

Common pleasures: The politics of collective practice from sociability to militant conviviality.

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Common pleasures:
The politics of collective practice from sociability to militant conviviality

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School of Business and Management

Queen Mary University of London

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Statement of originality

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Abstract

This thesis considers from a theoretical and historical standpoint the different political implications of experiencing togetherness as a source of pleasure and joy. The first part critically reflects upon the discourse of "sociability" developed from early modernity to the 19th century and examines the most significant institutional formations that characterised its practice, with a particular focus on the passage from aristocratic salons to the bourgeois world of cafes. The sociability of the upper classes is then compared and contrasted with the forms of collective joy of the plebs, critically accounting for the way in which subjectivity and the body are differently implicated in the discourses surrounding carnivals, collective dancing and ecstatic practices. The second part focuses on the 20th century arguing that from this point the conflict between high and low sociability diminishes its political relevance to give way to increasingly ambivalent forms of togetherness based on the consumption of experiences and situation. The paradigms of the scene, the brand and the game are discussed as the primary institutions of a new dominant form of sociability deeply embedded in economic cycles. Finally, in the last part the notion of "militant conviviality" is introduced as a concept-tool to describe an emerging body of practices that are raising the stakes of sociability as an important component of radical political action today.

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Introduction

The theoretical and political question of militant conviviality arises from the organic interconnection of my artistic practice, my theoretical research and my militant activity. As an academic, I have been teaching at universities in eight different countries; as a cultural worker, I have been creating participatory projects for art centres, museums, cultural foundations, festivals and NGOs; as an activist, I've been occupying, facilitating assemblies, picketing, distributing flyers, cooking and talking to people about injustice since my high school years. All these three different sets of activities contributed to the need to think through the idea of sociability, as in all three realms, over and over, there would be a point in a seminar, in a project or in a campaign when things (people, ideas, moods, gestures, communication flows, etc.) would begin to 'click' so to speak, to coalesce, to take up an autonomous generative force of their own. So it would happen that a discussion in a seminar would need to be continued past the hour, to be taken to the pub, into the night, pressed by an urgency to think together, but also to become intoxicated together. It would happen that participants in an project of so called 'socially engaged art' that I set up tell me in separate occasions that they have fallen in love with each other, and even thought they would not care less for the art and the culture they want to keep coming back to that special space we created together, to keep going even after the festival is over. It would happen when in a demonstration I begin to run away from the police together with strangers and begin to trust them with decisions that will affect my personal safety, and then we want to laugh together.

These affects admittedly are difficult to speak about in a voice that is not biographical or confessional, or even worse, a bit melodramatic. However, I would argue that they mark the 'success' of a pedagogical experience, of a cultural event or of a militant process in their own specific way: they are in other words the markers of a specific value that is being generated in

these occasions of collectivity. As a practitioner, I came to recognise that with my labour I was contributing to generate this value with others, and yet, this specific ambience for practicing togetherness, which for me marked its success in a sure manner as it made them into pleasurable occurrences, this satisfaction felt when a collective practice 'worked', was not explicitly registered in any of the frameworks that I had at my disposal to reflect upon my seminars, my art projects, my militant activities. In educational contexts, the important aspect is talked about in terms of knowledge and critical thinking. In the artistic realm, value is primarily aesthetic and it is ranked in relation to originality. In political antagonism, the success of a struggle is associated with its ability to engage and sustain conflict.

This brief description is no doubt a simplification of the complex systems of valuation at work in each of these realms, however I believe that I am not so far off the mark when I claim that the vocabulary to address the joy of practicing together per se and the tools to critically analyse this in each circumstance are limited and potentially problematic in each. There is a tendency to consign this wealth of meaningful elements, which can actually make or break the sustainability of a group process, to a secondary rubric, and worse, to either the personal realm of elective affinities among individual personalities (aka. "I just like some people better than others") or to a spontaneity that is to be evoked or trusted as an event of transcendence (something that simply "happens").

This is therefore, in a nutshell, the genealogy of the hypothesis of this dissertation: first, a need to find, across a variety of discourses, the fragments and concepts that would allow me to describe and perceive more clearly the contours of the subject at hand, which I address through the notions of sociability, collective joy and conviviality, to be able to bring into focus its characteristics. And secondly, to delimit the scope of its contribution to the possibilities of political practice in the present context, that is, to understand what within sociable ambiances opens up and

sustains the production of the possible, but at the same time to differentiate between the success of a convivial situation and the success of its politics, to avoid the pitfalls of a short sighted satisfaction in collectivism as a new version of familism. Indeed, we are arguably living in an epoch characterised by an explosion of the social: from social media to social movements, via social capital and social security, the idea of the social seems to ubiquitously colour the ways multitudes of human beings organize their daily experiences. While the topic of the social is far too broad to be squeezed into a singular enquiry, the notion of sociability represents a useful sub-portion of this vast notion that might be able to reveal some of its ambiguities and challenges, especially in relation to questions of organization of live collective encounters. All too often the ambiances of sociability generated in events, projects, centres and interventions that qualify themselves as "social" is conjured up unproblematically, as if being sociable was a universal natural human propensity that needs no further qualification. Despite the recent social turn¹ in the arts and media for instance, and despite the fact that sociability is on the empirical level the first way in which their "social" intention is tangibly manifested, this term rests largely under-examined by the critical efforts of disciplines that in recent years problematized many other ideas through which we discuss cultural practices – such as gender, race, nationality or cultural belonging for example. I wish to lift sociability from under the radar of critique to demonstrate how this notion, despite its apparently light and jolly undertones, corresponds to very potent dispositives of collective subjectivation, both in the sense of subjection and self-determination. One of the fascinating aspects of sociability is precisely its tendency to be dismissed as a naively benevolent. And yet, by observing the actual stuff that mark and make sociable practices in any given occasion, it is possible to infer about the kinds of desires that animate and motivate the evolution of sociable

¹ Cf. Latour, Bruno. "One more turn after the social turn." *The science studies reader* 279 (1999) and Bishop, Claire. "The social turn: collaboration and its discontents." *Artforum* 44.6 (2005): 178.

situations. Different ambiances of sociability, precisely because they correspond to occasions when people congregate to experience a temporary and reciprocal freedom, can tell a lot about their visions for the future, their ideas of what constitutes the 'best' version of themselves to present to others, in a nutshell, their utopia of a good life. At the same time, each of these utopian impulses allows for the seepage of more problematic questions around the techniques used to get there.²

The research begins by constructing a genealogy of sociability both in the sense of an intellectual account of the idea and of the concrete practices and corresponding organizational forms to which it gave rise. The materials I present here are not introduced as a linear narrative of sociable practices. The exploration of this notion begins in medias res in the 18th century because during the classical age of the modern era sociability established itself as a potent discourse and it gave rise to a distinct set of practices that later played an important role the formation of many key modern institutions, including what Jürgen Habermas later called the bourgeois public sphere.

This first chapter delves into some of the principle institutional forms that framed sociable experiences during their first phase of emergence as the characteristic practices of a certain, especially French, urban aristocracy during the course of the 17th century: the salons and the academies, the grand tour and the season all emphasized specific aspects of the sociable experience. The chapter then considers how these earlier formats evolved or where replaced by the newer ambiances of sociability that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie, such as coffee houses, clubs, the Freemasonry and the modern museum. Following this first account of sociability practiced and theorised as a constitutive element of Western cultures, the genealogy continues by introducing elements of disruption into this narrative, building upon the researches of anthropologists and

² Fredric Jameson usefully distinguished utopian impulses from utopian programmes, where the latter correspond to the systemic attempts to enforce the realization of the utopian impulses that are already present in everyday life, as in sociable situations for instance. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fiction*, (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

social historians who studied plebeian cultural practices that are distinctively other than modern - either in the sense that they arose before this epoch, but also, and more importantly, because they stood within and against the modern project. There is an element that these accounts of the sociable activities of the plebs, the subalterns, the poor, the colonised and, later, the first generations of urban lumpenproletarians, note time and again, a certain way of privileging collective practices that generate somatic experiences over semiotic ones. This transhistorical characteristic has been called with different names, such as the carnivalesque in Mikhail Bakhtin or the Dionysian in Friedrich Nietzsche, and I borrowed the more recent vocabulary of Barbarah Ehrenreich and identified them as practices of ecstatic "collective joy." In this contrast between modern sociability on the one hand and ecstatic joy on the other, the access to the pleasures of commonality and the aesthetic forms it is allowed to assume emerges as a heated object of political contention until the 20th century.

While the neglected status of sociability called for shedding some light upon material from the past, I am well aware that the episodes considered in the first part of the research are fragments of broader and more complex events, and each of them would merit further investigation in and of itself. In line with its scope and aim, the research has made use of a diachronic and long-range approach that allowed to bring into focus its primary object of study, which is precisely the variations among these different practices, their discontinuities, and the way these accumulated and sedimented in cultural tropes that still inform the modalities of formatting events and organizing encounters widely adopted in present-day society.

The methodology used in the first part combines the long *durée* approach of the Annales School with the History of Ideas approach of North American tradition. As David Armitage put it, such combined approach results in a "transtemporal history" that is however "not transhistorical" as it "stresses the mechanisms of connection between moments and is therefore concerned with questions of concrete transmission, tradition and

reception [of ideas].”³

Moreover, the multifaceted status of the subject at hand called for engagement with a variety of different disciplines. Therefore, the first part of the thesis is built upon the contributions of historians (Norbert Elias, Burke, E.P. Thompson, among others), sociologists (Simmel, Weber), and political philosophers (Immanuel Kant, Jürgen Habermas). This was necessary as sociability is a strange subject matter of a sort, and while references to its role in human societies and cultures abound in a variety of disciplines, it is seldom considered as a trope in its own right, or engaged with as something that needs to be explained rather than assumed to explain other social and cultural phenomena. The study therefore made use of the various strands of knowledges about sociable practices in a manner that is transdisciplinary in spirit – as opposed to multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary. As a transdisciplinary effort, this research does not have the ambition of starting from separate disciplines to bring them to converge in some way, but it rather begins from a set of problematics and brings to bear the contributions of those different disciplines to deal with them. While this approach will definitely leave room for further refinements from within the perspective of each disciplinarian field, it is consistent within the aim of the research that has as its objective the re-evaluation of the history of sociability and its concrete practices as an important element in the contemporary definition of political praxis.

Following from the first historical part, the second section of this study focuses on the rapid transition that led to the profound transvaluation of sociability that opened the contemporary era as that of globalized fluxes, cognitive capitalism, immaterial labour, networked intelligences and control dispositives. The compound of these dominant trends marks the

³ Armitage, David. “What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the *Longue Durée*”, *History of European Ideas*, 38:4 (2012), 499.

becoming of sociability as an extremely productive force within the present political, cultural and social conditions. Since the second half of the 20th century, the emergence of new forms of production and resistance under capitalism demands a significant break with the previously discussed thematisation of sociability as a matter of either privilege or transgression. In this new phase, sociability becomes first an aesthetic concern of artistic movements, most notably for the Situationism, and immediately after an object of economic, rather than political interest. The second part of the research narrates how this passage was extremely accelerated, spanning between the late 1960s and 1970s, and then considers how sociability was put to work under the new regime through the description of three of the main formats it assumes today: the scene, the brand and the game. This section too is transdisciplinary in its approach, and makes use of a different range of disciplines – including marketing, critical management studies, post-Autonomist political theory, sociology and the emerging field of game studies - to propose that sociability is no longer thinkable as a solely cultural problem, but it inevitably needs to be discussed as a crucial economic dispositive of production, consumption and governance within capitalist societies.

The new contemporary status of sociability should not lead to the conclusions that all its revolutionary political imports are lost however, that sociability now stands as a politically irrelevant resource, inertly available to a ubiquitous recuperation within capitalist processes. The decades 1960s and 1970s in fact represented a unique moment for the consolidation of sociable practices that revived its revolutionary potentials across a variety of experiences and fields of knowledge and that can offer an important genealogy for today's militant organizers. The third and last part of the dissertation therefore moves to consider how post-colonial theorists re-activated a discussion on sociability as a collective capacity for self-preservation around the term 'conviviality', producing a different handle on the matter of the pleasure of togetherness that differentiates itself from modern sociability in at least two important

respects: it refuses the separation between the event and the processes that sustain it, and it discusses the value of sociability as a practice rather than as an experience. After having introduced the idea of the convivial, the research turns to a set of emerging convivial practices to expose how this notion could look like in actual situations.

Such collective experiences and projects, sitting at the crossroad of educational, activist and artistic concerns, represent meaningful examples of how modes of sociability can affect the politics of collectivity in the present. I deliberately chose my example from an array of different fields: labour organizing, adult pedagogy, feminism, psychological care, and prison work. For each of these contexts, a present day practice of militant conviviality is narrated alongside a correlated antecedent from the crucial decades 1960s and 1970s, which directly or indirectly informed the way in which sociability is realised. To illustrate how conviviality can play an important role in shaping activism and political organizing, the example focuses on the recent experience of the Milan based movement of *Serpica Naro* and its many points of connection with the practices of squatted social centres and co-research that characterised the Italian Movement of '77. Within the context of radical pedagogy instead, we find the rich and diverse experience of *Colectivo Situaciones* as a mutant progeny of the participatory action research and popular education movements that activated the poorest constituencies across South America during the 1970s. Back in Europe, the long term experiment of reciprocal care of *Red Ciudadana Tras M-11* in Spain can be read against the grain of a prolific tradition of feminist organizing that in the 1960s and 1970s begun to question inherited models of thinking around organization, and the self-reflective process on the micropolitics of groups that followed the dissolution of *Collectif Sans Ticket* in Belgium has been inspired by the important precedent of schizoanalysis set within the field of psychiatric care in the contest of institutional analysis during the same decades. And finally, the survey of contemporary practices and their 1960s/70s antecedents concludes with the instance of *La Lleca*, a collective working with inmates active in Ciudad del Mexico, and the formation of the

discourse of socio-cultural animation that accompanies these kinds of interventions since the 1970s. The relationship between each pair of contemporary/1970s practices must be thought of as an attempt to draw attention to the almost impalpable, always tentative minor forces that shape the present practices of conviviality by showing how in fact they are strong enough to conjure up their own genealogies in the sense that Michel Foucault gave to this notion,⁴ as events in the present that intervene in the way we can access the past and draw new meaning from it to orientate future actions. As defined by Foucault, a genealogical approach deliberately differentiates itself from a positivist conception of history in the sense that it does not look for a point of origin to correspond to a meta-historical truth. Instead, genealogies are constructed from the urgencies of the present in order to face the challenges that are shaping the future. The study of these case studies and genealogies allows me to construct and experiment with the concept of "militant conviviality," which I define as an emergent theory of practice that enables to understand their attempts to reactivate the revolutionary possibilities of sociability in ways that are specific to the contemporary condition. In dialogue with practice, the concept of militant conviviality can help collectivities organize their experiences of reciprocal pleasure as a resource to face the daunting political challenges that await our collective intelligence in the near future.

PART I

⁴ Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Semiotexte* 3.1 (1978): 78-94; Foucault, Michel. "On The Genealogy Of Ethics: An Overview Of Work In Progress." *The Foucault Reader* (1984): 340-372.

The individual, in itself, remains a biological individual, a simple individual... But above these biological, socio-biological and interindividual relations, exists another level that we could name the level of the transindividual.⁵

- Gilbert Simondon

CHAPTER ONE: Sociability and modernity

1.1. Sociability: a conceptual framework

The term sociability began to be circulate across different European languages at the end of the 17th century, preceding in fact the modern idea of society as understood today. First used in its adjective form, "sociable," to discuss the collective behaviour of certain animals, or the disposition of men to relate to each other. During the course of the 18th century this notion was gradually charged with greater political implications, as it delimited the contested terrain over the natural law and the proper form of government in the passage from the *Ancien Régime* and the Age of Enlightenment. Among the many writers who mobilized this notion across this period, the voice of German theologian and philosopher Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher is noticeable for a particularly nuanced approach to sociability, one that advocated its ethical significance in determining a zone of seepage between the self and the other.

Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher

⁵ Simondon, *L'individuation Psychique Et Collective*, (Paris: Aubier, 2007), 189.

Schleiermacher has a peculiar theoretical persona. On the one hand, he was a Protestant theologian, and it is for his spiritual reflections that he is perhaps mostly known. However, on the other hand, he was also committed to a philosophical enquiry that he understood as separate from theology. It is this second body of work that is of interest to us here. This work on aesthetics emphasizes the role of praxis over that of theory in a such a way that as Andrew Bowie remarked "the nearest equivalent to some of his most significant contentions can be found in Marxist thinkers such as Bakhtin, and in Sartre, as well as in post-Wittgensteinian thinkers like Davidson."⁶ Moreover, Schleiermacher is credited for being one of the philosophers to first conceptualize the importance of speech acts in his theory of language, emphasizing that the relation of thought to truth must necessarily be partial and situated with the subject.

In his treaty *Toward a Theory of Sociable Conduct* (1799) the philosopher took an explicit interest in sociability. He postulated three laws that regulate sociable activity (*Geselligkeit*): a formal rule that predicates that everyone partaking in a society must be in a condition of constant interaction with all others; a material rule, according to which everybody must be spur towards a free play of thoughts through the sharing of one's own peculiar characteristics; and finally a qualitative rule establishing that everyone must stay within the limits within which only a given society can be maintained as a totality. According to the author, the last rule is the precondition for the other two, as it expresses an intrinsic limit to the number of possible social behaviours within a given society.

Sociability for Schleiermacher was an alternative and a remedy to the limited relations afforded both by private, domestic life and by professional life. These two spheres in fact only allow for an interaction with a limited set of people (colleagues, customers, relatives, etc.), and the interaction is burdened by a set of predetermined roles (boss, husband, etc.). Sociability on the other hand represents an ethical opportunity to acquaint ourselves with a variety of other forms of life and

⁶Bowie, Andrew. *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 187.

their “peculiarities”, autonomously and outside the predetermination of functional roles, because there is no ulterior end to sociable activities. Furthermore, sociability is important politically because it is in this form of social life that there is an “inevitable absence of public authority” and only here one can truly be “one’s own legislator”. Despite the fact that a sociable conduct was widely believed to be a matter of personality or “sentiment” of individuals (those who are more at ease and spontaneous in social interaction), Schleiermacher points out that there must be a faculty that guides this kind of action, in the same way consciousness is called into question in relation to matters of moral conduct. Elsewhere, the author arrives to define sociability as a praxis that consists in perfecting one’s conduct in such a way as to form a society everywhere there is a possibility of doing so and to maintain it alive wherever it is already formed, hence suggesting that to form and maintain a society is an ethical process. But what did Schleiermacher mean by society? The philosopher used this term in a very specific way, distinguishing it from community. While the latter is form of social union that is bound by constraints and determined by an external aims, and most importantly where members must share some common characteristic, a society is based on free sociability, where members might not have anything in common to begin with but where everything is *reciprocal* in their actions:

This means that each person is member of a society not because he possesses this or that quality or knowledge, but, precisely, because he brings to it his own contribution of individuality and peculiarity.⁷

Even though Schleiermacher admits that his idea of what constitutes a society is idealized and does not match any real human assemblage, he also insists that all kinds of societies “must participate, in some measure, to this essence [the society of free sociability].”⁸ It is only because human

⁷ Schleiermacher, Friedrich D. E. "Saggio di una teoria del comportamento socievole", re-printed in *La Società degli Individui* (30 March 2006), 129. My translation.

⁸ Ibid., 132.

groups participates in the experience of sociability that they can they exist as and be called societies.

In insisting on sociability as praxis, Schleiermacher's intention was not to write a "book of good manners for children."⁹ The ethical problem that he was implicitly addressing is more serious and surprisingly contemporary: how can one express one's own unique individuality while at the same time remaining committed to a common sphere? When people shrink away from individual peculiarities in the name of a common good, their society becomes conservative and banal, united by the lower possible denominators until it will cease to be a society (what would be the point anyway?). Conversely, when the expression of oneself is performed in disregard of whether the others can relate to it or not, arrogance or ridicule soon follow. In fact, there is a contradiction between the totality of the individual and the common scope within a society. If one attempts to participate in a society by negating some parts of herself, she ceases to be an individual (a complete being), and consequentially she will not, paradoxically, be able to be part of that society, because societies are made of individuals in relations of reciprocity. Schleiermacher's answer relied on striking a right balance on the level of praxis between narcissistic pretentiousness and humble (but ultimately sterile) self-negation. This balance is not to be achieved through compromise however. People who oscillate between self-affirmation and self-limitation do not solve the contradiction, but enact it. Instead, Schleiermacher proposed to conduct ourselves through an understanding of the principle of conduct as the limit of reciprocal freedoms. Schleiermacher phrases this as a necessity to participate in the construction and care of a common "tone", a common sphere of interest, while developing an individual "manner", or way of relating.

⁹ Ibid., 128.

Sociability is thus the condition for but also the object of all social action. But to create and preserve an ambience of free sociability, Schleiermacher maintains, one must follow precise rules. First, in order for sociability to occur, "many human beings have to interact in such a way that the influence one another, and this influx cannot be unilateral."¹⁰ Secondly, since the object of sociability is the formation and preservation of a society, "no determinate activity has to be collectively executed, no oeuvre has to be realized in common, no knowledge has to be methodically acquired." Instead of an external goal, the sociable action of each "has to affect the activity of all others" through "a free play of thoughts and sensations, through which all members spur and encourage each other."¹¹

Georg Simmel

Almost a century later, and with the development of sociology as a discipline, modern thinkers revisited sociability as a principle of sociation that could be used as a stepping-stone towards the comprehension of more complex political and economic frameworks. During the establishment of social sciences as recognized fields of enquiry between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, sociability returned to be at the centre of attention of some of the founding figures of sociology. Max Weber, and before him also Alexis de Tocqueville noted with interest the proliferation of 'associations' in the USA¹². Within the German milieu, Ferdinand Tönnies wrote the influential book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) discussing the differences between communities and societies in more detail than Schleiermacher had done,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 130.

¹² De Tocqueville, Alexis, Phillips Bradley, Henry Reeve, and Francis Bowen. *Democracy in America*. Vol. 2. (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and other writings*. (Routledge, 2001) and "'Churches' and 'Sects' in North America: An Ecclesiastical Socio-Political Sketch." *Sociological theory* 3, no. 1 (1985): 7-13.

and elaborating on the kinds of actions and relations that characterize each. A more political understanding of sociability was instead put forward by Eugene Fourniere, a French reformist socialist affiliated with the International League for Rational Education founded in 1907 by the Catalan anarchist Francisco Ferrer, who argued that the social growth towards a more just society includes three aspects: a political plane, striving towards democracy; an economic plane, striving towards communism; and a cultural plane, striving towards sociability (sometimes he calls it "sociality" too.)¹³

Out of the various figures who studies sociable phenomena at this time there is however one author in particular, Georg Simmel, who stands out for taking an interest in sociability in and of itself and to attempt to theorize its internal principles as a specific mode of playful and pleasurable collective interaction in a manner that is akin to that of Schleiermacher.

Georg Simmel presented a paper titled *Sociologie der Geselligkeit* (Sociology of Sociability) at the first German Sociology congress in 1910; this was later reprinted as an article (with slight modifications) in 1917 with the title *Die Geselligkeit. Beispiel der reinen oder formalen Soziologie*. Here, Simmel posited the question of sociability as an ontological condition of being-with and he pointed out that this is a universal human impulse characterized "by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others, and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others."¹⁴

According to Simmel, and this is where he differs most from other early sociological thinkers, human beings cooperate or relate to each other constantly moved to interact in order to satisfy material interests,

¹³ Fourniere, Eugene, *L'Individue, l'Association et l'Etat* (1907), quoted in Agulhon, Maurice. *Il salotto, il circolo e il caffè. I luoghi della sociabilità nella Francia borghese (1810-1848)*. (Donzelli Editore, 1993), 12.

¹⁴ Simmel, Georg. "The Sociology of Sociability", in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, (Sage, 1997), 121.

necessities of defence or attack, learning needs, religious yearnings, erotic impulses, and a variety of other "urges" that give rise to "the innumerable forms of social life, all the with-one-another, for-one-another, in-one-another, against-one-another, and through one-another."¹⁵ Even when the impulse that motivates human beings to seek others are not necessarily social in nature (for instance, hunger), Simmel argues that they have the capacity to add a dimension of pleasure to their interaction, in excess to the sheer necessity or requirements of their cooperation. Noting as a significant fact that all European languages express the concept of togetherness in the root of their word for society, Simmel proposed that sociability is a unique and fundamentally human realm where such excess productivity generated in human togetherness and experienced as pleasure can be experienced purely as a "free-playing, interacting interdependence of individuals."¹⁶

There are thus two kinds of possible experience of the 'sociable' according to Simmel: one is an extended social potentiality that traverses all kinds of cooperation, including labour and instrumental actions; a second one is as pure or intensified version as generated in specific convivial ambiances. In this second sense, sociability is realized when being with others when people interact for the pleasure of being with each other and with no further motives.

In both kinds of sociable sociation however, the sense of "satisfaction" is generated by the fact that the individual self is intensified through the co-presence of others. Simmel suggests that in sociability the pleasure of the individual is tied with the joy of others, unlike in other forms of sociation where the satisfaction of one is in contrast with or indifferent to that of another or of the group. He further stressed that the enjoyment of the interaction *per se* should not be dismissed, as rationalists tend to do, as simple "empty idleness." To the contrary, the involvement in sociability

¹⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁶ Ibid., 121.

expresses an ethical value, a commitment to equality and the willingness to develop techniques by which to sustain and advance reciprocity through communication. Moreover, another exclusive characteristic of sociability in comparison to other social formations is the importance of the aesthetic realm. The structure of sociability is one that relies specifically on "good form", understood not as a representational style, but as a production of affects and perceptions. Sociability is a "symbol of life" for Simmel, yet its symbolic register is not an "empty farce" nor a "schematization", but an "association and exchange of stimulus, in which all the tasks and the whole weight of life are realized [...] consumed in an artistic play."¹⁷

For Simmel sociability is the purest form of interindividuality, a democratic format that is culturally constructed, and not spontaneous, nevertheless it is not false: in this respect, concludes Simmel, the relation of sociability with reality is the same as the one of art. It wouldn't make sense to blame and artwork to be false; to the contrary, the only accusation one could move to art is to pretend to be a faithful description of the real. And so, in sociability, in the process of acting as if the others were all equals, a condition of parity is realised. Echoing Schleiermacher's earlier list of rules, Simmel too lays out what he sees as the necessary conditions to be preserved for the occurrence of sociability: These are that 1) participants must exclude all that has personal relevance but is not in common with the others (such as success or fame, but also personal crisis); 2) sociable interaction should have no further aims or ulterior motifs outside its own happening; 3) individuals must remain in a relation of reciprocity.

Elsewhere, Simmel reasoned around the ethical paradox of the subject that despite being unitary is constantly connected, so that it stays the same while constantly changing, caught in a permanent tragic contradiction between its own dedication to others and the affirmation of

¹⁷ Ibid., 129.

the self.¹⁸ The playful form of sociability offers an ambience where the intensity of the tension between the individual and the collective is liquefied in the fluidity of the symbolic register and the linguistic play; even if the contrast does not disappear, it is sublimated in what can be the only world "in which a democracy of equals is possible without friction" or "an artificial world, made up of beings who have renounced both the objective and the purely personal features of the intensity and extensiveness of life."¹⁹

Although only in sociability human beings can be together presenting each other in their "pure humanity" Simmel maintains that one cannot express the self as a pure truth, but that the self is paradoxically best expressed through the use of masks²⁰ and stylistic elements that liberate it from the constraints of identity. It is only due to the specificity of our modern life that we come to understand the sociable moment as somehow as a return to a natural condition of personal being. Echoing a Nietzschean vision of the human condition, Simmel saw nothing natural in sociability, which he insisted, is a cultural phenomenon, "is the abstraction of association, an abstraction of the character of art or of play", a "social game" that alone is based upon "a most engaging kind of interaction: that among equals."²¹

Simmel's understanding and use of sociability presents many point of convergence but also some important differences from Schleiermacher's. Both Simmel and Schleiermacher insisted on the importance of conversation, which Simmel considered "that most extensive instrument of all human common life"²² for sociability, and finally, both used metaphors referring back to the playing of games and the role of the arts

¹⁸Simmel, Georg. *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

¹⁹ Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability," 124.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., Italics in original.

²² Ibid., 126.

to describe its performance. Both Simmel and Schleiermacher as we have seen highlighted the importance of the formal aspects of sociability; assigned it a crucial importance for the expression of an ethical surplus of society, when it is freed by ulterior motives or aims. Both authors postulated that sociability actualises the purest impulse of humans towards sociation, and alone among all other modalities of interaction could offer a relief from the tension between the individual and the collective plane of existence.

The defining characteristics of modern sociability

Simmel echoes also Schleiermacher as both philosophers embarked on the task of extrapolating some fundamental rules for constructing sociable situations. They both warned their readers against the crossing of two thresholds of sociability: excessively receding into the personal, leading to a stealth collectivity, and conversely projecting the self in collectivity with too much force, leading to the formation of hierarchies. Both these threshold, if crossed, lead to the death of the sociable situation either by implosion for boredom and lack of desire or explosion and conflict among its members. When thinking about the limits of sociability however, Schleiermacher seems more preoccupied with the preservation of one's unique character from dissolving in the collective self, while Simmel spends more energy warning against the perils of an excessive individualism. Historically, this might be seen as an interesting indicator of the change of social conventions that regulated conduct and manners. This interpretation would be consistent with Simmel insistence on the playful, recreational quality of sociability, a perspective that marks a point of difference with Schleiermacher, who is keener on the pedagogical aspects afforded by sociability, the role it plays in the cultivation of one's own distinctive self. Schleiermacher places great emphasis on the importance of choosing appropriate topics for conversation, topics that, without excluding or leaving anyone behind, would still be able to accrue

the overall cultural level of participants. This aspect is extremely important for his conception of sociability as something that has to be constantly cared for at the same time it has to constantly be pushed further towards higher thresholds and more complex ideas, until this two actions of preserving and improving become one and the same. To understand them separately, the author specifies, would mean to destine a society to gradually loose its liveliness in favour of a flat banality that would finally disintegrate it. Simmel, on the other hand, maintains that while it is "not that the content of sociable conversation is a matter of indifference; it must be interesting, gripping, even significant; only it is not the purpose of the conversation."²³ Talking is an end in itself, its sole purpose is to "maintain the liveliness, the mutual understanding, the common consciousness of the group."²⁴ For Simmel then, the most important characteristic of sociability is not to be found in its pedagogy, but more in play and in its quality of lightness, that is not shallowness or detachment from reality, but the practice of taking on the "symbolically playing fullness of life ... which a superficial rationalism always seeks only in the content."²⁵ Here the emphasis is on the various forms of conversation - the anecdote; the ironic remark; the wordplay, the witticism - and on the kind of affects they can have on participants. Finally, Simmel's interest in sociability reverberates with the question previously posed by Schleiermacher: the problem of the place that the individual should have within the broader social life. Yet Schleiermacher roots the problem in the partial access to truth of each individual that can be perfected through sociable interaction, Simmel develops sociability less as the space where incomplete but already formed subjects appear to each other, and more as the ambience in which these very subjects are produced and re-produced. This does not mean however that Simmel's position within the Individualism versus Collectivism debate leans towards

²³ Ibid., 127.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 121.

a perfect adherence of the subject with its social milieu. In the essay "How is Society Possible?" Simmel sketches a more complex dynamic of interdependence: while the individual can reach its full potential only in a society, it maintains a surplus of excess of being, an element that stands "in addition" and that sustains a nucleus of individuality as separate from its social expression.²⁶ This juxtaposition between the singularity and its collective milieu is what creates a social dynamic that makes human societies mobile and open to constant modulations.

Schleiermacher and Simmel's treatises on sociability are very useful points of reference to distil the key features of this exquisitely modern notion. It is worth to sum them up here, as they will guide my exploration of the political possibilities that sociable practices yield for the present times. Hence, the basic tenets of sociability are that it is predicated upon rules that are at once ethic, aesthetic and political in that these rules taken together create an ambience of democratic equality, achieved not through compromise but through a mode for encountering the others "as if" we were all on the same level. Sociability is a matter of manners, or of conduct, that are indispensable to preserve the health of the society and to sublimate the tension between the freedom of the individual and the collective in a particular mode of inter-individuation. Sociability is further predicated upon the principle of reciprocity, or the constant exchange and interaction among all its contributors, so that each member can influence the others and be influenced by them; sociability is constituted out of free will and cannot be imposed from above, it needs to persist as a free, autonomous sphere; similarly, it exists in a space which is neither professional nor private; rather, sociability is akin to playing a collective game that allows people to interact in an ambience that actively exceeds and ignores outside pre-determined roles or functions; in sociability, conversation, including wit, storytelling and shared reflection, is one of

²⁶ Symons, Stéphane. "A Close Reading of Georg Simmel's Essay 'How Is Society Possible?' The Thought of the Outside and Its Various Incarnations," *New German Critique*, Winter 2009, 36: 103-117, Duke University Press.

the fundamental activities of the interaction; and finally, the experience of pleasure of each other company is the main purpose and experiential tone of this form of sociation.

1.2 The historical context of the emergence of the notion of sociability

The way Schleiermacher and Simmel conceived and treated the subject of sociability is not a work of pure abstraction. Their vision stems out of a concrete practice that saw them both implicated as active participants in specific sociable situations that are worth considering in some detail as their respective accounts outlines notions of sociability that are at once ontological and historical. To link their respective accounts of sociability to a historically and culturally specific practice is important as it allows the revisiting of their political implications.

Schleiermacher was an active member of the Jena circle, where he collaborated in the collective project promoted by Friedrich Schlegel of the famous romantic journal *Athenaeum*. The Romantics called their own gatherings cenacles to distinguish their own sociability from the more formal salons held by aristocratic families, however the format was rather similarly organized as regular meetings populated by chosen intellectuals (particularly popular and important to the Romantic movement were the ones hosted by Rahel Varnhagen and Henriette Herz in Berlin), to promote their vision and values, enjoy each other's wit, defined by Schlegel as "logical sociability,"²⁷ and to practice what they called *Symphilosophie* – a term roughly translatable as together-philosophy – regarded by the same author as the highest creative endeavour:

²⁷ Schlegel, Friedrich. *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 56.

Perhaps there would be a birth of a whole new era of the sciences and arts if *symphilosophy* and *sympoetry* became so universal and heartfelt that it would no longer be anything extraordinary for several complementary minds to create communal works of art. One is often struck by the idea that two minds really belong together, like divided halves that can realize their full potential only when joined...²⁸

Simmel on his part was similarly involved in a specific practice of sociability reminiscent too of the intellectual salon formulae born a few centuries earlier. Jewish writer and poet Margarete Susman recounts of the "*jours*", or frequent meetings organised by Simmel and his wife Gertrude, a philosopher herself:

The receptions in the Simmel household, the weekly "*jours*" were conceived entirely in the spirit of their common culture. They were a sociological creation in miniature: that of sociability whose significance was the cultivation of the highest individuals. Here conversation took on a form [...] which floated in an atmosphere of intellectuality, affability and tact detached from the ultimate burden of the personal element. Simmel certainly obtained the masterly chapter of his "Little Sociology" on conversation [the reference here is to the chapter on sociability in *Grundfragen der Soziologie*] from the experience of this select society. Only exceptional people, distinguished by intellect or even by beauty, took part in these social events.²⁹

These cultivated gatherings were hosted at the Simmel's house in Berlin and saw the participation of intellectual personalities of the time like

²⁸ Ibid., 125.

²⁹ Quoted in David Frisby, *Sociological Impressionism: a Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (Taylor & Francis, 1992), 20.

Marianne and Max Weber, Rainer Maria Rilke, Henri Bergson, Stefan George and Lou von Salomè. Erudite and sagacious conversations were the main activity of these occasions. Marianne Weber wrote that Simmel “won everyone’s heart not only with his exceptional conversational skills but also with his kindness, warmth and genuine humanity”.³⁰

The salons that both Schleiermacher and Simmel frequented as a fundamental part of their own life as intellectuals constituted also the experiential basis from which they theorized sociability. The fact that their two philosophical accounts are so consistent, despite having been written over a hundred years apart, reverberates meaningfully with the similarities between their respective practices considered in their concrete form. It is therefore worth asking to what extent the lived experiences of the philosophers informed their universal theorization of the sociable encounter, its rules and its values? And if these two, this theory of practice and its concrete actualization are considered as informing each other, it becomes necessary to ask whether their theorizations are still useful to orientate practice today, in a context where salons, cenacles and intellectual *jours* are not necessarily the most important (and most definitely not the only) occasions of sociability in contemporary societies. How much of their modern sociability as the “purest form of sociation” can be taken as a useful theoretical proposition outside of its historical determinate manifestations?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to zoom out from Schleiermacher and Simmel’s biographies and place their individual experiences within the framework, almost an ecosystem, of actual practices of sociability that accompanied the trajectory of the modern experience, their forms and rituals, their performances and institutions, in order to contextualize the two philosophers’ interest in sociability within the broader cultural and political discourse of the era.

³⁰ Quoted in *Classical Sociological Theory*, eds. Bert N. Adams and Rosalind Ann Sydie. (Pine Forge Press, 2002), 199.

The Salons

As we have seen, the practice that most immediately seems to have inspired Schleiermacher and Simmel's accounts of the sociable sphere is the salon. The salon is indeed a particularly meaningful practice within the history of sociability as its invention and development into a veritable institution was also the context of the birth of the modern idea of society. Before the late 17th century, the word society was very seldom recorded in European literature and written documents. Historian Daniel Gordon, who dedicated a study to the evolution of French sociability, observed how, when Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert edited the *Encyclopédie* in 1765 they felt it necessary to remark that "social" was "a term recently introduced in [our] language."³¹ Strictly speaking, their claim was not correct, as both terms "social" and "society" were already present in European languages since antiquity. However they detected in the contemporary uses of the notion a new characteristic of the era. The analysis of the sources shows how, when it began to enjoy some popularity during the course of this century, the idea of society did not refer, at first, to the broad organization of human groups, as in its primary contemporary usage, but it referred to small aristocratic associations and to the convivial life that took place within them. In other words, the idea of a society referred primarily to a specific cultural practice before it came to signify the broader condition of living together.

As historian Pierre-Yves Beurepaire explains, even though "the century of Enlightenment did not invent sociability [...], it is undeniable that the last century of the *Ancient Régime* brought new departures in sociability, akin to those in the circulation of free, direct, and useful information."³²

³¹ Gordon, Daniel. *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and sociability in French thought, 1670-1789*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19.

³² Beurepaire, Pierre-Yves. "Sociability", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime*, ed. William Doyle (Oxford University Press, USA, 2012), 375.

In the dictionary of the *Académie française* dated 1964, society was accordingly defined as “a company of people who assemble regularly for pleasurable parties”.³³ As the writings of Schleiermacher discussed earlier made particularly apparent, to be part of a society begun to correspond, from the 17th century onwards, to a set of preoccupations that the hosts of the first aristocratic salons and their regular guests created in order to address their practice of coming together. Intimately related to this idea of society, the concept of *sociability* thus emerged slightly later, during the 18th century, to express the particular value that emerged from the salon association. Through the notion of sociability as a positive value per se, independent from the excuses that brought people together (such as religious rituals or commemorations), the societies of the salons translated a set of apparently spontaneous, scattered and frivolous activities into a more coherent and meaningful practice. Since this inception, sociability laid claim to being a universal human virtue and a positive force within society at large, representing a utopic space of ideal interaction. Correspondingly, the property of being “sociable” or “social”, that is, to possess a witty personality and the appropriate refined manners for being good at playing sociability, assumed the status of an ethical virtue. But how and why did the salon itself emerge as a practice that for the first time necessitated a new vocabulary to speak about sociability as a value and a virtue?

According to scholars such as Daniel Gordon and Benedetta Craveri,³⁴ the salon was not simply an evolution of the earlier court system, but its emergence also contained a resistance and a critique of absolute monarchy that was carried out from within the upper classes themselves. From the 15th century onwards, the Spanish, French, Hapsburg and

³³ Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty*, 51.

³⁴ Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty*. Craveri, Benedetta. *The Age of Conversation* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006).

Burgundian courts had become one with the palace, which expanded its premises during the baroque and rococo eras so to include larger reception halls, theatres and scenographic parks. The palace was a self-contained unit, the special embodiment of the claim to separateness of the aristocracy. In Jürgen Habermas' interpretation, this privacy was however very different from the later bourgeois idea of a private sphere. The retreat of the court into the palace, and its concentration around the figure of the monarch, performed instead a kind of representative publicity, as "in the palace, even the living quarters were festive."³⁵ The grand receptions, balls and celebrations that punctuated the lives of courtly aristocracy were not designed for the pleasure of the participants, but to provide a corporeal proof, a spectacle, of their divine power.

And thus, when the likes of Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701), Chevalier de Méré (1607-1684), François de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), Jean de La Bruyère (1645-1696), Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde (1648-1734) began the literary discourse around the importance of honesty and good manners for the healthy constitution of society, they did so in the context of an open critique to the hypocritical place and the moral decadence of the court. This would have been a radically rebellious act indeed, was it not for the fact that much of the critique of the courtly way of life by these authors addressed not so much to its core values (Christian humility, charity, demeanour, demonstration of loyalty and obedience), but the perverted uses that they serviced at court to hide endless power schemes. The aristocratic salon was an opportunity, for the members of the high society, to congregate in a new alternative and critical space perceived as more free, honest and egalitarian than the one at court, caught up in cumbersome rituals and inauthentic rigid protocols. In this respect the salon as an antidote to the court and the ideal types of the English gentlemen or the French *honnet homme* were formulated as virtuous counterparts to the opportunistic and cynical courtesan can be seen as moments of micropolitical resistance to the processes of

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

subjectivation that characterise a totalitarian regime such as the one of 17th century absolute monarchy. The salon became a new existential terrain and realm of activity, where subjectivity could be posited not as a completely private matter nor as an immediately political persona subjected to the absolute power and scrutiny of the monarchy.

The salon thus became the paradigmatic institution of European sociability in the 17th and 18th centuries, finding in French high society its most accomplished and refined version. At first, receptions were rather intimate in character, involving mainly the extended family and close friends, while only in special occasions was the invitation extended to additional illustrious guests. Participants would be gathered for the day or afternoon, to speak freely about a variety of topics and entertain each other with music or poetry readings.

At the inception of the salons during the *Ancien Régime* this domestic and private character was particularly emphasized by the gendered and familial nature of the hosts, who were usually women or couples. The role *salonnières* such as the Marquise de Lambert, Madame du Deffand, Mademoiselle de L'Espinasse, Madame Geoffrin, or Madame Necker is well documented in the accounts of feminist historiographers such as Dena Goodman³⁶ and Joan B. Landes,³⁷ who remarked how the participation of women was progressively made more difficult as the circle of guests characteristic of the salon gradually extended to include men of letters, artists, scientists, foreigners and other figures perceived as possessing cultural and entertainment values, expanding the public vocation of this practice. The novelty introduced during the 17th century that set the sociability of salons apart from previous forms of sociation, such as the craft guilds and religious fraternities established during the Middle Ages (which were an important heritage and still very numerous in early

³⁶ Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A cultural history of the French Enlightenment*. (Cornell University Press, 1996).

³⁷ Landes, Joan B. *Women and the Public Sphere: In the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

modernity), was primarily the emphasis on free choice as their organizing principle, both in terms of voluntary subscription and participation to a group based on elective affinities (rather than a common trade or faith), and also in regard to the rules and principles that regulated a given conduct (rather than the rigid hierarchies and codes of behaviour that regulated life at court). As Landes put it, the salon introduced aristocratic Europeans to the possibility of "voluntary sociability [...] (as) free acceptance of belonging, temporarily or otherwise, to a peer group meeting under its own rules."³⁸

Therefore, sociability as practiced in the salon concerned the possibility of autonomous self-organization on a least three planes: in an ethical sense, it called into question the role of subjectivity in its relationship to others; in an aesthetic sense, as it posited questions around how various free wills could come together generating reciprocal pleasure of company, and therefore which forms of comportment would be more conducive to such effect. Indeed, the development of good or sociable manners was a central preoccupation within the 17th and 18th centuries discourses, that saw a proliferation of treaties on the subject, some of which as we saw annoyed Schleiermacher, since he feared a reduction of the ethical problem to a mere formalism. And finally, the sociability that was born and conceptualised during the explosion of salon culture across Europe and the colonies of the various empires concerned the possibilities yielded by autonomous self-organization on the political plane, at least in an implicit manner at first. This is the most controversial and ambivalent aspect of the salon. As even though this format of togetherness performed a germinal critique of absolute monarchy and religious dogma, it however posited equality of relations and the capacity for joyous autonomous self-organization as prerogatives of a few, of an aristocracy in the literal sense of the term, a chosen elite that was self-selecting rather than based on lineage, but an elite nonetheless.

³⁸ Ibid.

According to Gordon, sociability as it first evolved from French classical culture during the Enlightenment represents an historical novelty not because it posited the political problem of a democratic social order per se (these were already present in the repertoire of Renaissance revival of the republican ideals of ancient Greece for instance), "but the invention of the social as a distinctive field of human experience."³⁹ The significance of the hiatus opened during the 17th and 18th centuries between egalitarian and cosmopolitan ideas as practiced in *societies* and the hierarchical and nationalist contexts in which these sociable occasions were inserted remains an issue of discussion for historian today, and this is not the context where to address their different interpretations in detail. What seems most significant is that sociability opened up a new field of human experience, a fact proved by the many new institutions that it generated aside from the salons. In what follows the research will introduce a few of the most significant ones: the Academy; the Grand Tour; and the Season, and later the Café, the Club, Freemasonry and the Museum, to narrate a few of the principle ways in which the notion of sociability as a distinctive field of human experience transformed modern societies.

The Academies

Academies first became popular in Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries as a direct homage to the cultural life of Athens and ancient Rome, and later spread across Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Famous examples form a variety of disciplines include: the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, founded in 1699 for the study of the arts; The Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge, created in 1662; or The Real Academia Española established in 1713. This practice of gathering around a patron to study the arts, languages, or sciences bore many resemblances with the later model of the salon, devoted to the

³⁹ Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty*, 5.

cultivation of amicable relationships and pastimes rather than a systematic acquisition of knowledge. They offered a space of encounter for the nascent figure of the 'expert', no longer an amateur and not yet a professional. Despite their name, later adopted in a variety of research settings, activities within Academies were conducted in a fashion more consistent with the sociability of salons than the contemporary university, albeit with a more focused range of topics for conversation. Members would meet regularly, in a dedicated seat or at one of the member's houses, to speak informally, eat and take walks together. The Academy model was dissimilar from that of the university of medieval origins also because this entity was not focused on teaching or studying, nor its practice necessarily led to the acquisition of a title. However, members had to be formally admitted, and often the previous participation in fashionable salons was a crucial factor for determining the candidates' successful application. Especially in the French context, the Academies' interest towards scientific principles and specialist secular knowledges in general elicited some anxiety from State authorities, which in France as elsewhere implemented a strategy of official recognition in order to keep a firmer control and regulative power over the activities of these circles⁴⁰. Thus Academies were thus became increasingly institutionalized entities since the mid-17th century, with the most notable examples being the *Académie* dedicated to the study of French language, made official by Cardinal Richelieu in 1634 and the German Academy of Natural Sciences, set up in 1652 and made official in 1677 by Leopold I. The cultural practices of the Academies clashed with religious and aristocratic forms of erudition and introduced an interested in cosmopolitan knowledges useful to the rising merchant classes, who here were allowed to mix with other estates.⁴¹ Despite their closed character, the Academies represented an

⁴⁰ During the course of the 18th century however, more and more academies were directly founded by ruling monarchs who began to see them as valuable instruments of power and prestige.

⁴¹ Roche, Daniel. 'Academic Life and New Forms of Sociability', in *France in the Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 169-173.

important milieu for the first socialization of sciences and played a crucial role in the early dissemination of articles and papers across what was becoming a proto-scientific community. But what is more interesting from the perspective of sociable practices, the academy was a kind of network, it could be said using a contemporary term, in which competence and erudition were valued *alongside* - and not *in alternative to* - personal likability, status and seniority, and where dedication to knowledge was held in tension with a certain tendency to avoid criticism among members.

The Grand Tour

If the Academy evolved out of the Renaissance fascination with the intellectual life of antiquity, the Grand Tour could instead be said to have reinterpreted in a modern key the travelling traditions of medieval pilgrimages.⁴² The term itself was first introduced by Richard Lassels in the 1670 book *An Italian Voyage*,⁴³ and it rapidly spread to describe the trips to the South of Europe, especially France and Italy, of the aristocratic young heirs of the Northern European nobility. According to historian Jeremy Black, those trips, which could last up to three years and involved the mobility of a large number of personnel, including doctors, cooks and valets,

fulfilled a major social need, namely the necessity of finding young men, who were not obliged to work and for whom work would often be a derogation, something to do between school and the inheritance of family wealth. It allowed the young to sow their wild

⁴² Chaney, Edward. *The evolution of the grand tour: Anglo-Italian cultural relations since the Renaissance*. (Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ Lassels, Richard. *The voyage of Italy, or a compleat journey through Italy*. Ed. by Simon Wilson (V. du Moutier, 1670).

oats abroad and it kept them out of trouble, including disputes with their family, at home.⁴⁴

Black introduces an important consideration here. That the modern practices and institutions of sociability first developed as an activity for a class of people – the nobility– whose relations with the world and each other were not mediated by labour. Any productive or utilitarian activity was considered beneath the aristocratic status, and work, even if practiced out of personal volition and not for economic necessity, was precluded to them. This valorisation of sociable experiences as alternative to labour later continued to persist even when many sociable institutions admitted the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the Grand Tour proved to be an extremely versatile practice, able to change and reinvent its pleasures and attractions over the course of three centuries of its existence. At the beginning, it was justified as an educational exploration of the cultural myths of Italian Renaissance and classical civilizations (Ercolano, discovered in 1738 and Pompei, discovered in 1748, rapidly became important destinations in this sense), but later it became an idealised adventurous trip justifiable as a leisurely activity in its own right. Thus, more than other comparable civic institutions, the Grand Tour's value lay precisely in sociability, the possibility of making new acquaintances and new experiences.

The Season

Finally, the fourth practice of sociability that characterised the classical era of modernity involves the calendarization of cultural, sport and charitable events in what came to be know as the Season, a new distinct urban phenomenon especially characteristic of the English speaking world.

⁴⁴ Black, Jeremy. *The British and the Grand Tour* (Routledge, 2010), 122.

With the decline of the court, European aristocracies became increasingly interested in specific modalities of experiencing the arts that could be relocated into the public sphere, inventing forms such as the classical music concert, the opera or the ballet. Societies would convene at theatrical events, at balls and masquerades, to assist at amateur concerts or poetry readings, on the occasion of philanthropic events where the generosity of the elites could be grandiosely displayed. These events were organized during the spring and summer times, typically in the most prominent European cities, allowing the aristocrats to withdraw to their country estates during the rest of the year. As Habermas pointed out, in 17th century France, the idea of public “meant the lecteurs, spectateurs, and auditeurs as the addressees and consumers, and the critics of art and literature”⁴⁵. What all these different formats had in common was that they required a static spectatorship; they were to be enjoyed sitting down or standing. The forms of static spectatorship of elite cultural practices were not only outcome of the repression of the body that accompanied the rise of the importance of manners during early modernity, but it was also an enabling dispositive of power, as such static happenings of spectating crucially allowed attendees to display themselves. They were individuals participating in a cultural event both to see and to be seen, to present themselves as spectacles. Even the forms of dancing practiced by the upper classes did not emphasize expressive movement, but were configured as a series of figures. For instance, Thoinot Arbeau, author of *Orchésographie*, a famous treaty on late 16th century dance published in 1589, described the pavan, the courtly dance par excellence, as being “employed by kings, princes and great noblemen to display themselves in their fine mantles and ceremonial robes”⁴⁶. These encounters of the season replaced the disorderly excesses of promiscuous celebrations such as the medieval carnival with a polished body that was groomed and

⁴⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991), 31.

⁴⁶ Arbeau, Thoinot. *Orchesography: 16th-Century French Dance from Court to Countryside* (Courier Dover Publications, 1948), 59. My Italics.

moved as a support for the displaying of personal status and wealth (exhibited through the possession of luxury items and fashionable attires) and increasingly to express one's own specific, individual personality. By the 18th century, the landed orders constituted, as Maura A. Henry commented in relation to Britain, "the quintessential leisure class" who during this period became "amphibious":

While the landed ranks maintained their strong roots in the country through a wide variety of leisure pursuits including hunting, shooting and visiting [...], they simultaneously forged a new urban ethos by flocking to [...] towns where they partook of the delights of the city, including attending the 'Season', assemblies and theatres. [...] In this way, their new urban identity complemented rather than displaced their age-old country ethos.⁴⁷

Her statement would have applied to other context beyond Britain too, for from the end of the 17th century onwards not only did cities increasingly become an important location for the self-representation and the sociable interaction of the elites, but they also serve to consolidate their status in the country side. The notion of the Season, although specifically Anglophone, is an interesting one insofar as it addresses the delocalization of sociability from the more localized forms of pre-modern community. It stresses the importance of a shared temporal rhythm of life organizing activities across a variety of spaces, and indeed it begins to consider the diversity of experiences and locales as a distinct value of elite culture in itself. In this sense, the Season could be seen as the culmination of a longer historical process that led to the formation of two different spheres of sociability, one of the elites and the other of the common people.

The withdrawal of the upper-classes

⁴⁷ Henry, Maura A. 'The Making of Elite Culture', in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. By H. T. Dickinson. (Blackwell, 2002), 320.

In his seminal work on the European popular culture, historian Peter Burke noted how between the 15th and the 18th centuries there was a “withdrawal of the upper-classes”⁴⁸ from popular cultural practices. Before this time, folk events such as festivals, feasts, fairs, carnivals, collective dances, games and other forms of popular entertainment were also an occasion of interaction between the plebs and the elites. Surely as Burke suggests, European nobility took part in such celebratory occasions also in order to influence popular beliefs and control the behaviour of the poor; at the same time these were also occasions for participating in transversal cultural activities that transgressed class divisions, at times deliberately deriving a specific legitimate pleasures from it. From the middle of the 17th century however, the relation of the elites with the cultural practices of the plebs started to change in important ways, as the aristocrats begun to regard popular culture as something problematic, lacking in manners, religiously condemnable and ultimately as something in need of reform. According to Jürgen Habermas, “in comparison to the secular festivities of the middle ages and even in the renaissance the baroque festival had already lost its public character in the literal sense. Joust, dance, and theatre retreated [...] into the rooms of the palace.”⁴⁹ It is within the context of a moralizing discourse about the plebs (alongside the critique of the court system mentioned earlier) that the elites begun to organise their own separate sociable occasions.

1.3 From The Salons to the Bourgeoisie Public

⁴⁸ Burke, Peter. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 375.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

During the 18th century, the sociability inaugurated as a separate realm of experience during the shift from the *Ancien Régime* to the Enlightenment gradually begun to give way to new practices that reorganized sociability according to the predicaments of the rising commercial and financial class.⁵⁰ Sociable practices played an important role in the constitution of the new bourgeois identity, retaining some of the older formulations, such as the free flowing conversation of the salon, but giving them new rules and meanings. According to historian Michael J. Sauter, between the 18th and 19th century “the print public sphere and concomitant forms of sociability, such as salons, reading clubs and coffee houses created social spaces from which criticism of the state emerged. This elite criticism corroded the Old Regime’s foundations and the revolutionary crash of 1789, if it was not directly the intellectuals’ fault, was sufficiently related to their mental labours to establish that publicity had political consequences.”⁵¹

The passage between the society of salons and academies and the rise of the new bourgeois sociability is a contested terrain amongst scholars. Some historiographies, such as those of Norbert Elias or Joan Landes emphasize the continuities between them.⁵² Other historians, such as Daniel Gordon (influenced by Jürgen Habermas), Emmanuel Bury and Benedetta Craveri, however prefer to stress the bottom-line incompatibility between the sociable institutions of the old regime and the new republicanism.⁵³ According to these interpretations, the sense of

⁵⁰ Kale, Steven D. *French Salons: High Society And Political Sociability From The Old Regime To The Revolution Of 1848*. (JHU Press, 2004).

⁵¹ Sauter, Michael J. *Visions of the Enlightenment: The Edict on Religion of 1788 and the Politics of the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century Prussia* (BRILL, 2009), 51.

⁵² Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. I. *The History of Manners*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); and *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. II. *State Formation and Civilization*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982). Landes, Joan B. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁵³ Gordon, Daniel. *Citizens without Sovereignty*. Bury, Emmanuel. *Littérature et politesse: l'invention de l'honnête homme (1580-1750)*. Vol. 1242 (Presses Universitaires de France-PUF, 1996). Craveri, Benedetta. *The age of conversation*.

entitlement that the participants of the salons possessed was based on the belief in the innate superior qualities of the aristocracy, and it is precisely against this old system of values that the bourgeois classes pitch their version of sociability not only as a matter of personal improvement, but as a practice dedicated to the improvement of the entire society.

The decline of the salon and of the academies around the beginning of the 19th century is connected, by historian Maurice Agulhon, Habermas and others, to the rise of this new political urgency, which did not care for the manners and humorous gallantry of the old aristocracy, but also to the rise of new forms of affordable opportunities for entertainment that parcelled out sociability distinguishing between purely recreational activities without direct political import, such as "theatres, opera houses, but also carnival balls, 'attraction' gardens, cafès and ice cream parlors"⁵⁴ and more serious ambiences where business and politics were talked about. In other words, when sociability began to claim its legitimacy as a critical practice, its experience was on the one hand rendered more abstract through the emphasis on rational argumentation, on the other its sensual pleasures was recast as a practice of consumption.⁵⁵ Despite these different interpretations, historians concur that if the salon was the exemplary format of sociability of the aristocratic lifestyle, the café, alongside a few other institutions, epitomizes the advent of liberal bourgeois culture in Europe. In what follow, we will focus on four of the main formats sociability came to assume during this second phase close to our present, before drawing some conclusive remarks.

Cafés

⁵⁴ Agulhon, *Il salotto, il circolo e il caffè*, 31. My translation.

⁵⁵ Habermas famously interpreted this from the perspective of the Frankfurt School, roughly identifying two distinct phases in the history of the structural transformation of the public sphere, the first coinciding with a progressive moment and the second leading to consumer culture.

Cafés, first established in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century,⁵⁶ begun to proliferate across the continent in the period between 1680 and 1730, to become a central establishment for the legitimation of the reading public and an active agent shaping political debate. As noted, coffee in itself would merit a cultural history, as it belonged, together with opium and tobacco, to a special class of oriental commodities that shared the common property of affecting the ways in which people think, feel and act.⁵⁷ The social space of the coffee houses allowed for the regular frequentation among gentlemen (in the passage from the salon to public venues women were excluded from participation), who would meet there to drink and smoke, play cards and, most importantly, discuss business and engage in political debates while commenting the newspapers. Leisure, business and politics intertwined in this new café sociability, as the spread of the printed press contributed to a new international awareness of public affairs. Habermas famously explained how the very inception of journal and magazine culture was linked to the proliferation of coffee houses (reportedly, by the first decade of the eighteenth century there were about 3,000 of them in London alone): "the periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion."⁵⁸

While quasi-public venues where people can come together to drink and eat existed for a long time before modernity (taverns and inns have been present in cities since antiquity), it is true that the upper-class modern coffee houses constituted the primary milieu for a new form of sociability. First, because they represent the paradigmatic context in which sociability and a culture of consumption came together, both activities contributing to the construction of a new, modern sense of the self, and secondly because they proposed a new political and economic role for public

⁵⁶ Cowan, Brian. *The Social Life Of Coffee: The Emergence Of The British Coffeehouse*. (Yale University Press, 2008).

⁵⁷ Ellis, Markman. *The Coffee-House*. (UK: Hachette , 2011).

⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 42.

association. The first point has been expanded upon by Brian Cowan, who, following Colin Campbell, rejected purely functionalist explanations for the success of coffee houses in favour of a more complex approach that took into account the “ideological origins”⁵⁹ of consumption as a new kind of pleasure-seeking activity in its own right. Architectural historians Christoph Grafe and Franziska Bollerey instead might help us to bring into focus the implications of the second point:

The coffee house, and the nineteenth-century café or bar operated as a commercial enterprise offering a place for forms of informal contact, newsgathering, social exchange and business transaction. This did not mean that the coffee house eliminated experiences of sociability. The interaction of its visitors however, acquired a different nature: the explicit demonstration of collectivity was replaced by the act of entering an environment for private persons coming together in a publicly accessible space.⁶⁰

No longer a leisurely activity held in separation from political concerns and economic interests, in coffee houses sociability was reconfigured as a peculiar yet useful moment within a world of transactions; its autonomy was put to work to sustain the realization of interests.

Clubs

As cafés became more widespread and also more transversally accessible to lower sections of the population,⁶¹ members of the upper bourgeoisie

⁵⁹ Cowan, B. *The social life of coffee: the emergence of the British coffeehouse*, 10.

⁶⁰ Grafe, Christoph, and Franziska Bollerey, eds. *Cafés and bars: the architecture of public display*. (Routledge, 2007),7.

⁶¹ The spatial layout of cafès evolved from being simply a large room, to the introduction of a counter area separating waiting staff from customers, and the introduction of *privées*, or enclosed areas available to the more distinguished clientele.

begun to convene in the rooms above public drinking venues, instituting the club as a more secluded and selective space, in which only members were allowed to participate. Not only this reaffirmed the elite status of the commercial and industrial bourgeois entrepreneurs, but it also reconnected with the more specialist spirit of the earlier Academies. Clubs and societies could embrace a variety of causes and purposes: alumni associations; artistic bodies; book, debating and gambling clubs; medical and musical societies; sporting clubs; professional and political clubs; regional and ethnic societies are just a few examples of the versatility of this social institution. In the 18th century, Britain was perceived as being the mother country of new forms of voluntary association. According to Peter Clark, "clubs and societies became one of the most distinctive social and cultural institutions of Georgian Britain,"⁶² reaching an estimated number of about 25,000 in the 18th century. From Britain, these organizations became also an important feature of the colonial territories, in the Americas as well as in the Indian continent. The peculiar political and economic conditions that supported the flourishing of bourgeois associational life in the Anglophone world (early industrialization and urbanization, absence of legal sanctions punishing public gathering) are regarded as having contributed to this accelerated change in respect to other European countries where the urban elites remained invested in more aristocratic forms of association such as salons and academies for a longer period of time after the Restoration. Other northern European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany or Switzerland followed suit, witnessing the advent of a wave of middle class associations committed to cultural activities and egalitarian debates during the 18th century.

In France, the phenomenon of clubs was also significant, although the new organizations were more often called *circles*, or at times also *casinos*, borrowing an Italian expression, since the term club had a political connotation following the French revolution, a period during which clubs

⁶² Clark, Peter. *British Clubs and Societies, 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2001), 2.

begun to multiply.⁶³ Historian Maurice Agulhon reports that the first *circle* (understood here as a club for the leisure of men only) was opened in Paris in 1816, describing it as an egalitarian ambience conducive of “innovation, extra-familial space, masculine exclusivity, suspect morality, risk of politics.”⁶⁴ Despite the specificities of singular national context, however, it is possible to enlist the club among the new formats that characterize the modern experience of sociability. Margaret C. Jacobs noticed how this ubiquitous proliferation presented a common, explicitly modern motive: “if one single thread united most of these new disparate, unconnected, even informal groups, it was their interest in utility, in the practical, in progress and in intense self-improvement.”⁶⁵ The same author reports that revealingly in the Dutch Republic clubs were typically named “societies of usefulness”⁶⁶ (*Het Nut* in Dutch). In the case of clubs, even more than in coffee houses, sociability begins to be justifiable not as an ethical value per se, but for its capacity to do good and to intervene in the affairs of the city, the community or the nation. At the same time, clubs and circles provided sociable ambience with a more systematic and less informal mechanism of selection, especially when compared to the cafés that, in reason of their commercial nature, had to remain accessible to a broader variety of customers.

Freemasonry

⁶³ In Catholic countries such as Spain, Italy and the South of France, social activity was still arranged according to traditional confraternities extremely diffused since the 15th century. During the 17th and 18th centuries, some of them underwent some changes to accommodate the new social expectations, for instance by granting access through voluntary subscription rather than by birth status. Their social composition also changed during this time, retaining mainly merchants and artisans or the rural gentry, while even in the urban centres of southern Europe the literati and the mercantile elites gradually flocked towards the more dynamic milieus offered by Freemasonry or liberal clubs.

⁶⁴ Agulhon, *Il salotto, il circolo e il caffè*, 71. My translation.

⁶⁵ Jacob, Margaret C. “The International Republican Conversation”, in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*. Eds. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Among the many clubs and societies that animated modern Europe, a special case is represented by Freemasonry, an initiation-based form of association that originated in England and Scotland at the end of the 17th century. Freemasonry saw a veritable explosion during the mid-18th century, with local chapters or lodges being documented at the beginning of the 18th century in Paris, The Hague and Hamburg, and then spreading across European nations (St. Petersburg, Copenhagen, Naples) and also in the colonies (New England) at astonishing pace, to eventually come to represent what historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann described as “the most widespread and inclusive form of sociability of the European Enlightenment.”⁶⁷ In practical terms, the activities of the lodges were not so distant from those practiced in other kinds of circles. At their inceptions, masonic lodges were a kind of confraternities; the main purpose of Freemasonry was to educate their members, commonly addressed as ‘brothers’. They convened in more mundane occasions, such as hunting parties, balls, amateur literary or theatrical events, and to play games. Members of different lodges would also visit each other and engage in an on-going correspondence. Moreover, members of the lodges in many European cities were also active sponsors for the establishment of the first modern museums, a new institution explicitly dedicated to the artistic, scientific and historical education of wider publics and not only of the elites.

What sets Freemasonry apart from other formats of sociability however is the fact that it included a variety of symbolic rituals and secret ceremonies of initiation and progression in what could be seen as a secularized religion or cult of reason. The shaking of hands, kissing other brothers, or more elaborate gestures such as the pretend-dagging of initiates belong to a repertoire of interaction that passed for a different kind of social intercourse and corporeal presence than those allowed in cafes, mixing elements of reason with play, religious symbolism with

⁶⁷ Hoffmann, Stefan-Ludwig. *The Politics of Sociability: Freemasonry and German Civil Society, 1840-1918*. (University of Michigan Press, 2007), 19.

scientific formulae, in such manner that “certainly accorded with many playful dimensions of courtly culture, for example, its fashionable tendency to temporary self-mystification expressed in its passion for dressing up, for the theatre, and for masquerade.”⁶⁸

The secrecy surrounding the ritual activities of Freemasons had also political, as well as cultural implications. In his study of the politics of sociability in Germany between 1840 and 1918, Hoffmann clarified that “it would be a mistake to regard this withdrawal to ‘moral introspection’ as apolitical escapism. Rather, in these spaces lodges brothers were supposed to learn to govern their individual selves in order to be able to govern society as a whole”.⁶⁹ The improvement of individual subjectivity, of the nation and of humanity were seen as the three interlocking goals of the lodges, and secrecy or semi-secrecy were tactical pedagogical and aesthetic mechanisms to compose and experiment with new kinds of governing tools and a new kind of governing subjectivities that would be different from those of the *Ancien Régime*. In this sense, Freemasonry strikes as a particularly vivid instantiation of the paradox of sociability as an ideal form of self-government and as a practice based on exclusivity and secrecy. Notwithstanding such ambivalence, there exists a strong connection between the activities of Masonic lodges and the development of republican political ideas. Some, like the already mentioned Jacob, went as far as to argue that “modern civil society was invented during the Enlightenment in the new enclaves of sociability of which freemasonry was the most avowedly constitutional and aggressively civic”.⁷⁰ The lodges established a supra-national communicative space and an infrastructure of communication and reciprocal hospitality, in which the practices and ideas of the political culture of the Enlightenment could be discussed and their principles distilled in concrete behaviours.

⁶⁸Agulhon, *Il salotto, il circolo e il caffè*, 24. My translation.

⁶⁹ Hoffman, *The Politics of Sociability*, 8.

⁷⁰ Jacob, Margaret C., *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 15.

Freemasonry also actively brought together a variety of different professional profiles: civil servants, military officers, professors, wealthy merchants, bankers, factory owners, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, artists, and sometimes even royalty have all been reported as part of the Freemasonry. Some lodges even accepted women, although female participation remained a marginal phenomenon abandoned after 1789. Thanks to this heterogeneity, lodges were, alongside coffee houses, clubs and societies, a transversal space of interaction beyond existing corporative and religious orders, and also a channel of communication among different specialist knowledges and powers.

While Masonic lodges were effective in mitigating (but not dissolving) the differences in status among its members, they achieved this result by inviting nobles and bourgeois to imagine themselves part of a common higher elite, allowing them to produce a self-image pitted against the inferiority of the common people. As historian Wolfgang Hardtwig put it, "precisely because the lodges erected social barriers for those below them (e.g. craftsmen), the extent of internal equality embodied in Masonic rituals was astonishing. This exclusion 'below' made possible 'an egalitarianism 'above'."⁷¹ This phenomenon is a recurring process that is observed in other forms of modern sociability that retained throughout the entire course of this era an ambivalent character of being simultaneously an egalitarian space of liberation and experimental self-governance on the one hand, and a mechanism of exclusion on the other.

Museums

As it is the case for the other sociable institutions that we already considered, museums pre-existed the Enlightenment era as private collections, but only during this period they were reconfigured in their new function as public institutions at the service of citizens belonging to

⁷¹ Quoted in Hoffman, *The Politics of Sociability*, 22.

different classes. Most national museums were founded during the second half of the 18th century: the Louvre in Paris opened to the public in 1793; the British Museum in London became accessible in 1759; the Uffizi Gallery in Florence were established in 1765; the first museum in the USA, the Charleston Museum, was inaugurated only slightly later in 1824. French historian Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire places the foundation of museums in France at the intersection of the knowledge production of the Academies and the aspirations towards a publicly useful knowledge of the ascending bourgeoisie. The reason why museum are considered as a site of sociability is that the activities of *musées* extended far beyond the simple display of artefacts and works of art:

The creation of musées bears witness to the desire of the reforming elites of the end of the *Ancien Régime* to renew the field of academic sociability by offering a structure alongside official sociability, with its social and cultural conformism, open to non-Catholics and to the world of trade.⁷²

Alongside those dedicated to the conservation of the national artistic heritage, many clubs and societies gave impulse to the foundation of scientific museums, with the mission to provide access to laboratories and scientific equipment for amateurs and professionals at an affordable subscription rates. As an appropriate venue for educational walks and gatherings, museums appropriately soon begun to offer a programme of lectures in a variety of subjects, including "mathematics, chemistry, physics, anatomy, foreign languages, drawing [...] to such an extent that they sometimes became veritable institutions of free higher education."⁷³ Goodman explains that the originally French model of the Enlightenment museum was defended by its patrons on the basis of its public utility in respect to four kinds of services: "association, instruction, exhibition and

⁷²Beaurepaire, "Sociability", *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime*, 382

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 383.

decoration.”⁷⁴ The last function referred to the role of women, who were welcomed in certain museums as part of the attraction itself, as an attempt to entice male membership on the account of the possibility of romantic encounters. The Pilatre’s *musée* in Paris, for instance, gave women a 50% discount on the subscription rate. While they were acceptable and respectable venues for women to attend, the sociability of the museum did not challenge the foundations of the male-dominated sociability crystallized in the bourgeois public sphere.

The gender bias of museum culture that proposed women as one of the attractions to look at confirms another important shift between the early sociability of the aristocracy and its bourgeois mutation. If the 17th century invented the social season as the sociable context in which one could *be seen*, the late 18th century saw the inauguration of the museum as the exemplary institution for a new public of *spectators* that gathered to look at the world. More than many other sociable spaces, the institution of the museum therefore inaugurated what John Dwyer called the “*spectatorial*” model of culture.⁷⁵ The sensory realm, the body and its somatic ways of communicating and apprehending the world increasingly play a smaller part within cultural practices that re-organize sociability around events that one can observe. In the words of Maria Stafford, the 18th century culture saw a

tendency to collapse all sensory experience into the visual and the human body, specifically, into an assemblage of its projected optical effects [...] What had been one of the chief forces for enlightenment – making visually accessible inaccessible domains – has turned into the creation of, and the demand for, ghostly simulations.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 265.

⁷⁵ Dwyer, John. *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-century Scotland* (John Donald Short Run Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (The MIT Press, 1993), 28.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, museums were only one among the proliferating dispositives of the spectatorial mode of sociability under development. The manifestations of this new "exhibitionary order"⁷⁷ as Timothy Mitchell called it, became virtually ubiquitous: world exhibitions; panoramas and dioramas; public botanic gardens organized "to represent all the plants in the world;"⁷⁸ zoos; department stores, with their carefully arranged shop windows and item displays; house facades and even the Alps as observed from the vantage point of the new funiculars could now be perceived as "an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst: an observing gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition's careful order."⁷⁹ The new apparatus of exhibition-like re-presentation played a distinctive role in creating a perception and experience of the world as an object to be looked at, and simultaneously intensified the idea of looking together (rather than looking at each other) as sociable experience of reality, "and thus a distinctive imagination of the real."⁸⁰

1.4 How to be together: a short history of conversation and manners

Since the modern understood sociability to be predicated upon a voluntary reciprocity, it followed that it could only be maintained alive if participants agreed upon certain sets of rules governing how they could impact one another, parallelly addressing (and restricting) what was admissible to do with the body (manners) and what was possible to say (conversation).

⁷⁷ Mitchell, Timothy. "The World as Exhibition", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Apr., 1989).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, Timothy. "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 17.

Manners

From the 15th century onwards, the emphasis on polite manners first developed courtly etiquette profoundly impacted the experience of sociality of the elites. Three volumes in particular, published Italy in the 16th century, first put on paper the growing interest in the ethic-aesthetic continuum of sociable interaction: the *Book of the Courtier*, by Baldesar Castiglione (1528); *Galateo: Or, A Treatise on Politeness and Delicacy of Manners*, by Giovanni Della Casa (1558); and Stefano Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* (1574) became seminal treaties and were translated in most European languages as part of the educational tool for the youth of the aristocracy.⁸¹ Norbert Elias analysis of manners in *The Civilizing Process* meaningfully outlined how its evolution could be seen as a continuation of the violence that sustain the formation of the earlier knightly aristocracy through other means.⁸² Up until the 15th century, to be an aristocrat meant to be a warrior, and battling was a kernel source of identity and legitimation for that privilege class. As they congregated for war, knights rekindled their alliance with the king and reaffirmed their superiority over the subjects of their power. After the 15th century however, this source of authority is put into question by the new war technologies and techniques. War making quickly begun to rely more heavily on the presence of large quantities of expendable foot soldiers trained to use cannons and guns, and disciplined enough to follow orders to the letter, rather than on the virtuosity of small groups of brave generals. Aristocrats thus found themselves lacking a source of distinction or legitimation, and in this context this class begins to transform itself into a class of courtiers, deriving their prestige from their proximity and degree of intimacy with the sovereign king or queen. As we have seen, etiquette and elaborate

⁸¹ Burke, Peter. *The Art of Conversation* (Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁸² Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. I. *The History of Manners*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); and *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. II. *State Formation and Civilization*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

manners thus become the new currencies of political power at court. During this phase, the aristocratic self-representation shifted from the ideal model of chivalry – based on knightly courage as celebrated in the numerous jousts and tournaments held on feast days – to that of the humanist courtesan, expressed through what Habermas described as “personal attributes such as insignia (badges and arms), dress (clothing and coiffeur), demeanour (form of greeting and poise) and rhetoric (form of address and formal discourse in general).”⁸³

Elias expanded on the “civilizing” role of manners and etiquette in 16th century Europe as an advance of the thresholds of disgust, shame and repugnance towards body functions and substances. He further notes that not only the embarrassment threshold was expanding so as to progressively require a greater degree of self-constraint and its associated self-awareness, but it also expanded across different social situations: *civilized* manners went from being expected only in the presence of superiors to being a comprehensively expected standard of behaviour also in the company of peers or inferior subjects. Finally, the model of subjectivity condoned by courtly manners was introjected as the only acceptable comportment to be had even when alone. Moreover, Elias identifies a third vector of expansion of manners from being the characterizing trait of the aristocracy to becoming the model for the behaviour of the entire population. Elias’s sources were primarily manuals of etiquette and comportment used for the education of children but also as recommendations for adult refinement. His analysis shows how the ‘civilizing process’ emerged as a distinctive mode of governmentality during early modernity, reforming the relationship that subjects were expected to cultivate with themselves and others, their own bodies and speeches, and with the materiality of the world at large.

Elias’s approach remains extremely useful to account for an idea of civilization that is class-based, grounded into the materiality of quotidian

⁸³ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public*, 8.

experience and in the performativity of the self. However, his expansive model of interpretation has been recently called into question. Some critics, such as Robert Muchembled, while agreeing with Elias that the expansion of standards of comportments can adequately describe the process of governance of the elites, contend that when adopted as a perspective through which to assess the transformations of the masses of “uncivilizable” peasants, individual self-policing and social pressure to conform, in other words, disciplinary power, is not enough. Although it is true that manners were slowly adopted by the lower classes, this was achieved through violent techniques of punishment, imprisonment and surveillance.⁸⁴ As we shall see later in more detail, the sociable practices of the peasants and the poor elicited an enormous anxiety and interest in the elites, whose activities of repression constitute our primary source of information about this ‘other’ side of European modern sociability.

Conversation

The status of conversation changed profoundly over the course of the four centuries considered thus far. Within the salons of the 17th and 18th centuries, the discursive practice becomes a veritable art. Children of the upper classes would be trained in rhetoric and declamation as part of their preparation for entrance in society. However, unlike in the classics that served as study material, salon conversation was more valued for its lightness and entertainment values than philosophical inquisitiveness. It was not the depth of one’s argumentations, but one’s ability to come up with world-plays and clever puns that counted above anything else. It is in the context of the salon sociability that tactfulness, witticism, verbal dexterity and politeness of address become elevated to the status of ethical virtues.

⁸⁴ Muchembled, Robert. *L'invention de l'homme moderne. Sensibilités, moeurs et comportement collectifs sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

Given these premises, it follows that political, religious and other controversial topics were best to be avoided during this first phase. Despite this tendency towards an aestheticisation of expression, the art of conversation that emerged in 17th century had also important progressive implications that should not be dismissed. To appreciate this progressive character, it is important to remember that until that moment, traditionally Christian theology promulgated a perception of speech in general as a sinful activity, in which man could easily fall prey of evil instincts. Until the 17th century, it was not uncommon to call the tongue "the devil's instrument", as this is the way this organ is described in James' Gospel (3:6). Silence was valued morally superior to talking, as it was the appropriate conduct of pious souls dedicated to the *vita contemplativa*, as Arendt described. Later, when the dialogical public sphere explodes during the course of the 18th century, in the clubs and cafés of England and Scotland, dialogues become more informal. Conversation is not only rehabilitated as ethically good, but it begins to assume the connotation of a rational critical inquiry, as such it is presented in the works of Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Daniel Defoe, Shaftesbury, David Hume, Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, among others. Exemplary in this respect is the moral philosophy of Adam Smith, revolving around the utopian vision of a model of conversational society in which pleasure arises "from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another."⁸⁵ Not only is conversation held as one of the most pleasurable activities in life, but it also believed to yield implications for physical and psychological health, to the political strength of a nation, the success of commerce and business, and philosophical and moral improvement of the people. This last theme is particularly dear to Immanuel Kant. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, the philosopher offered a detailed praise

⁸⁵ Smith, Adam. *The theory of moral sentiments*, quoted in Russell and Tuite, *Romantic Sociability*, 7.

of conversation as one of the highest ethical-physical goods, remarking that leading a good life should involve the regular practice of good conversations. In Kant's view, this was best achieved through the regular hosting of dinner parties, to be held in the company of at least one interlocutor to nourish both the mind, with new thoughts, and the body, encouraging a healthy relation to eating. The German philosopher went so far as to detail a list of recommendations for hosting a successful dinners, including practical advises in regard to the ideal number of guests (three to nine), the opportunity of having music played to accompany the meal (an hypothesis he discarded as detrimental to good conversation) and the ideal duration of the *soireè*. For Kant, the sociable conversation during dinner parties was conducive of virtue, and he contended that it should follow a precise pattern, progressing from narration (of current affairs and relevant news and information); to ratiocination, or the critical judgement of the news and the discussion of the divergences among participants within the limits of amicability; and finally culminate in joking, witty remarks and good humour. "Social entertainment (conversation) is merely a game in which everything must be easy,"⁸⁶ concluded the philosopher. Here, it is possible to see how the emphasis on gaiety and lightness of spirit, in other words, of the principle of reciprocal pleasure, still played an important role in the newfound ethical valorisation of talking until the 18th century, a quality that was later under valorised in Habermasian characterisation of communicative action. In the context of the Whig tradition, for instance, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, elaborated on the contiguity between philosophical thought and the art of conversation echoing Kant's prescriptions: "Gravity," he wrote "is the very soul of imposture."⁸⁷ For Shaftesbury, the good conversationalist should

⁸⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, cited in Hamilton, Paul, "Post-Secular Conviviality", in *From Secularism, Cosmopolitanism, and Romanticism*, the Romantic Circles website, ed. Colin Jager, August 25, 2008, [accessed March 26, 2011]. <http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/praxis/secularism/hamilton/hamilton.html>.

be able to submit his ideas to the satire and critical inspection of an opposite raillery cheerfully, maintaining a "good humour" and avoiding the "melancholy" typical of religious enthusiasts.

Finally, during the course of the 18th and 19th century, conversational practices change in tone once more. The emphasis on pleasurable conversation as an end in itself is gradually replaced with an idea of good argumentation as a political practice that characterized the republican and liberal values of the bourgeois public sphere as described in the seminal work of Habermas. The work of this social theorist offers an important resource to comprehend these new dialogical practices, particularly with regard to the formation of subjectivity that they entail. What characterizes Habermas' concept of communicative action is an ambience in which the interlocutors can exist as equals, and yet this equality is a precondition to establish the possibility of a fair competition among different arguments. In this model, the subject prepares to participate in dialogue through the formation of an identity, that is, it is presupposed as an a priori stable entity enhanced through the conversational practice. As noted by Kester Grant however, the legitimacy of such forms of interaction "is not based on the universality of the knowledge produced through discursive interaction, but on the perceived universality of the process of discourse itself."⁸⁸ Hence, in the context of the bourgeois public sphere, participants enter into interaction as equals, adhering to specific rules of comportment to maintain this illusion of equality, but come out of it either as winners or losers of argumentative debates. What Habermas formulated as an "ideal speech situation," in which "everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever"⁸⁹ is a rather procedural fashion to get rid of the complicated relations between the validity of argumentation with the other factors at play in sociable encounters, such as the affective dimension of listening

⁸⁸ Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2004), 109.

⁸⁹ Habermas, Jürgen. "Towards a theory of communicative competence." *Inquiry* 13.1-4 (1970): 360-375.

and speaking, and power relations among those admitted (and those excluded) from the conversation.

1.5 Conclusions: sociability as privilege?

The genealogy of sociability as a practice mainly articulated through and in conversation and manners can be seen as consigning an ambivalent legacy to the present. On the one hand, it constituted a progressive vector of emancipation, first as liberation from the unmediated power of the absolute monarchy over its individual subjects, and later as a legitimation of communicative argument to shift from a private to a public relevance. On the other hand however, this mode of encounter and by extension the ideal equality of its dialogical practices depends upon the bracketing off of inequalities among members of a society and between them and others who are cast as unworthy to enter sociable interaction. Habermas himself postulated that the café and the club “preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.”⁹⁰ When attention has been given to the sociable conduct of the multitude of working poor and peasants, such as in Elias study, it was to highlight their vulnerability and ultimate defeat in the face of introjected norms or new forms of governance. Agulhon too justified his focus on upper-class institutions such as the circle and the coffee house because he declared popular sociability to be surely more fragile and less autonomous, because more determined from on the one hand the outside interferences of the state and the church “that impose their own framing structures,” and “the bourgeois circle that constitutes a model to imitate”⁹¹ on the other. In this scenario, the disregard of status was cast as a privilege rather than a critique to the hierarchical

⁹⁰ Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991), 37.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

differentiation of the social sphere; the very practice of equality among male, white and bourgeois subjects was predicated upon the active exclusion and labour of servants, women, and non white others. In other words, when sociability began to claim its legitimacy as a critical practice, its experience was on the one hand rendered more abstract through the emphasis on rational argumentation, on the other its sensual pleasures was recast as a practice of consumption. Critics of Habermas such as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge often remarked how his work did not elaborate on the possibilities of a proletarian public sphere.⁹² While Habermas later admitted that the bourgeois public sphere that functioned as the model structure in his influential thesis "from the beginning ... collides with a plebeian one"⁹³ and that he "underestimated" its importance, a theory of the implications of this collision would perhaps have led him to different conclusions in regard to the potential of sociability as a critical practice and as an ethic-aesthetic experience. The question remains whether a historical consideration of the concept of sociability based upon a genealogy of its deployment within the upper classes is enough to account for its status in contemporary times. Indeed, given the intimate connections between the emergence of the idea of society and the actual historical sociable practices of high society, it appears important to account for plebeian spaces of sociable encounters that developed and were sustained through alternative strategies, alternative to those that entailed the exclusion of certain types of people (women, the unmannered, the uncultured, the inarticulate).

As the beginning of this thesis explained, the theorisation of sociability was motivated by a search for a model or at least an experiential

⁹² Negt, Oskar and Kluge, Alexander. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁹³ Habermas, Jürgen. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere", in Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992), 430.

guidance on how people can form societies based on self-organization, equality and freedom. Having explored the historical context and conceptual articulation of the notion of sociability, by re-evaluating the history of modernity through the concrete practices and institutions of plebeian sociability, often disregarded by historians, it might be possible to discover elements of a critical theory of sociability that is not based on privilege, a sociability conducive of what Michel Foucault has defined as “counter-conducts” that does not need to be grounded on exclusionary privilege to grant its own autonomy. The notion of counter-conduct is useful to describe our object of inquiry here, as Foucault used it to identify a specific mode of subjective resistance to the immanent forces of governmentality:

Just as there have been forms of resistance to power as the exercise of political sovereignty and just as there have been other equally intentional forms of resistance or refusal that were directed at power in the form of economic exploitation, have there not been forms of resistance to power as conducting?⁹⁴

Emphasising its ethical-aesthetical character, Foucault further describes it as “the art of not being governed quite so much,”⁹⁵ of “not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them.”⁹⁶ What distinguishes counter-conducts from other modalities of struggle against power, be they intense as a “revolt” or feeble as “disobedience,”⁹⁷ is their positive ethical action, its capacity to

⁹⁴ Foucault, Michel. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977 – 1978*, eds. Michel Senellart, et al., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 195.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 201

⁹⁶ Foucault, Michel. “What is Critique”, in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e)), 1997, 45.

⁹⁷ Foucault carefully examines and ultimately discards both these terms, together with the too passive “misconduct”; “insubordination”, as he found it too specifically tied to

intervene, just like power, as a creative force of production of new possibilities of existence, to invent new forms of life, rather than performing itself as a negative opposition to power. The genealogy of plebeian sociability that I am going to trace in the following chapter will allow us to assess the limits of the modern sociability precisely by exposing the practices that it could not host, and in so doing, will point us to a way of overcoming the current impasse of the political action of social movements outlined at the beginning of the thesis.

Amidst this proliferation of new approaches to sociability within cultural practices, we find that many instances posits anew, rather than resolve, the original contradiction between the egalitarian intentions of sociability taken as an abstract ethic and aesthetic principle and the concrete organizational procedures that support it through processes of exclusion.

In the following chapter, I will reconsider the history of sociability by focusing on the institutions and practices of the common people, the peasants, the poor and the plebs who provided the contrasting backdrop of human forms of life against which the modern sociability proposed itself as a model of conduct. The question underscoring this discussion is whether the abstract concept of sociability proposed by Simmel and other modern thinkers can accommodate the experiences of the subalterns and their egalitarian and emancipatory aspirations.

CHAPTER TWO: Plebeian Sociability and Alter-Modernity

2.1 A short history of plebeian sociability

the military tradition; and "dissidence", as too reminiscent of the context of struggles against totalitarian political regimes. See: Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 200-1.

One of the reasons why theorists such as Habermas or Aguilhon found it hard to single out a characteristic proper to the “play forms of sociation” (to go back to one of Simmel’s definitions) of the common people, beyond its plasticity and receptiveness of other forms and aesthetic models coming ‘from above’, is that if and when this characteristic exists, its history cannot be narrated by examining literary and philosophical sources. Moreover, it could be argued that plebeian sociability is hardly a modern phenomenon. Instead, when looking for a genealogy of sociable practices distinctive to the common people, one must look at modes of leisurely togetherness that resisted the processes of creation of the modern subject. When considering the parallel history of plebeian sociability, it is necessary to revisit and problematize the importance accorded to manners and conversation by the moderns and their various declinations from *salonnières’* witticisms to the argumentative debates of liberal publics. This is necessary in order to substitute and contrast the role manner and conversation played in shaping the subjectivities of the upper classes with the primacy of a somatic experience, or the ability of the body to generate and perceive affects through pre-discursive corporeal prehension, in the sociability of the plebs.

In her book *Dancing in the Street*, the American scholar Barbara Ehrenreich identified a revolutionary plebeian sociability in the series of techniques, recurrent across different historical periods and cultures, that she names practices of “collective joy”. Ehrenreich immediately underlines that most contemporary languages lack a proper term to indicate this experience of collectivity as pleasurable:

[In Western cultures] we have a rich language for describing the emotions drawing one person to another [...]. What we lack is any way of describing and understanding the “love” that may exist among dozens of people at a time; and it is this kind of love that is expressed in ecstatic ritual. Durkheim’s notion of collective effervescence and Turner’s idea of *communitas* each reach, in their own ways, toward some conception of love that serves to knit

people together in groups larger than two. But if homosexual attraction is the love “that dares not speak its name”, the love that binds people to the collective has no name at all to speak.”⁹⁸

The two references in the above quote indeed point to two of the most influential studies on the subject of sociability as collective joy, and they both clearly indicate its intimate links with experiences of revolution. Sociologist Emile Durkheim invented the term ‘collective effervescence’ to theorise upon a variety of second hand ethnographic accounts of tribal rituals. With this expression however he wished to uncover a more universal intense experience of proximity so that “a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation.”⁹⁹ While his primary concern was to understand the form of “collective action...[which] arouses the sensation of sacredness,”¹⁰⁰ he did not fail to notice the political implications:

There are some periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutions or creative epochs.¹⁰¹

Anthropologist Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas* significantly overlaps with Durkheim’s idea. In *The Ritual Process*, he described by this term “a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Dancing in the streets: A history of collective joy*. (Macmillan, 2007), 14.

⁹⁹ Durkheim, Emile. *The elementary forms of the religious life*. (Courier Dover Publications, 2012), 215.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁰² Turner, Victor. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. (Transaction Publishers, 1995), 138.

Communitas differs from a quotidian experience of community or companionship found in quotidian social interaction, as it represents a peculiarly intense experiences of togetherness that is aimed at a deep transformation of the singular and collective subjectivity:

I have used the term "anti-structure,"... to describe both liminality and what I have called "communitas." I meant by it not a structural reversal... but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses.¹⁰³

While in both these authors the primary sources of reflection were ritual gatherings of other cultures, comparable experiences were key to the ancient civilizations that are considered the seeds of western civilization, such as ancient Greece and the Roman Empire.

Antiquity

Festive celebrations were already recorded in cave paintings, and although archaeologists are not sure about the precise function these group celebrations had within prehistoric societies¹⁰⁴ (scaring away big animals, propitiate hunting, reinforce societal bonds?), whether they are best understood as biological or cultural in origin, the fact remains that the practice of coming together at a sanctioned time to sing and dance at the beat of drums, often in a circle, wearing specially masks and costumes, remains one of the most consistent techniques that the human

¹⁰³ Turner, Victor. "Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: an essay in comparative symbology." In *From Ritual to Theatre: Play, games and sports in cultural contexts*. (Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York, 1982), reprinted in Counsell, Colin, and Laurie Wolf, eds. *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. (Psychology Press, 2001), 206.

¹⁰⁴ For a recent survey of theories of the origins of dance, see Williams, Drid. *Anthropology and the dance: Ten lectures*. (University of Illinois Press, 2004).

species has been using through history in order to achieve a state of shared bliss across thousands of years. Throughout Antiquity, ecstatic practices were at the core of many mystery cults, where revellers devoted to Dionysus, Bacchus, Cybele, Krishna and Pau¹⁰⁵ (often working people and featuring women as prominent celebrants) could experience the presence of their Gods by practicing techniques that allowed them to achieve a heightened emotional state through dancing and eating together. Similar ecstatic procedures is indeed to be found also during the early phases of Christianity, as the new religion was organized around enthusiastic gatherings so that communion was experienced as a collective intensity brought about as participants eat and sung together.¹⁰⁶ Ehrenreich's survey of the history of a variety of ancient religions underlines the fact that they consistently ended up by discouraging or actively suppressing such exuberant forms of spirituality as they became more established within their own social and cultural settings. The ruling classes of ancient civilizations had a predilection for an experience of the divine requiring the hierarchical intermediation of religious authorities, rather than the horizontal participation of a community of practitioners: thus, the Greeks persecuted the followers of Dionysus; the Romans rendered the cult of Cybele illegal; and Christian authorities quickly begun sanction forms of spirituality deemed too exuberant. This insight can be further confirmed by the findings of Ioan Myrddin Lewis, author of a very influential book on the sociology of ecstasy titled *Ecstatic Religion* (2003). If Ehrenreich's account was organized chronologically and remained focused on ancient civilization that are classically studies as precursor of western societies, Lewis' work is more ethnographically focused and offers an important account of ecstatic practices across a variety of cultural settings, which include many non western societies. The conclusions of this author are however importantly similar to Ehrenreich's:

¹⁰⁵ Ehrenreich, B. *Dancing in the streets*.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, Ioan Myrddin. *Ecstatic religion: A study of shamanism and spirit possession*. (Psychology Press, 2003).

New faiths may announce their advent with a flourish of ecstatic revelations, but once they become securely established they have little time or tolerance for enthusiasm. For the religious enthusiast, with his direct claim to divine knowledge, is always a threat to the established order.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, this author observes that ecstasy consistently emerges as a "peripheral" religious practice in those societies in which a part of the population is socialised into an "intolerable environment." Therefore, among many cultures, forms of possession are almost exclusively a women's phenomenon which begins with a sickness and is later treated by collective ecstatic female cults: "what men consider a demoniacal sickness, women convert into a clandestine ecstasy"¹⁰⁸ remarks the author, who also concludes that many of these female only religions are "thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex."¹⁰⁹ Lewis considers that there are occasions where possession can become a tool of power too, however he insists that comparative anthropological and ethnographic studies show enthusiasm to be , overwhelmingly, "a retort to oppression and repression."¹¹⁰

Secular collective joy: a Medieval invention?

The Medieval era saw a veritable explosion of ecstatic and celebratory occasions across the European continent. It is during this period that the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

experience of the joy of collectivity begins to exist in a separate social realm that is different from that of spirituality. Particularly interesting in this sense is the phenomenon of dance manias (also called St. Vitus or St. John dances or tarantella in the South of Italy), documented across Europe from the 7th until the 17th century, with a peak during the 14th century as they were completely a-signifying occurrences. During these apparently spontaneous events, collective frenzies, groups of peasants (many of which women ¹¹¹) would engage in frenzied collective movements, laughter, erotic and grotesques behaviours, manic gestures, and would dance themselves to exhaustion, sometimes going on for weeks while travelling from town to town. In their bizarre march they would be joined by more participants who would fall into a state of excitement by being exposed to the mood of the dancers. Even today, contemporary interpretations of dance manias seem to be uncomfortable with this contagious and apparently meaning-less form of sociability, and some medical historians, such as George Rosen and Henry Sigerist, tend to pathologise this phenomenon as a form of mass psychogenic illness or a hallucinogenic intoxication.¹¹² However, as anthropologist Robert E. Bartholomew suggested, such "diagnoses are based upon subjective, ambiguous categories that reflect stereotypes of female normality"¹¹³ and that emerge as remain speculative at best and misogynist or racist at worst. More importantly for the present discussion, dance mania can hardly be dismissed as a pathological phenomenon also because they often involved forms of rebellion to the status quo and insurrections against local governments and the clergy. According to Ehrenreich, medieval dancing manias could be seen as

¹¹¹ Daboo, Jerri. *Ritual, Rapture and Remorse: A Study of Tarantism and Pizzica in Salento*. (Peter Lang, 2010), 111.

¹¹² Cf. Bartholomew, Robert. "Dancing with myths: the misogynist construction of dancing mania." *Feminism & Psychology* 8.2 (1998),173-183.

¹¹³ Bartholomew, Robert E. "Tarantism, dancing mania and demonopathy: the an thro-political aspects of mass psychogenic illness'." *Psychological medicine* 24 (1994), 281-306.

half-conscious form of dissent. It was the poor who were mostly stricken, and they often experienced their affliction as a cure for what Hecker describes as "a distressing uneasiness", marked by dejection and anxiety, or what we would now call depression.¹¹⁴

This author particularly insists on the therapeutic quality of collective joy, expanding on the repression of popular festivities that intensified after the medieval era coincided with a rise of melancholia as a disease and cultural trope.

Dance mania were but one of the numerous occasions for celebration and merrymaking of the Medieval plebs. These were often a mixture of religious and purely sociable occurrences. Despite the Church aversion to sociability, and more broadly speaking to pleasure, Medieval Europe dedicated an unprecedented amount of time and energy to collective celebrations. As Mikhail Bakhtin also reported, many large cities "*devoted an average of three months a year to these festivities*",¹¹⁵ which included both secular and religious occasions such as Epiphany, Corpus Christi, Ascension, Pentecost, Easter, Christmas, celebrations of local patron saints, anniversaries of churches foundation, fundraising activities, weddings, baptisms and wakes. Edward P. Thompson highlighted that the sheer frequency of festivities in medieval times constituted a significant historical document in itself since, even in the absence of written sources, it testifies to the role that collective pleasures held within the cultural system of Medieval plebs:

Many weeks of heavy labour and scant diet were compensated for by the expectation (or reminiscence) of these occasions, when food and drink were abundant, courtship and every kind of social intercourse flourished, and the hardship of life was forgotten...these

¹¹⁴ Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the streets*, 87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

occasion were, in an important sense, *what man and women lived for*.¹¹⁶

It is not until the 12th and 13th century that the Christian Church successfully managed to purge all the travelling and festive practices from its officially sanctioned canons of liturgy. In place of joyous celebrations, Christendom during this times begun to offer a more elaborate aesthetic spectacle, investing in the construction of impressive, awe-inspiring architectural landmarks and artworks able to awe the illiterate common people. During the course of the 13th and 14th century the communion finally ceased to be a proper communal meal as the congregation was encouraged to witness the celebration of mass quietly from the pews that were also introduced during this time. However, such was the fundamental importance of sociability within people's cultural practices that even the Church did not succeed in eradicating them. Instead, the gradual but consistent expulsion of the festive realm from the official religious sphere generated a new institution that is quintessentially medieval: the carnival. According to Canadian historian Natalie Zemon Davis, medieval carnival was not simply a yearly ritual, but it represented a veritable "second life, a second reality for the people, separated from power and the state but still public and perennial."¹¹⁷ During the 14th and 15th centuries, the connection between common somatic and aesthetic practices and their meaningful interpretation was for the first time no longer mediated by traditional religious discourse, creating the possibility for a novel, more direct association between the experience of sociability and the use of its potency for the subversion of existing power structures. For Ehrenreich, the birth of the carnival marks a passage of particular significance in the history of plebeian sociability. Given that the carnival arose from the decision of the Church to dissociate itself from previously

¹¹⁶ Thompson, Edward P. *Customs in Common* (Merlin Press, 1991), 51. My emphasis.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

endorsed ecstatic practices, this institution established, for the first time in history, an experiential chiasm between “having fun” and “spirituality”, that is to say, between the experience of intense commonality and the elaboration of the meaning of that experience in relation to a holistic account of reality. What was a loss in terms of the experience of the divine became a gain in terms of understanding the capacity of creating and re-creating a society based on reciprocal pleasure was not down to enthusiasm (literally, the experience of god), but to the collective capacities of men and women.

2.2 The modern persecution of plebeian sociability

It is as a consequence of this secularization that recasts sociability as a subversive force not only of religious, but also of state authorities, that from the Renaissance onwards efforts to suppress public collective practices increased and the elites begun the process of retreating into their own separate cultural and sociable sphere. In his seminal work on the European popular culture, historian Peter Burke noted how between the 15th and the 18th centuries there was a “withdrawal of the upper-classes”¹¹⁸ from popular cultural practices According to Jürgen Habermas, “in comparison to the secular festivities of the middle ages and even in the renaissance the baroque festival had already lost its public character in the literal sense. Joust, dance, and theatre retreated ...into the rooms of the palace.”¹¹⁹ Before this time, folk events such as festivals, feasts, fairs, carnivals, collective dances, games and other forms of popular entertainment were also an occasion of interaction between the plebs and the elites. Surely as Burke suggests, European nobility took part in such celebratory occasions also in order to influence popular beliefs and control

¹¹⁸ Burke, Peter. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 375.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

the behaviour of the poor; at the same time these were also occasions for participating in transversal cultural activities that transgressed class divisions, at times deliberately deriving a specific legitimate pleasures from it. From the middle of the 17th century however, the relation of the elites with the cultural practices of the plebs started to change in important ways, as the aristocrats begun to regard popular culture as something problematic, lacking in manners, religiously condemnable and ultimately as something in need of reform. It is within the context of a moralizing discourse about the plebs (alongside the critique of the court system mentioned earlier) that the elites begun to organise their own separate sociable occasions. For social historians Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, since the Renaissance collective celebrations, especially those organized directly by the plebs, were the targets of "a long battle (with occasional truce) waged by the State, ecclesiastical and bourgeois authorities against popular custom."¹²⁰ The suppression was so strong that when modern aristocrats invented the notion of sociability, they were actually rediscovering a register of collectivity that the very culture that led to modernity had been violently suppressing for centuries. Indeed, this persecution served multiple purposes that were crucial to the constitution of the modern individual subject and the introduction of a capitalist logic of production: it went hand in hand with the introduction of a work ethic; the reform of the education of children and young people; and the separation between productive and reproductive spheres. Moreover, via the colonization process, such repressive measures were finally imposed on the majority of societies around the world.

A veritable "governance of pleasure" thus emerges as one the elements that reinforced the management of the population is carried out by sovereign powers of western civilization. This expression is borrowed from an article by where the two authors propose to add this as "a fourth pillar

¹²⁰ Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Taylor & Francis, 1986), 15–16.

of [western] sovereignty"¹²¹ to the tripartite description which sees power as declined in sovereignty as legitimated authority, as self-legitimated violence, and as the embodiment of white rule in the colonial process. While the notion of governance is clearly in reference to Foucault, who uses this notion to describe biopolitical power, the authors claim:

Where we would differ from Foucault is that we argue for the importance of looking at pleasure as a fundamental organising aim of sovereignty: the drive for pleasure, that informs sovereign intent and violence, and the investment in a regime that regulates pleasure within a logic of law.¹²²

The governance of pleasure thus offers a useful depiction of power as specifically targeting the capacity for experiencing pleasure as a common, transindividual experience (as opposed to a private commodity, which would undermine the ontological basis of private property), akin to what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten recently described as a policing regime "against all conservation, all rest, all gathering, cooking, drinking and smoking if they lead to marronage. Policy's vision is to break it up, move along, get ambition and give to your children."¹²³ Foucault himself acknowledged the primary importance of pleasure in processes of subjectivation and of care of the self as an ethic-aesthetic practice. For this author, pleasure was even more important than its (false) twin concept of desire. This is because in the modern era "we recognize ourselves as subjects of desire and not as agents of pleasure;"¹²⁴ however it is

¹²¹ Tedmanson, Deirdre, and Dinesh Wadiwel. "Neoptolemus: the governmentality of new race/pleasure wars?." *Culture and Organization* 16.1 (2010), 3.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (Minor Compositions, 2013), 81.

¹²⁴ Foucault, Michel. 'Pleasure Vs. Desire', audio interview, unknown source, 1983. Found online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNcQA3MSdIE> [accessed 30/06/2012]. On Foucault's views on the question of pleasure and its differentiation from desire, see also Deleuze, Gilles. "Desire and Pleasure", In Arnold Ira Davidson (ed.). *Foucault and His Interlocutors*. (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 185–86.

precisely pleasure's immediate link with action and practice, how to use it, how to provoke it and how to determine its limits, this transhistorical problem constitutes an important tool for creating practices of liberation. And if for Foucault pleasure was central to the philosophical practices of antiquity, desire emerged an important problem only with the rise of Christianity, the religious power that most dedicated to the limiting of pleasure in favour of a deciphering of desires via pastoral power, a dispositive that arguably culminated in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation.

Work ethics

Puritan protestant ethics promulgated an ascetic life style and a bureaucratic social order that was deeply intolerant towards "spontaneous enjoyment of life and all it had to offer."¹²⁵ Scholars such as Max Weber, Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson have convincingly illustrated how the late 15th century marks the birth of modern capitalist work ethics that repudiated enjoyment. Weber in particular famously explained how the accumulation of wealth for its own sake shifted from being considered a sin of greed to an accepted social goal via the theological vision of Calvinism. As a by-product of an endless labour cycle, wealth, which had formerly been a sin, came to be regarded as "bad ethically only in so far as it is a temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care."¹²⁶ The Calvinist grim vision of the afterlife, based on the scarcity of the possibility of admittance into paradise, transformed labour into a tool for salvation, and given that salvation is only attainable with death, work could never truly stop to leave room for sociable

¹²⁵ Ibid., 111.

¹²⁶ Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Routledge, 2001), 108.

interaction. Within Protestantism itself those puritan views had to be imposed by violent means. According to Hill for instance, religious groups devoted to the ideal of “a society of all-round non-specialists helping each other to arrive at truth through the community”, such as the Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians, and even early Quakers movements, who typically “danced, sang and smoked at their meetings”¹²⁷ were subjected to a veritable extermination during the British Revolution.

From disciplining youth to the creation of the wage-labourer

While religious authorities condemned collective joy on a spiritual plane, from the 15th century onwards, secular forces began a number of reforms aimed to produce the subjectivity of the wage labourer as necessitated by capitalism. According to Foucault, this second aspect was a crucial step towards the creation of a new kind of modern subjectivity that rather than being produced via collective practices could be directly moulded, or individualized, directly through power.¹²⁸

Initially, during medieval times, wage-labour had been a marginal and sporadic addition to one’s income, since livelihood was still largely supported through the commons. Until then, the idea of a salary had been associated to mercenary soldiers, and not to the production of goods and services, as the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude did not necessitate of the mediation of monetary compensation. For David Graeber, during the 15th century wage-work begun to assume a more important economic and cultural role as “basically a life-cycle phenomena.”¹²⁹ A new model of education for European youth developed in which young people were be sent to work as apprenticeships or into

¹²⁷ Hill, Christopher. *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 379-81.

¹²⁸ Foucault, Michel. “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4, The University of Chicago Press (Summer, 1982), 777-795.

¹²⁹ Graeber, David. *Possibilities: Essays on hierarchy, rebellion and desire*. (AK Press, 2007), 39.

service into other households, often of a higher social status than the one of origin, where they would learn manners and obedience to authority during a period that could last from pre-teen years until about the age of twenty-five or thirty. According to Zemon Davis, such taming of the young was a crucial step in the eradication of the carnivalesque realm, as young people had been the main actors behind the organization of the "actual experience of life without hierarchy"¹³⁰ of the popular festivities. In addition to the Protestant work ethics and the introduction of waged labour as a form of education, another factor contributed to the destruction of the plebeian sociality in Europe at the dawn of modernity: gender normativity. According to feminist scholar Silvia Federici, during the 16th century many countries such as England and France began to punish "nakedness" and "many other 'unproductive' forms of sexuality and sociality"¹³¹ which traditionally saw the participation of both sexes. Within a "vast process of social engineering"¹³² a new normativity of genders was finally imposed that locked women into a domestic realm, sanctioned the nuclear family as the norm and forbade spontaneous sensual and erotic modes of interaction.

The global war against plebeian sociability

Another important facet of the war waged by modern power on common sociability started when European colonizers began to subjugate other cultures across the planet. The merrymaking activities by the 15th century had been successfully eradicated in most parts of Europe; popular culture needed now to be eradicated in the foreign societies that the process of colonization brought into contact with it. The massive process of

¹³⁰ Zemon Davis, Natalie. "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France", *Past and Present*, No. 50. (February 1971), 49.

¹³¹ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch*. (Autonomedia, 2004), 137.

¹³² *Ibid.*

suppression of sociable practices worldwide was carried out during the course of over four centuries. Its success is testified by the peculiar formulation of the modern discourse of sociability as a 'universalist' theory of practice, which the modern formulated as if it had been their own invention or an achievement specific of their civilization.

The chronicles of the encounters between European and native populations (mostly narrated from the perspective of European) provide historians with a documentation of many lost cultural practices, as well as with an accurate depiction of the moral and aesthetic disgust felt by missionaries and colonizers as they witnessed the celebrations of the natives. Ironically, these practices appear to have shared many characteristics with earlier European traditions of plebeian sociability. In the eyes of 17th century commentators, the group ecstasy and the sensual dances of native people around the word confirmed the hypotheses of their lesser humanity. In the sources that Ehrenreich studies,

In some instances, the savage mind was described as "out of control" and lacking the discipline and restraint that Europeans of the seventeenth century and beyond came to see as their own defining characteristics. In other account, the savage was perhaps too much under control – of his or her "witch doctor" – or as a victim of mob psychology.¹³³

The ability to participate with abandonment in energetic celebrations, to become possessed, and to partake in collective were interpreted times and again as the paradigmatic expression of the bestiality, lasciviousness or mental incapacity of the Others. Moreover, the necessity to transform the colonized into a docile work force played a major role in setting the tone of the attacks over their all too frequent unruly group behaviours.

While in Europe the repression of collective pleasure had focused on the prohibition of certain form of behaviours, in the colonies the price to pay

¹³³ Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the streets*, 7.

for cultural preservation was much higher. Lower classes in Europe were punished for their feasting, but increasingly through discipline rather than brutal violence. There were important socioeconomic reasons for this different treatment, as white European ruling classes had to recognise that they had something in common with European peasants and working classes, namely a religion and a national identity. Colonised peoples on the other hand, could be easily killed together with their cultural traditions, reduced, in the eyes of the colonizers, to the status of "empty souls" during the initial phase of colonization based on religious conversion, and later as "racial bodies,"¹³⁴ during the second capitalist phase of imperialism.

Despite the extreme hardship of life, slaves of African descent in the Americas and other colonised populations continued to find strength in group gatherings deliberately aimed at bringing about a state of collective joy; many times, dancing or singing together was an important part of the preservation of their sense of self that countered the way they were dehumanised by the discourse of power. As in the case of American Jazz, often-new practices of plebeian sociability developed in the colonies out of the hybridization of different cultural traditions. European carnival traditions were also appropriated and acquired a particular importance in the Caribbean region for instance. Initially imported by the white ruling elites, and forbid to slaves, carnival celebrations in this part of the world later acquired a special status in this region, incorporating many elements of African, Asian and Native American cultures. Also in the Americas, ancient techniques of trance took on new significations within syncretic religions such as Voodoo, Santeria, Condomblè, Obeah, or Shango. In Africa, independent churches reinterpreted Christian rituals to include indigenous dances and music. And so in many other places, from Indonesia and Malaysia to North America and New Zealand, ecstatic forms of resistance to the process of cultural colonisation have been documented

¹³⁴ Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "Voicing Resistance: Race and Nation in the Global State", in *Identity, Culture and Globalization*, eds. Eliézer Ben Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg, Vol. 8. (Brill, 2002), 427.

up until the 19th century, playing a major role in the liberation from colonial rule.

Working class bars

I would like to conclude this historical account of plebeian sociability by describing what was perhaps the only plebeian sociable institution existing in modernity and definable as an alter-modern practice of sociability: the working-class café, public house or bar. While the bourgeois coffee house described in the previous chapter hosted a distinctively modern reading public, the plebeian café had more in common with the alter-modern forms of sociability described above. Scott Haine, author of an important study of Parisian lowbrow coffee houses, described the working class café as a “bridge between the ordinary world and the festival time of carnival and revolution.”¹³⁵ As a peculiar “third place”¹³⁶ between the public and the private sphere, traditional and new forms of community life, political organizing and escapism, working class café local taverns, pubs and wine bars hosted the beginnings of a nascent working class culture in the modern sense of the term, as expression of a class culture. As it is to be expected, such plebeian sociable spaces too suffered from the repeated attempts from religious and state powers to shut them down, limit their operations and otherwise spy on their activities.¹³⁷ In France for instance, already under the reign of Louis XIV, police was ordered to keep a close eye on taverns to “prevent the singing of “dissolute and slanderous songs”, the “drawing of bows” and other weapons, gambling, and

¹³⁵ Haine, W. Scott. *The world of the Paris café: Sociability among the French working class, 1789-1914*. (JHU Press, 1998), 237.

¹³⁶ Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Marlowe & Company, 1999).

¹³⁷ Although during the 16th and 17th centuries, working class cafés and taverns were usually condemned officially but tolerated in reality because they constituted a source of revenue through taxation. Cf. Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*.

prostitution.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, café owners were asked to keep a registry of attendants, and regulations regarding opening hours were introduced. And if the French Revolution liberalized cafés and somehow restored their morality for a limited period of time, during the Restoration, the repression on café sociability picked up again, through new concerns over standards of hygiene and the introduction of the new figure of the ‘lazy poor’, wasting money in drinking and gambling, in the imagination of the upper-classes. When alcoholism first became a topic of public concern in the course of the 1860s, this trope was again associated to a specific figure, that of the “alcoholic, communist café habitué”¹³⁹ who was a major source of disquiet for the elites. At around the same time, bars became a regular “fixture in radical workmen’s clubs”¹⁴⁰ in England, evolving from a long tradition of popular public houses.

It is important to point out that the sociable ambiances of bourgeois and working class cafés evolved to assume very different characteristics. To begin with, unlike the male-dominated world of bourgeois clubs, working class drinking venues saw a wider participation of women, a presence that elicited major outrage in public opinion as it disrupted the official discourse around the virtues of private family life. Secondly, most coffee houses and pubs that supplied the urban working classes, white-collar clerks, small shopkeepers and petty entrepreneurs were catered directly by the owners, usually a married couple, while upper class venues were serviced by waiters, which created a much more formal atmosphere in which a certain etiquette, albeit of a more sober tenor than the one that had been required in aristocratic culture, was expected. Furthermore, working class cafés were used as a ‘shelter’¹⁴¹ for dislocated plebs arriving from the countryside to the city, facing the dramatic changes of industrialization, migration and urbanization. They helped them find

¹³⁸ Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 15.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Jones, Gareth Stedman. *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982*. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 198.

¹⁴¹ Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 234.

orientation in an increasingly impersonal and precarious world, maintaining social bonds with people coming from the same region or country for instance. This experience is deeply different from the cafés and clubs of high society which served the opposite purpose of internationalization: hosting guests coming from abroad or other cities, reading news from distant places and so forth was part of a cultivation of cosmopolitan awareness that was expected in the conduct of the bourgeoisie as a class aspiring to leading the world.

While Haine account focused specifically on working class cafés before and during the French Revolution, the argument resonates with those of a number of other scholars who focused on working class bars, pubs, cafés and taverns in other contexts. Iain McCalman for instance demonstrated how London taverns were the site of the radical anti-establishment underworld culture that during the period 1795-1840 agitated the British capital with its "*humour, escapism, sex, profit, conviviality, entertainment and saturnalia*".¹⁴² Other historians such as David Gutzke and Madelon Powers recount how British or American workingmen respectively fought for their pubs and bars against the forces that wanted to sanitize such spaces to fight the problem of alcoholism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁴³ In modernity, life at the bar was for the working classes a break from hard labour; they were the first experiences of free time as opposed to working time (increasingly regulated by clocks rather than natural cycles) in the modern sense of leisure time devoid of any celebratory connotation (a second step in the secularization of joy, following the medieval one that led from religious to laic experience). As drinking during working hours was progressively banned, the café or tavern became the place for experiencing intoxication in common as a moment of relief from labour, an experience that retained a ritualistic,

¹⁴² McCalman, Iain. *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolution Aries and Pornographers in London, 1795 - 1840* (CUP Archive, 1988), 234.

¹⁴³ Cf. Gutzke, David W. *Pubs And Progressives: Reinventing The Public House In England, 1896-1960* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), and Powers, Madelon. *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

almost sacred connotation until the 19th century.¹⁴⁴ For this reasons, Haine sees working class cafés also as “incubators”¹⁴⁵ of proletarian self-organization, providing the experiential blueprint for the formation of labour unions and mutual aid societies.

2.3 The key features of plebeian sociality

An objection could be raised at this point as to whether it is justifiable to see plebeian celebrations as legitimately belonging to the idea of sociability or whether they represent another kind of collective experience. After all, collective effervescence and practices of *communitas* are formally quite distinct from the subdued satisfaction more usually found in the conversational settings described in the previous chapter. The concept of ‘collective joy’ as articulated by Ehrenreich, and also more recently by anthropologist Edith Turner¹⁴⁶, can be useful here precisely as it helps to refocus some of the constitutive elements of this experience as legitimate interlocutors of Simmel’s sociability as a constitutive part of the history of power struggles within so-called western civilization. The concept of collective joy presupposes an understanding that the historical instances described so far are not as a matter of impulsive, spontaneous outbursts – given that the capacity to ‘let go’ and to ‘become possessed’ actually require training and preparation and that even the most chaotic festive behaviours are actually subject to cultural expectations, in a way that is comparable to the way manners shaped the reciprocal expectations in the interaction of the modern elites. The theory of collective joy bears a number of further points of resonance with sociability: both Ehrenreich and Simmel regard aesthetics as a crucial aspect of the practices they

¹⁴⁴ Transchel, Kate. *Under the influence: working-class drinking, temperance, and cultural revolution in Russia, 1895-1932*. (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 12-38.

¹⁴⁵ Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 234.

¹⁴⁶ Turner, Edith. *Communitas: The anthropology of collective joy*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

describe, Simmel in terms of "good form" and Ehrenreich by addressing the importance of elements such as dancing and playing music, and masking, an element that Simmel too mentions as an important tool for the abandonment into "impersonal freedom."¹⁴⁷ Secondly, eating and drinking together, also considered in their symbolic and aesthetic function are present in both narrations. In Ehrenreich's survey, the nourishing of the body as a life affirming gesture is as important as the faculty to destroy, to consume, and to live in abundance without worrying of labour and scarcity. For Simmel, "communal eating and drinking [...] unleashes an immense socializing power,"¹⁴⁸ despite it being an animal necessity and ultimately a solitary activity, the meal sublimates food into something communicative. Yet another techniques constitutive of both ideas of collective joy and of sociability is the playing of games, including sports or other kinds of competitions. This aspect has developed into an important notion within event organization in recent years, as it will be discussed more in detail in chapter 4. Ehrenreich described how in non-modern cultures, cheering was often an integral part of the gaming occasion, and it is only in the last couple of centuries that the performance of the players was gradually perceived as separated from that of their fans. Simmel (and Schleiermacher before him) insisted on sociability's proximity to games, describing it as the "play-form" of the "interdependence of individuals."¹⁴⁹ Moreover, both sociability and collective joy are connoted by erotic play. While Simmel dedicated a separate study to coquetry and flirtation¹⁵⁰ with many references to the sociable sphere, Ehrenreich's book suggest that collective joy thrives on foreplay, flirting and erotic anticipation, or in other words, it is not the reproductive capacity of sex that is of interest, but the energy generated

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴⁸ Simmel, Georg. "Sociology of the Meal", in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. Frisby, David and Mike Featherstone, (Sage, 1997), 137.

¹⁴⁹ Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability", 121.

¹⁵⁰ Simmel, Georg. "Flirtation", in *On Women, Sexuality and Love*, ed. Guy Oakes (Yale University Press,1984), 133-153.

by the behaviours hinting at its possibility.¹⁵¹ Also laughter, humour, including practical jokes, mockery and irony are central aspects of both these theories of practices. Both authors further insist on the rule of reciprocity, which postulates that all activities of the members must affect all others, as one of the fundamental characteristics of the sociable experience. Taken as a theory of practices, Simmel's sociability echoes Ehrenreich's collective joy insofar as it describes practices that holds together a variety of forms of encounter that "above and beyond their special content [...] are accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others" and that hold "the associative process as a value and a satisfaction"¹⁵² in itself. If from a close comparative reading it appears legitimate to consider Ehrenreich's theory of collective joy as a specific modality of experiencing sociability, her proposal also offers a critical perspective from which to re-examine some of its axioms in the light of the different ways in which it constructs its subject. This becomes especially apparent in the ways in which the body is performed in the two ideas. On this issue, it is useful to refer to the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, who theorised collective individuation as the basic principle of all societies, claiming that both "collective conscience and collective corporeality"¹⁵³ must be accounted for determining the range of experiences available to a singular collective. As Simondon writes: "it is not possible to create purely spiritual groups, without bodies, without limits, without ties; the collective, as the individual, is psycho-somatic."¹⁵⁴ While the theories of modern sociability predicated it as a spiritual or intellectual endeavour, this did not erase the corporeality of collective co-presence, with its needs to be sustained and

¹⁵¹ Palladini, Giulia. "Towards an Idle Theatre: The Politics and Poetics of Foreplay." *TDR/The Drama Review* 56.4 (2012): 95-103.

¹⁵² Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability", 121.

¹⁵³ Simondon, Gilbert, *L'individuation Psychique Et Collective*, (Paris: Aubier, 2007), 195.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

kept alive; instead, it simply reconstituted the public body as that of the spectator, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

If one considers all the new formats of sociability developed from early modernity onwards – the salon and the café, but also the opera, the ballet, the concert and the exhibition – one trait they all shared is that they can be enjoyed in the absence of an active bodily participation. As we have seen, the reasons behind the development of the restful body of the modern sociable subject is linked to the necessity of representation. Graeber drew attention to the fact that the body of the elites is simultaneously a body of *property* (the body as the physical avatar of the abstract subject that owns not only of the body in question, but also land and resources), of *propriety* (cultivation of manners) and of *properties*¹⁵⁵ (the unique characteristics of the modern individual). Owning becomes a mode of relation not only with oneself - to be *self-possessed* - but also with others and the world. In contrast, the subjectivity that is sustained in the sociability of collective joy plays out the relation with the self, collectivity and the world as in flux with one another, in a relation of mutuality based on an acknowledgement of interdependency. The enthusiastic collectivities of the plebs and the 'savages' were not necessarily episodes of *loss* (of the self) but could be reconsidered as a technique of *expansion* of the self instead.

The import of the difference between these two modes of sociability is not exhausted on the level of aesthetics, however, as it would have been for instance if its difference was to be confined to the Nietzschean categories of the Apollonian or Dionysian¹⁵⁶, but instead it comprises of an idea of class conflict. For the aristocracies of the 16th to the 19th century, sociability was a literal substitute of labour, and given that the

¹⁵⁵ Graeber, David. "Manners, Deference and Private Property in Early Modern Europe", in Graeber, *Possibilities* (AK Press, 2007), 15-56.

¹⁵⁶ According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the Apollonian principle tends to compositional order, rationality and harmony, while the Dionysian spirit corresponds to a drive towards chaos, excess, cacophony. Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The birth of tragedy and the case of Wagner*. (Random House, 2010).

socialization paradigm of so-called *leisure classes* prevented them from any kind of labouring activity, sociability can be seen to constitute for them a substitute ambit of production and reproduction. For the working classes instead, understood here in the broad sense of the subject who produces surplus value,¹⁵⁷ sociability coincided with the end or refusal of labour as a form of self-preservation. The subject of property and properties can therefore only access the sociable encounter as an invulnerable, perfected being. On the other hand, the event of collective counter-conduct can establish occasions where collective and individual fallacies (as assigned by power) can be addressed and re-elaborated into something new, not to produce the flat collectivism based on sameness, but to deactivate the violence of the power that traverses those relations.

The revolutionary drive of collective joy

What could be described as the eradication of collective joy from popular culture, carried out both at the level of discipline and by means of violent repression, played a crucial role in the creation of distinctly modern, subaltern subjectivities. The hard-working proletarian, the domestic(ated) woman, and the black slave were all subjected to an exclusion from previously available sources of pleasure and self-valorisation. From the point of view of those in power, festive and sociable practices were dangerous for a number of reasons. For centuries, collective joy represented the natural end of labour, both in the sense of providing a goal, a meaning in life, and also in the sense of providing a measure of when to stop working. When left to free choice, people had typically regarded labour as a means to an end, to be interrupted as soon as a satisfactory level of sustenance was achieved. Folks had no reason to invest their work life with further meaning, because the need to make sense of the world, to express oneself, to shine and compete was met in

¹⁵⁷ Virno, Paolo. 'Multitude or Working Class', web article. Trans. Arianna Bove. <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcmultitude.htm> [accessed 18/09/2013]

and through these sociable occurrences rather than through labour. Thus, so long as these festive opportunities occupied an important place in culture, a system of power that elevated the productivity of labour and an endless accumulation of wealth as its ultimate goals had to be regarded as absurd.

Moreover, in plebeian sociability, collective expression was not severed from the activities that prepared it, as it therefore possessed an important pedagogical function as it gave people an experience of how it is possible to self-direct the creation of something, a event, outside from the parameters of labour and religion. Yet, the autonomy that emerges from the description of the self-organization that prepared and sustained plebeian sociability is significantly different from the autonomy of the salon or of the bourgeois café. While the autonomy of elite ambiances of sociability was achieved by severing its links with other forms of sociation, and particularly with the labour that was nonetheless needed to support them, the formats of plebeian sociability entailed a different process of self-organization: rather than exclusive, these were expansive events practiced in ways that tended to re-organize all spatial and temporal barriers organizing the social exchange, including, and perhaps most importantly, the relations governing the division of labour: tarantulated women dancing against their reproductive role; Saint Monday absentee workers drinking against the factory clock; mulattoes masked against the racial segregation of the colonial world. Thus, the sewing of costumes, the decoration of streets and fair grounds, the preparation of special foods, the rehearsals of dance steps and recitals, and the invention of pranks were *the* ambits in which the intersubjectivity of common people produced a collective enunciation that spoke of the possibility of a different social order at large. Another reason why those in power feared plebeian sociability was more concretely due to the fact that it gave subjected populations an opportunity to learn skills and form social bonds that they could put to use against them, or, to put it in political language, it provided a training in and direct experience of self-organization. Many

commentators remark the importance of this aspect of popular festivities. For instance, Mikhail Bakhtin writes:

In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators [...]. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. [...] It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.¹⁵⁸

Zemon Davis supports this interpretation too when, in her discussion of the constitution of the Abbeyes of Misrule, she reports:

City governments ordinarily did not plan, program, and finance [popular recreations] as they did the great Entry parades for royalty or other important personages or the parades in celebration of peace treaties. Rather, the festivities were put on by informal circles of friends and family, sometimes by craft or professional guilds and confraternities, and very often by organizations that literary historians have called "*societies joyeuses*" (or "fool-societies" or "play-acting societies").¹⁵⁹

In yet another account, Goethe appreciated the self-organizing skills he saw at the Carnival he witnessed in Rome during February 1788:

The Roman Carnival is not really a festival given for the people but one the people give themselves [...] unlike the religious festivals in Rome, the Carnival does not dazzle the eye: there are no fireworks,

¹⁵⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana University Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁵⁹ Zemon Davis, Natalie. *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford University Press, 1975), 98.

no illuminations, no brilliant processions. All that happens is that, at a given signal, everyone has leave to be as mad and foolish as he likes, and almost everything, except fisticuffs and stabbing, is permissible. The difference between the social orders seems to be abolished for the time being; everyone accosts everyone else, all good-naturedly accept whatever happens to them, and the insolence and licence of the feast is balanced only by the universal good humour. During this time, even to this day, the Roman rejoices because, though it postponed the festival of the Saturnalia with its liberties for a few weeks, the birth of Christ did not succeed in abolishing it.¹⁶⁰

In these quotes, the principles of reciprocity (no distinction between "actors and spectators"), of the importance of rules of conduct ("the laws of its own freedom") and of a playful re-invention of the world are described in a manner that intimately reminds one of the core values associated with Schleiermacher and Simmel's theorization of sociability. And finally, the joy of plebeian sociability was a political experience contiguous with that of revolt. It is in this sense that the continuity between ancient ecstatic religions and more recent forms of collective celebrations (not necessarily aimed at achieving a state of trance) that Ehrenreich offered in her theory of collective joy can be regarded as useful, despite some of its simplifications, perhaps inevitable in such broad-ranging kind of book. Since the 16th century, carnivals and other popular festive occurrences have been the occasions to ignite full-fledged revolts. According to the historical studies conducted by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White,

it is in fact striking how frequently violent social clashes apparently 'coincided' with carnival [...] to call it a 'coincidence' of social revolt

¹⁶⁰ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Italian Journey, 1786-1788* (Pantheon Books, 1962), 446.

and carnival is deeply misleading for [...] it was only in the late 18th and early 19th centuries – and then only in certain areas - that one can reasonably talk of popular politics dissociated from the carnivalesque at all.¹⁶¹

Stallybrass and White report a variety of historically documented instances of this link between revolutionary political action and sociability since as early as the 16th century: in 1511 Udine, a pre-Lent carnival turned into riot leading to the murder of fifty local nobles; similar events occurred during the June festivities of 1513, when a group of fed up peasants sacked the city of Berne. Uprisings were documented in Basel during the Shrove Tuesday of 1529; in 1580 a street dance evolved into a revolt in the French city of Romans. Norman Cohn presented an even earlier occurrence in the book *The Pursuit Of The Millennium*, which narrates the Peasants Revolt in England generating out of the feast of Corpus Christi of 1381.¹⁶² In times closer to ours, historical documentation exists of the 1740 rioting of Ketrington, in the UK, evolved from a football match; and as already noted, Haine documented many similar incidents through his analysis of police records in 1800s Paris. In the colonies too, festivals represented excellent opportunities for uprising; and in these cases too, the rebels and agitators of the revolts often learned organising and met each other through the carnival-organizing committees. So for instance, the Shand Estate revolt of 1805 in Trinidad was coordinated via slave societies called *Convois* (or *Regiments*), which were usually took care of “dancing and innocent amusement,”¹⁶³ recycling disused military paraphernalia as parodist symbols of power. In Cuba we find a similar situation: here the term *cabildos* referred both to a black dance and to the

¹⁶¹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 14.

¹⁶² Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium : Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. (Oxford University Press, 1970), 284.

¹⁶³ From the “Minutes of His Majesty Council”, held in Trinidad on 20th December 1805, reported in John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13–14.

societies who were responsible for their organization (a permission from the colonial authority had to be obtained in advance to each event) and were supposed to perform for non-members during festivals, but in 1812 prepared the Aponte rebellion instead. Matt D. Childs reports “by providing a network of alliances and an institutional structure that offered a limited sense of familiarity for Africans in Cuba, *cabildos* helped their members to survive in a society based upon racial oppression.”¹⁶⁴ Surely, part of the reasons of the coincidence of revolts and celebrations must be of a strategic nature: rebels were favoured by the large numbers of people gathered to party; uprising was aided by the possibility to disguise with masks or costumes and carry weapons camouflaged as props or musical instruments. However, more was at stake, as the activities afforded in such spaces challenge of modern sociability in at least one important way: rather than looking for meaningful free play as something that could exist because it sidestepped a direct engagement with the political sphere – as in the aristocratic model of the salons – or it welcomes politics on the level of an argumentative debate predicated upon a presupposed universal access to the speech situation – as in the liberal ideal conversation – the experience of sociality in plebeian practices maintains a psycho-somatic relation with political praxis.

Conducts and counter-conducts

It is important now to turn to the question of the political import of sociability, to better understand in which sense its practice can be conceived as political praxis with implications beyond the scale of the small and quotidian life of groups. As we have seen, the notion of

¹⁶⁴ Childs, Matt D. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 118.

sociability points to not only a theory of practice, but also a political discussion on the form of political action and the kind of utopian society to be desired. In modern discourses, sociability was first characterised precisely by high expectations of sociability as the new paradigm for a cosmopolitan polite civilization. The principles of reciprocity, voluntarism and non-instrumentality that underscore the modern, elite notion of sociability, however, did not in themselves resolve the question of power in the context of freedom and were not able by themselves to guarantee the design of a perfect society, but gave rise instead to a prolonged polemic around authentic and affected manners, true or false gentleness of spirit.¹⁶⁵ Michel Foucault's work on subjectivity and power is helpful here to address this question. Foucault's innovative conception of power separated it from the traditional motif of sovereignty. Power, in his view, is not a system that is simply transmitted from above, imposed by those 'who have power' through specific institutions such as the State or the Church, but it is a dimension that can characterise all kinds of social relations as they are constituted and reconstituted at every level of society. This does not mean that power comprises everything however, but that "it comes from everywhere."¹⁶⁶ Foucault accomplishes his reclamation of power away from sovereignty by differentiating it from domination (pure violence) and linking it with the concept of freedom. Power - he writes -

is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ For an overview of the most significant positions within this debate, see Cowan, Brian. "Public Spaces, Knowledge, and Sociability." *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (2012): 251-266.

¹⁶⁶ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (Penguin, 1998), 93.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 790.

This definition of power, when applied to sociability, describes it as a particular form of association where the "field of possibilities" and the "diverse compartments" available to collective subjects is not subjected to any necessity other than the preservation of the society and the reciprocal enjoyment of the association. And from this definition it follows that sociability maximises the possibility of the exercise of power, insofar as it expresses the freedom of association of those involved. This connection between power and freedom becomes particularly significant in the specific modality of power that Foucault attributes to modernity and that he calls governmentality, a form of power that is specifically referred to as a "conduct of conduct,"¹⁶⁸ articulated as "the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other."¹⁶⁹ In other words, the principle of reciprocity that is used in sociability as the basis for an equality that preserves individual peculiarities is the very object upon which governmentality seeks to operate. Moreover, for Foucault, the individual or collective subject is in a condition of constant change achieved through a double movement: on the one hand, it possesses a capacity of self-constitution, of creating itself anew, as expressed through "techniques of self" and "practices of creativity," or, more comprehensively, through what Foucault called the "art of living."¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, the genesis of the subject is grounded in "subjection," that is, it is determined by the forces of power that impinge upon the self at the level of the corporeal and the psychic, and thus the subject forms its relationship with the self, the others and the world according to specific logics that are never neutral. In this respect, the autonomy of sociability from other social spheres such as (labour, work, reproduction, etc.) does not safeguard it from subjection; its capacity to generate new forms of

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 389.

¹⁶⁹ Foucault, Michel. "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *The Final Foucault*, eds. Bernauer, James and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 19.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

subjectivity must be negotiated through techniques specific to each collective practice.

In his discussion of governmentality, Foucault also introduced the possibility of a "counter-conduct,"¹⁷¹ which entails a positive conception of the resistant subject that is not focused on *opposing* power, but instead insists on producing itself *differently*. This notion is especially useful applied to the collective subject of sociability. While governmental rationality always holds as its target the conduct of others, counter-conducts are described by Foucault as a "struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others."¹⁷² Emphasising its ethical-aesthetical character, Foucault further describes counter-conduct as "the art of not being governed quite so much,"¹⁷³ of "not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them."¹⁷⁴ As we have seen, the theme of the absence of a central figure of authority was also central in Simmel and Ehrenreich's efforts to think the sociable experience. What distinguishes counter-conducts from other modalities of struggle against power, be they intense as a "revolt" or feeble as "disobedience,"¹⁷⁵ is their positive ethic-aesthetic action, their capacity to intervene as a creative force of production of new possibilities of existence, to invent new forms of life, rather than performing a merely negative opposition to power.

When one applies Foucault's theory of counter-conducts to sociability, it becomes evident that, while still respecting the rules of autonomy and

¹⁷¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 201.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Foucault, "What is critique", 45.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault carefully examines and ultimately discards both these terms, together with the too passive "misconduct"; "insubordination", as he found it too specifically tied to the military tradition; and "dissidence", as too reminiscent of the context of struggles against totalitarian political regimes. See: Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 200-1.

freedom, different practices, different techniques and ethic-aesthetic arrangements can result in opposing modalities of encounter based on different conducts – on the side of power, seeking to influence the possibilities of becoming of others – or counter-conducts – on the side of struggle, seeking to invent new modalities for being-together against the determinants that foreclose the possibilities of experience in the present.

PART II

Politically, the important things are always taking place elsewhere, in the hallways of the congress, behind-the-scenes of the meeting, where people

*confront the real, immanent problems of desire and of power-the real problem of justice.*¹⁷⁶

– Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

CHAPTER THREE: From transgression to valorisation: the politics of sociability and contemporary impasse

3.1 Plebeian sociability as a revolutionary cultural practice

The working class café, barroom or tavern in the 19th century is a peculiar institution, insofar as it represents the last space of premodern plebeian sociability in an increasingly urban and industrial setting. Here, the realm of pleasure, the carnivalesque performative, the eroticism of heterosociality, the expansion of the self via intoxication and political organizing coexisted in promiscuity and were allowed to inform the way singular conducts occupied each activity. Without wanting to idealise such format of sociability (which also hosted forms of corporatist identification of the working class elites, for instance, and was one of the first site of exclusion of women from their participation in the politics of urban life too), working class taverns have also been considered as playing a fundamental role in the formation of a working class culture since the end of the 18th century.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the already mentioned comments from Haine who attributed to Parisian working-class cafés the role of “incubators” of

¹⁷⁶ Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 50.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Kaplan, Steven. “Reflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700–1815,” *Revue historique* 261 (1979): 17–77; Brennan, Thomas Edward. *Public Drinking And Popular Culture In Eighteenth-Century Paris*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Sonenscher, Michael. *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics, and Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Barrows, Susanna, and Robin Room, eds. *Drinking: Behavior And Belief In Modern History*. (University of California Press, 1991); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

proletarian militancy until the interwar years¹⁷⁸ (1920s-1930s), are echoed by the findings of Madelon Powers in relation of working class North American saloons, where "Many unions made their headquarters [...], using them for organizing efforts, chapter meetings, and occasional social events,"¹⁷⁹ so that a contemporary journalist would write in 1913 that the saloon was "the principal place in which ideas underlying the labor movement originate, or at any rate become consciously held."¹⁸⁰

It is important to underline again how it is not so much the case that collective joy coincides with the political experience, but that the two are continuous and are allowed to produce resonances. This is significant insofar as the thesis that emerges from the historical sources is not that before the formation of working class institutions of the party and the union of the 20th century the working classes relationship with the political was spontaneist. Instead, if borrowing one of Negri's expressions we consider that the problem of organization as "spontaneity that reflects upon itself,"¹⁸¹ it could be said that the tavern was the common experience of pleasure as liberation from labour (or of labour) upon which a common reflection on the politics of instituent power (rather than the tactical problem of the seizure of power within a logic of dialectic class conflict) could be carried on. Within the history of plebeian collective joy and its systematic repression within modernity, the proletarian tavern of the 19th century represents the last form of social organization able to keep together the experience of leisure and that of rebellion. Karl Marx noted the fact that Paris was at the same time "a centre of revolutions

¹⁷⁸ Haine, W. Scott. "Drink, Sociability, and Social Class in France, 1789-1945: The Emergence of a Proletarian Public Sphere." in Holt, Mack, ed. *Alcohol: A social and cultural history*. (Berg, 2006), 138.

¹⁷⁹ Powers, Madelon. "The Lore of the Brotherhood. Continuity and Change in Urban American Saloon Culture, 1870-1920," in Holt, *Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History*, 147.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁸¹ Negri, Antonio. *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-three Lessons on Lenin*. (Columbia University Press, 2014), 32.

and a birthplace of modern leisure."¹⁸² In the early 1840s, while visiting the French capital, the city with most cafés in Europe, the philosopher was favourably impressed with the sociability afforded by its convivial working class culture, noting:

When communist artisans form associations, teaching and propaganda are their first aims. But their association itself creates a new need – need for society – and what appeared to be a means has become an end. The most striking results of this practical development are to be seen when French socialist workers meet together. Smoking, eating, and drinking are no longer simply means of bringing people together. Society, association, entertainment which also has society as its aim, is sufficient for them; the brotherhood of man is no empty phrase but a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their toil-worn bodies.¹⁸³

For Marx, who also regularly met Engels in *Cafè de la Regence*, the liveliness of the Parisian taverns represented an example of embodied solidarity, where class-consciousness could be translated in a concrete practice and become more than an abstract ideal. Despite Marx's enthusiasm for this "new need for society" that he recognised in French socialist men [sic], we have seen that plebeian sociability arrives at modernity in broken pieces, after centuries of attacks and attempts at repression from State and religious powers. Within the history of the Left after the World War I, as the international labour movement begun to see its right of assembly recognised in many countries and it was allowed to form of its own institutions, the importance of sociability and its role in militant organizing begun to wane. While cafes "remained important,

¹⁸² Marx, Karl. "Early Writings", in *The Good Society: A Book of Readings*, eds. Anthony Arblaster and Steven Lukes, (Taylor & Francis, 1972), 175.

¹⁸³ Marx, Karl. *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. (Courier Dover Publications, 2012), 44.

especially in times of strikes (often as headquarters for strikers near their workshop or factory) or during demonstrations, when cafes often provided a gathering place before a demonstration or a refuge from police actions after it started,"¹⁸⁴ their symbolic role as political spaces was diminished. Also on the level of discourse, sociability was a neglected trope within the international workers movement, as part perhaps of a broader missing reflection of the micropolitical aspects of struggles. Thus, despite the differences characterising different national contexts, it can be argued that during the first half of the 20th century, the ideas of common (p)leisure and politics that previously had co-existed in the experiential framework of plebeian sociability were each developed along different vectors/logics of experience. On the one hand, the experience of leisure was increasingly provided by the market in the form of commodity by a growing mass entertainment industry (aided by the introduction of new media). Thomas Brennan traced this tendency towards commodification of sociability plebeian back this tendency all the way back to the French Revolution establishment of the *guinguette*, a particular kind of working class tavern situated at the edges of the city, outside its walls:

Although there had always been periodic entertainment associated with the yearly religious calendar, seasonal fairs, and sporadic royal events, the guinguette offered entertainment whenever one had the time and money to visit; it had become a commodity. This was leisure of a very different sort from the regular drink at the tavern with friends or fellow workers. The guinguette produced a form of glamor, not from any elegance but from a kind of frenzy and festivity, a carnival license that took people away from their normal identities and associations.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Haine. "Drink, Sociability, and Social Class in France, 1789-1945," 135.

¹⁸⁵ Brennan, Thomas. "Taverns and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution", in Holt, Mack, ed. *Alcohol: A social and cultural history*. (Berg, 2006), 108.

Many other commentators too, such as Habermas and Haine for instance, have concluded their narratives around the formation of a public sphere with the dissolution of café culture into mass consumerism.

On the other hand, the experience of political self-organization during the first half of the 20th century that characterised the birth of republican democracies and the international labour movement was increasingly recast in terms of a party politics where collective joy did not represent a significant point of reference for the organization of political practice. As Ehrenreich ironically put it: "for men like Robespierre and Lenin, the central revolutionary rite was the meeting – experienced in sitting position, requiring no form of participation other than an occasional speech, and conducted according to strict rules of procedure."¹⁸⁶ This remark was recently echoed by Franco Berardi Bifo:

It is said that in the period of the First World War, in a bar in Zurich, Vladimir Illich Lenin and Tristan Tzara met, without ever having associated before. The language of Lenin tried to create the world with the strength of the will, of law, of power. Tzara used language as irony, as the creation of worlds in which will, law and power were suspended. If they had understood each other, the twentieth century would have been lighter.¹⁸⁷

Leaving aside the complex history of the reception of Lenin's ideas on the form of political organization, the legacy of his thought within many proletarian institutions (including cooperatives, popular universities and unions), was characterised by what Guattari summarised as "authoritarian disciplines, formal hierarchies, orders of priorities decreed from above, and compulsory ideological references."¹⁸⁸ At the union and at the party,

¹⁸⁶ Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the streets*, 176.

¹⁸⁷ Berardi, Franco (Bifo). "Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography." (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 140.

¹⁸⁸ Guattari, Felix. " Appendix 1. The New Spaces of Freedom", in Guattari, Felix and Antonio Negri, *New Lines of Alliance New Spaces of Liberty* (Autonomedia, 2010), 124.

groups were expected to think and behave with efficacy and efficiency, not to produce affective relations or joy among participants. More broadly, parties both to the left and the right of the political spectrum during the first decades of the 20th century imagine sociability as being in the service of the representation of their strength. This is the age of the grand parades and organized festivals, first introduced during the French Revolutions and later adopted by Nazi-Fascism but also in the Soviet context.¹⁸⁹ The question of plebeian sociability, both in socialist countries under the soviet influence and also in the leftist party culture in the so-called west, was reformulated to fit an ideological and moral agenda. The recreational activities organized for the workers were often pedagogical in spirit, promoting the self-amelioration of the working classes. The Russian Revolution did institute spaces such as People's Houses or amateur drama circles later spread to other countries, yet these entities were understood and valued in relation to the education of the proletariat and the reform of popular culture, not in relation to what they could offer in terms of sociable experiences, and more broadly, of what was the role of reciprocal pleasures in a revolutionary process. In a similar spirit, many voices within the Left became openly adverse to any attempt of putting micropolitical questions (such as reproductive and domestic labour, affective politics, aesthetical experimentation, and ecological concerns) on the agenda, as they were perceived as carrier of a dangerous "subjectivist derive."¹⁹⁰ Moreover, barroom culture and alcohol consumption were often condemned a source of corruption and anti-revolutionary behaviours.¹⁹¹ From this point of view, the battle over manners identified by Elias as one

¹⁸⁹ For an account of the role of festivals during the Frenche Revolution, see Ozouf, Mona. *Festivals and the French revolution*. (Harvard University Press, 1991). For an account of mass rallies under Nazism, see Wilson John, William. "Festivals and the third reich." Doctoral dissertation (Mcmaster University, 1994). For a history of festivals during the Russian Revolution, see von Geldern, James. *Bolshevik Festivals 1971-1920*. (University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁰ Vercauteren, David, Olivier Crabbé and Thierry Müller. *Micropolítica de los grupos: para una ecología de las prácticas colectivas*. (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2010), 136.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Holt, M. ed. *Alcohol: A social and cultural history*.

of the characteristic feature of the birth of the modern subject was by the 1920s decidedly won by the repressive party.

3.2 The form of action in social movements: an impasse?

The breaking up of the dyad revolution/leisure within the working class movements of the first half of the 20th century radically transformed the status of sociability in contemporary society. While the way in which it resurfaces as a crucial element of contemporary capitalist valorisation will be considered in chapter 4, this section turns to examine how the lack of a critical discourse on sociability contributed to a long standing, cyclical crisis within the culture of the Left around how to conjugate the consciousness and desires of the oppressed into revolutionary political action. This problem greatly contributed to the critique that the communist and socialist parties suffered during the late 1960s and 1970s from autonomous social movements, a crisis that was never resolved to these days.¹⁹² The latest incarnation of such crisis around the modes of collective organization and the role of desire in political action became palpable in the early 2000s, in the aftermath of the first major defeats suffered by the so-called antiglobalization movement.

The 2000s was a decade marked by a deep crisis regarding the way of organizing action for progressive change, or, to put it differently, the way in which to engage in politically meaningful practices. Contemporary critical discourse during this time seemed particularly stuck in a paradoxical discrepancy between what is known, what is knowable and

¹⁹² The most recent data from the International Labour Organization report a constant decline in union membership at a global level in the period 1966-1994, correlated with a concomitant rise in social inequality, a relationship which the report indicates as indicative of "the weakening of the overall political and ideological influence of the left in society." – International Labour Organization, *The Challenge of Inequality, International Journal of Labour Research* vol. 6, issue 1 (ILO, 2014), 18-19.

the ability to create practices that are consistent with such an info-scape. This crisis was particularly palpable in social movements, and more specifically, the international alter-globalization movement that had been gathering momentum during the 1990s, travelling across internet and more traditional media, shaking groups and platforms concerned with social justice from a variety of political position and operating within a multitude of contexts, locales, and fields of knowledge. A few examples can help to illustrate this crisis.

The violent defeat suffered at Geoa by the alter-globalization movement, during the anti G8 protests in 2001, with the death of a demonstrator and thousands of people injured or illegally detained, provoked a deep crisis across social movements around the efficacy of nonviolent demonstrations and the deployment of tactics of civil disobedience. After such clamorous fiasco, what kinds of collective actions could prove effective and provoke real change? The limits of mass protesting major international events of global governance such as the G8 had proved insufficient to yield immediate tangible results and proved extremely dangerous and morale-defeating for many involved. The international series of demonstration organized against the war in Iraq during February 2003 was unprecedented for number of participants (record numbers were recorded in Italy, Spain, and the UK for instance¹⁹³) could nothing to stop Blair's government intentions to enter the conflict. In Latin America, the enthusiasm and political vitality that brought left wing governments to power in many countries across the region was facing some difficulties as the new executives failed to meet some of the expectations of their constituencies.

Partially as an antidote to the strategy of always chasing the agenda set by the elites, that is, mobilizing on the dates and at the locations chosen by the world's leaders, social movements developed the new format of the World Social Forum during this time. This was an independent

¹⁹³ Walgrave, Stefaan, and Joris Verhulst. "Government stance and internal diversity of protest: A comparative study of protest against the war in Iraq in eight countries." *Social Forces* 87.3 (2009): 1355-1387.

international gathering of activist groups, unions and third sector organizations that opposed globalization, financial capitalism and environmental destruction. Organized as big conventions with thousands of delegates, working session and resolutions, the first editions of the WSF proved initially very effective in generating new encounters and connecting different struggles working on similar issues across the globe. It generated a different temporality, a rhythm that allowed for more sociable conversations to take place, and consumed fewer resources into the organization of guerrilla logistics. However, the WSF format provided only a partial solution to the crisis of the form of action traversing the movements. Set up as a mega conference, this event shared many traits with the representational rituals of institutional politics which it wanted to denounce as bankrupt (delegates, deliberations, plenaries, etc.), and the sense of possibility and social creativity offered by the event quickly diminished.

Parallel to a crisis in finding new organizational forms for political practice, the 2000s saw a crisis in the theorization of political practice too. *Turbulence*, a UK-based international journal connected with social movements, formulated this problem of the form of collective political action as a peculiar "state of limbo"¹⁹⁴ in which social movements found themselves due to loss of a common theoretical enemy. The aggressiveness of neoliberal rhetoric that had facilitated the convergence of many different struggles under the alter globalization umbrella changed its register to embrace a more invisible biopolitical strategy, based not on rationality but upon the management of affects. This hypothesis was well illustrated by an anecdote reported by Stephen Duncombe in the book *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. Duncombe quoted a conversation that took place between Ron Suskind, a reporter for the *New York Times Magazine* and an unnamed senior adviser of George W. Bush, at the time president of the United States:

¹⁹⁴ Turbulence Editorial Collective. "Life in limbo?" *Turbulence: Ideas for Movement* 5 (2009): 3-7.

The aide said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernable reality.” I nodded and murmured something about Enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create reality. And while you are studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”¹⁹⁵

Here, the power of the “empire” is depicted as a creative, inventive force, actually providing the ontological innovations in the political realm, while critical knowledge and reflection are equated with impotence. Activists and critics are left to study, analyse, and deconstruct to no avail, since according to the anonymous adviser revolutionary action is reduced to an endless quest for the empirical proof of injustice. In other words, as Brian Holmes noted in “The Affectivist Manifesto” (2009), militant organizing today must confront “not so much soldiers with guns as [...] the zombie-like character of this society, its fallback to automatic pilot.”¹⁹⁶ A similar dramatization is found in the analysis of Argentinean researchers *Colectivo Situaciones*, who coordinated an international conversation on the crisis of collective action describing it in terms of a “state of impasse.”¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere, philosopher Miguel Benasayag suggested that the crisis of action goes hand in hand with the over-saturation of the

¹⁹⁵ Duncombe, Stephen. *Dream: Re-imagining progressive politics in an age of fantasy*. (New Press, 2007), 1.

¹⁹⁶ Holmes, Brian. “The Affectivist Manifesto: Artistic Critique in the 21st Century,” in *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum; Zagreb: What, How & for Whom, 2009), 14.

¹⁹⁷ Colectivo Situaciones. *Conversaciones en el impasse: dilemas políticos del presente*. (Buenos Aires:Tinta Limón, 2009).

informational sphere. While today's humanity is potentially better informed than in any other time in history, the ability to use the available knowledge to shape our material and immaterial environments appears as an increasingly remote opportunity.¹⁹⁸ This position was echoed by Italian media theorist Franco Berardi (Bifo), who blames the over stimulation provoked by the info-sphere for the rise of depression and panic.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, the data published by the World Health Organization seem to support his thesis as they indicate that depression (a condition defined, among other symptoms, as "a substantial impairment in an individual's ability to take care of his or her everyday responsibilities"²⁰⁰ – in other words, one might say, an impairment of the faculty to take action and engage in meaningful practices) is going to be the second cause of premature death in the world by 2020, calculated for all ages and both sexes. Other commentators, finally, understood the crisis of the forms of political practice as a symptom, to put it with Sandro Mezzadra, of the discrepancy between "the most traditional political concepts of modernity and the institutions most linked with them,"²⁰¹ generating a new kind of crisis qualified by Antonio Negri as an unprecedented kind of "disorientation that is not definable in terms of 'post ', of references to the past."²⁰²

Work And Life

Taken together, the examples above give a feeling of an ongoing decoupling between the ways in which contemporary capital develops and reproduces itself, the existing representations that we have of it, and the forms of collectivity that we organize to think together and produce

¹⁹⁸ Benasayag, Miguel. *Connaître est agir: paysages et situations*. (La Découverte, 2006).

¹⁹⁹ Berardi, Franco (Bifo). "City of panic." *Occupied London* 1 (2007).

²⁰⁰ World Health Organisation, "Depression" [accessed May 10, 2009], http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/definition/en/.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 191.

spaces of liberation. Beyond the immediate analysis of the symptoms of impasse that characterised the conjuncture of the 2000s, the crisis of thought around the organizational form of political collective practices can be situated productively within a broader interpretative framework that emerged some forty years earlier and that had as its object of enquiry the progressive demise of the differentiation between Work and Life. Two books have been particularly influential to shape this debate: the first is Hanna Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) and the second is Paolo Virno's *Grammar of the Multitude* (2001). In what follows, the central points made by these respective authors will be introduced in order to further contextualize the need for developing a more sophisticated theory of contemporary sociability as a political problem. This discussion of the collapse of Action (or Life) into Labour in fact was the first theoretical context that brought together the analysis of the transformations of capitalist mode of production with the analysis of the production of subjectivity.

Hanna Arendt's book *The Human Condition* has been a very influential text for social movements in the 1970s, who found it a powerful argumentation in favour of radical democracy, and while not immune from criticism, especially in regard to its treatment of Marx, it remains a significant reference point for those studying the phenomenology of labour.²⁰³ Arendt was able to spot very early, amidst the economic boom that followed the end of World War II, one of the main broken promises of modernity: even as unemployment diminished, standards of life increased and productivity reached unprecedented rates, technological advances were not going to be a sufficient condition to liberate post-industrial societies from the burden of an ideology based on labour. Instead, Arendt argued that labour was going to become an even more central dispositive

²⁰³ Most notably Habermas, Jürgen. "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 3–24. See also: Fenichel Pitkin, Hanna. *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Canovan, Margaret. *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jay, Martin. "The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt," *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

of control and subjection in the social order to come precisely and not despite the fact that it was going to be less and less necessary to sustain life. In her account, Arendt argues that part of this difficulty of imagining a society freed of Labour was due to the way in which modern mentality inherited a somewhat defective notion of its opposite, the idea of free political Action. This confusion was due essentially to two moments in the history of western thought: the split between active and contemplative life, or *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, and the emphasis on the second as the most desirable one brought about by the advent of Christianity as a dominant ideology in the passage from Antiquity to the Middle Ages; and, later, the blurring of the conceptual differences between the various activities that constituted the *vita activa* in the passage from the Middle Ages to the modern era. The conceptual differences that Arendt saw as lost in the contemporary discourse surrounding her were Labour proper (or those activities that produce products of consumption that man needs to perform out of the sheer necessities that derive from being alive), Work (which is the activity of fabrication of objects of use that constitute the man-made world around us, including craftsmanship and visual arts) and Action, understood as collective and public political practice. With the surge of Christianity that the distinction of classical philosophy between *poièsis* (productive activity, understood as a creation of thought to which follows a practice) and *praxis* (the reflexive relation between theory and practice as co-emergent) began to lose its conceptual importance. The different characteristics of the various experiences belonging to *vita activa* lost their relevance because the most important differentiation was the hierarchical division that opposed and, more crucially, subordinated activities that engaged man with the world and fellow humans (*vita activa*) to the life spent in the contemplation of God and His creations (*vita contemplativa*). This hierarchical division was only reverted with modernity, when the process of secularisation of society was set in motion, resting on a faith in men's capacity to intervene in nature and the world to change one's living conditions for the better. Arendt however argued that while modern political thought succeeded in reversing the

hierarchy between passivity and activity, it failed to challenge their very dualism as the basic structure of interpretation of the human condition. Indeed, almost all contemporary institutions and organizational forms still operate according to this split between thinkers and doers, from the way education separates theoretic from vocational training to the way in which remuneration is structured to reward those who “plan” more than those who “make.” Therefore, when modern thinkers such as Marx found themselves confronting the rise of industrial capitalism – the system of production that brought Labour into the public sphere for the first time – their critique was impaired by the inadequate concepts inherited from a long period of devaluation of the *vita activa*. The category of Labour, once only necessary to face the immediate necessities of social reproduction, became the dominant paradigm through which all other activities were understood, discussed, measured. In the shift towards industrial capitalism even the concept of Work, which used to describe the processes of fabrication of durable objects, was gradually collapsed into Labour, as the life span of goods was deliberately shortened until they became goods of consumption (rather than of use). More crucially for Arendt, in the new mode of production, the paradigm of incessant Labour was also corrupting Action too, the one activity that for Arendt differentiated humans from other living creatures as it needed them to be free. Instead, activities previously practiced as Action, such as the coming together as a public for a theatrical performance, were in her times being reorganized as Labour too: no longer free but constrained by economic calculations and yielding carefully planned consequences, for Arendt the public ethos of Action had evaporated when even intellectuals themselves begun demanding to be considered *workers*²⁰⁴ to be taken seriously.

Some forty years later, Paolo Virno, one of the most important contributors to the post-Operaist conceptual toolbox²⁰⁵, returned to the

²⁰⁴ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 124.

problem of Work/Life divide inaugurated by Arendt, but he did so by entering into a direct polemic with her work. In various texts, but most importantly in *Grammar of the Multitude* and in the essay "Virtuosity and Revolution", Virno provocatively announced:

In the opinion of Hannah Arendt--whose positions I would here seek to challenge -- this hybridization is due to the fact that modern political praxis has internalized the model of Work and come to look increasingly like a process of making (with a "product" that is, by turns, history, the State, the party, and so forth). This diagnosis, however, must be inverted and set on its feet. The important thing is not that political action may be conceived as a form of producing, but that the producing has embraced within itself many of the prerogatives of action. In the post-Fordist era, we have Work taking on many of the attributes of Action: un-foreseeability, the ability to begin something new, linguistic "performances," and an ability to range among alternative possibilities. [...] In relation to a Work that is loaded with "actionist" characteristics, the transition to Action comes to be seen as somehow falling short, or, in the best of cases, as a superfluous duplication. It appears to be falling short, for the most part: in its structuring according to a rudimentary logic of means and ends, politics offers a communicative network and a cognitive content that are weaker and poorer than those to be found within the present-day process of production. Action appears as less complex than Work, or as too similar to it, and either way it appears as not very desirable.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ For an introduction to the tradition of Italian post-Operaism, cf. Zanini, Adelino. "On the 'Philosophical Foundations' of Italian Workerism: A Conceptual Approach", *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010) 39–63; Wright, Steve. *Storming heaven: Class composition and struggle in Italian autonomist Marxism*. London: Pluto, 2002; Virno, Paolo, and Michael Hardt. *Radical thought in Italy: A potential politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

²⁰⁶ Virno, Paolo. "Virtuosity and revolution: The political theory of exodus.", in *Radical thought in Italy: A potential politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 189-210.

Here, the collapse of the meaningful institutions that organize time and experiences in Work and Life is posited as a problem emerging from the direct capitalist valorisation of practices of life, rather than from an expansion of the labour paradigm per se. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of the organization of sociability is that for Virno these seem to be somewhat obsolete occasions from the point of view of their political import, as contemporary sociability struggles to find a form that would allow it to compete with the thrills of immaterial Labour. The revolutionary continuum that linked collective joy with revolutionary ethos seems to be replaced by an engineering of social creativity that strives to keep together the necessities of social and subjective transformation with the interests of capital.

Despite the different lines of arguments of Arendt and Virno, it is worth noticing that both philosophers assign a key role to artistic practice in their analysis. In Arendt, the arts have two distinct roles: visual (representational) and narrative arts must record the otherwise fleeting effects of Action to preserve their significance for future historical memory;²⁰⁷ while performing arts, and theatre in particular, entertain a more direct political function as they are occasions of public assembly where the exercise of collective thought and action is actualised. In a way that closely resembles Simmel's own investment in sociability as the egalitarian space of democratic exchange, Arendt proposes the mode of public assembly invented with classical Greek theatre as the paradigmatic "space of appearance" in which "action and speech as a mode of being together"²⁰⁸ assumes a political significance.

Virno on the other hand entertains a more critical relation with the performativity of artistic production and the modes of sociability it entertains. He sees the cultural industries as the ambit of production

²⁰⁷ Moreover, insofar as they are the product of a craft as in the case of the visual, decorative and plastic arts, creative objects contribute to the creation of those stable worlds that are the specific product of Work and in which Action can then take place.

²⁰⁸ Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*, 208.

which invents the means of production that capital later applies across all other productive sectors. This is because the cultural industries produce precisely the styles and symbolic repertoires that are used for the production of subjectivities in their relationships with themselves and the world. Paradigmatic of this analysis is the figure of the *virtuoso*,²⁰⁹ an artistic worker whose labour does not produce anything else outside the performance of its perfected subjectivity (in a manner that reminds us of the construction of the self as a collection of refined properties as established in salonnere culture, especially as Virno remarks, in the case of the new productivity of "idle talk"²¹⁰ as a form of virtuosistic labour).

The different ways in which the category of artistic practice is used in Arendt and Virno is an important tool for understanding the transformation of the core problematics that define sociability vis-à-vis the political realm. Both authors in fact address sociability as part of their discussion of artistic practices, although neither does so explicitly. In Arendt, theatre was a metonym for the overlapping of artistic, political and sociable togetherness conceived as a separate public sphere marking the end of labour and the bracketing off of inequalities among members. This is precisely the sociable model of modernity at that we find at play here, which struggles to maintain its autonomy as separation and yet that must base this separate autonomy upon a condition of privilege. Virno's discussion of the performativity of the virtuoso and the productive capacity of the cultural industries instead posits the problem of sociability as one of different modes of practicing the promiscuity between labour and action, leaning either towards alienation or emancipation. Such analysis allows to comprehend how during the course of the 20th century, sociability ceases to be the stage of a political debate between privilege and transgression (the individual is allowed, indeed socially pressured, to be able to participate in different modalities of sociable encounter, transitioning effortlessly from the sophisticated context of a corporate

²⁰⁹ Virno, P. *Grammar of the Multitude*, 52.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

reception to the collective euphoria of a rave beach party for instance), and becomes the ground of a new contemporary problematic revolving around the intersection of capitalist valorization and relation to self.

This tormented search for new modes of practicing sociability in a way that is not labour has indeed been one of the most significant tropes of contemporary cultural and artistic practices.

3.3 The politics of sociability in contemporary cultural production

Especially in the last twenty years, the importance of sociability as a theory of practice is acquiring a new traction as many cultural venues are looking to engage their constituencies as active participants in their activities, and not simply as audiences to be entertained or educated. In other words, cultural institutions are looking to become significant as sociable spaces, as well as cultural or educational ones, an ongoing research that materializes in a lively proliferation of alternative formats for workshops, parties and collective experiences.

To give a few examples of such proliferation of formats of encounters in the cultural sphere: the French *Foundation Internet Nouvelle Generation* organizes since 2002 an event called *Carrefour du Possible* (laboratory of the possible), an event in which participants are invited to exchange information about ongoing projects and practices without a predetermined theme or list of speakers. Denis Pansu, coordinator of the project, described this format as consisting essentially of the “coffee break without the conference”²¹¹. A similar type of experience is offered by the *Unconference*, a format popularized by events such as *BloggerCon* (a conference of bloggers that took place between 2003 and 2006), *Foo Camp* (a hacker meeting) and *BarCamp* (an international network focused

²¹¹ Pansu, Denis, coordinator of the Carrefour du Possibles network for FING, private conversation with the author, 2007.

around technology) which uses variations of *Open Space*²¹² approach to allow all participants to autonomously provide content of interest and independently initiate an number of open discussions. More reminiscent of the expert approach to knowledge practiced within the academies is instead the *Black Market format*, a project created by dramaturgist and cultural organizer Hannah Hurtzig in 1995 for *Mobile Academy*. In this instance, participants are invited to hold intimate one-to-one conversations with a number of experts around a topic that is usually selected in relation to the host locality for the event. Each talk lasts 30 minutes, after which participants can shift and move on to a different conversation.

Within artistic practices especially, the 1990s marked the emergence of a new expanded field defined in the broad genre of "social practice" which has been particularly active in the reformulation of the sociability as an ambience of counter-conducts. Indeed, a proliferation of critical terms of debate accompanied such lively ferment. A list of adjacent and partially overlapping terms includes: "situation-specific" art (Claire Doerthy); "interventionist art" (Nato Thompson); "social works" (Shannon Jackson); "sociopoetic works" (Craig Saper); "postdramatic theatre" (Hans-Thies Lehmann); "NGO art" (BAVO); "useful art" (Tania Bruegeira); "relational aesthetics" (Nicolas Bourriaud); "social acupuncture" (Darren O'Donnel); "conversation pieces" (Grant K. Kester); "dialogue-based public art" (Tom Finkelpearl); "conversational art" (Homi K. Bhabha); "independent urbanism" (Park Fiction); "urban tactics" (aaa); "new genre public art" (Susanne Lacy); "site-specific art" (Miwon Kwon); "littoral art" (Ian Hunter and Celia Larner). 213

²¹² Owen, Harrison. *Open space technology: A user's guide*. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008).

²¹³ See bibliography for references.

The immaterial labour thesis and many other post-Operaist concepts have enjoyed a season of great popularity within such artistic research, not last a dedicated conference titled Art and Immaterial Labour at Tate Modern, London, in 2008. Amidst this proliferation of new approaches to event making within cultural and artistic practices, we find that many instances have been struggling to translate the paradoxes of the becoming labour of sociability from a topic of concern into a tool able to re-orient the organization of politically sustainable interventions. Significantly, one of the ways in which Virno and more broadly post-Operaist critiques have been received within the artistic context was a widespread "position of defeatist cynicism,"²¹⁴ to say it with Stephen Shukaitis, a sense of despair in the face of the seemingly endless possibility of capital to recuperate sociability as labour also associated with the work of Jean Baudrillard.²¹⁵ Across conferences, art events and publications, this specific type of impasse became a widespread endnote of conferences and projects otherwise critical in their intentions. The examples of instances where the problem of how to organize collective practices as counter-conduct was posited as an unanswerable question, where the very act of raising the question was considered enough to qualify the event as critically aware, are too numerous to be summarized here beyond what can be conveyed through a few examples which can include: the events organized by The Political Currency of Art (PoCA), a research group based at Goldsmiths College London (2007) that "investigates the condition and consequences of the claims to critique in contemporary art and elsewhere when such claims can be readily assimilated, as they now are, with the interests of more or less dominant cultural, state and financial institutions;"²¹⁶ the exhibition *Lapdogs of the Bourgeoisie*, a touring show

²¹⁴ Shukaitis, Stephen. *Imaginal machines: Autonomy & self-organization in the revolutions of everyday life*. Autonomedia, 2009. 202.

²¹⁵ Baudrillard, Jean, *Fatal Strategies*. New York: Semio-texte(e), 1990. See also, Heath, Joseph and Andrew Potter. *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*. London: Capstone, 2005.

²¹⁶ "The Political Currency of Art (PoCA)" website, <http://www.thepoliticalcurrencyofart.org.uk/about> [accessed 30/02/2008].

and event series curated by Nav Haq and Tirdad Zolghadr in 2007 aiming “to investigate the manner in which socioeconomic background still defines one’s career – and to what point this career might reflect or consolidate the very hierarchies in question;”²¹⁷ the article by Staš Kleindienst, “Between Resistance and Commodity,”²¹⁸ which claimed that “it is, in a sense, totally acceptable for art production to oscillate between luxurious arts events such as SeaFair and more socially engaged events because they are ultimately different sides of the same coin.”

An alternative prolongation of Virno’s vision of the cultural industries as the creators of the new means of production has been developed in a conversation across various European organizations and collectives loosely connected with the online journal *Transversal*.²¹⁹ This debate theorized that the role of the cultural sector in the current socio-political scenario might be that of generating new kinds of institutions. This *instituent* capacity is also discussed as a third wave of the institutional critique that has characterized politically engaged arts since the 1960s. While the first wave concentrated on attacking art and cultural institutions, and the second focused on creating alternative and autonomous cultural spaces, the third wave wants to transversally reclaim both the visibility and resources of major cultural institutions, and the self-organizing, critical and horizontal capacities of alternative spaces. Theorized in Spain as “monster institutions”²²⁰ and in the Italian context as “institutions of the common,” this alternative interpretation of Virno’s theories boldly reclaims and reasserts the political significance of cultural production and therefore

²¹⁷ “Lapdogs of the Bourgeoisie” website, <http://artdaily.com/news/17554/Gasworks-To-Present-Lapdogs-of-the-Bourgeoisie#.U7kxUqi7IOk> [accessed 12/05/2010].

²¹⁸ Kleindienst, Staš. “Between Resistance and Commodity”, *e-flux* journal n.1, December 2008.

²¹⁹ *Transversal* is a multilingual webjournal published by the Austrian based collective ‘European institute for progressive cultural policies’ (eipcp) since November 1999. (<http://eipcp.net/transversal>).

²²⁰ Cf. Raunig, Gerard and Gene Ray (eds.). *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice. Reinventing Institutional Critique*. (MayFlyBooks, 2009).

strives towards its collective re-appropriation. This aim however should not be understood as a kind of reformism, but as an occupation of the means of production of imaginaries and subjectivities.

Between the comforting self-deprecation of the cynical and the instituent efforts of the third wave institutional critics, I believe however that there exists a space of enquiry that remains under-considered, one that would involve an effort to re-conceptualise the experience of collectivity as pleasure on the debris of the crisis of sociability as a public sphere of encounter of private individuals and after the eradication of the skills required to autonomously produce subversive collective joy as a political act. This is a concern that chapter 5, 6 and 7 will address through the notion of conviviality. However, before the enquiry can move in that direction, it is necessary to articulate why the overcoming of the political impasse of sociability within artistic practices has proven so difficult by considering the legacy of one of the political/artistic movements that most inspired its contemporary developments: the Situationist International.

Artistic encounters and the refusal of labour

While the international workers movement and the party culture of the Left, as we have already seen, did not particularly favour the experimentation of different forms of collectivity, the practices of the artistic Avant-gardes in the 20th century offers a much richer vein of inspiration for present day organizing and critical theory. Since their constitution in 1916, for instance, Dadaists experimented with all aspects of the carnivalesque tradition: they were interested in masks and costumes, played jokes on their audiences and mocked authorities, indulged in collective drunkenness; they produced cacophonous music played with improvised percussion instruments and in inventing new ways

of dancing.²²¹ Their provocative and blasphemous rituals were linked to a precise political strategy of subversion. Dada wanted to provoke a rupture in the register of signification, tearing apart the individual rational subject of modernity to denounce its violent foundations. Hugo Ball delightedly reported that in "the jingling carnival" of the Cabaret Voltaire "goes right out into the street."²²² Richard Huelsenbeck quoted Nietzsche extensively to conceptualize Dada's role as "parodists of world history and God's buffoons"²²³ who, conscious of their own historical ephemerality, take up the task of disrupting the recursive teleology of progress with the futurity of their laughter.

Around the same time, the Futurist movement became interested in sociable formats in its quest for forces that could provoke a violent rupture in what they saw as the passive and past-loving mentality of Italians. The Futurist *serate*, the Italian word for *evenings*, or gatherings in which the Futurists engaged their audiences in provocative multimedia performances, exacerbating the interactive set-up of popular variety shows by deliberately provoking and insulting their audiences, encouraging them to let themselves loose, scream and interrupt activities on stage by throwing vegetables to the actors, jumping on the stage and initiate fistfights. Tommaso Marinetti, one of the movement leaders, was well aware that the stakes of this heightened form of audience participation exceeded the artistic realm and had political implications: by intentionally provoking the violent rage of the audiences and encouraging

²²¹ Cf. Prevots, Naima. "Zurich Dada and Dance: Formative Ferment." *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1985), 3-8; Partsch, Cornelius. "The Mysterious Moment: Early Dada Performance as Ritual." in *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-garde*. Vol. 18, ed. Jones, Dafydd (Rodopi, 2006); Wacks, Debra. "Playing with Dada," in *From Diversion to Subversion, Games, Play and 20th Century Art*, ed. D.J. Getsy (Penn State University Press, 2011); Ball, Hugo. *Flight out of time: A Dada diary*. (University of California Press, 1996); Breton, André. "Artificial Hells. Inauguration of the 1921 Dada Season", *October*, summer 2003, No. 105, 137-144.

²²² Hugo Ball, 11th April 1916, quoted in Greil, Marcus, "The Jingling Carnival Goes Right Out Into The Street", in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David E. Wellbery et al., (Harvard University Press, 2004), 710.

²²³ Huelsenbeck, Richard. *Dada Almanach*, 9, quoted in Lewer, Debbie. "Dada, Carnival and Revolution," in *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, ed. Sascha Bru, et al., (Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 106.

them to break with the conventions of traditional spectatorship, he meant to facilitate the birth of a new Italian subjectivity devoted to "a nationalist, militaristic, techno-futurist cause that aimed to motivate colonial expansion and rouse enthusiasm for war."²²⁴ In this, he fully understood the micropolitical gap left by the modern suppression of collective joy in the cultural formats available at the time. Alongside the destructive mode of participation embraced in the *serate*, Marinetti did not neglect to enlist more pleasurable forms of sociability to his purposes: during the 1930s, he became interested in revolutionizing the aesthetics of the meal, and set up a number of banquets organized as a kind of total "savoury-olfactory-tactile"²²⁵ scenarios that included music, poetry, food sculptures, lighting effects, interior decoration, furniture design and waiter's costumes. During the 1920s and 1930s, in Germany, Bertold Brecht incorporated pedagogical theories and Marxist political concerns in his formulation of an epic theatre in which the closeness between performers and audiences would be similar to that of the cabaret, where the audience active presence and participation/disruption of the dramatic action was crucial to the overall experience, but put in service of a less frivolous kind of fun.²²⁶ A few years later, in the United States, during the late 1950s and 1960s, Allan Kaprow began his seminal experimentations in performing arts with the creation of "Environments", "Activities", and "Happenings", which this artist described as "a game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing."²²⁷ In the mid-1960s, the neo-Dada movement Fluxus began to structure occasions of collective play through instruction performances and the

²²⁴ Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. (Verso Books, 2012), 47.

²²⁵ Berghaus, Günter. "The Futurist Banquet: Nouvelle Cuisine or Performance Art?," *New Theatre Quarterly* 17, no. 01 (2001), 3-17.

²²⁶ Thomson, Peter, and Glendyr Sacks, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²²⁷ Meyer-Hermann, Eva, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal, eds. *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*. (Getty Publications, 2008), 68.

distribution of gaming kits.²²⁸ But perhaps the theory/practice of sociability within the artistic discourse of the 20th century that came to have the greatest impact on subsequent political and creative practice was created by the Situationist International (SI) who also came together in the 1960s.

Situations

Members of the SI were deeply interested in the potential of collective joy to permanently overturn capitalism. This international collective of artists and activists saw festivity and play both as techniques of resistance to capitalist alienation and oppression and as the prefiguration of life after the revolution:

Proletarian revolutions will be *festivals* or nothing, for festivity is the very keynote of the life they announce. *Play* is the ultimate principle of this feast, and the only rules it can recognize are to live without dead time and to enjoy without restraints.²²⁹

In their writing, revolutionary festivals and play are portrayed as directly opposing the regime of what Guy Debord, one of SI most prominent members, famously named the "society of spectacle." The concept of the spectacle, according to Debord, pointed to the continuities between a variety of phenomena that he observed were emerging at the time of writing (1967), and that were fast beginning to utterly alter all aspects of social life:

²²⁸ Flanagan, Mary. *Critical play: radical game design*. (MIT press, 2009).

²²⁹ Situationist International, *On the Poverty of Student Life*, (1966) <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/poverty.htm>. [accessed 17/06/2012]. French original: "Les révolutions prolétariennes seront des fêtes ou ne seront pas, car la vie qu'elles annoncent sera elle-même créée sous le signe de la fête. Le jeu est la rationalité ultime de cette fête, vivre sans temps mort et jouir sans entraves sont les seules règles qu'il pourra reconnaître". Note that the word 'enjoy' in French has the double meaning of 'having fun' and 'experiencing orgasm'.

The spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance. But any critique capable of apprehending the spectacle's essential character must expose it as a visible negation of life - and as a negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself.²³⁰

The spectacle for Debord inaugurates a new regime of relations between people. This new regime is "the opposite of dialogue,"²³¹ mediated by images that have become detached from reality, or, put differently, that produce the real as something that "escapes the activity of men,"²³² an object of contemplation that cannot be touched but only looked at. Despite the fact that working hours were decreasing at that time, Debord did not interpret this as a step that could offer people more free time to engage in sociable occasions and collective practices of pleasure, but as a further imbrication into the alienating and isolating practices of the consumption of spectacular commodities.

The epoch which displays its time to itself as essentially the sudden return of multiple festivities is also an epoch without festivals. What was, in cyclical time, the moment of a community's participation in the luxurious expenditure of life is impossible for the society without community or luxury. When its vulgarized pseudo-festivals, parodies of the dialogue and the gift, incite a surplus of economic expenditure, they lead only to deception always compensated by the promise of a new deception.²³³

²³⁰ Debord, Guy. *The Society of Spectacle*, chapter 1, paragraph 10, (Zone Books, 1994).

²³¹ Debord, *The Society of Spectacle*, chapter 1, paragraph 18.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., chapter 4, paragraph 154.

The idea behind this was that capitalism actually dispensed with the narrow and stable structures of traditional societies, but only to capture their creative potential in an endless cycle of production and consumption that negated life. For the Situationists, access to more commodities, services and information through the growth of mass media did not result in greater satisfaction or in a stronger connection with others and the world. Despite the hollow festivities without festivals, the main affective state that tainted existence under capital was boredom:

A person's life is a succession of fortuitous situations, and even if none of them is exactly the same as another the immense majority of them are so undifferentiated and so dull that they give a perfect impression of sameness.²³⁴

And from this bored, anaesthetized succession of situations created by capitalism, situations that were only superficially different, and similarly inconsequential to life, the Situationist counter-concept of *situation* promised to rescue social experience. Debord and his associates formulated the *situation* as a theory of practice able to confront the seductive power of 1960s capitalism on its same terrain of positivity. As Debord wrote in June 1957 in the "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action," "the construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle."²³⁵ Its objective was the reorganization of collective desire away from the leisure regime of the spectacle.²³⁶ What the *situation* offered to the members of the SI was a new framework for the articulation of collective practices that engaged both political and

²³⁴ Debord, Guy. "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action". June 1957. Translated by Ken Knabb. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html> [accessed 06/01/2013].

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ It is relevant to note the etymological root of leisure, from the Latin. *licere* "to be permitted", which evokes a specific kind of freedom, temporarily granted or tolerated by power.

aesthetic realm, as they had become intertwined in the spectacle. Although many members of SI were artists, they understood art as being implicated in the capitalist organization of valorisation that separated the circulation of images from the immanent condition of their production, and thus, within the artistic field, they could not find the weapons to dismantle this alienated culture: As they explain:

The very criterion of formal invention or innovation has lost its sense within the traditional framework of the arts, insufficient, fragmentary forms whose partial renovations are inevitably outdated and therefore impossible.²³⁷

One of ways in which the *situation* aspired to exit the artistic framework was by rejecting the separation between audiences and authors:

The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, 'livers' must steadily increase.²³⁸

Thus Debord defined the situation as a sort of game:

Our action on behaviour, linked with other desirable aspects of a revolution in mores, can be briefly defined as the invention of games of an essentially new type. [...] The Situationist game is distinguished from the classic notion of games by its radical negation of the element of competition and of separation from everyday life. On the other hand, it is not distinct from a moral

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

choice, since it implies taking a stand in favour of what will bring about the future reign of freedom and play.²³⁹

The *situation* was thus meant to be a way to provide a space, or a new institution perhaps, where people could come together away from the competitiveness that regulated social norms, and where people could interact playfully with each other and their environments and experience their capacity of “playful creation”²⁴⁰ which the spectacle had methodically sedated. The Situationists’ *situation* bears many significant similarities with the idea of sociable action. Consider for instance how Debord describes it in the following passage:

We must try to construct situations that is to say, collective ambiances, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment. If we take the simple example of a gathering of a group of individuals for a given time, it would be desirable, while taking into account the knowledge and material means we have at our disposal, to study what organization of the place, what selection of participants and what provocation of events are suitable for producing the desired ambiance.²⁴¹

Here, this notion of the situation significantly overlaps with the ideal of sociability: this was an occasion in which the collective contributed to create the general mood and purpose, where the organizers would be hosts rather than authors or leaders; and which was presented as a group ambience that unravelled in some sort of play form, and yet unlike simple games it maintained a stronger implication with life. As Simmel thought

²³⁹ Knabb, Ken, ed. and trans., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 39.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

that sociability was “the play form of the ethical forces of society,”²⁴² so the Situationist definition of play postulated “the permanent experimentation with ludic novelties — appears to be not at all separate from ethics, from the question of the meaning of life.”²⁴³

Despite these similarities, there is one important difference that sets the *situation* apart from both the modern sociability that I described through Simmel and from the alter-modern sociability Ehrenreich refers to as collective joy; unlike these, the situation necessarily required a more conscious and strategic effort from the part of its organizers to elaborate the initial rules that could sustain its inception and take care of its development. On the one hand, Simmel admitted that there is nothing natural in the way sociability plays out: he was confident that the members of a particular society would be able to collectively elaborate its rules following what he saw as an impulse towards collectivity that they could already experience as an exceeding or residual satisfaction of togetherness found in other forms of social cooperation. On the other hand, in the case of Ehrenreich’s descriptions of collective joy, the rules of sociability were founded on the psycho-somatic techniques available to participants through their shared traditional culture. The Situationists, however, were aware that to challenge the positive power of the society of spectacle they could not base their theory of collective action on natural impulses, shared quotidian experiences or traditional knowledges. The ambitious roadmap imagined by the Situationists, though aimed at free play, did not leave scope for a *situation* predicated upon spontaneity and improvisation: these were not viable options to bring about social change. Instead, their idea of experiencing life away from the spectacle required the invention of new but artificial techniques, “systems of notation”, and the “application of reproductive technologies”²⁴⁴ to the uniqueness of the

²⁴² Simmel, “The Sociology of Sociability”, 125.

²⁴³ Situationist International, “Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play”, trans. Reuben Keehan. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/play.html> [accessed 07/02/2013].

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

playful events they organized, so that situations could be replicated and proliferate across the social body. The most famous examples of Situationist games are notably the *derive*, in which participants²⁴⁵ set out to drift through the city in a random manner, allowing their actions and direction to be dictated by the desires and intuitions provoked by the environment and chance encounters, and the *detournement*, based on the mixing and hacking of images and other cultural products produced by the spectacle to change their meaning and reveal their true alienating nature. But aside from the specificities of the Situationist methods of gameplay, what is worth of consideration is their overall approach to the situation as a form of sociability and how it relates to their search for a viable political terrain. This is important especially because Situationist ideas were carried forward by subsequent social movements, politically engaged arts and more broadly critical cultural organizers active in a number of fields and contexts in the name of social justice.²⁴⁶ The Situationists saw the need to produce a new knowledge of methods and strategies for generating collective play, one that could subsequently proliferate in society and become part of a shared autonomous counter-culture, enabling people to create their own "collective ambiances." The activation of playful collective practices was seen as fundamentally antithetical to the regime of the spectacle. SI invested in a idea of sociability as the antidote to the spectacle because that was intrinsically opposed to the latter's main forms of subjectivation, namely, isolation (capital's "lonely crowds"²⁴⁷), normalization (the production of sameness and the management of desires in mass media culture) and alienation (a subject

²⁴⁵ While it is possible of course to derive alone, it is interesting to note how SI recommends that "all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness" (Debord, Guy. "Les Lèvres Nues #9" (November 1956), reprinted in *Internationale Situationniste* #2 (December 1958), trans. Ken Knabb. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> [accessed 12/01/2013].

²⁴⁶ Among those who explicitly referenced Situationist ideas in the last two decades we find, among many others too numerous to list here: the Dutch counterculture collective Provo; The Weathermen Underground Organization in the USA; the anarchist CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective in France; Recalim the Streets in the UK.

²⁴⁷ Debord. *The Society of Spectacle*, chapter 1, paragraph 28.

separated from his/her capacity to create and act because caught in a world of representations to be contemplated). However, despite the enduring popularity of Situationist ideas, both at the level of theoretical analysis (*The Society of Spectacles* greatly influenced the social movements of 1968) and at the level of practical procedures (Situationist strategies are still an important reference point for activists and artists), these assumptions would be challenged in the following decades, as the next section will discuss.

CHAPTER FOUR: The contemporary sociability of capital

4.1 The situation at work: the experience industries

In 1970 Alvin Toffler published the book *Future Shock*, which became an instant bestseller (over 6 million copies sold) and was one of the first books of the futurology, a branch of the social sciences developed after WWII that engaged in speculations on the long term implications of the rapid technical and political changes affecting the world at the time.²⁴⁸ Toffler's musing and wild speculations about the future society never managed to gain solid academic respectability; nonetheless, his intervention did express, in a catchy and new terminology, the many changes that inaugurated the advent of a new era of capitalism. For instance, he picked up on the accelerating rate of obsolescence of new technologies and was the first to come up with the term "prosumers"²⁴⁹ to describe the increasing conflation of consuming with producing cycles. Another significant notion that Toffler introduced was the idea of the experience industries, which we are going to focus on in what follows. Toffler predicted that the global economic paradigm was about to undergo a major shift in the decades leading up to the new millennium: in his view "not merely the how of production but the 'why'"²⁵⁰ was going to change radically. With the increased productivity afforded by technological improvements and scientific discoveries of various kinds, objects would lose much of their intrinsic market value. What would become precious and desirable instead would be unique, personalized and memorable life "experiences", which a new industrial sector could then purposefully design and provide to an eager consumer base. This is how Toffler defined experiences:

²⁴⁸ Other notable foundational works in futurology include *The Limits to Growth* (1972), a report authored by scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) by Daniel Bell, and *The Fate of the Earth* (1982) by Jonathan Schell.

²⁴⁹ Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. (William Morrow, 1980).

²⁵⁰ Toffler, Alvin. *Future shock*. (Random House, 1970), 78.

If we think of an individual life as a great channel through which experience flows. This flow of experience consists – or is conceived of consisting – of innumerable “situations.” [...] There is no neat definition of a situation, yet we would find it impossible to cope with experiences if we did not mentally cut it up into these manageable units. Moreover, while the boundary lines between situations may be indistinct, every situation has a certain “wholeness” about it, a certain integration. Every situation also has certain identifiable components. These include “things” – a physical setting of natural or man-made objects. Every situation occurs in a “place” – a location or arena within which the action occurs. (It is not accidental that the Latin root “situ” means place). Every social situation also has, by definition, a cast of characters – people. Situations also involve a location in the organizational network of society and a context of ideas or information. Any situation can be analysed in terms of these five components. But situations also involve a separate dimension which, because it cuts across all the others, is frequently overlooked. This is duration – the span of time over which the situation occurs.²⁵¹

Toffler’ detailed examination of the components of situations (props; location; characters; networking mechanisms with the broader social field; ideas and information) strikingly resembles the intuition of the Situationists some thirteen years earlier. What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that for Toffler, experiences – of which situations are the basic blocks – are primarily an *economic* object, and not a *political* tool as it was for the Situationists. When Debord and his comrades had imagined the situation as the basic self-organizing unit against spectacle, they were seeking a concrete approach to action able to intersect the political plane via the integration of the aesthetic and the ethic realms. They were looking for ways of suturing the artificially created gap that capitalist

²⁵¹ Ibid., 25-6.

valorisation had inserted between all these three modes of engagement with the world, and the situation promised to be able to become generative of a micropolitical outlook able to confront the most seductive aspects of alienation. In Toffler instead, experience and situation constitute the basis for the re-launch of the very capitalist project, constituting the advanced components of an economic approach imagined as finally able to deliver wealth and fulfilment across the entire social body. Once the technological advancements achieved by humanity could guarantee food and primary resources to sustain life with a minimum labour expenditure, economic relations in search of a new object could thrive by shifting towards taking care of the existential needs of the masses. Toffler believed that if these situational components (things, location, other people, information and time) describe the most meaningful and pleasurable components of human experience, then it follows that the economy will take the direction dictated by the increasing numbers of people willing to pay significant sums to take part in unique situations tailored to their personalities.

While Situationism has enjoyed a welcomed popularity within artistic and cultural discourses which has been growing in the last fifteen years, Toffler's early intuition on the expanding role of situations and experiences as an economic rather than political object has found a much vaster basin of influence in late capitalism, especially since the 1990s, when a number of managerial and marketing studies revisited his notions. A recent example of this would be 'Situation Management' for instance, an upcoming paradigm of decision making to handle chains of command and communication in complex and rapidly changing contexts. These can include large networks of telecommunications, mass evacuations, moments of crisis within a cycle of industrial production, but also civil riots and systems of surveillance.²⁵² But even more significant for the purposes

²⁵² On the subject of situation management, see Jakobson, Gabriel et al., "Situation management: Basic concepts and approaches", *Information Fusion and Geographic Information Systems*, (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2007), 18-33; Jakobson,

of our research is the development of the 'experiential marketing' approach, which is directly indebted to Toffler. This approach is rooted in the conviction that the core of the purchasing transaction, what consumers really pay for, is the creation of a positive emotional, relational and signifying event in their lives. For this reason, scholars Michela Addis and Morris Holbrook, in an article aptly titled "an explosion of subjectivity," describe experiential marketing as focused on

the roles of emotions in behaviour; the fact that consumers are feelers as well as thinkers and doers; the significance of symbolism in consumption; the consumer's need for fun and pleasure; the roles of consumers, *beyond the act of purchase*, in product usage as well as brand choice, and so forth.²⁵³

From the perspective of experiential marketing, it is not the subjectivity of the consumer that is of interest, but subjectivity as a whole becomes a consuming entity, replacing identity as the constitutive basis of the social. Such new methods of marketing and managing are not simply singular techniques applicable to particular segments of the market: such new methods of experiential marketing and situation managing do not simply describe a specific set of techniques within the business sector, but they contributed to re-define the entire cycle of production, from research and development to retail and logistics. Taken together, these form the 'experience economy' paradigm that as I shall be arguing in this chapter offers a comprehensive description of the logic governing the dominant mode of production of sociability in contemporary society.

Gabriel et al., "Overview of situation management at SIMA 2005", in *Military Communications Conference (MILCOM IEEE, 2005)*, 1630-1636.

²⁵³ Addis, Michela, and Morris B. Holbrook. "On the conceptual link between mass customisation and experiential consumption: an explosion of subjectivity" *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 1, no. 1 (2001), 50. Emphasis mine. On the subject of experiential marketing, see also: Holbrook, Morris B., and Elizabeth C. Hirschman. "The experiential aspects of consumption: consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun", *Journal of consumer research* (1982), 132-140; and also Schmitt Bernd, H. *Experiential Marketing. How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act and Relate to Your Company and Brands*. (New York: Free Press, 1999).

In what follows, the present chapter will address the contemporary intersection of the force of sociability with the dispositives of capture of capital, using the framework of the experience economy as a starting point and moving to the more recent development towards an “engagement economy” based on the principles of gamification as its most noteworthy line of advancement. I will discuss how the ‘situation’ has been rendered productive in both consumption and production through a new generation of institutions, more fluid and delocalised, more imperceptible perhaps than their modern counterparts that hosted sociable practices in the tangible locales of the salons and the cafes: these will be discussed under the headings of the brand and the scene, as both these institutions represent paradigmatic examples of the tendency of placing sociability at the core of both consumptive and productive cycles. The purpose of this analysis will be to outline how, contrary to the predictions of commentators such as Walter Benjamin or Theodor Adorno, who feared the “methodical destruction of experience in modernity,”²⁵⁴ the contemporary era is systemically and relentlessly interested in the production (and consumption) of experiences, albeit this interest is tied to a specific regime of experiencing life that is subservient to the needs of capital accumulation. This analysis works to show how the modern practices of sociability and collective joy, often discussed as opposite poles of possible collective conduct, are no longer viable models to think the practice of a revolutionary collectivity, and they currently stand in need of a bootstrapping if they are to contribute to the formation of contemporary counter-conducts and of possible futures.

After Toffler, the notion of an experience industry resurfaced in social science literature in 1982, when Morris B. Holbrook and Elisabeth C. Hirschman, two marketing scholars based in New York, turned their

²⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno, Paris, May 7, 1940, in Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz and Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 326.

attention to the kinds of *environmental inputs* that could influence consumers' *involvement* with commodities:

Much consumer research has focused on the tangible benefits of conventional goods and services (soft drinks, toothpaste, automobiles) that perform utilitarian functions based on relatively objective feature (calories, fluoride, miles per gallon). By contrast, the experiential perspective explores the symbolic meanings of more subjective characteristics (cheerfulness, sociability, elegance).²⁵⁵

With their seminal work on the role of experience in marketing, the framework of construction of situations begun to shift from the predictive to the prescriptive or programmatic realm of the literature. Another ten years later the sociologist Gerhard Schulze put forward the hypothesis that we were transitioning towards an 'Experience Society', where subjects, suffering from the "deterioration of firm biographical patterns,"²⁵⁶ are compelled to search for meaning and happiness in experiential events. If, as Schulze maintains, this new sense of self is predicated upon the experiences he or she can afford, (rather than other factors such as social status, for example), then "taking pleasure, delighting, enjoyment has become a job,"²⁵⁷ and therefore even to consume becomes a kind of labour. At the end of the 1990s that the discourse of the experience economy finds its full formulation in the work of Bernd H. Schmitt, author of *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act, Relate*²⁵⁸ (1999), and B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, who together developed the theory of *The*

²⁵⁵ Holbrook and Hirshman, "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption", 134.

²⁵⁶ Schulze, Gerhard. 1993. *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, p.38. Quoted in Čargonja, Hrvoje. "A Contribution to Understanding Experience as Discourse." *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 23 (2011), 285.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵⁸ Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing*.

Experience Economy (1999)²⁵⁹ explicitly crediting Alvin Toffler for providing them with the initial inspiration for the thesis. In contrast to the critical undertones of Schulze's notion of 'experience society,' both Schmitt's and Pine and Gilmore's interventions read as an apology of the profit making opportunities that the newfound experiential realm might offer. In fact, these authors discuss the concept of experience economy exclusively from the point of view of who stands to gain from this model, inserting in their writing a number of practical 'how to' guidelines for marketers and entrepreneurs. Overall, the rhetoric of the experience economy found in their books strategically avoids any involvement with a rigorous exploration of what experience means in philosophy. Instead, experience is deployed rather loosely as something that is everywhere and belongs to anybody on the one hand, therefore as a primary resource of a sort that could be appropriated, or as a "genre of economic output"²⁶⁰ on the other, something that had hitherto not been articulated in previous philosophical discussions of the idea. If not a commodity per se, experience is however something singular and unrepeatable that can be however be produced on vast scale. In this set up, its basic unit, the situation, becomes the ambience that lends memorable and pleasurable qualities to good and services. Schmitt's concise definition of experience is indicative in this regard:

Experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation (e.g. as provided by marketing efforts before and after purchase). [...] They often result from direct observation and/or participation in events – whether they are real, dreamlike, or virtual. [...] As a marketer you need to provide the right

²⁵⁹ Pine, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*. (Harvard Business Press, 1999).

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

environment and setting for the desired customer experiences to emerge. Experiences are not self-generated but induced.²⁶¹

Here Schmitt spells out his understanding of the *private* nature of experience both as something that pertains to the interiority of the individual subject and as something that can be privately owned, and therefore bought and sold. Pine and Gilmore, on their part, maintain that while experience is an element present in all kinds of social practices, including classic production and consumption, Experience, as they mean it,

occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable.²⁶²

Their treatment of the subject was particularly ambitious as it put forward the manufacturing of experiences as a veritable recipe for a "new economic order,"²⁶³ which revolved not only around experiential marketing, but also the new realm of social media and customer experiential management.²⁶⁴ Like Schulze, Pine and Gilmore claim that experience is fast becoming a fundamental social need, a new way for establishing status and power, but also more fundamentally a way through which subjectivities produce themselves in the social. They see this production as the ultimate dream of any entrepreneur: the opportunity of having the *consumer become the product itself*.²⁶⁵ Pine and

²⁶¹ Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing*, 60.

²⁶² Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, 98.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, i.

²⁶⁴ On this subject and the related 'relationship marketing' framework, see Gummesson, Evert. "Relationship marketing in the new economy." *Journal of Relationship Marketing* 1.1 (2002), 37-57; Ravald, Annika, and Christian Grönroos. "The value concept and relationship marketing." *European journal of marketing* 30.2 (1996), 19-30.

Gilmore pragmatically distinguished between four basic types of experiences that can be industrially induced: Entertaining, Aesthetic, Educational and Escapist. This taxonomy based on different kinds of attractors allowed them to deflect a close enquiry on the deeper political implications of their proposed experience economy, and to sidestep what Jay defined as "the question [that] always has to be asked: experience in the service to what end?"²⁶⁶ The generic answer to this question, for Pine and Gilmore is "to transform oneself", no matter why or how, as they urge companies "enabling transformations" to "charge not merely for time but for the change resulting from that time."²⁶⁷

It is noteworthy that Pine and Gilmore's description of four kinds of experience mentioned above relies heavily on theatrical metaphors, as already indicated by the subtitle of their book, which read: "work is theatre & every business a stage." In contrast to the Situationist idea of the situation as a *game* of co-creation, Pine and Gilmore remain within a more classic framework of reference when they recommend a set of rather conventional Western theatrical elements²⁶⁸ as the ingredients for their situations: the shop as a stage, the goods for sale as props, and the personnel's behaviour and interaction as a scripted performance, in effect suggesting that the relationship between 'experience' makers and 'experience' purchasers is comparable to that between directors and their audiences. As for their notion of experience, the nature of the performance in these authors is left under theorised as the theatrical performance is described as inherently being made up of such elements. However, performance theory could productively be brought to bear upon the experience economy proposition, as it might be able to accurately

²⁶⁵ 'The Customer Is the Product' is the actual title of section 9 of the book.

²⁶⁶ Jay, *Songs of experience*, 406.

²⁶⁷ Pine and Gilmore. Preface to: *The experience economy. Updated Edition*. (Harvard Business Press, 2011).

²⁶⁸ On the notion of theatrical convention, see De Marinis, Marco. "Performance Codes and Theatrical Conventions", in De Marinis, Marco. *The semiotics of performance*. (Indiana University Press, 1993), 97-120.

describe one of its most pernicious political implications. Performance theorist Richard Schechner proposed that performances can be “make-believe” or “make-belief.”²⁶⁹ In make-believe performances, such as those of the classical Western theatre that Pine and Gilmore refer to, “the distinction between what’s real and what’s pretended is kept clear,”²⁷⁰ everyone involved, audiences and performers alike, knows that the situation is ‘just play’ and dependent on their suspension of disbelief (for example, as when in musicals actors pretend that people singing to each other is something normal). In make-belief performances instead, the blurring between reality and pretension is intentional and part of the enjoyment of the situation; the boundaries between performative encounter and the rest of life are not so clearly demarcated.

Critics of the experience economy model, such as Arlie Russell Hochschild²⁷¹ and Peter Fleming for instance, have often attacked its ambition by expressing their doubts on the fake quality of the designer experiences offered by staged spaces of consumption, exposing how, from the point of view of the workers, “back-stage identities and the boundary dividing them from front-stage presentations are constructed in the tumult of contradiction, tension and dissonance,”²⁷² a situation that ultimately places a limit on the experiential quality available to the consumers as well. In their view, it is not clear how Pine and Gilmore imagine the type of involvement of the customers vis-à-vis the experience as performance, more specifically, it is unclear whether they think that consumers would not mind acknowledging the fact that the labour of their experience providers is a theatrical performance (make-believe) or

²⁶⁹ Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. (Routledge, 2006), 42.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. (University of California Press, 2003).

²⁷² Costas, Jana, and Peter Fleming. "Beyond Dis-identification: Towards a Theory of Self-alienation in Contemporary Organizations." (paper presented at the 5th International Critical Management Studies conference, Manchester, 11-13 July 2007), 5.

whether they would need to think that together with these providers they can “create the very social realities they enact”²⁷³ (make-belief).

While the first presentations of the experience economy paradigm were indeed prone to this ingenuity, the later versions of the theory actually offer a much more sophisticated understanding of the nuanced distinction between make-believe and make-belief. In the lesser-known sequel to their first book, entitled *Authenticity. What Consumers Really Want*,²⁷⁴ Pine and Gilmore defend their initial thesis from this line of criticism. In their new strategic formula for the reorganization of the productive cycle, they propose that, since in the experience economy experiences are indeed manufactured, businesses run the risk of being perceived as manipulative by their potential clients. In order to overcome this problem, Pine and Gilmore suggest that enterprises should begin to incorporate the very process of production into the spectacle of the experience itself. In this passage, the experience economy reveals itself to be a mode of governance interested in much more than simply managing consumers. No longer restrained by the initial make-believe theatrical model the experience economy becomes a provider of ambiances in which the consumers can participate, alongside employed immaterial and affective labourers, in the construction of their own experiences. In this respect, Pine and Gilmore second re-elaboration of the experience economy paradigm somehow caught up, apparently unwittingly given the scarce references to the field of live arts in their oeuvre, with some of the more pressing developments within contemporary performance, such as post-dramatic theatre,²⁷⁵ non-representational theory²⁷⁶ and delegated

²⁷³ Schechner, *Performance studies*, 42.

²⁷⁴ Gilmore, James H., and Joseph B. Pine. *Authenticity: What consumers really want*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007).

²⁷⁵ Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. (Routledge, 2006).

²⁷⁶ Thrift, Nigel. *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. (Routledge, 2008).

performances,²⁷⁷ all approaches that register a frustration with drama's classic functions of representation, symbolism and structuring of time, and experiment with formats requiring performers to be onstage as themselves and a greater involvement of the audience in the process. As aptly summarised by David Barnett in reference to post-dramatic theatre specifically, here too "the stage becomes a generator of shared experiences rather than knowledge, and spectators are confronted with the question of how they deal with such phenomena."²⁷⁸ In other words, businesses like performance becomes interested during this phase into the ways of providing customers with a context where they can *pretend to believe* in their own performances *as if* they were real experiences.

The framework of the experience economy allows to bring into focus the continuities between the experimentations with the aesthetics of organization of artistic movements of the 19th century and the evolution of the mode of production under late capitalism. This framework is able to offer a better understanding of the new productivity of consumer culture than the neoliberal discourse around 'creativity' as conceptualised in the paradigm of the creative industries.²⁷⁹ In the latter in fact, the idea of value is still entangled with a certain idea of the individual genius as the generator of innovation and producer of novel sources of intellectual property (understood here in its classical sense of exclusive ownership). Instead, the genealogy of the discourse of the experience economy grounds productivity much more effectively in the relational sphere of

²⁷⁷ Bishop, Claire. "Outsourced authenticity?: Delegated performance in contemporary art." *Double Agent* (London: ICA, 2009), 110-25.

²⁷⁸ Barnett, David. 'Post-Dramatic Theatre'. *Drama Online*. <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/post-dramatic-theatre-iid-2516> [accessed 09/09/2013]

²⁷⁹ For an comprehensive overview and critique of the development of the 'creative industries' discourse in its different phases, from its origins in Australia in the mid-90s to its adoption as an economic policy framework in the UK and its global popularisation via Richard Florida's discussion of the 'creative class', see Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter. *MyCreativity Reader. A Critique of Creative Industries*, (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2007).

sociability as a form of collectivity able to valorise difference and variation like no other. To put it with media theorist Juan Martin Prada:

in today's context, the concept of production (historically linked to that of goods) is being continuously extended, because the new industries, increasingly oriented to pleasure and entertainment, and to the computerised production of "intangible" goods and information, are really producing contexts of interpretation and assessment, forms of identification and membership, interpersonal behaviour and human interaction – in other words, its mission is essentially *the production of sociability itself*.²⁸⁰

In this context, sociability has been reconfigured as one of the fundamental units of the contemporary mode of production: whilst modernity launched a war against plebeian and native forms of sociability, in the experience economy we find procedures that put an end to the claim of modern sociability that it could represent a practice of liberation. In this phase, both alter-modern and modern collective practices are transformed into something different, something that is subsequently reabsorbed into mechanisms of valorisation. Within "cognitive capitalism,"²⁸¹ characterised by a Post-Fordist organization of production, the financialization of markets, the globalization of logistics and information processes, and the precarisation of the workforce, the experience of sociability became both a kind of labour, the ambience immaterial labour ("the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity"²⁸²) and affective labour (or the "labour that produces or

²⁸⁰ Prada, Juan Martin. "Economies of Affectivity", *Multitudes*, (2006). Emphasis mine. <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Economies-of-affectivity> [accessed 08/04/2013]

²⁸¹ Vercellone, Carlo. "The new articulation of wages, rent and profit in cognitive capitalism." (paper presented at *The Art of Rent*. Conference held at Queen Mary University of London. 29th February 2008).

²⁸² Lazzarato, Maurizio. "Immaterial Labour." in *Radical Thought In Italy*, 133.

manipulates affects"²⁸³) take place and are made productive, and also the product of that labour, the commodity being bought, sold and circulated. This double role of sociability in contemporary capitalism can be best detailed through a close analysis of two of its most productive and fast emerging institutions: the scene, corresponding to sociability as labour, and the brand, which best describes the new productivity of consumption. In the following section each of these will be considered to better understand the transformed position of sociability in the present juncture.

4.2 Contemporary sociability and the governance of pleasure

By focusing on the scene and the brand as the contemporary practices of dominant sociability I want to link the historical genealogy sketched so far with two of its most influential manifestations. The conjoined constellation of forces brought into play through these two contemporary fluid institutions are crucial to establish both a continuity between the present and the past, but also more crucially to emphasise the extent to which modern and alter-modern forms of counter-conduct cannot simply be celebrated as meaningful antecedents, but must also be updated to account for these new dispositives of power. This section will provide the present research with a firm contextualization in the present problems and contradictions as brought to bear on the subject of sociability in cognitive capitalism, a necessary step to introduce the third and final part of the research that will instead survey a number of practices that are effectively disrupting and challenging such state of things and offer some notes towards an alternative conceptualisation of the common as pleasure.

²⁸³ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War And Democracy In The Age Of Empire*. (New York: Penguin, 2005), 108.

The Scene

The scene corresponds to a contemporary form of sociability that organizes the productive capacities of collectivities and rearranges them in ways that are most favourable to capitalist valorisation. The scene is the capitalist version of a network society, where people are compelled to participate both in their professional and personal lives. John Irwin undertook the first systematic and theoretical approach to the scene in 1977, in the course of his description of juvenile cultural forms of expression. Already in this early use, the scene is declined in sociable term: "that is, people participate in them [scenes] for direct rather than future gratification—...they are voluntary, and that they are available to the public. In addition, the theatrical metaphor of the word 'scene' reflects an emergent urban psychological orientation—that of a person as 'actor', self-consciously presenting him—or herself in front of audiences."²⁸⁴

Sociologist Pascal Gielen recently turned to the concept of the scene to analyse the peculiar organisation of the contemporary art world, addressing the productive patterns of major international players who are recursively gathered at large-scale events such as festivals, art fairs and biennales.

Local scenes are proving to be familiar focal points within a worldwide network. They generate just enough, but not too much, intimacy for global nomads. Whether you enter the art scene in Shanghai, Tokyo, New York, London, Berlin or Brussels, you find a familiar frame of reference despite what may be a totally different cultural context. If, six months ago, you had mentioned the name Damien Hirst in any of these art scenes, you would have instantly created a common ground for socializing, whether participating in an intellectual debate or chatting in a pub. The scene provides a

²⁸⁴ Irwin, John, and Gerald D. Suttles. *Scenes*. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 23.

safe, familiar, yet admittedly temporary home in a globalized world.

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In addition to supporting the mobility of art workers, the scene is also a necessary component of creative production as it importantly sanctions the originality and the ownership of new ideas, crucial attributes for the realization of their monetary value. Gielen explains:

After all, an idea can be easily ridiculed but easily stolen, too. The public — international yet intimate — environment is the perfect place for promoting the social conditions that enable the relatively safe exchange of ideas. Anyone stealing ideas within the scene receives at least a verbal sanction. A claim that an original thought has been copied elsewhere is an option only if witnesses exist and the thought has been aired in public. The originality or authenticity of an idea can be measured recursively, therefore, if that idea was ever 'put on the stage'.²⁸⁶

In Gielen's opinion, the scene has become an ideal production unit not only in the art context, but also for society at large. In my view the scene recovers and reuses anew many of the tenets of modern sociability: it provides a "comfortable setting" in which "individuality and authenticity as highly prized;" it generates "the freedom of temporary and flexible relations;" it "produces social cohesion and a shared identity;" and it affords relations that are "relatively free of obligations, but not without rules."²⁸⁷ What remains implicit in Gielen's argument is that the field of emergence of the notion of *scene* was not the jet set of the global creative elites. The idea of scene was initially used to describe a form of sociability

²⁸⁵ Gielen, Pascal. "The Art Scene. A Clever Working Model for Economic Exploitation?", *Open 17 - A Precarious Existence Vulnerability in the Public Domain*, (NAi Publisher, SKOR, 2009), 14. <http://www.skor.nl/eng/news/item/open-17-a-precarious-existence-vulnerability-in-the-public-domain?single=1> [accessed 04/04/2011].

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

of marginal forms of life, protecting collective practices considered deviant in relation to dominant culture, referring, for instance, to the 'gay scene' or the 'criminal scene' of a locale. Alan Blum, one of the main sources for Gielen's own elaboration, was drawn to the notion of scene for its "radical edge,"²⁸⁸ its ability to support the ethical and aesthetic values of counter-conducts, but also for its fragility, corresponding to the vulnerability of the subjectivities and forms of life that found in the scene a way to keep 'apart' from the rest of society. Blum writes:

The mortality of the scenes is intimately linked to the history of cities in the way that Paris, New York, London and Barcelona are marketed by their golden ages that, in most cases, are periods in which 'avant guard' activity is concentrated at urban sites. [...] Yet, the anecdotal ethnography of golden ages and historic urban scenes (Flanner, 1974; McAlmon with Boyle, 1984; Shattuck, 1979) often glosses or leaves as unmentioned the tension between the city and the scene. [...] If cities tell their stories through their scenes in part, the accomplishment of scenes are often hard won and hard fought.²⁸⁹

Blum's description of such "transgressive" performance²⁹⁰ describes precisely what Gielen's scene no longer is: a positive mode of resistance and a site of struggle between normalizing powers and collective pleasures. While the scene in Blum emerges as a situated locality, with its quirkiness and specificities (describing on a collective level a process not dissimilar from those considered by Levi-Strauss in the context of particularization and how modes of address can singularize a person through nicknames and in-jokes), Gielen's scene has transformed the cosmopolitan aspirations of modern bourgeois sociability into a procedure

²⁸⁸ Blum, Alan. *Imaginative Structure of the City*. (McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), 168.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-9.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

of globalization. However, this does not mean that local scenes have disappeared. Rather, capitalist valorisation now reconfigures their locality as a subsidiary property that feeds into the flows of a major delocalized scene: local scenes have become 'fringe' operations, as the word itself indicates, their marginality is nevertheless oriented to reconfirm the importance of the centre. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney put it:

As capital cannot know directly the affect, thought, sociality, and imagination that make up the undercommon means of social reproduction, it must instead prospect for these in order to extract and abstract them as labour. That prospecting, which is the real bio-prospecting, seeks to break an integrity that has been militantly preserved.²⁹¹

In my view, this last point captures the main danger faced by cultural practices in the present moment. In Blum's (minor) scene, sociable encounters could be understood as performances that players enacted for each other and in conflict with the dominant order. In Blum's words, "the element of theatricality integral to the scene marks the importance of its site as an occasion for seeing: the scene is an occasion for seeing and being seen and, so, for doing seeing and being seen."²⁹² Now, this seeing and being seen can either be taken as the sign of a collective relation of reciprocity, as in Simmel's sociability where people consider one another to belong, or it can become a spectacularised version of the situation, where relations follow the grammar of appearances. The constitution of Gielen's major scene obliges this minor scene to re-orient its own practices to accommodate the gaze of capital. Now, in the complex game of seeing and being seen, capital operates to turn what was effectively collective free play into a staged performance, where collectively produced

²⁹¹ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (Minor Compositions, 2013), 80.

²⁹² Blum, *Imaginative Structure of the City*, 171.

value is immediately assigned through proprietary forms of conduct, so as to prepare it to be harvested and turned into a source of profit or rent. As Lazzarato puts it, in the dominant society of control "the creation of possibles is not open to the unpredictability of events, but it is codified according to the laws of the valorisation of capital."²⁹³

The Brand

While management is commonly seen as a discursive practice that ensures a 'rational' use of the means of production, since the 1960s and 1970s the management of consumption has acquired an increasingly significant position within the overall economic cycle. In this context, the brand needs to be introduced as a form of sociability complementary to the scene, one that organizes consumption under the conditions of contemporary capital. The management of consumption involves a number of interrelated techniques that span from advertising and marketing to customer care and public relations, all of which are interested in devising procedures that stimulate the productivity of the social and its desires.

It must be noted however that 'to stimulate the productivity of the social' does not mean the same as 'to stimulate the social'. Here, a hiatus must necessarily open, a discrepancy that capital and management must work very hard to constantly cover up: the free play of sociability must not be autonomous, but self-organized in a specific way, as capital needs this in order to be productive. In Lazzarato's view, this dynamic could be summarized as one where "organizations produce and sell standards of socialization" because "if capitalism wants to control and exploit life it has to control the conditions of the process of constitution of difference and repetition."²⁹⁴ Martin Kornberger explains that the brand creates a context

²⁹³ Lazzarato, Maurizio. "From capital-labour to capital-life." *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 4.3 (2004), 202.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

where freedom of action is likely to evolve *in specific ways*, providing ambiances that, working with and through the freedom of subjects, make it more likely for their compartments to evolve in particular ways.²⁹⁵ In this perspective, the task of brand management is to avoid the use of openly repressive tools as much as possible. Censorship or other similar forms of sanction must be substituted by devices of impediment that would *discourage* the uses of the brand for actions that would decrease its value²⁹⁶ (the injunction “you *may!*” replaces the “you *must!*”²⁹⁷ of disciplinary society as the new imperative dispositive of the current social order).

The brand is a “new media object”²⁹⁸ that emerges within the ‘experience economy’ model as discussed by Pine and Gilmore and takes the principles it describes to their furthest consequences. The brand is not reducible to a mere logo, a slogan or promotional campaign, but it describes an entire mode of producing collective subjectivities. What it encapsulates is a meaningful process that connects the purchase of a given commodity, say a particular scent of perfume, with the possibility of all of the encounters, adventures and any other transformative experience that the subject might desire (in the perfume example, it may be a game of seduction, for instance), using the template of the situation where the fantasy is enacted and with reference to the appropriate way of behaving in the coveted circumstance. Scott Bedbury and Stephen Fenichell specify that now “a product is no more than an artefact around which consumers have experiences – brands are the total sum of those experiences.”²⁹⁹ In

²⁹⁵ Kornberger, Martin. *Brand Society: How Brands Transform Management And Lifestyle*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁹⁶ Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics For The Information Age*. (Pluto Press, 2004), 122.

²⁹⁷ Žižek, Slavoj. *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is The Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (Verso, 2001), 133.

²⁹⁸ Lury, Celia. *Brands: The Logos Of The Global Economy*. (Routledge, 2004).

their article "Blowing Up The Brand", Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers push this thesis further, stating:

The relationship between consumers and brands become less about the consumption of the product than about social relations, experiences and lifestyles such consumption enables.³⁰⁰

In their view, not only have social relations become something that can be consumed, but the entire process of valorisation has also left the traditional object of economic transactions, the product, behind. In a book on the same subject,³⁰¹ media theorist Adam Arvidsson dedicated a chapter to the process of "Branding Sociality" to further specify that the experiences that interest the brand are of a kind that can be communicated, shared, exchanged, and circulated socially, as it is only by virtue of their social circulations that the brands acquire value by exercising their power over subjectivities, shaping them on the singular and collective level. The brand acts upon the form and meaning of sociability at multiple levels: it provides a stable ambience for the inherently unstable and free play of sociability to unfold and it stimulates variations within that stability; it lends sociability the rules and tools for signification and imagination; in short, it assists people in the incessant labour of invention, imitation and repetition of constructing and maintaining meaningful relations with themselves and with each other, their bodies, and with the world at large.

The brand, in short, gives people something to do with themselves, especially in a context where other modern institutions are no longer able

²⁹⁹ Bedbury, Scott, and Stephen Fenichell. *A New Brand World: Eight Principles for Achieving Brand Leadership in the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 16.

³⁰⁰ Aronczyk, Melissa, and Devon Powers. "Blowing up the brand", in *Blowing up the brand: Critical perspectives on promotional culture*, eds. Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers. (Peter Lang, 2010), 26.

³⁰¹ Arvidsson, Adam. *Brands: Meaning And Value In Media Culture*. (Routledge, 2005).

to anchor the chaos of life to meaningful cartographies. As people struggle to find a sense of consistency in their biographies, or a sense of “belonging,” to use Stenger’s term, the brand helps them orient themselves and produce existential territories. In certain instances, the brand might help confirm a status and make us feel more valuable in relation to others. In such circumstances, brands might mobilize the empty shells of modern sociability, playing up aspects of mannerisms, sophistication, excellence and refinement. Cultivation can also be recast as something different from the ethical premises that lent a political foundation to modern sociability as a process of civilization. In the context of the brand, the emphasis is not on the care of the self,³⁰² but rather on the construction of the self as a flexible yet recognizable entity. Branded self-improvement needs to be chaperoned by consultants, coaches and trainers of various kinds, to ensure compatibility between the way a certain form of life is socialized and the *preferred* values of the brand. In this process, the relationship between work and life is recast as a tension between the deskilling of labour and the sophistication of consumption. However, the brand’s insistence on improvement does not mean that brands do not provide opportunities to let loose and celebrate. Let us mention, for instance, the incredible energy mobilized by international sport competitions such as the celebrations at the end of the FIFA World Cup, Or the way major brands sponsor music festivals and club culture (as in the case of RedBull, a textbook example of brand promotion).³⁰³ Or even, how charitable associations raise brand awareness through initiatives that give their patrons an opportunity to present themselves in the guise of a sort of benevolent carnivalesque spirit (Red Nose Day in the UK, for instance, invites supporters to ‘do something fun for money’ and

³⁰² I use this expression in the sense of Michel Foucault, cf. “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984” in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

³⁰³ Cf. Russell, Edward. *The Fundamentals Of Marketing*. (AVA Publishing, 2010), 174.

wear a clown nose; the *Funny Feet campaign from the Eve Appeal, also based in the UK, invites supporters to wear unusual footwear for a day*).

Indeed, the brand manages to breakdown the boundary between high and low culture that for centuries had organized sociability along the axes of a battle against certain collective pleasures. These are now re-proposed as alternative but equally viable experiences. It matters little whether a given conduct or style reflects the values of traditional, mass or erudite culture. What counts is that it chooses a mode of articulation that is propitious to the equity of the brand. To illustrate this point I will now turn to the example of House Party, a US-based company active since 2005 that acts as a broker between brands wanting to promote or test their products, and people looking for free samples goods or an excuse to throw a home party with their friends at small cost. House Party has been working with many major international brands, including Ford, Kraft, Microsoft, Disney, Playstation, BIC and Smirnoff, to mention a few, covering a very broad range of product categories. The company webpage offers an effective summary of their business model:

We provide the fun, you provide food, friends and feedback and promise to have an amazing time. Our parties are sponsored by the brands you love. By hosting, you and your guests get to try their products and receive a Party Pack chock full of goodies! You don't pay anything or sell anything. It's a no-pressure party. Just tell us what you and your guests think. But it's more than just you and your friends who are having a blast. Thousands of other hosts and guests from across the US (and sometimes the world) are also having a great time, on the same day. And with our interactive website and your own party page, you can invite guests, post pictures and videos, have conversations and more, all before the party even happens. It's a party online and off!

House Party represents on some level the contemporary version of the classic Tupperware party,³⁰⁴ however it dispenses with the intermediation of the sale lady's role as a scripted performance. Here, there is no further gain for those involved than their own sociability: they pick the music, the food, the tone and topic of conversations. Participants will joke, dance and play as they please. It is the entirety of their sociability that is put to work by the brand: not only it produces the valuable data that the host is required to collect through the provided feedback forms at the end of the event, but also and more importantly, they increase the 'equity value' of the brand by using it as a tool to their own interactions. As the brand is given attention, it is used as a prop and a set, it is manipulated and explored and played with, it can harvest more power, becoming more meaningful at every point.

Despite the free goods and the freedom of partying at the core of the entire experience in this example, there is an element that reveals the subtle persistence of imposition. Not everyone can obtain the "Party Pack": wannabe hosts have to go through an application process, involving a basic consumer's questionnaire specific to the sponsor's brand, and then be selected by the company. They have to describe the outlines of their planned party, with details about the location and most importantly, the number and profiles of invited guests. Priority is apparently given to larger parties (twelve guests or more, as described on their webpage), but also the ability of throwing a party on a date and location that is convenient to the brand. In return, selected parties *can* use the company's web page to invite their guests and post party photos after the event. As the House Party example suggests, the brand empowers its consumer to conjure up or invoke a specific fantasy about an enjoyable scenario of what could happen and how and with whom, and

³⁰⁴ Tupperware parties were invented in post-war America as a selling technique for the plastic containers produced by the company of Earl Tupper. This innovative method enlisted women as sale representatives who were to promote the products by hosting a series of sociable parties with their friends and neighbors. Cf. Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware. The promise of plastic in 1950's America*. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

act accordingly – both in the sense of political action and in the sense of playing a part. For this reason commentators such as Celia Lury or Erving Goffman have also described the brand as a “platform for action,”³⁰⁵ or a propertied “frame” of action.³⁰⁶ Media theorist Adam Arvidsson too defines the brand as *the* institution that embodies the logic of cognitive capital, intervening upon “what Hanna Arendt called ‘action’, the communicative construction of a web of stories, solidarities and identities that form the basis for political passions and identification.”³⁰⁷ Referring to the present conditions of production, Lazzarato explained:

in a reversal of the Marxist definition, we could say that capitalism is not a world of production, but the production of worlds³⁰⁸ [where] the enterprise does not create its object (goods) but the world within which the object exists [...] [and] the enterprise does not create its subjects (workers and consumers) but the world within which the subject exists.³⁰⁹

The particular *world* evoked by the brand is a totality; it has a disjunctive relation with all other scenarios or situations, within which it entertains a competitive and mutually exclusive relation if two brands are competing for the same market, or, more often, a modular relation in which each situation can be recombined with others without their concatenation resulting in any particular biographical narrative. The *situation*, in the brand, has become a monad, an impenetrable unit that does not care to relate with other processes of signification or relations outside of those it

³⁰⁵ Lury, *Brands*, 6.

³⁰⁶ Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay On The Organization Of Experience*. (Harvard University Press, 1974).

³⁰⁷ Arvidsson, Adam. *Brands: Meaning And Value In Media Culture*. (Routledge, 2005), 88.

³⁰⁸ Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Les Révolutions du Capitalisme*. (Paris: Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond / Le Seuil. 2004), 96.

³⁰⁹ Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour To Capital-Life."

can valorise. Given the managerial interest in creating *worlds* in which consumers can act and produce their own subjectivities, it should come as no surprise that one of the most recent trends within the experience economy discourse has shown a keen interest in gaming mechanisms. As Kathie Salen and Eric Zimmerman defined it by distilling elements of eight previous definitions, a game is "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome."³¹⁰ If each notion composing their definition is considered in turn, one can see why games might serve the agenda of an economy interested in producing worlds and conducting subjects: their systemic quality ensures that they can be modularly replicated in different times and spaces; as they involve more than one participant, they provide a platform for sociability; their artificiality points to their separateness from real life (another shared characteristic with sociability), a state that also ensures that the conflict of games is a mitigated experience compared with everyday life. In other words, as Chris Crawford suggested, games encourage players to take risks in a bracketed context.³¹¹ Moreover, games are governed by their own rules, suspending regular conventions, and importantly lead to outcomes that are measurable and can be ranked objectively. Considering the emphasis on voluntary participation, absorption, collaboration and fun associated with gaming, it is worth considering whether the new evolution of the experience economy paradigm to incorporate more and more elements of game in its model might carry the promise of a new social reorganization in which the free, pleasurable and egalitarian principles of sociability are finally given a centre stage. As ethnographer Tom Boellstorff declared in his inauguration of the journal *Games and Culture* in 2006:

The information age has, under our noses, become the gaming age. It appears likely that gaming and its associated notion of play may

³¹⁰ Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules Of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. (MIT press, 2004), 11.

³¹¹ Crawford, Chris. *Chris Crawford On Game Design* (New Riders, 2003).

become a master metaphor for a range of human social relations, with the potential for new freedoms and new creativity as well as new oppressions and inequality.³¹²

However, the advent of the new gaming paradigm as the most recent contemporary institution of sociability must be critically examined: while games are definitely able to activate participants, to *move* them, to produce new and unexpected experiences, these activities ultimately can seem fulfilling precisely because they never become action in a political sense; they dispense with all of the uncomfortable aspects of action, such as risk, endurance, resilience, solidarity (beyond cooperation), aspects that are a necessarily part of the convivial mode of social life they seem to refer to. The following section will explore the ways in which different understanding of the interrelated notions of game and play can help us navigate the ambiguity of the status of sociability both as a collective practice of liberation and as a technique of governance in contemporary post-Fordist societies. First, I will consider the growing paradigm of gamification, focusing on some of the contradictions made apparent in alternate reality games (ARGs), a new game genre first developed for brand promotion. Then, I will consider how certain elements of play can contribute to articulate a different paradigm of sociability that is in more direct conflict with the dominant modes of governance of late capitalism.

4.3 The gameplay of sociability

The first chapter on early conceptualizations of sociability already introduced the idea that the trope of gameplay played an important role in how this concept was first imagined. For Schleiermacher, in sociability

³¹² Boellstorff, Tom. "A Ludicrous Discipline? Ethnography And Game Studies." *Games and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2006): 29.

No particular activity should be collectively undertaken, no work collectively brought into existence, no insight methodically gained [...] There should, in other words, be no other purpose than the free play of ideas and impressions, through which all members stimulate and animate one another.³¹³

For Simmel instead:

It is an obvious corollary that everything may be subsumed under sociability which one can call sociological play form; above all, play itself, which assumes a large place in the sociability of all epochs.³¹⁴

Also in the literature on alter-modern sociability considered in chapter 3, references to the playing of games as a fundamental mode of plebeian merrymaking were also abundant. The same notion came up once more as a core concept in Debord's formulation of the *situation* as a kind of 'revolutionary game.' The importance of gameplay in sociability was further present in the experience industry paradigm that refers to the discourse of gameplay in order to better understand how to make sociable interactions occur on two distinct operative planes. In a first sense, which also corresponds to a first phase, Pine and Gilmore used elements of this discourse to describe the different types of pleasure offered by various business-made experiences; more recently however, play elements have been considered more strategically, as opposed to phenomenologically, to bring into focus the distinctive ways in which sociability as a form of collective practice produces value.

³¹³ Schleiermacher, "Toward a Theory of Sociable Conduct". English translation from German by Rasch, William, quoted in "Ideal Sociability. Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Ambivalence of Extrasocial Spaces", in *Gender in Transition: Discourse and Practice in German-Speaking Europe 1750-1830*. Eds. Ulrike Gleixner and Marion W. Gray (University of Michigan Press, 2006), 329.

³¹⁴ Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability," 125.

From games to gamification

In the first sense mentioned above, the experience economy incorporated elements of play in the categorization of the various case studies that backed the theory, which unwittingly approximated to a famous taxonomy of play of Roger Caillois. In the seminal book *Man, Play and Games* of 1958, Caillois distinguished four elements of play: competition, or *agon*; chance, or *alea*; simulation, or *mimicry*; and perceptual alteration, or *ilinx*. *Agon* describes the principle that governs situations of "rivalry which hinges on a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.), exercised [...] in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits."³¹⁵ *Alea*, which Caillois derives from the Latin name for the game of dice, refers to playful situations where the outcome is based primarily "on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary."³¹⁶ *Mimicry* is "an incessant invention,"³¹⁷ corresponding to "the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion [...] then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in a certain respect, imaginary universe [...] [in which] the subject make believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself."³¹⁸ And finally, *Ilinx* is based "on the pursuit of vertigo" and "consists of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."³¹⁹ Each of these elements of play can be combined with the others in any given ludic activity and the experience of these different pleasures is what makes playing a self-sufficient activity, with no need for ulterior motifs beyond itself. The examples given to illustrate

³¹⁵ Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play and Games* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 14.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

“Entertaining”, “Aesthetic”, “Educational” and “Escapist” experiences in Pine and Gilmore’s book, but also in subsequent publications that continued to develop the experiential marketing approach,³²⁰ include conspicuous references to the same kinds of playing principles, bringing together sports and videogames; casinos and online-gambling; Disney princesses and simulated rainforests; rollercoasters and microbrew beers (alcohol is described as an ‘experiential good’³²¹) to make their point.

The second and more direct plane in which the experience economy refers to game design has less to do with a consideration of the play elements of an experience and more with the principles of games as a strategy to make people have experiences. This is a turning point in the experience economy framework, as it begins to take an interest in sociability as a specific type of meta-value, encapsulating all of the other aspects of the experiences on offer. Already in 1999, speaking of one of their examples, a video game arcade, Pine and Gilmore wondered

What about social interaction, or the game outside of the game, so important to our enjoyment of all the old tabletop contests, and obviously important to the vociferous competitors at LAN Arena? Won’t this need enable business like it to maintain a gaming role? [...] No cybergame will be complete without its attendant virtual social experience.³²²

Around ten years later, the rise of *gamification* across a variety of

³²⁰ Cf: Sundbo, Jon, and Per Darmer, eds. *Creating Experiences in the Experience Economy*. (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008); Smilansky, Shaz. *Experiential Marketing: A Practical Guide To Interactive Brand Experiences*. (Kogan Page Publishers, 2009). Heitzler, Carrie D., et al., "Bringing "Play" To Life: The Use Of Experiential Marketing In The VERB™ Campaign", *American Journal Of Preventive Medicine* 34.6 (2008), 188-193; Leighton, Debra. "'Step Back In Time And Live The Legend': Experiential Marketing And The Heritage Sector." *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 12.2 (2007) , 117-125.

³²¹ Pine and Gilmore. *The Experience Economy*, 19.

³²² Ibid., 29-30.

organization theories³²³ would confirm the importance of their question about the 'game outside the game'. A recent report commissioned by think tank Technology Horizon Programme speculated in 2008 that gamification might be marking the turning of the experience economy into an engagement economy. As the executive abstract summarized:

In the economy of engagement, it is less and less important to compete for attention, and more and more important to compete for things like brain cycles and interactive bandwidth. Crowd-dependent projects must capture the mental energy and the active effort it takes to make individual contributions to a larger whole. But how, exactly, do you turn attention into engagement? How do you convert a member of the crowd into a member of your team? To answer these questions, innovative organizations will have to grapple with the new challenge of harnessing "participation bandwidth." To do so, they may start to take their cues not from the world of business, but rather from the world of play. Game designers, virtual world builders, social media developers, and other "funware" creators have the potential to offer essential design strategies and economic theories for otherwise "serious" initiatives.³²⁴

Gamification does not completely replace the theatrical model of experience economy with something utterly different, but it complements

³²³ Cf. Kane, Pat. *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto For A Different Way Of Living* (Pan Macmillan, 2005); Davies, Will, "The Rise Of The Economic Playground", blog post, (February 20th 2009), <http://potlatch.typepad.com/weblog/2009/02/the-rise-of-the-economic-playground.html> [accessed 08/05/2009]; Zichermann, Gabe, and Christopher Cunningham. *Gamification By Design: Implementing Game Mechanics In Web And Mobile Apps* (O'Reilly Media, 2011); Kapp, Karl M. *The Gamification Of Learning And Instruction: Game-Based Methods And Strategies For Training And Education* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012). Werbach, Kevin, and Dan Hunter. *For The Win: How Game Thinking Can Revolutionize Your Business* (Wharton Digital Press, 2012); Walz, Steffen and Deterding, Sebastian, eds., *The Gameful World*, (MIT, 2014).

³²⁴ McGonigal, Jane. *Engagement Economy. The Future Of Massively Scaled Collaboration And Participation*. Report commissioned by the Institute for the Future (2008). <http://www.iftf.org/our-work/people-technology/technology-horizons/engagement-economy/> [accessed 04/10/2009].

it by introducing a vocabulary able to deal with the complexity of engagement in situations that are increasingly configured as collective performances. In this discourse, gamification thus does not aim to produce complete games to replace or challenge existing social structures or power dynamics. Rather, it describes the efforts of introducing *certain* engaging elements of gaming into management procedures and marketing strategies that can provide better (more productive) sets of rules and measurable outcomes. Gamification advances the productivity of the *brand* and of the *scene* precisely in that it gives its subjects/actors the experience of being directors of their own process of valorisation. As game designer Will Wright said referencing his computer game *Spore*,

Most games put the player in the role of Luke Skywalker, this protagonist playing through this story. Really, this is more about putting the player in the role of George Lucas.³²⁵

The managed experience is no longer simply providing a proprietary ambience for playing at being the hero within a story that is already written by someone else; through gamification it can now provide the experience of being a hero in a scenario that is also scripted via the interaction of participants. To do that, gamification advises managers to use elements of game mechanics to redesign the ways businesses procure pleasurable experiences in their customers, workers and prosumers by providing them with goals, a set of rules, and offering a reward for their efforts. It goes without saying that gamification also necessarily leads to redesigning the interfaces that allow customers, workers and prosumers to engage *with each other* alongside the commodity on offer, and indeed the “game outside the game” of sociability is often a big component of the overall design of the experience. In the gamification approach, the sociable relations formed in excess of the core offer can be put to work in

³²⁵ Wright, Will. “Spore: Brith Of A Game”. Presentation at *TED* conference (March 2007). http://www.ted.com/talks/will_wright_makes_toys_that_make_worlds?quote=177 [accessed 09/06/2010].

various ways: as a goal in itself (sharing, making new friends, acquiring a popular status); as a rule (as when tasks are designed to be undertaken collectively); or as a reward (the company might grant access to an in-crowd as a reward for loyalty for instance).

But to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the impact of gamification on society, we must consider its implications beyond the redesign of branded experiences per se. Seth Priebatsch, creator of the alternative reality game *SCVNGR* (produced by Google Ventures), triumphantly declared:

while the last decade was the decade of social and the decade of where the framework in which we connect with other people was built, this next decade will be the decade where the game framework is built, where the motivations that we use to actually influence behaviour, and the framework in which that is constructed, is decided upon, and that's really important. And so I say that I want to build a game layer on top of the world, but that's not quite true because it's already under construction; it's already happening.³²⁶

Alongside the corporate world, games are changing the ways people think about the organization of sectors as diverse as education, urban planning, preventive medicine and public policy implementation. For instance, Robert Wright, author of *Nonzero: The Logic Of Human Destiny*, recommends game theories for addressing the current major crises and challenges of humanity, urging us to “recognize the game” we are collectively playing, which is his way for addressing moral questions by insisting that people should face them as non-zero-sum games because “while a zero-sum game depends on a winner and loser, all parties in a non-zero-sum game win or lose together, so players will more likely

³²⁶ Priebatsch, Seth. “The game layer on top of the world.” (Presentation at TEDxBoston, July 2010). http://www.ted.com/talks/seth_priebatsch_the_game_layer_on_top_of_the_world.html [accessed 19/03/2011].

survive if they cooperate.”³²⁷ Stuart Brown, author of the optimistic volume *Play. How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*,³²⁸ recommends play as an antidote to people turning into killers or dangerous criminals. Samantha Skey, CEO of the tech company Recyclebank and established public speaker within the gamification circuit, believes gaming can help young women to become better and greener mothers via their penchant for collaboration and competitive collaboration.³²⁹ Sunni Brown, co-author of *GameStorming: A Playbook for Rule-breakers, Innovators and Changemakers*, catalogues techniques that can “make the right things happen at work,” while warning that her book is “for people who want to learn how serious ‘play’ can be.”³³⁰ In short, as game designer Tom Chatfield further explains in *Fun Inc.: Why Games Are The 21st Century’s Most Serious Business*, with their immersive quests, deeply satisfying and symbolic rewards, games offer a great toolbox for developing new approaches to real-world systems that need improvement, such as alienation at work, low interest in voting or school grading systems.³³¹ And finally, games are an increasingly important cultural activity for many people who chose to engage in this form of entertainment in their so-called ‘free’ time. Since the early 2000s, the video game industry has seen an exponential rise, becoming one of the leading forms of entertainment in terms of total revenue and number of audiences. Presently, the industry is estimated to be worth around \$63-

³²⁷ Wright, Robert. *Nonzero: The logic of human destiny*. (Random House LLC, 2001).

³²⁸ Brown, Stuart L. *Play: How It Shapes The Brain, Opens The Imagination, And Invigorates The Soul* (Penguin, 2009).

³²⁹ Skey, Samantha. “Gaming for Good: Millennial Moms and Competitive Collaboration”, public speech, GSummit, (San Francisco, 2012). <http://www.gamification.co/video/samantha-skey-gaming-for-good-millennial-moms-and-competitive-collaboration/> [accessed 15/03/2013].

³³⁰ Brown, Sunni, Dave Gray and James Macanufo. *Gamestorming: A Playbook For Innovators, Rulebreakers, And Changemakers* (O’Reilly Media, Inc., 2010). The quote is taken from the book website: <http://sunnibrown.com/the-book/> [accessed 30/03/2013]

³³¹ Chatfield, Tom. *Fun Inc.: Why Games Are The 21st Century’s Most Serious Business*. (Random House, 2011).

67 billion for 2012, the fastest growing segment in the entertainment industries, surpassing within the last five years the net worth of DVD sales and the music industries in countries such as the USA and the UK.³³² Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as *World of Warcraft* are being followed by millions of players (as reported by the developer company Blizzard, it reached a peak of 12 million subscribers in 2010)³³³ who commit vast quantities of their personal time to their online missions.³³⁴ Other games are being created particularly to use the connectivity afforded by social media, such as *FarmVille* (developed by Zynga in 2009), a game created for the Facebook platform, which allows players to earn virtual coins by either actually buying them or by maximizing their strategic relation with 'neighbours'. In 2012 the Museum of Modern Art of New York sanctioned the newfound cultural relevance of games by becoming the first international art museum to acquire 14 video games as part of its permanent collection.³³⁵

But the recent importance of games as a cultural practice is not confined to the realm of digital technologies and online gaming. Among the variety of phenomena that are bringing games to the fore of so many social and economic processes, I would like in what follows to focus on a new genre of alternate reality games (ARGs) that first originated in 2001, and which uses a variety of means for engaging participants into a kind of adventurous treasure hunt. As I aim to show, ARGs represent one of the newest and most advanced institutions of sociability in contemporary

³³² Data retrieved from "Global entertainment and media outlook 2014-2018 – Video Games" <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/global-entertainment-media-outlook/segment-insights/video-games.jhtml> and "Video game industry", http://vgsales.wikia.com/wiki/Video_game_industry [accessed 30/02/2013].

³³³ <http://uk.ign.com/articles/2010/10/07/world-of-warcraft-reaches-12-million-subscribers> [accessed 28/02/2013]

³³⁴ 77% of gamers who play with others do so at least an hour per week. Adult gamers have been playing for an average of 15 years. Data from Entertainment Software Association, "2013 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data," http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2013.pdf [accessed 30/07/2013].

³³⁵ Antonelli, Paola. "Video Games: 14 in the Collection, for Starters," MoMA website (29th November 2012), http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters [accessed 20/02/2013].

post-Fordist societies, and they are emblematic in regard to the pervasive ludic register of governance and its contradictions in relation to the disappearance of inequalities it promises.

Alternate Realities

Alternate reality games are the most popular formulation of the ubiquitous gaming genre. This kind of game is designed to be played not only in real life scenario, in parks, in the street or other public or quasi-public spaces, but to play with the very social conventions that characterise the expected conducts in these contexts. ARGs are typically designed to allow for a great degree of emergent, spontaneous group play, often involving hundreds of players at a time. Episodes however are tied together through a narrative plot, often leading to the resolution of a mystery to be solved collectively by following a trail of 'breadcrumbs', deciphering encrypted messages and performing requested tasks. The game is usually articulated through a variety of media to distribute the experience across diverse platforms that include social media, websites and telephones, as well as actors, printed press, billboards and other types of props disseminated into the real world. The design principles of ARGs are typically organized around one or more missions (a popular version asks players to identify with super-heroes) that require players to collaborate with each other and with strangers to engage real life situations in a ludic manner, effectively altering the norms of perception and behaviour in public spaces such as streets, parks, public transport, etc.

ARGs differ from Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) in that they engage participants in real life missions and explorations of their surroundings, often using online technologies as only one of the components of the game experience. They can also be differentiated from live-action role-playing games (LARPs) in three important respects: first, while players are invited to inhabit a world with rules different from those governing the everyday, they enter this world

as themselves, and not 'in character', pretending to be someone with different characteristics, as it is usually required in role-playing. Secondly, the alternate world of ARGs is not neatly demarcated from the real one, contrary to what happens in LARPs, and much of the decision-making that is required of players involves differentiating between the elements belonging to the alternate reality and the everyday. And finally, in ARGs, the facilitators in charge of running the game have no direct contact with players during the sessions or afterwards. The puppetmasters (this is how ARPs' facilitators are called) make their presence manifest only indirectly, through the dissemination of clues, aids or obstacles. Their identity is akin to that of a *deus ex machina*, with no relation with the other players, and again, this is different from LARPs where the game master is also a character in the story and is also constantly interacting with other players. In relation to this last point, it would not be incorrect to suggest that the creative director of ARGs is one of the contemporary reincarnations of the modern salon host. The puppet master exercises a specific type of creative conduct over the conduct of others, composing situations that require, for the production of their most intense effects, the actual erasure of his or her presence. Precisely at the moment where the puppetmaster power is at its peak, this figure must be excused from the vulnerability of embodied co-presence.

While ARGs are now being developed for educational purposes by NGOs and governmental bodies³³⁶ and are also starting to be regarded as an artistic genre in its own right,³³⁷ what is significant about the origin of alternate reality games is that they have first been produced as part of viral marketing campaigns, significantly being the first art genre to be produced specifically to fit the exigencies of cross –media branding. One

³³⁶ Examples of educational ARGs include *World Without Oil* (Pitchfork Media, USA, 2007), dealing with a possible post-oil scenario; *Traces of Hope*, developed for the British Red Cross in 2008; and *ARGuing*, a project funded by the European Union to promote multilingualism in secondary schools.

³³⁷ As indicated by the attempt to establish in 2010 a Transmedia Artists Guild, no longer active today. See Phillips, Andrea. "Transmedia Artists Guild" (4th August 2010), <http://www.deusexmachinatio.com/blog/2010/8/4/transmedia-artists-guild.html> [accessed 15/05/2012].

of the most popular and earliest examples of ARGs was *The Beast*, a game that was developed as part of a marketing strategy to promote the launch of Stephen Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* in 2001 and to prepare the ground for a Microsoft video game series based on the same movie. The plot of the game revolved around a murder set in the future and related to the philosophically disquieting theme of the substitution of humans by machines. The first clue to solve the future archaeology puzzle of *The Beast* also served as an invitation to the game, which was not advertised in any other official capacity: game creators Jordan Weisman (then Creative Director of Microsoft's Entertainment Division), Sean Stewart (head writer), Elan Lee (lead director and producer) and Peter Fenlon (content lead) planted an obscure reference to a certain "Jeanine Salla, Sentient Machine Therapist" among the film's credits, while the sentence "This Is Not A Game" closed the movie trailer.

The Beast was a tremendously successful operation, which engaged over three million players with very varied backgrounds across the globe. Following its impact, many other corporate ARGs were commissioned, including *The Nokia Game*, run from 1999 to 2005; *I Love Bees*, part of a viral marketing campaign for the launch of the video game *Halo 2* in 2004; the *Lost Experience* and *Find 815*, created to promote the television series *Lost* for ABC; and *The Go Game*, not a marketing campaign, but developed as a tool for building corporate team spirit by a company based in San Francisco.³³⁸ My interest in *The Beast* is that it was the first iteration of the most potent game dynamic at play in ARGs, often referred to as the TINAG (This is Not a Game) aesthetic (and also the first game to use this wording as a clue). This sentence has since become much more than a motto or a 'rabbit hole' (or the first clue that marks the entry point to an ARGs); it came to describe the design philosophy that, more than any other, sets ARGs apart from other game genres, and it is also what makes them so relevant for my investigations of the contemporary

³³⁸ These and other ARGs are archived by the hub website ARGNet. Alternate Reality Gaming Network, <http://www.argn.com/> [accessed 24/06/2012].

formats of sociability in relation to their political standing. Elan Lee, who worked both on the development of *The Beast* and *I Love Bees*, summarized the TINAG approach to game design in three key rules: don't tell anyone, don't define the game space, and, most importantly, don't build a game.³³⁹

The first rule addresses the secrecy and lack of clear rules and information not only about the mechanisms of the game, but about the very existence and boundaries of the game. As opposed to the classic marketing views that recommend brand consistency, logo recognition and strategic positioning to ensure a maximum visibility (a marketing rule that, it should be said, is often also applied to advertise many cultural initiatives), here the game entices potential players by making them feel part of a restricted number of people who are precisely able to look beyond what is obviously there to be looked at. The second aspect of TINAG instead offers a significant break from the earlier phase of experience economy. Here, rather than developing a predetermined location, using bespoke architectural elements and carefully selected props to produce the perfect ambience fitting the desired experience, the ARG model operates by changing the way people perceive and behave in their environment, rather than modifying the environment per se. This allows players the extra thrill of transgressing the boundaries of the ordinary, instead of operating within a recognizable safe zone designated for their experience, which inevitable marks it as manufactured. And finally, the third rule of the "This Is Not A Game" philosophy is that the designers should not aim at building a game at all. As Elan Lee further elaborated in an interview:

It was obviously a game. There was nothing we could do about that. What we could do was make it a game with an identity crisis.

³³⁹ Lee, Elan. "This Is Not a Game", (lecture for the Game Developers Conference. San Jose: 19 - 24 March 2002), quoted in Thompson, Brooke, "This is Not A Game...and the TINAG Philosophy," ARGNet. Alternate Reality Gaming Network website, 27th April 2005, http://www.argn.com/2005/04/this_is_not_a_game/ [accessed 30/07/2011].

If I know it's a game, and you know it's a game, but IT doesn't know it's a game, then we've got a conflict.³⁴⁰

This last point involves a great deal of resources from the part of the game developers. Each element of the game must feel real to the players and potentially indistinguishable from any other element in their surroundings: if a corporation is featured in the story, it must have a real office somewhere downtown; if a character is to be contacted by phone, an actor must be ready to answer at all times. Every element, from websites to letterheads or radio messages must be prepared with care as to camouflage itself seamlessly within the semiotic flux that surrounds our regular everyday existence. In a featured article for the portal ARGNet, one of the websites of reference for the growing ARG community, Brooke Thompson explains what this means from the point of view of the producers:

As game designers, puppetmasters are a unique breed in that they do not build games. They build experiences that are games that don't know that they are games, they build experiences that need to look and feel real.

The TINAG approach to game design not only addresses specific hyper realist aesthetics, it also raises a series of ethical questions. I want to now turn to the specific example of the alternate reality game *The Jejune Institute* in order to explore how the blurred boundary between the ludic realm and life as made operative in the ARGs genre represents a seductive yet controversial way of building platforms for sociability vis-à-vis its potential to stir society towards more equal arrangements. I will conclude this chapter by comparing the elements of gameplay at work within gamification (of which ARGs are the most advanced format) with others that are currently set aside within the corporate adaptations of play

³⁴⁰ Lee, Elan. Interview with Jane McGonigal, quoted in McGonigal, "A Real Little Game", 12.

forms and I will consider the possibility of an alternative kind of sociability that does not require an *alternate* reality to come into place, but that can instead replenish the capacity of participants to form meaningful *alternative* forms of life in the real world.

The Jejune Institute

The *Jejune Institute* (also referred to as '*Games of Nonchalance*') was an alternate world game created in 2008 by Nonchalance, an Oakland-based creative collective of four (Jeff Hull, Uriah Findley, Kerry Gould and Kat Meler) that defines itself a "*Situational Design Agency*,"³⁴¹ a revealing nomenclature that once more calls into question the idea of situation as a produce of design and consumption. Involving over 10,000 players around San Francisco and Oakland from 2008 to 2011, the game has also been the subject of a documentary/fictional movie, *The Institute*, directed by Spencer McCall in 2013,³⁴² which I have used as my main source of information on the experience as it includes extensive interviews with both participants and puppetmasters.

The narrative of *Jejune* provided a poetic meta-commentary about the sense of wonder that lurks beneath the surface of the everyday and that the game invited players to explore. The plot of the game was complex and revolved around the struggle between *The Jejune Institute*, a mysterious institution devoted to "Socio-Reengineering" led by the guru Octavio Coleman Esquire, and the rebels of *Elsewhere*, who objected to the Institute's sinister use of techniques of mind control and reclaimed free access to the enhanced capabilities of the mind. Caught in the middle of the fight was Eva, a young sensitive girl able to see the elsewhere in the everyday. As the girl went missing, the players did not know whether she disappeared on purpose or was taken away against her will. The

³⁴¹ Nonchalance website. <http://nonchalance.com/> [accessed 13/12/2013].

³⁴² *The Institute*, directed by Spencer McCall. (Argos Pictures, USA, 2013).

purpose of the game was to solve the mysteries surrounding Eva's disappearance and the activities of the *Jejune* Institute by accomplishing missions and collecting clues disseminated across the Oakland area. The 'rabbit hole' for *Jejune* is a series of posters and obscure flyers disseminated in key areas of Oakland and San Francisco that invite people to phone the *Institute* to book a free induction session at their headquarters (for this, the game rented an office space in a skyscraper in the financial district).

Many of the people interviewed in the documentary describe the experience of playing as deeply meaningful and impactful on their lives. Not only did they meet and collaborate with many others, they also visited areas of the city that they would not have otherwise considered, such as underground tunnels full of water, a cemetery, and so on. Moreover, their assigned 'missions' typically required them to carry out unusual activities or daring actions as a group. In one instance, players were instructed to dance with a Sasquatch by a public pay phone; in another, they were required to organize an actual picket in protest against Octavio Coleman. Although the rhetoric of the game often addressed the possibility of a different society, an aspiration that is constantly reinforced by the plot, and the 'transgressive' ethos of many missions, the way *Jejune* negotiated not its status, but its consequences in relation to the real conditions of life reveal a more conservative stand. The issue comes into focus when the question arises of how ARGs manage to attract such large crowds.

Jane McGonigal investigated this question further by bringing into focus a set of apparent contradiction in what she called the "puppet master problem:" why is it - she asked - that so many people enjoy the experience of being directed as puppets? Why do they appreciate being given a mission to complete, with no questions asked, by unknown and anonymous game designers? Why do they comply when they are given bizarre or idiotic orders that make them look ridiculous, such as trying pick-up lines on all the women in a bar or "earn the trust of a stranger, and then document through photo or video a dramatic act that

demonstrates the stranger's newfound trust?"³⁴³ How come they do not find these acts embarrassing or plain silly, but liberating, fun and most of all, *meaningful* instead? Given that the freedom of play is one of the fundamental pleasures in the game, McGonigal offered an alternative explanation: ARGs' participants experience the lack of choice of their 'missions' as a relief from the constant optionality that they have to navigate in real life.³⁴⁴ One of the participants interviewed for the documentary *The Institute* confessed that when he began to play the game, he was not simply perplexed about the fake versus real nature of the invite, his main fear was in fact that of inadvertently becoming prey of a viral marketing initiative: "I guess I was afraid that at some point I would be marketed to; that it'd be like 'Thank you for...hum...going through this thing...by Reese's Peanut Butter Cups!' or something."

These remarks are significant as they point to the fact that the player hoped to have come across an opportunity of unfettered sociability, to be able to engage in a *real* game, and not in a marketing initiative formatted as a game. Seen in this light, in alternate reality, the pressure to choose among different options with no substantially different outcome is bracketed off. Actions have to be carried out in order to win the game, and the necessity of the situation provides a justification to be slightly

³⁴³ *The Go Game*, 'Trust is Everything' mission, referenced in McGonigal, Jane. "This Might Be a Game: Ubiquitous Play and Performance at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century". (PhD diss. University of Berkeley, 2006), 389.

³⁴⁴ McGonigal builds upon the notion of 'optionality' as developed by anthropologist Thomas De Zengotita in *Mediated: How the Media Shape the World Around You*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2005). De Zengotita observed that what characterizes this new mediated world is the very awareness of the mediation, a self-reflexivity upon what is real and what is culturally constructed that paradoxically contributed to a post-structuralist promotion of issues of identity, race, gender, etc. while by the same token depleting these categories of a large portion of their former political import. In gamification, the collective explicitly gives up the control over its "*representational existence*" (De Zengotita, 2005:136) in exchange for the suspension of endless optionality. In a mediated world, the opposite of real isn't phony or illusory or fictional—it's optional. Idiomatically, we recognize this when we say 'The reality is...,' meaning something that has to be dealt with, something that isn't an option. We are most free of mediation, we are most real, when we are at the disposal of accident and necessity. That's when we are not being addressed. That's when we go without the flattery intrinsic to representation (de Zengotita, 2005:14).

daring and transgress certain social conventions: this is what makes the experience of participating so intense and gratifying, so paradoxically real. McGonigal advocates 'pervasive gaming' as a way to encourage the "proliferation of communities who genuinely believe not in the fiction of a game, but rather in their own abilities and collective mandate to create more play."³⁴⁵ However, her approach seems to assign the political conditions of such realization to a matter of good game design, to a system of rules in other words, able to stir the participants' affects and knowledges in an appropriate and socially desirable direction. Interpretations such as McGonigal, for all their optimism, risk consigning the political consequences of the communities of players created through ARGs dispositives to the realm of fiction, despite their use of the real as a backdrop for the collective actions. In the utopian society of players, the principles of meritocracy ensure that commitment and dedication to the game will typically be met with appropriate rewards, (recognition from one's community and the successful completion of a mission). In this respect, ARGs are interesting simulations of the way the world could run if it was reorganized as a non-zero sum game, where, as Robert Wright puts it, "all parties [...] win or lose together."³⁴⁶ And indeed this sense of possibility is what many players hold on to and miss when the game is over. Actions in the parallel universe organized by ARGs yield meaning, they are epic gestures that contribute to a greater good. The entire plot is organized so as to confirm the role of players as protagonists in an adventure that will have, with all probability, a happy ending (or at least, a meaningful closure). The players are given tasks that both challenge them (unlike in consumption, where access to experiences can be bought, here one has to earn it) and yet the dares or the riddles are never too difficult or too hard to engage with. To strike this balance between pushing people out of their comfort zone and yet propose challenges that

³⁴⁵ McGonigal, "This Might Be a Game", 372.

³⁴⁶ Wright, Robert. "The evolution of compassion" (presentation at TEDSalon 2009 Compassion, October 2008). http://www.ted.com/speakers/robert_wright.html [accessed 27/01/2011]

they will be able to win is likely to be one of the most delicate tasks of game design, as it is only through this balance that the player feels like a capable subject, able to achieve great things individually and in a group. This is central to the *real* experience afforded by ARGs, as it taps into the transformative potential of collective actions, giving participants a taste of how life could be if they were not constrained by economic needs and hierarchical structures. However, the ARG as such does not offer the opportunity to collectively translate these actions into a meaningful practice that extends beyond the game: as Elan claims, the TINAG genre is all about creating a game that is unaware of its own status, and therefore the reasons why this adventurous mode of cooperation is not accessible in everyday life are never explored or part of the game adventures.

As is often the case in TINAG experiences, players reported that their experience of the termination of *Nonchalance* was unsatisfactory and sad. The game had to be ended early for lack of funds, as reported by the producers, in 2011. Having to come up with a satisfactory closure, Jeff Hunt hired the services of Geordie Aitken, not an actor or performer, as many other staff working for the project, but a management consultant specialised in ninja training for corporate leadership and team building exercises. In his own words, his expertise fitted the purpose of the game because he is used to “resisting people and cynics.”³⁴⁷ Here, the skills of corporate governance prove aptly transferable to a gaming or artistic context. Players’ comments on returning to their ‘normal’ lives signal a deep nostalgia, and in some case players speak of the period following the end as a phase of mourning. One of the players interviewed for the documentary cried when recalling the sense of solitude and impotence that accompanied her after the game had come to a close. Another player, who uses the fictional name Organeil during the game, declared that the experience of *Nonchalance* was so transformative for him that he

³⁴⁷ Aitken, Geordie. Interviewed in *The Institute*.

was no longer able (or willing?) to consider it just a game and undergo the psychical labour of maintaining the realms of fantasy and reality separate. Another player reported that to the suggestion that it was 'just a game' he would angrily reply: "*it is so much more*". And in a way, this player was possibly right. Reportedly, many other ARGs produce a tendency to form permanent ludic communities. A particularly famous instance was the case of *Cloudmakers*, a group of former players of *The Beast* who attempted to use their collective mystery-solving skills to the purpose of catching the responsible parties behind the events of September 11th 2001.³⁴⁸ Commenting on the player Organeil's attitude (who later withdrew bitterly from the game and complained about having sustained personal injuries while completing a mission without receiving any help from the puppet masters), Jeff Hunt said:

He thought that maybe this was going to change the world, it would be an opportunity for people to really come together as an organism...as an organization that could uplift the planet in some way. And you know, I don't think there is any limit on the amount of things you could do with this kind of artwork, but it went certainly beyond our scope.³⁴⁹

While this puppet master conveniently retreated behind the rhetoric of 'this is beyond the scope of my art' to address the problematic expectations of the disobedient player, the subjectivity of Organeil precisely confirms the success of *Jejune's* creators in providing the opportunity to taste in a simulated version the potential of collective practices, self-organized through the sociable interactions of play. In consideration of all of the above, the sociability engendered through ARGs and other kinds of gaming practices that are becoming so prominent in today's cultural landscape, is deeply ambivalent in relation to the link

³⁴⁸ McGonigal, "This might be a game", 372.

³⁴⁹ Hunt, Jeff. Interviewed in *The Institute*.

between ethics and aesthetics that they configure. Not only because games are proprietary platforms that harvest the productivity of collective action, but also because they foster a subjectivity that conceives of games *seriously* and of collective action as *only* a game. But is this the only possible conclusion to be drawn when considering sociability in terms of playful interaction?

Gamification and the contemporary politics of the subjectivation

Gamification is a fascinating and daunting topic to analyse, as it covers a vast ground that is part rhetorical discourse, part managerial strategy, bringing together a recently booming industry with ancient cultural forms. Without any pretence to exhaust this subject in all its far reaching implication, what I want to argue is that gamification is most of all a contemporary dispositive of subjectivation that is particularly concerned with the formatting of contemporary sociability in ways that transform its creative and vital capacity, that has had such an important place in the vicissitudes of modern politics, into a productive capability for the economy. I should specify that subjectivation, as elaborated by Foucault and by Deleuze and Guattari, described the ways in which singularities and collectivities become constituted as subjects, both as a result of their own autonomous becoming, but also in response to the injunctions of power.³⁵⁰ For the same authors, dispositives then indicated the strategic or machinic ensembles that condition the process of subjectivation from the perspective of power. In Foucault's definition

...with the term dispositive, I understand a type of—so to speak—formation which in a certain historical moment had as its

³⁵⁰ Cf. Foucault, "The Subject and Power"; Peter Dews, "The Return of the Subject in the Late Foucault," *Radical Philosophy* 51 (1989), 37-41; Harrer, Sebastian. "The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault's Lecture Series *L'Herméneutique du Sujet*", *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005); Guattari, Felix. "Subjectivities: for Better and for Worse" in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 193-203; Guattari, Felix. "Cracks in the Street," *Flash Art*, 135 (1987), 82-85.

essential function to respond to an emergency. The dispositive therefore has an eminently strategic function...I said that the dispositive is by nature essentially strategic, which indicates that it deals with a certain manipulation of forces, of a rational and concerted intervention in the relations of force, to orient them in a certain direction, to block them, or to fix and utilize them."³⁵¹

The mechanisms of gamification are a dispositive to the extent in which they have the capacity "to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, shape, control and ensure the gestures, the conducts, the opinions and the discourse of living beings"³⁵² by applying game design mechanisms to engage workers, voters and consumers where the tasks and roles reserved to them are manifestly boring, fatiguing or nonsensical. The promised efficacy of gamification hinges upon this promise to erase pain and alienation from everyday interactions. Game designer Jesse Schell, for instance, in a talk aptly titled "The Pleasure Revolution" where he expanded on the ongoing gamification of economy, enthusiastically announced

We're now moving from industrial economy to a pleasure-based economy. People don't choose a food based on 'hey, which one is going to give me the optimal amount of calories and what's going to make me survive through the winter?' It's 'What am I going to like the most?' When people talk about work, it used to be, 'Well, what job is going to pay the most?' Now, we talk about, 'well, what's going to be the most fulfilling?'"³⁵³

³⁵¹ Foucault, Michel. "The Confession of the Flesh" (1977), in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, (Random House LLC, 1980),194-228.

³⁵² Ibid., 22, my translation.

³⁵³ Schell, Jesse. "The Pleasure Revolution" (presentation at Google Talks 2011). www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PkUgCiHuH8 [accessed 22/09/12].

Schell is not alone in his optimistic investment in the power of gamification. The last decade saw a sprawling enthusiasm for the gamification discourse, especially as it landed an effective rhetoric for the self-promotion of marketing and IT consultants to their industry clients. An army of bloggers, opinion makers, instant book writers and innovation gurus have been divulging its principles to crowds with interests as diverse as improving the quality of life of the elderly, boosting workers productivity, or healing from depression.³⁵⁴ Eventually, as it is the fate of many business buzzwords, its fashionable status is destined to fade, and indeed it appears already dwindling at the present moment. However, it might be a mistake to simply dismiss gamification as an inconsequential fad, as its core mechanism push to the fore a kind of operation of governance which was already at the core of the 'creative industries' framework that characterised the previous decade, namely, the capacity of capitalism to provide a satisfactory life not only as consumers but also as producers. It is hard to argue against a paradigm that promises to turn every repetitive or alienating task into an engaging game; certainly a critique cannot be launched in the name of a return to a work ethic. A possible generative line of critique can come from turning to game studies, a transdisciplinary field of recent formation dedicated to the exploration of the role of gameplay across a number of disciplines, such as history, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. One of the ongoing lines of enquiry that animate the rich field of game studies is the theoretical differentiation between the notion of game and that of play. To bring some of the reflections around such distinction to bear upon the

³⁵⁴ For examples of discourses celebrating gamification as a solution to the drudgery of labour, cf: Korn, Oliver. "Industrial Playgrounds: How Gamification Helps To Enrich Work For Elderly Or Impaired Persons In Production" (Proceedings of the 4th ACM SIGCHI symposium on Engineering interactive computing systems. ACM, 2012); Smith, Ross. "The Future of Work is Play" (presentation at the International Games Innovation Conference. November 2011); Stevens, Susan H. "How Gamification And Behavior Science Can Drive Social Change One Employee At A Time", in *Design, User Experience, and Usability. Health, Learning, Playing, Cultural, and Cross-Cultural User Experience*. (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 597-601; McGonigal, Jane. "Building resilience by wasting time." *Harv Bus Rev* 90.10 (2012): 38.

notion of sociability might help unpack the apparently benevolent rhetoric of gamification and to reveal a much more ambiguous and biased politics.

Sociability as play?

The modern formulations of sociability do not usually differentiate between game and play. Both Schleiermacher and Simmel for instance used both notions in their texts. Schleiermacher considered how games might fit with its definition as a subcategory:

Playing games could fall [...] within the character of sociability, because in the most rational kinds of game reciprocal interaction involves de facto all participants: however they don't completely determine such interaction.³⁵⁵

Simmel for his part, referred to sociability both as a game and as play, moving freely between the two concepts. For him, sociability was a "social game" "in which "one 'acts' as though all were equal."³⁵⁶; "a free play of thoughts and sensations, through which all members spur and encourage each other;"³⁵⁷ the experience of "togetherness" found in "free-playing, interacting interdependence of individuals,"³⁵⁸ and "the play form [...] of the ethical forces of concrete society."³⁵⁹ While Simmel used the terms 'social game' and 'free play' interchangeably, to attend to differences between these two might indeed offer a point of departure for differencing between sociability as a dispositive – corresponding to gamification -

³⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, "Saggio Di Una Teoria Del Comportamento Socievole", 129. My translation.

³⁵⁶ Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability", 124.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 121.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

versus sociability as an ethical practice – better captured by the notion of play. Without the pretence of being exhaustive on the issue of this distinction, which is an ongoing debate in the field of game studies,³⁶⁰ in what follow I'm going to introduce how some significant contributors to this subject have considered the difference between game and play.

Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, author of *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* considered by many the foundational text of the field of game studies, regarded play as being a foundational category of the human experience, including many more manifestations than games. In fact, play for this author described a human trait that was even broader and more fundamental to the human experience than culture itself:

Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.³⁶¹

The reference to animal play for Huizinga is not mean to ascribe a certain natural or instinctual flair to the notion of play. To the contrary, by stating that "human civilization has added no essential feature to the general idea of play"³⁶² what Huizinga wanted to emphasise is that play is a significant function of the living, that "all play means something"³⁶³, and as such it cannot not be discussed as a physiological, biological or psychological need (which would have been the main trend a the time of his writing), as this would be a reduction of its scope. Instead, Huizinga wanted to

³⁶⁰ For a recent overview of the literature confronting the relation between game and play, cf. Frasca, Gonzalo. "Play the Message. Play, Game and Videogame Rhetoric" (PhD Diss. University of Copenhagen, 2007).

³⁶¹ Huizinga, Johan H. Foreword to *Homo Ludens: Study of the Play Element in Culture*, (Routledge, 1980), 1.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

champion a re-evaluation of play as a complex “cultural phenomenon”³⁶⁴ that required to be “approached historically, not scientifically”³⁶⁵. Despite believing that culture, civilization and history all originate in play, Huizinga maintained that it would be “a little cheap, to call all human activity ‘play’”³⁶⁶ however. He defined playful activities as maintaining certain fundamental characteristics through which he argued it is always possible to recognize play in its various historical and culturally specific manifestations. As such, play is dramatized in Huizinga’s narrative in a similar way as sociability was in Simmel. Both concepts function simultaneously as universal ideas that are fundamental for understanding the human experience, while at the same time they describe concrete, historically determined practices. While Huizinga dedicated a vast part of his own project to investigate play in its historical forms, I will limit myself to consider his exploration of play on a conceptual level, as this is what is most useful for my purposes. Huizinga definition of what play involves begins by differentiating it from the everyday :“we find play present everywhere as a well-defined quality of action which is different from ‘ordinary’ life”³⁶⁷. Moreover, for him play must also be “voluntary” and “superfluous”³⁶⁸; only when it is out of free choice we can legitimately say that people are playing, otherwise the very same activity would cease to qualify. Furthermore, play does not serve to satisfy any needs if not the need of playing in itself, which Huizinga sees as the need of “stepping out”³⁶⁹ from time to time from the “appetitive process”³⁷⁰ that marks the necessities of labour and “real life.”³⁷¹ Another characteristic of play is that

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 7–8.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 9.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 8.

it "has its rules,"³⁷² meaning that players come together because they intentionally recognize a set of constraints that give shape to their activities together. This means that play also "creates order, it is order,"³⁷³ as rules arrange the sensible in specific ways, and that in the emergent order of play it is hidden "a faculty of repetition,"³⁷⁴ that is, an essential disposition of play to recur in individual and collective memory as a "refrain."³⁷⁵ The tendency of play to assume a recursive temporality is also confirmed for Huizinga by the fact that play communities tend "to become permanent even after the game is over,"³⁷⁶ since playing together bonds people in ways that are meaningful beyond the actual occurrence that generated them. Yet another characteristic of play is that it is based on a suspension of disbelief that demands that players act 'as if' something was different from how it normally stands. For Huizinga however, the "illusion" (literally meaning 'in-play') of play has a double meaning: it stands for both a "mimetic" function, the acting, the pretending, the simulating or the symbolizing of play, but it extends to a "methetic"³⁷⁷ one, where play actually becomes and actualises the things it performs. As Huizinga put it, play is simultaneously "a context for something and a representation of something"³⁷⁸. If the mimetic describes the imaginary function of play that can portray unreal scenarios to make us perceive them, the methetic property of play refers to the way in which such representation is never only an illustration, but it performs an actualization able to produce actual consequences for those involved. This last characteristic of play becomes one of the reasons why Huizinga noted

³⁷² Ibid., 11.

³⁷³ Ibid. 10.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 15.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

a predilection of play for secrecy, masking and dressing-up (another point of overlap with Simmel's sociability). Finally, the last distinctive characteristic of play for Huizinga is the fact that it generates its own playground, a special space differentiated from the sites of other everyday occurrences: "the arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc. are all in form and function play-grounds."³⁷⁹ This last point too significantly echoes with Simmel's discourse on sociability, which he defined both as a "circle" within which special rules of conduct apply ("In sociability, whatever the personality has of objective importance, of features which have their orientation toward something outside the circle, must not interfere"³⁸⁰) and as a "world" ("This world of sociability, the only one in which a democracy of equals is possible without friction, is an artificial world"³⁸¹).

Huizinga's play offers an insight into the way sociability can be appropriately be discussed as a the play form of the ethics of society. However, Huizinga's broad treatment of his topic was more focused on restoring the importance of play within history and social sciences and as such it does not yet tell us much about the differences between play and games. In order to make that distinction more sharply, I must now turn to the work of Roger Caillois, whom I have already mentioned for his classification of play according to the principles of *agon*, *alea*, mimicry and *ilinx*. In his classification of games, Caillois offered that each of these four principles of play could be further arranged along a continuum comprising of two poles.³⁸² On the one end, he saw the principle of spontaneous free play that he called *paidia* after a Greek word. *Paidia* expresses "a primary power of improvisation and joy,"³⁸³ an almost indivisible principle,

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁸⁰ Simmel, Georg, David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (SAGE, 1997), 122.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 124.

³⁸² Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*,14.

common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety" or "uncontrolled fantasy."³⁸⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, Caillois positioned structured games, which he called *ludus*, which manifests themselves "as soon as conventions, techniques, and utensils emerge."³⁸⁵ Caillois' distinction has been massively influential among scholars approaching games studies³⁸⁶. One of the undeniable advantages of his work is that it offers scholars a terminology to name the different principles that orientate human play towards either regulated or spontaneous action, something that many European languages used in academia do not have in their vocabulary.³⁸⁷ However, I believe that the distinction between spontaneity and structuration only partially captures the distinction between game and play when it comes to sociability. Many gamified experiences offer their players the opportunity of choice and improvisation on a repertoire that can be extremely variable if the rules of the game are organized as an emergent or complex system.³⁸⁸

While Caillois differentiation points in the right direction, it can be expanded upon to describe the stakes in sociability as game or as play not in terms of spontaneity, but as expressing different degrees of the participants' empowerment in establishing the meaning of both rules and spontaneity. Games are systems that can be designed to be affected by the players' performances; they describe a series of rules and constraints

³⁸³ Ibid., 27.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.,13.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁸⁶ References to Caillois' work are found in Schechner, *Performance studies*; Getsy, (ed). *From Diversion to Subversion*; Bohman-Kalaja, Kimberly. *Reading Games: An Aesthetics of Play in Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett & Georges Perec*. (Dalkey Archive Press, 2007); Bateman, Chris. *Imaginary games*. (John Hunt Publishing, 2011); Saito, Yuriko. "Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 48.4 (2008): 461-463; Dovey, Jon, and Helen W. Kennedy. *Game Cultures: Computer Games As New Media: Computer Games as New Media*. (McGraw-Hill International, 2006); Montola, Markus, and Jaakko Stenros. *Playground Worlds*. (Ropercon, 2008); among many others.

³⁸⁷ French (*jeu*), Portuguese (*jogo*), Italian (*gioco*), Spanish (*juego*) and German (*spiel*).

³⁸⁸ See Salen and Zimmerman. , chapter 14 "Games as Emergent Systems" and chapter 21 "Breaking the Rules" in *Rules of Play*.

that become enabling³⁸⁹ of a certain kind of action, promising that an experience will be accessible in the future as long as the player keeps to the rules (rules that can also regulate how to successfully break them). Games comprise those elements, habits and artifices within a practice that express its necessity for repetition (to practice here can also be taken to mean 'doing something more than once'). And finally, games allow for the actualization of a system of ethic and aesthetic values through which we can compare and evaluate our own personal and collective performances. It is for all these reasons taken together that gamification is interested in making of gaming an imperative modality of conduct, the paramount format for structuring experience. Because on the ontological level, games express the measurable attributes of freedom, the structures that support it. And when something is measurable and structured according to rules, it can be incorporated in the biggest game of all that is capitalist abstraction. Proponents of gamification confirm this intuition too. For instance, a group of panellists reporting on gamification at a recent media conference, specified

We are talking about elements of games, not of play. While games are usually played, play represents a different and broader category than games. We agree with classic definitions in game studies that games are characterized by rules, and competition or strife towards specified, discrete outcomes or goals by human participants.³⁹⁰

The fact that games can distil discrete outcomes and goals out of activities that are not bound by necessity is what transforms them into valuable dispositives from the point of view of power. Obviously, with this I do not mean to suggest that games are bad or dangerous per se. The point of a

³⁸⁹ I borrow the expression "enabling constraint" from dance theorist Erin Manning, see Manning, Erin. *Relationescapes: movement, art, philosophy*. (MIT Press, 2009).

³⁹⁰ Deterding, Sebastian, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, and Lennart Nacke. "From game design elements to gamefulness: defining gamification." (*Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*. ACM, 2011).

critique of gamification as the dominant format of sociability within contemporary capitalism is to denounce the way in which it predicates that experience is measurable and comparable, an outlook that economizes the realm of so called free activities transforming them in a new kind of labour, and not to stigmatize games as dangerous social activities. Games however do impact society in a negative sense when they become the dominant format through which power promotes sociability. In this case the rules that qualify games as responsive systems morph into laws presiding the exclusion or inclusion of subjects from having access to fundamental resources for their life. In a game questioning of the rules is not contemplated, because in order to play a game the rules must be considered binding by all participants. As Huizinga, rules are so sacred in games that communities of players are usually more lenient towards those who cheat them than towards those who disregard them:

The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a "spoil-sport." The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle...the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others.³⁹¹

Yet, if sociability becomes a game, it requires that we accept the rules that govern the ethics of society leaving no margin for conflict or disagreement about what those might be. Gamification in this sense has major political and ethical implications, as it demands a belief in the inevitability of the social as it is, marginalizing all those who don't want to acknowledge the power of its magic circles rather than those who do not play by the official rules. In gamification, the cheats who 'plays the

³⁹¹ Johan H. Huizinga, Foreword to *Homo Ludens: Study of the Play Element in Culture*, New edition (Routledge, 1980), 11.

system' with a cynical attitude are actually often welcomed in the experience economy, as their activities identify malfunctions and weaknesses in the formats of organization and fuel the development of the experience industries towards the production of ever better and more sophisticated solutions.

In contrast with the idea of sociability as game, we can take play to be expressive of the capacity of sociability to 'make sense' of the world. Play in fact does not demand an a priori faithfulness to rules, but it is the drive that pushes us to discover and make up new rules and constraints to actualise our freedom. While games presupposes a shared meaning, meaning is what play makes out of reality (as Huizinga suggested "all play means something"³⁹²), and as a model for sociability it further indicates a process through which people become meaningful to each other. As such, to play describe the process that leads to the formulation of the rules of a given game, but it also move beyond games as such to describes the sense that is attributed to the relation between one game to another, or between games and other modes of action such as reproductive and productive labour.

In a more specific treatment of the subject than the one offered by Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman believed that we can derive an accurate idea of how play works by looking at its most basic definition derived from the context of mechanical physics: here, play indicates the "free movement within a more rigid structure,"³⁹³ such as in the case of gears for instance. Building upon this minimal definition, play can be taken to describe the capacity to discover the possibilities of autonomous (free) action (movement) within a relation of power (rigid structure), to look for the cracks in a system of conventions, to sense the potential variations in a given repertoire. What is more, this practice of search, production and activation of opportunities for free movement does not leave the 'rigid structures' in which it takes place unaltered. The radical independence of

³⁹² Ibid., 446.

³⁹³ Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, 30.

playful activity is not simply one of research of opportunities to exercise itself within a given context, but it is also a creative effort to reinvent the context, move the limits that define its perimeter and explore the elements that compose its arrangement in order to intervene in it.

Building upon this distinction between sociability as game or as play, it is now possible to outline the characteristics of a collective practice that might be able to respond to the ongoing process of gamification of sociability. Such minor sociability can be described an ambience in which the counter-conducts that struggle against the capitalist arrangements that make life precarious and economize all its functions can be put into play, literally, as an ethical and aesthetic collective practice. In what follows, we will see how the concept of conviviality emerged in recent critical discourse can be aptly borrowed to describe such idea of 'play' in terms of a militant politics.

PART III

Rather than a politics of class focused primarily on issues of economic redistribution and economic justice - particularly a politics that seeks to alter wage levels to redraw the map of class categories - the politics of work I am interested in pursuing also investigates questions about the command and control over the spaces and times of life, and seeks the freedom to participate in shaping the terms of what collectively we can do and what together we might become.³⁹⁴

- Kathie Weeks

CHAPTER FIVE. The concept of conviviality

Among its various significations, play can and has been used as a political concept to address the possibility of autonomous action, as a different term for non-alienated productivity. The idea of play however can also imply an activity that a) is propaedeutic to real action and 2) has lesser or no consequences for the life conditions outside its own experimentation. Insofar as these are both necessary characteristics of this form of sociality, when applied to the realm of actual event organizing, they might be best deployed in the context of educational or artistic practices. This leaves outside however another kind of sociable processes, which look precisely at ways in which collectivities can be generative of values outside of labour forms of cooperation with concrete impact on the material forms of life of those involved. Here, the discourse of play still offers some important tropes to aid the discussion, however in recent years a new discourse has emerged within critical theory, especially within post-colonial studies, which has identified another concept to underline the subversive potential of a new kind of contemporary sociability: this is the notion of conviviality.

³⁹⁴ Weeks, Kathi. *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, And Postwork Imaginaries*. (Duke University Press, 2011), 17.

The term conviviality here is chosen to indicate those collective practices that understand sociability as a form of ethical play as opposed to the sociability as gaming proposed as the standard experience of togetherness in the present engagement economy. This shift in terminology also wants to capture the extent in which conviviality describes a mode of being together that is not looking back to the alter-modern corpus of collective joy found in ecstatic rituals, and yet it is also something other in respect to the modern notion of sociability. Moreover, the discourse of conviviality provides an opportunity to distinguish sociability understood as an *experience*, as it has been taken up within the experience industries, and sociability as a property of *practice*. Indeed, it is significant to note that Toffler could only put the situation to work so swiftly because, unlike Debord, he did not approach the situation as a locus and outcome of a collective practice, but as the component of an experience that is simply 'to be had'. How are these two propositions different? The notion of experience is notoriously "one of the most compelling and elusive words in language,"³⁹⁵ and it is of extreme complexity even within specialist realms of philosophy, not least because it points precisely to phenomena in life that are supposed to go beyond the ability of language to describe them. For a comprehensive outline of this concept, it is useful to refer to Martin Jay's exhaustive book *Songs of Experience*, where the philosopher retraced the many approaches to this idea through the history of western thought. Despite the many shades of meaning that experience came to have in various philosophical discourses, Jay maintains that a constant of this notion is "precisely the tension between subject and object."³⁹⁶ And it is within this tension that capitalist dispositives have been so successfully inserted. Understood in this way, while experience can also resonate with practice, its polysemic and broad implications still leave room to a degree of ambivalence. While practices point to the mutually constitutive relation

³⁹⁵ Bérubé, Michael. "Experience", in *New keywords: A revised vocabulary of culture and society*, eds. Tony Bennett et al., (John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 121.

³⁹⁶ Jay, Martin. *Songs of experience: Modern American and European variations on a universal theme*. (University of California Press, 2005), 403.

of subject and object an experience can describe either an intersubjective process or a private affair, something that the individual can store away internally, as memory or knowledge, as if it was a property of sort. Following Isabelle Stenger, conviviality as practice can be used to describe a "social technology of belonging" which brings practitioners together through obligations (the autonomous rules of sociability) and hesitations around "what they may become able to do and think and feel because they belong."³⁹⁷

Before it will be possible to further elaborate on what distinguishes conviviality from the contemporary gamified version of sociability, it is necessary to first explain why this notion can be useful term to address the unique properties of critical collective play. For start, the etymology of conviviality gestures to the immanent factuality of 'living together', going straight to the kernel of the common and interdependent aspect of the human condition taken in its entirety, and it does so without the need to call into question an idealized version of society, as modern sociability did. Historically, the *convivium* (or *symposium*, in Greek) described the banquets of the Greek and Roman citizens, very elaborate social occasions that involved philosophical debates,³⁹⁸ storytelling, betting games, dancing as well as slowly getting drunk together, in a format that interestingly intersperses the cultivated exchanges of modern salons with the ecstatic penchant of alter-modern cultures.³⁹⁹ The reference to a shared festive meal that conviviality still evokes in the current usage is also a useful marker for my own use of the term, as it points to the sharing of resources (food and drinks) that sustain life as an occasion of encounter with the other and as a source of bodily pleasure instead of being framed

³⁹⁷ Stengers, Isabelle. "Introductory notes on an ecology of practices." *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013), 190.

³⁹⁸ For this reason, the *symposium* or *convivium* became a genre of philosophical writing, in which an imaginary dialogue is set among participants of a banquet, such as in Plato's *Symposium*. This literary form continued to exist during later periods, and it was used for instance by Dante Alighieri who wrote his *Convivio* in 1304-1307.

³⁹⁹ Slater, William J., ed. *Dining in a classical context*. (University of Michigan Press, 1991).

as a source of anxiety or competition to be mediated by compromise, as sustained for instance in utilitarian and functionalist views of the social bond.⁴⁰⁰

In critical discourse, the concept of conviviality was first introduced by the anarchist philosopher and former Catholic priest Ivan Illich during the 1970s. Illich wrote *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) in Cuernavaca, a village in rural Mexico where he had been based for over forty years, developing among other things, a school that could provide an alternative institution for the practice of the de-schooled knowledges that he defended so forcefully through his intellectual work⁴⁰¹. At the heart of Illich's reflection on conviviality, it is possible to detect an interest that intersects the notion of dispositive, that which Illich describes as 'tools'. Tools for the author are a deliberately broad category that includes "all rationally designed devices, be they artefacts or rules, codes or operators," "engineered instrumentalities," "simple hardware," "productive institutions such as factories," "productive systems," "school curricula or marriage laws."⁴⁰² Illich understands tools as both the embodiment and the conditions of human relations, as something "that he actively masters, or by which he is passively acted upon."⁴⁰³ The institutions of modernity produced integrated systems of tools and knowledges that de facto constitute a "radical monopoly"⁴⁰⁴ of the tools that articulated certain life experiences, such as learning, caring, entertaining, consoling, creating, healing, cooking, mourning, etc. For Illich, the problem with industrial modernity was that, after a certain threshold, its tendency towards the multiplication of tools by the integrated functions of the "corporate

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Burgess, Daniel. "Utilitarianism, Game Theory and the Social Contract." *Macalester Journal of Philosophy* 14.1 (2005): 7-15. Holmwood, John. "Functionalism and its Critics." *Modern social theory: an introduction* (2005): 87-109.

⁴⁰¹ Illich, Ivan. *Deschooling society* (Marion Boyars Publishers, 1995).

⁴⁰² Illich, Ivan. *Tool for conviviality* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), 28-29. http://clevercycles.com/tools_for_conviviality/ [accessed 17/06/2009]

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

state"⁴⁰⁵ induced an impotent relation to the self, the others and the word. Even when it managed to secure a certain affluence to a part of the population, this was for Illich only a kind of "enforced inactivity"⁴⁰⁶. The hyper-professionalization promoted by industrial modernity represented an atrophisation of the creative and generative capacities of society, until humans themselves were finally reduced to "indefinitely malleable resources"⁴⁰⁷ of institutions. Illich's analysis is comparable with that of other cultural critics writing in the first half of the 20th century, such as Guy Debord as we have seen, but also Walter Benjamin or Theodor Adorno⁴⁰⁸, who saw as the main treat of modernity the production of a standardised mass culture who reduced people to passive consumers. Illich's discussion of tools however focused on the fact that the 'artefacts or rules' of modern institutions not only generated passivity, but they also transformed the quality of activity, making his insight particularly useful for the analysis of the ways in which contemporary governance elicits incessant participation from its subject.⁴⁰⁹ Illich chose the term conviviality to placemark the opposite of such idea of productivity based on such radical monopolies created by the corporate state:

I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Benjamin, Walter. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. (London: Penguin, 2008). Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. "The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception." In *Media and cultural studies: Keywords*. Eds. Durham, Meenakshi Gigi, and Douglas M. Kellner, (John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 41-72.

⁴⁰⁹ For a critique of the paradigm of 'participation' see Miessen, Markus. *The nightmare of participation: crossbench praxis as a mode of criticality*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010).

realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members.⁴¹⁰

Convivial tools could "give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with his or her vision"⁴¹¹ through "the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others."⁴¹² The accessibility to such tools should be granted to "anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for a purpose chosen by the user"⁴¹³. When he gave examples of convivial tools, Illich talked about bicycles, for their ecological compatibility and their relative slowness that he thought could actually generate more, and not less time, in people's life; libraries, as a accessible pool of knowledges (today, he would have most probably added the internet to this list), and poetry, understood as the "ability to endow the world with personal meaning."⁴¹⁴ When, "after many doubts, and against the advice of friends"⁴¹⁵ Illich coupled the term conviviality with his expanded idea of tools, warning his readers that he did not intend this to indicate a kind of "tipsy jolliness"⁴¹⁶, but as an invitation to reclaim the possibility, to say it with Douglas Schuler, to "derive strength and meaning through living together, not in the narrow sense of residing in the same place or "cohabiting" but by actually living together-working, playing, eating, communicating, and being together."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴¹² Ibid., 28.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

The fundamental difference of Illich's conviviality from the concept of sociability as inherited from Simmel is that conviviality does not describe a 'pure' state of sociation, a separate sphere or a momentary exception to other modes of productive cooperation: to the contrary, it lays claims to applying the principles of equality, joy, ethics and aesthetics across the multitude of exchanges and relationships that form a society, echoing a second, minor kind of sociability that Simmel saw as potentially present in all kinds of social cooperation "above and beyond their special content."⁴¹⁸

In the last two decades, while sociability was becoming an important concept for those disciplines that study Web 2.0 platforms and digitally based social networks,⁴¹⁹ its queer-sister term conviviality resurfaced as an important notion within post-colonial and social movement discourses to talk about the joy of cooperation found in specific struggles against financial global capital. I would like to focus briefly on how this term was operated in such context not only to map a contemporary re-emergence of the notion, but also to situate it in relation to the specific traction of my own understanding of this term.

In the context of Latin American, various experiences connected with the Zapatista movement in the Mexican region of Chiapas, conviviality has been an operable term to posit a double critique of the predicaments of modern development, unveiled both as cultural colonialism and environmental disaster. Across social movements in Venezuela, Bolivia,

⁴¹⁷ Schuler, Douglas. "Conviviality and Culture", chapter in *New Community Networks: Wired for Change* (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1996). Ebook. <http://www.scn.org/ncn/> [accessed 26/09/2010].

⁴¹⁸ Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 121. The entire passage read: "above and beyond their special content, all the associations are accompanied by a feeling for, by a satisfaction in, the very fact that one is associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others. Of course, this feeling can, in individual cases, be nullified by contrary psychological factors; association can be felt as a mere burden, endured for the sake of our objective aims."

⁴¹⁹ See Preece, Jenny. "Sociability and usability in online communities: Determining and measuring success." *Behaviour & Information Technology* 20.5 (2001): 347-356. Nie, Norman H., and D. S. Hillygus. "The impact of Internet use on sociability: Time-diary findings." *It & Society* 1.1 (2002): 1-20. Hampton, Keith N. "Networked sociability online, off-line." *The network society: A cross-cultural perspective* (2004): 217-232.

Peru, Ecuador and Mexico, conviviality describes the cultural aspects of resistance to imperialism and capitalism, the capacity of creating opportunities for a resilient merrymaking as one of the values that are comprised in the multi-layered expression "*buen vivir*."⁴²⁰ This term does not find an exact translation in the English language, but it could be said that generally speaking it describes both a form of social organization and the corresponding affective register of pleasure that it should make possible. As Mirna Cunningham suggested, perhaps a close concept in English may be found surprisingly in the term 'commonwealth':

...the word Commonwealth, as in the British Commonwealth... [in] its original meaning was much similar to the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir, that is living together and sharing the wealth, conceived not just as consuming things but enjoying social life in the community of associated producers and members. The Oxford entry for the term: commonweal /kɒmˈmɪnwiːl/noun (the commonweal) archaic the welfare of the public. Oxford uses the term welfare in its sense of "well being", not charity or government handout.⁴²¹

In the Latin American context, *buen vivir* points to a refusal of any idea of progress that is not self-determined, and also places the attention towards the pathic and affective qualities of political action and autonomous living. Gustavo Esteva, founder of the University of the Earth (la Universidad de la Tierra) in Oaxaca and once a collaborator of Illich, illustrate the kind of autonomous organization implicated by convivial

⁴²⁰ For an introduction to the notion of "*buen vivir*", see: Gudynas, Eduardo. "Buen vivir: today's tomorrow." *Development* 54, no. 4 (2011): 441-447; Fatheuer, Thomas. *Buen Vivir: A Brief Introduction to Latin America's New Concepts for the Good Life and the Rights of Nature*. (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2011); Lander, Edgardo. "The discourse of civil society and current decolonisation struggles in South America", in Jorge Heine and Ramesh Chandra Thakur, eds. (New York: United Nations University Press, 2011).

⁴²¹ Cunningham, Mirna. "People-centred development and globalization" (Abstract of presentation for Human Rights Council Social Forum. Room XXI, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 1-3 October 2012.), 1. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/SForum/SForum2012/presentations2012/keynote_Cunningham.pdf [accessed 22/11/2012].

institutions in this context through the example of the school he contributed to set up:

In Unitierra we are not producing professionals. We have created a convivial place, where we all are enjoying ourselves while learning together. At the same time, both the 'students' and their communities soon discover that a stay at Unitierra is not a vacation. True, the students have no classes or projects. In fact, they don't have any kind of formal obligation. There are no compulsory activities. But they have discipline, and rigor, and commitment –first with their group (other 'students'), with us (participating in all kinds of activities for Unitierra) and with their communities. And they have hope."⁴²²

The author explains further that the hope he is referring to is not a matter of transcendental faith or a naïf believe that all will turn out for the best, but the articulation an affective micropolitics that the author sees as "the very essence of popular movements... not the conviction that something will go well, but, as Vaclav Havel has said, the conviction that something makes sense, no matter what happens."⁴²³ Situated in a different geographical context, but still sharing a similar set of concerns, Indian post-colonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty's contribution to subaltern studies also pondered upon the possibility for conviviality to constitute a collective joyful modality of opposing colonialist values and more recently, capitalist shattering of all sense of belonging in the world. Chakrabarty dedicated a chapter of his important book *Provincializing Europe* to the 'history of sociality', raising the question, crucial for the experience of the millions of people for whom the experience of modernization coincided

⁴²² Esteva, Gustavo. "Back From the Future" (Notes for the presentation in "Schooling and Education: A Symposium with Friends of Ivan Illich", TALC New Vision, Milwaukee, 9 October 2004).
http://gustavoesteva.com/english_site/back_from_the_future.htm [accessed 14/07/2010].

⁴²³ Ibid.

with capitalism and colonialism, of how it might be possible to “struggle to make a capitalist modernity comfortable for oneself, to find a sense of community in it.”⁴²⁴ Searching for a modality of struggle that could help ex-colonial subjects to find their own existential and material territories within modernity, Chakrabarty retraces the history of “adda” (pronounced “uddah”), “the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations,”⁴²⁵ which characterized the Bengali communities in Calcutta until the first half of the 20th century. Adda functioned as a process and site for the production of counter-values and identities from those imposed from outside. As Chakrabarty explains, “in Bengali modernity, adda provided for many a site for self-presentation, of cultivating a certain style of being in the eyes of others. To be good at adda was also a cultural value.” In exploring the trope of adda, both as a concrete practice and a literary theme, Chakrabarty does not seek to distill an idealized form of critical practice. He is well aware that

The apparent nostalgia in Calcutta today for adda must occupy the place of another—and unarticulated—anxiety: How does one sing to the ever-changing tunes of capitalist modernization and retain at the same time a comfortable sense of being at home in it?⁴²⁶

As in the Latin American context, we find in Chakrabarty a nuanced relationship with the past and traditions: they are never pure nor can they represent a feasible horizon in terms of becoming a compass or worse a prescriptive recipe of social protocols. Rather, the very heterotopic nature of the addas, as the open definition of ‘buen vivir’, are introduced as useful discursive markers to address in the lack of Western terms, the politics of joy and pleasure as a legitimate public matter of concern. In a

⁴²⁴ Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 180.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

similar vein we can British postcolonial scholar Paul Gilroy also recently turned to 'conviviality' in reference to the "processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere"⁴²⁷, and which this author sees as an antidote to the global affect of "melancholia" afflicting the collective mood of neoimperialism that pathologically clings to an idealized version of colonial societies in order to avoid facing the consequences of its violence.

Along with the recent interest towards conviviality within post-colonial discourse, my own use of this term as a specific articulation of sociability as play also intersect with the current articulation of the joy of cooperation as addressed in the theorization of the commons as a key notion in present-day political theory. With different inflections, post-autonomist philosophers such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt⁴²⁸ and feminist theorists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici,⁴²⁹ grounded their analysis in the concept of the common to replace the opposition of private and public and to extend the discussion of Left politics to the sphere of reproductive labour. Negri and Hardt wrote:

love is a practice of the common. Love is able, traversing the city, to generate new forms of conviviality, of living together, that affirm the autonomy and interaction of singularities in the common.⁴³⁰

Moreover, social historian Peter Linebaugh recently introduced the verb commoning⁴³¹ to address the forms of communism that predate the

⁴²⁷ Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Columbia University Press, 2005), xv. See also: Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia Or Convivial Culture?* (Routledge, 2004).

⁴²⁸ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. (Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴²⁹ Many articles on the politics of the commons and its theoretical foundations by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici can be found in the UK-based electronic journal *The Commoner*, published since 2001 (www.commoner.org.uk).

⁴³⁰ Hardt and Negri. *Commonwealth*, 380.

formation of an international working class movement in the 1840, tracing its origins “among the revolutionary workers of Paris” in Europe and in the “militant movement against slavery”⁴³² in America. For Massimo De Angelis, commoning today is used in the context of social struggles to indicate “the (re)production of/through commons” in which “communities of producers decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things”, including their “modes of relations.”⁴³³ Finally, a similar preoccupation with “communism as a particular activity and process”⁴³⁴ is at the heart of different theories of communization, a contemporary debate that registers the exhaustion of classical forms of political organizing and advocates “arguments that pose struggle as immediate, immanent” and “anti-identity.”⁴³⁵ In this context of the commons then, conviviality refers to the affects that accompany those emergent forms of struggles that extend their politics beyond the dimensions of conflict and representation; it indicates the playful conduct connoting reproductive labour when it is re-organized according to the principles of reciprocity and care. The literature on both post-colonialism and commoning thus inserted the trope of conviviality in the contemporary political discourse allowing to trace its emergence in contexts that are other in respect to the more common artistic origins of Situationism. The following chapter will therefore bring this theory of practice to bear upon a number of actual experiences of self-organization that have been able in the last decade to

⁴³¹The use of common as a verb was first proposed by social historian Peter Linebaugh, in *The Magna Carta manifesto: liberties and commons for all*. (University of California Press, 2009).

⁴³² Linebaugh, Peter. “Meandering on the semantical-historical paths of communism and commons”, *The Commoner*, December 2010, 15. <http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/meandering-linebaugh.pdf> [accessed 05/07/2011].

⁴³³ De Angelis, Massimo. *The Beginning of History. Value Struggles and Global Capital*. (London: Pluto, 2007).

⁴³⁴ Noys, Benjamin. *Communization and its discontents: Contestation, critique, and contemporary struggles*. (Minor Compositions, 2011), 8. Emphasis in original.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

confront the challenges raised by the experience economy, with its mechanisms of branding, of scene-sociality and of gamified consumption.

CHAPTER SIX: Practicing conviviality: 1970s to present day

This chapter considers a number of contemporary practices from the point of view of conviviality, as a distinct characteristic from both their capacity for social antagonism on the one hand, and social reproduction on the other. These practices boldly posit a number of alternative paradigms for both thinking and practicing 'being in common' in such a way as to not severing the pleasures of shared leisurely time from the politics that sustain them. One of the characteristics that these examples share is a certain reticence to fitting neatly within the parameters of descriptors of activity such as 'project', 'social experiment,' 'programme' or 'event,' all popular terms within the humanities and the social sciences. However, they do not lack a strong sense of politics, and indeed their insistence on allowing for a degree of unplanned 'play' within their unfolding is an important part of the way in which they function as convivial practice. For this reason, here they are referring as 'experiences,' recuperating an expression that is perhaps more commonly used in Romance languages to speak of specific political processes and events within broader socio-political processes. I share the difficulty of transposing this term, *esperienza*, from my native language, Italian, into English with Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza, who translated the texts from Colectivo Situaciones, one of the examples of militant conviviality discussed here. According to Holdren and Touza, in Spanish too the term *experiencia* can be used to refer to "singular, more or less organized groups, with flexible boundaries, involved in an ongoing emancipatory practice" and they specify that this word "connotes both experience, in the sense of accumulation of knowledges of resistance, and experiment, understood as a practice."⁴³⁶ While they chose to translate *experiencia* with 'experience/experiment', the following text will speak of experience to stress the intention of reclaiming this term from the way in which it has

⁴³⁶ Holdren, Nate and Touza, Sebastian "Introduction to Colectivo Situaciones", in *Ephemeris* journal , vol. 5 (4) 2005, 598.

been appropriated within experience economy model to signify a product rather than a practice. To speak of experiences further means to recuperate an idea of the cultural 'event' that is considered together with the interrelated processes of preparation that make it possible. Here, the notion of event ceases to describe the thrills of a spectacular occurrence but becomes something that has meaning in the long duration of collective memory. Finally, the term experience gestures to the lived, affective and embodied quality of their political efficacy, to their proximity with the ethics and aesthetics of the everyday.

This section focuses on two sets of experiences. The first series introduces a number of contemporary examples the span over the last two decades, since this arch of time has seen a significant proliferation of practices that explicitly reclaim the fostering of conviviality as a constituent element of militant action. Each of these contemporary practices will also function as an anchor, or entry point, to investigate the second set of experiences dating back from the period 1960s and 1970s that can be considered to constitute their antecedents in more or less direct manners. Taken together, these two sets of experiences map the contours of an epochal rupture from previous modes of thinking political action in modernity. The reason for juxtaposing contemporary instances of militant conviviality with their precursors developed during the 1960s and 1970s especially is not an attempt to create a linear history or a canon for the future. Instead, the chapter's narrative structure wanted to emphasise the points of resonance and indebtedness among singular experiences that might seem at a first glance exceptional or unique. Moreover, this stylistic gesture wants to contribute to what David Vercauteren, a contributor to one of the examples to follow, called the missing "*culture of antecedents*"⁴³⁷ within the autonomous left, a condition that negatively impact those organizers who, looking for new modes of caring for a collectivity, must reinvent the wheel rather than learn from the actions of others. Finally, both sets of

⁴³⁷ Vercauteren, Müller, and Crabbé, *Micropolitiques des groupes*, 17. My translation.

experiences, the recent as well as the ones from fifty years ago, will be examined to extrapolate a set of characteristic of an emerging militant conviviality, which will be detailed in the last chapter, and that might support practitioners dedicated to social justice across a variety of fields in the development of new forms of collective joy beyond the boredom of inherited formats (de-potentiated precisely because already recognizable as *formats*) and the ideology of spontaneism, or the belief in a natural capacity of people to feel good together.

One more necessary preamble before moving to the first experience. One of the available frameworks within anarchist political analysis understands practices as the ones to follow as “prefigurative,”⁴³⁸ in the sense that they are perceived to incarnate or sketch out the features of a future post-revolutionary society to come. By considering their traction against the grain of the gamification mechanisms adopted in marketing and, even more broadly, of the growth of a speculative interest which puts sociability to work, the present research wants to suggest that such practices can be more productively read as being *configurative*, rather than prefigurative. This means that their task is not so much to signify future possibilities or inspire visions for a future social justice to come, but to provide contexts, rather than contents, where the possibility of politically meaningful forms of life can be harboured in the present.

6.1 Counter-branding and the city : Serpica Naro, co-research and *centri sociali*

Serpica Naro is an experience developed since 2005 as a way of exposing and disrupting the conditions of precariousness within the glamorous

⁴³⁸For different uses of the idea of “prefigurative politics”, see: Graeber, David, “The New Anarchist”, *New Left Review* (13 Jan-Feb 2002); Vieta, Marcelo, “The New Cooperativism”, *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Summer 2010): 1-11; Bastani, Aaron J. “A New World in the Shell of the Old: prefigurative politics, direct action, education”, *OpenDemocracy* (13th May 2011). <http://www.opendemocracy.net> [accessed 16/05/2011].

high-end fashion system in Milan. The fashion industry represents an important part of the economy of Milan's district in Northern Italy: data reveals that some 12,000 companies involved in fashion production are based in this area, with the value of Italian fashion brands growing from 50 to 100 per cent between 2004 and 2008.⁴³⁹

Every year, the Milan Fashion Week marks the production cycle, offering an important market occasion for brands to present their new collections to major buyers. A variety of professional figures contributes to this event, some belonging to the fashion industry proper, such as fashion designers, tailors and models, and others situated within the broader communication industry (photographers, printers...) and service industries (hotel staff, chefs, hairdressers, florists...). Given the high profile of the Milan Fashion Week being recognized as one of the most important catwalks in the international circuit, the conditions of employment for many of these workers are less than ideal, and a lot of pressure is placed on them to contribute their professional skills in the name of a symbolic compensation or the opportunity to network rather than cash. Under-the-table agreements and mandatory free labour abound.

Such situation is indeed symptomatic of a broader mechanism embedded in the fashion industry as a whole: there is a vast pool of people who sustain it with their unrecognized labour, and out of this pool only a handful will be able to turn the market rule in their favour and become part of a profitable brand. This mechanism is perhaps best made explicit if we look at the production of new designs for high street collections: typically, a vast pool of designers is invited to contribute their ideas for free, and the brand subsequently only pays the designs that make it into production.

⁴³⁹ Both data quoted in Arvidsson, Adam, Giannino Malossi, and Serpica Naro. "Passionate work? Labour conditions in the Milan fashion industry." *Journal for Cultural Research* 14, no. 3 (2010): 295-309.

In this context, network that coalesced around Serpica Naro, comprising of around 200 precarious fashion workers and activists, managed to infiltrate a made-up, fictional young fashion designer into the prestigious young talents section of the Milan Fashion week. To an attentive reader, the political intentions of the initiative would have been clear from the name: Serpica Naro is in fact the anagram of Saint Precario (San Precario in Italian), a sister initiative around the theme of precarisation with strong roots in Milan and ramifications in Italy and abroad. However, for the purposes of the prank action they were preparing, Serpica Naro became the name of a plausibly real young and hot fashion designer of mixed British and Japanese background with an exuberant record of successful fashion collections to her credit. Her online persona and resume were prepared with care to look like the real thing, impeccable, as participants in the network created false reviews of her clothing lines and pictures of her products were inserted in spoof web portals of international women magazines. Initially, the activist who launched Serpica Naro as a "*cre/action*"⁴⁴⁰ enrolled her into the competition for young designers not hoping that they would be selected, so they simply planned a public statement about this fictional collective persona to represent the exploitative labour conditions of the fashion industry from sweatshops to precarious designers. However, once the inclusion in the show was surprisingly secured, the problem became how to play with the parameters and the format of the Milan Fashion Week in order to have an impact on the public perception of precarity. While to be included in the restricted circle of the Fashion week was a remarkable achievement in its own right, the Serpicas knew that young talents' shows are not in fact a very important component of the overall event, since VIPs, big buyers and the media tend to give precedence to events by other, more established labels. The question then became how to attract the attention of both the media and the actors within the fashion industry by effectively 'squatting'

⁴⁴⁰ Serpica Naro, "Serpica's Story", Serpica Naro website, <http://www.serpicanaro.com/serpica-story/serpica-naro-il-media-sociale> [accessed 18/09/2011], my translation.

the symbolic and very visible space they had conquered. At the same time however, the issue at stake was also the atomization of precarious workers involved in this sector, and the original crew wanted to create a process by which precarious subjects from various professions, some of which not directly linked with fashion but still connected with its production cycle, could come together and recognise their shared conditions of exploitation and possibilities for common action. It was at this point that the Serpica Naro network came up with the idea of staging an activist protest to disrupt their own upcoming fashion show, involving through informal word of mouth a lot of new people (some of which at their first experience of activism) to contribute to the various aspects of the production of the prank. Press releases announcing the protest action were sent to major newspapers and other media outlets declaring the outrage of an anonymous group of local militants from social centres enraged by Serpica Naro's appropriation of the street style coming from social movements and by the fact that the stylist wanted her catwalk to take place at the *centro sociale* Pergola (I will discuss what a *centro sociale* is in more detail later on), a squatted space incidentally located in one of the trendiest neighbourhoods of Milan. The hype that followed this news proved to be a successful tactic: with police cordoning off the Serpica Naro catwalk area, journalists arrived in flocks attracted by the potential confrontation, and VIPs followed suit, eager to secure their share of media attention. However, instead of a confrontation between activists and personnel, the imaginable happened: the activists peacefully joined the fashion workers in a collective celebration and denunciation of precarity and exploitation in the industry, while models paraded a unique collection of clothes 'for a precarious living', which included bags for shoplifting (for when ends don't meet), transformable suits for those juggling multiple jobs at the same time and pregnancy-concealing camisoles (it is common practice in Italy to terminate or fail to renew the contracts of pregnant women to avoid paying for their maternity leave). After this initial ironic intervention, the experience of Serpica Naro continued as an open collective operating under the same name, which

got involved in a number of other activities – including a space fitted with sewing machines for convivial and sustainable fashion production and a number of itinerant tailoring workshops among other - both still active at the time of writing. In 2010 Serpica Naro also conducted a co-investigation of the workers in the fashion sector in Milan, producing quantitative data about this specific population for the first time (an anomaly given the importance of this industry for this city). But perhaps most importantly in the context of our discussion is that this crew came up with the idea of the *meta-brand* as an alternative and antidote to the empire of fashion brands. The collective describes the meta-brand as a tool for collectively appropriating the symbolic and communicative power of big brands, while also allowing for a more equal redistribution of wealth among workers and creators. Using existing creative common licences as a starting point, Serpica Naro registered its name and logo as a meta-brand available for use to all those independent and precarious fashion workers who want to use Serpica's symbolic capital and designs. While the meta-brand encouraged people to share its logo to make its value grow, limitations were placed to protect the brand from misuse or exploitations that would prevent others in the network from re-using new materials generated under its name. This means that small individual fashion producers and makers could use Serpica Naro logo and symbolic capital to promote and market their own work, but also that sharing each other's designs was encouraged within the network. An online community was also created, to facilitate collaborations and the exchange of designs, and more generally to provide a different kind of network, where shared collections would be produced in collaboration, and where conditions of labour and life could be openly placed under scrutiny and alternatives explored. In this respect, they were one of the first activist circuits to reflect around the brand and propose an alternative counter-paradigm to it, in a way that confronted the issue of remuneration head on, pushing the conversation further in this sense compared to comparable activist initiatives that focused on anonymous authorship, such as the Luther

Blissett project, for instance.⁴⁴¹ More recently, Serpica Naro has begun a steady collaboration with various actors of the digital fabrication network. This is a new movement often associated with the experience of Fab Labs, a movement originally conceived at MIT of small-scale workshops equipped with digitally operated machines and tools for productions that allow a community to directly produce various kinds of products such as 3Dprinted prototypes, laser-cut wearables, chairs made out of recycled cardboard and repurposed old kitchen appliances, all objects with a quality and technical complexity previously exclusive to industrial productions.⁴⁴² The open source processor Arduino is enabling such experiences of co-design and independent production to operate in complete autonomy from proprietary software. While some FabLabs are not overtly political in their mission, other realities such as WeFab and WeMake (Serpica Naro's partners in recent workshops), openly embrace the more radical possibility offered by such shared resources, as they represent a very concrete solution towards the literal re-appropriation of the means of production. Within the digital fabrication movement, Serpica Naro is acting as a graft between the 'geekier' world of engineers and hackers of the digital fabrication movement with the makers and designers with an interest in fashion, typically less versed in the use of industrial laser cutters but ultimately the real potential users of such collectively owned production tools.

It is important to remark that Serpica was not prepared as a preconceived campaign, but the course of action grew during the experience itself out of the ideas of those involved and the analysis of the actual circumstances in which the action unfolded. This characteristic of the experience is

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Deseriis, Marco "'Lots of Money Because I am Many:' The Luther Blissett Project and the Multiple-Use Name Strategy". In *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas and Possibilities*, edited by Begum O. Firat and Aylin Kuryel. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 65-94.

⁴⁴² Mikhak, Bakhtiar, et al. "Fab Lab: an alternate model of ICT for development." Paper presented at the *2nd international conference on open collaborative design for sustainable innovation*. (2002).

important as participation in Serpica Naro did not mean to join a pre-packaged campaign, but to participate in collective play and have a say about what would happen. While Serpica Naro's CV was made up, the clothes and accessories that formed her body of work were not fictional, they were real items created by real participants involved with Serpica. In this sense, it is possible to argue that Serpica Naro evolved into an open-ended play-form that utilised a convivial mode of politicization of the fashion sector. Every time it denounced or critiqued an industry standard, it also proposed an alternative way for reorganising production more efficiently and justly. Moreover, the conviviality mode of organizing was key for bringing together a diverse range of fashion workers irrespectively from the strength or weakenss of their position within the industry. Serpica recruited through its informal networks designers, tailors, models, photographers, computer programmers, graphic designers and others who work in marketing and communication. The collaboration offered a chance to reflect on the issues of insecurity and competition afflicting each of these segments of production, and to find similarities in the experience of life and labour across various specializations. At the same time, Serpica offered to all those involved the possibility to experience what it would mean to produce a fashion collection through relations of non labour. Participants generated for themselves a context where to valorise their creative talents and professional skills not for servicing a market that would randomly compensate only a few among them, but in order to expose its very devices of alienation and exploitation, and such mode of cooperation resulted in a more equal redistribution of symbolic and material value. In order to better understand the importance of conviviality found in Serpica Naro, it is useful to contextualize this experience within the recent history of Italian social movements, particularly with those connected with the history of co-inquiry, the Movement of '77 and the birth of Italian social centres.

Workers' Inquiry And Co-Research

The practice of co-research emerged as a methodology of self-organization within the context of the Italian autonomous and Operaist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, who were inspired by the original workers' inquiry that Marx wrote for *La Revue socialiste* in 1880.⁴⁴³ Adopted by groups gathered around journals such as *Quaderni Rossi* in Italy or *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, co-research was primarily a tool for militants wanting to learn more on the living conditions of the industrial working classes without reproducing the power/knowledge division between experts and subjects of the research. Although some co-investigation took place in neighbourhoods (involving housewives or students), for the most part it took place at the edges of the factory turf of major plants in the north of Italy – such as Fiat in Turin and Olivetti in Ivrea for instance. In concrete terms, co-investigation was an excuse to facilitate a series of friendly, disinterested conversations between militant researchers and factory workers outside the factory gates. These informal encounters would take place over a protracted period of time, adapting to the rhythms of the shift rotation. The militant researchers would approach workers and begin by getting to know them, asking questions about their daily lives and striking informal conversations about the problems affecting them. These conversations were the basis for a process of analysis of the structural injustices that affected the workers and a common elaboration of what could be done, together, to change them. Examined as a form of knowledge formation, these conversations also marked the limits of power/knowledge of the academic social researchers (including those who were politically active within the communist party), who had to make themselves open to re/thinking their theoretical assumptions about the proletariat, the role of the avant-gardes and the modalities of political organizing. In the context of co-investigation,

⁴⁴³ Marx, Karl. "A Workers' Inquiry", first published in *La Revue socialiste* (April 20, 1880); English translation available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/04/20.htm> [accessed 23/07/2010].

conviviality was used to reclaim the validity of political relevance of the lived experience away from positivist methodologies of social research. For Tronti and other participants of *Autonomia*, the presumed neutrality of social sciences was precisely what justified the techniques of industrial management as rational in their insisting exclusively on the measurement of productivity (indeed, the propensity of workers to engage with each other for pleasurable purposes – joking, messing around - was one of the main targets of managerial techniques of surveillance and punishment in this phase).⁴⁴⁴ Aside from its critique of social sciences, the most radical aspect of co-investigations was its capacity to invent a new convivial space at the factory gates that was participated by militant social researchers and workers alike, changing each of these subjects. In a recent interview, Franco Berardi Bifo, who participated in a co-inquiry at the FIAT plant in Mirafiori in 1973, reported a significant anecdote in this sense:

Paradoxically, I have first encountered drugs during the occupation of Mirafiori in Turin, that is, I found out, because these guys from the inside would tell me, that inside Fiat's departments people were smoking joints; since I was coming from the idea that drugs are a danger for the integrity of the proletariat, all of a sudden I was discovering that instead they were a way to reduce the rhythms of production and so on. So, there, the occupation of Mirafiori, I have experienced it as a kind of explosion of not-at-all-Bolshevik and very hippie behaviours, very much 'Seventy-seven' ahead of times; then, when I heard talks of metropolitan Indians in '77 it always comes to my mind that the first metropolitan Indians I have met

⁴⁴⁴ Within the ferment that accompanied the critique of scientific rationalism within philosophy of science, the notion of 'tacit knowledge' expressed a similar principle to the one that informed the epistemology of co-investigation. Tacit knowledge was first discussed by Michael Polanyi, a theorist influential to philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn in his own formulation of the structure of scientific revolutions. Incidentally, it is worth noticing that Polanyi took an interest in the rhetoric of "conviviality" in order to explain how scientific knowledge is practiced and transmitted via the social sharing of tacit knowledge. See Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge. Towards A Post-Critical Philosophy*, (University of Chicago Press, 1962), especially chapter 7, "Conviviality."

were in Turin in '73, these ones who would put a red string around their head, would form pickets in which no one would shout slogans that would make sense, they would say the most complete absurdities, walking around with drums etc.⁴⁴⁵

Co-research is predicated upon three main points: it recognizes the daily experiences of people as a valid and necessary instrument of critical reflection. Secondly, by involving the subjects (often workers) in both formulating the analysis of the situation and inventing the most suitable action in response, it establishes the modification of life's condition for the better (as judged by its subjects) as one criteria to assess social research.⁴⁴⁶ And finally, it advocated against a positivist idea of a neutral social research.

There were two different strands of co-research within Italian Autonomia, and their differentiation implicated two different understandings of the political role of conviviality. There was a majority group who understood co-research to be an efficient new sociological method able to bring the hidden aspects of the workers' conditions to the fore, in the service of a renovation within the communist party, which would have allowed its members to renovate their orthodoxy without breaking with its basic organizing principles. The names of Vittorio Rieser, Dino de Palma, Edda Salvatori, Dario and Liliana Lanzardo are connected to this tendency. The ambiguities of this first kind of co-research emerges clearly when compared with the interest in workers' feedback and participation that management thinking was beginning to explore at the same time.⁴⁴⁷ On

⁴⁴⁵ Berardi, Franco (Bifo). Interview for the co-investigation "Futuro Anteriore. Dai Quaderni Rossi ai movimenti globali: ricchezze e limiti dell'operaismo italiano" (19 November 2000). My translation. http://www.autistici.org/operaismo/berardi/2_1.htm [accessed 07/08/2011].

⁴⁴⁶ This way for establishing validity is also discussed as "face validity" within social science methodology, and it has been proposed as one of the fundamental criteria for emancipatory social research, see for instance Lather, Patti. "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place", *Interchange* vol.17, No. 4 (Winter 1986): 63-84.

⁴⁴⁷ For example, see Elton Mayo's massively influential work on 'human relations' developed around the same time in the context of industrial psychology in the USA. Cf.

the other hand, the minoritarian trajectory of Danilo Montaldi, Romano Alquati and Mario Tronti, was closer to the anarchic unionist practices of the Wobblies in the USA and rejected the idea of party politics as a separate sphere of organization in favour of a vision of the political as the autonomous self-organization of the social.

Movement of 1977

The experiences of co-investigation (minoritarian strand) within Autonomia were the prelude to a more fundamental turmoil that was going to produce a deep metamorphosis across the Left. When the Movement of '77 explodes, initiated by groups of autonomous students especially based in Rome and Bologna, its main interest is no longer the method of establishing truth, but the quest for a new paradigm of both knowledge and action based on the assumption that there is no necessary proletarian truth to be discovered, but a multitude of truths to be created as a function of the social. Within a rapidly changing context of Post Fordism, traditional institutions no longer spoke to the experience of the new generation who was the target of the 'happiness society' discourse propelled by brands and marketing. The Movement of '77 came together in part as a reaction to the austerity measures promoted in response to the oil crisis of 1973 and supported by the Communist Party and the official Unions. The second half of the 1970s was characterized internationally by a strong recession and economic contraction. In Italy, the Communist Party faced the crisis by lending its support to the political line of the leading Christian Democratic Party (the so called 'historic compromise'). One of the fundamental characterizing traits differentiating the Movement of '77 from the cycle of struggles of 1968 was thus the rejection of the party and the union as effective forms of political

Mayo, Elton. *The social problems of an industrial civilization: With an appendix on the political problem.* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).

organization, which in turn ignited a more radical rejection of the idea of the *political* as expressed by traditional institutions. Against the call to sacrifice coming from the official Left, and against its ritualised formats of protest and assembly, the Movement of '77 went on a quest for a politics able to reclaim pleasure and abundance in everyday life for everyone. According to the *Centro di documentazione dei movimenti Francesco Lorusso - Carlo Giuliani* (a Bologna-based documentation and archive centre for and about social movements), much of the experience of '77 was lost in the official left wing historiography. Too often, they complain, this movement got simplistically split: "on one side the creative, ironic groups, basically the 'good ones', on the other side the violent groups, more politicized, basically the 'bad ones'", leading to the formation of armed groups.⁴⁴⁸ The account of Judith Malina (from the Living Theater collective) of the events of Bologna on 13th of July 1977 support this critique:

It's eleven thirty as we enter the piazza walking between lines of heavily armed men into a scene of innocent pleasures. There are only a few police scattered in the piazza, only as many as one would see on a normal night in summer. The rest of the scene is almost Paradisial. There are people singing, talking, dancing, playing ball...a large white ball like a peace dove keeps flitting in a huge ark over the piazza. The women tend again towards soft summer clothes, and Indian cloth, linens, flowered skirts brighten the scene. [...]Sing, dance and think of summer dresses: this is not the death dance of Antigone's city, this is the dance of vita...⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ Centro di documentazione dei movimenti Francesco Lorusso - Carlo Giuliani, "Per una ricerca sul movimento del Settantasette" (Press release, 9 March 2006), http://www.vag61.info/vag61/articles/art_126.html [accessed 19/01/2009].

⁴⁴⁹ Malina, Judith. "Nonviolence in Bologna", *The Diaries: Brazil, 1970, Bologna, 1977* (Department of Theatre, Dartington College of Art, 1979), re-printed in *Autonomia. Post Political Politics*, edited by Lotringere, Sylvere and Christian Marazzi, (Semiotext(e), 1980), 125.

The account undoubtedly romanticises the scene; however, the situation described remains remarkable as the square in question was being surrounded by heavily armed police forces who had issued an ultimatum to end the occupation and were ready to brutally suppress the occupation of the square (Malina reports that one of Living Theatre's members was later arrested in the same context). Despite the dominant depiction of this time as the *'anni di piombo'* (the lead years), which sought to split the movement between its more creative or artistic sides (later assimilated within the pop culture of the '80s) and the more violent and terrorist factions, cultural and violent forms of militancy contaminated each other in individual biographies. The peculiarity of '77 in Italy was that the creative side was during that phase as radical as the violent militancy option. It was a struggle over the meaning and ownership of the new forms of sociality emerging in a society becoming disjointed with traditional forms of community and aggregation on the one hand, but also a society discovering the limits of industrialism and rational organization. One of the examples of how the movement of 1977 engaged in this struggle to protect the convivial realm can be seen in the refusal of the rhetoric of sacrifice that was the dominant one proposed by the official left parties and unions (a rhetoric reminiscent of today's discourse around austerity). While in 1968 counter-culture was practiced as a form of anti-consumerism, the protagonists of 1977 refused to practice sociality as a marginal alternative to the society of abundance, and were very much against the register of self-imposed frugality. In one example, a flyer distributed in Milan during one of the many 'autoreductions'⁴⁵⁰ taking place at the time proclaimed:

The young refuse "necessary sacrifices".

⁴⁵⁰ An autoreduction is a planned or spontaneous collective action by which consumers take it upon themselves to reduce, at a collectively agreed level, the price of a good or service.

We are here to denounce the "society of sacrifices", as in '68 we were in front of the Bussola and La Scala denouncing the "society of consumption".

We are here today to reaffirm the right of all proletarians to take all that the bourgeois reserved for themselves: luxuries, privileges, theatres, cinema, restaurants, dancing halls.

We reaffirm the right to enjoy the same privileges that the bourgeoisie keeps for itself. The right to luxury, to pleasure, to roses, and not only bread.⁴⁵¹

What the Movement of '77 highlighted was the deep and uncomfortable ambivalence of conviviality during that epochal change. On the one hand, the industrial age had succeeded in eradicating forms of "inefficient" modes of vernacular cultural production enmeshed in local communities, while on the other it was re-instituting the value of conviviality by recreating it as a commodity, and thus as an object of economic scarcity (no longer the symptom of the excess creative forces of the social). The luxury and abundance evoked in the leaflet were important not because the movements wanted to obtain greater access to consumer goods, but because they understood that the last fragments of plebeian collective joy that still survived within working class culture were being eradicated and reconstructed as bespoke lifestyle products that only the wealthy could aspire to.

Centri sociali

Finally, one of the most important and long lasting outcomes of the Movement of '77 was the birth of *centri sociali* (also abbreviated in *csoa* – *centri sociali occupati autogestiti*, translatable as 'squatted and self-

⁴⁵¹ Quoted in Consorzio Aaster, Centro sociale Cox18, Centro sociale Leoncavallo and Piero Moroni, *Centri Sociali: geografie del desiderio* (Shake edizioni underground, 1995), 172. My translation.

managed social centres'), a new kind of institution explicitly dedicated to experimentations with the convivial politics of sociality. *Centri sociali* are spaces – often squatted factories or closed schools – where one or more militant collectives organize a mix of political, social and cultural activities in an autonomous fashion. They were first developed at the end of the 1970s out of the model of the *centri di proletariato giovanile* (Proletarian Youth Clubs), a slightly different form of association that lasted for a brief season in the mid-Seventies. Both experiences – *centri di proletariato giovanile* first and *csoa* – marked a crucial point of break with the modern idea of the People's Huses – *Case del Popolo* in Italian – the leisure and cultural centres created by the Communist Party on the model of the Northern European and Russian equivalents. While the aim of the latter was the education of the working classes,⁴⁵² the *csoa* saw themselves as spaces for the militant self-preservation of collective practices outside of capitalism. The *csoa* Leoncavallo collective (Milan), wrote, in a 1995 co-investigation:

We are also far from the vision of *csoa* as a ritualization of the *case del popolo* [...] The *case del popolo*, in fact, despite having played an extraordinary role in the history of the labour movement as places of sociality and territorial points of reference and of 'capture' of the class, delegated the most strictly political functions to the party or the trade union.⁴⁵³

However *centri sociali* represent also an historical break from the *centri di proletariato giovanile*.⁴⁵⁴ For Primo Moroni, the latter were the last expression of a 20th century relation between plebeian sociability and the

⁴⁵² Degl'Innocenti, Maurizio. *Le case del popolo in Europa: dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale*. (Sansoni, 1984).

⁴⁵³ Consorzio Aaster, et al., *Centri Sociali: geografie del desiderio*, 99. My translation.

⁴⁵⁴ To give an example of the short-lived exuberance of the phenomenon, Primo Moroni reports that 52 of them were opened in Milan alone between 1975 and 1976. – Cf. Moroni, Piero, "Un certo uso sociale dello spazio urbano", in *Centri Sociali: geografie del desiderio*, 172, My translation.

accumulation of capital in the city. As long as the elites had their territory clearly demarcated in the prestigious locations of the city centre they took an active disinterest in the manifestations of other kinds of social productivity with led to the opening of *centri di proletariato giovanile* in the periphery. However, the ambition of the *centri di proletariato giovanile* was to move closer and closer to the centre, to conquer the symbolic space of power. According to Moroni,

For anyone who knows the city it is evident that the inhabitants of the city of "abandonment" (the suburbs) in the South area find themselves with an approach to the city centre that is for a large part "amicable" and convivial. Amicability and conviviality are ensured by both the chain of shops, for a large part of medium-low profile - and thus corresponding to the purchasing power of the buyers from the suburbs - and by the uninterrupted series of gathering and entertainment venues (pubs, taverns, bars, bowls clubs, etc.).⁴⁵⁵

The passage from the *centri di proletariato giovanile* to the *csoa* marks the dissolution of the familiar duality city centre/periphery. The city centre was no longer approachable via an amicable experience, and simultaneously it ceased to be the symbolic locus of power. The city was becoming a metropolitan social factory, and *csoa* were resisting such reconfiguration of the material and existential spaces of creativity, understanding self-organized cultural and social activities as immediately militant, as political actions and not propaedeutic to it. The important aspect was the invention of modes of convivial interaction, rather than the achievement of a coherent aesthetic. Finally, the subjectivity of the youth involved in *csoa* was also different from those of both *case del popolo* and *centri di proletariato giovanile*. Primo Moroni summarized their profile effectively in the following passage:

⁴⁵⁵Ibid., 165.

The youth of the circles are for the vast majority children of proletarians, many of them were initiated to work at a very early age (14-15 years old). The neighbourhood recognizes them as its own. Spontaneously they feel that something has ended. Their fathers and their older brothers have memories of struggles and imaginaries of distant utopias to be implemented at an undefined later moment. But to them it seems that the immediate memory of the previous cycle of struggle has not changed their future prospects and their need for happiness that much. They do not have and do not believe in future horizons: they desire almost spasmodically the "here and now" realization of "spaces" of happiness and full, direct, conscious communication. It can be said that the "'invention of the present" starts with them and will be prolonged in time throughout the Eighties.⁴⁵⁶

For the *csoa* goer, conviviality plays a much more important role in the production of subjectivity as she does not come from other experiences of *communitas* such as the comradeship of partisan guerrilla. The self-organization of experiences of reciprocal satisfaction was the political project in this phase. The Leoncavallo collective commented:

Self-management (autogestione), self-organization, autonomous production, self-financing are the pounding words echoing in *csoa*. The self-management model that pervades every level of their activity is not what comes from the anarchist or from Tito's traditions. It is not so much a model that refers to another society or to a form of cooperation that proudly reclaims/defends a correspondence between social production and political direction, but it is the constitutive practice that measures cultural, social, political, existential autonomy against dominant canons. Not so much another 'against-power' or 'a-different-power', but an

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 170.

'another-from-power', which challenges its right to colonize every vital space and to metabolize it in the form of commodified relationship.

To conclude, the experience of co-research, Movement of '77 and *centri sociali* provides the context in which some of the convivial tools deployed in the experience of Serpica Naro first acquired their meaning a form of politics that sees collective play, irony, self-organization and reciprocity as valuable elements of a counter-conduct against capitalist governance. Serpica Naro can be said to have re-elaborated in a contemporary manner some of the key devices that Italian Autonomia invented for protecting conviviality as a counter-conduct: on the epistemological level, its use of co-investigation as a tool not only for socializing knowledge but also for creating the possibility of encounter and composition, for inventing a new collective subject; as the Movement of '77, it played with and against power and it reclaimed pleasure and abundance as part of a new frontier of struggle; and finally, it proved the importance that the ambiances for conviviality provided in social centres have for supporting struggles across a different temporality than that of movements.

6.2 Collective Translations: *Colectivo Situaciones* and participatory action research

Colectivo Situaciones has already been introduced in earlier chapter as a collective author, but here we will focus more specifically on their practice as an example of militant conviviality that intercepts and actualizes the legacy of Participatory Action Research, a movement started in Latin America during 1970s which had important pedagogical, methodological and epistemological repercussions worldwide. *Colectivo Situaciones* came together in the late 1990s. Alongside a publishing house (Tinta Limon), the collective is involved in longer processes of what they address as 'militant research' involving a number of constituencies in long-term

collaborations. These include the association of the children of the *desaparecidos* H.I.J.O.S., the *campesino* group *MoCaSE*, the art collective *Grupo de Arte Callejero*, the free school *Creciendo Juntos*, and other social movements in Bolivia, Mexico and other Latin American countries.

The members of *Colectivo Situaciones* met in the context of *El Mate*, a left student group in Buenos Aires, Argentina, that wanted to recover/rediscover the legacy of Latin American revolutionary thinkers from the 1960s and 1970s. The group is not an open collective (members are also close friends and in personal relations with each other); however in their activities they frequently intersect with other groups, constituencies, movements and associations. The collective first came together in the context of the Movements of Unemployed Workers (*Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados* or MTDs) of early 1990s, as Argentina was entering a deep socioeconomic crisis brought about by the aggressive neoliberal reforms implemented in the country. Especially significant was the encounter with the MTD of Solano, in the immediate south of Buenos Aires, one of the movements initiated by unemployed people who did not find their needs and requests met by traditional political institutions, not even by trade unions who kept focused on industrial workers. MTD Solano was particularly proactive in finding new ways of organizing, initiating collaborations with local university students to understand the structural changes of neoliberalism affecting them, the impossibility of a nostalgic return to full employment, but also to learn about collective decision making from students at the faculty of psychology. The movement cultivated a self-reflexivity, meeting not only to discuss strategies, but also to learn and think together.⁴⁵⁷

Colectivo Situaciones thus emerged out of this encounter as the group of university students interfacing with social movements begun to question their own practices both as militants and as researchers. With an ironic

⁴⁵⁷ Mason-Deese, Liz . 'From Decomposition to Inquiry: Militant Research in Argentina's MTDs', *Viewpoint Magazine*, (September 25, 2013). Available online at <http://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/25/from-decomposition-to-inquiry-militant-research-in-argentinass-mtds/> [accessed 30/10/2013]

gesture, they call their new way of organizing and thinking together 'militant research,' reappropriating both terms from which they wished to depart so as to problematise their investment in Truth and Power. The idea of 'situation' that the group chose for their name is different from the one of Situationism, as it expresses the desire to find new procedures for collective action and thinking "in and from"⁴⁵⁸ pre-existing situations (not to invent ones), without relaying on preconceived allegiances to ideological constructs, as in the case of the "sad militants,"⁴⁵⁹ who would valorise each situation only to the extent that it fits a preconceived strategy. *Colectivo Situaciones* also wanted to question the academic faith in standard procedures of social researchers, for whom the situations of real life exist only to the extent that they can confirm pre-existing systems of knowledge. The concept of situation as used by *Colectivo Situaciones* intersects that of the Situationist International insofar as it identifies the situation as the unit of political transformation of life in a revolutionary sense.

In order to avoid the creation of another myth of methodology, *Colectivo Situaciones* are particularly recalcitrant to the idea of sharing concrete information about their approach to practice. They insist on developing the exercises and games that they use for their workshops out of each context in which they are active, and they do not comment on these much in public. On top of their distrust of standardized methods of facilitation, members of the group are also equally critical of a certain modality of self-narration where collectives end up relating a "history of 'happy decisions' ",⁴⁶⁰ inventing a consistency among facts and episodes that did not in fact exist in reality ('We did this ...and so this happened as a

⁴⁵⁸ Colectivo Situaciones, "Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions" *Ephemeris, theory and politics in organization*, volume 5(4): 602-614 (2005), 605.

⁴⁵⁹ Benasayag, Miguel and Sztulwark, Diego. *Política y Situación: De la Potencia al Contrapoder* (Buenos Aires: De mano en mano, 2000).

⁴⁶⁰ *Colectivo Situaciones*, "Something More on Research Militancy", 606.

result'). For this reason too, *Colectivo Situaciones'* own writing shies away from anecdotes in favour of a more theoretical elaboration of events.

Taking into account the considerations outlined above, what follows is an account of *Colectivo Situaciones'* practice based on a personal experience with the group in 2009, when as part of the Micropolitics Research Group, we invited them to facilitate a workshop at Goldsmiths College, London. The event was part of a series that aimed at facilitating a practice exchange around work with different constituencies and ways of understanding militancy in research practice. On this occasion, the three members of *Situaciones* who were present wished to share the video documentation of their ongoing practice with youth from a Bolivian background living in a peripheral neighbourhood of Buenos Aires in destitute conditions. Together with these teenagers, members of the *Colectivo Situaciones* investigated the discriminatory perceptions they face when travelling to the city centre or when addressed as 'Bolivian' (this nationality having a negative connotation in Argentina).

While participants responded positively to the rare chance of watching the filmed material, there was a problem with the language of the video, as no English subtitles were available. *Colectivo Situaciones* therefore proposed to collaboratively respond to the crisis by engaging in what they called a "collective translation:" those who understood Spanish were asked to scatter around the room to be within reach of all the others. The video was then played in short sessions of around 5 minutes, and then stopped to allow for the collective translation to take place. The collective translation generated a convivial dynamic, unusual for the kind of codes that normally regulated expected behaviours in the context of an academic seminar in London. Some people from Latin America began to explain the nuances of certain slang expressions, providing information about the cultural milieu and background of places shown in the video; some others disagreed on the meaning of certain terms and what they signified for the situation of the kids. After a few rounds of video and translations, even those who did not understand Spanish began to speak

to offer their own specific analysis based purely on the visual cues of the film: since they could not understand the language, they focused on the gestures, expression and postures of the protagonists, enriching the overall discussion with more layers of signification. By the end of the seminar, some participants were discussing what they saw in the video in relation to their own experiences of migration and discrimination in the UK. During the event, the facilitation of *Colectivo Situaciones* was rather minimal; they spoke sparsely and seldom attempted to conduct the conversation flow towards specific topics. The simple mechanism of collective translation provoked a cascade of reciprocal generosity and activated the self-organizational capacities of the workshop attendees, using the very hitch that characterised the limits of the situation (the lack of subtitles) to do it.

The collective translation was effective in that particular context precisely because it was not introduced as a game of sort, but it was an opportunity for open-ended play; the collective translation was an exercise with no measurable predetermined outcome, and in this sense it allowed participants to modify its rules as they went along, until they found a common mode of self-organizing around what they wanted to discuss. The proposal of *Colectivo Situaciones* invited participation in the discussion by allowing room for vulnerability, for not knowing and not understanding, for publicly admitting doubt around the interpretation of a certain world or scene in the video. As participants discussed their own encounters with stereotype and racism in relation to the ones emerging in the video, the binaries between personal experience and political elaboration were loosened. And even though the seminar was a one-day project, these conversations planted the seeds for some consistency to form against the dispersive character of academic events, because the conversations placed participants in relation to each other and not simply in relation to critical theory. Indeed, the London seminar offers an effective example of *Colectivo Situaciones'* distinctive approach to militant research, which they described in a number of occasions as ultimately consisting of the

activation of “the production of values of a new non-capitalist sociability”⁴⁶¹ and “the organization and production of new vital forms of sociability,”⁴⁶² one that corresponds to what is called here militant conviviality. This understanding of “the exercise of resistance as creation of sociability”⁴⁶³ is rooted in an ethics that does not (and cannot, in the context of the flexible subjectivities produced by the experience industries) assume political identity as a starting point, and this is a trait they share with the legacy of popular education movements that animated the Latin American context since the 1970s.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Participatory Action Research

Pedagogy of the Oppressed of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as developed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda are two of the most significant experiences within the radical education movements of 1970s’ Latin America. Although the first was more interested in popular education and the latter in revolutionizing the paradigms of the social sciences, they both regarded teaching and researching as indissolubly linked to each other and to a process of social justice.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who established an international reputation as a proponent of critical pedagogy, especially in the realm of adult literacy and popular education processes. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,⁴⁶⁴ inspired by a reflection on the *Movimento de Cultura Popular* in Recife where Freire was active in the 1950s and 1960s, is considered to be one of the most quoted educational texts around the

⁴⁶¹ Colectivo Situaciones, 19 & 20. *Notes on a New Social Protagonism*. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2002), 100.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 74.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁶⁴ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. (New York: Continuum, 1970).

world.⁴⁶⁵ His theories of radical popular education were further rendered internationally famous as they constituted the theoretical basis for the elaboration of the Theatre of the Oppressed,⁴⁶⁶ a participatory theatrical method created by director Augusto Boal in 1973 as a means to support self-organization amongst the poorest Brazilian communities. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes the relation between oppressed and oppressors in terms of an identification of the oppressed with the values, aesthetics and forms of life of the oppressors. On their part, however, oppressors cannot be existentially satisfied either, as “in the egoistic pursuit of having as a possessing class, they suffocate in their own possessions and no longer are; they merely have.”⁴⁶⁷ Freire’s premises are partly reminiscent of a Gramscian analysis of the cultural hegemony of the elites, and partly recall the conception of the body as a collection of properties and propriety and the relation to self as one of self-possession described as the limit of exclusive modes of sociability. For Freire, the powerful subject is impotent, while possibility of change lies, in each situation, in the hands of those who are oppressed. This basic relation constitutes the principal dynamic that Freire activates in the pedagogical situation, where educators and learners must prevent the reiteration of hierarchy and of a cumulative idea of knowledge, understood as a ‘banking’ model where notions and models of comportment are simply transferred. Instead, Freire recommends a dialogic mode of pedagogy, organized around conversations between students and teachers to address the different powers that impact their reciprocal relations. In his classes Freire, who was particularly active in adult literacy programmes, taught to read and write words that would have the most transformative impact in the life of

⁴⁶⁵ Smith, Mark. K. (1997, 2002) ‘Paulo Freire and informal education’, *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, <http://infed.org/mobi/paulo-freire-dialogue-praxis-and-education/> [accessed 12/12/2013].

⁴⁶⁶ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Transl. Charles A. & Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. (*Theatre Communications Group, New York, 1979*) (originally published in Spanish as *Teatro de Oprimido*, Ediciones de la Flor, Buenos Aires, 1973).

⁴⁶⁷ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 59.

his students – such as the content of employment contracts, for example – because, in his view, the creative act of *naming the world* is the first step for understanding our capacity to act in it:

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.⁴⁶⁸

In other words, having access to the right vocabulary means being able to create an object of reflection in conversations, out of which a collectivity is born. Following the initial stage of shared reflection around common conditions, the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* identifies a second pedagogical step of moving into action, followed by a third phase of analysis of the deed/s and its outcomes, which in turn becomes the first phase of reflection inaugurating a new cycle, and so on. For Henri Giroux, an influential educator who translated the Freirian tradition in the North American context, at the core of this project there is “a view of citizenship education based on a different view of sociability and social relations than those that presently exist.”⁴⁶⁹ The *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* situated the production of knowledge in social conflict, seeing the classroom (or the theatrical event, in the case of the Theatre of the Oppressed) as convivial ambiances where the social body can gain an autonomous consistency, forging new values, pleasures and relationships. Freire’s work presents many points of contact with another major contribution to contemporary militant conviviality in the educational context, that of participatory action research (PAR). This framework for

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁶⁹ Giroux, Henry. “Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 10, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), 347.

conducting social research was first proposed by Orlando Fals-Borda, a Colombian sociologist. Fals-Borda, a Sociology professor at the university of Bogota, Colombia, first theorized PAR as a methodology for social research whilst looking for an alternative paradigm for conducting social research. He wanted the latter to empower not only the researchers and commissioning decision makers, but first and foremost the constituencies that were the subjects of the research. Aside of his academic role, Fals-Borda too, like Freire, was connected with peasant movements in Latin America, particularly with the resistance guerrilla against the regime of Julio César Turbay Ayala in the 1970s. His definition of PAR describes it as a

complex process, which also includes adult education, situation diagnosis, critical analysis and practice as the sources of knowledge [...] PAR is not exclusively research oriented, that it is not only adult education or only socio-political action. It encompasses all these aspects together as three stages or emphases which are not necessarily consecutive. They may be combined into an experiential methodology, that is a process of personal and collective behaviour occurring within a satisfying and productive cycle of life and labour.⁴⁷⁰

PAR, described as an 'experiential methodology for collective behaviour,' articulated, as early as the 1970s, the question of experience as a political matter, understanding that the modes of togetherness of popular cultures were something that modernity had to eradicate. For this reason, PAR provided an effective vocabulary and methodological toolkit for a number of social researchers active in a global south that was undergoing the process of de-colonization and becoming exposed to the new domination of global financial capital at the time. Although PAR was developed in the specific context of Latin American peasant and indigenous struggles, in resonance with the activist clergy connected with Liberation theology, it

⁴⁷⁰ Fals Borda, Orlando. *Knowledge and people's power: lessons with peasants in Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia*. (Indian Social Institute, 1985), 93.

soon spread to other regions of the global south, such as Bangladesh through the work of Mohammad Anisur Rahman (former ILO member and founder of the research funding agency Research Initiatives - Bangladesh) and Zimbabwe, thanks to Sithembiso Nyoni (sociologist and former Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises Development). The initial impetus of PAR was in fact a reaction and a critique to the dominant tendency within so-called 'developing' countries to adapt to the requirements of Research and Development (R&D), an economic planning framework that industrializing nations were pressured to adopt since the 1950s. In the context of R&D, social research and social policy become subordinated to the capitalist imperative of economic growth and state consolidation, regarding the traditional ways of living of local populations as obstacles to its progress. In contrast, Fals-Borda hoped that PAR could be "a new brand of ethnogenesis,"⁴⁷¹ a way to defend the right of combating extreme poverty without giving up on the possibility of desiring autonomous futures.

Fals-Borda compiled a comprehensive summary of PAR practical approaches, which he called 'techniques', in *Knowledge and People's Power*, a study prepared for the International Labour Office within the framework of the World Employment Programme in 1988. Here, Fals-Borda narrates in detail three PAR projects in Colombian, Mexican and Nicaraguan rural communities carried out between 1972 and 1983. Since the second section of the study is actually dedicated to "base groups" and intended to provide a basic training for researchers who want to practice PAR, this document provides a useful summary of some of the main characteristic of PAR not only as a method of social investigation, but as a way of understanding a kind of political action able to preserve the convivial practices that it came into contact with. These are:

⁴⁷¹ Fals-Borda, Orlando. *People's Participation: Challenges Ahead*, (New York: Apex, 1998), 218-219.

1. Collective research. This is the use of information collected and systematized on a group basis, as a source of data and objective knowledge of facts resulting from meetings, socio-dramas, public assemblies, committees, fact-finding trips, and so on.

2. Critical recovery of history. Oral tradition, in the form of interviews and witness accounts by older members of the community possessing good analytical memories; the search for concrete information on given periods of the past hidden in family coffers; data columns and popular stories; ideological projections, imputation, personification and other techniques designed to stimulate the collective memory.

3. Valuing and applying folk culture. regular political practice, such as art, music, drama, sports, beliefs, myths, story-telling and other expressions related to human sentiment, imagination and ludic or recreational tendencies.

4. Production and diffusion of new knowledge. The use of image, sound, painting, gestures, mime, photographs, radio programmes, popular theatre, video-tapes, audio-visual material, poetry, music, puppets and exhibitions. Finally, there are material forms of organization and economic and social action developed by base groups, (cooperatives, trade unions, leagues, cultural centres, action units, workshops, training centres, etc.) as a result of the studies carried out.⁴⁷²

Fals-Borda concluded that while PAR practitioners should also be familiar with more standard methods of social research, such as surveys or statistics, they should use them responsibly and teach these tools to activists belonging to indigenous communities, so that they can finally become independent from intellectuals trained in the western tradition.

⁴⁷² Fals-Borda, Orlando. *Knowledge and People's Power*, 94-7.

The cycle of PAR assigned great value to the vernacular aspects of local cultures, as these become the object of a militant activity of collective preservation. Convivial forms of life that characterise Latin American folk cultures are precisely what Fals-Borda credits as the most resilient aspect of indigenous societies faced with the instrumentalist reason of globalizing agendas. Fals-Borda further elaborated on such experiences addressing them as "people's SpaceTime", or the range of "concrete social configurations where diversity is part of normality."⁴⁷³ What seems especially poignant in Fals-Borda's account of *people's SpaceTime* is that while it acknowledges its ancestral duration, it does not sacralise it nor does it address it in a mystical tone; on the contrary, it insists on its vernacular qualities of humour, wit, music and shared meals. It is this quality of 'diversity as part of normality' that he places in direct relation to the possibility of political action, as "there are at least three processes worthy of attention in this behaviour which converge in the establishment of people's power: feelings, imagination and ludic tendencies (games and play)."⁴⁷⁴

While Fals-Borda defended "local reserves of common sociability and solidarity"⁴⁷⁵ as indigenous people's SpaceTime, Freire pitied the "false *conviviality*"⁴⁷⁶ of certain revolutionaries as being in striding contrast to their preaching. For both, the positionality of the militant researcher or educator in relation to her constituencies was of crucial ethical importance. As the PAR researchers went to live within rural communities, there they organised regular opportunities for encounter and knowledge exchange. These meetings were given various names - "friendship groups" in El Cerrito; "discussion workshops" and "study circles" at San Agustin, Atenango and Ixmiquilpan (Mexico); "collective sessions" to

⁴⁷³ Borda, Orlando Fals. "Peoples' SpaceTimes in global processes: The response of the local." *Journal of world-systems research* 6, no. 3 (2000): 624-634; 627.

⁴⁷⁴ Fals-Borda, O. *Knowledge and People's Power*, p.79.

⁴⁷⁵ Fals-Borda, O. "Peoples' SpaceTimes in global processes", 632.

⁴⁷⁶ Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. (Temple University Press, 1990), 217.

"socialise the data" in El Regadio; and "analytic workshops" in Puerto Tejada. All of these formats indicate an effort to establish and valorize the reciprocity between researchers and communities, insofar as the research aims and methods might be modified by both. For this reason, even seemingly trivial issues like the disposition of chairs during meetings were considered important.⁴⁷⁷ As Freire acknowledged, many militant educators and researchers have an upper class background, and they run the risk "of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressors".⁴⁷⁸ Fals-Borda was also particularly careful in describing all the risks and dangers that even well intentioned researchers may fall trap of, including wanting to stay in a community for too long in order to "protect" it. His work also articulated a powerful denunciation of the academic apparatus that praises intellectuals who confine their efforts to the writing of books for exclusively academic or specialist audiences.

As an alternative to the above, both PAR and Pedagogy of the Oppressed invite participants and researchers alike to analyse their own patterns of dependency from the inherited and hidden prejudices of authoritarian and paternalist social structures. Moreover, PAR claims that the mark of success of any given process of militant research coincides with the moment when the researchers themselves become obsolete to a context, when their presence is no longer needed to carry the political struggle forward, and when organizers and their constituencies occupy interchangeable positions in relation to one other.

In summary, *Colectivo Situaciones* is one of the protagonists of the contemporary discourse on militant conviviality, which has its roots in a critique of academic knowledge and activism. Their explicit concern with the production of alternative modes of sociability translates the preoccupations of a number of radical educators across the Latin American continent from the 1970s, a period of violent transition from dictatorships to accelerated modernization forced through neoliberal reforms, to a

⁴⁷⁷ Fals-Borda recommended to place chairs in a circle to avoid the identification of leaders.

⁴⁷⁸ Freire P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 60.

contemporary context. In the traditions of Pedagogy of the Oppressed and PAR, for the first time education and research are explicitly valorised on the basis of the conviviality that they can afford, as opposed to the quantity of measurable knowledge generated. The acquisition of new knowledge is not called upon to civilize indigenous bodies, nor is it aimed at reforming their manners and modes of speech and replace them with comportments more compatible with the institutions of modernity. Instead, to expand one's knowledge means to take seriously the elements of the vernacular culture in which one is embedded, and to use the invariables of one's situation as the basis for thought and action. Finally, the exercises of collective practice generated within the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and PAR still constitute an important toolbox used in contemporary collective practices engaged in convivial processes, as for instance in the case of the Theatre of the Oppressed. While some of these tools have been clearly formulated as games, both discourses in which they originate always insist that the efficacy of specific games is always contingent upon the free play of sociable interactions produced in each encounter, and that there are no universally valid techniques for militant researchers to rely on.

6.3 Resilient healing: *Red Ciudadana Tras M-11* and feminist organizing

Alongside political organizing and radical education, a third trajectory of contemporary militant conviviality connects to the history of feminist networks that organized mutual support as a critical response to painful biographical events. The experience of the Spanish *Red Ciudadana tras M-11* is a valuable example of how conviviality can play an important role in connecting personal healing with political organizing in the face of violent trauma. *Red Ciudadana* was constituted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack that hit Madrid on 11th March 2004. On this day, 191 people were

killed and nearly 2,000 were injured when 10 bombs exploded in four commuter trains during rush hour. The attacks deeply impacted the Spanish social and political scenario, an impact that was deepened with the news of a second failed attack on 2nd April. Governmental authorities initially pointed their fingers at the Basque separatist militant group ETA, but shortly after evidence moved the accusations to a fundamentalist Islamic group protesting the Spanish contribution to the US-led invasion of Iraq. Given that the attack took place three days before the general election, the majority party, the *Partido Popular* (PP) led by Jose' Maria Aznar rushed to blame the terrorist attack onto ETA, in order to avoid facing the popular opinion which had been against their decision to bring the country into the Iraq war in the first place. But as the investigations begun to contradict the official version of the story, popular opinion grew angry about the attempted manipulation of the PP and voted in favour of the Socialist party led by Jose' Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, who withdrew the troops from Iraq in May 2004.

It is in this context that *Red Ciudadana*, which described itself as "an unusual experience of de-victimization"⁴⁷⁹ came together, gathering not only the friends and families of the victims of the attacks, but opening itself up to anyone who did not find their experience represented in mainstream discourses. The participants in *Red Ciudadana* found themselves dealing with two sets of interrelated problems. One was at the level of political representation: an official commission was formed to investigate the attacks and allowed to conduct its investigation in secret, preventing the friends and families of the victims, as well as the general public, from having access to its methods and findings. A second set of problems impacted those involved on a more micropolitical sense. In the period following the two attacks and the general elections, the figure of the friends and families of the victims of terrorism became heavily instrumentalised in public discourse and media representation, coming

⁴⁷⁹ Desdedentro. *Red ciudadana tras el 11-M: cuando el sufrimiento no impide pensar ni actuar*. (Antonio Machado Libros, 2008), x. My translation.

under an enormous pressure was to formulate themselves as victims, and position themselves in favour of one of the two main political coalitions.⁴⁸⁰ *Red Ciudadana* wanted to offer a space where the affected ones could elaborate a different subjectivity rather than the one of the victim, one that could allow them to imagine a different kind of politics that would not simply be a reaction to the discourse produced by the major political and media forces in the country.

Red Ciudadana was an autonomously organized network, independent from external funding of any kind, where participation was maintained informal and without fixed terms of commitment, with decisions being taken by collective consensus. Activities were articulated on two fronts. On the level of representation, *Red Ciudadana* acted in collaboration with the *Asociación 11-M Afectados de Terrorismo*. While these two entities were closely related for some times, they always remained distinct. The *Asociación* carried out more traditional forms of political engagement by collecting signatures for petitions, printing t-shirts and networking with other associations with similar focuses. While the *Asociación*' activities were successful in intervening in the space of public discourse and official politics, participants in the *Red* felt the need to collectivize their experience on a different, non representational level, providing a more intimate mode of self-organizing where people could question the premises that characterize the discourses of assistance, representation, denunciation, justice, and so on used to frame the experience of violent death brought about by terrorism and war.

It is therefore on the plane of the micropolitical that *Red Ciudadana* articulated its practice around regular monthly meetings, at times intensified to become weekly, informal gatherings and finally the collective writing of a book on the experience. The meetings saw the participation of people who had been injured during the attacks, friends and families of

⁴⁸⁰ It should be noted that due to the history of internal terrorism linked to Basque separatism, associations of victims of terrorism are a significant political lobby in Spain, often backing conservative governments that press for harsher punishing measures for terrorism-related crimes and higher monetary compensations to the victims' relatives.

those who died, but also social workers, psychologists, militants from the social movements, and others who suffered other comparable traumas. The network's main activity was to exist as a space where people could come together to talk, take stock of the dissonances between media representations and their own lived experiences, ask questions or just be together.

One of the main sources to understand *Red Ciudadana* was the book *Red Ciudadana Tras el 11-M* written by five of its participants who decided to adopt the collective name of *Desdedentro*, or 'from within', in order to mark their position in relation to the broader group, one not of representation or spokespersons. The written accounts of *Desdedentro* – "a minority within a minority"⁴⁸¹ as they write – represented *Red Ciudadana* as an emblematic example of militant conviviality for a number of reasons. First of all, the Red values conviviality in its own right and considers it a relevant form of collective practice. This is made explicit in an anecdote recalled by *Desdedentro* who described a fieldtrip to the municipality of Candeleda as a particularly meaningful moment of conviviality in the Red:

In Candeleda – a village in the Avila province – there was a grief process support group formed by different people and professionals. This group made itself available to any person or family affected by 11-M who might have needed such a group or one of the restored rural houses at the disposal of Candeleda municipality. During the bank holiday of May 2005 we organized an informal stay over to share time and hang out together [*compartir tiempo y ocio*] and enjoy the beauty of the surroundings. Different activities and excursions took place and the affective ties and bonds grew closer. Even though there were neither working sessions nor agenda for the day, everybody recalls the Foro in Candeleda with affection and it is considered as one of the most important ones. It is described

⁴⁸¹ *Desdedentro. Red ciudadana tras el 11-M*, v. My translation.

as a moment of convivial living [*convivencia*] and affection, a 'brief breather' and an 'oasis of peace', a place where participants felt 'very comfortable and well accepted', and that gave them strength to continue fighting.⁴⁸²

The politics of the *Red* are convivial also in the sense that they refuse the accepted dichotomy between unproductive/reproductive recreational activities and productive action (as in the paradigm of sociability). While sharing time and doing nothing together are important components of the network's practice, these are not cast as private affairs. The *Red* refuses the dichotomy between private emotions and public space of appearance. In the words of *Desdedentro*,

the Red is not an association, it does not have other objectives than what is decided in each moment, it does not have to respond to anything or anyone. Excursion, hanging out [*convivencia*] and snacking together [*meriendas*] are part of the Red as much as the public assemblies, the collection of signatures and the media declarations. The Red is an affective space and one of care that also serves to organize action. Because of this, concrete initiatives alone cannot explain it. For this reason it is not possible to know the Red only through its public dimension.⁴⁸³

On top of not wanting to be victims, the authors *Desdedentro* also refused to assume the identity of witnesses or whistle-blowers. They did not see as the function of the *Red* as offering solutions, blaming or prescribing cures. Rather, it wanted to show that the politics lie in the very process of the construction of sense in the aftermath of a violent such as the terrorist attack. This position openly contrasts the Habermasian notion of the public sphere based on the bourgeois practices of the café and the

⁴⁸² Ibid., 39. My translation.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 38. My translation.

circle. The convivial ethos of *Red Ciudadana* problematizes the idea of the public sphere as universally accessible and based on rational argumentations, both as it reveals the conflictual nature of common sense as always shaped by relationships of power and also as it refuses to separate the process of elaboration that take place in sociable encounters from the theatre of representation. Furthermore, the *Red* questioned grief counselling offered as a 'service' by the state, a model of assistance that formats mourning as a set of stages to be overcome. The *Red* instead looked for a mode of self-organization based on reciprocity between listening and narrating, and one in which mourning is allowed to produce its own ethics and aesthetics. In the introduction of the book, Desdedentro explain that the

social dimension of the attacks achieved something exceptional in a society characterized by dispersion and disaggregation: it unified experience in a lived experience [*vivencia*⁴⁸⁴] that intertwined [*vinculó*]⁴⁸⁵ the political with the emotional.

In other words, an event that suspended and took away meaning from people's life is here assumed as the basis upon which a different mode of collectivity can be experimented with. Finally, the convivial ethos of the *Red* is captured by the notion of 'afectados', the term used by participants to name their subjectivities in relation to 11-M. To be affected meant to acknowledge that no one is allowed to reclaim a position of greater insight into the true meaning of the event. Instead, the collectivity of *afectados* embraces a more complex meaning of 'event' as being something that produces a rupture in people's life but that needs to be elaborated in order to acquire meaning in history, and such elaboration is never neutral, natural or merely personal. It is interesting to note that in recent years,

⁴⁸⁴ The notion of *vivencia* in Spanish roughly corresponds with a lived experience, or something that one has lived through. This term is more conveys a stronger association with ideas of acknowledgement, perception, awareness, and consciousness than the broader idea of experience as skill or understanding might convey in the English language.

⁴⁸⁵ Desdedentro, *Red Ciudadana Tras el 11-M*, 19.

the same subjectivity of the *'afectados'* became a key protagonist of the social movements fighting the wave of evictions and house repossessions that hit Spanish populations after the financial crack of 2008. The *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH)* for instance was formed in Barcelona in 2009 and currently extends across the country as an active network that mobilises for the right to a home, protecting people from evictions and offering legal advice, practical aid and emotional support to those who struggle with their mortgages or face eviction⁴⁸⁶. Here too the capacity for political enunciation and action is rooted in the common elaboration of the events of financial violence that disrupted singular biographies.

Feminist Organizing

In order to contextualize the practice of *Red Ciudadana* I want to turn now to the legacy constituted by feminist consciousness-raising. Drawing a connection between these two modes of self-organization is relevant to trace a third trajectory of militant conviviality (to add to the legacy of co-investigation and participatory action research) generated in resistance to the deep socio-political changes that begun in the 1960s and 1970s. It is pertinent to connect *Red Ciudadana* to this specific legacy of feminism even though its politics did not explicitly concern questions of gender. Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that the juxtaposition can be relevant to highlight the pertinence of convivial organizing to an array of different radical practices expressing a similarly situated ethical position even when they do not share the same object of critique.⁴⁸⁷ In the words of feminist scholar and activist Carol Hanisch, consciousness-raising was

⁴⁸⁶ This organization played a central role during the 15-M movement that occupied the squares of about 60 Spanish cities and organized recurrent demonstrations during 2011 and 2012.

⁴⁸⁷ Significantly, feminist self-organizing is also greatly influential for the collective *Precarias a la Deriva*, also active in Madrid during the same years of *Red Ciudadana* (they first came together in 2002). The two experiences display some points of contact as some of their members have been involved in the same editorial and militant projects together.

“birthed as a mass-organizing tool for the liberation of women in 1968,” as a “way to use our own lives — our combined experiences — to understand concretely how we are oppressed and who was actually doing the oppressing.”⁴⁸⁸

Although consciousness-raising was first conceptualized within the US based Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, other feminist scholars trace its roots to earlier struggles. Marta Malo de Molina, a member of *Precarias a la Deriva*, for instance, unearthed a similar approach inside the Black Clubwomen’s Movement, active in the USA since 1865 to offer a network of mutual support for Afro American women in conditions of slavery. Other authors, such as Starhawk, instead trace its origin to Maoist Chinese Speak Bitterness circles in which “oppressed peasants and workers were encouraged to speak openly of their experiences under the old regime.”⁴⁸⁹ Such expanded genealogies are particularly important as they squarely situate consciousness-raising as an approach to self-organization that is transversally relevant to all struggles that want to find a way to fight dominant modes of subjectivation as they intersect with individual biographies, challenging not only gender normativity, but also racism and economic inequality. Simply put, a consciousness-raising group consisted of a relatively small number of women, usually no more than a dozen, who would gather to hold open conversations about selected topics related to their lives, including marital issues, sexual pleasure, dating, beauty, economic dependence, having children, abortion, and a variety of other tropes related to quotidian and intimate situations. The participants would take turns to speak about their personal testimonies in relation to a chosen topic, and then the group would analyse, theorize and reflect upon what

⁴⁸⁸ Hanisch, Carol. “Women’s Liberation Consciousness-Raising: The and Now”, *On The Issues Magazine*, spring 2010, http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php [accessed 19/11/2013].

⁴⁸⁹ Starhawk, ‘The Five-Fold Path to Productive Meetings’, *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups*, bonus chapter available for download http://www.starhawk.org/2_Empowerment_Five-Fold%20Pat.pdf [accessed 16/04/2013] , 11.

emerged from the personal tales, discussing implications and possible actions. Consciousness-raising can be discussed as a convivial procedure on a number of levels. First of all, feminism elaborated a theory and practice of conversation that challenged the neutrality and universality of discourse, advocating for the *localization* and *implication* of knowledge and valorising its vernacular character. Kathie Sarachild, active within the first CR group within the Women's Liberation Movement in the US, recalls

our meetings were called coffee klatches, hen parties or bitch sessions. We responded by saying, "Yes, bitch, sisters, bitch," and by calling coffee klatches a historic form of women's resistance to oppression.⁴⁹⁰

The women involved in consciousness-raising established its political significance not by denying its associations with neighbourly gossip, but by ironically reclaiming the validity of hen parties as the coming together of women connected in relations of reciprocity and mutual support and as a political way that housewives have to transgress the isolation of domestic labour. In a similar ironic way, feminists consciousness-raising reappropriated the idea of 'therapy,' something that the prevalent militant culture at the time used as a pejorative to imply that what women achieved when coming together "wasn't politics, economic or even study at all," as Sarachild put it. Feminism reclaimed the therapeutic value of consciousness-raising not as a supplement or propaedeutic to politics proper, but rather, as a core component of political agency, as women produced their own subjectivities differently, elaborating alternative counter-conducts to the ones prescribed by the gender norm. However, claiming that their conversation produced new subjectivities did not mean that feminists wanted to substitute the sharing of emotions to collective

⁴⁹⁰ Sarachild, Kathie. 'Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon', in *Feminist Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 1978), pp.144-150. Available online <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/wlm/fem/sarachild.html> [accessed 17/04/2013].

practice. In the words of Sarachild: "the importance of listening to a woman's feelings was collectively to analyse the situation of women, not to analyse her."⁴⁹¹ Feminist scholar Carol Hanisch similarly criticised consciousness-raising groups that held as their limited goal the "self-expression" of the women involved. Instead, she recalls that within the earliest consciousness-raising group of which she was part: "Actions — large and small — also resulted from these discussions."⁴⁹² The idea was not to claim more respect for women's inner life, but to counter the very structure that opposed the personal and the political, and the private and the public, as binaries, critiquing accepted modes of both militancy and therapy in the process. This was the only way in which women self-organising could become an expression of their autonomy and rather than a kind of self-management of their productive and reproductive capacities. Similarly, in the experience of *Red Ciudadana*, it is possible to see such complex positionality in relation to the therapeutic as a category of reciprocal action. This ensemble of knowledges and techniques is simultaneously reclaimed and problematized. It is reclaimed because *Red Ciudadana* wanted to be a space where the elaboration of pain could be autonomously conducted and healing could find support in a shared environment protected from media attention and political instrumentalisation. At the same time, the therapeutic was rejected when it was offered as a preformatted service that limited its aims to 'make one feel better'. *Red Ciudadana* recognised that the collective elaboration of their traumatic encounter with terrorism was political inasmuch as it could lead to a very different worldview (including the possibility of generating an indiscriminate hate towards all Muslims or the understanding of the structures of power that make terrorism a viable political tactic). Another way in which the framework of conviviality can be usefully applied to consciousness-raising is its role in relation to a feminist epistemology that rejected knowledge as the product of a disembodied mind. In

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Hanisch, Carol, "Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising."

Women's Ways of Knowing (1986), an important text in the development of feminist epistemology, Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule set out to understand the different ways in which women know the world. Although their analysis is gender specific, it does not imply that men do not have access to the same range of experiences, but simply that there is a need to correct the bias in studies around the system of knowledge that are based on largely male dominated contexts, such as academia. In their findings, they identified differences between women as well as differences between genders. According to them, women's procedures for apprehending new facts and ideas are largely based on "connected knowing" as opposed to the "separate"⁴⁹³ mode that is most socially valorised. Separate knowledge, privileged within academia and in the Habermasian public sphere, is a form of critical knowledge that encourages participants to interact in an adversarial "game" and to extricate their personal circumstances and feelings from the argument. Instead, connected knowledge counters the dangers of projection not by removing the self from its object, but by connecting it with the experience of others as much as possible:

Connected knowers know that they can only approximate other people's experiences... but insofar as possible, they must act as connected rather than separate selves, seeing the other not in their own terms but in the other's terms.⁴⁹⁴

Conversations are here a way of grounding the self, and judgment is formulated according to the particular concrete conditions and relations of the situation, rather than a universal standard or truth. Finally, feminism also developed important tools for the practice of militant conviviality as

⁴⁹³ Belenky, Mary Field, et al. (eds.) *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*, 100.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.,113.

this movement developed a critical reflection around the use of procedures and rules within collective practices. Significantly, feminist critique in this sense encompasses a problematisation of both the act of substituting the openness of play with pre-codified gaming procedures, and of confusing play with spontaneity. Carol Hanish identified the transformation of consciousness-raising into a method during the peak of its popularity within the feminist movement as one of the very problems that ultimately undermined it. Referring to the mainstream recasting of consciousness-raising as a method, she explains that in fact

many of these rules came from those who really only wanted a personal support group where they could "vent" about their lives with no intention of following it up with group analysis and action. The purpose of the group, in this view, was to be supportive, develop oneself and be able to feel a part of this important social movement, without ever having to move.⁴⁹⁵

In the internal critique of the codification of consciousness-raising, we see the movement becoming aware of the dangers of formalism, the belief that it might be sufficient to follow a certain scheme in order to produce the same results (in this case, the same affect or orientation in a given group). In fact, the formalization of rules procures a blockage in the collective body, as I already discussed as the most important difference between the concepts of 'game' and 'play' when applied in the context of sociable interaction, as this should be the ambit where singularity and collectivity experiment with new possibilities of reciprocal implication.

Alongside this first problem, feminism also discussed the harm caused by the faith in the spontaneous as an alternative to method. Jo Freeman, in her well-known article "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (1970), questioned informality when surged to a general principle of political organizing, because in her view "contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a " 'structurelessness' group" and "the

⁴⁹⁵ Hanisch, Carol, "Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising."

idea of 'structurelessness' does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones".⁴⁹⁶ The production of rules of conduct is intrinsic to collective subjects in the same way as Foucault described power as always traversing human relations. Therefore, the existence of differences within groups, even at the level of personal amicability ("elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities,"⁴⁹⁷ - wrote Freeman) calls for a constant elaboration of new procedures able to make the collective and personal bodies *vulnerable* again and again in a process that is, strictly speaking, the activity of play.

In this last sense, the legacy of feminism was reflected in the practice of *Red Ciudadana* in its insistence of avoiding predetermined formats or protocols. The concern for maintaining a flexible and emergent agenda by design, with moments of deliberate under-productivity (*otium*) embedded within it, was an opportunity to reconfigure the affective becoming in the network, and allow relations among dissimilar people, perhaps more difficult or simply slower, to form.

6.4 The conviviality of coming apart: *Collectif Sans Ticket* and institutional analysis

Collectif Sans Ticket was an activist collective formed in 1999 in Belgium. Members came from two previous experiences: *Collectif Sans Nom*, active between 1997 and 1998 within a social centre, and *Chomeur, pas chein*, a collective that organized on unemployment issues. The name refers to a campaign to reclaim the right to mobility for all, including those who could not afford the expensive fares of public transport to travel from the periphery to the centre (this was one of the most visible concerns of the

⁴⁹⁶ Freeman, Jo. "The Tyranny Of Structurelessness", *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41.3 (2013), 231-246.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

group and their actions were primarily directed to addressing it). In 2003 the *Collectif Sans Ticket* experience came to a close as members felt that the group had lost its focus and personal relations among members deteriorated, an epilogue that is not uncommon among autonomous self-organized collectives. Before opting to dissolve the group (and while still under trial for their disruptions of public transport), the members of CST decided to undertake a last process of being together, as they embarked in a collective reflection on the conditions of their own practice and its dissolution. It is this last experience that I wish to describe here as indicative of a fourth trajectory of militant conviviality, one that finds its roots, as I shall describe later, in institutional analysis.

Collectif Sans Ticket first published their initial reflections on their collective practice in a collective text entitled *Bruxelles, Novembre 2003*. This first manuscript represents a first attempt to develop a shared narration of the group dynamics that determined its dissolution in terms of an ecology of practices affecting one another; the text was circulated among other collectives and militant groups connected with CST, and later, in April 2004, followed and contributed to by 40 meetings with movement networks in Spain, Belgium and France. After one year of collective inquiry, from 2005 until 2006, two of the former members of CST began to write down what had emerged, so as to transcend the specificities of the history of the Belgian collective and arrive at a more articulate exposition of the various components of the life of a collective. Even during this last phase of writing, as they were written, texts were being circulated to others who had been involved in the process, and over ten people kept the feedback loop alive throughout the writing process up until the first publication of the book *Micropolitique des Groupes. Pour une ecologie des pratiques collectives*.

This book was written as a guide of sort, a present to the groups of the future from the activist networks that generated it and wanted to contribute to the development of a "*culture of antecedents*"⁴⁹⁸ of collective

⁴⁹⁸ Vercauteren, David, Olivier Crabbé and Thierry Müller. *Micropolítica De Los Grupos*, 17. My translation.

practices. The book is divided into short sections, each dedicated to a specific plane of analysis of the micropolitical dimension of collective relations, including a detailed description of procedures for taking decisions and evaluating actions, meeting and programming, asking for public funding and dealing with splits within the group. Despite the organization of the text as a guide that can be read in different orders (the writers even suggest a few different routes through the book to match the specific circumstances of the readers) and with a convenient glossary of terms and roles at the end, *Micropolitique des Groupes* does not offer a formula for success, a sure format that guarantees effective actions, or secures the longevity of an activist posse. In other words, the book does not turn collective practice into a game. Instead, at every level of the analysis, the authors offer detailed accounts of how, when it comes down to group processes, a practice's ecology relies on the capacity of the subjects involved to keep the core of their self-organization open and susceptible to change. For example, the process of evaluation is described in the book as potentially concerning the measuring of results or a shared reflection on the quality of processes involved in a given activity and the affects it produced for those involved. Or again, misunderstandings are appraised not simply as frustrating, as mishaps that could be best avoided, but as opportunities to renegotiate each other's truths and desires. The authors further stressed the importance of cultivating dissent alongside consensus (a favourite mode of decision making within social movements and militant organising) because the art of inventing new problems is as vital and important to a group's ecology as the capacity for solving them. In this respect the micropolitics that gives the name to the title of this experience articulates a form of conviviality, as it develops a knowledge of and the tools to share aspects of collective experience that are usually considered negative and therefore excluded from common pleasure. These frustrations, these moments of boredom or dissatisfaction etc. can be either internalized as personal failure, and therefore

psychologised and introjected as shame, or they can explode as rage and resentment among members, blocking the capacity of the group to act and desire together. Instead, the collective intelligence of *Micropolitique des Groupes* invented a language and some artifices (tools or techniques) to think about collective practice both in terms of its creativity and activity and in terms of its own self-care and reproduction.

The experience of *Micropolitique des Groupes* activated relations that were able to sidestep the habitual roles of the activists involved in CST to bring them together once more for a communal reflection on what had been. The process went very much against the logic of dispersion that represents the normatively sanctioned way to end collectives, among hateful and sad passions. Instead, the efforts of those involved created a collective enunciation of the procedures that might help other collective practices to become more sustainable in the future. In yet another way, this was a convivial practice because it maintained an ironic outlook onto its subject matter, refusing to prescribe 'true' solutions to its readers, but instead inviting them to de-naturalise their own group dynamics. In fact, one of the artifices proposed in the text addresses precisely the benefits of using a language that decouples one's own position from any claim to an absolute Truth. And finally, in relation to its aesthetics, it is possible to see the emergence of an entire new vocabulary and mode of naming issues and processes in the book that closely resembles a vernacular language, and displays a poetic quality that avoids the dry professionalisms of expert disciplines. This poetic quality is particularly noticeable in the way the authors adopted the language of ecofeminist and neopagan writer Starhawk⁴⁹⁹ to describe the roles that can be assumed in order to take care of a collective process. Amongst these, we find the Crows, who keep track of the collective's long-term objectives and purposes; the Graces, attentive to the energies and appetites of the group; Dragons, who analyse the practical and materialist aspects sustaining the practice; Snakes, always up to date with the emotions, the

⁴⁹⁹ Starhawk, *Truth or Dare. Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988), 278-283.

unwritten rules and the nascent conflicts of each situation; and Spiders, caring for the interconnections and the encounters of each participant with the others.

In sum, Vercauteren and co-authors embarked on the process of collectively writing *Micropolitique des Groupes* as a way to rethink the negativity and the resentment often generated in collectives. In doing so, they wished to intervene within Left culture to address its symptomatic lacks of what they named a “*culture of antecedents*”. In their view, this reluctance to pass on, even in mythologized forms, the tales of struggles of the past, of their organization but also their trivialities, might have to do with the idea of a strong masculinity within the working classes who, overpowered in the late 1970s and 1980s by the rise of neoliberal capitalism, do not wish to share the painful stories of what was perceived as a terrible defeat of the revolutionary dream. For the authors of *Micropolitique des Groupes* however, there is sense in taking stock of mistakes and difficulties to collectively produce the meaning of the experience of events lived together that might be carried into the future. Given the scarce literature that records the quotidian strategies of self-organization within militant practice, the authors of *Micropolitique des Groupes* significantly drew on the contribution of institutional analysis, a pedagogic and therapeutic approach to organizing developed in France during the 1970s, which is considered next.

Institutional Analysis

Institutional analysis emerged in France in the mid-1960s, as a heterogeneous practice bringing together concerns of pedagogy, psychotherapy and political organizing. Felix Guattari is credited for being the first to use this term while collaborating with the *GTPSI – Working Group of Institutional Psychology and Sociology*, a network of politicised psychotherapists who wanted to reform and turn the institutions of psychiatric care into more egalitarian and free platforms of therapy, as

recommended by the founder of the group Francois Tosquelles (1912 – 1994). For Guattari, the evolution of the integrated global capitalist order required a new political praxis able to account for the role of subjective libidinal investments and of the collective unconscious in the life of groups and institutions. Guattari explained the need for institutional analysis in an interview with his friend and collaborator Jacques Pain:

It was in the course of discussions at the heart of GTPSI (Groupe de travail de psychologie et de sociologie institutionnelle), under the impulse of Tosquelles, who complained that one "walks with two legs" - one Marxist leg, and another Freudian leg - that I began to reflect on another possible analytic path, which I baptised at the time "institutional analysis", an expression that I did not really impose on that milieu, but which proliferated outside. It sought to make discernable a domain that was neither that of institutional therapy, nor institutional pedagogy, nor of the struggle for social emancipation, but which invoked an analytic method that could traverse these multiple fields (from which came the theme "transversality").⁵⁰⁰

As a political activist and psychotherapist trained in the Lacanian tradition, he understood the need for tools and techniques of analysing the political import of social events from a perspective that was able to bring together a materialist outlook (Marx) and an expanded notion of the therapeutic that could account for psychic factors. It was in this sense that Guattari, together with Deleuze, elaborated the three interrelated concepts of micropolitics, schizoanalysis and institutional analysis. The idea of micropolitics was offered by Deleuze and Guattari as a critique of dogmatist and ideological Marxism. It corresponds to an approach to the political that differs from the one inherited from the great revolutionary movements of modernity; it is opposed to a macropolitical outlook not in

⁵⁰⁰ "Institutional Practice and Politics, Guattari in an interview with Jacques Pain", in Genosko, G. *The Guattari Reader*, 121.

terms of scale but in terms of sensitivity to the heterogeneous elements influencing the outcomes of specific situations. Schizoanalysis is the concept that the duo used in their critique of the psychoanalytical perspective, which in their view limited the exploration of the unconscious to a trite representation of the Oedipal complex, focusing on the family as an archetype, siding with normative power in its systematic disregard of the much wider implications of libidinal processes as productive of sociability in a broader range of situations. And finally, institutional analysis is the term that especially Guattari used to talk about "*an analytic method that could traverse these multiple fields*". The principle of transversality of which Guattari speaks at the end of the quote above is concerned with the processes of collective subjectivation of a group and the way in which these affect the power relations that traverse it. Guattari identifies two (non-absolute) kinds of group: subject-groups and subjugated-groups. A subject-group "*endeavours to control its own behaviour and elucidate its object, and [...] can produce its own tools of elucidation*",⁵⁰¹ whereas the subjugated-group is merely passive and fits into the hierarchical arrangement of other groups within an institution. Guattari contrasted transversality with the traps of verticality and horizontality that characterise subjected-groups and subject-groups respectively. On the one hand, the impasse of verticality within a collective, an organization or an institution is represented by the formal and informal hierarchies that determine the relations among various roles and sub-groups (for instance the chains of command within a hospital from top management to doctors, down to the patients). The trap of horizontality, on the other hand, is the tendency whereby peers socialize and organize themselves only within the homogeneity and fixed confines of their group (i.e., doctors with doctors, patients with patients, nurses with nurses, etc.). The actual efficacy of political group praxis (in terms of achieving a concrete aim) is somewhat a secondary issue in Guattari's

⁵⁰¹ Guattari, Felix. *Molecular revolution: Psychiatry and politics*. (New York: Penguin, 1984), 14.

reflections on collectivity, which he understood as an ecology of practices. Instead, the kind of subjectivity fostered by membership to a group is primary, and thus

whether there was real effectiveness hardly matters; certain kinds of action and concentration represent a break with the habitual social processes and in particular the modes of communication and expression of feeling inherited from the family.⁵⁰²

In this framework, the coefficient of transversality of each group determines the capacity of a group to foster different subjectivities, support the elaboration of new aesthetics, proliferate modalities of action, produce its own truths in the world, and become 'other' from itself. Transversality thus operates as "the unconscious source of action in the group [...] carrying the group's desire".⁵⁰³ It is possible here to see the experience of *Micropolitiques des Groupes* as one of institutional analysis or collective schizoanalysis, in the sense that it explored, as Guattari recommended, the manifest and the latent unconscious desires of the groups of activists who participated, highlighting how often they do not coincide, how they are, in fact, in constant negotiation. The unconscious of a group is manifested through its habits and dispositives of organization, which can contradict its explicit political goals and values and contribute to the becoming of the group as a site of subjection rather than augmentation of the capacity to act autonomously. Among the discourses that most influenced institutional analysis are: the theories of Jean Paul Sartre who, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, conceptualized the instituent revolutionary process as comprising of three phases - the 'fusional group', the organization, and the institution that gives rise to bureaucracy-; Marxism, especially the work of Henri Lefebvre and Cornelius Castoriadis; the pedagogical theory of Celestin Freinet; and the

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 22.

North American psychotherapy group of Kurt Lewin and Carl Rogers. More than as a result of these theoretical approaches however, institutional analysis as a collective practice must be understood in relation to the practices of institutional pedagogy and psychotherapy as articulated by Ferdinand and Jean Oury.

Institutional Psychotherapy and Pedagogy

Institutional psychotherapy and psychiatry originate in France during the 1950s. Prior to Jean Oury's intervention in the discourse on psychotherapy, his brother Fernand Oury had formulated a critique of education, initiating the movement of institutional pedagogy in the 1950s. Fernand Oury and his collaborators⁵⁰⁴ wished to develop an educational approach that would be willing to take care of the relations between the psychic and collective life, the processes of group subjectivation, the role of the collective unconscious, and the introjection of rules and rituals. All of these factors became closely related in the concept of the 'institution', which lends its name to this pedagogy:

What do we mean by "institution"? The single rule that makes it possible to use a soap without quarrelling is already an institution. The whole of the rules allowing to define what "can or cannot be done" in this peculiar place, at this precise moment, what we call the laws of the classroom, is another one.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ Such as psychoanalyst Aïda Vasquez; the Groupe Techniques Éducatives (GET), founded in 1966; CEPI, the Collective of Teams of Institutional Pedagogy *Le Collectif des Équipes de Pédagogie Institutionnelle*, and the MPI, Association for the Support of Institutional Pedagogy *Association Maintenant la Pédagogie Institutionnelle*, both founded in 1978 and still active today.

⁵⁰⁵ Fernand Oury, quoted in Pain, Jaques, "Institutional Pedagogy", personal website, http://www.jacques-pain.fr/jacques-pain/Definition_IP_anglais.html [accessed 30/03/2011]

The institution for Fernand Oury was the product of a permanent confrontation between the instituted (the dominant modalities of established practices) and the instituting (the vectors of change); he saw it as something emerging from social movements as a formalized compound of affectivities, ideologies and organizational habits within which a pedagogical intervention was possible. An important source of inspiration for Fernand Oury was the work of Célestin Freinet, a French pedagogist founder of the cooperative learning movement in the 1940s. In his 'active' classrooms, Freinet would encourage students to self-organize their learning experience, by means of collective journal writing, discussions and hands-on experiments. A particularly important component of Freinet's theory of education was also the relationship of studying with real life experiences, and he put a lot of effort in developing active relationships between the school and the broader community in which it was situated.⁵⁰⁶ Also during the 1950s, psychiatrists Francois Tosquelles⁵⁰⁷ and Jean Oury⁵⁰⁸ became particularly engaged in exposing

⁵⁰⁶ For instance, students would conduct surveys and interviews in the local community, print a magazine to circulate outside, engage in correspondence with other schools and also learn practical skills that would be useful for running the school (gardening, carpentry, managing a budget, etc.).

⁵⁰⁷ Tosquelles was a Catalan psychiatrist who had been the coordinator of the mental health services for the Republican army during the Spanish civil war (there he notably proposed to consider the role of prostitutes as caregivers). He received several death threats during the Franco regime and migrated to France where he became the head of the Saint-Alban sanatorium (Lozère) in 1952. There, Tosquelles began a reorganization of the therapeutic processes that followed Marxist and libertarian principles. Working alongside other progressive psychiatrists as well as intellectuals and artists connected with the Resistance movement (such as the Dadaists Paul Eluard and Tristan Tzara), he created a formidable array of new theoretical and practical approaches to psychiatric care. Together with fellow psychiatrist Lucien Bonnafé, he developed *geo-psychiatry* as a method to analyse "local human geography"⁵⁰⁷ working with spatial concepts such as migration, drifting, pilgrimage, etc. He encouraged the self-organization of patients' workshops and autonomous therapeutic circles, challenging the hierarchical distinction between patients and caregivers, and also encouraging the extension of the remit of therapeutic practices to the latter. Tosquelles' work was inspired by Hermann Simon, who, in a 1929 German publication, formulated the ergotherapeutic approach, an early version of occupational therapy⁵⁰⁷ that insists on the importance of the free circulation of patients within the institution and advocates their becoming responsible for their wellbeing and therapeutic activities.

⁵⁰⁸ Among the younger generation of psychiatrists who came to train at Saint-Alban (including Franz Fanon), Jean Oury, also a follower of Jacques Lacan, began to collaborate closely with Tosquelles, with whom he shared a commitment to *polycentric*

the contrast between the absolute paradigms of orthodox psychiatry and its repressive and marginalizing institutions.⁵⁰⁹ In 1953 Jean Oury established his own clinic at Cour-Cheverny, in the castle of La Borde, which would later become the most influential centre for the development of institutional psychotherapy and, subsequent to Felix Guattari's involvement on a full time basis from 1955, of institutional analysis.

La Borde offered a first context to Guattari for his experiments with schizoanalysis and institutional analysis, an approach he later continued to develop with others in various collective formations.⁵¹⁰ Here, he used the concept of transversality as a guiding organizational principle of the reorganization of roles and activities into new patterns, by problematizing, for instance, the distinction between manual and intellectual labour, and the distinction between patients, doctors and nurses. One of the most famous dispositives implemented at La Borde was perhaps the 'grid': a system of rotation of roles that involved doctors, nurses, patients and other staff. In the grid, each one would in turn occupy the position of another, experiencing the opportunities and the problems of each situation and adopting them as the basis for a common ongoing analysis and discussion of the institution.

heterogeneity and transdisciplinarity in the development of the framework of institutional psychotherapy.

⁵⁰⁹ Institutional psychotherapy fully developed its theory and practice during the 60s and 70s, as part of a larger international movement to reclaim social justice within healthcare practices and institutions. A few examples of this broader movement are David Cooper's experimentations in England in the early 60s, leading to the formulation of the "anti-psychiatry" movement; the German Socialist Patients' Collective *Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv*, also known as SPK, founded in Heidelberg in 1970 by Dr. Wolfgang Huber; Franco Basaglia's efforts to outlaw psychiatric asylums in Italy; and Ivan Illich's critique of state-controlled institutions of health and mental care and education as monopolizing capacities and attitudes which should belong to the common.

⁵¹⁰ Such as the Federation of Institutional Study Groups and Research (FGERI, 1965) and the Centre for Institutional Study, Research and Training (CERFI, 1967). In the early 1970s CERFI managed to secure various important government research contracts, mainly for health and community development. Peter Osborne reports that by 1973 CERFI had seventy-five full-time employees and its main journal, *Recherches*, and other publications enjoyed an extremely broad readership (one particularly notorious special issue (#12) was devoted to homosexuality in France, *Trois milliards de pervers: Grande Encyclopédie des Homosexualités*).

A lesser known but perhaps more inspiring instance of transversal practice within La Borde was initiated by Suely Rolnik, a Brazilian psychotherapist who was training with Guattari at the time. Rolnik proposed to organize a carnival at the clinic, engaging staff, patients and the various visitors, (students, activists and resident artists) who regularly spent time at the clinic. Everyone was thus invited to imagine a new persona for themselves, a character they would have liked to be. Masks and costumes were sewn and built accordingly in view of the party. A lot of care went into the preparation of the carnival, and the process of imagining who one could have become was given priority over the crafting of its execution. In other words, the process of preparation was as important as the celebration itself. The carnival constitutes a particularly fitting instance of the kind of convivial activities that the institutional analysis framework allowed its practitioners to experimentally pursue. It was a collectively organized event that involved an intense aesthetic self-production and emphasised the importance of collective joy as a technique of health care.

The framework of institutional analysis has collectivity as its object, involving its practitioners in a cycle of reflection aimed at identifying implicit roles and lines of power, so as to de-naturalise them creatively, by encouraging a playful experimentation with different modes of togetherness, rather than the application of pre-formulated therapeutic exercises or techniques. Institutional analysis consciously undermines the figure of the expert in favour of a position of implication with a particular situation. The forms of being together that could be afforded by institutional analysis are therefore endless, their positivity being judged in relation to a given situation. Guattari also refused to map the micropolitical realm via pre-given models and specialised knowledges assumed as axiomatic truths. Instead, his concern was to find out the "graft" procedures that can – both in theory and practice – allow subjectivities to commit to

a procedure of "auto-modelization", which appropriates all or part of existing models in order to construct its own cartographies, its own reference points, and thus its own analytic approach, its own analytic methodology.⁵¹¹

This relationship with rules is ironic in spirit, as it performs the opposite operation than a cynical relativism that always sides with power. Here, artifices and procedures are invented in order to constantly disrupt the flows of power wherever they manifest themselves. It is possible to see striking parallels between Guattari's preoccupation with models and his suggested distinct mode of meta-modelling on the one hand, and the predicaments of game and play as connoting sociability on the other. By proposing the schizoanalytical approach, Guattari (and Deleuze) did not mean to romanticise the psychological condition that bears the same prefix; rather, he was proposing an analysis of the very 'grafts' that develop in the relations between various worlds (situations) and the meaning of the actions arranged within them:

[Schizoanalysis] tries to understand how it is that you got where you are. 'What is your model to you'? It does not work?—Then, I don't know, one tries to work together. One must see if one can make a graft of other models. It will be perhaps better, perhaps worse. We will see. There is no question of posing a standard model. And the criterion of truth in this comes precisely when the metamodeling transforms itself into automodeling, or self-management [auto-gestion] of the model if you prefer.⁵¹²

In the context of institutional analysis, Guattari and the others involved in this movement were able (for a short season) to adopt these principles at the level of pedagogical and therapeutic self-organization, or the

⁵¹¹ Guattari, Felix. quoted in Watson, Janell. "Schizoanalysis as Metamodeling", *Fiberculture Journal*, issue 12, 2008. <http://twelve.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-077-schizoanalysis-as-metamodeling> [accessed 05/04/2013].

⁵¹² Ibid.

autonomous self-management (*autogestion*) of an entire institution, substituting bureaucratic procedures with convivial ones.

6.5. *La Lleca* and sociocultural animation: another kind of social work

Another specific example of a practice affirming the precedence of play over the structure of the games used in their project is the Mexican experience of *La Lleca*. *La Lleca* defines itself as a feminist and anticapitalist collective active in Mexico City since 2003.⁵¹³ The specificity of their practice is that it unfolds as an encounter between a group of activists with an artistic background and the inmates of the Santa Martha Acatitla prison in Mexico City. The collective has been working within the penitentiary with male, female and youth offenders in a long term practice that includes a variety of forms of facilitation supporting the “insubordination of affects”⁵¹⁴ and a “critique to institutional education”⁵¹⁵ in prison. Their activities are varied and include a radio project (Radio Kanero), a magazine, collective performances, bodily exercises, writing workshops and children games.

One of the early projects of the group was *Collective Marriage*. For the occasion, the group organised a wedding ceremony during which prisoners and the members of *La Lleca* intermarried. The action was the occasion to question the form of marriage and its gender implications. Participants drafted their own wedding documents, which each couple then signed with a chosen body part. Participants also decided how they wanted the group

⁵¹³ *La Lleca* has four permanent members: Lorena Méndez, Fernando Fuentes, Saúl Sandoval y Juan Mena; other members who joined the collective for specific projects are: Juliana Floriano, Cristina Rodríguez, Mariano Andrade, Guadalupe Peralta, Liliana Chávez, Minerva Ante y Hunab Mata and Rodrigo Hernandez-Gomez.

⁵¹⁴ *La Lleca, Como Hacemos Lo Que Hacemos*, (Consejo Nacional Para La Cultura y Las Artes , Mexico, 2008), 57. My translation.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

arranged for their wedding photos and came up with toasts to celebrate the occasion, and then went on to dance without music. Storytelling also plays an important role for *La Lleca's* way of "being alongside"⁵¹⁶ the prisoners. Projects focusing on personal narration and representation included a co-investigation of the popular forms of representation of delinquency that involved the relatives and friends of the inmates, photo histories and collective self-portraits. In *Poetry Without Poetry*, the group engaged in a critique of the "cultural uses, both contemporary and historical, of writing",⁵¹⁷ questioning the accepted social function of writing and looking for a new role for writers. However, the form of expression remained conceived of as a medium or tool and not as an end in itself: in their words, it "was not a project about writing or about creating a new type of writing. It was the creation of a unique social formation between 6 people".⁵¹⁸ This was reflected in the manner of working utilised by the group. Initially, a methodology was suggested, but it remained a blueprint that was then abandoned when the process led the group to function in another manner. As an unnamed *La Lleca* member writes,

After presenting the methods of writing that I had come to develop, the other members were free to take or leave them. These methods held the group's interest for only several weeks and after that we left them behind in a search for our own manners of working.⁵¹⁹

Another crucial component of *La Lleca's* experience was its attention to the somatic dimension of relations, how bodies affect one another through co-presence, proximity and content. Touching, hugging, caressing and laughing were all integral part of the praxis of the group, as they addressed the consequences that incarceration bears on the corporeal

⁵¹⁶ La Lleca, website, www.lalleca.net [accessed 04/05/2012]. My translation from Spanish.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

dimensions of the relationship with oneself and others. In *Competition*, gender normativity was discussed through the context of who had the most hairy armpits between inmates and Lorena Méndez, one of the female members of the group. Another project, *Children Games*, which was in the words of another *La Lleca's* member "one of our best actions",⁵²⁰ created the ambience for this kind of physical and emotional exchange through the simple playing of a variety of popular children games (spin-the-bottle, charades, hangman, etc.).

The participants always note that when they are playing with us, they forget where they are. It is with "children's games" that we construct a very particular atmosphere, one of "convivencia." It could be because the differences between the participants and us disappear when we have this type of spontaneous contact. We hug when we play with teams or when our side wins a point.⁵²¹

The importance of ludic procedures and the specific politics of conviviality that they convey for *La Lleca* is narrated by another member of the collective in an log entry written for Cynthia Pech, a professor of Communication Studies at the Autonomous University of Mexico, who investigated the practice of the collective as a participant observer in 2010:

We were playing snakes and ladders; each writing down his number on paper and so on... We confronted the issue of social recognitions; for what are we usually congratulated and what might be the "rewards" and in what cases these might work or not. We also talked about work ... This was around the image of a man lying down, who went so low in the serpent until he became a

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

"mamarracho" (galoot/crazy fool) as the boys called him.

And therefore came the question of how necessary it is make the most of time ... but how to seize time? And according to whom? ...We talked again about how for some people the use of time is a "stable" work whose goals are to have a car and a family, and about how some of us do not want that [...]. It is a fact that economic distribution is not "fair" and that money is not synonymous with happiness either. The game went on like this, everyone threw the dice, and spoke from the image ...⁵²²

In the above passage and on other occasions reported in the publication *Como Hacemos Lo Que Hacemos*⁵²³ (How we do what we do) – La Lleca insists on not wanting to ascribe their practice to a given discipline, field of knowledge or tradition, so as to preserve the possibilities for collective action to remain open and permeable to change and experimentation, but also to question its own methodological premises and prevent them from becoming routinized methods. The convivial aspect of the practice is further made apparent by the ludic approach that characterises much of their work. However, children games and playful activities with the inmates are never gamified procedures valorised in their own right on the basis of aesthetic properties. Rather, they are proposals for collective play that constitute the starting point for coming together and are subsequently modified, taken elsewhere or even abandoned if necessary. In the projects that specifically challenge stereotypes around gender relations and the media representation of prisoners, these interventions bring about a vernacular, localising aesthetics that constitutes a grammar for the circulation of kinds of affects that are different from those imposed

⁵²² La Lleca working log, 24th June 2010, prepared by Liliana Chavez, quoted in Pech, Cynthia "Arte activista/arte político: reflexiones en torno al trabajo del colectivo La Lleca con adolescentes varones en situación de reclusión", *Arte y políticas de identidad*, 2010, vol. 3 (December), 29-40, 36. My translation.

⁵²³ *La Lleca, Como Hacemos Lo Que Hacemos*.

by the prison logic (e.g. a macho masculinity). Furthermore, conviviality emerges from their attempts to open up a space of reciprocity and self-organization within one of the most controlling institutions of the modern state. In one of the processes narrated in the book, following the theft of a camera belonging to a member of the collective, La Lleca decided to speak with the group about how to solve the issue of security and trust within them and between the group and the other inmates without involving the security guards. Most decisions were taken via articulate and apparently disorganized discussions, and chaotic conversations are an important component of the process of dialogue in this practice. When qualifying the kind of conversations they wish to facilitate with the young men they work with, La Lleca specified that they are not interested in “creating a shower of opinions” nor in “giving shape to a chat forum”⁵²⁴ where all that counts is the repetition of personal opinion. Instead, what is valued is the capacity to construct collective knowledges out of these conversations, knowledges that this collective recognizes as being situated and transversal, in direct reference to *Colectivo Situaciones* and the work of Felix Guattari. In truth, the collective practice of La Lleca is informed by politically engaged and activist art. Yet, it is relevant to discuss the specificities of their way of doing things in terms of a militant convivial praxis too, a hypothesis that is confirmed also by the attention and uneasiness of the collective with respect to the positioning of their own practice within the art field:

It’s difficult for us to talk about our work (and thus its relation to artistic production) because the type of work that we do is not motivated solely by artistic concerns. Moreover, the work is perhaps best defined negatively via its critique of certain historical tendencies within art, be they economic, institutional, or productive. To a certain extent, the very demand for accounting for the “artistic” in our work forces its orientation towards capitalist

⁵²⁴ Ibid.,102. My translation.

and artistic systems of production and their attendant institutions that we repudiate — if we have to open ourselves and our work up to them it can only be while on the run, so as to be a moving target. To begin and to return to the negative, we can note certain relations between our work and current artistic production (taken generally). We don't do "interdisciplinary" work, neither do we essentialise "collectivity"; we don't force art (as institutionally constructed) to stand in for politics (as institutionally constructed) or vice versa; and we don't use "pseudo-ethnographic" approaches to address social problems.⁵²⁵

Because of this uneasy relation with the art context, the experience of La Lleca offers a precious entry point to consider conviviality in relation to both the history of the arts and the developments of social work. Discussing their collective work, Cynthia Pech introduced the framework of sociocultural animation,⁵²⁶ an important insight that allows me to articulate the last genealogy of militant convivial practices developed since the 1960s and 1970s in response to the expansion of global capital. From this time onward in fact, the exploration of different kinds of sociability became not only the remit of artists experimenting with the political and pushing the boundaries of artistic praxis in their respective realms (visual, performative, etc...), as we saw in the case of Situationism and other artistic avant-gardes. In truth, many of the artists that operated in this period understood their experimentations as a critique and reformulation of the major conceptual pairs of modern art – such as audiences and actors, frame and painting, oeuvre and support platform, art and everyday life, art and revolution, art and politics, etc. However, during the same time, a different, minor form of artistic experimentation was also emerging from a different set of preoccupations, less specifically

⁵²⁵ La Lleca, website, www.lalleca.net [accessed 04/05/2012]. My translation.

⁵²⁶ Pech, Cynthia. "Arte activista/arte político: reflexiones en torno al trabajo del colectivo La Lleca con adolescentes varones en situación de reclusión", *Arte y políticas de identidad*, 2010, vol. 3 (December), 33. My translation.

artistic and more broadly cultural in character, one that had as its main object the critique of dominant models of organizing public social provisions. During the 1960s and 1970s in various parts of the world (especially in Europe and North America) social workers and community organizers became interested in radicalizing the political import of their work using creative, ludic and artistic processes in their practices.

Sociocultural Animation

Considering the recent history of socially engaged art practices, art historian Shannon Jackson noted the lack of attention given to various histories of social work to account for its development:

Although the history of welfare and social policy is seldom referenced in discussions of community art, I would argue that an awareness of it is necessary for a full understanding of this work.⁵²⁷

The history of the formation of social provisions during modernity can be linked to at least three different discourses. The first, there is the model of charity that precedes the form of the modern state. Practiced by the elites and morally reaffirmed by religious authorities in various contexts, this model is geared towards a temporary alleviation of the sufferings of the lower classes while confirming the existing social order. A sentiment of gratitude is also expected to mark the appropriate response of the recipients to the magnanimity of those in power. Alongside this, a second model emerged through the articulation of liberal bourgeois morality, which looked for techniques that could to improve the characteristics of those in need in the name of a democratic principle. And finally a third model, in contrast with the previous two, translated in modern terms the

⁵²⁷ Jackson, Shannon. *Social works: Performing art, supporting publics*. (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 137.

traditional forms of mutual aid and solidarities of the plebs and working classes – such as for instance Friendly Societies, Societies of Mutual Aid and early union and cooperative formations. Within this history, sociocultural animation can be seen as describing a specific current of thought emerging among progressive social workers that during the 1960s and 1970s were looking for models of care in a variety of settings, ranging from informal and street education to chronic pain management, work with elderly patients with dementia or residential communities for former addicts. While it definitely comprises many pedagogical aspects, the specificities of animation as a convivial cultural practice and as an approach to cultural policies are best understood as a mode of thinking the provision of care in a way that allows for the autonomy and self-directedness of the 'receiver'.

Sociocultural animation does not correspond to a unitary body of work deriving from an identifiable thinker or a clear-cut method of social work. Its proponents comprised of a heterogeneous group of adult educators, community and social workers who shared a common set of values concerning the role of cultural practices as an important and political element of social life. The origins of sociocultural animation can be traced back to francophone countries, especially Canada, France, Belgium, francophone Switzerland and also Holland during the 1960s. As the sociologist of leisure Joffre Dumazedier (one of the first proponents of sociocultural animation) put it, sociocultural animation consists of

forming the people to a 'militant' culture to reinforce a progressive republic in struggle against the reactionary forces and the pressures of money" and of "creating leisures within an idea of cultural revolution of free time, leisures that modify the expression of self, the relations with others and the relation with nature".⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ Joffre Dumazedier, 1962, quoted in Della Croce, Claudia, Joëlle Libois, and Rima Mawad. *Animation socioculturelle: Pratiques multiples pour un métier complexe*. (Editions L'Harmattan, 2011), 34. My translation.

Sociocultural animation is concerned with the cultural and material poverty of populations, such as residents of social housing projects for instance, whose most immediate needs are often met by other welfare policies and yet find themselves reduced to being a client of the state. Roughly defined, activities in these animation programmes make use of artistic media, such as music-making, dancing, graffiti art, games and theatre – and other ethnographic and sociological tools such as discussion forums, questionnaires, interviews and informal conversations to find out the problems that impact the quality of life of the constituency the most. While the expression ‘sociocultural animation’ only recently become more widely adopted within the English-speaking world, a significant overlap exists between the principles of equality and self-determination that it proposes as a paradigm for cultural interventions and the frameworks of ‘community arts’ and ‘community organizing’ more central to the 1970s cultural activism traditions of the UK and US respectively⁵²⁹. As a social and cultural policy framework, sociocultural animation was however a central component of the political processes within the European Union during the 1970s. In 1976 the European Council of Cultural Cooperation defined it as such:

Animation is that stimulus to the mental, physical and emotional life of people in a given area which moves them to undertake a wider range of experiences through which they find a higher degree of self-realisation, self-expression, and awareness of belonging to a community which they can influence. In urban societies today this stimulus seldom arises spontaneously from the circumstances of

⁵²⁹ For a contextualization of community arts in the UK, see Kelly, Owen. *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels*. (Comedia, 1983). For a contextualization of community organizing in the US, see Kahn, Si. *Creative community organizing: A guide for rabble-rousers, activists, and quiet lovers of justice*. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).

everyday life. It has to be contrived as something additional to the environment.⁵³⁰

Within the framework of policymaking, the umbrella of sociocultural animation was applied for a brief season at the level of local institutions to protect the self-organizing processes that social justice movements were pushing forth in civil society. Educators, artist and social workers used this framework during the early Seventies to push for an official support of those cultural practices that questioned and challenged the economic and political conditions of the life of their constituents, allowing them to engage in the autonomous management of their resources. Culture and art were used as tools to arrive at a materialist reading of power and inequality, and to promote social solidarity. Jakob Kornbeck, Administrator of the European Commission for the Directorate General for Education and Culture, posited sociocultural animation as an alternative to the more conservative framework of Social Work. In the article "Reflections on the Exportability of Social Pedagogy and its Possible Limits",⁵³¹ he referenced Social Work (*Sozialarbeit, assistance sociale*) – as the least emancipatory approach to social care, often articulated through bureaucratic procedures located within social administration institutions. In his view, Social Work conceives of the relationship with its constituents as one with 'clients' in need of material assistance; only to a lesser degree does this model take care of the psychological and social aspects of malaise. The idea of help also reveals an understanding of the persons it seeks to reach as 'in deficit', as lacking something to be fully integrated citizens. In this sense, the predicaments of Social Work can be readily inscribed within the welfare state provisions distributed as 'services' to the population of entitled citizens, but also as a means of state disciplining and control over those excluded from economic productivity and gain.

⁵³⁰ Simpson, J.A., in the foreword to Jor, Finn, *The demystification of culture* (Council of Europe. Strasbourg, 1976).

⁵³¹ Kornbeck, Jacob "Reflections on the Exportability of Social Pedagogy and Its Possible Limits". *Social Work in Europe*, Vol. 9, No. 2. (2002), pp. 37-49.

The ethos of sociocultural animation therefore influenced the early phases of the European Union project as a more progressive model for cultural and social policies. In 1976 the Council of Europe in Oslo publicly endorsed community arts (UK) and animation as viable approaches. They saw part of the mandate of public culture as that of "assisting people to overcome the pressure and seductions which confine their leisure to the passivity of the mass media and the escapism of commercially produced *mass culture*".⁵³² The institutional reforms aiming to give institutional support to sociocultural animation and community arts were initially promoted through the work of the Council for Cultural Cooperation (CCC), part of the Council of Europe under the heading of "*cultural democracy*", an approach that opposed the paradigm of "*democratization of culture*" that was prevalent at the time.⁵³³ While the democratization of culture maintained the idea of a national high culture that needed to be democratically made accessible to all citizens as the basis for a shared identity, the proponents of cultural democracy saw the role of cultural workers as one aimed "to offer each individual the means and the incentive to become the active agent of his own development and of the qualitative development of the community to which he belongs".⁵³⁴

Already during the second half of the 1970s sociocultural animation lost momentum in official national and international policy. A variety of factors contributed to this rapid decline: the petrol crisis of 1973 affected public spending in many countries and animation interventions swiftly faced cuts; the model failed to provide meaningful quantitative 'proof' of its effectiveness to funders who were increasingly compelled to offer evidence of the meaningfulness of such approach; the defendants of the

⁵³² Proceedings of the Conference of European Ministers for Culture, Oslo, 1976. Quoted in Jarvis, Peter, and Colin Griffin, eds. *Adult and Continuing Education: Adult education-viewed from the disciplines*. Vol. 5. (Taylor & Francis, 2003), 195-6.

⁵³³ Evrard, Yves. "Democratizing Culture or Cultural Democracy?." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 27, no. 3 (1997): 167-175.

⁵³⁴ Grosjean, Etienne and Henri Ingberg, "Animation: Implications of a policy of socio-cultural community development." *Information Bulletin of the Council of Europe*, 74(33), 1974, 1-39, 4.

democratization of culture model, including many museum directors, staged a public polemic to defend the reasons of high culture. But there were also internal factors that came to the fore as dissolving agents: animators who saw cultural events and artistic expression as values in themselves came to clash with those who utilised a more militant and materialist analysis of culture and privileged a social mission (a similar debate unfolded in Britain in relation to the institutionalization of community arts).⁵³⁵ The professional profile and status of the animator also became a source of debate, one that led some countries to professionalize this figure by creating animation schools and training programmes.⁵³⁶ Nonetheless, sociocultural animation still provides a significant contribution to the articulation of contemporary militant conviviality. At its best, it represented a truly international discussion around the role of popular culture as an active agent in the resistance to both the bureaucratization of the state and the expansion of a mass culture driven by the market in the aftermath of WWII. Its principles had a lasting effect on the level of regional and municipal policies, giving local politicians (usually left wing) the tools to protect autonomous practices, resources and legitimacy, de facto providing job opportunities for many of those involved in radical politics during that time. In terms of conviviality, sociocultural animation can be seen to have taken an interest in leisure time as meaningful on a micropolitical level; despite the attempts to systematize it into a certified discipline, most of its proponents defended it as an open *techne* moving between pedagogical, ludic, artistic and therapeutic concerns according to the situation at hand. And finally, while many of its practitioners are not famous authors or artists, sociocultural

⁵³⁵ Cf. Kelly, Owen. *Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels*.

⁵³⁶ Course of higher education training sociocultural animators are on offer in France, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Italy. A more extensive but dated survey can be found in Moulier, Pierre, "The Training of Cultural Animators", *UNESCO Cultural Development: documentary dossier*, 18-19, 1980, CC/80/WS/29.

animation offers a history able to narrate the joined efforts of social workers and their constituencies as they fought against social control with creative and cultural means. In the context of an increasingly punitive state that tends to intervene via the criminalization of social problems – rather than their prevention or care – the investigation of how social workers have been organizing various collectivities in the name of social justice and solidarity, with an emphasis on play and culture not as added pleasure but as core political activities, remains an important history to be further investigated.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Notes towards a contemporary militant conviviality

By selecting the practices narrated in this section, my hope was to unfold the ways in which conviviality is contributing to a new kind of militancy, one that places the capacity of experiencing the presence of the other as pleasure in the foreground as a resource and as a manifestation of the political. Each of the genealogies presented here contributes to inform the current imaginaries of radical practitioners in education, culture and activism today, and it also transformed the possibilities of what it means to research in more specialist realms such as social research and psychological care. This selection is by no mean conclusive or prescriptive of the ways in which militant conviviality might evolve in the future, but it more simply wish to register a constellation of experience that connotes the present juncture of critical interventions understood in a broad sense. Taken together, I believe that these practices therefore allow to extrapolate a set of principles that might be useful to theorise further as the constitutive elements of an emerging militant conviviality able to raise the stakes of how it might be possible to politicise our encounters in the social sphere. In what follows, I will outline some of the ways in which it might be possible to recognise that we are in the presence of a convivial ambience that is distinct from the way in which sociability is construed as a neoliberal value.

Different playgrounds

A first sense in which the emerging militant conviviality diverges from sociability is the way it stands in relationships with so-called 'real life'. As we have seen, in modernity, sociability described a space that stood as an alternative to both the constraints of private life and the burdens of work. Considered in terms of play, it can be said that modern sociability constructed its own playground away from the rest of social relations, it

functioned as a "magic circle."⁵³⁷ Its autonomy was therefore conceived as a freedom from before it could be a freedom to. Its thinkers formulated sociability as a diffused capacity for finding satisfaction in a sociation that needed to be pursued in a pure form in order to become the main reason for being-together. The necessities and travesties of real life in the salons and other modern institutions of sociable interaction needed to be minimized or ignored as much as possible for sociability to manifest itself more purely. The separateness that characterised modern sociability is also the reason why the examples of sociable practices that both Schleiermacher and Simmel's essays on the subject are anchored on, are consistent despite the hundred years separating the two. However, as Simmel put it,

*If sociability cuts off completely the threads which bind it to real life and out of which it spins its admittedly stylized web, it turns from play to empty farce, to a lifeless schematization proud of its woodenness.*⁵³⁸

Even Simmel had to admit that real life played an irreducible role in determining the quality of sociable interaction. In his view, the main danger was to forget that an excessive use of mannerism could become meaningless and ridiculous, with no connections with the real life forces with which sociability was supposed to play. Through the proliferation of different brands and the acceptance of a variety of regimes of conduct, contemporary *gamification* entertains a different relation with real life. As we have seen, its main problem is not that it could potentially cut off the threads that connect it to real life, but that it needs to substitute itself to life as, having mastered the ingredients for conjuring up experiences and situations where it can stir action towards preferable behaviours, it discovers that it no longer needs this category of interpretation to feed its

⁵³⁷ For an overview of the concept of the 'magic circle' and its criticism, see Stenros, Jaakko. "In Defence Of A Magic Circle: The Social And Mental Boundaries Of Play." (Article presented at the *DiGRA Nordic 2012 Conference*. 2012).

⁵³⁸ Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability", 129.

speculative abstraction. In this respect, the playground is being stretched at libitum to become a layer on top of the world.

By contrast, in my analysis, rather than following the wide spread assumption that the playground of play is something different from everyday life, conviviality takes this distinction as problematic and it uses it as a leverage to begin to critically question the conditions that prevent play from becoming a quotidian mode of relation with things and others. In conviviality, the ethos that organizes the playground in relation to real life is one of neither separation nor substitution; rather, it insists upon its own conditions of implication with the real, on transforming the threads that connect it with real life to expand the possibility of play in it. In conviviality, the starting point is that there is no real life outside the playground as such: the playground emerges as an expression of a given social composition that is not taken at face value. Referring to the performative nature of gender, Judith Butler wrote: "*performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions than those in theatrical contexts*".⁵³⁹ Commenting this passage, Jon McKenzie explained that Butler's major contribution to the field of performance studies was to suggest that

*the subjunctive mood of the "as if," used by Schechner and others [to describe the il-lusory separateness of the playground] ... must be understood not in opposition to an indicative mood of "it is," but as intimately related to an imperative mood which commands "it must be".*⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ Butler, Judith. "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory." *Theatre journal* (1988): 525. It is perhaps significant to notice in passing that for Huizinga too it was important to reconceptualise the idea of the playground away from the paradigm of the theatrical "stage", which he thought we inherited from 17th century culture as the main rhetorical figure to imagine the context of deeds and narration he wanted to reclaim as play forms.

⁵⁴⁰ McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (Routledge, 2002), 168.

Modern sociability procured itself spaces and institutions that provided protected enclaves from the 'it is'. It needed to be a pure space of utopia, either a precursor of the society that would be delivered by progress in the future of a prefiguration of a revolution to come. Sociability instead pitches its 'as if' not in relation to social conventions, but as a pretend 'it must be'. In my view, conviviality can be seen as a mode of sociability that explicitly addresses the violent nature of the clash between the 'as if' of play and the imperative 'must be' injunctions of a real life that is organized so that it never stops working for capitalist valorisation, even - and perhaps especially - when it plays.

Irony versus cynicism

Following from the above, another difference between sociability and conviviality relates to the ways they frame their situation via a process of meta-communication. Meta-communication refers to the ability of sentient beings to loosen the relation between a given sign and the reality it conventionally represents. For anthropologist Gregory Bateson, the first sign that social play is taking place is that two or more people begin to communicate among themselves in a special way that invites them to become aware of the fact that they are playing. In his definition, "*play occurs within a delimited psychological frame, a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages*".⁵⁴¹ Bateson's reflection on play was inspired by animals:

What I encountered at the zoo was a phenomenon well known to everybody: I saw two young monkeys playing, i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence of which the unit actions of signals were similar to but not the same as combat. It was evident, even to the human

⁵⁴¹ Bateson, Gregory. "A Theory of Play and Phantasy", in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (University Of Chicago Press, 2000), 191.

*observer, that the sequence as a whole was not combat, and evident to the human observer that to the participant monkeys this was "not combat." Now, this phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message "this is play."*⁵⁴²

Meta-communication is based on an awareness of the contingent and indeterminate quality of linguistic systems of communication that involves the capacity not only to recognize a given sign, but also, paraphrasing Bateson, to see that a sign is precisely a sign, something which can denote different intentions and meanings. The signal that in Bateson's formulation carries the message that 'this is play' simultaneously reveals that the laws of relation that had previously been perceived as inevitable, whether one is aware of them or not (in his example, the violence of combat), can in fact been seen as rules of engagement requiring awareness and willingness, or to put it differently, our attention and our intention.

As it turns out, while meta-communication is the precondition of a critical engagement with the world, it is not necessarily subversive in itself. Actually, contemporary power celebrates meta-communication as a particularly productive capacity of individuals, as it is one of the preferred modalities of engagement with the platforms of mediated sociability it proposes. An example at hand to illustrate this phenomenon might be the global trope of *cool*, a mode of engagement with the world that is informed by a refusal to believe in the sincerity of signs and a resistance to trust the affects that they provoke in us. *Cool* is a globally encouraged cultural posture, and one for which the experience industries are well prepared to cater to. As Alan Liu explained in the book *The Laws of Cool*, this mode of conduct is

⁵⁴² Ibid. 9.

*...both strangely resistant to and enthralled by the dominating information of postindustrial life, cool is the shadow ethos of knowledge work. It is the "unknowing," or unproductive knowledge, within knowledge work by which those in the pipeline from the academy to the corporation "gesture" toward an identity recompensing them for work in the age of identity management.*⁵⁴³

As *cool* is progressively established as a mode of conduct and of relation with the affects produced by semicapitalism, then the recent success of 'This Is Not A Game' aesthetics might signal an attempt to create a different mode of sociability, one that can be more candidly enthusiastic about the pleasures of playing together with others (because it is just a game anyway). The collective practices encouraged in ARGs ensure the possibility of committing to the joys of togetherness without the labour of care that sustains this capacity outside the commodity form of entertainment, through a common and constant invention of shared rules. For this reason, and despite their fresh appeal, the core ambivalences of TINAG formats of organization reiterate the dominant 'must be' of capitalist sociability experienced as entertainment rather than experimenting with alternative convivial possibilities that might be able to subvert rather than feed into its social configuration.

In order to mark the different ways in which metacommunication is deployed in capitalist sociability and militant conviviality I will borrow the concepts of cynicism and irony as discussed by Franco Berardi Bifo. Referring to the problem of contemporary power, Berardi acknowledged that the contemporary subject is faced with an impossibility of believing in a Truth principle able to anchor and justify the Law. The absence or crisis of Truth however does not result in an undifferentiated relativist ethics, but it in turn opens up two main possible intellectual postures in relation to the Law, one cynical and the other ironic according to their positioning of disbelief in relation to power:

⁵⁴³ Ibid. 78.

*Neither irony nor cynicism believes in the true foundation of law. But the cynical person bends to the law while mocking its false and pretentious values, while the ironic person escapes the law altogether, creating a linguistic space where law has no effectiveness. The cynic wants to be on the side of power, even though he doesn't believe in its righteousness. The ironist simply refuses the game, recreating the world on the basis of a language that is incongruent with reality.*⁵⁴⁴

Berardi's distinction between irony and cynicism can also be applied to our analysis of meta-communication to operate the distinction between conviviality and sociability: while all playful activities involve meta-communication insofar as they must recognize that 'this is play', only conviviality invites participants to partake in an ironic attitude that rejects the inevitability of the rules as confirming the existing power relations that traverse a given collectivity. The sociability of brands and scenes do not encourage participants to believe in specific truths, it still requires them to have faith in brands and scenes themselves as the organizers of signification, articulation and valorisation. From the perspective of conviviality instead, collectivity is based upon the possibility to produce a different mode of organizing out of the common conditions that effect those involved. This capacity of creating a sense of play is treated as an ethical responsibility that binds those who participate in ironic play to a "*social solidarity*".⁵⁴⁵ This process of communication stands in opposition to the aggressive attitude of cynical relations that need a target against which to vent their critical faculties in a way that reconfirms the power dynamics that produced it in the first place.

⁵⁴⁴ Berardi, Franco (Bifo). "Irony, cynicism and the lunacy of the Italian media power". *Through Europe*, 15th February 2011. <http://th-rough.eu/writers/bifo-eng/irony-cynicism-and-lunacy-italian-media-power> [accessed 30/02/2011]

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

Vulnerability or Flexibility

So far, I've introduced two level of analysis derived from the distinction between game and play to differentiate between sociability and conviviality. First, the production of the 'as if' of the play space and time can be pitched either as an alternative to the 'it is' or in opposition to the 'must be'. Second, the metacommunication of play, the realization that our representation systems bear a non-necessary relationship with the contents that they address, makes us responsible and able to choose between tweaking signification to reconfirm the injunctions of power, or vice versa embrace the lack of ultimate truths as an opportunity to produce ourselves differently. On a third level of analysis, sociability and conviviality can also be said to describe very different processes of subjectivation. As we have seen, modern sociability was born as a partial antidote to the subjectivities created by the totalitarian regimes of societies ruled by absolute monarchy and religious authorities, in which one's relation with oneself and with others was ascribed to a repertoire of socially policed options contingent upon one's class, gender, race, age, profession, etc. Early modern sociability facilitated the expression of an individualized self, offering a temporary relief from available repertoires and an opportunity for experimentation with other modes of collective subjectivation, a feature that persisted in the conceptualization of sociability thought modernity. With the radical shift that started in the 1960s and 1970s however, the paths of subjectivation based on the construction of stable identities were severely disrupted, not only for those plebs that had seldom enjoyed the opportunity of stability to begin with, but also on the level of the cultural production of imaginaries and aspirations. Initially, the global experience industry that developed during those years was a response to the new subjectivities emerging from the counter-cultural and social justice movements of the time, who had become too many and too strong to be governed with techniques of shame and work ethics that still worked for earlier generations. According to Suely Rolnik, the 1960s and 1970s inaugurated a new ethic-aesthetic

regime of subjectivation that substituted to the fixed identities of the 1950s a new flexible personality,⁵⁴⁶

*constituted by the absence of an absolute and stable identification with any repertoire, and the absence of blind obedience to any established rule, giving rise to a plasticity of the contours of subjectivity (instead of identities); a fluidity in the incorporation of new universes, alongside a freedom of hybridization (instead of ascribing a truth-value to any particular universe); and a courageous experimentalism taken to its limits, alongside an agility with improvisation that created new territories and their respective cartographies (instead of fixed territories with their predetermined and supposedly stable languages).*⁵⁴⁷

For the short season of the 1960s and 1970s, this new flexible subjectivity was able to actualize itself in a proliferation of different forms of life, often distinctively convivial in their ethic and aesthetic, which were inaugurated as subversive initiatives, propelling a micro-revolution that effectively brought the post-war Hollywood version of society based on the hegemony of the Victorian family to a point of collapse.

Rolnik importantly cautions against the consequences of assuming that the newfound plasticity and dynamism of subjectivity as a value in itself, an unquestionably positive trait that would liberate the process of subjectivation from the interference of power. Indeed, "*flexibility, fluidity, and hybridization*"⁵⁴⁸ became the new traits of the dominant subjectivity of neoliberal capitalism that also developed during the time. Despite the cult status that many of the 1960s and 1970s' counter-cultures enjoy today, it is therefore necessary to differentiate between the ways in which

⁵⁴⁶ Holmes, Brian. *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms*. (New York: Autonomedia, 2007).

⁵⁴⁷ Rolnik, Suely. "Avoiding False Problems: Politics of the Fluid, Hybrid, and Flexible", *e-flux journal* n.25 (May 2011).

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

their sociable practices brought into being different modes of fluid collective subjectivation. In agreement with Rolnik's analysis, I claim that the sociability of brands and scenes stimulates and celebrates a kind of flexible subjectivity that "*has its origin in the refusal of one's vulnerability to the other and to the deterritorializing turbulence that he or she provokes*",⁵⁴⁹ whereas in conviviality there is a consideration for the singular expressive capacities of each person, not only when these express vital energy, but also when they are modes of existence and understanding that require effort in order to be recognized and admitted in the space of play.

An encounter with the *other* that allows the self to remain open to its consequences is a destabilizing experience because it implies a loss of control and a risk (of pain, dissolution of meaning, conflict, boredom, disillusionment, etc.), and yet it is precisely because of the fragility of subjectivity that it is possible to touch the world and be touched by it, to be moved by its forces and sustain a practice of the self that is also a transformative action in the world, in ways that generate pleasure. The flexible subjectivity of the era of gamification, instead of sustaining this pleasure of encounters, encourages a proliferation of desires. It occupies the subject with games that constitute worlds of smooth perfection, where an illusion of absolute control guides collective subjectivation. Here too change is at the heart of the process, yet it is not a change that results from encountering alterity, but one that is needed for desire to be maintained (productively).

Invariables against dispersion

A fourth distinction between the sociability of gamification and conviviality relates to the different ways in which they concatenate discrete situations and experiences to form broader historical and biographical narratives.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

The engagement economy of Post-Fordism is allegedly the economy of a time that knows no rest, but also one with no history and no stories. After the 1970s, capitalism has become the fundamental social dynamic. The Market is the new ontological basis of the social, replacing the primacy of State and Church in most parts of the world. The specificity of the semio-capitalist logic is that while it is able to produce endless relations, recombining symbols and compounds of affects with fragments of signification, the territories that it produces do not generate historical meaning per se. The experiences of the experience economy result in an accumulation, a collection perhaps, rather than a biography. Argentinian scholar Franco Ingrassia calls this new social dynamic an "*aesthetic of dispersion*".⁵⁵⁰ The process of dispersion maps the new dynamic of the social, substituting to the modern tendency towards entropic fixedness (one History, one job, one family, one identity, etc.), the anxious restlessness of the market. An infinite series of temporary jobs has now replaced the one occupation of the past; couples do not last together unless they 'work' on their relationship; one's address must change frequently to follow work but also to escape real estate speculation; friends met during our youth rarely follow us for life, unless an effort is made to keep in touch. Less and less moored or constrained in fixed structures (traditional, bureaucratic, etc.), sociable interactions now unfold through liquid fluxes, where contact and intimacy with others is much more dynamic, but also inevitably less memorable and more violently prone to dissolution.

The aesthetics of dispersion seem to have realized the future that Toffler envisaged in *Future Shock*, not just as acceleration but also as a shattering. In Ingrassia's view, dispersion is not something that capital organises or plans for, but manifests itself as a symptom, a kind of side effect or residual element of the procedures of governance in place on a global scale. However, I believe that it would be more accurate to see it as a core dynamic of its productive cycle rather than as a mere side effect of capitalist logic. It is on this level that the platforms and ambiances of

⁵⁵⁰ Ingrassia, Franco, ed. *Esteticas de la Dispersion* (Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2013).

gamification become important, as they produce worlds that one can inhabit *significantly but only temporarily*. This is true for both the transnational capitalist class⁵⁵¹ that can actually access this kind of tertiary affluent consumption (and participate in its immaterial production as part of a class of specialized, remunerated professionals), and the millions of residual, obsolete or 'superfluous' populations whose only access to the fluxes of capitalist consumption is via an imaginary identification with global brand culture. From the perspective of power, keeping the social body subjected to constant change becomes a means of generating anxiety, a fear that has no object, and instigating more commitment and dependence on the products that allow us to produce existential narratives, however precarious or temporarily rented these might be. In the absence of autonomous common processes to produce meaning, the identification with the images of the spectacle and the engagement with the gaming repertoires of the experience industries become the primary tools for the production of the self. In this context, the forms of political and aesthetic insurgency conceived of as shocking incursions into a monolithic social order are no longer effective carriers of positive change. Metonymies such as critical theory *smashing* false pretences, artworks *shocking* the senses, or journalism *shattering* the veil of appearances, lose their efficacy for moving us into action in a context that is no longer organized into rigid regimes, fixed protocols, ritualized procedures. When the context is changed into the fluid one of dispersion, the political, aesthetic and cognitive challenge is rather to find ways of forming and maintaining meaningful relations that can yield meaning across different situations and platforms of experience in a way that is not accumulative. Conviviality can thus be used to describe political practices that focus on sustaining social relations with a reflective and critical approach to their temporality in a context where social relations are constantly torn apart or configured with a sort of embedded planned

⁵⁵¹ Robinson, William and Jerry Harris. "Towards a global ruling class? Globalization and the transnational capitalist class". *Science & Society* 64 (Spring 2000): 11-54. Sklair, Leslie *Sociology of the Global System* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 1-352.

obsolesce. Conviviality seeks to singularize the bonds connecting different collectivities and subjectivities to each other, in the sense that it acknowledges the specificities of the elective affinities and tropisms that connote each social relation. The politics of conviviality in this respect could be said to correspond to what philosopher Miguel Benasayag calls “a quest for the invariables”. In a world where everything is being constantly reconfigured, invariable are those residual elements in biographies “*which cannot be constructed... the things with which humanity has to negotiate, to come to terms with*”.⁵⁵² Benasayag recommends that to find a new condition of potency, it is necessary for subjectivity to establish and perceive its limits, addressing what is not possible and what cannot be constructed. Only departing from that which is not possible can possibility emerge.

For Benasayag, the idea of the flexible subject, smooth and endlessly adaptable, and the accompanying notion that everything can be an epic adventure for those individuals who are willing to try culture hard enough “*is, properly speaking, a psychotic enunciation*”.⁵⁵³ Pure change, without invariables, is in fact no change at all, as the notion of change makes sense only when contrasted with that which cannot be changed, or in other words, change is a relational function. Without a sense of the invariables that singularise subjectivity, incessant inter-action remains impotent because it lacks the friction it needs to generate meaning. In this impotence however there is not only suffering; for many, this impotence is simultaneously a form of pleasure, because it maintains the image that everything could be possible whilst avoiding a coming to terms with the finite dimensions of subjectivation.

Benasayag points out that the injunction to change of contemporary capital operates by forcing organisms to change as if they were artefacts.

⁵⁵² Benasayag, Miguel. “Dispositivi e Affetti” (Lecture at *Focus Brera* lecture series, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Scuola di Nuove Tecnologie dell’Arte, Milan, 24th May 2010). My translation. A video recording of the lecture is available <https://www.youtube.com/user/videofocusdibrera> [accessed 12/12/2011].

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

From a biological perspective, an *organism* is differentiated from an *artefact* or an aggregate by the relationship between the whole and its parts;⁵⁵⁴ but while the unity of the artefact is given by the permanence of its extensive parts, the unity of an organism is an intensive quality. For example, the way in which we would cease to recognize a specific car if enough of its components were substituted with the ones of a different model, while we would still be able to recognize a child whom we have not seen for a long time even if she is growing and changing fast. For this reason, "*change in organism is not achieved through making a tabula rasa, but through the "reactivation of certain attractors"*".⁵⁵⁵

The quest for invariables however cannot be approached with a technique. The logic of technique in fact implies that all limits are negative, they are losses; techniques cannot establish a relation with their limits.⁵⁵⁶ It is for this reason that instead of relying on methods, convivial practice must approach invariables through play by exploring what is afforded by each given situation.

The concept of affordance, as developed in the theories of perception of James J. Gibson⁵⁵⁷ and Donald Norman,⁵⁵⁸ can indeed complement Benasayag's proposal of the activation of the invariables to contrast the meaningless proliferation of dispersion. Affordances describe the perceived and actual possibilities that a certain object or situation offer for action. Norman believed that affordances not only reside in the actual qualities of the objects that make up the physical world (Norman's

⁵⁵⁴ Benasayag, Miguel. *Organismes et artefacts: vers la virtualisation du vivant?* (La Découverte, 2010).

⁵⁵⁵ Benasayag, "Dispositivi e Affetti".

⁵⁵⁶ Benasayag, Miguel. *Connaître est agir: paysages et situations*. (La Découverte, 2006).

⁵⁵⁷ Gibson, James J. "The theory of affordances." In *Perceiving, acting, and knowing*. eds. Shaw, Robert E., and John Bransford. (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977); Gibson, James J. "Notes on affordances." *Reasons for realism. Selected Essays of James J. Gibson*. (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1982): 401-418.

⁵⁵⁸ Norman, Donald A. *The psychology of everyday things*. (Basic Books, 1988); Norman, Donald. "Affordances and design." Unpublished article, <http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/affordances-and-design.html> (2004).

examples are: “*plates are for pushing. Knobs are for turning. Slots are for inserting things into. Balls are for throwing or bouncing*”⁵⁵⁹), they also depend upon the agent’s own perceptions and expectations about the world. In other words, affordances are relational and not fixed attributes of things. To play with something can thus be seen as an exploration and the activation of the possible affordances of the world. In the specific play form of convivial sociability, the exploration and activation of affordances shifts its object of interest from physical items to sociation itself, its reciprocity and the possible range of activities and forms of life that a collectivity can generate. In order to do that, convivial practices constantly elaborate collective cartographies of the lines of greatest resistance they encounter, the blockages caused power, and they consider their attrition as a specific affordance that invites play.

Self-organization is not self-management

A sixth point of distinction between conviviality and sociability is the way in which they articulate the self-organization of collectivities.

To put it succinctly, self-organisation and self-management are not the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ version of the same process. Self-organisation is another term to express the constant proliferation of the social; in order for self-management to be possible, self-organisation is presupposed, not set aside or replaced. The opposite of self-management instead is autonomy, the capacity and the processes through which collective artifices, procedures, methods and rules are generated. In this context, it is useful to consider how the proximity between self-management, promoted by branding and gamification for instance, and autonomy (which literally means “the law we give ourselves”) is not a process of blurring and becoming the same, but it describes a mimetic strategy of a parasitical nature. Autonomy *per se* does not grant the fact that the chosen convivial artifices will be successful to sustain and create

⁵⁵⁹ Norman, *The Psychology Of Everyday Things*, 9.

possibilities of life, but it does indicate that such processes will not be imposed onto a situation from a position of power. Self-management on the other hand insists on the self (and especially collective selves through peer pressure to conform) as the site of negotiation of the multiple dimensions of conflict between the interests of life in common and power. In self-management, there is ultimately no difference between resisting the self and resisting management, as the subjectivity becomes the locus for negotiating the contradictions between the common character of subjectivation and the privatized tools and ambiances available for its reproduction.⁵⁶⁰

Sociability is productive from a capitalist perspective because the self-management it encourages – both a management-by-the-self and a management-of-the-self – is the most efficient way to keep the proliferation of the social entangled with the destiny of capitalism. In the engagement economy, subjectivities can recognize themselves as such only through the identification with the medium of capital. Departing from the same conditions, convivial autonomy opposes to self-management what the thinkers of *Autonomia* called 'auto-valorisation' (or self-valorisation) referring to "*an alternative social structure of value that is founded not on the production of surplus value but on the collective needs and desires of the producing community*".⁵⁶¹

The process of auto-valorisation is a kind of open ended *techne* and resonates with Foucault's research on counter-conducts, friendship, and ascetic practices, which he understood as "*those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic*

⁵⁶⁰ Lopdrup-Hjorth, Thomas, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Pia Bramming, and Michael Pedersen. "Governing work through self-management." *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 11, no. 2 (2011): 97-104.

⁵⁶¹ Hardt and Virno, eds. *Radical thought in Italy*, 264.

values and meets certain stylistic criteria".⁵⁶² In my view, convivial practices describe the ambiances where the autonomous production of aesthetic values and conducts is encouraged and valorised as a substitute for the regime of abstraction of surplus value and not as a component of its realization.

Vernacular aesthetics

To conclude my reflection around the characteristics that differentiate sociability and conviviality, I shall briefly discuss their different aesthetics of engagement as my seventh and last point. Sociability manages its aesthetic qualities (here, aesthetics refers to the involvement of all senses in the classic use of the term) to achieve an overall concordant effect. For example, brand consistency is a preoccupation for brand management as it has to ensure that the brand's recognisability across different media remains strong. This kind of aesthetic consistency presides over the design of experiences that are industrially produced. Design in this sense is an economic discipline that cuts out elements that are deemed discordant with the production of a cool product or of a corporate identity. In the case of sociability, even if the process of production is incorporated into the aesthetics of the experience, as Pine and Gilmore advised in their second book on authenticity, this incorporation is organized as a spectacularization of labour and as a grammatization of play that subdivides its elements into coded performances

In contrast, the aesthetic consistency of convivial practices is not achieved by design, but it emerges as the effect of a process of vernacular composition. In introducing the notion of the *vernacular* here I'm referring to the use that Ivan Illich made of this term.⁵⁶³ He adapted the original

⁵⁶² Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, Water Damage (Vintage Books, 1990), 10–11.

⁵⁶³ Illich, Ivan. "Shadow-Work", *Philosophica* 26, 1980 (2), 7-46.

meaning of the word (vernacular refers to native languages) to describe the look and feel of things when they are home-made or self-made, as opposed to industrially produced. For Illich, the specific aesthetic register of the vernacular connoted the aesthetic production of alter-modern societies, societies based on the informally arranged management of limited resources governed in common, those societies that Marx would have addressed as being based on primitive accumulation⁵⁶⁴ and the social sciences would call societies of subsistence.⁵⁶⁵ For Illich, to focus on the economic and technical traits of these societies often led to a blind spot in research, which was unable to address and explain the often found richness and sophistication of their aesthetics, which he chose to address as vernacular. The characteristic of the vernacular aesthetics is its local quality, in the sense that it express what is singular of the situation that generated it, and its self-organized process of formation, resulting in an heterogeneity that design understood as a rational planning technique can only reconstruct *a posteriori*. This can be typically seen in the case of products marketed to urban liberal elites⁵⁶⁶ that favour crafty products with a home-made, artisanal feel (let's think for instance of the many designer and food markets that are regularly organized in major global cities to celebrate local productions). Vernacular aesthetics as a concept might help to differentiate between the look and feel resulting from the application of a set of technologies to a given process of production and that resulting from the incorporation of the relations of production in the perceivable aesthetic qualities of an item. As Andrew Boyd and Stephen Duncombe put it referring to the organization of social movements "*the popular vernacular we should adopt*" should involve "*creating spectacle*

⁵⁶⁴ Marx, Karl. "Part viii: Primitive accumulation." *Capital* Vol.1 (Penguin, 1990).

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Dalton, George, ed. *Primitive, archaic, and modern economics: Essays of Karl Polanyi*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1968).

⁵⁶⁶ Samuel, Sajay. 'In Defence of Vernacular Ways', *Viewpoint Magazine*, Issue 2 *Theory and Practice*, (September 2012). <http://viewpointmag.com/2012/09/12/in-defense-of-vernacular-ways/> [accessed 03/02/2013].

which is understood as spectacle".⁵⁶⁷ The idea of the vernacular thus points in this sense to an ethics of aesthetic production that would base the elaboration of new forms upon the inconsistencies and indecisions that mark collective practices (the opposite of what happens in branding, where consistency as we have seen is paramount).

⁵⁶⁷ Boyd, Andrew, and Stephen Duncombe. "The Manufacture of Dissent: What the Left Can Learn from Las Vegas." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1, no. 3 (2004), 34-47.

CONCLUSIONS

The experiences that I narrated for the last part of my research are organized both as a map and as a genealogy of practices from the near past. Taken together, they do not result in a comprehensive survey of what is happening in the present, nor were they selected to represent 'best practices' intended to indicate excellence in any way. Rather, the aim was to provide some concrete narrations of experiences that lend a consistency to the conceptual framework of militant conviviality that I have proposed with my research. Indeed, in proposing this concept my aim was to find a perspective capable of holding together practices developed in different contexts, times and places for the purpose of uncovering a shared sets of characteristic values and *modus operandi*.

The necessity to juxtapose recent, contemporary examples of what I came to call militant convivial practices with initiatives and actions from the 1960s and 1970s arises from the fact that while they traditionally belong to different disciplines – such as social sciences research, education, psychotherapy or art – each of them fits into these more official and accepted histories with a degree of unease, as marginal or as exceptions in relation to more canonical centres. Therefore, to uncover and perhaps generate in the course of narration alternative histories that could lend them consistency might be important to claim their importance beyond the restricted concerns of their respective 'fields'.

Among the core concerns of worker's enquiry, meta-branding and maker's movement, participatory action research and militant research, feminist organizing, institutional analysis and micropolitics of groups, as well as sociocultural animation, lies the ambition of addressing the constitution of a new plane of political praxis, rather than a reform of the institutions to which they might properly belong as specialist knowledges (education, academia, activism, art, therapy, etc.). The shared politics of convivial practices begins by positing the social as a conflicted generative realm rather than as an object of political action. Unlike the sociability inherited via the dominant model of modern thought, which was initiated via a

demarcation of the social as a performative space of excellence, the convivial first acquires consistency from the common processes that sustain the material conditions of life for a given context or human grouping. Instead of exclusivity, militant conviviality investigates sustainable modes of inclusivity.

Moreover, my research aimed to show how the collective practices created through the different genealogies that I have described originated in the late 1960s and 1970s for a precise reason, as they were developed to resist and counter the parallel emergence of new capitalist assemblages able to transform the *generative* capacity of sociability into a *productive* injunction. By juxtaposing the rise and evolution of the experience economy until the most processes of gamification with their critical counterparts often associate with the avant-garde artistic production of Situationism and other artistic constellations, I wished to highlight some uncomfortable similarities between their strategies and conceptual starting points, proximities that are not brought into focus by accounts centred on the value that sociality assumes from the perspectives of art theory or marketing alone.

On top of offering a critical friction within and against the empire of experience economy, the collective practices of militant conviviality I have considered expose the limits of a certain radical political praxis inherited from the international workers movement, which maintained a distinction between 'spontaneity' and 'organization'. Through my account of experiences that characterised the 1970s I showed how this dichotomy began to be perceived as a misconstrued problem for revolutionary politics. Rather than assuming the sociability as a natural given, radical conviviality proposed it as a specific political realm to be both invented and preserved as an aspect of the political, rather than a propaedeutic or as a consequential realm of the political. In describing the array of practices that I have presented as militant conviviality, I hoped to contribute to further research by highlighting their micropolitical ethos in a way that avoids the limits embedded in four more common perspectives.

First, by focusing on the immediate ways in which they generate collective and singular subjectivities, the framework of conviviality avoids the false problem of understanding successful (joyous) collective experiences as temporary utopias, or as part of a prefigurative politics. Indeed, each of these practices insists on implicating itself, its knowledges and its participants in relation to the various political problems, inequalities and contradictions in which they operate and upon which they reflect. As such, the temporality it addresses is one of composition of forces in the present rather than a bracketing off of tactical successes to prop up an abstract future. Second, by addressing the aesthetic plane as a matter of both productions of linguistic meaning and of affective corporeality, of somatic as well as poetic import, the framework of militant conviviality complicates the duality between the forms of sociality of the elites and of the plebs. Third, the framework of militant conviviality allows us to connect the problem of organization and aesthetic with those theories of affect that politicise the notions of love and friendship. I'm thinking here of the endnotes that conclude political accounts such as the one found in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* for example, which closes on an exhortation to follow the example of "love, simplicity and innocence"⁵⁶⁸ of Saint Frances of Assisi as an example of communism; or the references to Michel Foucault's notion of "friendship" as a "shared estrangement"⁵⁶⁹ as they have been productively put to use recent queer theory for instance; or again, to the role played by both love and friendship in Deleuze and Guattari's descriptions of the philosopher relation with the production of concepts⁵⁷⁰. In all of these theories of the politics and meaning of caring for each other is described from a set of perspectives that hit to, or simply evoke, the kinds of concrete procedures that might sustain such affectively charged collectivities, rather than exploring how such

⁵⁶⁸ Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. (Harvard University Press, 2009), 413.

⁵⁶⁹ Roach, Tom. *Friendship as a way of life: Foucault, aids, and the politics of shared estrangement*. (SUNY Press, 2012), 2

⁵⁷⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. *What is Philosophy?* (New York, 1994), 1-12.

affectivities might relate to specific organizational knowledges. While love, friendship and care relationships can invest the people involved in these collective practices, they cannot be assumed as organizing principles without becoming impositions that foreclose the possibility of conflict which is a the core of conviviality's own production of pleasures. And finally, the framework of militant conviviality offers a critical alternative to those discourses within political and art theory that posit the problem of the social as one of participation presupposing, rather than questioning, the structure of power which make participation possible in specific instances. In art theory, this problematic notion of participation emerges a re-centring of the artistic realm as preceding the audiences' encounter as activate in respect to a given artwork, rather than as an encounter of the collectivity with itself as an aesthetic practice which precedes and is fundamentally autonomous from the artistic realm. Similarly, in political theory, the notion of militant conviviality reclaims the object of the political as in need of a constant critical reaffirmation and co-institution, in a manner that is different from the discussion around participatory procedures understood as a set of formal measures to ensure citizen's inclusion into a pre-constituted discursive field that is already proposed as politically legitimate and relevant form the perspective of governance.

An invitation

In conclusion, this dissertation began by considering the historical manifestations of sociability, the modern notion corresponding to the experience of joy and satisfaction of togetherness, attending to both its different concrete manifestations in practices and institutions and to its significance as a modern theory of collective practice. In the first part of the research I have turned to historical materials to provide a broader temporal framework for this emerging trope of sociability, demonstrating how the preoccupation with the possibilities, risk and joys of reciprocity are not a contemporary concern, but were generated at the incipit of the

modern project understood in Foucault's terms less as an epoch and more as a particular way of thinking and feeling and of acting and behaving.⁵⁷¹

As I have shown, the Enlightenment invented sociability both as a distinct political concept (which preceded the adoption of society as a category for interpretation) and as a practice. Before the incipit of modernity, the idea of society referred to informal associations and gatherings, it described a set of pastimes and pleasurable activities instead of indicating the ensemble of human dwellings and relations. During the 17th century, for the first time in a long period, the idea of full human realization becomes associated with the expressive interaction with others freed from the burden of work. The true self is to be found in this kind of sociable action, and no longer in contemplation, as in medieval sensibility.

As I have shown, the egalitarian ethos, as expressed in the theories of sociable conduct that preoccupied modern thinkers from the 17th until the beginning of the 20th century when Georg Simmel wrote his treaty on the sociology of sociability, presents us with a paradox. Although sociability served as a conceptual tool for the establishment of a modern subjectivity able to oppose the totalitarian authority of the *Ancient Régime* in France and other totalitarian monarchies across Europe, it did so by configuring sociability as a separate sphere, detached from the constraints of productive and reproductive life. Insofar as sociability was posited as the expression of cultivated men, those who possessed the appropriate codes of conduct and conversation, the egalitarian space it configured did not

⁵⁷¹ "I know that modernity is often spoken of as an epoch, or at least as a set of features characteristic of an epoch; situated on a calendar [...] Thinking back on Kant's text, I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history." Foucault here continues by characterizing this attitude through Baudelaire's writing as being one of "ironic heroization of the present, this transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self". (Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?", in Rabinow, Paul, (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50.

align itself with democratic and revolutionary becomings, but it reiterated the possibility of pleasure in common as a privilege for the proprietary classes.

The history of sociability of the European upper classes is significant because its ethos still greatly influences the concrete knowledges used for organizing cultural events in contemporary times, although many of the formats invented during the 18th and 19th centuries are seldom considered as historically connoted. The organizational forms of contemporary symposia, private views, inaugurations, exhibitions, premiers, artists' talks, public debates, colloquia and so on, are still largely based upon formats and conventions that were invented over the course of modernity – as exemplified by the institutions of salons, academies, grand tours, seasons, private clubs, and museums that I discuss in chapter 2. What all these formats have in common is the way in which they actualize the disjunction between the political equality of sociability and the political inequality of the social as mutually exclusive, thus contributing to the affirmations of private property as a value – a notion that has important micropolitical implications given that it is intimately interrelated to the idea of a propriety of manners and conduct as a capacity for self-possession and as the optimal relation with the self.

The historical, cultural, gender and class specificities of the notion and of the practice of sociability as it emerged in modern discourse called for an important integration that could account for the sociality of alter-modern societies both in Europe and in the territories subjected to colonization. The reconstruction of this alternative history of the modern civilizing process, which I have retraced with the help of social historians and anthropologists in chapter 3, exposes the limits of the modern sociability of the elites in an important way. Elite sociabilities were spaces for the putting in common of values that were considered positive attributes of the individual self. As such, they represent a new kind of collectivity, one where individual identity is arranged in relation to others as inserted in hierarchies of power, success and accomplishment according to values that the collectivity itself validates. In this context, the kind of pleasure to

be found in the collective experience, which Simmel called the 'satisfaction' of sociable interaction, is of the kind that I would call of adoration. The etymology of adoration is consistent with the modality of avoidance relations. It contains the root of the Latin word for 'mouth', and it references the gesture of the person who wanted to show worship and thus bowed, touching with one hand the object of devotion while bringing the other hand to the mouth, as a kiss that wanted to avoid contact, preserving the superior being or sacred object from being polluted by the worshipper's breath. The pleasure of adoration determines a specific kind of what can be established as an enclave of premium horizontality within a hierarchical social order, a 'space of appearance' can be accessed via the construction of the body as an abstract entity and the self as a sum of individual properties. In contrast, the 'collective joy', to reference Ehrenreich, of plebeian sociable practices, was founded in an intentionality aimed at exploring the possibilities of expansion of the self (rather than the singularity of the individual) in order to experience the collective as a dimension of one's identity. We could call this second kind of common pleasure one of consideration, in regard to the etymology of this concept that describes the act of looking at the stars together (a reference to ancient divination practices). Here, the pleasure accessed through collectivity is about looking for a common futurity, rather than acknowledging the worth of individual properties, it expresses the search for modalities of composing each individual presence into a new intensity open to a future. The corporeal can thus become one of the dimensions of the encounter not as an abstraction, but as one of the elements of commoning. The history of plebeian sociability thus constitutes an important source of knowledge of practices that run through modernity, resisting relentless and violent attempts of eradication from the part of instituted powers, as examples of counter-conducts. As discussed, despite the many historical and cultural specificities, plebeian sociable practices share some common characteristics that allowed me to discuss them as an object of inquiry. Not only the role of the corporeal dimensions of experience where important tools for ecstatic modifications of

consciousness, but the attention to the body meant that the processes of preparation of festive and sociable events formed a continuum with the celebrations per se: the labour of production and reproduction acquired a meaning and a 'natural' end when it was able to generate and sustain a new process of sociable pleasure. Also, the techniques and formats of plebeian sociability were able to devoid hierarchy of meaning and show how the egalitarian ethos of self-organization did not only realize itself in the event of representation, but was also present in the processes of its preparation, which can be thought therefore as constituting an experiential and aesthetic continuum with the event of celebration. Finally, the different body constituted in plebeian sociability included in the joy of togetherness a collective capacity of transforming life's negative values – its limitations, errors, ugly corporeal traits and functions – into elements of celebration.

In pointing to these sets of plebeian practices spanning from medieval carnivals to dance manias and working class taverns in times closer to our own, I wanted to show the profoundly different ethics of togetherness that emerged in such spaces, but also the problems in accessing their legacy in manners that are other than a nostalgic homage, given the relentless process of suppression first and recuperation later which they have undergone, but also and more importantly, given the fundamental historical mutation of capitalism that I have described as erupting in the 1960s and 1970s. As outlined in chapter 4, this period inaugurates a shift in production that places sociability as a core site of production and capitalist realization of value. To illustrate how this new capitalist sociability came into being, I started by considering the centrality of the notion of situation and of experience in those business theories that since the 1960s-70s have explored ways to redesign the entire cycle of production by placing the affective and relational properties of commodities at its core. This new mode of production is important as it shifted the site of political conflict away from the one between the different modes of elite and plebeian sociability, as elements form both

became useful to produce the novel formats of encounter in an economy based on experiential goods. This approach became a full-blown phenomenon in the 1990s and 2000s. From the perspective of consumption, this became evident in the passage from a marketing based on advertising, logos and public relations to the evolution and integration of these components into brands. And as my review of different brand theories revealed, both critical and non-critical commentators believe that the best way to capture the way in which brands are ontologically different from the marketing tools that preceded them is by seeing them as proprietary platforms of sociability. Thus not only are contemporary subjectivities stimulated to enter the sphere of the sociable through purchasing and participating in a branded culture, they are also invited to use the brand as a tool for their very subjectivation. In doing so, the collective practices of sociability are both profitable and productive from the point of view of capital, whose role is that of managing the mediated moments of the encounter so as to pre-programme their signification into directions that are favourable to the expansion of the brand.

If the brand allows us to talk of the role of sociability from the point of view of (productive) consumption, the notion of the scene allows us to uncover the mechanisms of capitalist sociability as a core element of production. The scene is the contemporary institution that allows the social capacity of creativity and invention to become the source of individual gain in the form of monetary gains and of authorial authority. Once again, the sociability of the scene suppresses the elements of social reproduction (which we found in plebeian practices) in order to establish the scene as a modular unit able to replicate itself on a global scale treating the specificities of the localities it encounters as a plurality of resources to be transformed into competitive advantages, rather than as proliferating forces that might point to alternative modes of cultural valorisation (which might call into question the capitalist *modus operandi* of the scene). As I conclude in my critique of contemporary capitalist sociability, the dispositives of valorisation at play in both brands and scenes have in the last ten years been captured and intensified by the

emergent discourse of gamification. The rhetoric of gameplay is proving particularly efficient to bypass the conflicts embedded in experiences of both work and consumption. Questions of exploitation, exclusion, exhaustion, alienation, boredom, etc. are reinvented as rules of a game that ultimately promises a win, albeit only as a sterile value in itself. In order to complicate the positivist assumptions that underpin gamification, in chapter 6 I turned to the beginnings of game studies to explore how early game theorists actually were very careful to differentiate between the ethics and politics of game and of play, making this division one of the most debated aspects within game studies even today. To summarise here, game and play denote two different kinds of active engagement with the world and others. In games, the freedom of activity of the players is always to be considered in relation to a set of rules which function as the element that gives consistency to a given set of strategies of behaviour. In contrast, play conjures up a sociality that is predicated upon the common elaboration and re-elaboration of the rules. Once this distinction is established, it is easy to reveal the reasons behind the recent enthusiasm for gamification as an optimal tool of governmentality (and the parallel convenient absence of a discourse emphasising the possibility of play). The differentiation between game and play allowed me to introduce the third and final part of my research, by formulating conviviality as a way of understanding the pleasures of collective practices (something akin to playing in a world obsessed with gaming). By outlining an initial set of attributes of militant conviviality in contrast to those of capitalist sociability I wished to put forward some coordinates to orientate further discussion about the possibilities of collective action to come out of the impasse that characterises it where the boundaries between work and life become undone in Post-Fordist cognitive capitalism that I discussed in the first chapter/introduction to the thesis.

Departing from the difference between encounters organised as games or as opportunities of play, I considered a series of concepts that might help us reflect not only on the difference between labour and life, but also on that between different kinds of sociality as gamified sociability on the one

hand and militant conviviality on the other. These interpretative tools for differentiating include: a cynical versus an ironic posture *vis-à-vis* given sets of rules, in which the first would recognize truth as relative only to side with power, while the second would recognise truth as constructed so as to produce practices of freedom; an organizational logic of dispersion, privileging an approach to relations and situations that takes them as temporarily desirable as long as they remain instrumental, as opposed to a mode of organisational practice that insists on the elaboration of shared invariables as the ontological basis for a common space and time; a differentiation between elements of self-management, which make the individual the site of negotiation of systemic conflicts, and self-organization, which expresses the capacity of producing new meaning and new values through and for our action; a contrast between flexible subjectivities that transform and hybridise themselves to the requirement of capitalist logic and those who, while still remaining fluid in the face of rigid identitarian dynamics, do so in order to remain vulnerable to the life forces that invest them; and finally, the last conceptual pair that I have proposed as a useful component for my differentiation between capitalist sociability and militant conviviality distinguishes the designed coherent aesthetics of global cool from the vernacular aesthetics of practices that particularise experience. Through these conceptual pairs, I wished to contribute to the conversations that have rejected work ethics as a value in itself and proposed the social as an important site of production instead, most notably found in (post)operaism and radical feminism,⁵⁷² by highlighting to the importance of complementing accounts focused on the way all kinds of capacities and actions are becoming subsumed in labour under capital with a parallel and equally sophisticated theory capable of supporting us in making our collective practices more autonomous.

Given the importance of positioning oneself within a given situation for all the practices of militant conviviality that I have considered, it seems

⁵⁷² For an account of both, see Weeks, Kathi. *The problem with work: Feminism, Marxism, antiwork politics, and postwork imaginaries*. (Duke University Press, 2011).

appropriate to conclude my research by addressing my own position as an immaterial labourer, a member of the precarious – albeit privileged (white, European, middleclass, gender appropriate) – migrant, transnational cognitariat, as a creative practitioner, as a curator, as organizer, as teacher, spinning between social movements, political activism, academic progression, teaching jobs, consultancy gigs and artistic projects.

At the crossroad of all these different kinds of specialized fields, each with their own scenes, games, and systems of valorisation, there exists a common activity that involves the creation of encounters between people and knowledges, people and objects and people and people. While the first two have specific politics, the third type of organization involves bringing strangers together to inter-act in the presence of each other, outside the constraints of immediately re-productive and/or bureaucratic environments, with an open finality of experiencing an event of togetherness. It is in this sense that I find myself reaching out for a history of the inherited formats and ways of thinking about the generative fold created by the encounter of the intelligences of aesthetics, pedagogy and political organizing, which I have addressed here with the term 'conviviality'. Those who dwell on art, pedagogy and political activism in fact all do, in one way or another, whether professionally or out of personal commitment, afford the opportunity to develop a specific kind of situated knowledge around acts and experiences of collectivity. The situated condition of these different organisers is that they all have to concern themselves with the crafting of invitations to others. Finally, my hope is that the framework of militant conviviality that I proposed could serve as an antidote to some of the pitfalls that rendered sociability an easy prey of capitalism, helping practitioners like me to figure out how we, as a cognitariat or as a creative class, can begin to undo ourselves to become something more joyous.

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