

Markus Miessen
The Nightmare of Participation

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The Paradox of Collaboration

Eyal Weizman

At the horizon of the concept of participation—its very absolute extreme—is that of collaboration. Collaboration might be thought of as the tendency for forcefully or willingly aligning one’s actions with the aims of power, be it political, military, economic, or a combination thereof. The historical allusions are clear. This alignment is usually justified as a commonsensical, if tragic, solution to a problem of limits. The dilemma of participation/collaboration implies a closed system in which the options available for choice, and those who present them, cannot be challenged. Seeking to force the subject into compliance, a set of alternatives might thus be posed in such a way that “free-subjects,” choosing for their interests in moderating harm, would end up serving the aims of this power. Participation thus tends to raise a number of political and ethical dilemmas that demand a clear-headed study of the alignment of powers around the arena where it is called for.

The paradox of participation impacts most independent non-governmental organizations that make up the ecology of contemporary crisis. It operates by creating upon a common ground where activists must cooperate with the very states, armies, or militias they originally sought to confront. Thus, for example, a military officer attempting to administer

life in an "enlightened" manner might seek the collaboration of humanitarian agents who need military permission for providing life substances and medical help. The logic of this participation might somewhat obscure the fundamental moral differences between these groups.

At the core of the paradoxes of participation is a tactical compromise that often deteriorates into a structural impossibility—one that entangles the state and its opposition in a mutual embrace, making non-state organizations *de facto* participants in a diffused system of government in which the state outsources its ethical self-consciousness to a non-governmental ethical agency, and this agency delegates its claim to effectiveness in the state.

Between refusal and tactical embrace the difficulty of the problem of participation is equally in practicing and in avoiding it. There is, of course, no general formula to address this dilemma, but the deliberation of a political thought-practice might insist on an orientation of political patterns and on the constant expansion of the limits of the problem in both space and time. The former by seeking to identify more extended and intricate political connections, by studying and analyzing the force field around and outside the dilemma; and the latter by looking further into the future.

The ancient Greeks thought of dilemmas as one of the elements of tragedy. Each option that a "tragic hero" faced necessarily led to different forms of terrifying suffering, and the dilemma was presented as a choice between the two horns of an angry bull.

But the dilemma, if we are still to think in its terms, must not only be about which of the horns to choose, but whether to accept the terms of the question and choose at all. Robert Pirsig suggested several ways to subvert this complicity of the opposites: one can "refuse to enter the arena," "throw sand in the bull's eyes," or "sing the bull to sleep."

Political and spatial activists will always be within an arena of struggles in compromising situations, but these forms of practice must look for ways to challenge the truth claims, and thus the basis of the authority of the powers with which they both cooperate and confront—the very people who placed their bulls before us and then asked us to choose the lesser of their two horns.

When this is impossible, refusal might still be regarded as one effective form of political action. But this option must be reserved for those who can and otherwise will act.

Collaboration and the Conflictual

*The disappearance of class identities and the end of the bipolar system of confrontation have rendered conventional politics obsolete. Consensus finally reigns with respect to the basic institutions of society, and the lack of any legitimate alternative means that this consensus will not be challenged.*¹

—Chantal Mouffe

*In contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex realities rather than romantic notions of a common ground or commonality. It is an ambivalent process constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect each other.*²

—Florian Schneider

Pity is very underrated.

—George Costanza

Any form of participation is already a form of conflict. In order to participate in a given environment

1. Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), 3.
2. Florian Schneider, "The Dark Site of the Multitude," in *theory kit* (<http://kit.keim.org/node/1>), accessed Jan. 25, 2006.

or situation, one needs to understand the forces of conflict that act upon that environment. In this context, it seems urgent and necessary to promote an understanding of "conflictual participation," one that acts as an uninvited irritant, a forced entry into fields of knowledge that could arguably benefit from spatial thinking.

In the politics of participation, it is crucial to differentiate between cooperation and collaboration as pointed out by Florian Schneider.³ Political theorist Chantal Mouffe distinguishes between two scenarios in which the dimension of antagonism can be expressed in society: antagonism proper—the classic friend-enemy relation—and the concept of "agonism," as an alternative way in which oppositional positions can be played out. In the latter, we are faced not with the friend-enemy relation, but with a relation of what Mouffe calls "adversaries." This reading is based on the notion that adversaries are "friendly enemies": They have something in common, and they share a symbolic space. What is important in this concept is the potential to undo the innocence of participation, to point out the realities of responsibility, and expose the "violence of participation." In this context, it is useful to think through a concept of conflictual participation as a productive form of interventional practice.

Conflict refers to a condition of antagonism or a state of opposition between two or more groups of people. It can also be described as a clash of interests,

3. See *ibid.*

aims, or targets. When we look at conflict as opposed to innocent forms of participation, conflict is not to be understood as a form of protest or contrary provocation; but rather, as a micro-political practice through which the participant becomes an active agent who insists on being an actor in the force field they are facing. Thus, participation becomes a form of critical engagement.

When participation becomes conflict, conflict becomes space. Micro-political action can be as effective as traditional state political action. Such micro-political fragmentation strengthens what Hardt and Negri call the "multitude," a composite of multiple differences that carries with it the power of different positions.⁴ They argue that the accelerating integration of economic, political, and cultural forces on a global scale has enabled the growth of a powerful network. The multitude is defined by its diversity rather than its commonalities. According to Hardt and Negri, this multitude is the key for future change and might strike just where it is least expected, and with maximum efficiency where the antagonism is at its peak. However, as illustrated in the conversation with Chantal Mouffe in this book, Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude appears oversimplified when it comes to the global versus the local scale.

In the context of spatial practices and participation, probably the most interesting aspect of the notion of the multitude is its overlap with Italian writer and

4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005).

political theorist Antonio Gramsci, who proposed a "long march through the institutions," by which he meant the appropriation of cultural institutions at large: the media, the academies, and the theaters. Gramsci, Hardt, and Negri share the rejection of the understanding that changes in culture come "after the revolution." All three of them recognize the importance of culture. Their "revolution," therefore, is understood as the establishing of counter-institutions rather than overthrowing the economic base: a slow transformation in which conflict is understood as a constructive model of antagonistic encounter, a means of intervention that the democratic process should be able to afford. It is through the expression of disagreements that the unexpected will be able to emerge while appreciating culture as a living system.

In July 2006, Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed more than fifty people over the course of twenty-four hours. Their first so-called "Interview Marathon" at the Serpentine Gallery in London, was set up as a model to deliver a cross-section of practitioners that, in one way or another, define what London is today. Although the event was interesting and successful in many ways, one could also sense a certain frustration among the more critically oriented audience members. Surely, one would think, if one sets out to trace some kind of cross section, that it would include a multitude of dissimilar voices. Now, in order for this not to be misunderstood, it needs to be mentioned that I am not trying to argue for a more inclusive model or one based on political correctness. On the contrary: What

was missing was precisely the conflict that "is" the city. The Marathon was set up as a "stimulating set of discussions." However, all participants were either part of an existing network of cultural practitioners, thinkers, or commentators or at least originated in the same cultural milieu.

Regarding collaboration as a post-consensus form of practice, I would like to argue that, in order to include the complexity of the city, one also needs to include the conflicting forces of that city. Consensus is only achieved through a relationality of powers. One could argue that if such a relationality were to brake, another kind of knowledge would be produced, one that helps us understand the composite realities of the contemporary city and the forces at play. Interestingly, one of the interviewees at the Marathon was Chantal Mouffe, who usually suffers from a severe angst of the middle-class consensus swarm. Although her interview session was more of a monologue than a conversation, it revealed probably the most important point of the event: Because today's networking culture is based on consensus rather than conflict, it merely produces multiplications, but rarely new knowledge. As Mouffe argues, "To recognize the constitutive role of power relations implies abandoning the misconceived ideal of a reconciled democratic society. Democratic consensus can be envisaged only as a 'conflictual consensus.' Democratic debate is not a deliberation aimed at reaching 'the one' rational solution to be accepted by all, but a confrontation among adversaries."⁵

In this context, it could be useful to rethink

the concept of conflict as an enabler, a producer of a productive environment rather than as direct, physical violence. Conflict does not have to register as a physical force. A more diverse set of conflicting voices could have potentially been a risk for the turnout of the Marathon. However, it would have allowed multiple agencies and discourse that, through the recalibration of vectorial forces by means of critical conversations, could have produced alternative and unexpected knowledge: "[...] in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse."⁶

In order for any kind of participation to reach a political dimension, the engagement needs to be based on a distant critical voice. Through this kind of "conflictual participation," the exchange of knowledge in a post-disciplinary field of forces starts to produce new forms of knowledge. As a starting point for such a model of "conflictual participation," one could make use of the concept of collaboration as opposed to cooperation that Florian Schneider distinguishes in "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude":⁷

5. Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, op. cit., 4.
6. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 93–94.
7. Florian Schneider, "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude," op. cit.

"As a pejorative term, collaboration stands for willingly assisting an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force or a malevolent power. It means to work together with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected..."⁸ Since such a notion of collaboration is also based on an idea of the inside and the outside (if you're inside, you're part of an existing discourse that is to be agreed upon and fostered), it will increasingly be "the outsider" who will manage to critically add to pre-established power relations of expertise. Although the outsider will be understood as someone who does not threaten the internal system due to a lack of knowledge of its structure, it is precisely this condition that allows one to fully immerse himself in its depth in a dilettante manner. What we need today are more dilettantes who worry neither about making the wrong shift nor preventing friction between certain agents in the existing force field if necessary; we need a means to—as Claire Doherty calls it—"circumnavigate predictability."⁹ It is this dilettantism that might enable us to enter more productive modes of collaborative engagement. In this sense, the critical production beyond disciplines could be interpreted as the temporary abandoning of one's own specialized knowledge for the benefit of entering an existing discourse through the access point of curiosity. Through specialist

8. Ibid.

9. Claire Doherty, "The New Situationists," in *Contemporary Art—From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog The New Situationists, 2004), p.11

non-knowledge, but highly specific targeting in terms of a will to participate in a given environment, system, or discourse, such curiosity engenders exploration, investigation, and learning; it allows for a forceful injection of external knowledge that is alien to the system one engages with.

Schneider describes the notion of teamwork as something that often fails because of often banal, internalized modes of cooperation that are characterized by the opposite of sharing knowledge: "In order to pursue a career, one has to hide the relevant information from others. On the other hand, it also refers to the fact that joining forces in a group or team increases the likelihood of failure much more than the likelihood of success. Awkward group dynamics, harmful externalities, bad management practices are responsible for the rest."¹⁰ Schneider interestingly stresses the fact that there is increasing evidence that working together may also happen in unexpected ways. In such a regime of practice, the individual members of, for example, a work group—in which they are usually conditioned to pursue solidarity and generosity—are being exposed to a more brusque method of collaboration, a mode where "individuals are relying on each other the more they go after their own interests, mutually dependent through following their own agendas."¹¹ Cooperation should be understood as the process of working side by side, in agreement rather than in competition. Collaboration

10. Florian Schneider, "Collaboration: The Dark Side of the Multitude," *op. cit.*

11. *Ibid.*

is a process by which individuals or organizations work together at the intersection of common goals. This can be adversarial, joining forces to generate a surplus, although the stakeholders' goals might be opposing. In order to clearly distinguish between modes of cooperation and modes of collaboration, Schneider introduces cooperation as a method applied between identifiable individuals within organizations, whereas collaboration articulates a more disparate relationship generated by and based on heterogeneous parts, which are defined as unpredictable singularities. In contrast to an organic model of cooperation, collaboration is being put forward as a rigorously immanent and illegitimate praxis.

This notion of course connects to the concept of the outsider, as well as the need for a more conflational mode of participation from the point of view of self-initiated practice versus the more established model of the service provider: "Cooperation necessarily takes place in a client-server architecture [...] Collaboration on the contrary presumes rhizomatic structures where knowledge grows exuberantly and proliferates in a rather unforeseeable fashion."¹² It is this collaborative structure that presents, according to Schneider, the most fertile site of revolutionary potential. It is where change can occur, frameworks of difference can flourish, and the creativity of the multiplicity can generate productive practices.

Collaboration often produces actors who work on projects for something other than a purely mon-

12. *Ibid.*

etary exchange or the accumulation of cultural capital. It can also be described as a productive learning process. In the book *In Search of New Public Domain*, Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp characterize what they call a true public domain as an experience in which there is interplay of friction and freedom, as we temporarily but frequently come into contact and enter the parochial domain of others.¹³ It points to the fact that, if you set up a situation in which people can produce what they believe in, this condition can produce a set of relationships and productivities that take the situation further than the conventional understanding of disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices. The logic of change is always based on the notion of exception, while unpredictable acting is the enabler for something "new" to emerge. One could argue that the autonomy of the art world produces an infrastructure for this. In such a context, opposition can be read as affirmation, and whether boundaries retract or expand, they set up the limits of potentialities.

The concept of using conflict as a generator of critical and productive collaboration was first introduced in conflict theory. There are very formalized political, transnational, and non-governmental structures and procedures in place that utilize conflict as a strategic tool, in order to both reveal realities and generate a crisis, which allow for change to occur more rapidly. The United Nations practices a number of conflict strategies in which micro-conflicts are

13. Maarten Hejer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search Of The New Public Domain* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2002).

superimposed onto existing situations of conflict in order to deal with the source issue. This concept of introducing other conflicts falls within what is officially called "conflict transformation theory," which is strongly influenced by Johan Galtung.¹⁴

To return to the notion of collaboration, it would thus not be farfetched to argue that conflict could be understood as a productive variable within collaboration. It points to the larger question of how we think of challenges and change. Conflict is not necessarily a given. It needs to emerge and needs to be fostered as a generative friction, a force of critical production. However, as introduced earlier, such conflict should be understood as one that is neither physical nor violent, but a friction that emerges on a content and production level, a conflict played out within the remit of the democratic arena. Acting within this arena produces reality. In this context, those who do not act, but stand by as spectators, do not participate and simply confirm existing paradigms of

14. Galtung is currently the director of Transcend, an international peace and development network, seen as the pioneer of peace and conflict research, and founder of the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in Oslo. Galtung also originated the concept of Peace Journalism, increasingly influential in communications and media studies. Over the past forty years, Galtung has published ninety-five books and more than a thousand articles on the operations of conflict. Interestingly, Transcend also promotes codes such as: "Even if electoral democracy and individualist human rights are good for you, they might not be for others." This is interesting precisely because Galtung has developed the concept that is widely known as "structural violence." Here, conflict is understood not as a means of provocation, but as an idea of prompting change through the operational collision of interests that produce new meaning and practice, a means of productive and operative change.

practice. The culture of antagonistic collaboration could also be described as an urban, rather than a rural, practice. Density allows for antagonisms to emerge more naturally. The space of performativity is a space of reaction and encounter, in which there is an intrinsic relation of what Chantal Mouffe calls the adversarial, of “friendly enemies.” What they have in common is that they share a symbolic space. They agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political association, but they disagree about the interpretation of these principles, a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles. In a similar manner—excavating the dynamics between friend and enemy—Jacques Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship*,¹⁵ applies the use of difference to the concept of friendship. Haunted by the provocative address attributed to Aristotle—“my friends, there is no friend”—Derrida illustrates that there is a play of difference associated with the concept of friendship. He does not have to problematize the concept of friendship, as it is already problematized by its very own history: In its essence, friendship is marked by difference. Between friend and enemy, as well as friend and friend, there is the potential for a conflictual consensus, one that produces the fertile ground for conflictual participation to emerge.

This allows for the politics of participation to be redefined by a productive difference, inserted as friction. Critical practice is supposed to challenge the expectation of what things should be and how they

15. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997).

should be done. Knowledge is necessarily shareable and occurs after there is a common ground, even if that shared ground is conflictual. If art is political in defining ways of being together and reshaping common ground and how it emerges, then—as Tom Keenan remarks—“art clearly can be and in fact is a mode of research in the political.”¹⁶ Art is “doing” politics not through modes of representation, but through practice. The moment of the political is when agency is assumed, when one becomes visible. Almost by default, this raises a problematic: Someone on the outside needs to recognize it as political. Therefore, the relationship between practice and distribution and the question of how to address and present, become imperative. It is important to understand that architecture can never deliver solutions. However, what it can do is visualize and spatialize the conflicts that are the reality of the very nature of its context; in fact, even more so considering that these conflicts are disappearing from our visual registers. Consequently, architecture becomes a mode of witness testimony.

One should therefore argue that, instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should encourage the “uninterested outsider,” the “uncalled participant” who is unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, entering the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to provoke change. Running down the corridor with

16. Tom Keenan quoted from a Centre for Research Architecture roundtable presentation and discussion on March 24, 2006, Goldsmiths College, London.

no fear of causing friction or destabilizing existing power relations, he opens up a space for change, one that enables “political politics.” Given the increasing fragmentation of identities and the complexities of the contemporary city, we are now facing a situation in which it is crucial to think about a form of commonality, which allows for conflict as a form of productive engagement: a model of bohemian participation in the sense of an outsider’s point of entry, accessing existing debates and discourses untroubled by their disapproval.

Democracy Revisited (In Conversation with Chantal Mouffe)

From December 2006 until the summer of 2009, Markus Miessen conducted a series of meetings and one-on-one conversations with political theorist Chantal Mouffe. In a series of ongoing discussions in London, Vienna, and Berlin, of which this chapter presents an edited volume of selected material, Miessen implicated his current investigation into conflict- and non-consensus-based forms of participation as an alternative spatial practice and point of departure to discuss democratic life and Mouffe’s understanding of what she calls “conflictual consensus.”

PART 1

MARKUS MIESEN — Chantal, you have written extensively on the struggle of politics and the radical heart of democratic life. Could you explain the main thesis of your latest book, *On the Political*?

CHANTAL MOUFFE — My objective in *On the Political* consists of two aims: The first one is from the point of view of political theory. I am convinced that the two

Risk and Failure

In his memoir *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure*,¹ the American postmodern novelist Paul Auster clarifies his understanding of failure by stating that, in his late twenties and early thirties, he went through a period of several years when everything he touched turned to failure. As Colin MacCabe noted at a conference titled “The Value of Failure,” in June 2005,² “Success has become one of the key terms by which people evaluate their own and others’ lives.” When MacCabe refers to failure, he posits it as a crucial component of both the development of knowledge in science and creative experimentation in the arts. He ends by asking to which degree contemporary society demands success and what happens when, in contemporary Britain (and indeed Europe), both public and private funding for projects in the cultural and educational sectors become increasingly success-oriented.

Imagine if one were to see the world through a pair of technocratic goggles of failure analysis. Backed up by the comforting environments of Structuralist certainty, this is actually pretty simple. One would start an analysis by determining both the mechanism and the root cause of failure in order to implement a corrective action. One can therefore proportionally raise the track record of “success” over time.

1. Paul Auster, *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).
2. Conference at Tate Modern’s Starr Auditorium, June 2005.

We always think of success as being good because it has become linked to prosperity. In MacCabe's words, "Success dominates because of its part in the global evaluation of the good life in terms of money." Hence, failure has become the unthinkable, the semantic confirmation of poverty. Looking at the current production of space, and indeed the art world, one contentedly realizes that creative production and failure are an inseparable pair. This, of course, may be true of almost any industry or economy, but it seems that, at least in current cultural discourse, the value of failure is being put forward as an alternative idea to success. Within such a regime of production, one might argue that the realization of "failure as the fundamental condition of surprise" is nothing new, but an interesting one to build upon. Today, the primary issue that needs to be stressed is the fact that we have moved away, at least in creative production, from the reference model of the final product. Fortunately, such a notion is often replaced by cultural laboratories in which the proto-product—in other words, the process towards X—and its failure is valued as knowledge production, and embodies precisely the laboratory for experimentation that provides challenging work. If one were to understand experimentation as a vital ingredient that contributes to the cultural gravitas of spatial production, one has to coercively admit to the value of failure. Hence, the societal norm of success as the only way forward needs to be reviewed.

Thinking about failure and conflict from the point of view of process, the most infertile situation

that can occur is to let the fear of failure lead to inaction. It is the act of production that allows us to revise, tweak, rethink, and change. Along the lines of reinventing oneself, it also opens a space of uncertainty that often produces knowledge and content by surprise. If one's priority is to resist failure at all cost, the potential of surprise is never played out. This is why the results of certain investigations and inventions in many fields and disciplines have become predictable, and the outcome of a vast majority of creative and artistic output is both conventional and mediocre. To take a risk means to be incapable of preempting the outcome of an investigation. By consciously allowing processing to fail, one opens up a window of surprise; it is the moment where conflictual involvement and non-loyal participation produce new knowledge and political politics.

The Uninvited Outsider

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said introduces the public role of the intellectual as an outsider, an amateur and disturber of the status quo. In his view, one task of the intellectual is to break down stereotypes as well as the reductive categories that limit human thought and communication.¹ Said speaks about intellectuals as figures whose public performance can neither be predicted nor reduced to a fixed dogma or party line. He clearly distinguishes between the notion of the intellectual and that of the insider: "Insiders promote special interests, but intellectuals should be the ones to question patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege."² For Said, an ideal intellectual works marginally, as an exile, as an amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power, rather than an expert who provides objective advice for pay. This disinterested notion of what one could call the "uninvited outsider" is, in the context of this book, the most relevant of Said's ideas. It puts forward the claim that universality always comes hand in hand with taking a risk. There are no rules. There are "no gods to be worshipped and looked to for unwavering guidance."³ In questioning

1. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (The 1993 *Reith Lectures*) (New York: Random House, 1996), xi.
2. *Ibid.*, xiii.
3. *Ibid.*, xiv.

the default mode of operation, which is clearly that of the specialist, the insider, the one with an interested agenda, he writes of the intellectual as one who always speak to an audience, and by doing so, represent them to themselves. This mode of practice is based on the notion that one operates according to an idea that one has of one's own practice, which brings with it the intellectual duty for independence from external pressures. In underlining the role of the outsider, Said exposes the need to—at times—belong to a network of social authorities in order to directly effect change (as already elaborated in chapter 8). This spirit of productive and targeted opposition, rather than accommodation, is the driving force for such a practice. To understand when to be part of something and when to be outside of it, to strategically align oneself in order to make crucial decisions, which would otherwise be made by others (most likely with a less ethically developed horizon).

Said, however, also illustrates that the role of the outsider is a lonely condition; it involves what Foucault calls "a relentless erudition": "There is something fundamentally unsettling about intellectuals who have neither offices to protect nor territory to consolidate and guard."²⁴ The uninvited outsider is someone who has a background within a particular (taught) discipline, but ventures out of his or her milieu and immediate professional context. Using a set of soft skills required elsewhere, he or she then applies them to found situations and problematics.

4. Ibid., xviii.

According to Said, this individual has a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced to a faceless professional; it is precisely the fact that one is operating without one's own professional boundaries that one can start to articulate concerns, views, and attitudes that go beyond the benefit of the individual or particular. On the one hand, it seems that there are benefits to professional boundaries, expertise, and specific knowledge. While on the other hand, one could argue that specific sets of parasitic knowledge can most generatively, surprisingly, and productively apply to situations precisely when they are not based on disinterested principles. This is something that can particularly emerge when driven by "symbolic personages marked by their unyielding distance to practical concerns,"²⁵ driven by a consciousness that is skeptical and engaged, and devoted to moral judgment: "The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us."²⁶ The intellectual should be neither understood as a mediator nor a consensus-builder, but "someone whose being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or

5. Ibid., 7.

6. C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz, (New York: Ballantine, 1963), 299.

the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwilling, but actively willing to say so in public."⁷

In this context, it is necessary to raise a basic but crucial question: What language does one speak and whom is one addressing? From which position does one talk? There is no truth, only specific situations. There are responses to situations. One's talk or reaction should be modeled after these situations. Therefore, it is also a question of scale. It may be the case that a specific situation might lead to potential readings of larger bodies and relationships. Once the specifics are dealt with, one usually easily understands the larger ramifications. In terms of communicating one's message, it is essential to break away from one's own milieu—which often consists of people who share the same disciplinary background—in order to produce new publics and audiences that would otherwise not convene if not for one's practice. In the context of the uninvited outsider, exile can also be understood as a metaphorical condition, such as exile in other fields of expertise. Or as the saying goes: One cannot be a prophet in one's own country. This also relates to one's professional background.

Such exile can be understood as a nomadic practice, not one that is necessarily driven by territorial shifts, but one that sets a course that is never fully adjusted, "always feeling outside the chatty, familiar

world inhabited by natives."⁸ According to Said, exile—as dissatisfaction—can become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation. Said further makes a claim for a kind of amateurism, an "activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization."⁹ As a result, today's intellectual ought to be an amateur, "someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity."¹⁰ Instead of simply doing what one is supposed to do, one can inquire about reasons and protocols. Practitioners in exile are individuals who do not represent the consensus of the foreign practice, but who have doubts about it on rational, moral, and political grounds. Questioning long-established agreements and consent, these outsiders can represent and work toward a cause, which might otherwise be difficult for those entangled in the force fields, power relations, and political relations of the context that the pariah enters. What is important to realize here is that Said deliberately emphasizes the need to be in some form of contact and relationship with the audience in order to affect change: "The issue is whether that audience is there to be satisfied, and hence a client to be kept happy, or whether it is there to be challenged, and hence stirred into outright opposition or mobilized into greater democratic participation in the society. But in either

8. *Ibid.*, 53.

9. *Ibid.*, 82.

10. *Ibid.*

7. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, op. cit., 23

case, there is no getting around the intellectual's relationship to them."¹¹

What is at stake here is not an activation of dilettantism as the cultivation of quasi-expertise, but rather a notion of the outsider as an instrumentalized means of breaking out of the tautological box of professional practice. The outsider is not necessarily a polymath or generalist—the Renaissance image and description of the architect¹²—but someone who can use a general sense of abstraction in order for his or her knowledge to fuel an alternative and necessary debate, and to decouple existing and deadlocked relationships and practices in a foreign context. One way to become active and productive as an instigator and initiator in the choreography of strategic conflicts is to appropriate the strength and potential of weak ties. Such an understanding of surplus value through otherness is essentially antithetical to the notion of Gnostic knowledge; that is to say, the idea that the specialist is “good” and trustworthy, and that only specialist knowledge should be accepted in a specific and related environment or field of practice. It further entails that one accepts the status quo by not engaging with it if one is not an expert. The outsider does not accept this. The venturing out of both the notion of expertise and discipline is crucial in order to remain sufficiently curious toward the specialized knowledges of others. Moreover, it is important that, once in exile, one builds up what architect Teddy Cruz

11. *Ibid.*, 83.

12. See also Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983).

calls a “critical proximity,”¹³ a space in which the role of the outsider is to tactically enter an institution or other construct in order to understand, shuffle, and mobilize its resources and organizational logic.

This then starts to translate into a discipline without profession, a discipline without a set of prescriptions or known knowledges, but a framework of criticality: a discipline from the outside, a parasitic and impartial form of consulting. Knowledge and the production of knowledge is not fueled by accumulation, but editing and sampling. Or as Jorge Davila argues about Foucault's analytics of power: to cut is to start something new—knowledge itself is a cut, a moment of rupture, a moment of exception driven by the moment of decision.¹⁴ But like “participation,” “critique” itself can also become a form and force of normalization. As already elaborated in the case of Joschka Fischer (chapter 8), critique can be normalized and absorbed just as rebellion is being subsumed. For critical spatial practice to remain productive and unforeseen, one must avoid a situation in which criticality turns into yet another modality of commodification.

13. See also Teddy Cruz, interview by Sevin Yildiz, “With Teddy Cruz on ‘Power’ and ‘Powerlessness,’” on *Architect*, available at http://architect.com/features/article.php?id=93919_o_23_o_M

14. See Jorge Dávila, “Foucault's Interpretive Analytics of Power,” in *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, vol. 6, no. 4 (August 1993).

What follows is an e-mail by curator and writer Tirdad Zolghadr on the outsider as professional, which is replied to by Markus Miessen.

Dear Markus,

Before you write me off as a mono-disciplinarian—this is the thing: we are not outsiders. We love to see ourselves as smugglers, delinquents, nomads, etc. But actually, the art world emissary dropping in for hurried pluridisciplinary sound bites has become an orthodox participatory model. So not only are we not outsiders, we're not uninvited either. As "professional amateurs," we really HAVE become professional. Our rituals of semi-knowledge are now fully institutional. This doesn't mean you cannot be experimental, playful, and brash. But you also need perseverance and patience to do that. Long-term engagements, theme by theme, all that stuff.

Deepest respect,
Tirdad

Dearest Tirdad,

I am not in fact referring to a glorified notion of romantic outsiders. I am talking about a job description, a set of skills beyond discipline without profession. I am trying to move away from the notion of participation that has been surrounding

me for too long, a phoney and pseudo-social interest in democratic processes, and toward a reading of participation that is opportunistic. I am neither a philanthropist, nor interested in presenting myself as a social worker, as half of the art world seems to have done since the second half of the 1990s.

Although I am very fond of working on projects that are d'accord with my personal ethical positions, I am not interested in establishing yet another democratic utopia.

As you know, working across what is labeled "disciplinary borders" is not that easy. Just because a curator is a good curator does not automatically mean that he or she is also useful as an architect, or vice versa. Within my notion of crossbench practice, there is something about the need to accept limitations: without limits and edges that rub against each other, there is no productive friction.

Yes, we love to see ourselves as smugglers, delinquents, and nomads. But don't forget: I am not part of the art world as you are. And what I am writing about, referring to, and working on, is only marginally connected to the art world. I have recently read a very interesting statement of yours in *frieze* about Eyal Weizman. I agree with you on the remarkable project he is working on. The problem is that it is a great project, because it is interested in real change on an actual site, in an actual situation, and not simply in the representation of change, as so often stipulated in the art world.

For me, the art world is one of many testing grounds and arenas for ideas. For everyone inside

the art world, it is the "employer." Maybe this short paragraph, in which Brecht describes a Gramscian idea of hegemonic articulation, pointing specifically at the mechanisms of a neutralized media apparatus, partially explains my interest in the outsider:

As for the radio's object, I don't think it can consist merely in prettifying public life [...] radio is one-sided when it should be two-. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him... Whatever the radio sets out to do it must strive to combat that lack of consequences which makes such asses out of almost all our public institutions. We have a literature without consequences, which not only itself sets out to leave nowhere, but does all it can to neutralize its reader by depicting each object and situation stripped of the consequences to which they lead.¹⁵

At the end of the day, the question is: What are the consequences? And more importantly: What are the consequences outside the art world? If

15. Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 53.

anything, this book uses my situation and desperate search for a way out of the "participation crisis" as a means to try and optimistically—and maybe naively—wrap up my current thoughts about how to act in this crisis. And if we can be professional while being outsiders, all the better!

Best wishes,
Markus

The Crossbench Practitioner

There is always a confused soul that thinks that one man can make a difference. And you have to kill him to convince him otherwise. That's the hassle with democracy.¹

—Senator Charles F. Meachum

I relate my approach to homeopathy, which puts poison in the system in order to generate energy to defeat the weakness.²

—Gustav Metzger

As Simon Critchley argues, philosophy always begins with disappointment.³ Nihilism is the breakdown of the order of meaning, in which everything that we have previously imagined as a sound basis for moral judgment becomes meaningless. According to Critchley, philosophical activity, by which he means the free movement of thought and the possibility for critical reflection, “is defined by militant resistance to nihilism.”⁴ In order to remain at least borderline optimistic within the current sociopolitical climate

1. Played by Ned Beatty in *Shooter*, directed by Antoine Fuqua, Paramount Pictures, 2007.
2. Gustav Metzger, interview by Mark Godfrey, “Protest and Survive,” *frieze*, no. 108 (Jun–Aug 2007); available at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/protest_and_survive/.
3. Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 2.

of practice, one needs to generate a turf in which it seems possible to overcome the constant lamenting, pessimism, and black writing about and toward the contemporary condition. As Peter Sloterdijk contends, the individual designer needs to attempt to mount a certain universe of competency, a territory in which one can exist as a sovereign individual, not in the sense of relative specialization, but rather, the reverse: The contemporary "expert" needs to become not a more specified master of a singular terrain, but an incompetent master navigating the ocean of practices. For Sloterdijk, design is the skillful mastering of incompetence.⁵ Skillful incompetence enables a type of neutral gear, a parallel reality, in which practice, even in the presence of those who attempt to render themselves unconscious, can be sustained in an optimistic mode of production.

Free movement of thought necessarily implies not always clinging to what is known and perceived as functional and "right," what has been practiced or experienced previously. Working from the outside, like a non-institutionalized free agent—who is, to a certain extent, comparable to an external consultant⁶—also means actively performing a certain marginality. The isolation of such marginality can only be overcome by a relentless will for collaboration, a commitment and willingness to change things—beyond intellectual aspirations, but through

5. Peter Sloterdijk and Sven Voelker, *Der Welt über die Straße helfen – Designstudien im Anschluss an eine philosophische Überlegung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010), 11–12.

6. See also chapter 9, "Learning from the Market."

significant distance that produces a mode of criticality, a distance that an insider cannot offer and does not possess. In this model of practice, which strives for change through commitment, complicity connotes the death of a project. Such a model needs to be driven by a result-oriented praxis whose potential for modalities can only ever be tested in reality. Rather than simply regurgitating its theoretical potential over and over again, these results can be critiqued, altered, tweaked, edited, or even dismissed. The key phrase here is "constructive critical productivity." One should rather attempt to produce ten critical realities in a year and repeatedly learn from the potential mistakes, and then develop a singular practice. Testing allows for agility. Such testing needs to be carried out in the relevant context, in collaboration with others, and across cultural milieus in order to avoid self-stimulation, vanity, and the comfortable and passive nestling behind walls of egocentric practice, which are all highly uncritical and vastly unproductive:

There is the danger that theater is turning into solely a simulation of itself. Like a cleaning lady who swabs the floor of the stage, and while observing her own reflection in the window, realizes how she likes the movement of her ass while scrubbing the floor. It no longer seems to matter whether the floor is actually being cleaned, because the movement of her ass is the only result of scrubbing it. This is how I perceive theater right now: a cleaning lady who has nothing else on her mind but the salacious movement of her own ass.⁷

To use Martin Wutke's analogy, it seems crucial to find a way to position oneself, in an agile manner, within the context of current practices and the contemporary condition, without falling into the trap of deadlock. Today's critical practitioner should opt to become a receptor of political processes rather than a remote player who navigates through the cultural-political terrain in a deaf/dumb/blind-like manner, which Diedrich Diederichsen calls "surrogate-democratic participation,"⁸ and presents nothing more than a depoliticization of the individual beyond serious modes of engagement. In the current climate, it is necessary to separate oneself from magic buzzwords—sustainability, participation, democracy, or the multitude—which were propagated at the tail end of the 1990s. Instead of using them as simple billpostings for political one-liners, one must tackle their underlying motives through contextualized practice. These buzzwords were only a few of the terminologies that were used in order to move attention from the micro to the macro scale. This was happening across the board, beyond political alliances, whether on the Left or the Right.⁹ At some point, it became sexy to subscribe to these terminologies. Whether one was convinced by its content or possible future potentials was a secondary question. It was a

7. Martin Wutke in Stephan Suschke (ed.), *Nahaufnahme: Martin Wutke – Theaterarbeit mit Schleef, Müller, Castorf, Pollesch* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2010), trans. by the author.

8. Diedrich Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping – Selbstverwertung, Künstlerromantik, Partizipation* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 279.

9. *Ibid.*, 49.

mainstream trend, across disciplines, across political beliefs. The whole point about cultural praxis is that it presupposes and assumes possible futures, that it speculates on what might be possible through a series of critical theories and practices that, for society at large, are still too abstract.¹⁰

One could claim, however, that the real value is hidden in an approach in which there is no evidence in the result of either fully rational decision-making or consensus. One could argue that the crossbench politician in the British House of Lords is an interesting reference to consider, not as a *gesamt*-political structure of the House and its conservative alignment, but as a structural component that is designed to leave space for those who want to remain disassociated in order to provoke, motivate, and eventually stir change. The crossbench politician is essentially an independent practitioner who neither belongs to a specific party nor regularly fosters alliances with the same political camps. Although this also makes him or her a less reliable or dependable player, potentially even without a clear stance, it offers an alternative disinterested and less biased perspective toward the internal, consensus-driven mechanisms of the other political parties present in the House. Although these politicians have an undoubtedly political stance and opinion, they do not subscribe to the nailed-down membership books or party platforms of other consolidated politicians. This is also reflected in the crossbencher's spatial arrangement and positioning

10. *Ibid.*, 184.

within the house, where Labour sits on one side and conservatives on the other; the crossbenchers are in the middle, slightly retracted toward the back of the room.

By now, participation is part of the neoliberal project, and ultimately serves the preservation of the system. Real questions of power are no longer being negotiated. Within the remit of such "directed participation" and highly controlled political engagement, one should promote a practice of the autonomous practitioner as a means to master conflict as an enabling, rather than disabling, force. It calls for a new interpretation of both the late 1990s romantic use of "participation" as a mode or operation, as well as the function and responsibility of the crossbencher: a mode of conflictual participation, which no longer perpetuates and relies on a process by which others are invited in, but instead acts without consensual mandate as a disinterested productive irritant.

In participation, there are often too many potential decision-makers; but there aren't enough people who take on the responsibility, risk, and courage to turn these decisions into reality, to move things forward. Any political practice must, of course, always opt to remain within the territory and be grounded on the basic rules of the democratic arena. Nevertheless, there is a potential danger in always using majority as a way to generate democratic decision-making. The dilemma with democracy is that, the moment you have a room full of idiots, they will vote for an idiotic government; or, in the case of the recent Swiss referendum regarding the subsistence of the country's

mosques, if one has sufficient financial resources to mobilize the idiots, it is possible to make the entire country look like a fool. The central difficulty with the romanticized notion of the participatory project is that it assumes that everyone should sit around the table in order to make decisions. Yet this might not necessarily be in everyone's interest. Should one seriously read the British *Sun*, the *New York Post*, or the German *Bild Zeitung* just simply because they are the newspapers with the biggest audiences and print runs? The question at hand and the development of the last decade's notion of the participatory project actually point to a far greater danger: the problem and helplessness of the Left. If all one can do in order to make decisions is to outsource it and open up the responsibility to the floor, then something in representative electoral democracy has gone severely wrong. This is also why, in the shadow of the last decade, one could witness the reemergence of the Right, which now oddly appears to get things done. It developed irony to perfection, a lunge that has rendered the Right almost invulnerable: "The Left may have won the curricular battle, but the Right won the public-relations war. The right did this in the old-fashioned way, by mastering the ancient art of rhetoric and spinning a vocabulary that, once established in the public mind, performed the work of argument all by itself."¹¹

What can the architect's role be in all of this today? As a contemporary architect, one confronts the dilemma of a profession that no longer really exists. There is no such thing as a core competence, which, as we learned from Peter Sloterdijk earlier, may

actually be an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Core competences—such as Sony = miniaturization, Honda = combustion engine, 3M = everything you stick together—also mean that you may be very good at doing one thing, but the demand simply vanishes. Everyone who joins one of these companies needs to understand that such competencies are only valuable when they can be applied in different fields; they should have an understanding about how to design this transfer and why this is desirable. Until recently, most architects did not know how to do this. Over the decades, they unlearned this skill, which was even part of architectural education for a long time. In the Renaissance, the Polymath and generalist was the role model for such a practitioner; he was a reflexive, educated individual capable of lateral thinking. Different times have identified different primary dimensions, but it becomes interesting when one allows these dimensions to become transparent and understood as interdependent.

Rather than mourn the good old days, this can also be understood as a challenge and potential. Architects have at times been very prolific in exploiting the potential of existing in a parasitic relationship to the discipline that actually produces architecture, which is the discipline of building. The natural disillusionment with the way in which decisions that have already been made are often not carried through by those who should materialize them has equipped

11. Stanley Fish, "Intellectual Diversity: The Trojan Horse of a Dark Design," *The Chronicle of Higher Education/The Chronicle Review*, February 13, 2004.

architects with a healthy amount of skepticism. Over the last decades, what used to be known as the profession of architecture has disintegrated into a plethora of practices. This change from a profession or clearly outlined discipline into a series of practices was fuelled and mobilized by a certain politicization, which emerged in the mid-1990s.¹² These practices are trying to achieve many disparate aims, but might be united by a singular quality that is the possibility and skill of the imagination, formulation, and design of strategic frameworks that enable things to happen. The problem, however, is that this abstract quality is continuously applied in the same old field and turf, which failed architects in the first place. This raises the question of positioning and how one situates him or herself within the larger territory of critical practices. It is easy to agree that there is a certain impotence, which seems to govern the profession. However, within the cultural sphere, there are many niches to be explored and squatted. Exploring the potential space between stability and instability, critical spatial practice can be understood as a stage set of sorts, a strategic manual for choreographing futures. Critics might argue that the architectural project per se is simply a more baggy type of storytelling. And there may even be a certain accuracy in this. Nevertheless, one needs to be pretty good at telling the story.

Such a polyphonic practice opens up a new role not only for the architect, but for critical practices in

12. As described in the chapter 4, "The Grand Narratives: Life after Bilbao."

general: To go beyond conventional physical construction and venture into the construction of realities, not in order to follow existing protocols, but to proactively generate them. It embodies a plea for the non-academic intellectual, with a wide diffusion beyond the academy, although most of it may have been nurtured inside it.¹³ Even more so, the cross-bench practitioners should not remain at the edge of the water. They should turn toward the political world precisely because it is animated by considerations of power and interest. Unlike the academy, its impact might affect an entire practice or social body rather than only a student body. This is not to sound megalomaniac, but rather to say that in times of crisis, one is responsible for an intellectual premise on a larger scale. In this sense, moving from relatively discrete questions of interpretation and reading to much more significant and proactive ones of social change and transformation, may introduce and articulate an outsider's perspective on a larger scale: "The intellectual who claims to write only for him or herself, or for the sake of pure learning, or abstract science is not to be, and must not be, believed."¹⁴ In this regard, Edward Said proactively summarized the key problematic: "The hardest aspect of being an intellectual is to represent what you profess through your work and interventions, without hardening into an institution or a kind of automaton acting at the behest of a system

13. As described in chapter 12, "The Future Academy."

14. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Random House, 1996), 110.

15. *Ibid.*, 121.

or method."¹⁵ In Said's opinion, the significance is to never forget that you have the choice. And choice is what inhabits strength and power, even from the point of view of the individual.

Political space entails the practice of decision-making and judging; judgment means to introduce a system of hierarchies. Such curatorial practice includes at its core the act of strategizing and destruction: making choices to determine what to eliminate. In the given context of critical spatial practice, the architect as curator could be understood as an instigator, who—through the introduction of zones of conflict—transforms the cultural landscape, which is the result of an unstable society that consists of many distinct and often conflicting individuals, institutions, and spaces. One could therefore argue that instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should aim for the encouragement of a disinterested outsider who exists at the margins, only waiting for the relevant moment to produce ruptures in the prevailing discourses and practices. This is someone who is intentionally unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, one who enters the arena with nothing but creative and projective intellect. Running down the corridor with no fear of causing friction or destabilizing existing power relations, this outsider opens up a space for change, one that enables "political politics."

The question remains whether this is all to be understood as an opportunistic endeavor, trying to simply describe one's own role within a plethora of differentiated practices, or whether it has some qualities

or use-value beyond the individual. Crossbench practice is could be described precisely as acting without a clearly defined mandate, but proactively seeking engagement: a freelancer with a conscience. It calls for a hermeneutics and recalibration of the notion of participation. Such an understanding of practice seems vital in order to optimistically face the future. It assumes that one defines oneself through the notion of practice rather than through discipline or profession. Here, skills and a core competence replace the traditional notion of discipline and professionalism. Here, participation produces an alternative and parallel reality, which is activated and driven by self-motivation, political agenda, collaborative willingness, and the fearlessness to exclude, rather than thrive in unquestioned inclusion. Such an agenda of critical manipulation must not take anything for granted and must never take final sides; in other words, not to cop out of responsibility, but to stay flexible, agile, and critical beyond the dogmatic. One should, on the other hand, be aware that crossbench tactics also have a weak side as they tend to be temporal and often local, hence maybe in danger of missing the bigger picture, or having trouble seeing over long time spans.

The clique of the art and architecture worlds as practice rather than pure critique have, in this regard, lost touch—apart from a relatively small circle of practitioners. Many practices in the art world rarely produce more than one-liners and postings, and nestle in the relative freedom and luxury of a superimposed happy-go-lucky bubble, in which participation has become nothing but an esoteric

self-awareness program. This has resulted in an almost entire de-politicization. What is needed now is a re-introduction of critical interrogation in regard to the value, positions, and temporal nature of political engagement, being raised in and against the institutional interior. Along this path, an alternative rendering of participation and the relational should be delineated, one that moves from performer to proactive enabler, beyond the event-driven realities of a certain artistic production around social situations, toward a direct and personal engagement and stimulation of specific future realities. This can only be achieved by avoiding the trap of getting stuck in one milieu, such as the art world, or a singular political project; humans have feet in order to move and not get stuck. Otherwise, we would be trees. It needs to result in a content- and agenda-driven nomadic practice fueled by critical inquiries, an extra-discursive position in which one exits a milieu in order to be able to re-enter it differently. It should allow for an ambiguity that assumes responsibility while moving from pedigree to bastard. This practitioner will be a co-author rather than a participant—as participants are usually confronted with superimposed structures. Although the “free radical” does not exist and nothing is clean—rather, everything is ambivalent—such a practice needs to work toward an ambition that is immune to complicity. Such complicity can be overcome by assuming three positions with which modes of proactive participation can become meaningful: attitude, relevance, and responsibility. Unfortunately, these are missing.

Space is the result of *Handlung*.¹⁶ It is impossible to generate change through the passive mode of reacting. Practice always needs to go beyond absorption and become projective; it must inject itself into contextual realities and make itself visible in order to instrumentalize. In a time when participation has become nothing but a rendering of tokenistic political correctness, such a propositional, rather than a purely reflective, notion of practice offers a hideout for agonistic commitment.

Most subcultural developments of the last fifty years obliged themselves more toward the military logic of the avant-gardes than to the ideas of democratic participation: first on site, scouting unknown terrain, on and off transmission of information, but otherwise living the wild and dangerous life of small underground cells.¹⁷ As Marcel Reich-Ranicki wrote about Gotthold-Ephraim Lessing: "The loneliness appeared to him as the qualification for the autonomy of the critic, the autonomy as the prerequisite for his function."¹⁸

16. See also Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001).

17. Tobias Rapp, *Lost and Sound* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), 49, trans. by the author.

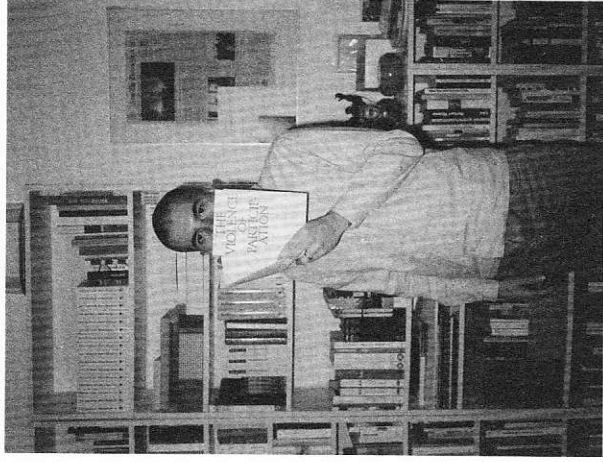
18. Marcel Reich-Ranicki quoted in Uwe Wittstock, *Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Geschichte eines Lebens* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005), 192, trans. by the author.

Postscript

Jeremy Beaudry and Bassam El Baroni

A nightmare is an iconic representation created by your mind. The idea of the icon is that it visualizes a situation that you cannot, in your conscious mind, imagine to be worse or more powerful. In sleep, the subconscious shows you something that your waking mind cannot elaborate on; it cannot construct a more difficult, horrific icon. The familiar and the plausible is often taken to such an extreme as to be terrifying, or problems that have no solution are presented. You become trapped in an endless cycle.

To wake up from a nightmare is to reach the threshold of realizing that you are in fact dreaming. You cannot escape the nightmare from within the logic of the dream itself; you must exit the dream world. Crossing the threshold of realization, you begin to understand that you are a character performing a role within a staged play—the dream—that you are watching. You observe this character, who is you, doing that which only a moment ago was natural and inevitable according to the logic of the nightmare. Escaping this logic, your conscious mind moves out of the dreamscape and into consciousness as the artificiality of the scene is revealed... the lights, the cameras, the props, the other actors, the monster who is not real, but rather, merely a huge animatronic puppet.



MARKUS MIESSEN (*1978) is an architect, consultant, educator, and writer. In 2002, he set up Studio Miessen, a collaborative agency for spatial practice and cultural inquiry, and in 2007, he co-founded the Berlin-based architectural practice nOffice. In various collaborations, Miessen has published: *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space* (Sternberg Press, 2009), *When Economies Become Form* (Berlage Institute, 2009), *East Coast Europe* (Sternberg Press, 2008), *The Violence of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2007), *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices, and Politics in the Middle East* (Bidoun, 2007), *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of*

Spatial Practice (MIT Press, 2006), and *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Müller+Busmann, 2002). In 2008, *The Independent* listed *Did Someone Say Participate?* as one of the ten best architecture books of all time. Miessen frequently contributes to international magazines and journals, such as *Artforum*, *Log*, *032c*, *Bidoun*, *Volume*, and *Kaleidoscope*. His work has been published and exhibited widely, including at the Lyon, Venice, Performa (NY), Manifesta (Murcia), and Shenzhen Biennials. He has taught and lectured at the Architectural Association, London (2004–08), the Berlage Institute, Rotterdam (2009–10), Columbia University, and MIT. He has consulted the Slovenian Government during Slovenia's presidency of the EU council, the European Kunsthalle, the Serpentine Gallery, the Dutch organization SKOR, and the Swiss think tank *W.I.R.E.* In 2008, he founded the Winter School Middle East (Dubai, Kuwait, Iran). Miessen works as a Harvard Fellow on a research project in Kuwait, is a professor for architecture and curatorial practice at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (Karlsruhe), a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Research Architecture (Goldsmiths, London), and an editor of *Archive Journal* (Berlin/Turin).

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