjoyment that drives participation in bar camps I will explore three contradictions through which the anxiety, repression and guilt provoked by participatory formats are apparent. These include: the demand for passion and enthusiasm (an alibi that justifies exclusions across a field of practice; participants are made both more responsible and less responsible for the success or failure of the event), the emphasis on instrumental activity and a flexible relation to time (paradoxically driven by anxiety about the scarcity of time), and the space for refusal and antagonism within consensual spaces (negativity is managed by privileging choice and selection by individuals yet undermining collective stakes, decisions and meaningful debate). It is through the contradictions of participation as ideology that we can glimpse its obscene underside or the unofficial rules that bind people to it.

From the perspective of a radical political critique of neoliberal capitalism the main symptom produced by this particular structure of enjoyment is that critical energy is funneled towards small-scale collaboration and short-term projects, which are planned according to the pragmatic limits of the current conditions with no attempt to gain widespread legitimation amongst a broader collectivity. They contain energy within the boundaries of the possible rather than support belief in fundamental transformation of capitalism.

Passion and Enthusiasm: Enjoy(!) Work Camp

Barcamp.org advertises an event called Enjoy Work Camp that took place in 2015 in Germany.[121] The description on the web site tells us that this was a space to discuss and learn about the latest management theories related to enhancing the experience of employees at work. As we have seen, the focus on managing employee experience through participation is nothing new. While surely intended to define the camp in question as one whose theme was the enjoyment of work, the title of this event inadvertently triggers a second reading if the last two terms are read in conjunction. The phrase "work camp" is more readily associated with conditions of forced labour – as found historically under authoritarian regimes like Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia, as well as under liberal capitalist democracies in the form of prison labour and work for food programs targeting itinerant and homeless populations – than it is with the nostalgic and playful notion of summer camp that lies at the origins of bar camps. The perverse difference separating these examples of literal work camps from the continuous and "free" activity of today's precarious knowledge worker is the fact that under current regimes we are expected to enjoy our work! The above comparison is not intended to draw a false equivalence between the two, but rather to draw out the underlying logic of the demand to enjoy that compels participation in "voluntary" activities like bar camps. This constitutes the first contradiction of bar camp ideology, that a positive affect is not considered a freely assumed relation to one's activity but an explicit rule of engagement. The fact that there is no institutional authority in a bar camp to enforce this demand makes it more rather than less pernicious. In this case the rule is put into force by an unspoken market imperative that partially guides subjects under conditions of worsening precarity. The formal equality of participation that is central to

bar camps' explicit ideology is based on the disavowed knowledge of the inequality and exclusions that structure the field of knowledge production.

Passion and enthusiasm are the predominant values within the ideological system of bar camps. Boule characterizes the essentials of an unconference as "passion, ideas, technology and time."[122] Ingebretson describes how for Open Space Technology to work, "participants must be passionate about the topic, and decisions must be made rapidly."[123] Jay Cross insists that in an unconference "people actually enjoy meetings."[124] In order to function as intended, bar camps presuppose a highly invested and strongly motivated subject whose passion for the theme drives the success of participation. Boule's assertion that unconferences "provide what all people desire: to share a passion, have their voice heard, and connect with others," closely mirrors the ideological foundation of the projective city that elevates a universal desire and ability to connect as a natural and inherent trait of human beings.[125] It is clear from Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis that excitement and personal development are the strongest features of the projective city. It is therefore not surprising that passion is the key concept of the advocates of unconferences.

What is most compelling in ideologies of participation in the work realm is the prospect that necessary labour can be synthesized with meaningful vocational work in such a way that the opposed interests between labour and capital are overcome. In this fantasy structure, participation is the path to enjoying, loving, desiring our labourious activity. Bar camp ideology draws on this fantasy by interpellating us to be both professionals and amateurs in relation to our activity, to simultaneously display the skill of the professional and the enthusiasm and curiosity of the amateur. We all want a job that we love, or that does not wear on us too heavily. But what price are we willing to place on passion? If participation is considered its own reward might it

enhance processes of self-exploitation? After all, if the burdensome nature of our work is diminished due to our passion for it, do we no longer consider it labour that should be materially compensated? Bar camps are fun social events where we are encouraged to circulate our ideas through online platforms, whether they be non-proprietary wikis or commercial platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Flickr. In this respect, could bar camps be situated within the broad category of highly exploitable "playbour" that has emerged most markedly in the creative industries?[126]

We have good reason to be suspicious of practices that demand passion. The invocation of informality, play and authenticity at work has been used to undermine the value of labour. Those who choose a job for which they are genuinely passionate may consequently be more willing to accept worsening material rewards, increased self-exploitation and precarity for the sake of living one's "vocational calling." This tradeoff between emotional and material rewards, or between "authentic" relationships at work and the sort of professional distance that would allow one to set stricter limits on work/life boundaries became especially apparent in the Internet industries of the 1990s. In his case study of the web design company Razorfish, Ross describes a workplace culture that was defined by countercultural attitudes, a casual working environment that encouraged play and sociality, and strong affective bonds between workers, middle management and even upper management.[127] Such a workplace culture was intended to foster creative work on the part of highly educated employees who possessed rare and highly sought after skills and were generally skeptical towards the dominant corporate culture that equated success with purely material rewards.

The workplace ethos at Razorfish placed a strong emphasis on personal relations, trust and identification with the goals of the company, which the "fish" imagined to include much more

than the bottom line. Since their jobs were sold to them as an existential challenge to be better and be different than the traditional media companies, employees related to Razerfish as a family rather than simply a job.[128] The intense emotional attachments fostered in such a climate required a great deal of emotional management on the part of middle management in particular, who came to fill the "mentor" or "coach" role described by Boltanski and Chiapello in the inverted hierarchies of the projective city. Ross offers an illustration of the altered expectations that employees placed on the company within the ideology of the "humane workplace" when he recounts how during a period of extensive layoffs those who were downsized expressed more complaints about the *way* in which they were fired, which came across as cold and uncaring, than the *fact* that they were fired at all.[129] In his critique of the humane workplace under digital capitalism, Ross refers to the darker side of a "flat" company where authority was widely distributed. While in good times this dispersal led to innovation, as well as conditions of overwork, in economically poorer times of precarity and constant change, dispersed authority meant a vacuum of accountability and excessive responsibility placed on the shoulders of production employees for the fortunes of the company and for their own self-management and self-training.[130] What is particularly interesting is the way that these exploitative conditions were experienced in the perceptions of employees who allowed themselves to imagine they were not working for corporate America while simultaneously handling huge brand name clients like Nike and large banks.[131]

The logic of working long hours, working for less or for free, and thinking of it as a kind of emancipation through participation, became endemic in the digital media industries. This logic carries over into new iterations of network ideology such as bar camps. Because of their punctual temporality and short duration, the voluntary labour demanded at bar camps can be intensive,

requiring participants to put other life demands on hold, to neglect bodily needs, forego family and other work responsibilities.[132] In this case the invocation of passion has a less visible consequence. The premium placed on participant initiative and self-activity is founded on a negative understanding of freedom that typically privileges those who already have the most to give and are most likely to gain. Those most likely to participate in or organize a bar camp are those with the most time, education, skills, mobility and social, emotional and material resources at their disposal. Those who are able to put their lives on hold for a weekend of intensive voluntary labour tend to be those with flexible commitments, who already enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The emphasis on passion and enthusiasm in bar camp ideology is marked by the common liberal assumption that a lack of formal barriers to participation is adequate to ensuring an egalitarian and emancipatory social space that serves as the ground for individual self-realization. The Open Space Technology principle that those who show up are the "right people" because they were driven to participate by their enthusiasm for the theme draws on the common capitalist dogma that individual motivation and hard work is all that is required to access opportunities for success.

The compulsion to participate that I am claiming structures our relation to events like bar camps does not alter the fact that they can be genuinely enjoyable events. What makes bar camps fun is their ethos of informality and a paradoxical increase and diminishment of the investment and commitment required of participants. On the one hand, participants are given responsibility for making up the schedule and actively engaging in sessions. Everyone is expected to take part and to display enthusiasm and passion for the theme. People are discouraged from sinking into the background and passively listening to the proceedings. On the other hand, this responsibility is dispersed. No one individual is responsible for the entirety of a session, no one needs to

prepare a long and rigorous presentation, and anyone may disconnect from a discussion at any time if they find it boring or unrewarding. The informal nature of a bar camp lowers the pressure and stakes that may be present during a professional conference. There are no job interviews occurring on the side of a bar camp and since participants do not give formal talks and are not accepted according to a peer-review process bar camps are not of particular value on a curriculum vitae. It is by dispensing with such professional practices and the feelings of stress and self-censorship that may accompany them that the events hope to open up space for passionate engagement with ideas and intellectual risk-taking.

On the surface, the demand for passion appears to be what Žižek would call a "non-pathological" demand driven by some higher principle – in this case a pure desire for knowledge or enthusiasm for ideas. At the same time, the passion demanded is entirely pathological, driven by the need to enhance future employability and make connections with others who might invite one into other projects. In this regard the demand for passion reproduces the basic capitalist utilitarian dogma that the pursuit of individual interest ultimately maximizes social benefit. On an affective level, the enjoyment offered by bar camps derives from a temporary feeling of control over impersonal economic conditions that is provided by activity and social connection. Yet, in a context of precarious employment, the flip side is also apparent, that the demand for passion also motivates through fear and anxiety: 'What if I'm not enthusiastic enough?' 'Will I be left behind?' 'I had better contribute or I'll be marginalized.' Such anxieties become apparent when we consider the emphasis on timeliness, value for time, and the scarcity of time that bar camps are meant to respond to.

Activity Over Passivity: Pragmatic Activity, "Useful Information" and Scarcity of Time

The privileging of action over thought and discussion is a central aspect of bar camp ideology. THATCamp is an umbrella of unconferences within the digital humanities.[133] Within the THATCamp community, this conflict between action and discussion is referred to as the "Hack vs. Yack" debate, the division within the field between those who are more technologically adept (the hackers or makers) and those who are more rhetorical and prefer to converse (the yackers).[134] The collected proceedings of THATCamp are dominated by technology-themed showcases, workshops and ideas that are about introducing and keeping up with new technologies, as well as how to implement them in ways that open up new possibilities. This is to be expected in a discipline whose raison d'être is to integrate digital technologies into the humanities and that presumes that technology is a solution to all sorts of problems. The desire to theorize is denigrated within bar camp spaces while sessions based on "making" are preferred. Here we should recall Žižek's critique of interpassivity, or the way that the urgency to act can actually function as a form of passivity by staving off a confrontation with the contradictions of our activity and the critical thought that would lead us to act in a way that is genuinely transformative.[135] Activity over passivity is a central dimension of the participatory complex that is apparent in bar camp ideology. It can be seen in particular in the rejection of spectatorship as an acceptable mode of being or learning and an emphasis on "hands-on" collective problem solving.

When it comes to the task of implementing ideas decided elsewhere, or collectively figuring out a concrete and small-scale problem amongst participants who share a similar worldview, bar camps are in their element. This orientation emerged out of the pragmatism of the original techie bar camps that were designed to facilitate collective problem solving in relation to coding and

software development. However, this makes bar camps unsuited to dealing with problems that require the time-intensive forging of consensus across differences. Substantial disagreement or lack of clarity as to the best course of action must be overcome through deliberation, something that stands in the way of immediate pragmatic action. The result of this hands-on, pragmatic orientation is that the solutions sought by participants will most likely be those that do not significantly question existing conditions.[136]

One of Boule's central arguments for bar camps over traditional conferences is that the former are better at providing "useful" and "applicable" information, while the latter presents the "big ideas" of speakers who are out of touch with the needs of the audience or community.[137] Boule's point makes some sense within business, management, technology or library science conferences, if the purpose of a conference is simply to find out about the latest technologies or management strategies that similar organizations are using and apply them in one's own work context. In this case, these would hardly be settings for "revolutionary" knowledge production, but simply another space where the drive towards innovation in accordance with demands for ever-greater efficiency or new products are shared and propagated.[138]

The pragmatic "hacking" ethos is accompanied by a sped-up temporality. The work of critical reflection found in seminars, workshops, reading groups and other spaces of free-flowing discussion are invaluable spaces for collectively working through difficult or complex ideas. Despite the ideological emphasis on useful pragmatic activity and hands-on sessions, bar camps are often another form of discussion space to add to the list of already existing practices. In theory the discussion formats that dominate the schedule of many bar camps offer a more expansive and flexible relation to time than most highly scheduled conferences. This happens to be one of their most attractive dimensions. Paradoxically, in bar camp ideology the motivation

behind such participation-based formats is driven by a very anxious relation to time. One of the reasons bar camps caught on in the technology fields was precisely because of the timeliness they enabled in relation to the emergence of new technology. The dizzying pace of the development of digital technology is felt to make the uptake of new information and trends difficult to keep up with. Furthermore, the social effects of ever-changing technology are hard to grasp and analyse when what was new and exciting one year ago has already been abandoned by users. Bar camps respond to this situation by avoiding the vetting process. This allows them to be organized quickly and allows participants to determine the topics that are the most pressing. But should the demand to keep up with the pace of new technologies be treated as a central principle of bar camps in the diverse social and disciplinary domains that they treat? At what cost is urgency put forward as a central driver of knowledge production and social connection?

Beyond the utility of quick organization we should attend to the internal temporal dynamics of bar camp participation. Bar camp ideology interpellates a subject of participation who is worried and anxious about being left behind, about wasting their time, being in the wrong place at the wrong time or of being bored. As in the projective city, time is the scarcest resource for a person driven to accumulate the right kind of connections that will enhance their status and future opportunities, while avoiding redundant information and useless connections. This reveals another reason why the figure of the lecturer is so denigrated in this ideology of participation. As John Durham Peters argues in his comparison of dialogue and dissemination as modes of communication, a public lecture is receiver-oriented, and therefore tends to require work and interpretation on the part of the receiver.[139] The sender delivers a uniform message to a large diverse public and it is up to each listener to interpret the content in a way that is interesting or "useful" to their own thinking or life situation. In a context where time is perceived to be the

scarcest resource, to ask for an hour, twenty minutes, or even ten minutes of an audience's time

is perceived to be a huge and selfish imposition. As a result there seems to be resentment at the

possibility that one might put in time listening to someone and not come out at the end with

knowledge that one deems useful to oneself. Rather, it is preferable that the speaker reduce their

ideas to three-minutes and a slide so that each participant can more immediately ascertain

whether their ideas are valuable to them or not. This points to a very instrumental relation to

ideas which allows no time for the exposure to things outside of one's immediate area of interest,

or ideas that do not fit one's predetermined objective. The logic of bar camp structures is to

accommodate individual preference and selection over a single shared reference point like a

keynote lecture. If a quickly communicated idea does seem valuable people can always talk at

greater length one-on-one with the presenter without imposing their private, interested

conversation on anyone else. This subject of participation is restive, fidgety, distracted and

unconcerned with issues that do not appear to pertain directly to them, imagining that better

things are happening elsewhere and afraid to miss out.

It is worth mentioning that this anxious relation to time occurs within a broader context of

general speed-up of production. The refrain of boredom, wasting time, needing very specific

useful information and so on, is a reaction not only to the speed of emerging technologies, but

also to conditions of increasing competition and job insecurity. Bar camps could contribute to

quality and slowness, allowing time for extended discussion of difficult problems or for

collectively work-shopping a thinker's work in progress. But for this to be the case, the emphasis

on brevity, timeliness and participation would need to be tempered by a stronger awareness of

the structural demands placed on production and a willingness to resist the temporality of

emerging technology. To a certain degree, this may entail a return to aspects of traditional

conferences like a more determined theme that justifies the time and energy of participants, and a willingness to engage with ideas and collective spaces that are not directly pertinent to one's own research interests. The self-activity demanded at events like bar camps may at times exacerbate the problems of speed-up rather than counter them. For instance, one of the few posts on THATCamp.org's forum recounts the problem of bar camp fatigue encountered by THATCamp Philadelphia.[140] After four years they experienced notable drops in attendance. The organizer notes that a survey of participants revealed that the main problem was that participants lacked the energy required for the unconference format. As a solution, THATCamp Philly reduced the spontaneous and self-organized aspects of the event and combined them with more traditional conference formats like structured and led workshops, a clear theme and a shorter duration.

Partial returns to traditional conferencing formats help to overcome the simplistic separation in bar camp ideology between spontaneous free-flowing group discussion and the other forms of knowledge production and exchange that support such spaces. Boule describes the informal discussion that takes place during coffee breaks or post-lecture hallway spaces, as well as online spaces like Twitter, as a "backchannel" to official conference proceedings.[141] She claims that the backchannel is the most lively, enjoyable and valuable part of a traditional conference and it therefore follows for her that such informal discussions should be made the central activity of such events. However, the desire to isolate these moments fails to acknowledge how they are dependent on the formal structure and presentations that brought people together in the first place. Group discussions are often enlivened, more productive and more focused when they can respond to a shared source of knowledge like a specific reading, a lecture or the widely known ideas of a leading figure. Many knowledge workers will have experienced the frustration of a discussion that is fragmented and free floating and seems to go nowhere or everywhere at once.

One of the functions of the "big ideas" and "talking heads" denigrated by bar camp ideology is to offer common points of reference to bring diverse participants together and to hopefully add a layer of complexity to the discussions that follow.

It is this desire to get rid of the distinction between the official scene and the obscene underside that drives compulsory participation, personalization and radical transparency. However, we should ask whether this attempt risks resulting in an even more oppressive social dynamic by defining refusal, resistance or non-participation out of existence. This brings me to the final contradiction of bar camp ideology: in an effort to create a space where formality does not get in the way of spontaneous free flowing discussion, bar camps can unleash a suffocating tolerance where productive conflict and dialogue is avoided. In spite of its official rhetoric calling for personal expressiveness and subversive attitudes, bar camp participation is governed by unwritten rules based on polite distance, tolerance, and an avoidance of confrontation, argumentation and debate.[142] People can express themselves only insofar as others are not directly confronted or implicated, and with the understanding that no one is obligated to respond to or engage with someone with whom they disagree.

Refusing the Law of Participation: A Repressive Consensus?

The demand to be a passionate subject and to take responsibility for one's own learning, training or self-development, acts as the central law of bar camp ideology, a law that delimits the possibilities of refusal, autonomy and non-compliance with group norms. The overwhelming positivity with which bar camp modes of interaction are characterized by advocates does not reflect the reality that social encounters, collaboration and learning can often be uncomfortable, tedious and difficult. It therefore begs the question as to what room for negativity exists within

this ideology of participation. To what degree do people feel comfortable expressing dissension and disagreement within or against participatory spaces? The answer will be as variable as bar camps themselves and differ for each participant. However, we can explore some of the contradictions of participation by reflecting on how conflict and refusal are dealt with in the "letter of the law" of bar camp ideology. In bar camp ideology non-participation is managed through the "law of two feet." This concept, borrowed from Owen's Open Space Technology, defines the accepted form for exercising refusal as leaving any session in which you do not find yourself productively participating or finding the discussion you expected or prefer. The implicit policing of bar camps is present in the demand that those who are not "passionate" and therefore possibly reserved, introverted or unaffected by the issue physically exclude themselves. Or, if a person holding court in a session is perceived to be disagreeable, their influence and position should be undermined by the other participants leaving the session.[143]

In contexts that are not organized around an ideology of participation, the act of leaving generally signals a strong public statement of rejection. At times, intellectual events have transformed into a highly politicized instance when masses of audience members either walk out or occupy the space, insisting that an issue be addressed. But within an ideology of participation, leaving a session mid-way is transformed into an individual choice and an affirmation of the participation-based format itself. Such an act is a priori incorporated as an expression of autonomy that reflects the values of openness and tolerance of participation.[144] Precisely because the act of walking out is permitted and even encouraged by the law of two feet, it is not obvious that it should be read as a rejection of a particular behaviour or idea – for instance it could simply be that the people leaving are attracted to something else or are tired, etc. It is therefore a deeply

passive aggressive strategy driven by values of tolerance and inclusivity, and oriented towards the repression or avoidance of conflict.[145]

The law of two feet enables one kind of autonomy while undermining another. While permitting people to seek out their preference, the flip side is that it does not allow or encourage the expression of negativity or productive confrontation within the space of discussion itself. Criticizing, complaining about, or remaining passive in a session, is discouraged in favour of initiating a new space more to your liking. The very freedom to leave and initiate an alternative session undermines the legitimacy of questioning and contesting a session from within. Since the law of two feet makes the individual solely responsible for their own experience, the group is implicitly innocented. While certainly smoothing over potential conflicts, one wonders about the consequences of such a passive aggressive method of refusal. It opens the possibility that ideas or behaviour deemed problematic by a particular network is disempowered through a process of marginalization and isolation.

Discussion-based bar camps are intended to foster productive intellectual exchange, including dissent and debate. Whether they succeed or not is highly variable. But what happens when participants disagree with the very presumptions and processes of the participatory format? Here, I will simply offer an illustrative example of the different ways of dealing with refusal in a participatory space and the differing interpretations of such refusals. Critical Practice, a U.K. artist's group that organizes bar camp events, recounts one example of a refusal to participate. Critical Practice organized a small bar camp in Warsaw, Poland, in collaboration with the Slow/Free University of Warsaw. In an interview, members of Critical Practice register surprise at one particular difference between how participants in Warsaw related to the bar camp's demand to participate in comparison to their U.K. counterparts.[146] When participants were asked

to give their name and two keywords as a way of introducing the session, the Polish participants refused to do so. The organizers of the event have differing interpretations of this refusal. Kuba Szreder, a member of the Slow/Free University of Warsaw, characterizes the refusal in largely disparaging terms, arguing that it stems from a lack of public culture in Poland. According to Szreder, Poles suffer from authoritarian habits that are conditioned by the hierarchies of the Catholic Church. He states: "It's rather about being ashamed of showing anything, even your interests in public. It was more about the passivity of the people. They didn't want to participate, or be active."[147] His collaborator, Agata Pyzik, invokes the demand to enjoy, claiming that Poles are too serious and rigid and "one has to learn again how to take pleasure in something."[148] In contrast, Cinzia Crimona, a member of Critical Practice, feels that the Polish participants were very good at expressing contradictions in public, if not their opinions. She describes how in England "the way to refuse participation would be to just sit at the back of the room and disappear."[149] Crimona points out that in contrast at the Warsaw bar camp, "people were saying 'No' with a really strong voice. They came to the table, and then refused."[150] The English mode of refusal described by Crimona closely accords with the repressive aspects of the law of two feet, without going so far as to physically leave the session.

In either interpretation, the explicit refusal to participate is experienced as surprising and exceptional. I would argue along with Crimona that there is something valuable in this willingness to publically refuse that is typically repressed in participation-based formats. The paradox of Critical Practice's position is that on the one hand they demand that people be active and expressive and feel comfortable disagreeing, yet on the other hand, the underlying values of tolerance, diversity and consensus intended to make people feel comfortable, simultaneously undermines their willingness to be confrontational and disagreeable. The Polish participants, in

refusing the demand to be expressive and yet at the same time insisting on their presence, exercised their autonomy in a more direct and public way than the English participants who did not want to contribute and yet who conformed to the participatory format by stating their two keywords. While on the surface the U.K. participants were "active," they were not able to find an adequate way to express their feelings of non-compliance within the participation-based format.

The way in which passion is wielded as a disciplining concept is far more obvious in a work context where non-compliance with participation is not optional. When advocating for the spread of bar camps within professions such as libraries, Boule presumes that employees are jaded by learning structures based on lecture formats and "talking heads" and need to rediscover a love for their jobs. The solution for this lost love is more opportunities to share and connect.[151] The presumption that employees are jaded and not passionate may simply be management rhetoric. If employees are truly jaded, Boule does not consider any other reasons why employees may be unhappy with current conditions, such as the drastic budget cuts that precipitated the employee self-organized staff training day "camp" at the Princeton Public Library that she draws on as a case study.[152] While the training camp is presented as a good in itself, the fact that it was necessitated by budget cuts that are not open to questioning by employees is not addressed. Participation is presented as way to cope with rather than confront systemic underfunding. In relation to employees who display resentment and resistance to participative management initiatives, Boule asserts that "workers who choose not to participate by giving ideas and opinions have therefore chosen to accept what the rest of the group decides without complaint."[153] This argument is strikingly similar to that made in relation to citizens who refuse to participate in elections. The idea that the electoral system itself can be a legitimate target of political contestation is rendered invisible by such an argument. Boule insists that employee

complaints, "griping," "whining" and resentment towards further training can all be reduced through greater opportunities for participation.[154] Such patronizing characterizations of worker resistance to unsatisfactory working conditions illustrates the fundamental contradiction at the base of the compulsion to participate: participation as ideology exhibits the freedom of the forced choice – essentially you have the choice to participate or not but only on the condition that you make the correct choice. In this case, one should willingly take on the task of self-training, pull one's weight for the team, not challenge the budget itself, or otherwise one risks becoming redundant. Boule does not consider the possibility that more stable working conditions, fewer demands on employee time for the sake of self-training and participation, and committing more resources to people rather than constant technological upgrades might alleviate employee cynicism and rekindle a love for the job. It is only a lack of connection and opportunities to share that are to blame for this condition.

Conclusion

Bar camps do not claim to be political. Yet, considering that the majority of bar camps aim to implement technology and/or participation-based collaboration into a broad set of institutional and cultural domains where it is presumed to lead to innovation and social progress, it could be said that bar camps purport to *replace* politics. We should remain attentive to the possibility that meeting events like bar camps, by bringing together dispersed freelance knowledge workers who are cut off from regular contact with others who share their working conditions, could become important spaces for sparking longer term associations. This possibility remains dim when one considers the ideology of participation that bar camps reproduce and the practical constraints imposed by this ideology. Reflecting the apolitical and technophilic orientation of software

developers as well echoing the fantasies of participatory management advocates who presumed that class conflict at work could be overcome through the harmonizing "hand" of participation, bar camps reproduce an ideology that reinforces the fragmentation, personalization and privatizing drive of neoliberal reorganization. Rather than a platform for conscious organization they act instead as a survival mechanism where small group activity can contribute to processes of self-valorisation under conditions of precarity.

In the social movements I examined in chapter two, participation was understood to be a fundamental foundation of radical democracy. But in the case of bar camps, participation stands in for a lack of democratic decision-making spaces and becomes a method for diffusing class-based antagonisms and the construction of collective interests within spaces of knowledge production. In the context of bar camps, participation as ideology works against the construction of ongoing collective commitments and democratic engagement. Rather, it reproduces the loose ties that are standard in online spaces and that characterize the networking activities of the projective city. It channels social engagement towards small-scale collaboration and niche interests, undermining the legitimacy of collective interests.

Bar camps entreat us to enjoy. The explicit rules call into being a subject of participation that is spontaneous, enthusiastic, flexible, tolerant and subversive. Yet the playful exhortations excite participants not through the pleasure of easy social contact and promises of individual autonomy alone. I argue that this enjoyment is also excessive, driven as much by anxiety, guilt and disavowal as by the excitement of fast-paced change and creative activity. The excessive nature of this enjoyment is apparent in the way that participation demands both too much and not enough. On the one hand the burden of success or simply getting by is placed entirely on the shoulders of the subject, who must corral the appropriate enthusiasm, social skills, time and

motivation to make themselves productive in these self-organized spaces. On the other hand, no subject, whether individual or collective, bears responsibility for the success or failure of projects, many of which amount to nothing or whose value is dependent on market uptake and investment even if they are intended to be applied to traditionally public and non-profit institutions like public libraries, universities and development projects. Participants can disappear behind the veil of open collaboration without concern towards the obligations their activity may entail towards others. In this sense, bar camps represent a special kind of "community" brought together around a shared lack of community. Such a social space can operate remarkable smoothly when antagonism is diffused through compelled contributions, a foregrounding (and therefore denial) of unofficial spaces of sociality and a lack of collective identification. But this does not mean that antagonism ceases to exist or is effectively dealt with through spaces of participation.

Fortunately, it is questionable whether the foregrounding of the backchannel is really possible under the conditions of short-term relations that bar camps foster. Those who have participated in participatory experiments know that grumblings and discomfort about the proceedings continue to emerge along the sidelines, in the breaks, over lunch and in more discreet exchanges between participants as a kind of "return of the repressed." However, insofar as ideologies of participation continue to enjoy a position of cultural hegemony, such grumblings are more likely to lead to withdrawal from collaborative engagement than vocal challenges to the format as such. Part of the impetus of this thesis is to provide a language of critique with which to approach participatory formats, to provide the necessary distance from participatory values required to extricate social critique from this limited imaginary and mark out an alternative space to

participation that cannot be reduced to its foil of hierarchy, bureaucracy, domination and closedness.

How can one break out of a format whose affirmation of self-expression turns every critique into a reinforcement of its values and where self-exclusion or non-participation is made invisible? In this case rather than remove oneself from the proceedings or try to include critical content, we can take inspiration from the direct 'no' of the Polish participants in the Critical Practice bar camp. The repressive dynamic of participatory spaces I have highlighted may be productively disrupted through small acts of refusal – not by adding another layer of expression or opinion to the space but by visibly subtracting. Rather than a passive acquiescence that occurs under the cover of meaningless "activity," the direct and unambiguous refusal to participate functions as an irruption that destabilizes the discourse of participation. This is similar to the breakdown of a computer network at a hacker conference, or a coordinated walk-out of the proceedings at a public lecture. The presence of the non-compliant participants, uncommunicative but clearly antagonistic, is an irruption of negativity that opens up a gap, a distance from participation as ideology. This is not adequate in and of itself, but it makes it possible for the reassertion of antagonism into such social spaces that could be articulated in relation to collective experience, principles and accountability. It marks the return of politics to the spaces of depoliticized "knowledge production."

Notes

[1] Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge, 1970).

[2] Nonetheless, workers act to expand their autonomy at work through acts of sabotage.

[3] It should be noted that while workplace democracy is rightfully considered a central pillar of a democratic and socialist society, in itself worker's management does not confront capitalist market relations. See Joseba Azkarraga, George Cheney, and Ainara Udaondo, "Worker's Participation in a Globalized Market: Reflections on and from Mondregon," in *Alternative Work Organizations*, ed. Maurizio Atzeni, pp. 76-102 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillon, 2012) and Greg Sharzer, *No Local: Why Small-scale Alternatives Won't Change the World* (Winchester, UK and Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2012).

[4] David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[5] See Ervin Williams, ed., *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976).

[6] Steve Babson, "Lean Production and Labour: Empowerment and Exploitation," in *Lean Work: Empowerment and Exploitation in the Global Auto Industry*, ed. Steve Babson, pp. 1-37 (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1995).

[7] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

[8] Andrew Ross, *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

[9] Trebor Sholz, ed., *Digital Labour: the Internet as Playground and Factory* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

[10] See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor," in *Digital Labour: the Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz, pp. 33-57 (New York and London: Routledge, 2013) and Andrew Ross, "In Search of the Lost Paycheck," in *Digital Labour: the Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz, pp. 10-31 (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

[11] Richard Barbrook, "Cyber-Communism: How the Americans are Superceding Capitalism in Cyberspace," in *The Internet Revolution: From Dot-com Capitalism to Cybernetic Communism*, Richard Barbrook with Andy Cameron, pp. 28-51 (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2015).

[12] Terranova, "Free Labour." See also Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014).

[13] For this general description of participative management process I'm drawing on Lorne C. Plunkett and Robert Fournier, *Participative Management: Implementing Empowerment* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, and Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1991).

[14] Likewise, face-to-face events are important for constituting the lifeworlds of hackers, as Gabriella Coleman argues in her analysis of hacker conferences. See Gabriella Coleman, "The Hacker Conference: A Ritual Condensation and Celebration of a Lifeworld," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83:1 (March 4, 2010): 47-72.

[15] David Noble theorizes the emergence of management as a form of social engineering that resulted from the dominance of the engineering profession within the rise of corporate capitalism (Noble, *America by Design*, pp. 257-320).

[16] For an overview of Taylorism and scientific management see Ibid., pp. 268-277.

[17] Noble distinguishes two phases of management practice that accord with this shift. The first he calls "social engineering," which as in Taylorism focused on workplace organization and the activity of labour, and the second he calls "human engineering," which entails an attempt to control the human element through the study and manipulation of human behavior (Ibid., p. 264).

[18] Williams, *Participative Management*.

[19] See Stane Mozina, Janez Jerovsek, Arnold S. Tannenbaum and Rensis Likert, "Testing a Management Style," in *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation*, ed. Ervin Williams, pp. 59-70 (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976); and John Dickson, "Participation as a Means of Organizational Control," *Journal of Management Studies* 18:2 (1981): 159-76.

[20] See Noble, *America by Design*, p. 269. For one of the most articulate conceptualizations of the fantasy of class harmony through participation, which comes to occupy a similarly "neutral" position as that of technology or science see Kurt Lewin, "Socializing the Taylor System," *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader,* ed. Martin Gold (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999; originally 1920).

[21] A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 117-22.

[22] Keith Davis, "Evolving Models of Organizational Behavior," in *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation*, ed. Ervin Williams, pp. 3-14 (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976).

[23] Ibid., pp. 6-8.

[24] Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960).

[25] McGregor's leadership theory is summarized in Karlene Roberts, Raymond Miles, and L. Vaughn Blankenship, "Organizational Leadership Satisfaction and Productivity: A Comparative Analysis," in *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation*, ed. Ervin Williams, pp. 75-90 (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976).

[26] Ibid., p. 76.

[27] Rensis Likert, *New Patterns of Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

[28] Davis, "Evolving Models," p. 9.

[29] See for instance, Frank A. Heller and Gary Yukl, "Participation, Managerial Decision-Making and Situational Variables," in *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation*, ed. Ervin Williams, pp. 241-55 (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976); Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," in *Participative Management: Concepts, Theory and Implementation*, ed. Ervin Williams, pp. 17-29 (Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University, 1976).

[30] Mozina et. al, "Testing a Management Style," pp. 59-70.

[31] Ibid., p. 69.

[32] Ibid., p. 66.

[33] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

[34] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations*, pp. 177-82 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[35] Plunkett and Fournier, *Participative Management*, p. 6.

[36] Ibid., p. 7.

[37] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[38] Ibid., p. 5.

[39] Ibid., pp. 7-10.

[40] Ibid., pp. 109-42.

[41] Ibid., pp. 99-103.

[42] A section of their book is devoted to debunking myths surrounding participative management, including the one in which it is conflated with workplace democracy. They insist that participative management not be confused with workplace democracy since the leadership of management continues to play a vital role. They clearly differentiate participative management from experiences of democratic industrialization in Scandinavia and Europe, reminding us that in these cases workers vote as a constituency, whereas in participative management the ultimate responsibility of senior management is to shareholders and not to employees. While employees are given increased responsibilities, their margin of autonomy is clearly defined by management and restricted to instances where management deems particular workers to have knowledge appropriate to the task at hand. Ibid., p. 28.

[43] Ibid., pp. 21-22; 182-3.

[44] Babson, "Lean Production and Labour," pp. 1-37. For an overview of the labour concerns stemming from the integration of computers and network technologies at work and how the latter contributed to the drive towards "flat" organizations, see Darin Barney, *Prometheus Wired: the Hope for Democracy in the Age of Network Technology* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2000), pp. 148-52. Barney argues that the "empowerment" offered by network technologies in fact diminishes the control of workers over their work while contributing to unemployment, deskilling and increased surveillance.

[45] Plunkett and Fournier, *Participative Management*, p. 65.

[46] Ibid., p. 179.

[47] Ibid., p. 11.

[48] Ibid., p. 179.

[49] For an extensive overview of these and other meeting and deliberation methods used in organizations see Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, and Steven Cady, *The Change Handbook, The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, 2nd Edition* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007).

[50] The idea that attendees appreciated the conferences breaks more than the sessions themselves motivated Harrison Owen to develop the idea of Open Space Technology, a kind of flexible meeting format that is a precursor to bar camps. The origins of Open Space Technology are briefly described in Mark Ingebretson "Unconferences Catch On With Developers," *IEEE Software* (Nov/Dec 2008): 108-10.

[51] Quoted in Jay Cross, "Unconferences," *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways that Inspire Innovation and Performance* (Pfeiffer, 2007), unpaginated.

[52] For an account of the first bar camp I rely on Jay Cross's description in his book *Informal Learning*. Michelle Boule claims that the word "bar" is a reference to the slang term "fubar" and therefore also implicitly marks itself as

a parallel or alternative to "foo" camp. See Michelle Boule *Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences, and Trashing the Talking Heads* (Medford, NJ: Information Today/CyberAge Books, 2011), p. 79.

[53] Barcamp.org covers the basics of organizing a bar camp here: http://barcamp.org/w/page/403229/HowToGetStarted (Accessed March 20, 2015). Steve Lawson offers a brief guide to organizing unconferences with a particular emphasis on those organized by librarians and known as Library Camps. See Steve Lawson, *Library Camps and Unconferences* (London: Facet Publishing, 2010).

[54] San Yamin Aung "5th Bar Camp Attracts Thousands of Technology Lovers," The Irrawaddy, February 3, 2014. http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/5th-barcamp-attracts-thousands-technology-lovers.html (Accessed March 20, 2015).

[55] The quality of the online traces of bar camp sessions is highly variable. In some cases very detailed minutes are available that record each participants' statements. In others very schematic point-form minutes are presented or else one person's general point of view about the session. Bar camps therefore tend to suffer from the same contradictions of online transparency that are seen in the OWS working groups page: either an overwhelming amount of tedious, overly detailed, and unedited content, or vague, overly general and very short transcripts that do not communicate much of what occurred. These traces can be valuable to researchers like myself, but it is difficult to imagine them being particularly helpful to those interested in the theme of the event and who could not directly take part. In spite of the call to transparency through online representation, the contribution to public knowledge that arises from bar camps appears most valuable and accessible to those who directly participate in the sessions. Many of the proceedings documents that I refer to in my analysis in this chapter are concise proposals for sessions rather than minutes of sessions, which are harder to find and usually less coherent.

[56] Barcamp.org: http://barcamp.org/w/page/401208/BarCampNewsArchive

[57] The term "hackathon" refers to a hands-on, hacking oriented event resembling a technology oriented bar camp. Hackathons pre-exist bar camps but due to bar camps' emergence from the world of software development there is no way to neatly delineate these events. They share the same basic principles and ideology, with bar camps' only claim to distinction being the fact that they are not *necessarily* dominated by hacking and are seen as extending some hacker principles to broader domains of activity.

[58] Bar camps treating these themes are listed in the barcamp.org archive: http://barcamp.org/w/page/401208/BarCampNewsArchive

[59] Leigh Buchanan, "Sick of Canned Speeches? Try an Unconference," *Inc.* 31:10 (Dec 2009/Jan 2010): 124-8.

[60] See thatcamp.org for a list of events: http://thatcamp.org/camps

[61] Radical Library Camp appears to be fairly exceptional among bar camps for explicitly treating political and ideological themes. A few other examples that have occurred include Transparency Camp (2009), which brought together advocates for open government, Pirate Camp (2010) which was hosted by the German Pirate Party, Wikileaks Camp (2011) in support of Wikileaks, and Hack For Egypt (2011) which organized support for the uprising in Tahrir Square. For a description of Radical Library Camp see: Bradford RadLibCamp Collective, "Radical Library Camp: In the Fight Over Information, Librarians Start to Get Organized," Opendemocracy.net, October 7, 2013. https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/bradford-radlibcamp-collective/radical-library-camp-in-fight-over-information-librarians-.

[62] Barcamp.org: http://barcamp.org/w/page/405173/TheRulesOfBarCamp

[63] Harrison Owen, "Opening Space for Productivity," *National Productivity Review* 17:1 (Winter 1997): 67-71.

[64] Buchanan, "Sick of Canned Speeches?" p. 124.

[65] Ingebretson, "Unconferences Catch On," p. 108.

[66] Ibid., p. 109.

[67] Jay Cross, "Unconferences."

[68] Scott Kirsner, "Take Your Powerpoint and…" *Business Week* May 14, 2007, pp. 73-4.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 73.

[71] For a compilation of digital humanities perspectives on the transformative role digital technologies are having on academic institutions, which includes an essay on unconferences see Daniel Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt, *Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michegan Press, 2013).

[72] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*. The other book-length treatment of bar camps is Lawson, *Library Camps*. As mentioned in a previous note, Lawson's book is a short guide on how to organize a library camp. He avoids makings the kinds of strong claims that Boule makes for the organizational and educational transformations portended by bar camps.

[73] Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: the Power of Organization without Organizations* (London: Allan Lane, 2008).

[74] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 41.

[75] Ibid., p. 88.

[76] Ibid., p. 1.

[77] Ibid., p. 4.

[78] Ibid., p. 3.

[79] Ibid., p. 7.

[80] Ibid., p. 79.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., pp. 80-2.

[83] One of the most valuable critiques put forward by Boule is in regards to conference pay walls that restrict access to information about conference proceedings. Nonetheless, as I later argue, the open access position of bar camps doesn't offer an adequate funding model for knowledge production or the work of organizing such events.

[84] Boltanski and Chiapello, *Spirit of Capitalism*.

[85] Ibid., pp. 14-16.

[86] Ibid., p. 16.

[87] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[88] Ibid., p. 73.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., p. 78.

[92] Ibid., p. 85.

[93] Ibid., p. 92; 96.

[94] Ibid., p. 104.

[95] Ibid., pp. 104-7.

[96] Ibid., p. 104.

[97] Ibid., p. 127.

[98] Ibid., p. 107.

[99] Ibid., p. 112; 121.

[100] Ibid., p. 113.

[101] Ibid., p. 119.

[102] Ibid., pp. 135-6.

[103] Ibid., p. 155.

[104] See also Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015). See chapter two of this thesis for my critique of Brown's approach to neoliberalism.

[105] See Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades "The Academic Capitalist Knowledge/Learning Regime," in *The Exchange University: Corporatization of Academic Culture,* eds. Adrienne Chan and Donald Fisher, pp. 19-48 (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2008); Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); and Stanley Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

[106] For more on the labour issues surrounding the rise of contingent faculty see Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low Wage Nation* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008) and Carey Nelson, *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labour in Crisis* (Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[107] Terranova, "Free Labor," pp. 33-57.

[108] Ibid., p. 41.

[109] Ibid., p. 49.

[110] In an article on the coworking movement, a phenomenon where freelance workers rent shared workspaces on an hourly, daily or weekly basis, Janet Merkel mentions the case of one such space, Berlin's Supermarkt which

provides support to grassroots social movements and regularly discusses how to organize and support the emergence of a freelancers union in Europe. Coworking spaces sometimes host their own bar camp events, however, one significant advantage they have over bar camps in terms of organizing potential is that through the permanent space members are brought into a more long-term relation to one another even though this membership is very fluid. See Janet Merkel, "Coworking in the City – 'Saving' the City: Collective Low-Budget Organizing and Urban Practice," *Ephemera Journal* 15:1 (2015): 121-39.

[111] Gabriella Coleman, *Coding Freedom: the Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[112] Ibid., p. 14.

[113] Ibid., p. 9.

[114] Ibid., pp. 185-205.

[115] Ibid., pp. 186; 200-5.

[116] Lilly Irani, "Hackathons and the Making of Entrepreneurial Citizenship," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40:5 (2015): 799-824.

[117] Ibid., p. 801.

[118] Ibid., p. 807.

[119] Ibid., 810-11.

[120] Slavoj Žižek, *For they Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. lxi.

[121] See http://www.arbeitswelten-lebenswelten.de/enjoyworkcamps/enjoyworkcamp-2015-stuttgart/

[122] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 68.

[123] Ingebretson, "Unconferences Catch On," p. 109.

[124] Cross, "Unconferences."

[125] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 88.

[126] Scholz, *Digital Labour*.

[127] Andrew Ross, *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

[128] Ibid., pp. 87-122.

[129] Ibid., p. 208.

[130] Ibid., p. 209.

[131] Ibid., pp. 44-9.

[132] In the case of the Delhi hackathon, Irani describes how the background experience in coding and software development of most participants made them predisposed to the idea of intensive unpaid labour as an acceptable

norm of hackathon participation. The one participant in the group who lacked this hacking experience and who moreover had outside work commitments and family to care for ended up leaving the working group mid-way through. Irani uses this incident as an example of how the logic of the hackathon forecloses other kinds of wage work and care work (Irani, "Entrepreneurial Citizenship," p. 812).

[133] Beginning in 2008 at George Mason University and spreading to dozens of other locations in the following years, THATCamps became one of the most popular iterations of bar camp structures in the academic world. More than 28 THATCamps are listed as upcoming in 2015, most of which are taking place in the U.S. See thatcamp.org.

[134] See Adeline Koh, "More Hack, Less Yack?: Modularity, Theory and Habitus in the Digital Humanities," Blog post. May 21, 2012. http://www.adelinekoh.org/blog/2012/05/21/more-hack-less-yack-modularity-theory-and-habitus-in-the-digital-humanities/. Drawing on Tara McPherson, Koh argues that the pragmatic "hack" mentality is rooted in modular thinking and disciplinary hyperspecialization that was central to the development of computerization. She argues that the "common sense" approach of hacking culture is a particular habitus that allows for significant amnesia towards its own socio-political origins and context.

[135] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006) pp. 25-6.

[136] In the case of the Delhi hackathon Irani targets the celebration of speed and the faux urgency of the hackathon form for preventing participants from taking a course of action that would be appropriate to confronting the problem at hand. The end result of the workshop was not that it made parliament more accessible to working class Indians as the group had hoped, but that it reinforced an existing ideology of social entrepreunerialism. This ideology resulted in a rather myopic fixation on the design studio at the expense of avoiding any real contact with the community that the software was meant to help. (Irani, "Entrepreneurial Citizenship," p. 813).

[137] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 7.

[138] Boule goes further and applies the same logic to academia. She writes: "The more academic the conference, the more likely it will be that the speakers will be presenting on topics that are so specific that they are not *applicable* in any other setting. Seeing the work of others is interesting, but it is not always *useful*" [my emphasis] (Ibid., p. 8). She goes on to argue that the planners of conferences are out of touch with the daily realities of their profession: "In the academic world, this can be compounded by speakers who have only research knowledge but no practical experience in the real world" (Ibid., p. 9).

[139] John Durham Peters, "Dialogue and Dissemination," *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, pp. 33-62 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1999).

[140] Matt Shoemaker, "Is it still a THATCAmp?" THATCamp.org, forum thread posted May 28, 2014: http://thatcamp.org/forums/topic/is-it-still-a-thatcamp/.

[141] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 8.

[142] For a critique of tolerance see Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[143] Once again we can see a parallel with the way problematic individuals were dealt with in Occupy Wall Street – they were ignored and marginalized, rather than being formally excluded from decision-making spaces.

[144] Irani describes how after the anthropologist Prem decided to leave the workshop the remaining participants criticized him for not upholding the ethos of the hackathon. He is disparaged for being "politically inflexible," "hardcore" and "ideological," traits that I've shown to be the standard ideological foil of high status in the projective city and in the corresponding ideology of bar camps (Irani, "Entrepreneurial Citizenship," p. 812).

[145] This situation is very similar to that of Marcuse's repressive desublimation. Precisely because in a "one-dimensional society" a certain degree of sexual permissiveness is allowed and basic material needs are met, any refusal of the society appears not only groundless but even an argument in favour of the freedom allowed by such a society. There is therefore no space of refusal that can be articulated from within such a society. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

[146] Agata Pyzik and Kuba Szreder, "Barcamp: Making Knowledge In Public," interview with Critical Practice for *Journal of the Free/Slow University in Warsaw* 1 (2009).

[147] Ibid., p. 2.

[148] Ibid., p. 3.

[149] Ibid., p. 2.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Boule, *Mob Rule Learning*, p. 88.

[152] Ibid., p. 93.

[153] Ibid., p. 92.

[154] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPATION IN ART

A Demand for Social Amelioration, a Desire for Resistance, or a Drive towards Revolution?

During the 2015 version of Nuit Blanche in Montreal I came across a participation-based installation piece. Strips of transparent plastic were suspended in a row from a white A-Frame structure, forming a rectangular wall. On a plinth next to the wall was a stack of cards and a pen with instructions asking the audience to respond to the question: "What is the path to freedom?" Each plastic strip consisted of slots where the audience could insert their card to be displayed as part of the installation. On the cards were written a variety of mostly single-word responses, including "free speech," "love," "peace," and "down with capitalism." This work demonstrates in the most direct and simple way a form of art that is incomplete and open, depending on the audience's participation in order to create meaning, all the while implicitly championing open-endedness and participation as values in themselves. Significantly, the work does not call into being any collective entity or process, even if a few of the statements written by the audience indicate some kind of social project. Instead, it is an assemblage of individual contributions that express vague and even contradictory beliefs. Ironically, in light of the question posed, it offers no path to achieve any of the suggested answers, functioning instead as one more site of self-expression in a world full of similar opportunities.

Participation or interactivity in art has become a widespread norm, one that is commonly present in large public art festivals like Nuit Blanche. This kind of public interactive art has been extensively criticized on a number of levels. The spontaneity and contingency that is supposed to be central to such work unfolds in unsurprising and highly scripted fashion as the audience is asked to perform a specific task that leaves little room for action that disrupts the frame of the

work and whose stakes are negligible. Interaction tends to take place between the individual and the work, which often showcases and fetishizes the use of technology, rather than unleash a social process among the audience. These kinds of projects are often decontextualized from their cultural and political context. Art festivals like Nuit Blanche have come under scrutiny for contributing to processes of commercialization and gentrification, ostensibly bringing art to a wider audience but watering down the content as art is subsumed within a tourist economy.[1] In Montreal the Nuit Blanche is situated on the periphery of a winter carnival kind of event. However, if Nuit Blanche represents a carnivalesque experience, it is one that is highly controlled and channeled towards commercial exchange.

Gentrified forms of public interactive art are easy to dismiss for their benign and banal affirmations of the status quo. And yet, participation as an ideal in contemporary art goes much deeper than such participatory spectacle. In this chapter I explore participation as an emancipatory ideal in art by considering work that is socially engaged and critical, rather than simply affirmative and interactive. In the case of the most critical and compelling participatory art, the staging of collaboration and the treatment of social relations as an aesthetic medium draws on the legacy of the historical avant-gardes and their desire to sublate art into life, and in this way to contribute to radical social transformation. At the same time, the values of the participatory complex, in particular by privileging dialogue, rejecting mediation, and placing an emphasis on process over product can result in work that is more conciliatory and adaptive to existing institutions than confrontational and challenging. While socially engaged artists wish to blur the line between art and life in order to effect social reality, the desire for utility can contribute to art's cooptation by state cultural agencies.[2] The belief that participation is the key to

repairing the social bond by bringing marginalized individuals and communities into an inclusive

process of creative collaboration can function as a mean to repress the aesthetic

Figure 1. Nuit Blanche 2015.

strategies and forms of action that challenge existing social relations and hegemonic ideas. While

aesthetic strategies that are confrontational, divisive, unsettling or disorienting are treated as

illegitimate by participatory discourse, these strategies may also be able to address the

contradictions of everyday life under capitalism.

On the level of political content, the art practices that I examine in this chapter are

commendable and "correct" from a leftist perspective. All of them attempt to have a direct

impact on the non-art spheres of economic, political and social relations. While much socially engaged art has been judged according to the concrete benefits of its intervention, what is particularly significant in my analysis is the different modes of enjoyment that these works produce for participants or audiences. While most of the art I look at is based on participatory process, I argue that more important than the simple fact of collaboration is the mode of enjoyment that is activated in a work and how this relates to or unsettles existing ideology.

In order to elaborate the different ways that participation as an ideal can be manifest in socially engaged art I will begin by laying out the competing positions of two influential theorists of such work, Grant Kester and Claire Bishop. The differing approaches of these two writers set up a productive tension between participation as ethical interaction based on dialogical process and participation as a disruptive intervention that treats social relations as an aesthetic medium. It is within these conflicting treatments of participation that I situate the work of the artist collective Superflex. Over the last two decades, Superflex have made participatory relations a central concern of their work. I argue that Superflex achieve an effective balance between socially ameliorative collaboration and an attention to the aesthetic frame, an attempt to politicize their practice, and an embrace of mediation. At the same time, the limits of participatory ideals are apparent at the level of enjoyment. As critical as Superflex may be, their work does little to disturb the dominant mode of enjoyment of art audiences. Their work is pragmatic, ethical and critical, but it is not destabilizing, disruptive or troubling when it comes to many aspects of contemporary ideology. Superflex's core strategy of flexibility and adaptability attempts to transform capitalism from within, ultimately upholding belief in a more humane capitalism.

In order to elaborate two competing modes of enjoyment I contrast Superflex with activist art practices that situate themselves directly within social movements rather than within art institutions. The first is PublixTheatreCaravan, whose participatory and nomadic caravan was organized as part of the "no borders" and alter-globalization movements of the late-nineties and early two-thousands. I draw on Gerald Raunig's interpretation of PTC as a temporary assemblage of art and politics that embraces a logic of deterritorialization. Lastly, I analyze Papas Fritas' burning of Chilean student debt papers as an example of social movement art that dispenses with participation in favour of a strictly interventionist practice. The distinction between participation and intervention tends to be a difference between conciliatory, inclusive ideology, and confrontational, disruptive symbolism and practices. In spite of the participatory nature of the theatre group, the two cases I look at here both share a clearly oppositional and confrontational approach that produces a transgressive enjoyment for participants. Nonetheless, there are significant differences in how these art works imagine political change and in the nature of the social movements to which they contribute. I argue that Papas Fritas' act allows for a different kind of enjoyment – neither the self-satisfied enjoyment of ethical collaboration, nor the transgressive enjoyment of short-sighted rebellion, but rather the enjoyment unleashed through commitment to what Slavoj Žižek terms a "lost Cause."

An Ethics of the Demand: Dialogue and Social Amelioration as Ethical Standards

The work of Grant Kester is a good place to begin a discussion of participation in art. Kester is one of the earliest art critics to attempt to produce a conceptual framework for thinking about discussion-based projects within contemporary art practice. His 2004 book, *Conversation Pieces*, focuses on art in which discussion, dialogue, and conversation are the primary aesthetic medium

of the work.[3] Kester's concept of "dialogical aesthetics" is developed in contrast to the foil of twentieth-century avant-garde art. Kester characterizes avant-garde strategies as "violent attacks" on the semantic systems of the viewer, which are based on presumptions of the inherently corrupting and impossible nature of discursive communication.[4] Kester argues that it is both possible and preferable to engage audiences in gentle forms of communicative exchange while still achieving the important critical task of challenging dominant stereotypes. It is the reductive nature of this contrast between the "violent" avant-garde and "ethical" dialogical practice that is the most problematic dimension of his argument.

Kester's interpretation of the modernist avant-garde emphasizes an aesthetics of disruption, ambiguity and shock intended to destabilizing the viewer.[5] In order to disturb dominant mores, categories of thought and stereotypes, avant-garde artists make use of defamiliarization, juxtaposition, abstraction, montage; they negate familiar forms of representation and narrative, as well as theatrical communication techniques. These confrontational strategies are based in a fundamentally antagonistic relationship with the audience that Kester interprets as a symptom of the political, economic and social context of the mid-nineteenth century.[6] During this period, the rise of industrialization, bourgeois market values, scientific positivism and mass culture created a situation where artistic production was vulnerable to the instrumentalizing and commercial pressures of the market. Against these tendencies modernist artists attempted to create work that was radically autonomous from any kind of utilitarian values and instead posited art as containing inherent worth, as epitomized in the art for art's sake movement. At the same time, a modernist art theory had developed that characterized the aesthetic realm as offering a potentially universal basis for social equality.[7] Referring primarily to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, Kester describes how common cognitive experience was thought to provide a

universal ground of association and unity because it was a level of human experience beyond the discord of politics and its ideological and identitarian conflicts.[8] While in theory, and according to Kester's interpretation of Kant, the perception of abstract works have the potential to be universally available, in reality the experience of this aesthetic common sense was highly classed.[9] The universal qualities of modernist art works were achieved by distancing themselves from the worldly and particularistic nature of their cultural context in search of a more transcendent realm of autonomy. The exclusive nature of aesthetic experience and its distance from the sensibilities of popular audiences becomes one of the main fulcrums upon which Kester's argument unfolds.

According to Kester, the situation out of which avant-garde art emerged set off a trajectory in which artists attempted to make work that was as unpalatable to the audience as possible. Since the rational level of discourse and the existing symbolic order was presumed by these artists to be based on violence and alienation, a belief that was reinforced by the butchery of mechanized warfare in the First World War and the order of industrial production, the only way to avoid reproducing this order was to embrace an aesthetic sphere beyond language and discursive intelligibility.[10] While for some modernist movements, like Abstract Expressionism, this rejection of the dominant social system leads to a distrust towards language and a will towards the inscrutability of formalist abstraction, for others it leads to what Kester calls the "orthopedic aesthetic."[11] Kester places revolutionary art movements that actively engage with the audience and popular culture in this category, including the Russian productivists, Sergei Eisenstein's film montage, and the radical theatre of Proletkult and Bertolt Brecht.[12] Despite these artists' engagement with popular forms and audiences, Kester distances them from later dialogical aesthetics because their work continues to emphasize an aesthetics of shock and conceives of the

viewer as an "inherently flawed subject" whose "perceptual apparatus" needs correction.[13] While Kester agrees with these artists that we are surrounded by hegemonic cultural discourses, he is concerned with how this aesthetic approach ostensibly supposes the artist to be a superior being, who is able to see through the mystifications of daily life in a way that others cannot. For Kester, what "orthopedic" artworks have in common is that they all are based on a relationship to the viewer that posits their "lack," which in some way the artists or the work can fill in with their insight.

Kester goes on to describe the emergence of dialogical aesthetics in the postwar period as a gradual questioning of the exclusivity of modernist aesthetics and an embrace of the democratization of art through a transformed relation to audiences. This shift begins with artists who make work that draws attention to its context and to audience perception, as seen in minimalism and performance art. This quickly develops into all kinds of interactive and participation-based projects that have the designations of community art, site specificity, new genre public art, and socially engaged art practice.[14] In contrast to orthopedic aesthetics, dialogical aesthetics revolves around the belief that communicative exchange can lead to increased critical awareness over time. Mutual transformation is a result of ongoing discussion rather than the production of an instantaneous insight resulting from avant-garde shock and distanciation.

The Austrian collective WochenKlausur is one of the most exemplary cases of socially engaged art that prominently embraces dialogue as its central medium. Kester returns to WochenKlausur throughout the book as an example of the potential of dialogue to overcome entrenched differences.[15] WochenKlausur engages in extensive discussions with particular communities in order to uncover a precise problem that they then seek to aid in resolving. Their

advocacy-based projects involve bringing together diverse stakeholders into a conversational

context that removes some of the constraints typically produced by official roles and media

scrutiny. For example, *Intervention to Aid Drug Addicted Women* (1994) saw WochenKlausur

invite politicians, journalists, sex workers, and local activists from Zurich to a series of

conversations about drug policy.[16] The conversations were held on a small sightseeing boat on

Lake Zurich, providing an intimate space for discussion that was spatially and temporally

removed from the regular lifeworlds and official roles of the participants. Individuals who were

normally on opposite sides of the debates on drug policy managed to come to consensus on the

creation of a boarding house for drug-addicted women. This solution directly responded to the

concerns of sex workers who were often homeless and in need of a space to sleep during the day.

A number of questions have been raised about WochenKlausur's and similar artists' projects

that aim to directly affect social policy.[17] Some art theorists are concerned about how such work

can be included in a discussion of aesthetics and differentiated from social work when its scope,

criteria and aims are completely subsumed by social reform. Should a project like this be

assessed solely in terms of its policy outcomes? WochenKlausur insist on understanding their

practice as art, but their motivations appear to be largely strategic.[18] Defining the project as art

opens up funding opportunities and avoids the more rigorous control mechanisms and

regulations of social work. The art frame creates more room to maneuver and can lead to more

creative solutions and disarm participants from falling back into automatic positions and roles.

For his part, Kester acknowledges that political outcomes alone are not adequate to judge such

work.[19] He highlights the spatial and temporal dislocations of the Lake Zurich discussions as

important aesthetic features introduced by WochenKlausur.[20] However, it is clear that for Kester

the most important feature of the dialogical practices he examines are neither the political outcomes nor the aesthetic characteristics, but rather the ethical quality of the collaborations.

Kester views a dialogical work as successful if it offers an ethically exemplary collaborative model that can be replicated by others. He goes on to offer other examples of dialogical practice, which he posits as privileging a mode of communication based on an ethics of alterity, a renunciation of the authorial position of the artist, and an openness to mutual transformation.[21] In dialogical works, the artists are undoubtedly progressive and the issues they address are those that demand moral outrage. However, they tend to remain ensconced within the horizons of existing liberal democratic reformism.[22] A central limit of WochenKlausur's projects is that they target single issues and try to provide a specific solution, but these do not contribute to a broader understanding of structural or systemic problems. Kester's dialogical framework goes one step further than WochenKlausur in understanding social problems as rooted in individuals' deeply ingrained fear of difference. In Kester's approach, social problems are implicitly construed as resulting from failures in communication that can be overcome by creating contexts where people encounter difference and learn to temper their egos and self-interest. What is left out of this picture is the fact that political injustice is often the result of conflicting interests and structural constraints and not simple misunderstanding or individual prejudice and ill-will. For instance, it is difficult to imagine any meaningful progress emerging out of a WochenKlausur-style dialogue between oil executives and climate change activists over the issue of tar-sands development. This is not to say that any single art project could or should be expected to bear the weight of responsibility for resolving such large-scale issues. It does mean that we should acknowledge the potential contributions to be made to processes of politicization by artistic practices that utilize symbolic dissonance, rupture, shock, defamiliarization, and even

controversial, quasi-legal or illegal direct action. This is especially the case in the context of political divisions that are based on vast power inequalities and where dialogue simply reaffirms the façade of a pluralistic democratic public sphere. Ultimately, whether dialogical processes are employed by artists is less important than whether the project contributes to raising critical consciousness and politicization. A key distinction could be posited between works that are ameliorative and apolitical and those that aim to politicize situations and build on existing social movements.

In contrast to Kester's reductive characterization of avant-garde aesthetics, politicization in my view involves more than merely delivering the correct political ideas to an audience or shocking them into consciousness in a way that presumes the superiority of the artist and the lack of the viewer. Following Žižek's insight that ideological attachments operate not on the level of what we think (the explicit political ideas we consciously subscribe to), but at the level of our activity (how we are nonetheless interpellated by the structuring of our daily reality or an externalized unconscious), part of what makes an artwork compelling is how it produces enjoyment for the audience and artists. In the final pages of *For They Know Not What They Do*, Žižek offers a useful breakdown of differing approaches to ethics in psychoanalysis that he associates with various approaches to leftist politics.[23] The four approaches are an ethics of demand, desire, enjoyment and drive, and each represents a different way of dealing with desire and our relation to the big Other, understood as the anonymous rules and symbols that structure our social universe. Žižek associates the obsessive with an ethics of the demand, wherein the subject attempts to make themselves useful to the Other at any cost.[24] Whereas Žižek associates this dynamic with social democratic politics, in the case of social engaged art this could be applied to an NGO-style pragmatic gesture that attempts to serve the concrete needs of marginal

communities, but always within the limits of the possible and precluding something more politically transformative. Some artists and audience thus occupy this obsessive position in which the guilt over knowledge of social inequality is repressed or temporarily assuaged by the awareness of the utility of the work, enabling us to enjoy our consumption without any deeper obligation to political organization. For all of their good intentions and progressive ideas, WochenKlausur's projects appear to be caught in this obsessive attempt to meet the demand of the Other. Their artistic production reads like an endless list of reactions to the symptoms of a larger political crisis that avoids addressing this crisis directly by moving on to uncovering the next demand on the part of the public so that art can feel useful.[25]

Kester acknowledges the problematic legacy of Victorian reformism on dialogical works that are oriented towards social amelioration.[26] The discourse of Victorian reform presumes that the cause of poverty and disenfranchisement is primarily individual rather than systemic. Because the act of giving is tied to the spiritual growth of not only the recipient, but also the reformer, the act of giving must be a fundamentally private transaction brought about not by obligation or guilt, but as a spontaneous outpouring of moral compassion. Kester points out that today's community artist is positioned as a social service provider whose practice comes to replace and contribute to the dismantling of social policy in favour of a privatized notion of philanthropy and moral pedagogy. Yet he goes on to argue that this re-positioning of community art along conservative lines can be overcome and seems to suggest that this requires artists to adopt the correct political attitudes and collaborate with the right kinds of communities. These would be the politically coherent communities that, according to Kester, diminish the risks of hierarchy and exploitation that are implicit in arts-based collaboration.[27]

One might wonder, does the presumption that the artist knows the correct political attitudes that drive their choice to collaborate with the most critical and progressive community organizations reinforce the same structure that Kester critiques in relation to the orthopedic aesthetic? The choice of collaborators is itself a result of the artist's authorial function and degree of insight into an issue. Kester's dialogical practices simply displace the moment of authorial insight to the moment of conceptualizing who to engage in collaboration. This kind of work does not eliminate authorial insight, even if during the process of collaboration the artist learns from others and the nature of the project shifts. The aspects of avant-garde practice that Kester has deemed ethically problematic continue to arise in dialogical projects. Even when an artist effectively diminishes their authorial presence the very role and identity of an artist and community outsider perpetrates an implicit hierarchy, especially if they aim for the project to have a critical dimension that the collaborators do not necessarily share.[28]

Kester wants artists to be able to maintain a position of critical engagement with communities and produce work that questions existing conditions of inequality and oppression. However, he also at the same time wants to deconstruct the artists' position of enunciation. For Kester, it seems that a critique of society presumes insight on the part of the artist about what is wrong, which in turn presumes the superiority of the artist vis-à-vis the audience, who is positioned as those who are in need of insight and enlightenment. He applies this critique unevenly, however, targeting non-dialogical works as unethical for merely presenting an audience with alternative content, while rationalizing the critical impulses of the artists in cases where a dialogical process is in place. While the authorial will of the artist is still constructed as ethically problematic, dialogue is held to be enough to temper it. This leads to curious interpretations, as when Kester equates the pedagogical strategies of the artist collective Critical Art Ensemble with a retrograde

avant-garde position, and this, despite the group's non-threatening educational aesthetic.[29] Kester characterizes their work as a presentation of critical content in the form of essays, pamphlets and performances that bring a "shock of insight to the benumbed viewer."[30]

The language of shock and description of the viewer as "benumbed" seems completely inappropriate to CAE's work and is symptomatic of Kester's belaboured attempt to draw strict ethical divides between non-dialogical and dialogical projects. For example, CAE's food laboratory project *Free Range Grain* (2004) offers audiences access to scientific tools that enable them to discover whether the food they eat contains GMOs.[31] The project is not primarily dialogical and CAE reject making work that purports to speak on behalf of any marginalized community. Instead, they see themselves as a monadic cell intent on challenging entrenched institutions. Rather than undermine their authorial role, CAE present the critical ideas in their work to be their own. Their ideas become a contribution to an aesthetic and public space that can then be taken up, rejected and debated actively by the audience. But beyond simply presenting ideas, the food laboratory offers the audience tools with which they can interrogate the world around them. In an essay discussing their thoughts on biotechnology, the CAE say they wish to

> represent the unseen elements of biotechnical developments in ways that are accessible and meaningful to nonspecialists. CAE believes that the best way to do this is through participatory projects in which information and actual scientific projects are brought to nonspecialists outside a context overwhelmed by signs of scientific authority.[32]

There is no presumed superiority implied here or special skills the artists purport to possess, merely an awareness that the CAE's artist status gives them access to tools (the scientific equipment used in the project) and spaces (the gallery exhibition) that the majority of the population may not have access to. In cases such as this, one begins to wonder whether dialogical process should really be held up as more important than the political horizons of the

intervention in question. The fact that CAE hold up certain elements of participatory ideals while also drawing on a language of tactical and interventionist media troubles Kester's attempt to more strictly delineate dialogical from orthopedic aesthetics and indicates that a more productive approach to participation in art would be one that focuses more strongly on the continuities and influences between avant-garde strategies and participation as an ideal in socially engaged art. Instead, Kester tries to distance CAE from the dialogical works he prefers and imply that their strategies are alienating.

The strongest insight one could draw from Kester's book is his argument that dialogical works should seek to collaborate with "politically coherent communities."[33] These are defined by Kester as communities that have already established a self-defined collective identity and internal organization prior to the engagement with the artist, which he thinks can help prevent the problem of artists parachuting into contexts and attempting to impose community on people presumed to be isolated and unformed "raw material." This could be a direction that opens up into projects that are more highly politicized than many of those Kester explores here, which at best tend to amount to little more than community building exercises, extensions of social work, or concrete but minor reforms. In today's context of participation as ideology, dialogue is regularly used to disarm radical movements by diffusing tensions and operating as a method of manipulating people into accepting the status quo. This alone should be enough for us to be wary of automatically imputing an ethical status to dialogical methods and continue to insist on the importance of the surrounding political context, not to mention the ideological and aesthetic frame of the work. Kester remains a pragmatist, aware that one can never really avoid the hierarchy that is implicit in the role of an artist engaging with non-art and typically marginalized communities. His attempt to attend to the political and aesthetic dimensions of these works is

generally overshadowed by his insistence on the primacy of art as an ethical model, a position that proves inadequate for addressing the complexity of avant-garde strategies.

Bishop's Critique: Aesthetics Beyond Ethics, the Secondary Audience and Lacanian Desire

Kester's characterization of avant-garde art is influenced by an emphasis on formalist art criticism, a line of theory he traces from Kant and Friedrich Schiller, to Clive Bell and Roger Fry, to Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. He provides a compelling account of this version of modernism as well as the reaction against it on the part of the postwar generation of North American artists who sought to engage the audience in different ways. However, this focus on formalist art theory comes at the expense of an acknowledgment of the diversity of avant-garde art practices. Kester devotes only a few pages to the legacy of the revolutionary avant-gardes who actively engaged with audiences and drew on the forms and content of popular culture. He mentions these mostly in order to dismiss them as an orthopedic aesthetic. It would seem that early experiments with audience participation on the part of the historical avant-garde as well postwar European groups would be an important touchstone for contemporary artists who understand art as contributing to social transformation. We should consider the possibility that participation in art is more than a negation of avant-garde practices and has actually been influenced by the latter.

In comparison to Kester's treatment, Claire Bishop's 2012 book *Artificial Hells* is more satisfying in its attempt to trace the presence of participatory values and practices in art back to the beginning of the twentieth century.[34] Bishop avoids the reductive dichotomy between avant-garde distanciation and dialogical interaction that Kester's argument depends on, instead approaching participation as a concept that has encompassed multiple strategies for imagining

collective experience across different historical contexts and that is marked by particular political conjunctures. She focuses her analysis around three intense political periods and the participatory art practices that accompanied or followed on these events, including the Russian Revolution of 1917, the uprisings of 1968, and lastly the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Bishop locates the historical precedents of participatory themes in art in theatrical and performance-based traditions rather than in painting or the readymade, which are the forms typically placed at the centre of twentieth-century art historical narratives.[35] She begins by exploring the examples of Italian Futurism, the mass public re-stagings of revolutionary events in the early years of the Russian Revolution, Proletkult theatre, and Parisian Dada. The drive towards participation-based processes and interactions found in these works is in part an outcome of the radical conceit of sublating art into life, a goal that was associated in Leftist art movements with the overcoming of capitalist alienation, the division of labour, and the technocratic state, and which continues to underlie some of the assumptions and ambitions of participatory art today. These are movements that Kester largely glosses over as shock-oriented in his own characterization of early twentieth-century avant-gardes.

Bishop's argument is a critique of ethics as the main criterion for assessing participatory art and an insistence on the importance of the aesthetic frame. She contends that the ethical turn in contemporary art, a shift towards assessing work based on either the quality of its collaborative process or whether it leads to demonstrable ameliorative outcomes, results in a number of reductive dichotomies and reliance on a general set of ethical precepts rather than attention to the disruptive specificity of a work.[36] Within an ethically-charged climate of art criticism the focus is whether the intentions of the artist are noble, whether they have adequately renounced their own authorial position, and whether they have established a collaborative model that could be

replicated. Assessment resorts to establishing whether the project exhibits "good" collaboration rather than "bad" individual authorship but neglects to address more productive and interesting questions as to what meanings the work is producing or eliciting and how it relates to its specific context beyond presuming that collaboration is itself an inherent good. Bishop argues that this approach to art making and criticism risks functioning as a repressive norm that constrains the more critical impulses of artists.[37]

Bishop's concerns about the rise of ethics over aesthetics is related to the advent of neoliberal cultural policy. She notes that "third way" governments in the UK and Northern Europe have embraced socially engaged art as a form of social amelioration that can fill in the gaps created in the welfare state by neoliberal reforms.[38] Support and funding for this work is often premised on an instrumentalization of art that is tied to demonstrable outcomes that reduces space and support for artistic experimentation as an intrinsic value. Furthermore, citing Jacques Rancière, she notes how the broader discourse of ethics has been recuperated, along with democracy and human rights, as a premise of American imperialism and military intervention.[39] In this context an ethical discourse focusing on individual interaction and exclusion from spaces of privilege depoliticizes issues of social justice. Works that presume that participatory process is implicitly progressive risk reinforcing and lending support to the existing hegemonic order by positing that better integration into the capitalist West is the solution to political oppression and poverty. However, Bishop is not rejecting ethical considerations entirely. She notes that any collaboration that involves other humans requires attention to ethics, but she sees this as merely a starting point for a successful work and not the inevitable goal.[40]

If ethical criteria are problematic, what can aesthetics bring to the discussion of participatory works that are conceived to be anti-spectacular? Bishop describes how many socially engaged

artists and art critics associate aesthetics with formalism, decontextualization and depoliticization – the kind of work that is exchanged on the art market or that re-affirms a conservative cultural hierarchy.[41] Against this tendency, she wishes to defend the space of aesthetics as a significant dimension of participatory art projects, one which is not of secondary importance to their social effects but that contributes to the political potential as well as the compelling and enduring qualities of the best examples of such work. Rather than reduce aesthetics to a purely visual register, as many of its detractors do, Bishop understands it rather as an ability to think contradiction.[42] The aesthetic is based on a paradox between, on the one hand, the space of autonomy and distance from means-ends relations, and on the other, the desire to blur the lines between art and life with the intention of influencing or transforming the world.[43] While for many of today's artists, the aesthetic sphere is considered too removed from real effectivity, Bishop points out that it is this very autonomy that artists draw on strategically to allow for experimentation outside of the constraints of traditional politics.[44]

In order to better define the category of art, Bishop draws on Rancière to argue that the aesthetic already contains the promise of social amelioration. She defines the aesthetic as "*aisthesis*: an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality."[45] *Aisthesis* is a concept drawn from Rancière, who shifts the discussion of autonomy away from the art object and instead focuses on our experience of art.[46] Aisthesis is a mode of sensible perception with which we approach art and where we temporarily suspend judgement that is based on either reason or understanding. For Rancière, this freedom from logic, reason or morality that defines aesthetic experience suggests the possibility of politics "because the undecidability of aesthetic experience implies a questioning of how the world is organized, and therefore the possibility of changing or redistributing that same world."[47] It is the very ambiguity

and contradictory nature of aesthetic experience that portends political dissensus. In sharp contrast to Kester's position, Bishop understands the sometimes disturbing or inscrutable nature of many avant-garde strategies as fundamental to the political imagination in situations that might otherwise remain firmly entrenched within the given coordinates of possibility. It is for this reason that Bishop insists on the importance of layered, contradictory meanings, ambiguity, and potential discomfort at the heart of successful participatory works. However, she also points to the limits of Rancière's conceptualization of art and politics in that it renders all art political while leaving its ideological positions indeterminate.[48] The distribution of the sensible can be reordered in progressive or reactionary ways.

This awareness of the ideologically ambiguous nature of aesthetics is another reason why Bishop chooses to approach art projects as singular works whose meaning must be derived on a case by case basis rather than distilled to an ethical model of collaboration that can be praised regardless of the results in each particular instance of its use. She supplements her Rancièrian approach with an ethics of Lacanian singularity in which a work is judged according to its fidelity to a singularized desire rather that a repressive social consensus.[49] Because aesthetic forms have no fixed or instrinsic political affiliations, their meaning can only be determined with reference to historical and political context. Bishop illustrates the multivalent political articulations of participation as an artistic form through many historical and contemporary examples, describing how it was articulated with nationalist fervour and total commitment to a cause by the Italian Futurists, or seen as an affirmation of an artificial collective unity in the early Soviet Union, or utilized as a non-conformist mode of disruption and intervention on the part of the Parisian Dadaists.[50]

Bishop's book is an effort to establish aesthetic criteria through which we can approach participatory works that operate through largely non-visual relationships. One of her central arguments is that in spite of the non-optical orientation of many participatory projects and artists' disavowal of spectacle, participatory works always function in relation to spectators in the form of the "secondary audience" of the work.[51] Projects that involve direct collaboration with a particular group of participants or community nonetheless must be conveyed in some way at some point to the broader public, who are typically excluded by necessity or circumstance from direct participation in these highly situational and temporally finite works. Dismissing the simplistic binary of active and passive that often grounds critiques of spectacle, Bishop argues for the importance of the mediating object as something that is both inescapable and that brings the artist and audience into relation. She notes how many critics regarded early participatory works from the 1990s, such as Mary Jane Jacob's groundbreaking Culture in Action exhibition, as failures precisely because they took little account of the secondary audience, rejecting representation so thoroughly that the work becomes an exclusive experience unavailable to the public except through curators' descriptions in catalogues.[52] Bishop praises more recent artists who have developed multiple modes of representation that speak to many different audiences and add layers of complexity and contradiction to the initial live situation or interaction.[53]

Another point that Bishop highlights is the idea that the opposition between control and contingency is a key aesthetic dimension that is present in participatory works.[54] Like spectatorship, the authorial role of the artist can be suppressed or denied, but it nonetheless remains as a fundamental dimension of any participatory project. The artists are the instigators of the work and their conceptual and material decisions continue to play a role in determining the meaning of the work even when extensive audience collaboration is involved. The tension

between the limits placed on a situation by the artist and the spontaneous and contingent contributions of the audience is one fulcrum that defines a work.[55] Bishop points to a wide range of approaches to this issue in participatory works, from those that are mutually determined by the artist and the audience, as in Futurist cabarets or Jean-Jacques Lebel's anarchic happenings in the 1960s, to those that are more highly scripted, such as the delegated performance works of Santiago Sierra or Phil Collins' *They Shoot Horses* video.

Finally, Bishop contends that the quality of a participatory work can in part be determined by the degree to which it activates contradictory reactions and interpretations, opening up social reality to questions that might not otherwise be posed with the same degree of intensity. In this way she distances aesthetic assessment from straightforward ethical praise of the politically correct position adopted by the artist and demands that critical art be more than agitation or advocacy for a cause or marginalized group. She offers the example of Christoph Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria* (2000) as a compelling if troubling work whose ambiguity does not allow for a singular interpretation and yet became an event through which to confront the contradictions of Austrian immigration policy.[56] Schlingensief invited a number of asylum-seekers to a shipping container placed in the centre of Vienna. The container was designed as a "Big Brother"-style reality TV environment and emblazoned with a large sign reading "Foreigners Out." The living environment was monitored by a live video feed and web cast on webfreetv.com where viewers were invited to vote on a daily basis to have their least favourite inhabitants removed. The losing refugees were sent back to the deportation centre from which they came; the winner was offered a cash prize and the chance to become an Austrian citizen through marriage if a suitable volunteer stepped forward. The artist sat on the roof with a megaphone providing running commentary on the proceedings and yelling provocations to the

surrounding crowds who argued intensely with one another. The project caused considerable controversy and confusion amongst the public with both right wing nationalists and leftist critics praising and condemning it. Some leftist students even attempted to sabotage the container. For Bishop what is interesting about this work is not that it failed to convert people to a pro-immigration position, as some critics charged, but that an artificial detention centre attracted more debate and interest than the actual detention centre only a few miles away.[57] The work demonstrates the power of the aesthetic frame to highlight social contradictions and generate dissensus, sometimes more effectively than straightforward political activism.

Bishop offers a valuable critique of the dominance of ethical criteria in participatory art and a defense of avant-garde strategies and aesthetics for unsettling our presumptions and disrupting structures of enjoyment. This position allows more space for revolutionary art beyond the stultifying task of exemplifying an ethical ideal of social relations. She contrasts a self-suppressing sense of social obligation and fidelity to that of a singularized desire, which can be used to defend an aesthetics of perversity, paradox and negation.[58] In the following section I will draw on some of her aesthetic considerations to explore the participatory work of the Danish artist collective Superflex. My analysis will emphasize their embrace of mediation, their active attempt to work within the institutional frameworks of art, as well as their appropriation of market relations in order to add greater extension to their work. Their participatory ethos fuels work that is critical of economic inequality and corporate control over intellectual property. However, at the level of enjoyment Superflex does not escape the tendency towards a politically correct liberal ameliorism.

To Be of Use: Superflex's Tools of Participation and Market Utopia

Rasmus Nielsen, Jakob Fenger and Bjornstjerne Christiansen began working together as the artist collective Superflex in 1993. In their practice, Superflex act as instigators of projects that often involve extensive collaborations with other organizations, experts, or communities. As artists they see themselves as facilitators or mediators rather than creative producers. Many of their major works, which have a strong conceptual dimension, are ameliorative in orientation and pragmatic, aiming to realize a concrete improvement in the world. Superflex have initiated a wide range of projects which they conceive as "tools" that can be used by other people beyond the control or purview of the artists. Self-organization is a central value found across many of Superflex's diverse projects. Their ideal is for the projects they start to be able to continue to function in the absence of the artists and to gain a life of their own. Crucially, Superflex often rely on market strategies in order to develop tools that are self-sustaining outside of art world institutions and funding. To these ends they have registered a number of their projects as actual businesses, including Supergas, Superchannel and Superdesign, and they have collaborated with various business partners. Their earliest works were exercises in branding, launching the group with an orange logo and displaying their name on banners and other surfaces. This appropriation of techniques of corporate brand building would continue to be a core strategy of the group.

Superflex are an interesting case in the discussion of the potentials and limits of participatory ideals in art. In my view, their approach to participation cannot simply be dismissed as apolitical community art that centres entirely on small-scale ethical interactions as a path to social progress. There is a strong critical edge to their projects, which highlights capitalist property regimes, power inequalities and institutional limits, while also offering a commons-based conception of free culture and self-organization as resistant to global capitalism. Moreover,

Superflex appear to embrace collaboration and audience participation while still creating work that would meet many of the aesthetic standards highlighted by Bishop. In the following I will consider three of Superflex's works, *Guaraná Power* (since 2003), *Free Beer* (since 2004) and *Today We Don't Use the Word Dollars* (2009), with attention to specific issues: the embrace of mediation; conceptualization of the secondary audience; the maintenance of the authorial role of the artists; the application critical and oppositional politics; and lastly, the production of small gestures with ambitious aspirations. While representing a critical approach to participation in the art world, the work of Superflex nevertheless allows us to discern some limitations of the participatory approach. What these works certainly do not do is disturb or unsettle the art audience, or cause them to question or interrogate their own ideological position. The strategy of flexibility and adaptability that is Superflex's hallmark risks creating tools that allow people to adapt to capitalism rather than challenge it.

Guaraná Power is one of the most well-known and widely discussed Superflex projects.[59] For this work, Superflex collaborated with a cooperative of guaraná berry farmers in Brazil whose livelihoods were under threat from a cartel of multinational corporations that had undercut the price of their crop. The guaraná berry contains caffeine and is used in many carbonated beverages in Brazil to add a stimulating effect. Superflex worked with the farmers to develop their own brand of guaraná berry soft drink that the collective could bring to the market themselves, and thus gain greater control over the price of their commodity. Central to the success of this new product was the development of the Guaraná Power brand and label that both reconfigures a popular corporate soda brand and associates the stimulating effects of the guaraná berry with the empowerment of the producers. The Guaraná Power soda was launched by Superflex in a gallery space that mimicked the visual design and layout of product launches by

Figure 2. Superflex, *Guaraná Power*, 2003.

major soda corporations, with the bright logo covering the walls and with crates of the drink

given away as samples. Five commercials were produced that feature the guaraná farmers

concocting humourous narratives about the powerful qualities of the soft drink. All of these have

been presented as videos in Superflex exhibitions.[60] The Guaraná Power soft drink was initially

produced by the small Danish manufacturer Soebogaard and by 2006 had sold 100,000 bottles,

becoming a cult product available at supermarkets in Denmark.[61] Superflex would also sell

Guaraná Power in many of their gallery installations.

The *Guaraná Power* project embodies many of the characteristics of Kester's dialogical

aesthetics. Like Superflex's earlier project *Supergas/biogas*, *Guarana Power* was developed in

collaboration with a peripheral and marginalized community and served a concrete ameliorative

function. The farmer's collective COAIMA had self-organized prior to the involvement of

Superflex and therefore the collaboration could be seen to exemplify Kester's ethical demand

that artists work with politically coherent communities.[62] Furthermore, the project exceeds the

temporal and spatial limits of the art frame. As an autonomous business of the farmer's

cooperative (COAIMA formed a non-profit organization called the Power Foundation to launch

the product in Brazil) there is no predefined end to this project and it carries on independently of

the presence and involvement of the artists. It is therefore another tool of self-organization,

strategically generated by the resources of the art space but enhancing the labour power of the

farmers in a gesture that exceeds strictly aesthetic considerations.

Guaraná Power clearly extends beyond the moment of dialogue and collaboration with the

farmers in order to engage with a broader audience and aesthetic frame. Superflex do not ignore

or reject the mediating function of the art institutions or produce work that leaves no space for

what Bishop would call the secondary audience. The symbolic investment of meaning in a brand

and its widespread circulation is central to the success of the product and the artwork. The western art audience is brought into the work as ethical consumers who can support the farmers by purchasing the product. In the process it highlights global supply chains and the labour standards behind our consumption. It also engages local activists who have sold Guaraná Power at their events as an act of solidarity. In its mimicking of corporate strategies, the bold graphics of the product launch tries to syphon off some of the enjoyment associated with commodity fetishism. Rather than representation being an evil that is repressed in favour of direct interaction, it is understood to be a tool for building networks of support and solidarity across time and space.

The *Guaraná Power* concept also contains a critical edge and exemplifies a shift in Superflex's practice to a politics of opposition towards intellectual property rights. The Guaraná Power label includes a partially covered logo of Ambev, a multinational corporation that produces one of Brazil's most popular soda brands, Antartica. In this way the Guaraná Power brand incorporates an oppositional stance towards the large corporation directly into its marketing. Will Bradley describes how Superflex understands the "international profile of global brands as being a 'raw material' that can be exploited by such counter-economic strategies, in the same way that the raw materials and labour forces of developing countries are exploited by multinational corporations."[63] By turning the brand identity against the company the small collective can partially reverse the power relations of the situation. When planning their exhibition as part of the Brazil Biennial, Superflex were contacted by the president of the festival who banned them from including the Guaraná Power label in the show due to concerns that it would upset a sponsor. The president also refused the work because its commercial aspects were considered inappropriate activity in an art exhibition. Superflex therefore presented an

installation about censorship in which only the blacked out silhouette of the Guaraná Power bottles could be seen. This ironically drew more attention to the project and the influence of the sponsor than would have otherwise been the case. The brand in question later pursued a trademark infringement suit against Guaraná Power. The fact that Superflex invest this project and subsequent projects with opposition to intellectual property rights and support for the Open Source Software movement introduces a degree of criticality and political contestation to their work that prevents it from being interpreted as purely ameliorative in function or restricted to only the economic interests of the farmers' collective (who could have designed a label that made no reference to the corporate logo).

After this experience of censorship Superflex proceeded to create a number of works inspired by the Open Source software movement. In *Free Beer*, they produced a product whose recipe is "open source" and encouraged others to produce it themselves.[64] Playing off of open source software advocate Richard Stallman's well-known statement "free as in 'free speech,' not as in 'free beer,'" Superflex developed a beer brand called "Free Beer" that was intended to operate according the principles of open source software.[65] The recipe for free beer incorporates the guaraná berry as an energizing element. The recipe is made available on the website and managed through a Creative Commons (Attribution-ShareAlike 2.5) license. This means that anyone can produce Free Beer, recreate it or modify the original recipe, use the original brand and label, and sell it at a profit, so long as they agree to also make the recipe available according to the same license and credit the original producers. Free Beer has now been brewed by brewers around the world, including German brewer Skands. It is also regularly available at Superflex gallery shows.

In spite of its open source license, as well as the fact that it depends on the participation of a broader public, *Free Beer* nonetheless highlights the strong authorial role that Superflex continues to adopt in their projects, both on a conceptual and a design level. Troels Degn Johansson recounts how the *Free Beer* project actually began as a collaboration with his students in a design programme at Copenhagen IT University.[66] Acting as invited project supervisors, Superflex tasked the students with developing a beer product and brand that drew on open source software principles and incorporated the guaraná berry into the product and brand. The initial result produced by the students was called "Vores Ol," which means "Our Beer" in Danish. According to Johansson it was not entirely successful.[67] The students struggled to incorporate the guaraná berry's stimulating effects and the farmer's struggle into the brand and web site design. The brand "Vores Ol" draws on the idea that it belongs to the people and has a traditional aesthetic drawing on beer making as a traditionally communal and social practice. It also, in its choice of brand name, reconfigures the marketing slogan of a popular beer brand by Carlsberg, shifting its meaning from simple populism in an anti-corporate direction. Johansson points out that this branding strategy failed to build a strong connection to the open source software concept of the project or to Supeflex's artistic practice and identity. If the project had simply stopped there it might be an example of the potentially compromised aesthetic or design quality that can result when authorial decisions are renounced in favour of participatory inclusiveness. However, after the collaboration with the students, Superflex did not hesitate to develop their own version of the idea, resolving the issues that Johansson describes in relation to the original brand. Superflex's Free Beer boasts a much bolder design aesthetic and dispenses with the local references of the Vores Ol version. This allowed it to enjoy a more global reception and conceptual flexibility. The name "Free Beer" more directly references the open source origins of

Figure 3. Superflex, *Free Beer*, 2004.

its concept, and the website makes the presence of the guarana seed and its role in worker empowerment a central dimension of the brand's narrative. It has since become one of Supeflex's most well-known projects, receiving some press on the lifestyle and arts sections of mainstream news shows.[68]

Although *Guaraná Power* was developed in response to a particular problem faced by a particular community, the work itself aims to exceed this context in a way that many dialogical works do not. It does so mostly through an appropriation of the marketing and design logic of major brands and the organization of the project as a functional business. In this way it inserts itself into an economic system beyond the commodification of artworks within the art market, reaching more people than it would otherwise and contributing to the avant-garde project of

sublating the contradictions between art and life. While few can afford to purchase contemporary artworks by recognized artists anyone can afford a bottle of Guaraná Power. In the process one can become a part of the work and also feel good for helping a good cause. *Free Beer* works according to a similar logic. However, in this case the audience can act not only as consumers of the product but also co-producers. The attempt to create works that are highly replicable and extend beyond a singular community has become a hallmark of Superflex's practice.

Bishop disparages the limited scope of what she characterizes as the "small gestures" of dialogical art. Superflex's *Guaraná Power* and *Free Beer* do feel like small gestures, but ones that nevertheless contain a more ambitious aspiration than many dialogical works. This is mostly due to the way that Superflex have conceptualized their practice as generalizable tools rather than highly context-specific works. It is also due to their appropriation of business strategies. There is something expansive and utopian about works that are intended to exceed the context of their original manifestation, transforming the world as they spread. One can clearly discern a rhizomatic approach to social transformation in projects like this.[69] It is not simply that the project constitutes an ethical model of collaboration that can be praised by art critics and replicated by other socially engaged artists, but that the techniques of self-organization that inhere in the work itself are designed to circulate beyond the boundaries of the art world and the context of the original collaboration. However, regardless of how critical the intentions of Superflex are regarding this appropriation of the extensive reach of the market to circulate critical ideas and practices, the question arises: can the market be bent towards the social good through a combination of consumer politics and subsidy by art institutions? Does the minimal critical distance created by the aesthetic frame relative to these market practices change them into something other than what they are? Can capitalism be reformed from within? Or does

Superflex's flexibility simply offer tools for adapting to the market and surviving it in the short term?

There are competing interpretations of the nature of Superflex's practice in relation to its market strategies. In an early interview, Superflex are very direct in stating their intention to work with both market organization and art institutions rather than outside of them: "It [forming a company for Supergas/biogas] has proved the most efficient form or method for us. Unlike artists who see themselves in opposition to society or who want to be alternative, we are working within the social structure. By using this method we improve our chances of being socially and economically relevant."[70] They go on to characterize their project as an attempt to create small-scale and private utopias within the framework of market exchange, which they argue has the benefit of enabling self-organization and initiative rather than the kind of dependencies that are engendered by charity-based models of developmental aid. They include the neoliberal flourish that "all humans are potential entrepreneurs," which could be taken as a naïve belief in the market to generate meaningful development, or an ironic stance based in over-identification. In his review of an exhibition of *Guaraná Power* in Los Angeles, Anupam Chander reassures us that in spite of the intellectual property issues

> SUPERFLEX's work is not anti-commerce. Rather, it seeks to bring more people into commerce, on fairer terms. Nor is SUPERFLEX's work anti-globalization. Rather, it seeks to bring the benefits of globalization to more people. After all, SUPERFLEX – a Danish group that hopscotches around the world – is itself a prime example of the virtues of globalization.[71]

Chander's affirmative enthusiasm for the benign commercialism of the project can be contrasted with the incoherent screed by Nicolas Bourriaud, in which he characterizes Superflex's approach as representing "real provocation." He asserts that: "there is nothing more disruptive in the economic system than the act of doing something that nobody has asked you to do and for which

you are not paid. Scenario number one, dealing with profit and performed by the professionals, is utterly and completely thrown into disarray by this."[72] This assertion flies in the face of the reality that capitalism depends on massive amounts of unpaid labour, including cultural, artistic and entrepreneurial labour among many others. And this in no way throws the economic system into disarray.

If Superflex's projects are taken as literal attempts to use art world resources to start up fair trade businesses, and if the success or failure of these projects is to be solely assessed in these terms, they would not be particularly interesting. In this case, they could be criticized along the same lines as other forms of consumer politics such as alternative economies, fair trade, and "buy local" initiatives within capitalism.[73] The limits of fair trade initiatives and cooperative enterprises are built into the very laws of the market.[74] If an enterprise is to survive, it must grow and compete, which typically entails the adoption of the same cost-cutting measures and hierarchical organization used by other major corporations. This is the reason that cooperative enterprises tend to either fail to sustain themselves financially, or else abandon their cooperative and fair trade principles as they grow in size and success. Highlighting the fair trade status of products has become common practice among corporations as prominent as Starbucks and American Apparel. Selling a fair trade product hardly raises consciousness about global labour standards or unsettles an audience's daily forms of consumption. It rather mitigates the potential concerns of customers by including social and economic amelioration into the cost of consumption. It does this, however, on a scale that does not threaten the overall imbalance between producers in the 'global South' and the profits of multinational corporations.

Most commentators locate the critical dimension of Superflex's practice not in the direct economic and social effects of their initiatives but rather in either the political potential of their

self-organization tools or in the critical distance towards global trade and commercialism produced by the aesthetic frame. In his analysis of *Guaraná Power*, Bradley acknowledges the weaknesses of fair trade strategies for meaningful social change but argues that the project cannot be reduced to a fair trade initiative.[75] The reasons given are that it generates conflict, that it responds to a very precise situation of exploitation, and that it has greater ambition than most participatory projects. The difference of *Guaraná Power* rests entirely on the political element – the contestation of intellectual property regimes – and not on its fair trade strategy. Others place more emphasis on the autonomy and critical distance afforded to their work by the aesthetic frame. Barbara Steiner argues that Superflex's work is essentially a Derridean deconstruction that compellingly displays its own contradictions. She writes: "[t]hey do not destroy traditional structures but wholly in keeping with Derrida's deconstructive method they pinpoint the contradictions on which the structures are founded."[76] Charlse Esche argues that their practice should be described as an "engaged autonomy" that risks affirming the status quo when it attempts to have real world purchase, but nonetheless retains enough "[m]odernist aspiration to utopian escapism" to prevent it descending into "a related kind of affirmative populism."[77] If Supeflex's "tools" influence the world, it is through the utopian imagination opened up by art's space of autonomy and critique, rather than the success of these projects as direct political or economic interventions. Nonetheless, it is the knowledge that these projects are based on contributing to some level of improvement in the lives of a marginalized community that enables the secondary audience to imagine they are somehow supporting a micro-utopia.

What kind of utopian aspirations do Superflex projects gesture towards? Although *Guaraná Power*'s potential copyright infringement certainly produces a conflict, I am not convinced that the contestation of intellectual property law is enough to distance it from the desire for a more

humane capitalism.[78] While Superflex's stance in defense of the autonomy of the farmer's collective is ethically commendable, the ideal subject of the work is the western ethical consumer and not the politically engaged militant. The (over-)identification with business strategy produces a space of enjoyment that is highly similar to the ethics of the demand, except in this case it is the market that is construed as being capable of living up to demands for social change rather than the social democratic imaginary of the welfare state as in the case with WochenKlausur. Superflex meet the demands of the Other by forming start-up after start-up, attempting to bend the market towards the social and political good.

At this point, Superflex's tendencies towards relational aesthetics should also be discussed.[79] The staging of common production and consumption on the part of the audience is the basis of a number of Superflex works including *Copy Light Factory (2005)*, *Free Sol Lewitt (2010)*, *Social Pudding (2003)*, *Copy Shop (2005)*, *Merchandise Shop (2005)*, *Free Beer* and *Guaraná Power*. In these works, the social relations engendered in the act of consumption and production make up the experience of the work in conjunction with the sensorial properties of the object of these processes. While *Free Beer* for instance works within a compelling conceptual framework established by the artists it also implicitly draws on the conceit of many participatory works that art contributes to repairing the social bond by providing spaces of open and relaxed social engagement. The risk of all such relational aesthetics is that banal everyday practices, such as hanging out in a gallery drinking soda or beer, or making pudding, is elevated into an inherently political and moral gesture that flatters participants while demanding very little of them. The fetishization of sociality as a value in itself is a core dimension of participation as ideology. On a purely aesthetic level, such works can be appreciated for expanding the range of practices that are accepted as art. Problems arise when a politically progressive or radical potentiality is

imputed to such practices as if the social relations they entail are inherently anticapitalist rather than comfortably compatible with the existing art world. Ostensibly, in the case of Superflex, the articulation of this social experience with a larger political project that is critical of intellectual property helps to temper this reductive tendency, which is found in much starker form in the practices of other relational artists, such as Rikrit Tiravanija, with whom Superflex have collaborated.

In spite of the fact that Superflex's practice lives up to the demands of Bishop that participatory work strive to be critical, layered, and actively attend to the aesthetic frame, their work departs from her framework in one significant dimension. These works do not challenge or disturb the ideological attachments of the western art audience. On the contrary, Superflex's projects present themselves in ways that work entirely within the comfort zones of the typical progressive consumer. While the ideology of participation surrounding the rise of digital networks contributed to early characterizations of Superflex projects as being emancipatory, utopian, or in some way related to radical democracy, in retrospect it is difficult to avoid cynicism when the open and participatory premises of works like *Karskrona2* and *Superchannel* have now become the basis of online life through commercial instantiations like Second Life and YouTube.[80] Can art be truly critical without the avant-garde element of destabilization? Some of Superflex's more recent works do adopt a different relationship to the audience that could be interpreted as conforming to the kind of enjoyment Bishop describes as offering the potential to break out of the reductive ethical discourse surrounding participatory art.

As their practice has developed in the 2000s, Superflex have increasingly tended towards works that are less collaborative, and based on gallery-friendly media like video, sculpture and installation. Short films such as *Burning Car* (2008)*, Flooded MacDonalds* (2010), and *The*

Financial Crisis (2009), and installations like *Lost Money* (2009), *Power Toilets* (2010), and *Liverpool to Let* (2012), address the audience through traditional modes of spectatorship, clearly highlighting the authorial role of the artists and containing content that is clearly critical of contemporary social, economic and environmental conditions. During this period Superflex also developed a number of works in response to their experiences of censorship that involve a different approach to audience participation. In their "contract pieces" Superflex draw up a legally binding contract that participating institutions or groups are asked to sign and that limits their behaviour for a certain time period. For instance, for *Today We Do Not Use the Word "Dollars"* (2009) Superflex drew up a contract that was signed by a branch of the Auckland bank ANZ, which stipulated that for one day all employees of the bank must refrain from using the word "dollar(s)." Anyone who broke the contract was sanctioned through a one-dollar fine that went to the bank's staff social fund.[81]

Works like *Today We Do Not Use the Word "Dollars"* fit in with the kind of art praised by Bishop in her chapter on delegated performance. Bishop refers to the tendency by contemporary artists to "outsource" or delegate the role of performer to members of the audience or hired amateurs or experts, rather than assume this role for themselves, as was common in earlier performance art.[82] Superflex's contract pieces treat everyday spaces and interactions as a medium. However, rather than telling participants what to *do*, they are told what *not to do*. These pieces stage relations of constraint rather than the ostensibly "open relations" of their more relational aesthetics style work. They highlight the way legal contracts aim to control people's speech and expression and limit what is possible. The ongoing concern with intellectual property rights and censorship is apparent, except now, rather than stage a transgression of such limits as in their *Copy Light Factory, Guaraná Power, Copy Right* (2006) and other works, and rather

than strategically use the art space to temporarily create a commons of production and exchange, they use an over-identification strategy to impose their own limits on social realities outside of the gallery (in this case a bank, but in another case the entire city of Cork, Ireland). Like Bishop's "artificial hells," the work plays with scripted realities, but the artists' control here emphasizes negation and is entirely non-spectacular. It is possible that the contract works signal a shift in Superflex's approach away from the utopianism attached to participatory spaces and open culture that their earlier work seemed to indicate. Nonetheless, even here Superflex retain their impetus towards social amelioration as the small fines for breaking the contracts are donated to various social causes. Furthermore, while presenting a minor difficulty to the participants, the tone of these directives are clearly playful and do not present us with content that is unsettling in the fashion of Santiago Sierra's staging of exploitation or Schlingensief's ideologically ambiguous *Please Love Austria* (2000). Even when working with negation and constraint, Superflex prefer to make work that is subtly suggestive and inviting rather than provocative. After all, legal documents leave little room for ambiguity and require the knowing consent of the parties involved.

I have argued that among artist collectives that embrace participation as a central value, Superflex manages to be quite successful at working collaboratively and facilitating "commonist" relationships based on Open Source Software ideals and sharing culture. At the same time, their projects work with a rigorous conceptual frame, take into account aesthetic considerations, and strive to make work that contests the exploitation and imbalances that are present in globalized market relations. For these reasons, Superflex seem to address most of the concerns of both Kester and Bishop in offering a case of art that is both participatory and critical. Nonetheless, I have also drawn attention to the problematic nature of Superflex's strategy of

adaptation that indicates an underlying belief in the ability to push markets in the direction of

social good and a tendency to flatter rather than challenge the political and ethical sensibilities of

western art audiences. Superflex's pragmatic ethic of approaching the art institutions as a tool

has enabled them to channel those resources in socially and politically beneficial directions. At

the same time, the balance they strike between non-confrontational participatory aesthetic and

smartly critical content has made them one of the most successful and well-established artist

collectives of the 2000s. While Superflex generate sophisticated projects that can be appreciated

on many levels, their work does not introduce a disturbance into either art or politics that risks

destabilizing either realm.[83] The fact that their form of participatory art is so compatible with

existing art institutions is for some socially engaged artists reason enough to dismiss the efficacy

of such practice when it comes to contributing to radical social transformation. While in her

conclusion Bishop gestures towards radical art's contingency in relation to the broader political

horizons of the left, she has been rightly criticized for privileging work that is for the most part

safely ensconced within the gallery and festival circuit. Kester is in a sense more sympathetic

towards artists' stated desires to work outside of mainstream art world institutions and

meaningfully integrate art and politics. But neither Kester nor Bishop attempt to address the

work of activist artists who do not attempt to work within the boundaries of the gallery system

and rather see themselves as deeply embedded within social movements. Something should be

said for artists attempting to make work that is more difficult to incorporate and more resistant to

art world standards of presentation.

An Ethics of Desire: Activist Art and Deterritorializing Machines

In the concluding chapter in her book, Bishop argues that art cannot itself constitute political

transformation nor should it be made to bear the weight of creating an ideal model of political

organization and subjectivity.[84] Precisely because of the degree of autonomy from moral and ideological judgement that aesthetics produces, the effectivity and political meaning of activist art depends on its relation to the realm of politics. The fact that contemporary participatory art is often invested with political potential is a symptom, Bishop argues, of the uncertain horizon of leftist politics after the decline of the Soviet Union. The historical avant-garde was relieved of the burden of constituting political change by positioning itself in relation to existing political parties and radical social movements. The postwar neo-avant-gardes, while refusing organized politics and instead searching for aesthetic intensity in everyday life, nonetheless still held up aesthetic experience as a disalienating process that contained anti-elitist and egalitarian values. For Bishop, recent participatory art's embrace of the ethical signals both a lack of faith in art as a disalienating endeavour and in the potential of organized politics to effect social transformation.[85] After the collapse of 1960s radicalism and the rise of the neoliberal "There Is No Alternative" ideology, art in the West lacks a coherent narrative of revolutionary transformation within which artists can understand their practice. Consequently, contemporary participatory art exhibits either a lack of connection to a shared political horizon beyond the liberal capitalist present, or else it reflects the limitations of the leftist social movements that currently exist.

Although she does not cite him directly, Bishop's understanding of artistic practice in reference to a "transversal encroachment of ideas" bears a strong affinity to Gerald Raunig's Deleuzian theorization of art and politics as two distinctive but sometimes overlapping "machines."[86] Raunig directly addresses the kind of activist art that works within social movements and that understand their practice as existing within the horizons of revolutionary social change. I will draw on Raunig's discussion of the Austrian theatre collective Volkstheatre

Favoriten and the transnational PublixTheatreCaravan as a foil for the work of Papas Fritas, which will serve as my final site of analysis. The former reflect the loosely defined anti-capitalism of activism at the turn of the millennium while the latter could be seen as an artistic contribution to emerging populist movements that are once again experimenting with mass organizational forms in the period after the 2008 financial crisis.

In his 2007 text *Art and Revolution*, Raunig constructs a recent history of transversal activist art in which he includes the representational practices of groups largely seen as belonging to social movements rather than the institutional art world, including the AIDS activism of ACT UP, the third wave feminist platform of the Woman's Action Coalition, and the anti-racist and anti-fascist activities of the Committees of Public Safety in Germany.[87] The artist activists "embedded" within social movements have little interest in how they are perceived or valued within the art world's aesthetic regime.[88] Instead, these artists assess their practice largely according to the degree to which it contributes to building and sustaining the social movements to which they themselves belong. Their representational practices are therefore largely agitational and propagandistic. Within this recent trajectory of "transversal" activism, Raunig situates the radical theatre collective Volktheatre Favoriten, who collaborated with noborder activists to create PublixTheatreCaravan (PTC) during the anti-G8 summit protests in Genoa in 2001 and who participated in the noborder camp in Strasbourg in 2002. Raunig understands the relation between art and politics in these practices to be that of a temporary alliance and exchange that is more modest than the revolutionary desire to sublimate art into life.[89] The concept of the "transversal" is taken from Félix Guattari and is a spatial metaphor intended to break out of the dichotomy between vertical and horizontal organizational structures. He describes it in this way: "transversals are not at all intended to be connections between multiple

centers or points, but rather lines that do not necessarily even cross, lines of flight, ruptures, which continuously elude the systems of points and their coordinates."[90]

The Austrian theatre collective Volkstheatre Favoriten emerged as a part of a squatted cultural centre operated in the Ernst-Kirchweger-Haus (EKH).[91] Volkstheatre Favoriten performed their own adaptations of plays by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, Heinrich von Kleist and Heiner Müller.[92] Originally, these were performed in the EKH squatted space, but eventually spread to performances in other squats, in public streets, and finally as two separate travelling caravans around Austria, the second as part of widespread anti-racist activism in response to the rise of the radical right-wing government of Jorge Haider in 2000. The caravans were reminiscent of the actions of Reclaim the Streets. Raunig describes how the EKH caravan would take over a street, set up tables with political literature, a kitchen and a sound system, with the aim of producing a carnivalesque atmosphere.[93] Juggling, pie fights and street theatre would be performed in the day, and selections from Volkstheatre Favoriten's plays would be scheduled for the evening. The PublixTheatreCaravan (PTC), which followed from the EKH, was a transnational version of this previous experiment. As part of an emerging movement against borders, PTC was a transnational caravan that grew out of a collaboration between Volkstheatre Favoriten and a number of other noborders activists from ten different European countries.[94] The slogan endorsed was "no border, no nation." The convoy passed through a number of European countries making stops in cities, border camps in Lendava and Frankfurt, and performing at border crossings on the way to major demonstrations against the WEF in Salzburg and the G8 in Genoa. In contrast to the earlier EKH caravans the PTC shifted towards more directlt interventionist performances and actions. For instance, they would set up a fake border crossing near actual borders where they would stop cars and present them with political fliers and "noborder passports."[95]

Raunig theorizes Volkstheatre Favoriten (VF) as an example of transversal activism. Drawing on Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, or fearless speech, he characterizes the collective as aiming to balance a critique of existing society (present in the radical content of their plays) with an internal self-critique that is oriented towards building non-oppressive organizational structures within the collective and in the relation between VF and the EKH institution. These organizational features can be noticed in the rejection of the role of director, collective work and decisions, no membership fees, no exclusions of interested participants, as well as ongoing discussions about the contradictions of the squatted setting.[96] For Raunig, such practice exemplifies an approach to art and revolution that rejects synthesis and top-down identity formation, which he associates with processes of structuralization and reterritorialization, in favour of necessarily ephemeral "concatenations," assemblages of art and politics that constantly work against closure and stasis.[97] The eventual adoption of the caravan format further demonstrated a nomadic and deterritorializing aesthetic and politics.[98]

Volkstheatre Favoriten and PublixTheatreCaravan embody an aesthetic that balances participation with oppositional political content and interventionist tactics. In contrast to Superflex, they do not try to work within markets and institutions but rather present themselves as an alternative on the margins of these institutions: squatting rather than finding a way to pay rent; performing in self-organized spaces or public streets rather than art galleries. They are unabashed outsiders looking in and criticizing what they see while also deconstructing their own internal relations. This work is clearly oriented towards destabilizing existing structures, especially national borders, and presenting audiences with content that is critical of existing realities and that also offers alternative ways of being. The fake border checks performed by the PTC takes drivers by surprise, detourning their expectations. Presumably, Kester would see these

practices as belonging to an orthopedic aesthetic, partially aimed at shaking audiences out of complacency and raising their political consciousness. PTC did not produce a space of reception that enabled an audience to feel self-satisfied with liberal capitalism or that sustained belief in a more humane capitalism. They are primarily deconstructive and oppositional, rather than affirmative or ameliorative. Nonetheless, these experiments were participatory and held up self-organization as an ideal. Their rhizomatic approach to politics implies that the participatory relations they attempted to embody should be seen as pre-figurative of desired social transformation. Similar to the ethical modeling that Bishop is critical of in relation to dialogical art, and somewhat paralleling Superflex's tools, such participation is a standard that is intended to be replicated by others. It is hoped that such iteration might produce effectively resistant spaces to capitalism and state.

On the level of political content, the work of VF and PTC cannot be faulted. Their plays and interventions explicitly support anti-capitalist and anti-oppressive themes and they situate themselves within the spaces created by social movements, whether they be squats or large-scale demonstrations. The resistant stance they adopt positions this art practice within a confrontational or oppositional symbolism that can counter the overly conciliatory and adaptive strategies of more mainstream instances of participatory art. Yet, questions could be raised in relation to the mode of enjoyment that the events staged by VF and PTC produce for themselves and their audience. While not sustaining belief in liberal capitalism, these practices could be understood as sustaining an attachment to resistance itself as a self-perpetuating, self-marginalizing activity that maintains a comfortable distance from state power, allowing participants to revel in the purity of their outsider status. Žižek associates this particular ethical stance with that of the hysteric in psychoanalytic thought.[99] The hysteric is dominated by an

ethics of desire, which should be distinguished from the more general Lacanian maxim to "not give way on one's desire" that is invoked by Bishop. The latter indicates a non-moralistic form of ethics that is based in the singularity of a subject's desire, and is referenced by Bishop to defend the singular nature of an artwork rather than judgement based on generalizable ethical precepts. The former refers to the more precise and symptomatic way that a subject may deal with its relation to power or authority. For the hysteric, in order to keep desire operative, any object that could potentially satisfy it (and therefore extinguish it) must be rejected as inadequate or "not really it." This ethical stance seems to characterize Raunig's encouragement of constant flux and critique, as well as his lack of belief in the feasibility or emancipatory character of any organizational politics that seeks greater longevity than temporary micro-political actions. Any form that does not self-destruct or deconstruct is tainted by the corruption of stasis and power and is therefore "not really it," not the true liberation that can only be experienced through resistance.

The ethics of desire that are at play in the travelling caravans are characterized by a playful, slightly transgressive mode of enjoyment that draws on carnivalesque symbolism. The audience that encounters a caravan street party is offered a temporary space of conviviality, diversion and relaxation where the regular codes of spatial practice have been overturned. The lack of permission for such street festivals adds a mild thrill of transgression to the proceedings that risk being shut down by authorities.[100] The carnivalesque has been criticized as a "steam valve" that releases pent up frustrations but ultimately contributes to the functioning of the system. Žižek has characterized this as the problem of the "excess" of spontaneous rebellion that does not give adequate thought to the "morning after," or the hard work of sustaining meaningful change within the everyday functioning of society.[101] For his part, Raunig rejects this gap between

resistance and state as belonging to an outdated "phase-model" of revolution. According to Raunig this gap is not real because structures of resistance can and should manifest constituent power. While I agree that leftist politics should attempt to constitute the social relations and organizational structures it wishes to see in society in its own process of resistance, I am not convinced that this resolves the issue that Žižek is highlighting. The gap between constituent power and constituted power, which Raunig associates with state power and which he rejects, is a fundamental stumbling block for emancipatory politics that cannot be sidestepped by conflating resistance with constituent power. The reality of this problem is apparent in the fact that existing leftist modes of resistance are not in their present form capable of replacing the functions of the state. This is especially the case for modes of resistance premised on temporary micro-political practices that make a virtue out of nomadic flight.

While a nomadic and deterritorializing aesthetic and politics fosters critique and resistance, it is not well suited to building self-sustaining radical social movements that have a chance at constituting revolutionary political change. The caravans were inherently ephemeral and unstable. Being embedded in a movement that was highly suspicious of mediation risked relegating the PTC's practice to the enclave of a small niche activist community.[102] In Raunig's view, this is the PTC's most valuable quality, precisely because he equates their opposites, structuralization and reterritorialization, with either cooptation by the capitalist state, or twentieth-century top-down approaches to revolution that have tended to result in a strengthening of state structures.[103] The gap between resistance, constituent power and constitutional power that Raunig describes is a gap that no anti-capitalist movement has yet resolved. I am not convinced in Raunig's assertion that resistance and constituent power can perpetually avoid reterritorialization or structuralization, nor is it obvious that the latter processes are inherently

undesirable. There is plenty of evidence to recommend the long-term stability produced by publically owned and managed systems of healthcare, employment insurance, and citizenship rights in a safe and peaceful nation-state, regardless of their limitations and contradictions. Raunig himself is careful to note the difference between the privileged nomadism of the PTC and what he calls the "molecular" flight of refugees attempting to enter and remain in Europe.[104] Although the caravans and noborder camps were organized in solidarity with refugees and aimed to raise critical consciousness about the inequalities and exploitation inherent in globalized capitalism, those without European citizenship could not participate in these nomadic practices. More to the point, those forced into situations of migration do not idealize their condition of deterritorialization but are instead actively seeking a new and better form of stability. Raunig does not characterize the figure of the migrant as a revolutionary subject, but understands the nomadic flight of the noborder activists as a form of offensive action under precarious conditions.

In my final section I would like to explore a work that enables us to imagine a more affirmative form of interventionist art that not only deconstructs, but also contributes to building and strengthening positive forms of solidarity and stability against the precarious conditions of late capitalism. Such a contribution must go beyond both modeling participatory relations as well as liberal capitalist schemes of social amelioration. The work shares a confrontational, oppositional symbolism with the PTC and noborder camps, but it differs in that it does not embrace destabilization and in contrast to micro-political utopias it confronts us with a "lost Cause" of large-scale revolutionary transformation.

Papas Fritas: Interventionist Alternatives, Counter-Stabilization, and Revolutionary Drive

In the period following the 2008 financial crisis leftist social movements have emerged that signal a shift away from the micro-political organizational forms of the alter-globalization movement. The latter could be characterized as loose coalitions of affinity groups, NGOs, labour unions and civil society organizations, congregating for punctual and short-lived demonstrations against the summit meetings of international bodies that regulate and control global trade and finance. Since the 2010s a number of movements have developed that aim for more sustained mobilizations and appeal to a more populist base of support, including the popular assembly movements in Greece, Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the US. There have also been various attempts to articulate these and other social movements with mass organizational forms. For instance, we have seen the rise of new political parties in Europe campaigning against austerity, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. There are ongoing attempts to democratize existing parties or swing their policies to the left, as seen for instance in the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the British Labour Party and the movement surrounding the Bernie Sanders campaign to win the nomination as the Democratic Party candidate in the US federal election. In addition to these attempted revivals of party politics, syndicalist student unions in Quebec and Chile have mounted impressive sustained revolts against the privatization of education and union organizers have worked towards unionizing precarious service workers in the American fast food industry and have joined political efforts to fight for a $15 minimum wage.

How far these efforts at mass organization will go and the degree of success or failure that will result remains to be seen. In my view the resurgence of political spaces in which direct democratic practices are being experimented with on a large scale partially relieves art of the task of modeling participatory relations and creates room for other kinds of aesthetic

interventions. I will look at one exemplary work, *Ad Augusta Per Angusta* by the Chilean artist Francisco Tapia, which was produced against the background of massive student strikes and months-long occupations of university and high school campuses. This is an instance of aesthetics that engages with macro-political intervention and contributes to the symbolism of radical possibility. This work does not directly embody participatory ideals but may constitute a significant aesthetic and symbolic rupture that opens and sustains belief in revolutionary horizons while also creating greater stability in a very concrete way in the present.

On May 12, 2014, Chilean artist Francisco Tapia (aka Papas Fritas, meaning "french fries" in Spanish) released a video statement onto YouTube that went viral in which he confessed to having burned student debt papers worth five hundred million US dollars.[105] According to Papas Fritas, he obtained the debt papers from the University Del Mar's (UDM) central building in Reñaca in early 2013 during a student occupation of the university. Tapia was not a student at the university but told the occupying students that he was there to collect materials for an art installation. After retrieving the documents, Tapia drove them in his white Volkswagen van back to Santiago where he ritualistically burned them one by one. This deed was kept secret until the video was released in 2014, at which time he also exhibited the ashes of the debt papers in the white van that had been transformed into a mobile gallery with the logo of UDM painted on the side. One side of the van opened to an interior niche containing objects lit by small spotlights, a plastic bin filled with the fine grey ashes and a diploma mounted on the wall issued to Papas Fritas for a "Bachelor of Pyrokenisis in Education Banking Scams."[106] The back of the van contained a flat screen TV monitor that played Papas Fritas' confession video. A letter of self-denunciation addressed to the Santiago courts was affixed to the outside of the van. The van was displayed in a public square by the Santiago art gallery Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM).

Figure 4. Papas Fritas, *Ad Augusta Per Angusta*, 2014.

It toured the streets of Santiago and Valparaiso and was eventually gifted by Tapia to the former students of UDM.[107] At one point, Chilean detectives wearing full body suits attempted to collect the ashes as evidence. Later, during a mass demonstration in Valparaiso that was part of the ongoing struggle for free quality education in Chile, the students rammed the van, now partially covered in black graffiti, through a police barricade.[108]

The context for this artistic intervention was a popular student movement that had begun in 2011 and demanded the end to private for-profit education and an increase in state support for public schools and universities.[109] The UDM was one of many universities in Chile that were

charged by the students for fraudulently operating a for-profit education scheme. In 2013, after these charges were investigated and confirmed, the university was stripped of its accreditation and shut down. However, the students were left with unfinished diplomas and outstanding debts to the university that bankruptcy tax collectors were still aiming to recuperate even after the institution had been shut down. Tapia's act of sabotage made it extremely difficult for this debt to be collected. In an interview with *Democracy Now*, Tapia states that digital versions of the papers are not adequate under Chilean law to collect the debt, and that the institution must present the physical documents.[110] But he also says that there are no longer any digital backups and that during the investigation of the university's finances the digital copies were hidden or destroyed by either the rectors of the university or the investigative police. In any case, collecting the debt without the original promissory notes would require that each student be individually sued and confess to the debt owed.

If this work were to be judged solely based on its participatory dimensions it could be criticized on a number of levels. The artist obtained the cooperation of the occupying students by not being entirely transparent with them. He did not confer with them and seek approval for his plan. While Papas Fritas conceives of his artwork as a joint effort that was only possible due to the ongoing struggle of the student movement, the artwork itself highlights the individual figure of the artist in the confession video, potentially configuring him as a hero or martyr. The romance of criminality could be criticized for alienating viewers who would otherwise support the student cause but whose sensibilities cause them to disidentify with criminality. These are all things that artists embracing participatory ideals and a theorist like Kester would likely reject as "unethical." Papas Fritas does not show us the correct way to live or interact, the work does not demonstrate non-oppressive social relations, and he does not present himself as an exemplary

being. Instead, he presents himself as a poor and uneducated criminal, but one whose crime is ultimately just because it is based on a more fundamental law – a principle of equality, dignity and a sense of justice. Ultimately, I argue that the work represents an ethics of drive.

On the surface, Papas Fritas' *Ad Augusta Per Angusta* may appear to belong to an avant-garde tradition of confrontation and destabilization. While the work is thrillingly confrontational, the idea of destabilization does not really describe its effects. I would like to read it against the grain as a productive rather than destructive gesture. To the former students of UDM, it allowed a way out of the unstable condition of indebtedness and the opportunity to live a more secure future. It therefore creates a counter-stabilization against the precariousness and rapaciousness of the market. This dimension of the work is concrete and ameliorative, but not on the terms of neoliberalism – this is not a charity-based debt forgiveness premised on continued subservience to international finance or dependent on the benevolence of western cultural institutions. It is rather a forced concession, imposed on the creditors and relying not only on an individual act of heroism and transgression, but also on the conditions made possible by the occupying students and the broader student mobilizations that enabled Papas Fritas to enter the building and retrieve the documents. The obvious utility of this artistic performance ensures that the "primary audience" of the work, the Chilean students, will not experience it as alienating or unsettling, but rather as an affirmation of the struggle they are spearheading. This fact is made evident by the decision of some students to triumphantly drive the van through a police barricade.

Tapia's project exceeds its utilitarian value. Similarly to the tactical media approach of the Yes Men, but unlike the anti-representational purity of the noborder activists, he actively inserts himself into the circuits of the mainstream media, adding a greater level of symbolic power and extension to the work.[111] In his confession video Papas Fritas addresses both the students whose

Figure 5. Papas Fritas, *Ad Augusta Per Angusta*, 2014.

debt he has helped eliminate and the broader audience of the art work, describing his act as a gift

of love to all who are watching. Yet the representational politics with which the audience is

addressed could be described as anti-spectacular. Papas Fritas does not publicly perform the act

of destruction that he alludes to. The incendiary gesture is left to our imagination and we are

transported to that moment through the artist's narration of the act. Papas Fritas closes his eyes

as he relives the moment for us, evoking a meditative state with his gestures as he characterizes the burning as not a bonfire of destructive glee, but as a serene and ritualistic practice he undertook with intent and thoughtfulness, as he burned the documents one by one over time. Because the work was performed in private there is no primary audience involved. Even the students who undertook the actions that made it possible did so unknowingly. The work we are presented with is thoroughly mediated, and the fact that it was presented to English-speaking audiences through mainstream and alternative news platforms, rather than art and culture platforms, paradoxically makes it all the more surreal. In contrast to the anti-spectacular mode of presentation in his video and mobile gallery, the news headlines sensationalize the act, emphasizing the huge dollar amount of the debt, as well as its thrillingly destructive and romantic criminal aspects. Beyond drawing attention to the story this ethical spectacle prompts a reaction of incredulity – is this real? How did he do this? Why was he not charged with a crime? This is perhaps followed by the unspoken afterthought: could something similar happen in other contexts? Could my debt be erased too? Rather than criticize the incorporation of the work into the conditions of spectacle I argue that this is an important dimension of the symbolic rupture that is opened up by the project, which I understand as an attempt to confront our incredulity with an "impossible" lost cause. In comparison to the pranks of the Yes Men, Tapia's work has the added benefit of supporting symbolic rupture with a real achievement.

On first encountering this work, I intuited the enjoyment on offer as that of the trickster. This was due in part to the counter-cultural style of Papas Fritas, his laid-back mannerisms, which were evident in his interview with *Democracy Now*, his humourous but seemingly meaningless moniker, and the clever way in which he managed to escape any serious repercussions for his crime.[112] However, beyond this surface image of the prankster there is a profound seriousness in

this work. The seriousness is apparent in the impassioned and emphatic intensity with which Papas Fritas addresses the audience in his confession video. His speech is not interpellating the audience to come and play, but to love, a much more serious affair and one that requires commitment.[113] The language with which Papas Fritas chooses to characterize his act is as a gift of love that can free us from fear. Furthermore, the strategic, deliberate and careful way in which the artist undertook the risk of the crime does not imply a spontaneous transgression buoyed by an instant of desire or inspiration, but a calculated risk based on a deep commitment to an ideal and a willing sacrifice to aid in its realization. This work required careful planning and conceptualization, an understanding of the legal frameworks involved and timely execution. In this sense it is similar to the labourious organizational work and long-term struggle of the student movement. Even the title of the work evokes a long and difficult struggle that must be passed through to reach victory – pleasure through struggle, not in the hedonistic avoidance or escape from constraint or towards immersion in sensorial experience.[114] Ultimately, the mode of enjoyment on offer is not based in resistance but in a far more demanding task. It interpellates the audience to likewise engage directly in a struggle to produce new conditions in which social relations can unfold and which entail macro-political engagement.

Does an act based on deliberate strategy, personal commitment and a potential sacrifice of freedom in the name of a greater cause open up a space of enjoyment that is hopelessly tied to a dehumanizing image of collectivity: the subsumption of individual autonomy in the name of some universalizing abstraction like Party or State? This is the fear that pushes artists and activists towards micro-political practices and an embrace of participation as an antidote to top-down forms of decision-making and control. But it is also a symptom that may block the development of revolutionary organization. In the post-Soviet era, it is the totalitarian mode of

enjoyment that haunts the left and is referenced in order to support either the reformism of the social democracy that avoids "impossible dreams" or the resistance of the nomad that avoids engaging state power. This threat clings to any radical social movement that adopts large-scale organizational forms and builds enough popular power to effectively confront or influence state decisions. The kinds of aesthetics attached to the totalitarian impulse are described by Bishop as affirmative in nature and oriented towards imposing an artificial unity on the subjects of politics.[115] The example she gives are the massive re-enactments of the October Revolution that were perceived as either empowering affirmations of revolutionary hopes and collective presence or else lifeless performances that imposed conformity on a people who had become disillusioned with the revolution.[116] Bishop notes that such an aesthetic would eventually reach its purest expression in the Nuremberg Rallies.[117]

Žižek's categorization of ethics clarifies the distinction between liberal amelioration, short-sighted rebelliousness, the totalitarian impulse, and a more substantial radical act. Žižek characterizes the obsessive by an ethics of the demand, wherein they attempt to make themselves useful at any cost to the Other.[118] The hysteric embraces an ethics of desire, a mode of enjoyment that could characterize micro-political resistance and nomadic flight. The third approach to ethics is that of the pervert, in which the subject gains pleasure by making itself the instrument or object of the Other's enjoyment. Žižek associates this latter structure with totalitarian politics, for instance the belief under Stalinism that the Communist Party serves the big Other of historical progress.[119] The latter relieves the communist subject of the burden of ethical decision as their acts are deemed "necessary" and not associated with their personal will.

Beyond demand, desire and enjoyment, Žižek posits an ethics of drive as a compulsion to repeatedly mark the memory of a lost Cause.[120] Rather than a line of flight or escape, the

Figure 6. Tapia's van at the student demonstration in Valparaiso on May 21, 2014.

movement of drive is characterized by a perpetual return or encircling of a traumatic or impossible Thing.[121] On a political register, drive is connected to a resurgent leftism that refuses to give way on revolutionary politics or to bury revolutionary dreams and catastrophes. How should we situate Tapia's art in these frameworks? As a mere instrument of an objective movement of history, or as compulsion to return to and mark a revolutionary past in order to sustain the radical impulses of the present?

Cleary, Tapia does not belong to a political organization nor refer to an explicit ideology, but neither does he flee from the crowd or the radical demand. Papas Fritas' work differs from the revolutionary art of the past. It does not try to represent the crowd or act in the name of historical necessity, but acts according to an ethical "lost Cause" that encircles a leftist imaginary of systemic, meaningful change – the abolishment of debt, of fear, of the criminal status of poverty,

and a world that searches for cooperation, founded in love and equality. The Cause he evokes is that of an abstract egalitarian impulse ("we are all the same!") and a dream of cooperation and love. It holds open the emancipatory dream ("for love! For the idealism!") by delivering an impossible demand: "It's over! You're free of debt! You don't have a buck to pay!" The work does not stage an ideal interpersonal collaboration that could be the basis of a just society, and it does not propagandize on behalf of students or endorse an alternative lifestyle. It stages a singular act that directly transforms the relation between creditors and debtors, effectively rendering it inoperative. In the process, the act reveals this seeming necessity to be a harmful fiction. Žižek presents the tombstone as the paradigmatic object that marks the site of the lost Thing and embodies drive in its zero degree.[122] In the case of this project, the white van as pyre and the ashes within it become the inert object marking the site of the impossible demand, which Papas Fritas offers to the crowd as a fetish object.

The "impossible" status of this gesture and what makes it so compelling is in part related to its scale. In his confession video, Papas Fritas emphasizes the modesty of his gift, the fact that the work is "a tiny little project," and that "[t]his is the little I could give from my heart for you, for what I felt!" In comparison to the movement the artist is contributing to, a massive undertaking that included months-long student occupations and years of demonstrating, it is true that this work could be understood as a "little project." At the same time, removing 500 million dollars in debt for tens of thousands of students is no small thing. It is a far greater ameliorative gesture, in terms of monetary value, than any other socially engaged or community art practice I am aware of. The effects of the work are limited to the former students of UDM and it does not directly contribute to winning the gains in educational policy that the students are fighting for. However, it is not the task of art to directly achieve the goals of politics. Perhaps more important is the

symbolic power of the work, the way its scale lives up to the radical ambitions of the movement to which it contributes. These ambitions are not to live on the margins of capital in small prefigurative communities, but to build enough popular power to directly influence the state-wide policies that effect millions. The symbolic significance of the work goes beyond its monetary achievement. It enables us to think big. Community gardens and social centres, co-operative cafes and banking services are important and valuable infrastructures that help sustain day to day life under conditions of neoliberal precarity. But we have been left wanting for acts that convince us that much more than minor improvements are possible. The vast systems of inequality and debt vassalage that rule our prospects, dreams and daily experience should be confronted more directly so that they may be abolished completely. This is what *Ad Augusta Per Angusta* enables us to imagine. The symbolism of this act therefore goes beyond micro-political imaginaries and makes a space for strength, hope and belief on the scale that is necessitated by the global realities of capitalism and climate change that must be confronted by the left today.

Conclusion

One of the key points of contention amongst the theorists that I have considered is the value of work that ostensibly "destabilizes" the viewer or unsettles hegemonic ways of seeing, experiencing or relating to the world. Kester places his hopes in the ability of dialogue and communication to foster critique, characterizing avant-garde strategies to be violent destabilizations that simply alienate the viewer rather than productively transform their way of seeing. Bishop argues for the central importance of ambiguity and contradiction as aesthetic strategies that produce dissensus, opening up reality to questioning and generating the potential to think beyond existing structures. She is concerned with the prospect that participation may lead to works that are simply affirmative of the status quo and uphold a repressive consensus in

the name of a reductive equation between participatory values and ethics. This is a concern I share. Ultimately, Superflex's work produces a space of enjoyment that affirms an attitude of liberal reform within capitalism, leaving its audience to alternate between guilty complicity and self-satisfied moralism. However, many of the works that produce an aesthetic ambiguity that Bishop champions stage this dissensus within an aesthetic sphere that places their influence at a safe distance from direct political contestation.

For his part, Raunig values tactics that are thoroughly politicized and confrontational, that seek to destabilize existing social relations in the wider world while also engaging in internal self-critique that results in the constant flux of affinities and that necessitate short-term actions. However, his embrace of nomadism, spontaneity, the carnivalesque and the avoidance of formal organizational structures does not extend to ambiguity in relation to the political content of the work, which is clearly partisan and based in agit-prop aesthetics. The VF and PTC performances attempt to raise the political consciousness of the audience while also offering playful and rebellious fun. Finally, Papas Fritas performs an act that is disruptive towards the financial functioning of the University Del Mar but produces a counter-stabilization for the previously indebted students dealing with the precarity of life under neoliberal marketization. While the political act is completely partisan, it does not attempt to convince its audience of anything other than the social solidarity of the artist and the simple possibility of large-scale social transformation. Sustaining a universalism of belief, generated by an ethics of drive, is perhaps the most significant contribution that aesthetics can make to radical social change.

In this chapter I have interrogated the emancipatory core of participation as an ideal in socially engaged art. Participation tends to indicate a desire for art to influence social reality in a more direct and concrete way than through a politics of representation or through a symbolic

reconfiguration of semantic codes. The attempt to intervene in the non-art spheres of daily life and to politicize aesthetics draws on a long history of revolutionary and avant-garde art. For all its good intentions, the drive towards social transformation and collective projects that involve collaboration with non-artists can become caught up in a mode of enjoyment that results in the support of the status quo. What I have called an ethics of the demand can be seen in an approach to art that mimics the reformist orientation of social work, patching the symptoms of political and economic crisis while propping up belief that pluralist liberal capitalism is a necessary and inevitable condition. Certain values of the participatory complex contribute to this tendency to neuter the critical, oppositional and unsettling potential of participatory aesthetics. In particular, these include the fetishization of face-to-face dialogue, the rejection of mediation/representation as inauthentic or corrupting, and the privileging of the process over ends. In the case of the latter I mean to refer to how the process of social collaboration and its instrumentalization is privileged over the aesthetic and political ends of producing broader symbolic ruptures or dissensus within a wider, mediated social space.

Direct intervention in solidarity with social movements is one way that socially engaged artists have attempted to insure that the participatory values they advance are thoroughly politicized and resist incorporation into existing neoliberal institutions. The critique of aesthetics is partly based on a fear that that activist artists have that their work will be spectacularized and rendered politically ineffective. This wary stance, however, can be taken so far as to undermine activist artists' own representational practice and the reach of their tactical interventions. This was the case in the uneasy relationship between the PTC, alternative media organizations, and the other participants in the noborder camp in Strasbourg. While clearly oppositional and politicized, participation continues to be held up as an ethical model of social relations, one that is micro-

political in orientation and not intended to be sustained indefinitely. Insofar as social movements have until recently been themselves oriented towards practices of short-term rebellion and resistance, the art activists that contribute to these movements produce symbolic ruptures that could be associated with an ethics of desire. The risk entailed in this mode of enjoyment is that the actors become attached to the position of resistance itself in a hysterical avoidance of any organized form of politics that could occupy and transform the place of power. A dynamic of resistance followed by repression is unleashed that reinforces itself in a vicious circle. An ethics of enjoyment modeled on the pervert becomes an alibi that rationalizes the small-scale and temporary gestures of micro-political resistance and liberal reformism alike.

A politicized artistic intervention need not be hamstrung by the ideals of participation. Social movements that make use of direct democratic methods and are organizing on a mass scale to confront state and corporate power are transforming political conditions in a way that opens up the possibility for an ideological shift. The return of revolutionary political horizons and leftist mobilization frees artists from the pressure to bear the weight of political change. The ability of aesthetics to organize and reconfigure modes of enjoyment makes it especially significant in relation to ideology. It is not by presenting audiences with politically correct content, whether in the form of ideas or by modeling "correct" relations, that artists confront ideology at the level of enjoyment. It is by following the compulsion to return again to impossible dreams.

Notes

[1] For a critique of Nuit Blanche type art festivals and their relation to the creative economy and neoliberal models of citizenship see Max Haiven, "Halifax's Nocturne Versus(?) the Spectacle of Neoliberal Civics," in *Public* 45 (Spring 2012): 79-93.

[2] Claire Bishop raises this issue in relation to European cultural policy and cites it as one of the reasons motivating her critique of participatory art. See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 5. For a more in-depth treatment see George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[3] Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004).

[4] Ibid., p. 27.

[5] Ibid., p. 12.

[6] Ibid., p. 27.

[7] Ibid., pp. 28-9.

[8] Kester therefore sees the rise of modernist aesthetic theory as a symptom of the destabilization created by the emerging democratic culture engendered by the French revolution and Enlightenment theories of man that undermined the former basis of social cohesion in ideas of divine right and cosmic order (Ibid., pp. 27-8); he also situates the Formalist rejection of theatricality found in Fried's thinking to this similar historical conjuncture (Ibid., pp. 57-8).

[9] Ibid., p. 44.

[10] Ibid., p. 12; 35.

[11] Ibid., p. 88.

[12] Ibid., pp. 83-4.

[13] Ibid., p. 88.

[14] This historical shift is covered in chapter two "Duration, Performativity, and Critique," (Ibid., pp. 50-81).

[15] Ibid., pp. 1-3; 97-101.

[16] Ibid., p. 100.

[17] The question of the status of WochenKlausur's projects as art is addressed by Wolfgang Zinggl, "Frequently Asked Questions," in *WochenKlausur: Sociopolitical Activism in Art,* ed. Wolfgang Zinggl, pp.129-36 (New York: SpringerWienNewYork, 2001).

[18] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p. 101.

[19] Ibid., p. 11.

[20] Kester addresses the aesthetic dimensions of dialogical works most directly in his discussion of the Artist Placement Group, which emerged in the Late-sixties in the UK and consisted of John Latham and Barbara Steveni (Ibid., pp. 61-3; 67-9). Latham theorized the artist as a figure able to transcend the social class and other distinctions

present in society. It is this status as a class "neutral" person that endows artists with an ability to facilitate productive encounters across identitarian divides and professional specializations. Kester includes a moment of critique of Lantham's assumptions and inability to perceive the artist's own class position as part of the managerial-professional class, but nonetheless bases his account of the aesthetic dimensions of dialogical works on some of Latham's ideas. These include the introduction of an enhanced time sense, or extended duration into situations oriented towards short-term vision, a spatial imagination that allows artists to comprehend and represent complex social and environmental systems, and the use of the art frame to introduce a relatively open space for addressing political issues (Ibid., 68-9).

[21] Ibid., pp. 110-14.

[22] Rather than question the larger structural frame in which these problems exist, these projects tend to work within them. For these reasons, community art and socially engaged art practices whose purview is social amelioration have been derogatively termed "NGO" art by some critics. These critics contend that these works adapt to neoliberal economic policy by patching up the holes created in the welfare state. Even while being critical of inequality and poverty, these initiatives are performing a role akin to charity by providing services that arguably should be taken on by the shrinking public sector. Art critics BAVO criticize "NGO art" as a pragmatic politics that undermines the critical potentiality of art in "Always Choose the Worst Option. Artistic Resistance and the Strategy of Over-Identification," *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification,* ed. BAVO, pp. 18-39 (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007).

[23] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 270-73.

[24] Ibid., p. 271.

[25] For instance aside from their *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women*, WochenKlausur have initiated the following projects: *Intervention to Provide Healthcare to Homeless People, Intervention to Establish a Community Centre for Seniors, Intervention in Immigrant Labor Issues, Intervention in a School, Intervention to Improve Conditions in Deportation Detention, Intervention in Community Development, Intervention in the Job Market, Intervention to Upcycle Discarded Products, Intervention to Establish Language Schools in Kosovo, Intervention in Japanese Schools, Intervention to Facilitate Civic Participation, Intervention to Improve the Conduct of Public Debate.* All of these are discussed in Zinggl, *WochenKlausur*.

[26] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, pp. 138-40.

[27] The most compelling parts of Kester's book are those where he attempts to develop a critical framework for assessing dialogical works and in the process reflects on the politically reformist and uncritical nature of many of these projects. He gives the example of the work by Dawn Dedeaux. While this project was held up as exemplary of an ethical collaborative practice, the finished gallery installation reinforces rather than challenges the dominant perception that crime and poverty are the result of individual moral failings rather than systemic inequalities. Kester argues that a better project would have been informed by the critical discourse of groups working on prison reform that she could have collaborated with (Ibid., pp. 140-7).

[28] Kester is aware of this criticism, acknowledging that one of his examples of dialogical art by Steve Willats also in some ways embodies his disparaged orthopedic aesthetic (Ibid., p. 95).

[29] Ibid., p. 160-1.

[30] Ibid., p. 160.

[31] Critical Art Ensemble and Beatriz de Costa, "Free Range Grain," in *The Interventionists: A Users' Manuel for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life,* eds. Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette, pp. 115-6 (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MASS MoCA, 2004).

[32] Critical Art Ensemble, "Body Invasion and Resistant Cultural Practice," *Art Journal* 59:3 (Fall 2000): 48-50.

[33] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, pp. 148-51.

[34] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

[35] Ibid., p. 3; 41.

[36] Ibid., p. 23.

[37] Ibid., p. 26.

[38] Ibid., pp. 13-6.

[39] Ibid., p. 28.

[40] Ibid., p. 39.

[41] Ibid., p. 18.

[42] Ibid., p. 29.

[43] Ibid., p. 27.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 18.

[46] Ibid., p. 27.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 27-8.

[49] Ibid., p. 39.

[50] Ibid., p. 74.

[51] Ibid., p. 9; 37-8.

[52] Ibid., p. 206.

[53] Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* is offered as an exemplary case in that the one day festival and battle reenactment at the center of the work was accompanied by a gallery exhibition and archive, a CD and book, and a full length DVD documentary by Figgis which was also broadcast on Channel 4 in 2002. These multiple modes of representation not only extend the audience and influence of the work, that otherwise would only have been available to the community of Orgreave, they also add layers of ambiguity and contradiction to the project (Ibid., p. 37).

[54] Bishop addresses this aspect of participatory aesthetics at length in chapter eight, "Delegated Performance: Outsourced Authenticity" (Ibid., pp. 219-39).

[55] Ibid., pp. 32-3.

[56] Ibid., pp. 279-83.

[57] Ibid., p. 283.

[58] Ibid., p. 39.

[59] Guaraná Power tool: http://superflex.net/tools/guarana_power.
Will Bradley, "Guarana Power," in *Self-Organization/Counter-Economic Strategies*, eds. Will Bradley, Mika Hannula, Cristina Ricupero, and Superflex, pp. 313-35 (New York and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2006). Rikke Andreassen, "Reclaim the Brand Name," *New Glocal Times* Issue 6 (November 2006), unpaginated.

[60] One of the videos can be viewed on Superflex's website: http://superflex.net/tools/guarana_power_commercials. The commercial is shown with the references to the brand name and label self-censored for legal reasons.

[61] Bradley, "Guarana Power," p. 320; 333. In 2010 another batch of Guaraná Power was manufactured by Danish company NaturFrisk-Orbæk, this time as an organic soft drink.

[62] Ibid., p. 318.

[63] Will Bradley, "SUPERFLEX/Counter-Strike/Self-Organize," *Superflex.net*, 2003, unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/superflex_counter-strike_self-organise (Accessed April 20, 2016).

[64] See Free Beer Tool on the Superflex website: http://superflex.net/tools/free_beer.

[65] Richard Stallman was interviewed about Superflex's *Free Beer* project. See: Henrik Moltke, "Richard Stallman on Free Beer," *Superflex.net*, 2005, unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/richard_stallman_on_free_beer (Accessed April 22, 2016).

[66] Troels Degn Johansson, "Free Beer and Engaging Tools: Chains of Analogies in Superflex," *Nordes: Nordic Design Research Conference - Engaging Artifacts,* The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway, August 30 – September 1. Number 3 (2009): 1-9. http://www.nordes.org/opj/index.php/n13/issue/view/9.

[67] Ibid., p. 6.

[68] In 2006 *Free Beer* was profiled on CNN and in Wired magazine.

[69] In an early interview with Superflex, Asa Nacking suggests their tools are intended to spread like a virus, a characterization that Superflex accept. See Asa Nacking, "An Exchange Between Asa Nacking and Superflex," *Afterall*, issue 0 (1998), unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/an_exchange_between_aasa_nacking_and_superflex (Accessed April 19, 2016.

[70] Ibid., unpaginated.

[71] Anupam Chander, "Illegal Art? The Artists' Group Superflex Co-opts Global Trademarks," *Superflex.net,* 2004. http://superflex.net/texts/illegal_art?_the_artists_group_superflex_co-opts_global_trademarks (Accessed April 20, 2016).

[72] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Make Sure That You Are Seen (Supercritique)" *Superflex.net*, 2002, unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/make_sure_that_you_are_seen_(supercritique) (Accessed April 22, 2016).

[73] For a critique of the limits of localism as a method for contesting capitalist contradictions see Greg Sharzer, *No Local: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won't Change the World* (Winchester, UK and Washington, US: Zero Books, 2012).

[74] The Mondragon cooperative in the Basque region of Spain serves as one of the most interesting case studies on the difficulties faced by cooperative enterprises that try to compete in global markets. See Joseba Azkarraga, George Cheney and Ainara Udaondo, "Worker's Participation in a Globalized Market: Reflections on and from Mondragon," in *Alternative Work Organizations*, ed. Maurizio Atzeni, pp. 76-102 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[75] Bradley, "Guarana Power," p. 329; 333-35.

[76] Barbara Steiner, "Working Within Contradictions," *Superflex Tools,* 2003, unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/working_within_contradictions (Accessed April 22, 2016).

[77] Charles Esche, "TOOLS and Manifestos," *Superflex Tools*, 2003, unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/tools_and_manifestos (Accessed April 22, 2016).

[78] Afterall, not only the rights of intellectual property owners but also limits to these rights function as a basis for market innovation and competition. While the Ambev corporation may have chosen to pursue a case against Guarana Power, there are not adequate grounds in trademark law to result in a conviction. The power of corporations in cases like this to drain the legal resources of their opposition is all the intimidation that they need to get their way.

[79] Johansson offers an analysis of the early Superflex project *Karlskrona2 (1999)* as an example of virtual relational aesthetics. In this project Superflex collaborated in creating a "Second Life" -style virtual representation of the city of Karlskrona, Sweden that was accessible to all local residents. See Troels Degn Johansson, "Visualizing Relations: Superflex' Relational Art in the Cyberspace Geography," *Culture in the Cyber Age Conference*, Asia-Europe Forum, October 23-25, 2000, Kyongju, South Korea. http://superflex.net/texts/visualising_relations (Accessed April 22, 2016). Nicolas Bourriaud, who created the designation "relational aesthetics" has also written a short response to Superflex's work which is available on their web site. See Bourriaud, "Make Sure," unpaginated.

[80] Asa Nacking and Superflex discuss their early project *Supergas/biogas* as a kind of small-scale market-based utopianism. See Nacking, "An Exchange," unpaginated. Steiner interprets Superflex's late-nineties practice as being modeled on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's understanding of radical democracy as an articulation of pluralistic identities and concerns. See Barbara Steiner, "Radical Democracy: Acknowledge the Complexities and Contingencies," *NU: The Nordic Art Review* 2 (1999). Will Bradley discusses the participatory potential of new technologies in his discussion of *Superchannel*. See Will Bradley "The Local Channel for Local People," *Nifca Info* 01/01 (2001), unpaginated. http://superflex.net/texts/the_local_channel_for_local_people (Accessed April 23, 2016).

[81] See: http://superflex.net/tools/today_we_do_not_use_the_word_dollars; Jon Bywater, "Superflex Today We Don't Use the Word Dollars a Critical Response," *Superflex.net*, 2009. http://superflex.net/texts/superflex_today_we_don-t_use_the_word_dollars_a_critical_response (Accessed April 29, 2016).

[82] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 219.

[83] It should be noted that Superflex have produced a few works, or attempted to generate works, that could have profound political effects, but have simply not been able to actualize them under existing political conditions. For instance, Superflex engaged in collaborations throughout the 2000s in an attempt to get Palestine included in the Eurovision Song Contest. It is projects such as this that reveal Superflex's larger political ambitions relative to more typically micro-community art projects. However, the failure of their collaborative methods to negotiate the realization of this inclusion does more to point to the limits of participation, communication and collaboration when confronting global systems of inequality, imperialism and state terror, than to their potential. In the more recent work *Hospital Equipment (2014)* which also addresses Palestine, Superflex return to their less politically ambitious and more typically ameliorist approach. Here they present a gallery installation which consists of a surgical equipment desperately needed by Palestinian doctors and a large colour photograph of the equipment on the gallery wall. When the work is sold, the buyer receives the photograph while the surgical equipment is donated to a hospital in Gaza.

[84] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp. 283-4.

[85] Ibid., p. 284.

[86] Ibid. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century,* trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

[87] Ibid., p. 206.

[88] However, as socially engaged art or social practice art has become more popular some institutions and platforms have arisen to accommodate them, including the Creative Time Summit; furthermore, these activist artists continue to rely on grant money, residencies, and other resources from arts organizations.

[89] Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, p. 203.

[90] Ibid., p. 205.

[91] Ibid., p. 206.

[92] Ibid., p. 208.

[93] Ibid., p. 221.

[94] Ibid., p. 223-24.

[95] Ibid., p. 226.

[96] Ibid., p. 216.

[97] Ibid., p. 17-18.

[98] Ibid., p. 227.

[99] Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 271.

[100] Raunig notes that participants in the caravans were arrested on occasion. The most significant repression faced by these nomadic artists took place during the G8 summit demonstrations in Italy when the PTC bus was stopped by the police, their theatrical props were confiscated as potential "weapon-making materials" (Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, pp. 232-5). The participants were arrested and beaten in custody, a similar brutal treatment to that visited upon dozens of protesters over the course of the summit.

[101] Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions," *Revolution at the Gates: Žižek On Lenin: the 1917 Writings,* ed. Slavoj Žižek, pp. 3-12 (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

[102] When discussing Volkstheatre Favoriten's practice of *parrhesia* Raunig mentions that the constant self-questioning required plenty of energy, produced conflicts in the group (he doesn't describe the nature of these conflicts), and could only be sustained by most actors for short periods of time. These are common problems encountered by any form of direct democratic practice that I've addressed in greater detail in chapter two of this thesis. Raunig describes how during the noborder camp in Strasbourg in 2002, the alternative media activists including the PublixTheatreCaravan bus occupied a particular "barrio" in the camp that functioned as a physical and political border zone between the inside and outside of the camp. He describes how many in the camp were highly suspicious of technology, the media, and representational practice in general, to the extent that it was unclear whether the alternative media barrio was a part of the camp or an unaccepted appendage (Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, p. 259).

[103] Ibid., pp. 27-39.

[104] Ibid., p. 227.

[105] "Artista confiesa haber quemado letras para acabar con las deudas de estudiantes de la U del Mar" *YouTube.com,* posted by Radio Villa Francia, May 12, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upmmUzislj8 (Accessed May 9, 2016). A version with English captions is also available and is the source of all translated quotations in this chapter. See "Francisco "papasFritas" Tapia's confession" *YouTube.com,* posted by 31D0L0N3S, May 17, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NazXo1WWcCg (Accessed May 9, 2016).

[106] The exact words were "Licenciado en Pirokinesis en Estafas Educativas Bancarias."

[107] Jonathan Franklin, "Chile Students' Debts Go Up In Smoke," *Theguardian.com,* May 23, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/23/chile-student-loan-debts-fried-potatoes (Accessed May 9, 2016).

[108] "Exclusive: Chilean Robin Hood? Artist Known as "Papas Fritas" on Burning $500M Worth of Student Debt," *Democracynow.org,* May 23, 2014. http://www.democracynow.org/2014/5/23/exclusive_chilean_robin_hood_artist_known (Accessed May 9, 2016).

[109] For an overview of the struggle against the commodification of education in Chile see Lili Loofbourow, "'No to Profit': Fighting Privatization in Chile," *Boston Review,* May 16, 2013. http://www.bostonreview.net/world/"no-profit" (Accessed May 12, 2016).

[110] Democracynow.org, "Chilean Robin Hood?"

[111] The story was covered and Tapia's confession video circulated on a number of mainstream news platforms, including the *Washington Post, The Huffington Post, The Independent,* and *The Guardian,* as well as alternative new site *Democracy Now*. See
Neela Debnath, "Chilean activist destroys student debt papers worth $500m" *The Indepedent,* May 18, 2014. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/chilean-activist-destroys-student-debt-papers-worth-500m-9391907.html (Accessed May 9, 2016); Terrence McCoy "Chilean artist steals and destroys $500 million worth of student debt papers" *The Washington Post,* May 19, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/05/19/chilean-artist-steals-and-destroys-500-million-worth-of-student-debt-papers/ (Accessed May 9, 2016); Sara Gates, "Chilean Artist Francisco Tapia Burns Financial Documents To 'Free' Students From Debt" *Huffington Post,* May 19, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/19/francisco-tapia-artist-burns-student-debt-papers_n_5351380.html (Accessed May 9, 2016).

[112] The stealing and burning of debt papers seems like it would be a straightforward crime, but in this context it is ambiguous. Tapia was able to avoid prosecution for a number of reasons. Although he confessed to burning the documents, the authorities must produce actual evidence in order to prosecute, which they do not have. Furthermore, a charge of break and enter would be difficult to make because the university was already occupied at the time when Tapia took the documents. Other mitigating factors are the fraudulent status of UDM's financial dealings which reduce the legitimacy of the debt in the public mind and that Tapia has been transparent and cooperative with the authorities. Consequently, no charges have been pursued against the artist. Papas Fritas addresses the concept of criminality in his confession video: "but we have to lose the fear, the fear of the idea about criminality that this state has wanted to impose on us, that we are criminals for being poor, for wanting our rights to be met."

[113] Alain Badiou includes love as one of his four truth procedures. In his book *In Praise of Love* he defines it as the construction of a truth that derives from difference, "all love that accepts the challenge, commits to enduring, and embraces this experience of the world from the perspective of difference produces in its way a new truth about difference." Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (New York: the New Press, 2012), pp. 38-9. While politics and love cannot be conflated in Badiou's thought, the qualities of commitment, endurance, and struggle that characterize fidelity to a truth are present in both. When love is invoked in a political register, as it is by Papas Fritas, it's tied to

an intensity in relation to collective action that likewise refers to a deeper commitment than the momentary pleasures we would associated with desire.

[114] Ad Augusta Per Angusta is a latin motto commonly used by Universities on their official crests and logos, and in this case includes Universidad Del Mar. It means "to honors through struggle."

[115] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 74.

[116] Ibid., pp. 57-63.

[117] Ibid., p. 74.

[118] Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 271.

[119] Ibid., p. 272.

[120] Ibid.

[121] To develop this spatial metaphor further, I would also associate the longer-term mobilizations and occupations of the post-2008 financial crisis period with this attempt to revive and circle around a lost cause. The nightly marches of the Maple Spring that would wind their way through various neighbourhoods for hours, often without a planned trajectory or a precise physical target of protest, but always returning in waves back to a particular public square could be likened to a ritualistic practice, calling into being the return of leftist politics and stubbornly refusing to let it go.

[122] Žižek, *For They Know Not*, p. 273.

CONCLUSION

Participation is one of the most prevalent social ideals of the postwar period. Although participation is often equated with a decision-making procedure or with grassroots democracy and popular power, this thesis has sought to approach it as an ideological concept. Participation is not an innocent ideal that should be taken for granted as a good in itself. Rather than attempt to specify participation as a particular set of practices, organizational structures or decision-making procedures, I have taken it to be a complex of values that captures desire in the support of various fantasy formations. I have argued that in some instances the ideological enjoyment of participation can be organized in such a way as to become symptomatic, preventing the functioning of democratic power and organization on the radical left. Participation forecloses the possibility of widespread social transformation by adapting subjects to the status quo and satisfying desires for change with small-scale reforms, personal empowerment, ethical consumerism and ethical collaboration. This occurs within digital capitalism, the knowledge industries, socially engaged art and social movements. Making a distinction between our desire for participation and practices of direct democracy is particularly important for social movements on the left seeking to increase popular power and collective autonomy with the aim of combatting neoliberal policy.

When participation is put forward as the central ideal of social progress we risk sublimating politics and its inherent antagonisms. The openness, flexibility and non-threatening nature of participation adds to its allure while these same qualities make it susceptible to integration with a post-political managerial capitalism. Against the tendency to presume that participation can be equated with democracy, that it necessarily fosters egalitarianism, or that it contains an inherent anti-capitalist potential, I insist that ideologies of participation reinforce the influence of late-

capitalist cultural values. The mid-century rise of participation was a response to a particular

context where corporatism, modern industrialism and the welfare state combined to produce the

spectre of top-down systems of control. Participation was understood as a rejection of

bureaucracy and hierarchy under representative democracy and socialism alike. Yet in the

ensuing decades social institutions have changed dramatically. The fantasy of participation has

been formatted by transformations in capitalism towards decentralization, privatization,

entrepreneurialism, integration with digital networks, and precarious labour arrangements. As

capitalism has taken on neoliberal characteristics these conditions have contributed to fostering

new social values including an embrace of diversity, pluralism, tolerance, individual

empowerment, self-expression and niche consumer culture. In this present historical conjuncture

an ongoing intense rejection of hierarchy takes on an excessive and symptomatic character.

   In my different chapters I have presented the symptomatic nature of contemporary ideologies

of participation in various ways. With regard to social movements, particularly the public

assembly movements that arose after 2008, participation as ideology is symptomatic in the sense

that it leads to stasis, the inability of a movement to move forward in decision-making, to resolve

internal conflicts, and an unwillingness to politicize its boundaries. Important here in my analysis

is the need to look beyond common organizational difficulties that are confronted by direct

democratic methods and towards the ideological blockages that contribute to this stasis. The

symptomatic character of participation can also be seen in new modes of enjoyment that support

neoliberalism. Bar camps sustain desires for autonomy and empowerment at work through

participation. But such desires are channelled in the directions of managerial capitalism,

entrepreneurialism, technological solutions and social fragmentation. The ideology of

participation is steeped in enjoyment as the knowledge industries demand that one enjoy one's

self-exploitation, that one be a passionate subject, bring one's creativity and social connections to projects, and reinforce a general urgency to be active without a larger strategy or framework that would make such action meaningful. The pleasure and stimulation of quick social connections and collaborations is underwritten by anxiety, guilt and the repression of conflict. Lastly, participation is one way that socially engaged art practices adapt to rather than challenge the status quo. Artists may pragmatically contribute to social welfare but at the same time ignore the systemic nature of the problems that their projects address. They risk finding enjoyment in the occupation of the place of resistance for its own sake, or they overestimate the political salience of the pleasures of ethical collaboration and consumption.

The participatory complex is widespread and reflects a strong attachment to individualism, consumerism and digital culture. However, while the values of participation continue to proliferate in new guises and practices, participation is not all-encompassing. A few recent trends of political engagement may indicate a partial overcoming of the ideology of participation in social movements. The public assembly movements exemplified a foregrounding of participation as a central idea of social change, which is something I have been critical of. And yet, at the same time, this wave of public occupations marked a new era of politicization. In Canada and the US there has been an increased politicization that could be interpreted as both inspired by and a reaction to the limitations of Occupy Wall Street and the Quebec Student Strike. Waves of social movements have sprung up against different facets of neoliberal domination, including Idle No More, campus movements against rape culture, Black Lives Matter, Fight for Fifteen, unionization efforts among fast food and retail workers, resistance to the Kinder Morgan, Transmountain, Keystone XL, Energy East, and Dakota Access pipelines, and an increasingly visible trans rights movement. What appears to be shared by this diverse range of social

movements is a relative de-emphasis on the ethos of participation and internal decision-making structures in favour of substantive political goals and direct action tactics. These movements have relegated participatory decision-making structures and processes to the background as they focus for the most part on substantial and narrowly targeted campaigns. They tend to be combative, oriented towards direct action and unapologetic about their politics. This narrower strategic emphasis has its benefits but also its dangers and limits.

For all of its faults OWS aimed at systemic change and tried to coalesce struggles against multiple aspects of neoliberalism into a coherent movement. Participation proved inadequate as a unifying basis for sustainable movement building, but the inclination to bring people together around a common political platform was correct. What can replace participation as a politics that speaks to a mass of marginalized and exploited people? Movements like BLM and Idle No More represent the real material struggles of those bearing the brunt of colonialism, neoliberalism, imperialism, militarism, petro-capitalism and environmental exploitation. As such, they are at the forefront of class struggle. Yet their political concerns and how they should be interpreted are currently the object of heated battles. In the wake of these movements there has been the resurgence of a politics that foregrounds identity as a primary basis of commonality and shared interests rather than seek to extend outwards as a universal emancipatory politics. The return of identity politics post-Occupy may represent a search for a more solid basis of commonality than either "participation" or the kind of unity that is presumed by populist and class-based solidarity.[1] However, such a reliance on identity presents dangers of slipping back into essentialism and cultural nationalism that expends energy by trying to police the boundaries of belonging. It can prioritize representational politics at the expense of the material concerns of

these social struggles; or, it can open up a redistributive politics based on group identity while maintaining and supporting a more meritocratic capitalist inequality.[2]

Alongside such social movements in the broader Euro-American world there has also been a renewed attempt on parts of the radical left to organize within existing political systems with the intention of fighting austerity policies. The challenge presented by public occupations is being taken up in new ways, including attempts to articulate social movements with institutional machinery such as political parties in order to have real impact on policy. Examples include Syriza's spectacular show of resistance to the European Troika, Podemos' growing popularity in Spain, the surprising support received by left-field politicians within centrist parties like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK's Labour party, the near win of Bernie Sanders in the US Democratic Party primaries, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's last minute relevance in France's presidential elections. Direct democratic procedures will surely continue to be an important part of such future political experiments, but these are one strategy in the movement towards socialism and do not stand in for or replace the goal of establishing an egalitarian universalism. Participation as such is not adequate as a horizon of social change.

The shift towards greater politicization and attempts to articulate movements with existing power structures and with the aim of transforming them is encouraging. Yet, optimism is tempered by the dangers of cooptation, reaction and fragmentation faced by the left today. The unhinging of participation as ideology in social movements opens up possibilities for a variety of forms of collective action that sustain commitment to radical principles. However, the critique of participation also makes room for a cynical rejection of the possibilities for systemic political change. Direct action and political pressure are tactics that can be used for all kinds of ends. In some cases, the lack of emphasis on participation may not represent the embrace of a more

concrete radical political project, but rather a dismissal of the idealism of Occupy and an acceptance of status quo institutions as the only option. It is important that radical projects aimed at occupying existing parties and working within electoral politics do not fall prey to a disabling rhetoric of "winning" and "pragmatism" that restricts what is possible to the same neoliberal parties and policies. While I have argued against the ineffectuality that participatory politics confronts, it is not with the intention of endorsing an electoral politics that settles for the least-worst option and forecloses alternatives. My critique of participation is not about sacrificing core principles for the illusion of electoral "success" and minor but ultimately insignificant reforms. It is about organizing the movement of the people in such a way as to compel the system to adapt to our demands.

The case of the Bernie Sanders campaign illustrates the kind of political action that has potential to shake up ossified power structures within the dominant parties. Sanders insisted on working within the Democratic Party machinery and being taken seriously in spite of being regularly dismissed by corporate media. Yet, he also insisted on doing things differently by refusing to accept super PAC money or corporate donations and by calling himself a democratic socialist in a culture where this would previously have guaranteed him little popular support. While his steady rise in popularity as Hillary Clinton's primary challenger could not have been easily predicted, it is on such unlikely occurrences and seemingly "idealistic" strategies that we must focus our energy.[3]

With renewed interest in radical leftist organization have come attempts to theorize the relationship between mass movements and organizational or institutional power. It is an extreme challenge to organize in such a way that one can effect a meaningful counterattack against neoliberal capitalism while also maintaining a degree of popular engagement and democratic

control over the organization, party, or movement. However, it is one that must be faced directly, something that the participatory complex, with its obsessive and hysterical evasion of power, makes impossible. One indication of the changing tides was a short blog post by Antonio Negri during the rise of Syriza and Podemos, in which the theorist most often associated with the horizontalist notion of the "multitude" stated that today's left needs to find ways to wield new forms of "verticality."[4] However, beyond organizational structure, one should also consider the role of enjoyment and belief in political life. The dichotomy between horizontal and vertical quickly descends into discussions of ideal models of organization rather than close attention to the political and ideological context that makes any organizational approach functional or not.

I have focused less on the explicit and formal ideologies calling for participation than on the contradictions between these stated positions and the fantasy space that supports practice. Ideology sticks due to the enjoyment it produces; it is present more in the unconscious structuring of social reality than our self-conscious ideals. Participation remains hegemonic in everyday institutions of work, education, culture and digital capitalism, and will continue to be a significant object for critical theory. A slight reassessment of participatory values within social movements does not address the many other ways that participation continues to influence daily life. An interesting question going forward for scholars of participation is the ever-changing digital landscape that serves as a primary location for reproducing participation as ideology. The external and unconscious nature of ideology is well rendered by Mark Andrejevic's critique of the algorithmic automation of participation online.[5] As he argues, participation and our desires for it are increasingly automated and unconscious, embedded in online algorithms and smart objects that capture our data. With regard to network culture I have focused on attempts to extend participation's ideological premises through face-to-face instances in bar camps.

However, the logic of participation is increasingly embedded in the new digital infrastructures and protocols. As Andrejevic notes, participation in this context involves new forms of fetishization insofar as the invisibility and unknowability of algorithmic profiling comes to pacify users' desires for control over cultural practices online. Convenience, customization and the incessant demand for participation are met by displacing participation onto algorithms. The automation of participation contributes to its pernicious character, removing it from critical awareness in everyday life.

Digital capitalism is capable of becoming increasingly participatory while continuing to reinforce and create inequalities of all kinds. The challenge of an unchecked participatory complex is that it forebodes a kind of social control dressed in the garb of democracy and for this reason becomes more difficult to resist. To push this possibility even further, there is evidence that in contexts that offer no pretext to democracy, participation can be enhanced to reinforce the legitimacy of non-democratic government. For example, the work of Mark Warren explores participatory experiments that have been sponsored by the Chinese government.[6] While the typical expectation is that the introduction of capitalism and experiments with participation indicate inevitable inroads for liberal democratic reforms, Žižek has suggested otherwise. He raises the possibility that "capitalism with authoritarian values" may not be a transitional stage on the way to democracy but represents a tendency towards which even the Western democracies are heading.[7] Such a possibility underlines the way that participation, even in an authoritarian context like China, works to substitute for democracy, placating desires for influence without necessarily contributing to democratic revolution. Cases such as this illustrate in starker terms the flexibility of participation as ideology and its limits as a tool for undermining capitalist and authoritarian social relations.

Contrary to such fears, can participation be the name of a contestatory politics that opens up the space for social struggles? Many activists continue to rely on a language of participation and the values of the participatory complex to push for a more democratic politics. For my part, I believe that this complex does more harm that good. Other radical traditions, such as the syndicalism that informed the Quebec student associations, draw on values that overlap in some ways with the participatory complex. Those who seek to specify which practices are maximally or authentically participatory might look at an organization like ASSE and declare that in many respects this was and is a participatory organization or that it advanced a participatory politics.[8] Yet, the practices that this movement engaged in did not necessitate an ideology of participation, which was largely absent during the tuition fee struggle. Organizational efforts drew on a strategy of syndicalist workers' struggle applied to the context of student associations. The different language used is not a mere semantic difference. The concepts of collective action, class struggle, militancy, direct action, solidarity, self-management, revolution, and so on, connote an altogether different logic from that of participation which, therefore, could not simply stand-in for these more demanding commitments. The substantive goals of universally accessible education, self-management and student control demanded a variety of collective actions, some of which involved direct democratic decision making, collaborative creation and performance by small groups, spontaneous or minimally directed street actions by large crowds, as well as somewhat decentralized and autonomous but coordinated picket lines on campuses. This repertoire of collective action was drawn from historical struggles that valued collective empowerment without a need for participation per se to operate as the ultimate horizon of social change.

Participation often points to an obsession with hierarchy, bureaucracy and representation within movement organizations that is counterproductive. Against such a dynamic, we must reckon with the fact that neither participation nor any decision-making process it entails will lead to pure horizontality. Rejecting participation does not mean throwing out direct democracy, which is important for producing credibility and mass engagement. However, when participation is made into an absolute it destroys itself in a search for a harmonious social levelling that denies the inherent antagonism of politics, society and human subjectivity. Any kind of political or social transformation requires long-term commitments and organizational work that will introduce or reproduce a degree of hierarchy. Rather than reject hierarchy out of hand, more pointed questions need to be asked: what function does hierarchy serve within an organization or movement? What degree of representation or hierarchy is acceptable and in relation to which organizational tasks? Which activities or positions that carry power within an organization require mechanisms of accountability and which do not? In order to confront these questions the ideology of participation needs to be displaced by concern with common interests and the goals of social, cultural and political organizations that assert the value of emancipatory universal politics and a class struggle that builds the capacity to cohere, strategize and commit to collective power and autonomy.

Notes

[1] The turn towards identity post-Occupy has some interesting parallels with Francesca Polletta's analysis of participatory organization in SNCC. In the latter case, racial identity and centralized organizational structure came to stand in for a sense of unity and purpose at a point at which the movement was struggling with a lack of programmatic vision and direction. Polletta argues that the organizational shift did not adequately address the problems of black leadership and program that they were intended to but simply displaced these antagonisms onto organizational structure. See Francesca Polletta, "How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice" *Field: a Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 1 (Spring 2015): 215-54.

[2] Ta-Nehisi Coates' project in support of slavery reparations is a recent example of this kind of redistributive politics. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014. Cedric Johnson presents a persuasive critique of the politics of reparations. See Cedric Johnson, "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals Who Love Him," *Jacobin Magazine*, March 2, 2016. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/ta-nehisi-coates-case-for-reparations-bernie-sanders-racism/ (Accessed August 3, 2017).

[3] Clinton supporters regularly dismissed the Sanders campaign by insisting that although they supported his platform Sanders could not actually win against Trump, implying that a vote for Sanders was futile idealism. Clinton was presented as the pragmatic choice that could easily win against Trump. A number of commentators countered this notion with polling data that suggested that Sanders would in fact have defeated Trump by a wider margin than Clinton, who ultimately lost the presidential race. See Nathan J. Robinson, "Unless the Democrats Run Sanders, a Trump Nomination Means a Trump Presidency," *Current Affairs: A Magazine of Politics and Culture*, February 23, 2016. https://static.currentaffairs.org/2016/02/unless-the-democrats-nominate-sanders-a-trump-nomination-means-a-trump-presidency (Accessed Aug. 7, 2017); H.A. Goodman, "Bernie Sanders Defeats Trump by a Wider Margin than Clinton in a General Election," *Huffpost*, October 21, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/h-a-goodman/bernie-sanders-defeats-trump-by-a-wider-margin_b_8345156.html (Accessed Aug. 7, 2017); Louis Jacobson, "Bernie Sanders Says He Consistently Beats Donald Trump by Bigger Margins than Hillary Clinton Does," *Politifact.com*, March 8, 2016. http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/mar/08/bernie-s/bernie-sanders-says-he-consistently-beats-donald-t/ (Accessed Aug. 7, 2017).

[4] Antonio Negri, "Charlie Hebdo, Fear, and World War: Two Questions for Toni Negri," *Verso Blog*, January 21, 2015. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1814-charlie-hebdo-fear-and-world-war-two-questions-for-toni-negri (Accessed Aug. 2, 2017).

[5] Mark Andrejevic, "The Pacification of Interactivity," in *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, eds. Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne and Tamar Tembeck, pp. 187-206 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 2016).

[6] Mark E. Warren, "The Surprising Adoption of Deliberative Democracy in Chinese Political Discourse," *Ideologies and Cross-Border Conceptual Travel*, Simon Frasure University, July 4-5, 2016.

[7] Slavoj Žižek, "Interview with Slavoj Žižek," Jonathan Derbyshire, *New Statesman*, October 29, 2009. http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2009/10/today-interview-capitalism. (Accessed Aug. 2, 2017).

[8] On minimal and maximal practices of participation see Nico Carpentier, "Power as Participation's Master Signifier," in *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, eds. Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne, and Tamar Tembeck, pp. 3-19 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

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