The London Journal of Critical Thought

The **London Journal of Critical Thought** is an open access and peer reviewed academic journal that publishes 'collections' of short pieces that emerge in conversation from participation in the London Conference of Critical Thought (LCCT). The LJCT is distinct from a traditional proceedings journal in that the pieces are not framed as stand-alone work, but rather a part of its particular collection.

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Introduction: Art in the Time of Capital
Martin Young

> For the duration of Maria Eichhorn's exhibition, *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, Chisenhale Gallery's staff are not working.

So began the short statement that adorned the front gates of Chisenhale gallery between 24 April and 29 May 2016. It was posted to all corporate social media accounts, and prefaced the automated out-of-office email.[1] Following a day long symposium on 23 April, every employee at the gallery in Bethnal Green, East London was given five weeks off, paid in full. Work was suspended and, beyond external conversations inspired by the project, so was the gallery's participation in cultural production. This artwork dispensed with a focal object, be it painting, sculpture, or performance, and instead directed attention to the usually unseen institutional apparatus on which such an object might depend. Highlighting not simply the process of artistic production but also the quotidian routines of curation and administration, Eichhorn emptied the gallery in order to show how it is ordinarily filled. The real heart of the work was not the inoperative gallery itself, however, but rather the time bestowed on the workers and the uses to which they put it. Rather than being the product of artistic labour, the artwork was the absence of artistic labour itself. In this context, the bare fact of unobligated time takes on an auratic status, elevated by whatever stubborn ideals of beauty and cultural importance are still connoted by the concept of a 'work of art' into something important, meaningful, and worthy of contemplation.

5 Weeks, 25 Days, 175 hours is an apposite work with which to introduce this collection on art, time, and capital, as it makes the gallery the locus (if not the actual site) of a series of questions about the temporalities of work and production. The essays collected here similarly turn attention away from the art object and towards the

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[1] *Maria Eichhorn: 5 Weeks, 25 Days, 175 Hours*, Chisenhale Gallery, 2016, https://chisenhale.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Maria-Eichhorn_5-weeks-25-days-175-hours_Chisenhale-Gallery_2016.pdf.

institutional, professional, commercial, and productive processes on which art rests. Eichhorn's exhibition, through its instantiation of a concrete reprieve from work, hints prefiguratively at the possibility of the withdrawal of or withdrawal from paid labour. These ideas underpin the essays that follow, which are concerned with the situation of the arts within capitalism, the situation of workers within the arts, and the persistent hope that either subject may be able to escape its position.

If the concept of the piece was suggestive, the practical execution drew stark attention to the kinds of work which sustain a gallery like Chisenhale. There is the day to day activity of keeping the gallery open to public attendance; the immediate superintention of the space, the active compliance with legal responsibilities, and the daily execution of curatorial strategy. There is also the bureaucratic administration. This work is more temporally fluid; what is not completed one day carries over into the next and tasks accumulate. However, during the course of the installation, all incoming emails were automatically deleted; the staff returning to their desks in late May did not face a backlog of deferred work. There is also the work of sustaining the organisation, through fundraising and maintaining professional contacts. To this end, the gallery set up a dedicated email address, checked once a week, for urgent matters which, while arguably undermining the spirit of the piece, is also revealing about the relationship between day to day staff activity and the long term reproduction of the institution. Reorienting the approach to art to centre on time calls into question categorical certainties about, say, the separation of aesthetics and finance or the relationship between art and entertainment. Chisenhale temporarily opted out of its ordinary participation in the leisure economy, ceasing to be a destination at which time might be spent.

Moreover, to address art in terms of the temporal logics of capital is to draw attention to its troubled relationship with industrial production. Theatre, while colloquially classified as a branch of 'the arts', has enjoyed an ambivalent status in the history of art criticism, a marginality which has occasionally seen it savagely denigrated as the antithesis of art.[2] Art, which is generally dedicated to the production

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[2] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1995), 116-147.

of unique works, and theatre, which is generally concerned with the reproducibility of a performance product, reveal important characteristics about each others' relationships to the temporalities of capitalist production. Dave Beech, whose influence recurs through this collection, has identified an overwhelming tendency within Western Marxism to position art as absolutely enmeshed within the economic and cultural web of capitalist society, but without a meaningful consideration of art's actual economic position. He argues instead for the political importance of recognising its exceptional status and attending to how the production of art differs from the production of other commodities. [3] This economic approach, interrogating art's relation to capital, rather than to capitalism, establishes a robust analysis on which further theory and action can be built. In close agreement with Beech, Michael Shane Boyle has made what is effectively the inverse intervention about theatre. He repudiates the widespread belief within theatre criticism that performance lies outside of, or is inherently able to disrupt, the circulation of capital (a conception closely indebted to *operaismo*), demonstrating instead the theatrical performance's capacity to function quite conventionally as a commodity.[4] And yet in spite of these divergent disciplinary contexts, in this collection theatre workers stand alongside artists and curators as subjects of a common circumstance. Indeed, the central theme of Sophie Coudray's contribution is the absolute political and historical contingency of our conceptions of what art and work are. It requires only a shift in the interests of capital to transform 'workers' into 'creatives', or 'creatives' back into 'value producers'.

5 Weeks, 25 Days, 175 hours allowed a small number of people a fleeting opportunity to step outside of their ordinary work patterns, and in doing so provides the prompt for us to imagine the possibility of more comprehensively stepping outside of the overdetermined social structures of productivity, accumulation, and exploitation. A conception of unproductive time as a weapon against capital has recurred throughout the history of art and art criticism, and is the

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[3] Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 19-20.

[4] Michael Shane Boyle, "Performance and Value: The Work of Theatre in Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy," *Theatre Survey* 58:1 (2017): 4-5.

central animating idea of this collection. My own contribution locates this real distinction at the heart of other critical theoretical and artistic conceptions of the categorisation of time into divisible forms. With Sophie Coudray's analysis of theatre strikes, the resistance to productivity is framed in its most codified and traditionally understood terms: absolute refusal at the site of production. The strike is a suspension of productive time, a decisive interruption into a predetermined process. Finally, however, the possibility that art might externalise itself from capital is challenged through a dialogue between Rowan Lear and Panos Kompatsiaris on the current state of the biennial. This builds on Lear's idea of 'radical inefficiency', an effort towards survival within capitalist conditions that is characterised by embracing, rather than resisting, the delays, interruptions, and stoppages that mark our lives.[5]

Compiling the various drafts of this collection was a process seriously disrupted by interruptions into the ordinary workflow of artistic/academic life, which, though precarious, irregular, and intermittent does nonetheless proceed according to capital's logic (even where it does not contribute directly to capitalist production). Health problems related to stress and overwork, the demands of paid employment, and a national wave of university strikes all delayed the production of this journal. Along the way, hours of intense work were offset by inefficiency, procrastination, and the guilty sting of wasted time. The three contributions to this collection represent an attempt to navigate these temporal problems and to consider the always compromised, always insufficient, but still always necessary strategies through which they might be resisted.

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[5] Rowan Lear, "Towards radical inefficiency: autonomy, overwork and resistance in artistic labour," *Doggerland* 4 (2017): 8-19.

Adorno's Razor: The Taxonomy of Time
Martin Young

Theodor Adorno didn't have hobbies. He was fortunate that his job (teaching and the production of critical thought) tessellated neatly with his interests and served as a vehicle for the satisfaction of his desires. The portion of his life not accounted for by his employment was dedicated to the same intellectual projects and, as such, his work time could not 'be defined in terms of that strict opposition to free time, which is demanded by the current razor-sharp division of the two'.[6] This division is evidently one which Adorno regards with a degree of scepticism. Although in bourgeois society 'the difference between work time and free time has been branded as a norm in the minds of people, at both the conscious and unconscious level', this purported distinction serves to obscure a real continuity between these two spheres of life.[7] Rather than being the simple absence of work, free time is conditioned by work, its function is to inculcate a disciplined work ethic and reproduce labour power, and it is the time in which workers' wages are exchanged for the products of work. In Adorno's neat expression, 'free time is shackled to its opposite'.[8] It is to disguise this dialectic of work and leisure in bourgeois society that the imperative emerges that 'free time must not resemble work in any way whatsoever, in order, presumably, that one can work all the more effectively afterward'.[9] The razor cuts decisively through life, leaving two unambiguously delineated purposes of time.

I have alighted on Adorno's casual metaphor of a razor because the motivation to separate social experience into precisely taxonomised temporal categories seems so ubiquitous. Colloquially, time outside of formal work hours may be 'free', 'spare', 'discretionary', or 'unobligated'. The cannon of critical theory in the Marxist tradition

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[6] Theodor W Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein. (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), 189.
[7] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 189.
[8] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 187.
[9] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 190.

throws up a dense taxonomy of forms of time. 'Dead time' captures the alienated experience of work, the hours spent toiling to secure the means of life during which life itself is seemingly put on hold.[10] Outside the workplace, the hours required to secure the necessary conditions of capitalist employment are 'reproductive time'. Activity which resists bourgeois normativity in the reproduction of social life renders its time queer. Herbert Marcuse, like Adorno, marks hours outside of work as nonetheless 'unfree' owing to their administration by business and politics.[11] In a similar mode, the artist Pierre Huyge seeks to actively cultivate 'freed' time, time that authentically refuses participation in the capitalist administration of leisure,[12] and Antonio Negri proposes the still more radical 'liberated time', not as the 'residue of exploited time', but as the complete negation not only of temporal domination but of time itself as an ordering social logic.[13] Whichever way you slice it, it seems, temporal experience is formed from the oppositional relationship between work and its absence. Within contemporary discourses of art, work, and exploitation, Adorno's perspective is all but unrecognisable. Rather than a suspicion of the artificial demarcation of work and leisure, capital's domination over time is experienced as the impossibility of any such demarcation. Work bleeds into life, it refuses to be contained within the hours for which it is contracted and, as Jen Harvie has noted of recent trends in artistic production, risks 'saturating all time with work time; eroding private life'.[14] Activity which commercially benefits arts institutions is undertaken by people giving up their discretionary time unpaid, motivated by enthusiasm, ambition, or the need for a foot-in-the-door. This work forms what Gregory Sholette calls the 'dark matter' of the art world, invisible to critical and institutional discourse

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[10] For example, see Charles Thorpe, *Necroculture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 19.

[11] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics 2002), 52.

[12] Lauren Rotenberg, "The Prospects of 'Freed' Time: Pierre Huyge and *L'association Des Temps Libérés*," *Public Art Dialogue* 3, no. 2 (2013). My thanks to Rebecca Starr who presented a critique of Huyge's work at the LCCT stream from which this collection emerged.

[13] Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution* trans. Matteo Mandarini (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2013), 121-124.

[14] Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 55.

but comprising 'the bulk of artistic activity' through 'makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, [and] self-organized practices'.[15] A perpetual blurring of work and freedom takes place through such mundane and concrete mechanisms as voluntary positions, internships, work for exposure, commissions, the freelance economy, delegated performance, and passion projects. In the figure of the artist, the imperatives of work and the imperatives of personal enthusiasm are inextricable.

Though it is sometimes naively romanticised as the transcendence of capital's logic, this situation has seldom been advantageous to the artist. As Andrew Ross frames it, 'artists in general are expected, and are therefore inclined, to put in time gratis for love of their art in contexts that would require overtime pay for most other workers'.[16] This, and the low rates of remuneration for the time that is paid, produce the too infrequently acknowledged situation that 'the largest subsidy to the arts has always come from workers themselves'.[17] And yet this state of affairs is not enough to dissuade artists (and others who work in the arts) from treating their time in such a disadvantageous way:

> The cruel indifference of the marketplace does not seem to deter the chronically discounted. Indeed, and largely because of artists' traditions of sacrifice, it often appears to spur them on in ways that would be regarded as self-destructive in any other economic sector.[18]

Against this pervasive self-exploitation, there is a long tradition of critique and resistance within the arts. To take one recent example, the Precarious Workers Brigade's pedagogic resource pack *Training for Exploitation* features an exercise to prompt students to visually map paid and unpaid work time in their lives, a simple graph to render the distinction between opportunities for remuneration and requirements

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[15] Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 1.

[16] Andrew Ross, "The Mental Labour Problem," *Social Text* 1, no. 2 (2000): 15.

[17] Ross, "The Mental Labour Problem," 6.

[18] Ross, "The Mental Labour Problem," 6.

for voluntarism starkly clear.[19] Though it may seem vulgar and antithetical to some of the art world's loftier ideals (and disruptive to those institutions which rely on volunteers, interns, and unpaid overtime), insisting on the clarity of this delineation has regularly been of supreme strategic importance both for the wellbeing of the individual and as a focal point for collective action. Despite Ross's suggestion of exceptionalism, this strategic response is not a peculiarity of the art world.

The apparent contradiction between Adorno's account of a strict division between work and leisure in bourgeois society and an art world which thrives on the violation of that distinction can be illuminated by placing them in the context of labour history. The political utility of a strict apportionment of time, of a clear line between time that is the boss's and time that is one's own, has deep roots in the labour movement, finding concrete expression in the demand for 'eight hours work, eight hours rest, and eight hours for what we will'.[20] 'Indeed', writes Susan Ferguson, 'the history of class struggle can be seen as a history of contestations over the … work/leisure divide'.[21] In these contestations, however, workers frequently, and to their detriment, conceded the fact of that divide; the nineteenth and twentieth century struggle over work hours was not only predicated on but actively reified a division of work and leisure.[22] This process, as much as any other, produced the dialectical shackling of the two which Adorno critiques, but it was a response to conditions of work inflicted by the capitalist organisation of society's productive forces. In the course of codifying and elaborating a concept of time-discipline, E.P. Thompson narrates the capitalist subsumption of labour processes in early modern England through the shift from 'task-oriented' work to work regulated by the clock:

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[19] Precarious Workers Brigade, *Training for Exploitation?: Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education*, 2016, 37, http://joaap.org/press/pwb/PWB_Text_FINAL.pdf.

[20] Roy Rozenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

[21] Susan Ferguson, "Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 120.

[22] See for example Philip S. Foner and David R. Roediger, *Our Own Time: The History of American Labor and the Working Day* (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

> a community in which task-orientation is common appears
> to show least demarcation between "work" and "life".
> Social intercourse and labour are intermingled - the
> working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task -
> and there is no great sense of conflict between labour and
> "passing the time of day".[23]

From this perspective, the razor-sharp division between work and the time which surrounds it is more than a bourgeois obfuscation; it is a real condition imposed by proletarianisation.

Since Thompson, and occasionally responding to his influence, this account has been more substantively developed by theorists of domestic labour and social reproduction. While there is still an active debate within this body of thought as to whether reproductive labour is productive of value (as is claimed by some of the most significant figures in the field, including Selma James, Mariosa Dalla Costa, and Silvia Federici), I am here drawing on the analysis of scholars who maintain that it is not (including Tithi Bhattacharya, Lise Vogel, Nancy Fraser, and Carmen Teeple Hopkins). While Hopkins notes that this disagreement has 'generalized the inability to distinguish neatly between temporal and spatial categories of productive and unproductive work', requiring further thought that moves beyond this binary, it is precisely because this (increasingly influential) branch of social reproduction theory consciously concerns itself with activity that falls outside of the industrial production of surplus value that it is useful here.[24] The razor-sharp division between work and life takes the form here of the real historical separation of social activity into the distinct spheres of production and reproduction. As Hopkins dryly remarks of reproduction, 'this sphere is not one of leisure'.[25]

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[23] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 no. 1 (1967): 60.

[24] Carmen Teeple Hopkins, "Mostly Work, Little Play: Social Reproduction, Migration, and Paid Domestic Work in Montreal," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 134.

[25] Hopkins, "Mostly Work, Little Play," 134. This is most clearly communicated by Arlie Hochschild's designation of domestic work as a 'second shift', a set of

This view, along with the different coinages in the taxonomy of temporal categories indicated above, each with their own particular critical emphases, converges around a certain foundational conception that is ultimately rooted in the division of productive and unproductive time. Properly speaking, to be productive is to produce something which the rest of society acknowledges as having economic value (an acknowledgement which is signalled through market demand).[26] This distinction is as real as the capitalist distinction between work and life and is at the root of the antagonism between those who sell their labour by the hour and those who buy it; the calculation of time that yields profit and time that is wasted is the basis of workplace discipline. The troublesome category of free time, to which critical theorists and artists constantly return, emerges from this real distinction, though often conceals a misapprehension of it. If, in capitalist employment, to be productive is to be exploited, unproductive time is marked in the consciousness of those habituated to work by a sense of relief or respite. Whether motivated by a theoretical understanding that expanding productive time is the central mechanism for profitable exploitation, or by an intuitive sense that the pain of work must be alleviated through not working, unproductive time, its utility, and its expansion, are of crucial importance. A kind of romantic hope for the possibilities of unproductive time motivates puckish essays like Bertrand Russell's 'In Praise of Idleness' and Roland Barthes' 'Dare to be Lazy'.[27] Adorno denigrates hobbies, a necessarily unproductive use of time, as offering the false appearance of being an 'oasis of unmediated life within a completely mediated total system'.[28] This idea has run, overtly or subtextually, through attempts to politicise art's relationship to time. Dave Beech has demonstrated that an art object is a commodity in the broad sense of being produced for exchange but does not conform to

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obligations to labour that fall outside of codified work hours. *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin, 1989).

[26] Within capitalist production, for which labour-power must be purchased, labour must produce more than it costs to meaningfully be considered productive.

[27] Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980* trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).

[28] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 189.

capitalist laws of value, and the labour that produced it therefore does not 'count' as productive in the political-economic terms I have outlined. Beech echoes Ian Burn's conclusion that 'artists' time has never been commodified'.[29] The idea of unproductivity is seldom discussed with this degree of technical political-economic precision but it continues to haunt attempts to think about time, work, art, and capital. Art is a repository for optimism over the political potential of unproductive time. Because the time in which art is both produced and consumed is unproductive, art is seen as a disruptive weapon against capital. However, it is a mistake to think that being unproductive is necessarily resistant - much of our time is spent in quite innocuously unproductive activity which does very little damage to capital. Moreover, as social reproduction theory has made clear, the unproductive use of time can be an essential condition on which capitalist accumulation rests (though whether or not art also fills this social role is less obvious). What art seems to promise is a more fundamental break, not only from economic productivity as such but from the reach of capital entirely. Much of this fantasy seems to recoup the nineteenth century Aesthetics Movement, and echoes Oscar Wilde's infamous boast that 'all art is quite useless', albeit in a more overtly politicised light.[30] The implication is that there is something useful about being useless, that to dedicate time to the production or consumption of a useless thing is to have gained back some ground from capital. It is this hope of some purposefully useless time, external to capital, which Adorno is resisting.

The razor-sharp division of work and leisure, and their corresponding interdependence, is an attempt to render these temporal relationships legible in critical theoretical terms. This legibility can also be achieved in far more immediate terms through Lefebvre's suggestion that 'everyone look at the space around them' in order that they 'see *time*'

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[29] Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical, and Marxist Economics* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 4. It should be made explicit that being artists does not immunise people from the commodification of time; their labour-power is still available for purchase by the hour as baristas, cold callers, teachers, etc. See Sophie Coudray's contribution to this collection for a discussion of how artists time can be productive under conditions of commercial performance such as theatre.

[30] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 2000), 4.

and identify its operations in a built environment in which 'this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible'.[31] He continues, 'Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power)'. To this we might add that artistic space aestheticises time, treating it as a raw material for creation, as a thing to be played with and troubled, and as a medium for reception.[32] But because art and its spaces are both economic and political they are still marked by the subordination and expulsion of time. The aestheticisation of time is in tension with a counter tendency to obscure and conceal the temporality of production. Adorno critiques the 'phantasmagoric' nature of artworks as reproducing the logic of the capitalist commodity by disguising the labour and the productive processes which created them: 'Time is the all-important element of production that phantasmagoria, the mirage of eternity, obscures'.[33] Even as artworks operate at one level to aestheticise time, they nonetheless remain complicit in the elimination of time from conscious apprehension.

Because the observer of the work of art is encouraged to adopt a passive role, is relieved of the burden of labour and hence reduced to the mere object of the artistic effect, [they are] thereby prevented from perceiving the labour that is contained in the work.[34]

While this obfuscation of productive labour seems to to undermine the political efficacy of the creation and reception of individual artworks, it has a significant general implication. It is, for Adorno, a kind of tacit admission of bourgeois society's dirty secret: 'The work

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[31] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell 1991 [1974]), 95.

[32] As in, for example, Nicholas Bourriaud's widely cited claim that the contemporary artwork is 'a period of time to be lived through'. *Relational Aesthetics* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les presses du réel, 2002), 15.

[33] Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* trans. Rodney Livingston (London: Verso, 2009 [1952]) 76.

[34] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 72.

of art endorses the sentiment normally denied by ideology: work is degrading.'[35]

It is easy to be pessimistic. To see time in Lefebvre's sense, to bear witness to the hours upon hours of human labour on which our lives are built, is potentially overwhelming. It becomes apparent that it is impossible to occupy a temporal vantage point outside the flow of capitalist time while we remain spatially trapped within its physical residue. The material world within which we exist is the dead embodiment of work that has been done, of time that has been exploited; to imagine a world free of temporal domination is to imagine a world devoid of all familiar manufactured things. It is difficult to think what difference time spent in the studio or gallery might make either to this situation or to our understanding of it. Whether through the mutual dependence of productive and reproductive labour, or the shackling of work and leisure, this line of thought leads us to apprehend capitalism as a totality; the razor-sharp division is a clean cut, leaving two neat edges that tessellate seamlessly. This mode of analysis reifies the atemporal logic of the 'always-already'; all activity is recuperated as a matter of course, as a condition of its existence. As Panos Kompatsiaris suggests elsewhere in this collection, this view, while premised on an absolutely radical critique, effectively forecloses radical action. Critical thought must navigate a fraught negotiation between, on the one hand, the naive belief that through art time can be reclaimed and help to liberate us as subjects from capital, and on the other the incapacitating conviction that all activity, real or imagined, is already inescapably captured within and purposed towards the needs of capitalist accumulation. This confrontation between naivety and incapacitation is the starting point for conceiving of any meaningful action towards the reconception, repurposing, reclamation, or liberation of time, even on such immediate terrains as industrial organising, embracing inefficiency, or producing works of art. This leaves us somewhere very like where we started...

Roland Barthes had hobbies. He was, like Adorno, confronted by the fact that the most obvious uses of his free time, reading and writing, would simply replicate the activity of his working life. Unlike Adorno,

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[35] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 72.

he did not feel the compulsion to dispose of his time in serious activity (a commitment which looks today suspiciously symptomatic of a disciplined bourgeois work ethic) and instead sought out idleness. Barthes, therefore, took up painting, the appeal of which lay precisely in the fact that it was 'an absolutely gratuitous activity'.[36] The restful satisfaction he found in it as a use of idle time was predicated on his disregard for the quality of the work he produced; 'there's no pride or narcissism involved,' he wrote, 'since I'm just an amateur. It's all the same to me whether I paint well or badly'.[37] Adorno rejected this reduction of artistic activity to the status of hobby by amateurs whose work is merely 'the imitation of poems or pictures' which 'others [that is, specialists] could do better'.[38] Adorno's complaint is that under current conditions people have been denied the opportunity to be meaningfully productive in their free time; productivity is the sole preserve of work, where it is undertaken in the interests of the employer.[39] While Barthes took pleasure in the gratuitousness of his painting - its disconnection from any productive imperative - Adorno writes of amateur artists:

What they create has something superfluous about it. This superfluousness makes known the inferior quality of the product, which in turn vitiates any pleasure taken in its production.[40]

Though his tone is snobbish, there is an underlying sympathy with those who are not afforded the opportunity to become artists and so remain amateurs, producing work that, because it is bad, is a testament to the curtailment of their achievement through the social domination of their time. The disagreement between these two theorists about the nature of amateur art cannot adequately capture the whole breadth of

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[36] Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 340.
[37] Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, 340.
[38] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 193.
[39] Adorno's definition of productive is to 'bring forth something that was not already there'; this is slightly broader than the definition I gave above, which is more narrowly grounded in Marx's political-economic account of the production of value.
[40] Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 193.

problems exposed in this article, but it does bring a certain dispute into focus. Either the repressive conditions of capitalist society have lead Barthes to idly pass the time in painting, inducing him to deny himself the possibility of producing meaningfully and seriously, or, alternatively, by wilfully cultivating his idle hours he has carved out a reprieve from the demands of capitalist productivity, taking pleasure in the process, rather than the product, of his activity. I do not believe that this antagonism is resolvable through critical thought while the real conditions that produce it remain in place. Confronting it, however, seems a necessary step towards changing them.

Theatre Production/Creation Within Capitalist Temporality
Sophie Coudray

Consider two aspects of French theatre workers. First: when addressing the current situation of French artists and in particular theatre artists (actors, stage directors…), one can be surprised by the fact that most of the time, artists do not consider themselves as workers, wage labourers, or even producers, but primarily as *creators*. What is the significance of this statement with regards to relationships of production and exploitation? Secondly: French artists and technicians working in the performing arts are considered as *intermittents du spectacle*, which means that their working status is characterised by the exceptionality of its temporality: periods of (intense) work alternating with periods of unemployment. Does (or should) the shift from worker/producer to creator affect our understanding of theatre work's temporality? In other words, do an artist considering themself a producer/labourer and another artist considering themself a creator have the same relationship to work temporality? This will be the starting point of this paper, which aims at understanding the issues and implications of the ideological shift which took place in the 1980s from the French state apparatus considering artists as workers to considering artists as creators, with regards to relationships of production and temporal exceptionalism. To demystify this *creator aura* might help to provide an analysis of theatre's specific production mode, but also to indicate paths for strategic reflections concerning the *intermittents du spectacle*'s struggles.

In 1977, the Marxist-Leninist theoretician and stage director Jean Jourdheuil criticised the French Socialist Party's (SP) cultural policy, targeting its will to deprofessionalise the artistic field. According to Jourdheuil, the SP's claim that deprofessionalisation would be the first step towards the abolition of the social division of labour was no more than a trick.[41] He considered this seemingly radical promise as

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[41] Jean Jourdheuil, 'L'action culturelle selon le parti socialiste 'Le théâtre, l'artiste, l'État* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 33.

nothing else but a treacherous strategy to weaken trade unions and, in the end, liberalise the artistic field and economy. At the end of the 1970s, the biggest cultural enterprises such as national theatres or opera houses still had strong trade unions, embracing most of their workers.[42] Yet trade unions depend on this professional status. Within a capitalist society, deprofessionalising incurs deunionising and, thus, deregulation of employment policies is made easier. The SP's hypocrisy is made clear by the fact that the deprofessionalisation of the political field has never been put forward as a subsequent stage of the same policy. At the same time, the French Communist Party (FCP) was defending a 'creator' policy for artists, distinguishing the latter from the mass of workers. This kind of discourse defended by the Left appears *a posteriori* as the basis for the deep ideological shift in artistic and cultural policies that was to happen a couple of years later.

Indeed, from 1981, under the presidency of François Mitterrand (SP), the Cultural Minister Jack Lang introduced a turn in the very conception of the status of artists. Under his leadership, state cultural policies relied on considering artists not as workers, producers, but as *creators*. While considering artists as creators clearly predates the 1981 elections, this constituted a real paradigm shift. This is no incidental point. To consider artists as creators – and lead them to consider themselves as creators – had concrete consequences upon working conditions and brought a new approach in relationships between artists and capitalism, along with another conception of temporality implemented in the sphere of artistic production.

Creators Vs workers? A problematic definition of artistic labour
What does it change to regard artists as creators rather than workers? In his 1926 essay *Art and Production*, Russian art critic and founding member of the *Levyj front iskusstva* (Left Front of Arts) Boris Arvatov developed the idea of a progressive distinction made between two approaches of the artistic function. On one hand, the artist as the master of technique in their work, whose production is dedicated to

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[42] The international collapse of trade unions that began at the end of the 1970s and extended in the 1980s has been well documented in a number of articles and books. See Stahis Kouvélakis, *La France en révolte, luttes sociales et cycles politiques* (Paris: Textuel, 2007). Not only did trade unions lose an increasing number of adherents but their fighting spirit also failed.

improving the everyday life of their contemporaries; and on the other hand, the artist as 'the solitary master […] the specialist in "pure art"',[43] whose 'art' is dedicated to contemplation and to bourgeois consumption. He adds: 'This is the origin of the illusion that art is an end in itself, from here originate its bourgeois fetishes.'[44] This is why Arvatov asserts that 'the advent of the bourgeois state marked the end of direct contact between the artists and society.'[45] Consequently, according to him, the differentiation between 'labour' and 'creation' is internal to bourgeois society and he deeply regrets that, while 'understood as something purposeful from the bourgeois perspective', this differentiation 'continues to dominate Marxist theory and criticism.'[46] This last remark is still true in France, decades after Arvatov's writing. As Jean Jourdheuil noticed, the French CP adopted a posture relying on total assimilation of this bourgeois approach to art.[47]

In this way, creation tends to appear as the opposite of work. Considering the etymology of creation (*creatio*); the creator draws their piece of art, their creation, out of nothing. Notions such as labour process, endeavour, work are obscured. One might assume that our relationship to creation's temporality and labour's temporality may not be the same, the first being more abstract, evanescent and the second more concrete, embodied in social structures. Labour entails 'a specific, concrete *time*. Indeed, every act of concrete labour embeds particular concrete temporalities, tempos, time patterns; it also involves specific concrete activities of timing, and entails specific

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[43] Boris Arvatov, *Art and Production* (London: Pluto Press, 2017 [1926]), 94.

[44] Arvatov, *Art and Production,* 94.

[45] Arvatov, *Art and Production,* 54.

[46] Arvatov, *Art and Production,* 98.

[47] To be more specific, after May 68, the CP's position concerning arts has focused on national culture, classic bourgeois theatre, thereby denying theatre's ability to produce a political discourse, and strengthening the distinction between artistic activities and political ones. This is obvious while reading Roland Leroy's book, *La Culture au présent,* with a preface by Georges Marchais, published in 1972. Leroy has been a member of the central committee of the French CP from 1956 to 1994 but also the director of *L'Humanité* from 1974 to 1994 and one of Aragon's close friends.

concrete series of temporal sequences.'[48] Thus, to cover up what is tied to work entails covering up what is tied to labour time. Ultimately, talking about creation instead of work leads to a failure to account for the labour process and temporality – preventing things such as exploitation from being taken into account.

Talking about 'creation' often arises from an individualistic approach to artistic production – through the figure of the creator – which is particularly disingenuous in performing arts, where working methods are collaborative. The cultural press and academics mostly attribute the creation of a play to its stage director (in which one can recognise in some ways a theatrical reflection of cinema's Auteur Theory) and the work of the whole (often numerous and primarily constituted of technical professionals) team, although essential is, to a large extent, underappreciated. The collective process and, even more, the role played by technical professionals is overlooked. A hierarchical division of labour between intellectual or 'creative' tasks on one side and manual or technical tasks on the other remains quite strong. However, even technical professionals in the artistic sphere have been progressively included in this 'creation shift', with the emergence of terms such as 'lighting designer.'[49] This is no surprise given that a similar phenomenon to this linguistic and thus ideological shift became hegemonic in the artistic sphere in the 1980s. The overemphasis on individual self-realisation – tied to a general injunction to become 'actor', 'creator' or 'manager' of one's own life – goes hand in hand with a rapid growth of management and neoliberal guidelines. [50] Transforming workers into creators not only individualises work and isolates it from the production process, it also depoliticises it. That which is creation is not working. Therefore, it denies the very existence of exploitation and thus weakens trade unions and the demands of workers. The transformations that happened within the artistic sphere were obviously part of a more

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[48] Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation. A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 114.

[49] In French, the exact term is '*créateur lumière*' which refers directly to creation as the paradigm of artistic production.

[50] See François Cusset, *La décennie, Le grand cauchemar des années 1980* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

global tendency, but went partly unnoticed because of the specificity, the exceptionalism of the artistic sphere itself.

From Artistic Production to Artistic Temporality: Unsolved Issues

If we assume that there is an exceptionality of theatre work, in particular in relation to its temporality, this specificity needs to be defined. Outside of performance time, for which it is easy to conceive the status of theatre workers and what they are paid for, how can we approach their (often unpaid) activity which takes place out of the public eye and sometimes outside any regulatory framework?

In his *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx writes: 'The capitalist production process, therefore, is *not* merely the production of commodities. It is a process which absorbs unpaid labour, which makes raw materials and means of labour – the means of production – into means for the absorption of unpaid labour.'[51] This unpaid labour is the amount of time a worker works beyond the time necessary to reproduce the value of their wages. If unpaid labour is a general concept used by Marx to address process of production, one should not confuse it with the invisible work on which performing arts rely. It includes rehearsals, text learning, training, dramaturgical work, light tests, etc., which in France, by the way, often remains – depending on the working framework and the resources of the company – unpaid. In both cases, this is a matter of time dedicated to work but which is not taken into account for compensation. Theatre's invisible and unpaid work operates mostly on an implicitly voluntary basis rather than contractual conditions: artists are expected not to count hours worked, precisely because of their commitment to an activity not considered as 'classic labour'. Common thinking is that *creation* needs more time than the parcel of working time for which one can actually be paid. However, one can ask with Copfermann: 'In what way does theatre differ from other human activities (why is work "after six o'clock" required)?'[52] Actually, if differentiation is made between creative activities and labour, how is it possible then to defend artists'

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[51] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Annexe 1. (1863). https://www.marxists.org.
[52] Émile Copfermann, 'L'argent dans le théâtre', *Travail théâtral* 12 (1973), 7.

interests and rights as wage labourers, or to address work conditions and especially invisible unpaid labour?

According to Daniel Bensaïd, an artistic specific temporality does exist. He writes, in *Eloge de la résistance à l'air du temps* : 'everything is not adjusted or indexed to political temporality [and *a fortiori* to economical temporality]. There are such things as aesthetic time and rhythm […].'[53] A similar idea can be found in Althusser's theory of relatively autonomous temporalities. Art requires time, time for production, time for contemplation. Its temporality is at odds with capitalist acceleration and profitability imperatives. As such, time appears as an area of contradiction between art and capitalism, leading Steve Edwards to write about 'the problem of uneven and combined simultaneity'.[54] Capitalist pressures that affect theatre production become visible while considering that its economy is a matter of time. Budgetary restriction is primarily time restriction. It means less time dedicated to rehearsals and it also entails aesthetic choices.[55] In France, the large spread of short plays for one or two actors – enabling companies to reduce costs related to work force and contract period – is a consequence of budgetary restrictions.

Indeed, artistic creation requires time, an incompressible but also 'unproductive' time; that is, in a Marxist definition, which does not create value.[56] Here again, the theatre artist appears to have an ambiguous status because they can be a productive or an unproductive worker, depending on the context and the social relations that encompass their work. As Michael Shane Boyle explains it: 'For theatrical labor to be "productive" it will be organized as wage labor for the purposes of creating commodities that yield surplus

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[53] Daniel Bensaïd, *Eloge de la résistance à l'air du temps* (Paris: Textuel, 1999), 21.

[54] Steve Edwards, 'Adrian Rifkin, or from Art History in Uins to a Lost Object', introduction to Adrian Rifkin, *Communards and Other Cultural Histories* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 24.

[55] Much could be said about an aesthetic of slowness or of the experience of other rhythms within theatre performance as a form of resistance to capitalist's temporality.

[56] According to Marx, 'this remains the correct definition that only the wage-labour which creates more value than it costs is productive.' *Theories of Surplus-Value*. https://www.marxists.org.

value.'[57] Hence, theatre is not a 'directly productive' labour[58] and, according to Marx, 'Actors are productive workers, not in so far as they produce a play, but in so far as they increase their employer's wealth,'[59] and that makes a big difference. It's only when the 'temporary disposal over the labour-power'[60] of the performer – that is 'a certain quantity of it in terms of duration […] calculated in equal time-units'[61] – is hired by an entrepreneur (a theatre institution) in order to sell the performance as a commodity to the audience (consumers) that theatre 'acquires this market value'.[62]

Nevertheless, the fact remains that public art institutions – relying on the State – do not often create surplus value and, to a large extent, do not increase the capital (of the State) either. If we take a look at economic studies such as Dominique Leroy's on the performing arts economy in France during the twentieth century, it appears that those public art institutions remain unprofitable, with labour costs increasing faster over years than cash inflows.[63] It is only government subsidies which enable public theatres and, more generally, public cultural and art institutions to remain viable and to support new creations.

There exists, without any doubt, an 'exceptionality of artistic production.'[64] Though, we could add, with Dave Beech, that 'art is economically exceptional but it remains economic', because 'art is expensive' for artists themselves who 'spend money and time producing works'.[65] It can be said that artistic production is fraught with many contradictions. What a strange field of activity in which theatre artists, who are only intermittently considered as producers,

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[57] Michael Shane Boyle, 'Performance and Value: The Work of Theatre in Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy'. *Theatre Survey* 58:1 (2017), 13.

[58] Émile Copfermann, 'Un théâtre révolutionnaire', *Partisan* 36 (1967), 5.

[59] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1993), 328–329. Cited by Michael Shane Boyle, *Theatre Survey*, 15.

[60] Boyle, *Theatre Survey,* 12.

[61] Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation. A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time*, 117.

[62] Copfermann, 'Un théâtre révolutionnaire'*,* 6.

[63] Dominique Leroy, *Économie du spectacle vivant* (Paris : L'Harmattan : 1992).

[64] Émile Copfermann, *Vers un théâtre différent* (Paris: Maspero, 1976), 48.

[65] Dave Beech, *Art and Value. Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 27.

spend time not considered as productive time to create works that hardly create surplus value but (as we will see later) that do make them exist socially as workers…

Having said this, a question arises: why would a capitalist state sustain non-profitable art institutions (such as public theatres) and theatre companies? For philanthropic reasons? It is hard to imagine. Artistic institutions *must be*, in one way or another, potentially useful for the ruling class. According to Copfermann, if those institutions do not create profit in the form of money, they produce 'art' and 'culture', ensuring the proper functioning and reproduction of the state institution itself.[66] To complement his critique, we can add that cultural and artistic institutions play a role in ideology, which, according to Gramsci, is part of the framework of the theory of hegemony, that is, a theory which can explain 'the "voluntary" submission to the alienated structures of domination and to the corresponding restricted conditions of practice'.[67] In other words, hegemony, as a 'critical ideology-theory', can help us to think the '"government by consent of the governed", conducted by a state that "demands" and "educates" consent in the interest of a ruling class', thus 'ensuing stability of the dominant class-system'.[68] We can make the assumption that the artistic and cultural institutions dependent on the State participate in hegemony and in its stability.

Antagonism and Political Struggles
Such considerations about theatre workers status have implications for their work conditions and struggles. If artists consider themselves as 'creators' instead of 'workers', then common work may not be considered anymore as employment, but as some kind of informal relationship between different creators or acquaintances, 'informal work', which 'can also be a way to sneak in labour that is both

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[66] Copfermann, 'L'argent dans le théâtre', 6.

[67] Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology. The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 145. The idea of a voluntary subjection through ideology will also be developed – in a different way though – by Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New-York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[68] Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*.

unacknowledged and unpaid.'[69] If hierarchies, class antagonisms, contradictions and exploitation have not vanished, they have become more insidious as soon as the professional artistic field stopped considering itself as governed by the same rules as the global labour market in a capitalist society. How can you build a balance of power favourable to your interests as a worker when you do not consider yourself as a member of the working class, when you are convinced that the environment in which you work is, in its operation, outside capitalist society's mechanisms? This can help to explain why the artistic field, although it often appears as a progressive sector, traditionally more to the left, has difficulties facing, for example, racism and sexism, while it is crossed by tremendous inequalities. In its totality, the French institutional artistic field often fails to understand that it is constructed by the same structural racism and sexism that historically imbued republican and state institutions. Recently, public positions by Eva Doumbia about theatre[70] and the publication of the book *Noire n'est pas mon métier*[71] (*Black is not my job*) by a collective of black women cinema personalities, precisely sought to address these thorny issues. Artistic institutions seldom address these political issues, hiding behind art's exceptionality or a few exemplary figures to avoid a deep structural questioning. How to build a positive balance of power when the very existence of the antagonist is being denied? *Relations of production, that is capitalist exploitation relationships and* their racial and sexist co-constitutive dimensions, are being easily reproduced within those artistic and cultural institutions.

This does not mean that there is no antagonism within the artistic field. But this antagonism is much more polarised against governance bodies such as the employer organisation Medef (*Mouvement des entreprises de France*), when the specific unemployment compensation system of artists as 'intermittent' workers is threatened, than against management and exploitative practices inside artistic institutions. Hence, there is a contradiction between, on one side, the level of antagonism that opposes artists against governance bodies or

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[69] Hal Foster, *Bad New Days. Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London: Verso, 2017), 136.
[70] Stage director Eva Doumbia spoke about the language dimension of social and racial discriminations in theatre. https://www.telerama.fr/scenes/le-phrase-qu-on-enseigne-aux-comediens-les-separe-des-quartiers-populaires,125015.php
[71] Coll, *Noire n'est pas mon métier* (Paris: Seuil, 2018).

the State itself when they defend their specific regime, and, on the other, the weak level of antagonism within artistic institutions or companies, between artists or technicians as workers and their employers, despite the iniquitous working conditions they are often facing.

Time, status and struggles: reverse the trend?

The French artistic sphere is governed by the *régime de l'intermittence du spectacle*, a specific unemployment compensation system for artists and technicians working in the performing arts, which allows workers to receive social aides during unemployment periods, providing they achieved a total amount of 507 declared hours during a twelve-month period – this takes no account of undeclared or unpaid working time, including invisible work such as training, text learning and, sometimes, rehearsals.[72] Created in 1979, the very existence of this exceptional regime has been subjected to numerous attacks from the Medef and exposed to conflicts since the mid-1980s. This regime has long been considered as a potential neoliberal labour laboratory on the basis that, firstly, it is a matter of continuity and discontinuity – income continuity within labour discontinuity. Secondly, because it represents an exception in labour legislation, enshrining that a whole category of workers (regardless of their function, status, study level…) does not work continuously over a year but alternate work periods on projects and unemployment periods. Thus, employment and unemployment are not opposed but intertwined. Paradoxically, an artist who gains this 'intermittent' status (providing they fulfilled enough declared working hours) becomes a 'job-seeker'. Thirdly, this work arrangement is, by definition, constantly precarious and most workers live all lifelong in precarity. It's also characterised by hyperflexibility, invisible and often unpaid work, and the accumulation of employment contracts with many employers, sometimes at the same time, in part because many artists are forced to take up another job in a sphere of activity entirely alien to the artistic one just to meet basic needs. For these reasons, the artistic sphere may have appeared as a laboratory for global labour tendencies. Besides, 'intermittence' is an increasingly

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[72] On the French 'régime de intermittence du spectacle', see Mathieu Grégoire, *Les intermittents du spectacle. Enjeux d'un siècle de lutte* (Paris: La Dispute, 2013).

used category for sociologists who study developments in other spheres, such as Humanities Research or social work, characterised by a break with legitimate institutions, de-professionalisation, discontinuous temporalities and work outside the space-time usually assigned to labour.[73]

Despite artists' common subjection to artistic institutions' management, [74] a high level of antagonism remains between 'intermittent workers' and governance bodies, and even the State when it engages in restructuring policies which threaten them. Two statements have to be made here concerning the political foothold of artists and, more generally, recent 'intermittent' struggles. The first point is related to a discourse which arose during the struggles of recent years, when 'intermittents' defended their specific status, their own exceptionalism within labour laws. Recent struggles tended to show that in front of the government, artists defend themselves by arguing that they are value producers. The sticking point was that intermittent workers were actually defending their own integration to the global market. Intermittent trade unions' main point was often to claim that culture contributes more to GDP than the automobile industry[75] and that is why the intermittent regime should be preserved. This is a very surprising statement revealing art's integration into neoliberalism's standards. If the state is to invest in culture and support it only because culture produces surplus value and increases capital, does that then mean that if culture were not profitable enough it would not be worth defending? This statement marks a return of the idea of theatre workers as producers – instead of creators – but artists willing to defend their status as producers, as workers, appeared to be inclined to understand their own place within capitalist society through the prism of neoliberalism. The second point is that, during the last 'intermittent struggles' that happened at the same time as 2016 struggles against the 'labour reform', alliances were made between

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[73] See Pascal Nicolas-Le-Strat, *L'expérience de l'intermittence dans les champs de l'art, du social et de la recherche* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2005).

[74] The very specificity of the performing arts makes artists quite vulnerable if they want to oppose their hierarchy.

[75] *De facto*, a part of the entertainment field of activity is economic but this statement does not take account of the heterogeneity of the artistic field as a whole.

artists' and technicians' trade unions on one side and the intermittents and precarious coordination on the other, an alliance that helped to build a balance of power favourable to intermittents. Moreover, intermittents did not put their sectorial interests ahead of all precarious workers' interests, seeking an agreement for everyone and not just the artistic and cultural sector, highlighting the will to put aside the exceptionality of these sectors. Art workers then appeared at the vanguard of a more general social movement. However, intermittent workers were the only category to obtain an agreement with the government. Thus, they were offered an improvement of their specific status and regime and they signed the agreement, abandoning the claims of other precarious workers. This certainly did not go without tensions inside the movement. Consequently, it weakened the general mobilisation against the 'labour reform' and '*Nuit debout'*, and was even considered as a betrayal, because the improvement of artists and technicians intermittent regime was gained through a withdrawal of class solidarity with all the precarious workers and unemployed people.

What do we need to learn from this? An idea is running and gaining strength among theatre – and, more broadly, artistic – workers: the idea that being creators does not prevent them from being workers, that it does not erase class, race and gender contradictions and that the artistic sector will never be a protective bubble against the outburst of late capitalist policies implemented by the state. But some unsolved questions remain: how can workers of a sector characterised by its exceptionality (and, first of all, its temporal specificity) enter a more general social movement? Can their means of action be the same? The suspension of work – the strike – can be an efficient means for theatre workers inside an institution but a difficult one with long-term consequences for independent companies. The 2003 general strike that led to the Festival d'Avignon's cancellation is the most glaring example of that. This was a major event, even more so because this festival represents a crucial step for any company, so that strikers were not just losing money (most of the time, to perform at Avignon costs more money to companies than it actually brings), they were compromising future tours and thus months, perhaps years, of work. To choose not to perform is a big decision for theatre workers, for, according to Emile Copfermann, there is a specificity of performing

art workers, because 'an actor who does not perform is not even an unemployed worker; by not performing, he does not exist socially. A painter who does not sell, who does not show his paintings, a writer who does not publish can go on painting, writing. An actor who does not perform is not an actor.'[76] So, the temporality of intermittent work might require other types of protest.

        To conclude, we should remind ourselves of the words of German philosopher Walter Benjamin in his article 'The Author as Producer'. Benjamin writes: 'the place of the intellectual [or the artist] in the class struggle can only be determined, or better still chosen, on the basis of his position within the production process.'[77] In this way, we can assert that it is only by considering the production process of artistic creation and its contradictory temporalities that we can figure out the status of artists within neoliberal society and open up ways of resistance to exploitation and precarity.

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[76] Copferman, *Vers un théâtre différent*, 49-50.
[77] Walter Benjamin. *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1998), 93.

Is Another Biennial Possible? Art, Time and Refusal

Panos Kompatsiaris and Rowan Lear

This text results from a long-distance dialogue between Panos Kompatsiáris and Rowan Lear, who met in a panel at LCCT 2017 and decided to take the conversation further.

Panos Kompatsiaris (PK)

I would like to share some initial thoughts on the idea of 'radical inefficiency' that you proposed as potential (anti-)strategy for disturbing capitalist temporalities. To relate this strategy with the interventionist art institution and, indeed, the biennial, I would like to start the discussion with a pretty much 'dated' question: the question of boundaries, the boundaries between the inside and the outside or between co-opted and autonomous practice. The constitution of this boundary is regularly an arena of discursive contestation, an arena upon which a practice may be interpreted as radical, conformist, effective, co-opted, incapacitated and so on. And given a recent series of boycotts against prestigious art institutions,[78] does it make sense to speak about co-optation in the context of a biennial or shall we merely trace the 'effects' it produces in the social sphere?

The typical post-Marxist response to this question (and the one that most curators and theorists nowadays use) is that our very fabric is implicated in capitalist temporalities to such a degree that we should have no illusions: there is no outside, no escape from power in the first place. In this manner, the very posing of the question of the 'outside' is made redundant if not totally irrelevant: we should only speak about the effects. The argument here is that we need to implicate ourselves with powerful institutions so as to 'change them from within' as this would be a far more effective strategy than operating in the margins.

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[78] Joanna, Warsza (ed.), *I Can't Work Like this: A Reader on Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press: Berlin, 2017).

In these justifications, the prioritizing of politics of affirmation and performance leaves little space for negativity or radical inefficiency. But then we should also ask who can afford to be radically inefficient and navigate time in their own pace? To return to the issue of capitalist temporality, one could perhaps look at calls for its abandonment or its acceleration through touching upon aspects of privilege and situated power; who abandons, who accelerates and how?

Rowan Lear (RL)

This is a restart – a reboot – following a protracted period of time, in which I left you hanging. This unplanned interruption was something of a bodily intervention: a corporeal-barging-into-the-conversation. Pain and sickness is an unwelcome guest that makes itself heard. For Michel Serres, pain literally names the body and makes it appear:

> In the silence of health, the body – absorbed in its capacity for omnitude – knows nothing of membership. Illness causes it to fall into a description. Only syndromes exist, the healthy don't say a word.[79]

This recent corporeal disturbance was a sharp echo of another – the one that triggered my initial paper last year. In this, I was preoccupied with exhaustion, depression and psychic trauma, all things that seemed to come hand-in-hand with the labour conditions associated with the artist-led event: in this case, the art biennial. The temporality of the biennial – its oppressive regularity amid dwindling resources – seemed to me to be a problem resistant to any subversive ambitions of the organising team. For me, then a practitioner rather than scholar of biennial organising, this was not an abstract problem, but something concretely experienced through the body.

I proposed radical inefficiency as a potential strategy – a strategy not for revolution, but for survival, bodily endurance. The extent to which one – and who – has agency to choose or capacity to act upon a strategy, needed more scrutiny, which I think you have highlighted

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[79] Michel Serres, *Variations on the Body* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2012), 60-61.

above. In my thinking, I am tending away from the idea that inefficiency might be consciously called upon or chosen but that it is always, already materially embodied: a body under stress will stutter, slow down, become erratic or prone to repetition. It literally produces the effect of inefficiency (let's remove the radical, for now!). The body or bodies I speak of are of course not singular organisms: it might be a body of arts workers, a public body, a body of thought. There is no consciousness *within* a body: the body itself is conscious. This is a philosophical query I'm interested in – but it may take us further from the art biennial itself, and I'm really interested in what you have understood of this phenomena across Europe.

In your article, 'Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials', you note the biennial's enmeshment with global neoliberalism, economic extraction and the casualization of labour (a sticky web of instrumentalisation brutally realized in my own experience of a micro-scale biennial). Yet, you do not construe this to render the biennial a lost cause for the practice of emancipatory politics, claiming *"such a view fosters a fatalistic conception of political and social relations that overlooks the particularities of social interaction".[80]*

At the conclusion, you pose a series of questions, closing with *"What kinds of new worlds are produced within such settings and for whom are these worlds potentially valuable?"[81]* These suggest to me that you retain some kind of optimism about biennials. For you, does this materialise as a hope for 'another kind of biennial', or that the biennial as organizational model is infrastructurally open enough that it can generate new political possibilities?

PK

I am very glad to hear back from you following this unexpected interruption, an interruption performing our temporal and physical fragilities vis-à-vis (un) productive time, or, in other words, performing the very concept of this conversation.

Concerning your question, I would say that the biennial, as any other type of organizational structure, is always a multiplicity, and as

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[80] Panos Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7:1 (2014) 83
[81] Ibid.,86

such, it may be many things at once; it can simultaneously be (self) exploitative and profitable for participants, cities and members of art worlds, it can be both empowering and alienating for local and neighbouring populations or it can simply be a site where the poetics and politics of contemporary art gain visibility and wider distribution. Historically speaking, the biennial assumed diverse forms, served conflicting political and economic purposes and its fragmented histories were connected with different networks of power-something that Anthony Gardner and Charles Green carefully describe in their useful recent title on the topic (2016).[82] Therefore, to a priori condemn the biennial for its implication with power means to state a pretty much obvious fact, sealing off the discussion somewhat prematurely. A more sensitive approach – for which perhaps ethnography is best suited due to its capacity for 'thick' descriptions-would involve tracing the types of power a biennial each time invents and reproduces, ranging from the macro levels of nation and city branding and their impacts upon communities to the ways that interpersonal relations between participants are modelled and the types of subjectivation these entail.

In this context it is crucial to see the biennial not as a free-floating but as an ordered multiplicity, defined by certain "rules of art",[83] to put it in terms of traditional art sociology, and also by the ways these porous rules interact with what lies outside the (supposedly properly) 'artistic'. For instance, within the current globalized economic framework, the form of the large scale art event is defined by expectations that cast their shadow on the creative aspect of the event itself. For instance, the necessity to generate economies of visibility and prestige so that the event continues to exist institutionally, may shape, as you say, a very demanding repetitive temporality that can be managed (without leading to breakdowns) with proper funding and resources. In turn, to get hold of this funding and resources, the biennial is compelled to think in an entrepreneurial way, to behave like a sort of cutting-edge capitalist and innovator. To give one example, if we see the curatorial statements found in

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[82] Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016)
[83] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field.* (CA: Stanford University Press, 1996)

prestigious large-scale exhibitions in the past few years we will come across a sophisticated but ultimately very standardized and packaged language, often manifestly modelled to enable the effects of innovation, experimentation and radicalism to audiences. So while one can agree on the idea that there are always cracks in the system and that a biennial can be done otherwise, perhaps it is the very contours of this "otherwise" that may need more scrutiny. I may be slightly caricaturing now, but sometimes when everything is said to be done otherwise one may get the uncanny feeling that everything still looks the same.

I think that this might relate to your idea of radical inefficiency given that this idea acts as a strategy of prevention, of halting, of interrupting a given temporality and withdrawing from an oppressive state of affairs, and thus of balancing between 'not-doing' and 'doing otherwise'. One then could ask how different inefficiency is from efficiency, in the sense that within (austerity and de-unionized) capitalism there is permanent workforce disposability and as soon as one declares oneself to be inefficient there is always someone "efficient" to do the job. Following from that, I was also wondering whether this body under stress that you mention can redirect capitalist violence to platforms of collective resistance and organizing.

RL

I agree that "a more sensitive approach" is necessary, equipped to trace the cultural intricacies of different events in different places, run by different people, resourced differently and so on. To speak of the biennial in general is truly to reproduce a caricature – but it is a persistent one. In my experience, an artist-led group taking on the name "biennial" always evoked one of two responses: first, the institutionalised arts worker expecting an international, highly-resourced event with "named" curators; and second, quizzical looks from friends and neighbours: "what's a biennial?". Funnily enough, these two groups never seemed to meet, except perhaps by chance, in the disco lights of the opening party.

Beyond socio-cultural expectations, I wondered whether there was something particular about the term biennial, which indicates only that something will happen every two years. This periodicity might seem akin to body rhythms of breathing, heartbeat and digestion, to

seasonal weather in the Earth's middle latitudes, and of course, to clockwork. Yet heartbeat and other regular body movements have a flexible character, able to respond to stress and different environments, while seasons are mutable and unpredictable, especially now as they are impacted by global climate change. We're left with clockwork, a mechanical, infinite and seemingly inflexible technology for time measurement, and a harbinger of a new capitalist order of routine, which became socially pervasive in the industrial era. This is perhaps the model of regularity that the biennial is too closely associated with.

In search of the opposite – irregularity – I think of moments of surprise and shock, when one is confronted by something not expected. Last Autumn, an anonymous artist collective We Don't Need Gatekeepers (WDNG) was formed to interrupt the proceedings of a public consultation on arts funding in Bristol, UK. Through a coordinated in-person and twitter-based intervention, WDNG called for a redistribution of funds directly to artists rather than accepting what trickled down from a few institutions. It struck me, while WDNG was unfolding and by all accounts, discomfiting and aggravating the directors of various cultural institutions in the room, that the campaign had attained a degree of symbolic power purely because it hadn't been predicted, and therefore could not be prepared for.[84]

While this was happening, I was a resident artist in Wexford, Ireland, and had just visited Vinegar Hill, the site of a bloody battle during the 1798 Irish Rebellion against British rule. It would take another 120 years for Ireland to win independence, but Vinegar Hill was significant, not least because it was here that the Irish rebels (all of them civilians) began to seriously exercise guerrilla tactics, in the face of a organised, orderly and powerful British army approaching on all sides. From wikipedia: "Guerrilla warfare is a form of irregular warfare in which a small group of combatants, such as paramilitary personnel, armed civilians, or irregulars, use military tactics including ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and mobility to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military."[85] But

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[84] https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/dont-need-gatekeepers-artists-respond-bristol-visual-arts-review

[85] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_warfare

the irregular warfare of the guerrilla, and its potential to form the basis of a broader strategy of incalculability against more powerful yet predictable forces, seems to be in conflict with the sheer inevitability of the biennial temporal mode.

Yet we know the biennial, in all its forms, already operates on a flexible, resource-light basis, generally unencumbered of the trappings of bricks and mortar, permanent staff and the burden of assets, performing periodic parasitism on a city's resources. To perpetually call for the unexpected and the innovative – as you mention above, a common trope of the contemporary art institution – also appears to consummate capitalism's desire for the ever-new: opposition - or "the otherwise" – is currency. (A side note: a collective that I'm a member of recently drafted a manifesto which included the following line: "We make the ordinary happen. We are unexceptional"). However, Deleuze and Guattari, in their 'Treatise On Nomadology: The War Machine', note that "it is true that guerrilla warfare and war proper are constantly borrowing each other's methods and that the borrowings run equally in both directions."[86] So it cannot be claimed that it is merely that late capitalism has co-opted our methods of resisting: the poaching is two-sided, and, in rejection of the neoliberal market demand for expedited art production, could we not steal from the institution the parts that work for us?

The only permanent job I ever had was in an art institution and I was taken aback, shocked even, by the freedom enabled by a regular paycheck - despite entailing extensive overwork, it also offered respite from looking for work and promoting oneself; and time to socialise, pay into a pension, register with a doctor's surgery and so on. Perhaps this would lead to complacency, but it lasted just a few months and notably, most of my colleagues at that same institution were made redundant: permanency is no longer security and vice versa. But the formation of new institutions, rather than or despite being a process of sedimentation, could also be an affirmative strategy: as feminist

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[86] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 459

philosopher Ewa Majewska claims: "Forming institutions is a means for the weak: it can be a way of securing agency."[87]

What Majewska calls "weak resistance" brings me back to your question around whether the body under stress is capable of resistance. I draw from Mark Fisher's words on depression under capitalism: that whether pharmaceutical, psychoanalytic or psychiatric, treatments are wide of the mark, and miss the most likely cause: that depression results from – and is cultivated by and cultivates – the destruction of a class consciousness. He writes: "Collective depression is the result of the ruling class project of resubordination."[88] So while I'm certainly not trying to conflate the two, I think we can see inefficiency and depression as kindred - both an affront to late capitalism, but simultaneously an embodied symptom of it. If depression or inefficiency itself is produced (as a by-product) of enforced austerity, precarity and subjection, what else does it allow us to do? Both are stops in motion, but neither are methods of recuperation. They don't make us better workers when we return or begin again.

Fisher concludes that it is possible to rebuild our resistance by "converting privatised disaffection into politicised anger."[89] In a way, my paper at LCCT 2017, the related essay published in artist journal *Doggerland*, and our continued conversation: they're all fairly public ways of working through a private frustration, with the hope, surely, that this can become a collective and practiced politics.

PK

I agree with the idea of disturbing patterns of regularity and deteritorrializing the rituals that stick with them especially when these patterns and rituals work to empower a business mentality and extract capital from the social landscapes they interact with. On the other hand, I often wonder whether the proper response to oppressive regularities can be their opposite, that is to say posing the irregular and

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[87] Ewa Majewska and Kuba Szreder, 'So Far, So Good: Contemporary Fascism, Weak Resistance, and Postartistic Practices in Today's Poland', *e-flux journal* #76 (2016) http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_71467.pdf

[88] Mark Fisher, Good For Nothing, *Occupied Times* (2014) http://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=12841

[89] Fisher, Good For Nothing.

the unexpected against the 'complacent regular'. While the irregular may provoke regimes of instability, and thus potential change, instability can often nurture rather dark and demeaning futures. I have things in mind like the recent economic crisis in Europe leading to austerity and the rise of fascisms, conditions that can be seen as irregular in respect to the established political space – at least in the so called Western world of the last decades. Perhaps then the problem may not always be with regularity itself, but with the kinds and qualities of regularities as well as the aims that these regularities are meant to perform. For regularity can also harbour a politics of consistency, by which I mean a politics of being truthful to an ideal, to remain uncompromising vis-à-vis a cause. Even if often unregistered, the rituals and repetitions of subversive politics are part of struggles for change, even in acts of nomadic and guerrilla war as you mention. The sense of self-sacrifice performed by these Irish rebels, for instance, as well as of other rebels elsewhere, the act of putting their lives into danger for the sake of an ideal, requires the shaping of prior patterns of consistency including the belief that the ideals these people fight for are good and just ideals. In other words, it may often be a certain regularity, the rituals of belief it casts, the unshakable belief for instance that a society should be equal in terms of gender, ethnicity and class, that may enable people to protest and disrupt the regular state of things. These rituals may take place publicly or in closed groups but in any case they can stitch together unities of refusal so that the line between the regular and the irregular becomes porous.

Now all this may sound slightly off topic regarding the biennial and its temporalities, but perhaps it could help us approach the question of time, of navigating within present and future time, in relation to the prospect of enabling more equal futures. The biennial harbours a pattern of regularity in which the participants' practice is intertwined with productive labour. This practice is usually expected to work as a future currency that would ensure more professional success and status. On the contrary, the practice of the guerrilla and the terrorist offers its time in the prospect of a larger cause, casting present day sacrifice – often physical – as indispensable for making the world a better place in the future. The aims of these radicals may vary, it may be benevolent or utterly regressive from the perspective of social equality. In any case this difference in velocities may be one

of the reasons I started growing suspicious of the idea of 'us' stealing from the institutions. Does the biennial practitioner inhabit the same terrain with the Irish rebel (and I don't mean to fetishize the 'Irish rebel')? Of course people do not need necessarily to inhabit the same space so as to act collectively (there can be no same space anyway!) but there is a certain imbalance that perhaps needs to be made visible when biennial superstar curators often pose as radicals who similarly 'steal' from the institution in order to advance some form of social change. I was recently listening to such a curator quoting people like Lenin and Gramsci in order to frame their practice. I think there may be a danger here of conflating professional practice that can bring future personal success and status with the practice of people who sacrifice their lives to collective causes. On the other hand, a certain courage is required to refer to past radicals in such commercialized contexts, it may be a ritual that needs to be rehearsed so that the art world does not collapse to vulgar aestheticism.

And then a question can be whether acts of refusal should be reflected on the refuser's 'lifestyle' or whether such acts merely rely on the dynamics of the ritual or even performative act (e.g. how many people one managed to mobilize in a 'radical' cause)? The figure of the 'hermit' and the activist celebrity (of Bono!) would always haunt the specters of these poles and potentially act as a reminder against them. There is then a question of what to do when the 'ideal' becomes compromised, 'tainted', by the routines- the regularities- of our everyday activities. And I find this quote by Vivian Gornick in her Emma Goldman biography extremely useful:

> The turn-of-the-century moderns were admirable in that many of them, when forced to look squarely at things as they were, chose to honor the evidence of their senses, even though that inevitably meant the beginning of the end, not necessarily of their ideals but certainly of their rhetoric. To see oneself in the gap was, almost always, to lose heart for spouting grand, unalloyed certainties. On the other hand, it takes a certain kind of mad courage to reject the claim of experience as superior to that of idealism, and to go on insisting, against all odds, that ultimately the ideal will work because it must work, because it is

not acceptable that it not work. This is the courage of the born refusenik, who, any day of the week, will discard defeatist reality in favor of the elevating ideal.[90]

The dilemma then may be whether one should tone down as a result of reflecting on a 'compromised' lifestyle or embrace this 'mad courage' and speak for the ideal despite the contradictions of experience?

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[90] Vivian Gornick, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a way of life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 84-85

Introduction: Radical hospitality?
Cecilia Canziani & Louise Garrett

> The welcome orients, it turns the *topos* of an opening of
> the door and of the threshold toward the other.[91]

The concept of a 'radical' hospitality represents a contentious – and
hopeful – rethinking of the ways in which relations between hosts and
(unexpected) guests to homes, places, cities, nations or continents are
conceptualized and practiced. In the current of numerous
manifestations of devastating politics of exclusion being administered
globally, represented by (say) the rise of populist political movements
across Europe, the ongoing Mediterranean crisis, the implementation
of the UK Home Office's hostile environment for immigration, or the
Trump administration's zero tolerance immigration policies, such
hopefulness proposes a radical rethinking of the ways in which
political space between hosts and guests is activated and negotiated. In
today's generally *in*hospitable environment – a space characterized by
the blatant suppression of minority rights – addressing the complex
and deeply problematic question: 'How do we act hospitably now?'
strikes us as particularly urgent – both in terms of potency and
potentiality.

This question stems from a desire to create dialogues between
theoretical and practical applications of hospitality in order to try to
think through a politics of space that is open to and oriented by the
agency of the *étranger* (foreigner, stranger) – a figure that presupposes
(rather than being an exception to) all social relations.[92] Regarding

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[91] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanual Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and
Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 54.
[92] Cf. Simmel's claim that 'to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; …
The stranger, like the poor and like sundry 'inner enemies,' is an element of the
group itself. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it
and confronting it.' Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" (1908) in *On Individuality and*

such a terrain appeals to a recognition of the iniquities of dispossession, precarity, dislocation, exclusion and myriad degradations that the current hardening of borders represents (shored up by malignant political rhetoric that imagines 'marauding' immigrants as invaders, or as a form of natural disaster – a 'tidal wave,' a 'flood' – or as insects or parasites 'swarming' across newly reinforced sovereign borders). [93] Theorizing hospitality (without forgetting its etymological links to hostility)[94] and thinking about the highly ambiguous, uneven, often ambivalent and potentially violent relations between hosts and guests may not suggest the most straightforward route towards a critique of the global right to civic and public space. Yet engaging with questions of hospitality offers a useful way of thinking alternatively about the welcoming, marginalization or exclusion of strangers and the dispossessed by city, state and global administrations – by embedding such administered politics of space within a broader ethico-political responsibility.

The Radical Hospitality stream at the 2017 London Conference in Critical Thought (LCCT) provided a platform for interdisciplinary approaches towards interrogating the antinomies of hospitality as a vehicle for thinking through theories and practices of spatial politics in contemporary cultural contexts. The point of departure was Jacques Derrida's political analyses, in a sequence of seminars from the late 1990s,[95] in which he reads hospitality as an aporetic space between the principles of unconditional or absolute hospitality – the principle of

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Social Forms: Selected Writings, edited by Donald N. Levine (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 143-44.

[93] A brief but insightful analysis of this form of toxic language in relation to immigration can be found in David Shariatmadari, "Swarms, floods and marauders: the toxic metaphors of the migration debate," *Guardian,* August 10, 2015: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/10/migration-debate-metaphors-swarms-floods-marauders-migrants, accessed 22 September 2018.

[94] For a reading of the troubling (and troubled) relationship between hospitality and hostility, see Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities,* 5, no. 3 (2000): 3-18, DOI: 10.1080/09697250020034706.

[95] Key publications related to this topic include: Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997); *Adieu to Emmanual Levinas*; *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

allowing whomever or whatever enters one's domain without reservations or calculations – and conditional hospitality – the laws required to control and protect 'home.' Rather than setting these principles of hospitality as mutually exclusive forces, Derrida argues for an irreducible relation between the two. This manifestation of undecidability as a politicized concept was crucial to Derrida's late writings and, in this context, allows for a fruitful tension within the politics and ethics of hospitality as well as between theory and practice.[96]

Derrida understood hospitality as an interrogative term to consider both public space as a bounded zone, in which the stranger/foreigner (*étranger*) is subject to the codes, rules and regulations of its host (home, city or state), and the common right of any stranger to any space; that is, the ethical imperative that the host receives whatever and whomever enters its domain. The provisionality of this aporetic space between conditional and unconditional hospitality appeals to a radical rethinking of hospitality in relation to contemporary conditions determined by exclusionary premises of legally mandated, state-regulated hospitality in the form of (say) border control and deportation policies or the conditions of refuge and the illegal detention of asylum seekers. How might actual issues of space and resource allocation, controls on free movement and rights, and imposed definitions of a guest's identity and status be reoriented by thinking through the ethical imperative of unconditional hospitality?

The radical basis of Derrida's interpretation calls for the hyperbolic, unlimited ethics of (unconditional) hospitality to orient the (conditional) realm of legislation operating between hosts and guests, challenging the more conventional situation in which the unconditional is contained or guarded by the precepts of conditional hospitality. Radically re-orienting the conditional identity of hospitality, which Derrida summarises as the requirements for 'a

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[96] Derrida, "Hostipitality." Another significant work in the context of Derrida's late political writings is *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). For a reading of the origins of 'undecidability' in Derrida's writing, see David Bates, "Crisis Between the Wards: Derrida and the Origins of Undecidability," *Representations,* 90, no. 1 (2005): 1-27.

police inquisition, a registration of information, or a straightforward frontier control,' invokes threshold politics as an 'unstable place of strategy and decision.' This, Derrida writes, is '[a] difference both subtle and fundamental, a question that arises on the threshold of 'home,' and on the threshold between two inflections.' For Derrida, this is an absolute principle: 'An art and a poetics, but an entire politics depends on it, an entire ethics is decided by it.'[97]

The Radical Hospitality stream was part of an ongoing curatorial project investigating current research and practice which looks particularly at art and architecture as practices of encounter, sociality and spatiality. This project aims to illuminate, critically scope and expand concepts of hospitality when considered in relation to space, mobility, migration, refuge, sanctuary, cosmopolitanism, travel, translation and related phenomena. The six sessions in the 2017 LCCT conference offered a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives from academics in the fields of philosophy, history, religion, law, politics and linguistics alongside practitioners including artists and architects. Opening up this discussion to authors from a variety of different disciplines offered the beginnings of a constellation of ideas allied to the ethical (im)possibilities of hospitality, and the way this concept inscribes interdisciplinary modes of enquiry into spatial and threshold politics. This current collection draws out a small selection of these diverse strands to create a dialogue between theoretical and practical applications of Derrida's interpretation of the antinomies of hospitality.

The collection begins with Andreas Michel's reading of Derrida through Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala's 2011 book *Hermeneutic Communism*,[98] which argues for a radical politics originating from the margins, based on the care for the weak. Vattimo and Zabala's proposition of a 'twisting' (*Verwindung*) of democratic foundations *from the margins*, speaks to Derrida's response to the (im)possibility of hospitality in its 'pure and hyperbolic' dimension 'in whose name we should always invent the best dispositions, the least bad conditions,

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[97] Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford,
California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 66-7.
[98] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism from Heidegger to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

the most just legislation.'[99] This frames the question of hospitality as a radical demand for justice and rights for an international precariat marginalized by economic and social conditions that equally sidelines migrants, refugees, colonized subjects and indigenous peoples. Also, considering hospitality as a catalyst for a plurality of interpretations, following the way 'hermeneutic communism' is understood by Vattimo and Zabala, suggests a way of thinking about a hermeneutics of hospitality as necessary political action in a radical sense. Rather than conserving or protecting the status quo – for example, already established hierarchies between hosts and guests – hospitality as a hermeneutic may be thought of as a productive resistance to conventional principles and categories in which the door is not shut on 'what cannot be calculated, meaning the future and the foreigner.'[100] Recalling the appeal to hope invoked earlier in this introduction, Michel characterises Vattimo and Zabala's radical proposal as based on a common ideal of basic human solidarity and love.

Such a reading of hospitality as a politics of resistance provides a basis for the discussion between Shaimaa Abdelkarim and Alessandra Ferrini, which elaborates on their respective papers presented at LCCT 2017. The conversation stemmed from a reciprocal interest in the implications and responsibilities involved in presenting their respective research on two specific instances of 'the future and the foreigner' – the 2011 uprising in Tahrir Square in Egypt, which unseated President Hosni Mubarak on 11 February of that year (Abdelkarim), and the plight of agricultural workers in southern Italy subject to the gangmaster system (Ferrini). Ferrini's film *Radio Ghetto Relay* draws on material from the radio station Radio Ghetto, Voci Libere (Radio Ghetto, Free Voices), which was established to give voice to the inhabitants of the Gran Ghetto in Rignano Garganico, near Foggia (Puglia, Italy). These inhabitants were migrant workers (some of them trafficked) who have been exploited by gangmasters operating on behalf of the tomato industry (and other agricultural sectors) in Italy. The radio station was designed to offer a vehicle for Gran Ghetto residents to communicate their situation and grievances in public, but in such a way that circumvented and resisted their own

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[99] Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," 67.
[100] Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," 67.

subjection to economic exploitation. Radio Ghetto, which Ferrini's film draws from, can be considered a practical response to the demand for a politics of the margins, articulated in Michel's paper. Ferrini and Abdelkarim discuss how they situate themselves as researchers in relation to their subjects, characterizing this relation as a negotiable, unstable space between hosts and guests. Taking Derrida as a lead, Ferrini and Abdelkarim think through the responsibility researchers hold towards marginalized subjects and narratives. This is relevant to both a hermeneutical methodology based on a 'care for the weak' and Derrida's motivation to disrupt or resist (to deconstruct) power structures based on a prescribed order of foundational thinking. In the conversation between the two authors, Radio Ghetto and Tahrir are considered as what Abdelkarim describes as 'spaces of negotiation in which the roles of guest and host are constantly questioned and redefined': a space of undecidability between the force of law and the right to justice.[101] The question they share in relation to their respective (ongoing) research is how to re-enact the potential of these spaces of negotiation as ongoing – and irrepressible – archives of resistance in the present.

A very different space for negotiation is considered in the final paper by museologist and cultural scientist Luise Reistätter. In her research, threshold politics is positioned in relation to a symbolic realm of exclusionary, hierarchical power and knowledge: the museum. Reistätter presents the case study of Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud: an easy-to-read wall text evaluation and language learning project developed by the Salzburg Museum and the University of Salzburg. The project was designed to develop the museum's educational offering by attempting to give agency to marginalized voices. By addressing the roots of language as the 'border guard' of the museum (considered as a hegemonic discursive space), the project suggests a basic, or radical, shift in how the museum might be 'read' and actively interpreted by migrant and marginalized voices. This represents a basic principle of hospitality in which language as a vehicle for communicating across cultural difference is opened up and made more flexible, facilitating a shift from the traditional

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[101] See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 3-67.

authoritative voice of the museum to a more inclusionary space of diverse voices and positions – a space where the co-production of knowledge is proposed as a real possibility. Ideally, this suggests the potentiality of the museum as a host space for the disenfranchised in which access allows for the possibility of parallax views on its conventional representational perspective – a minor gesture towards the unpicking the social fabric drawn tight by the professed guardians of knowledge. In Derrida's terms, this may be a way of originating an 'idiom to come.'[102]

Likewise, justice (Derrida says):

> …may have an avenir, a 'to come,' [which is] rigorously distinguish[ed] from the future that can always reproduce the present. […] Justice remains, is yet, to come, à venir, it has an, it is à-venir, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. […] 'Perhaps,' one must always say perhaps for justice.[103]

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[102] Derrida uses the phrase "idiom to come" in many of his writings on hospitality, including in *Adieu to Emmanual Levinas*, 19.
[103] Derrida, "Force of Law," 27.

Hermeneutic Communism and the Challenge of 'Radical Hospitality'
Andreas Michel

Based on Heidegger's critique of subject metaphysics, *Hermeneutic Communism* argues for a politics originating from the margins, at the heart of which is the care for the weak. Providing a political dimension to Heidegger's notion of disclosure (*Entbergung*), the authors call for a paradigm change in liberal democracies where entire segments of society ('the weak') experience the effects of their metaphysical foundations as violence. The solution, however, is not the promise of utopian communism because, being itself a foundationalist enterprise, it would replicate similar forms of oppression. Rather, in order to address the systemic problems plaguing liberal democracies (as a result of individualism, capitalism), Vattimo and Zabala propose not an overcoming (*Überwindung*) but a distorting, a twisting (*Verwindung*) of democratic foundations *from the margins*, that is, from within liberal democracies.

In my paper, I show how the practice of *Verwindung*, as laid out by Vattimo and Zabala, might be conceived as formulating a politics of the gap between the ethical and political dimension Derrida uncovers in Kant's notion of hospitality.

'How do we act hospitably now?' This question as well as the Radical Hospitality stream itself grew more or less directly out of Derrida's lectures and reflections on what he calls the aporia, antinomy, or the double-bind implied by the concept of hospitality. In a number of texts from the late 1990s and early 2000s, Derrida explored these aporias that stem from the fact that any application of the concept of hospitality implies simultaneously a conditional (local) law as well as an unconditional (universal) law of hospitality.[104] At the same time, Derrida is very clear that the aporia should not mislead one to assume

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[104] Jacques Derrida: "Hostipitalité," *Cogito 85* (1999): 17-44; Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); JD, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

that practices of hospitality are not desirable or impossible; quite the contrary. I therefore understand the formulation 'radical hospitality' as a reminder to remain cognizant of the aporetic nature of hospitality so as not to assume that any particular content will satisfy the concept. In this paper I would like to relate Derrida's conceptual analysis to what may be seen as a blueprint for a political application of the concept of hospitality. The text I have in mind is entitled *Hermeneutic Communism* (2011) and is co-authored by Italian philosophers Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala.

Assuming that there is less familiarity with this text than with Derrida's, I will begin by outlining, in very broad terms, the principal claims of *Hermeneutic Communism*. In a second step, I will test to what extent Derrida's analyses are addressed in Vattimo and Zabala's approach. The question I would like to explore is in what way – if indeed at all – Derrida's aporetic formulation of hospitality can be shown to be compatible with a socio-political project of hospitality such as the one suggested in *Hermeneutic Communism*.

Hermeneutic Communism

Vattimo and Zabala's text from 2011 is an impassioned philosophical appeal to redress the plight of those left behind by the neoliberal policies of the past few decades, and to whom they refer as the losers of globalization or, in more drastic terms, the 'discharge of the West.'[105] In the course of their argument, the authors explore existing alternatives to Western – especially American-style – capitalism, which they see as imbued with fantasies of world dominion. They discover such alternatives, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, in Latin America in the countries led by Castro, Chavez and Morales. While I have much sympathy for the authors' impassioned advocacy for those left behind by the global economic policies of the West, I have my doubts (albeit with hindsight) as to the well-foundedness of the policies of some of their heroes. But this is not my subject. Rather, I am concerned with the politico-philosophical framework of *Hermeneutic Communism*. In this text, Vattimo and Zabala make an impassioned appeal to stand up for the excluded; their appeal is radical and so are the philosophical underpinnings of their approach.

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[105] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism. From Heidegger to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

In order to take the full measure of the book's argument we have to begin with the philosophy of 'weak thought,' or *pensiero debole*, that Vattimo has been formulating since the early 1970s.[106] For, in some sense, *Hermeneutic Communism*, authored by him and one of his students, can be seen as the theoretical and practical culmination of Vattimo's oeuvre.

The hallmark of weak thought is its theoretical anti-foundationalism, a philosophical attitude which, in the wake of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the different post-structuralisms, is suspicious of all thought that derives the truthfulness of its statements from an unshakable ground (*fundamentum absolutum inconcussum veritatis*) – be it called God, Nature, the Subject, History, Science, or the Party. For Vattimo and Zabala, notions of unshakable grounds merely occlude hidden interests, designed to first establish and then safeguard regimens of truth. With Heidegger and Derrida, Vattimo labels this entire Western tradition metaphysics: 'the idea that an objective order exists independently from us and to which we ought to conform in order to know (mirroring) and act (rights and 'natural' ethics).'[107] In response to such ideas, Vattimo's philosophy of weak thought does not offer an unshakable ground. Instead, it is content with being an interpretation – the 'hermeneutic' of the title – whose sole aim is to present a different perspective, i.e., a new interpretation led by a declared interest with respect to the matter at hand. For over forty years, Vattimo's weak thought has been concerned with formulating this anti-foundationalist alternative to the Western tradition.

While Vattimo joins a number of fellow travellers in this critique of metaphysics – Derrida, Lyotard and Rorty come to mind – weak thought represents his own particular brand of such post-metaphysical thought. Vattimo calls his approach an 'ontology of actuality,'[108] by which he means to signal that his critical analysis of the Western

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[106] There is no single text of Vattimo's that could function as *pars pro toto* to capture the unfolding of his philosophy of weak thought from the early 1970s to around 1996. However, Vattimo's *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, & Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), introduced by Richard Rorty, provides a comprehensive overview of the nature and range of Vattimo's thought.

[107] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 94.

[108] Gianni Vattimo, "Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality. A biographical-theoretical interview with Luca Savarino and Federico Vercellone" *Iris. European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, 311-350.

world (and its intellectual and socio-political reproduction *in toto*) derives from the hermeneutic approach to the present historical epoch. The post-metaphysical epoch is defined by the end of strong foundational claims or metanarratives, and it is the work of weak thought to interrogate all foundational discourses as to their hidden interests. In particular, Vattimo never tires of criticizing how the West assures and reassures itself of its unshakable metaphysical ground through regimens of truth based on logic, reason, and experimental science. Vattimo's position is not that the sciences furnish untruth; rather, he is dismayed that they present their approach as the only viable (because objectively true) way to explain events. In Vattimo's view, scientific truths can count as true interpretations only from within the frameworks that have been used to establish them. But the frameworks used are far from being the only ones possible.

With this background we can turn from the philosophy of weak thought to the main argument of *Hermeneutic Communism*. In this text, Vattimo and Zabala develop a concrete socio-political alternative to neoliberalism from within their hermeneutic critique of Western metaphysics. At its centre is the critique of objectivism (or what they call a realist metaphysics), i.e., the approach that rationalises all Being as conceived by a timeless all-powerful Subject describing its Object. In this critique of objectivism they take their cue from Heidegger: 'Insofar as the *pure relationship of the I-think-unity* (basically a tautology) becomes the unconditional relationship, *the present that is present to itself* becomes the measure of all beingness.'[109] In other words, the truth promoted by the sciences necessarily conceives of the present state of objects as their essential nature. Vattimo and Zabala reject this realist or objectivist ontology as metaphysics. In its stead, they defend the anti-foundationalist hermeneutic position described above.

Now, what is new in *Hermeneutic Communism* is the political thrust of this hermeneutic ontology, for it allows the authors to advance a radical critique of contemporary socio-political reality. They suggest that objectivist metaphysics validates the status quo and as such is essentially conservative, i.e., it is inherently resistant to change, especially radical change. This is so because science, in describing what it encounters as objective, obscures the vested interests

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[109] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 13.

underlying its interpretive operation. Once these vested interests, and their stabilizing function, are illuminated, the conservative nature of science is revealed. Again, the results generated by science are not wrong, but they are not the only ones possible. This is what metaphysics forgets, and it is this forgetting that turns science into a conservative force, supportive of the status quo. The hermeneutic approach, on the other hand, knows and affirms itself as an interpretation, aware that its unscientific (in the sense of not claiming an ultimate ground) claim to truth may well be provisional. The point of its truth claims is therefore to present alternative scenarios to the status quo – to interfere with what is, and to change it in the direction it favours.

This takes us to the second term of Vattimo and Zabala's text: communism. This term does not reference a nostalgia for any historical instances of real-existing communism; rather, it attempts to go back to the spirit of actively interfering in perceived injustices on the grounds of human solidarity. Even if notions of class war have lost their purchase, the injustices that first created them are still with us. Vattimo and Zabala point out that little has changed when it comes to 'the rich' and 'the poor,' the 'winners' and 'losers' of modern capitalism and of globalization. Not unlike Frankfurt School philosophers, they see the contemporary world as an administered society run by technocratic rule for which they coin the term 'framed democracy.'[110] In their view, Western democracies have congealed, in economic, political, and military terms, into conservative formations that lack any sense of empathy for the fate of the marginalized people(s) within and without the West.

In summation, then, the political critique levelled by *Hermeneutic Communism* is not launched from a *fundamentum absolutum inconcussum*, an ultimate ground for a just political practice. Rather, its authors conceive of political action as hermeneutic performance in a universe of interpretations for which no ultimate arbiter exists. It is from within this postmodern anti-foundationalism that Vattimo and Zabala present their interpretation of how to safeguard the weak. They try to gain access to a realm that leaves truth as correspondence behind and moves to truth as interpretation. In this fashion, *Hermeneutic*

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[110] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 7

Communism turns the 'hermeneutic ontology'[111] of weak thought into a political philosophy for the marginalized.

Radical Hermeneutics and Radical Hospitality

As we saw, *Hermeneutic Communism* is driven by a political critique of existing liberalism and neoliberalism. But unlike regular political critiques, it is launched without a platform based on an ultimate ground, such as a substantial vision of freedom, justice, or the pursuit of happiness. Because Vattimo and Zabala attempt to leave metaphysics behind, they cannot identify an ultimate ground or a certain set of laws as binding for all – as scientific communism assumed it could – and legitimate all action performed in its name.

In their model, the power of the weak and their allies consists in affirming a different interpretation of the status quo by protesting against their fate in the neoliberal world. In the hermeneutic universe of interpretation no foundational discourse can disqualify this appeal by the weak. Rather, the hermeneutic approach offers an open horizon to any appeal at any time. It is in this structural openness to the future – or so I would like to claim – that Vattimo and Zabala's hermeneutic communism can be related to the aporetic notion of hospitality as advanced by Emmanuel Levinas and Derrida. Although the following statement will have to be qualified in due course, for heuristic purposes I might put my argument this way: hermeneutic ontology is to metaphysics what radical hospitality is to the particular laws of hospitality. As we saw above, in *Of Hospitality*, Derrida presented two readings of the concept of hospitality, one conditional, the other unconditional. My claim is that the conception of radical hermeneutics, like that of radical hospitality, is defined by an open horizon that is, in the final analysis, conditioned by the ethical brotherhood of humankind. Derrida explicates the openness of the horizon through the conceptual analysis of the structural encounter with the stranger, while Vattimo and Zabala use the notion of horizon to condemn the shortcomings of 'framed democracies' inside and outside the Western world. Ultimately, the motivation for Vattimo and Zabala's critique of the objectivist notion of truth and in favour of the care for the 'discharge of the West,' is rooted in a feeling of

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[111] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 93.

ethical responsibility. As such, it is another word for unconditional love, or the ideal of basic human solidarity where distinctions of nation, language, creed, and custom are null and void.

This sentiment is at the bottom of Vattimo and Zabala's radical hermeneutics which, like the notion of radical hospitality, represents an appeal, not a ground. Giving voice to this appeal takes the form of interpretations that are always provisional. Most important for Vattimo's philosophy of weak thought, however, is the fact that radical hermeneutics does not legitimate violence. Rather, it takes the form of a utopian project. The question is if Derrida's structural reading of radical hospitality can be read as supporting such a utopian project or not.

Difference

The notion of horizon, then, is decisive for both Derrida's and Vattimo and Zabala's approaches. However, their respective horizons are developed from within very different theoretical frameworks, i.e., *hermeneutics* as the philosophy of interpretation and *deconstruction* as the critical idiom exploring the limits of conceptual thought. Derrida's conceptual investigation uncovers an unresolvable aporia at the very heart of the structure of hospitality – which at first sight hardly makes him a viable candidate for a political project.

To recall some aspects of this aporia quickly: according to Derrida there are two orders of law when it comes to hospitality. On the one hand, there is the unconditional, ethical law of hospitality that enjoins all of us to treat the stranger as if s/he were us. On the other hand, there are the local laws of hospitality as they exist in a bounded space – such as a state, a nation, or a home that, for pragmatic reasons, restrict unconditional hospitality. The aporia consists in the fact that the law of radical hospitality can only ever be realized in historical laws grounded in real circumstances that necessarily restrict it. Furthermore, the institutions granting 'hospitable' space must, in order to safeguard it, develop safety requirements that take the form of laws to be enforced by police, aspects that further control and restrict hospitality while granting the limits of its possibility. What is more, the very notion of hospitality contains in it the idea of a space in which to grant hospitality, and within which the owner of that space necessarily has authority over the stranger. Structurally, in other

words, hospitality can only appear in aporetic fashion, as both conditional and unconditional. In Derrida, we therefore confront not a utopian project but rather a structural conundrum. Thus, although they share the anti-foundational attitude and a concern for unconditional human solidarity, hermeneutics and deconstruction seem to part ways when it comes to turning such similar premises into a political project – quite in spite of what Vattimo and Zabala at least implicitly suggest by enlisting Derrida's support in their critique of actually existing neoliberalism.

And yet I would like to suggest that we take a closer look *at the manner* in which Vattimo and Zabala articulate their utopian project and how they imagine the nature of hermeneutic communism. For the issue may come down to how they conceptualize 'communism's weakened essence.'[112] Put differently, the question is what a weakened communism, a 'communism without dominion,'[113] a non-foundational communism, actually looks like.

In the last chapter of *Hermeneutic Communism* the authors state: 'Weak communism is the political alternative to the neoliberal impositions of framed democracies.'[114] At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Vattimo and Zabala find such weak communism realized in a number of Latin American countries. Elected on a democratic platform, the policies of Chavez and Morales – such as the distribution of the proceeds from oil sales into general health programmes, as well as free medical and educational programmes that drastically reduced extreme poverty, infant mortality, and illiteracy[115] – ought to be seen as successful examples of weak communist political programmes. However, rather than regard such policies, which they emphatically support, as truths to be exported around the globe, Vattimo and Zabala treat them as falsifiable *interpretations* that, given the open horizon of hermeneutics, may have to be overturned at a later point. Overturned, that is, if I might put this in the language of Derrida's investigations, in light of the continually retreating law of unconditional hospitality, which

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[112] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 113.
[113] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 119.
[114] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 128.
[115] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 125.

constitutes the categorical imperative of hermeneutic praxis. In this spirit, Vattimo and Zabala maintain:

> While we cannot imagine a world where communism is completed, neither can we renounce this ideal as a regulative and inspiring principle for our concrete decisions. But wouldn't we lose in this way the meaning of the regulative ideal? Kant's lesson of practical reason also has this meaning: the union between virtue and happiness is not only the end that gives meaning to moral actions but also something impossible to carry out in the world. Nevertheless, this impossibility does not remove the obligation toward the categorical imperative. In sum, communism is utopia or, as Benjamin would say, a project of the '*weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim.'[116]

I believe one can interpret this paragraph as being in line if not with the letter at least with the spirit of Derrida's investigation into the aporias of the concept of hospitality. Vattimo and Zabala state here explicitly that the completion of communism – which would be akin to the realization of unconditional hospitality – is impossible to imagine, which I read as impossible to achieve. Yet a non-foundational, weak communism continues to function as a regulative principle for daily decisions to be made, similar to the role played by the unconditional law of hospitality for the particular laws of hospitality. That is to say, the obligation toward the categorical imperative remains, although its realization may forever be postponed.

So how do we act hospitably now? By being mindful that heeding the appeal coming from the categorical imperative is both impossible (in the end) and necessary. Both Derrida's aporia and Vattimo and Zabala's 'hermeneutic communism' point that way. The above quote continues:

> The messianic power of the utopia is also a critical and indispensable limit; it is only when the revolution is considered completed (or, which is the same, when Being is identified with beings as a present fact) that it becomes despotic power,

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[116] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 117.

hegemony, and violence against any disclosure toward a different future.[117]

The notion of utopia as indispensable limit, as continuous revolution producing provisional results to be improved upon at a later time, is to apply the appeal of the unconditional law of hospitality to the local laws of hospitality.

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[117] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 117.

A Hospitable Encounter: A Conversation Between 'Radio Ghetto Relay' and Tahrir

Shaimaa Abdelkarim and Alessandra Ferrini

This collaborative piece stems from a conversation about *Radio Ghetto Relay*, a short video directed by Ferrini in 2016. Commentary on the film is interweaved with reflections on Abdelkarim's research on documenting the legal reception of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. *Radio Ghetto Relay*[118] is based on the archived radio broadcasts of Radio Ghetto Free Voices,[119] a project of 'participated communication' that gave voice to the dwellers of the Gran Ghetto of Rignano Garganico (Puglia, Southern Italy). Until its demolition in March 2017,[120] this shantytown housed up to 2500 migrants and refugees, mostly from West Africa, who were (and continue to be) systematically exploited in the local tomato plantations by the local mafia through the so-called gangmaster system. [121] The 2011 Egyptian uprisings initiated a

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[118] *Radio Ghetto Relay* is available online: https://www.alessandraferrini.info/ghetto-relay

[119] I will be referring to Radio Ghetto Free Voices as Radio Ghetto only throughout the rest of the text.

[120] Radio Ghetto is now broadcasting again after a period of inactivity, although using a different format as it is no longer hosted in a fixed place – it travels to various shantytowns and follows harvesters' demonstrations currently breaking out in different parts of the country. As such, the direct involvement of the harvesters in the running of the radio is more marginal now.

[121] The gangmaster system is a form of modern-day slavery that has been on the rise worldwide, especially within the agricultural sector. In Italy, it has been growing exponentially since the 1980s. Oftentimes migrants get trapped in this system after being lured to Europe by international criminal rings with the promise of a decent job. Other times they end up in the plantations because there are no other options to earn a living at their disposal. Working under the scorching sun and being beaten if not fast enough, they work for about ten hours a day, earning around €1 per 100kg of tomatoes harvested. Gangmasters act as intermediaries between the plantations' owners and the harvesters, getting a percentage of their salary. It is worth noting here that this practice extends to other crops too. The disenfranchised 'guest' thus represents a fundamental part of the agricultural industry on a national level – his/her labour is turned into valuable capital for the

relocation of the Egyptian identity outside the docility that Mubarak's regime had constructed. Through re-narrating the occupation of Tahrir, the current legal constraints on acts of resistance are questioned towards asserting a presence of the events of the 2011 uprisings. Conversing about both Tahrir and Radio Ghetto, this discussion explores the notion of hospitality through Radio Ghetto and Tahrir as spaces of negotiation in which the roles of guest and host are constantly questioned and redefined. These reflections emerge as we consider the two case studies, our positioning and personal investment in the objects of our studies, as well as the ethical implications of such work. In so doing, this conversation scrutinises the researchers' relations to their subjects advocating for the possibility of creating a hospitable encounter – namely, a subversion of the hierarchies implied in the guest/host relations.

Shaimaa Abdelkarim: I wanted to initiate this conversation by linking two relationalities: the first one is that of the intellectual in relation to her subjects, oscillating from being a host welcoming their experiences to a guest intruding on those experiences; and the second considers how we navigate this oscillation through reimagining the space of resistance, a space that both our researches frame as a space of negotiation. As a researcher working through marginalized narrations, you sometimes consume your subjects within your narration of the event; but you still expose yourself to your subjects, not only by being hospitable but also you are burdened by a responsibility, as Derrida asserts: to disrupt or possibly resist your privileges, as an intellectual. This disruption is quite vivid in Derrida. For Derrida, to resist is to sabotage irrationally what our internal presumed coherence dictates. It is a disruptive force as it puts the intellect in a position of responsibility towards the unpredictable guest who may/may not come: to open the door for her. But then, in another instance Derrida, traces a moment of his own fascination with the word 'resistance'; a word 'loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia' that never loses its appeal even when its parameters are

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host nation. It follows that this form of enslavement is not exceptional, it is a systemic issue that is enabled by existing regulations on migration and hospitality.

being questioned.[122] It 'magnetizes' the legal realm to host resistance, to curb it, to limit those acts of defiance, to legalize yet never fully consume it, breaching the parameters of legality.[123] For example, the current anti-protest laws in Egypt demands that protestors acquire permission from local police stations before protesting, giving the police arbitrary powers to dismiss any such requests.[124] Law conditions the presence of resistance within its parameters; yet, with every condition legality self-deconstructs with the absurdity of the legitimate, asserting a space for negotiating its limitations. There are moments that assert this possibility of a radical openness; when hospitality becomes momentarily attuned to the uncertainty of the to-come (*à venir*). Think of Tahrir in 2011 right before Mubarak was unseated; being there in the stagnant present yet empowered by a will that is anticipating the ousting of Mubarak: that is where I try to position myself as an intellectual who experienced Tahrir. What is fascinating about Tahrir and *Radio Ghetto Relay* is that both spaces navigate suffering and empowerment, renegotiating a regenerative form of resistance that we, as researchers, narrate. You communicate your subjects through this space of renegotiation, of repositioning yourself through that space that Tahrir and Radio Ghetto open up.

Alessandra Ferrini: Working with Radio Ghetto was challenging on a personal level because I was dealing with people suffering extreme hardship. I became very aware of the uneven relation at the basis of this project.[125] While I sat safely at my desk, the migrant workers were

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[122] Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al., (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 2.

[123] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", trans. Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5, no. 3 (2000), 3.

[124] Amr Hamzawy, "Egypt's Anti Protest Law: Legalising Authoritarianism," Aljazeera, November 24, 2016,
https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/11/egypt-anti-protest-law-legalising-authoritarianism-161107095415334.html

[125] *Radio Ghetto Relay* emerged from a series of online conversations with Radio Ghetto's team, through which we selected the most representative clips from their archived broadcasts. This exchange also helped me to define my approach to this material, leading to a focus on translation rather than mimetic representation or direct visual documentation.

actually living in a great degree of insecurity, risk and violence.[126] Whenever I caught myself feeling too comfortable or convinced that I was somehow entitled to tell this story, I forced myself to step back. I believe that feeling constantly unsettled and doubting myself was perhaps my attempt at disrupting my privilege, to echo Derrida's words. This operation obviously demands that you attempt to expose and resist your own bias and habits, even as these may be blindspots. This is why you needs to keep mistrusting and, as you put it, sabotaging yourself. I had to have constant discussions with the Radio Ghetto team and to systematically ask them for either validation or harsh criticism. As I listened to their voices, I kept reminding myself of how privileged I was for the trust they gifted me when they decided to host me. I was the guest in this relation and by being invested with this trust I also, in turn, became a sort of host: the film has become a repository for their voices – it hosts the workers' experiences.

Alessandra Ferrini, *Radio Ghetto Relay,* 2016, video still. Courtesy of the artist.

SA: True, I understood your approach, which you define as a 'remote collaboration,' as a form of contesting conditions on hospitality,

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[126] The harvesters are exposed to great violence and risk, even beyond that perpetrated by the plantation owners and gangmasters. For example, many fires have broken out at the Gran Ghetto, the last one claiming the life of two young men from Mali. Moreover, the ghettos have no running water or electricity and the harvesters are forced to sleep in overcrowded shacks.

reengaging constantly with what Derrida framed as 'the thought' of hospitality.[127] How did you interpret your role in putting the work together; this oscillation of the researcher as host/guest? I struggle with this in my research. Even though I tend to theorize from my own experience of the event, being present in Tahrir square, there is still a gap between my role as a researcher – tasked with communicating and 'mastering' this experience – and the openness of the event that makes me aware of my imposition. It is, somehow, this 'mastering' and closure of the final product that I refuse to reconcile. Yet, it is a necessary closure; a decision of exposure that, however, only revives a space to potential communication and/or interaction to deconstruct the closure: the very condition of being hospitable. I somehow cannot reconcile, or more precisely I refuse to reconcile, the radical in me that experienced Tahrir on the ground with the researcher that is indoctrinated in post-structuralist thinking, who has to produce/clarify/write down/archive the experience of Tahrir square through my academic baggage. But sometimes it feels as if the radical in me is searching for some resonance in western thinking that can critically legitimise the event to be able to communicate it against other impositions that narrate the 2011 uprisings as a victory of westernization. The uprisings were not a site for development in a Western sense, but a site that renegotiated an alternative agency for Egyptians. The event negated the legitimacy of emergency law that Mubarak's regime nurtured and relied on to create docility in everyday living. Tahrir was a site to regenerate the Egyptian identity and connect it to its possibilities to-come, outside those constructed by the regime.

AF: Since the early stages of this project, I envisioned my role as a translator relaying a message from afar. However, I have wondered if, by not having exposed myself directly to life in the Gran Ghetto, I might be participating in exploiting the suffering of its dwellers. Still, I feel that my legal status of host (as an Italian citizen) rather than guest would prevent a truthful identification. My privilege over their condition as either undocumented migrants or asylum seekers would still persist. I felt that their broadcast was already offering me the tools

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[127] Derrida, "Hostipitality", 10.

to start understanding their struggles and that I could use my privilege to their benefit – namely, to increase the reach of their voices through translation and dissemination.

Alessandra Ferrini, *Radio Ghetto Relay,* 2016, video still. Courtesy of the artist.

On the contrary, your research is based on your first-hand experience and this further complicates the research process because you have been directly affected by the event. You are both the witness/subject and the researcher and by not having these two roles clearly separated, you have to deal with the uncertainty of the blurring of these roles. Likewise, you seem to oscillate between the role of host and guest. However, it is exactly this ambiguity that allows you to introduce a different perspective and deal with the 'real' (the event) in a very direct way, without risking the reduction of your analysis to a pure intellectual exercise. I think that we often forget about more visceral ways of knowing that your work brings to the fore. So, my question for you is: how do you negotiate your position as both host and guest within your research?

SA: I think my answer to that is simple: I struggle. I continue to struggle to understand that experience and I believe that this is, perhaps, how I am supposed to feel. For example, in *Radio Ghetto Relay*, what galvanized my thoughts was the shift of control from you (the researcher) to your subjects (the migrants in Gran Ghetto); I

wanted to offer that empowerment to my 'visceral' experience, as you put it, against my oscillation as a host/guest of the subjects of Tahrir. However, in your video the operation of tracing the migrants through the radio signals and over Google Earth and Streetview is also shown; you somehow managed to address the migrants through the interaction between you and them within the 'threshold' of hospitality, as Derrida puts it.[128] It is a paradoxical position; on one end, we start by opening up the door, being hospitable to our subjects; on the other end, we are oscillating between being the host and the guest not knowing what hospitality could hold. You relied on the potentiality of Radio Ghetto and I relied on Tahrir. I navigate my experience of Tahrir by trying to focus on its potentiality: what is left of Tahrir within me and everyone who experienced it. The researcher in me attempts to bring out the 'undesireable guests' of my encounter with Tahrir not to inscribe them within the limits of legality but to question the constituents of legitimacy within the horizon (to-come). As Derrida articulates it, the 'to-come' is not a futurity that will end or will come but a constant renegotiation of the potentiality of what is lacking.[129]

AF: You are right – this oscillation between the roles of guest and host within our researches can lead to paradoxical choices. For example, on one hand *Radio Ghetto Relay* departs from an intrusive documentation – one that would have showed the migrants in what they experienced as a disempowering environment and to which we were opposed. But on the other it attempts to subvert this through a compromise: the documentation of their presence in the rural landscape surrounding the ghetto through footage recorded on Google Earth and Streetview. As you suggest, this choice has to do with me: it is a need for proximity, a desire to be directly affected – or at least as much as technology allows. I guess that for a hospitable encounter to occur, there must be a willingness for the host to be affected by the guest and vice versa; to be as close as possible to a 'welcome without reservations or calculation.'[130] In your case this

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[128] Derrida, "Hostipitality", 10.
[129] Derrida, "Hostipitality", 10.
[130] Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans Rachel Bowlby (Stanford University Press, 2003), 66.

notion is further complicated because host and guest coincide; the navigation of the affective and transformative power of Tahrir is both your departure and end point.

Alessandra Ferrini, *Radio Ghetto Relay,* 2016, video still. Courtesy of the artist.

SA: I liked the absence of the physical body in *Radio Ghetto Relay* and I think that the focus on the transmission/communication of the struggle through radio recordings redefines how we theorize the violence of the struggle. It problematizes the epistemic alienation and inhospitable approaches to the body of the migrant, to allow the body of the migrant to communicate through her sensual voice rather an objectified physical pain; she speaks through her own laws of language on her economic exploitation beyond occidental understanding of pain as physical harm. The migrant, present through radio recordings, has a platform; like the people who took on Tahrir and other streets in Egypt to assert their presence. They exceeded the rules of hospitability by being ahead of its conditionality; here I see Tahrir and Radio Ghetto as spaces that renegotiate the rules of hospitality, possibly extending a radicalness to hospitality. They subvert the oscillation of host/guest to the agency of the subjects of Tahrir and Radio Ghetto.

AF: By having the harvesters speak on their own terms, the radio circumvents the highly problematic – yet so often reiterated – convention of the victimization of people living at the margins.

Although it was set up by a group of activists based in Rome, they did not try to force a model or a set of rules that we oftentimes see within practices of governmental or humanitarian hospitality. Rather, they let the workers use the resource as they saw fit, somehow turning the radio itself into a host. As a result, I believe that we can think of the radio as an example of radical hospitality, in which hierarchical relations are subverted and temporarily neutralised. It allows for the state of peripheral existence experienced in the ghetto to be sabotaged by its ability to reach a wide audience while letting their voices and messages take the central stage and resonate with full force.

As such, in *Radio Ghetto Relay* it became imperative to let the broadcasts speak for themselves while using the medium of the video first and foremost as a tool for translation that could create an opportunity to rethink how migrants' voices are often mediated, filtered and appropriated to serve other agendas.[131] Listening directly to their opinions on those political and social issues that concern them is a chance to understand their organisational and militant power whilst recognising their struggles – which are, in turn, a result of the politics and policies of the hosting countries and so they are not confined to the migrants' lives but affect the hosts too. By concentrating on their political agency and the impact that it can have within the environments they inhabit, this strategy creates a fertile ground to rethink and renegotiate what hospitality means: how it has been regulated and enforced through an arbitrary, top-down relation between guest and host but also how it opens up to the possibility of learning from the practices of resistance devised by the guests. And this is also true for Tahrir.

SA: It is Radio Ghetto and Tahrir that navigates the middle ground between the privileges of the researcher and her subjects, which Derrida framed as an interruption of the face-to-face.[132] That middle space empowers the subjects; and it does so by attempting to suppress the authority implied in the role of the researcher: power remains in

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[131] Here I refer to some of the ways in which governmental and humanitarian organisations, NGOs, artists and journalists have been exploiting the voices of migrants and refugees.

[132] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Stanford University Press, 1999), 29.

the hands of the subjects. Like you as a privileged researcher in relation to the Gran Ghetto residents whose identity is contingent on their actions and how they are 'interpreted'; and how I, as a privileged researcher, navigate my experience of Tahrir against all other experiences like those of the subaltern identities that occupy Egyptian slums, many of whom did not choose to be part of the event but got tangled up with the uprisings. Such a middle space attempts to navigate through the *experiences of its subjects* rather than through the *exposure of the researcher to the subjects*, a strategy that calls on a third positioning to initiate a re-narration of justice, as Derrida asserts.[133] It is this subversion of the agency of the researcher that the 'third' encounter somehow opens space to engage with the parameters of legal justice and 'protects against the vertigo of ethical violence.'[134] My intellectuality becomes subverted against the space of Tahrir as a space that renegotiates its relation to justice. Likewise, your exposure to Radio Ghetto is not centralized in *Radio Ghetto Relay*, which constantly refers the audience to the question of what Radio Ghetto actually meant to its subjects. And a more compelling question to me as a researcher, how did your video respond to that burden of communicating the workers' struggles?

AF: I see my practice as a site to engage with theoretical and political debate. I do not aim to propose some sort of resolution; rather, I wish to engage the viewer in an exercise in critical thinking in which the endpoint is not closure but a nagging question, an appeal to enquire about and challenge assumptions. *Radio Ghetto Relay* was especially difficult to conceptualise, although its apparent formal simplicity might betray all the negotiations and hard questions that I had to ask myself. It was important for me to focus on the empowerment that the radio offers (and the force of the different speeches and conversations) but also that the heart of the matter – 'bare life,' to quote Giorgio Agamben[135] – would be exposed alongside the more 'human' aspects of the radio, such as the humour that is still present even in the face of adversity. Rather than reducing the migrants' lives

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[133] Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 29-30.

[134] Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 33.

[135] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

to pain and suffering, I was hoping to paint a fuller and more complex picture. The radio is not just used to discuss living conditions and ways of bettering the migrant workers' lives: it is also used to sing, freestyle, hang out and charge mobile phones because the electric generator is running.[136] Broadcasting, thus, also promoted leisure activities as well as providing basic services. On the other hand, it is used to send messages to those people who are at risk of falling prey to the gangmaster system: to warn them of the dangers. I tried to balance these different aspects in the video and provide a nuanced representation of the harvesters' lives, personalities and preoccupations.
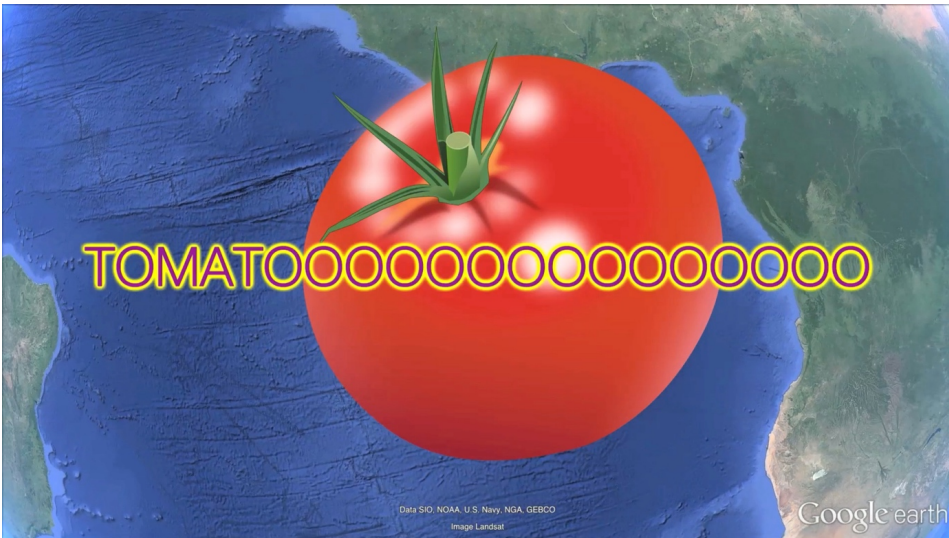
Alessandra Ferrini, *Radio Ghetto Relay,* 2016, video still. Courtesy of the artist.

SA: I was interested in knowing how you came to navigate your subjects, not as victims but rather as the 'third' reinvigorated identities that somehow contest their subalternity through Radio Ghetto. It is a task of subverting the epistemological barrier between subject-object in the production of knowledge. In my case the object, Tahrir, acts as a space for asserting the agency of its subjects, while the subjects act within a de-homogenised 'fable' offering different relationalities to

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[136] In the ghetto, basic amenities such as electricity or running water were lacking. Moreover, in the nearby villages local bars charge migrant workers a fee for the use of their sockets.

Tahrir.[137] Somehow Tahrir exceeds the intellect and its subjects as well, as the event exceeds their struggles, constructing a communicative space for resistance. It is as if, even when the communication stops, the potentiality of Tahrir persists as a trace against the authoritative legal forces that threaten the proliferation of the political. The feeling of familiarity that everyone in Tahrir Square felt to each other in the 2011 uprisings, even though this is somehow lost when walking down Tahrir now it has returned to being a bureaucratic hub, still lives within the archives of what we witnessed, or continue to witness through the absence of a hospitable – a negotiable – space for resistance within the current protest laws. Currently, the memory of Tahrir Square is celebrated by the regime not as an attestation of the constituent will of the people but to make sure that the event of Tahrir Square never happens again. The process of statist remembering imposes limitations on the revolution's memory from the moment of its construction through to speaking of it as part of the (finished) past: a process that aims 'to repress the archive while archiving the repression,' which Derrida interprets in relation to the violence of archiving the event.[138] It becomes a question of how to address the temporality of the struggle. Even with the absence of Tahrir or Radio Ghetto's transmission, there is an unconditional affirmation of the possibility of the coming to the event. Justice becomes an act of remembering what is forgotten from the archive; a reiteration of Derrida's 'third.' The process of forgetting signifies the violent process of remembering.

AF: Surely what we are left to deal with is an imposing absence. Not so much for me, as the demolition of the Gran Ghetto happened months after I finished the video. Yet, this sudden disappearance greatly changed the meaning and potentiality of the work. Especially because it feels as if state repressive forces have managed to annihilate this reality while refusing to take any coherent steps towards finding a

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[137] Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." In Cadava, Eduardo, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), *Who Comes After the Subject* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 102.
[138] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77-78

real solution – namely, actively fighting the gangmaster system.[139] So now the question is – similarly to what you must be asking yourself in your research – how to deal with this event that was Radio Ghetto? Perhaps, we ought to think about what these archives of resistance can teach us in the present. It does not really matter that the Gran Ghetto no longer exists: what matters is that these voices keep being heard. Because that struggle is not over, it is still very much present.[140] And so is the struggle of the Egyptian people. I guess our work, as researchers, is to make sense of what happened and somehow turn it into an event anew: one that is able to keep retaining its transformative power. In other words, we need to become 'good' hosts, remaining open to the unexpected guest. The question thus is: how do you address the absence of the revolution that took place in Tahrir Square in your work? But also, I am curious to know, what do you think might be the best way to archive such a powerful event so that its legacy can do it justice?

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[139] The local council has taken some steps to close the ghettos and relocate their dwellers in host structures within the closest cities. But moving out of the ghettos means being too far from the plantations and so being unable to work. As a result, many migrants prefer to stay in the shantytowns. That shows how the system of hospitality in place does not work: it does not take into consideration the needs of the guest. It is a system based on reaction to emergencies rather than one of planned and calculated hospitality.

[140] As I write this article in August 2018 the tomato pickers have been on strike after sixteen harvesters died of work-related injuries within a week in southern Italy.

Alessandra Ferrini, *Radio Ghetto Relay,* 2016, video still. Courtesy of the artist.

SA: I like the resonance of an ongoing archive: as a negation of the linearity of time; as a constant exposure to Tahrir through bringing events of the past to the present; to pay homage to its presence and to dwell on its absence; to expose myself to its everyday loss through the brutalities of the current regime; but still to never lose sight of Tahrir. And I mean Tahrir as an ongoing archive; one that cannot be pinpointed to a date, a place or an event like 2011 but one that can extend relevance to what is left out of the archives: how, for example, Tahrir could be read as an extension of the sparks of the Egyptian labour protests in 2008. Just like Radio Ghetto, Tahrir attests to a presence of the radical and I like to relive that presence with all its agonies even while not being able to claim such space now. I think we, Egyptians, need to speak out on how, during the 2011 uprisings we wanted to negate the presence of Mubarak and his regime in our everyday lives; but we did not acknowledge the extent to which we collaborated in maintaining the normalcy of excluding certain identities from being a legitimate 'nationalist Egyptian'; we did not acknowledge that we were part of the regime, constructed by its orders. I feel that taking responsibility for that is necessary for reviving an identity for Egyptians that is non-hegemonic alongside rejecting the dominant 'nationalist' narrative that the current regime is utilizing to justify its repression of freedoms. We can start by questioning what is left out of our research, such as different

experiences of the Egyptian 2011 uprisings that surpassed my exposure in Tahrir and Cairo, or different aspects of Radio Ghetto such as, like you mentioned, the fact that it was used as a source of electricity, for survival and not just for political resistance. To answer your question briefly, if we speak of justice, it has to be a conversation on our certainties and privileges, on our annotation of the event, and on our hospitable encounters like this one: to converse on our ethical conflicts within our positions as hosts/guests to the possibilities of the event.

Going Radical in Museum Space? Inclusive Strategies that Challenge the Institution's Core

Luise Reitstätter

In 2016, the Salzburg Museum integrated Easy-to-Read text panels in their exhibition spaces – a novelty within Austria's museum landscape. The initial reactions were split, ranging from people who declared it a powerful innovation for an inclusive museum to others that sniffed at the strongly simplified 'stupid' text versions. Based on these ambivalent reactions, the project *Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud* – a collaboration between Salzburg Museum and the University of Salzburg – took a two-fold approach to explore this radical gesture of (new) visitor-orientation. First, a sociological analysis through hermeneutic discourse analysis, participant observation and qualitative visitor interviews: How do different people use and value these Easy-to-Read texts in the exhibition space? Second, a specifically developed language course within the exhibition *Tell Me About Salzburg!* for German learners at level A2. Being visitor-oriented not only towards the core cultural audience but towards people with different socio-cultural backgrounds and language levels, the museum becomes a highly-contested site. The study consequently shows the difficulties of hegemonic power structures of institutions as well as the transformative potential of inclusive museum and language strategies, which proposes a basic rethinking of the grounds of 'hospitality' within museum strategy.

If museums are meant to be public places, what is meant by 'public'?

Museums and hospitality may or may not be a logical combination. First, when defining the museum as a public institution, it becomes obvious that there were times when the public claim was not a substantial part of the museum's mission and partly these sentiments still exist today. Museums of kings, aristocrats or simply the elite for a long time represented the model of an institution that was mainly

symbolic of the owner's wealth and power, only strategically opened to a small percentage of the public. In the course of the Enlightenment collections became open to the general public but nevertheless stuck to the model of the audience as admirer of the collections, which were entangled with concepts of the nation state and civic education.[141] As recently as 1974, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) refined the museum's definition by emphasising its public role, reframing the institution as 'a non-profit making, permanent institution *in the service of the society and its development*, and *open to the public*, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.'[142]

In the context of current democratizing tendencies, today's contemporary museum discourse places less emphasis on objects and more on people, putting material and social encounters at the forefront of their purpose. Influential museum publications, websites, blogs, and newsletters all declare that museums are designed for a variety of people, or even for 'everyone.'[143] However, the nature of these phrases is often more aspirational than based in reality. The general public claim often does not coincide with everyday museum realities, especially regarding visitor profiles. Sadly, despite all utopian concepts, idealistic aspirations and well-meaning social attempts, the visitor profile of most museums reads as a quite homogeneous representation of a relatively wealthy and well-educated class. A major impact on outreach was not necessarily provoked by socialist, reformative or emancipatory ideas but is instead based on capitalist

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[141] Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience. Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 19–47.

[142] Emphasis by the author. For the changing ICOM museum definitions, see http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html (12.09.2018).

[143] See for instance Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2016) or the mission of The Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1 'to be inclusive places – both onsite and online – where diverse cultural, artistic, social, and political positions are welcome' (https://www.moma.org/about/, 12.09.2018) or the newsletter from 28 April 2018 on the Tate Collective where one can read: 'It's all part of our commitment to bringing more young people into our galleries and putting them at the heart of our plans for the future. Because art is for everyone.'

conditions, in which commodification and cultural tourism widened the museums' reach but not necessarily the scale of diversity.[144]

Taking the term 'public' seriously, one could in contrast for a 'Right to the Museum,' that, inspired by the Lefebvrian a 'Right to the City,' fights for this symbolic space at the centre, establishing itself as a political demand by citizens of very political, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.[145] This claim line with the unconditional hospitality imagined by Jacques where whomever or whatever may enter a domain 'without reservations or calculations'.[146] Hospitality, through the simple inviting more marginal groups of people who are not yet the museum, could thus become a clue to reinterpreting exclusionary boundaries.

Traditionally, as outlined above, this is not a particular strength of the museum. However, confronted with the 'societal challenges' of migration and calls for greater inclusion and wider access, museums increasingly have felt the need to react to the realities of a diversified society. Specifically, with the exponentially increasing migratory movements from Africa and the Middle-East to Central Europe since the beginning of 2016, museums were confronted with a wakeup call to assume their civic responsibility, i.e. to open their doors and to develop programmes that could appeal to the new citizens. Often not endowed with a natural gift for working with people from

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[144] Graham Black speaks of the core audience making up 70% of museum attendance as 'the professional class, those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher level of education' that 'has expanded rapidly since the 1950s' with 'increased wealth and leisure time.' However, he very much stresses the point that museums should not simply rely on this core audience as 'class is changing.' See Graham Black, "Museum Informal Learning in the 'Age of Participation. Our Museums in 2030,'" *Standbein Spielbein* 109, no. 1 (2018), 11.

[145] Luise Reitstätter and Florian Bettel, "Right to the City! Right to the Museum!" in *UNCERTAIN SPACES. Virtual Configurations in Contemporary Art and Museums*, eds. Helena Barranha and Susana S. Martins (Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte, FCSH - Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015), 159–82, http://unplace.org/sites/default/files/uncertain_spaces.pdf.

[146] Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," in *Paper Machine,* trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California; Stanford University Press, 2005), 66–7.

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different socio-cultural backgrounds, museums struggled with
paternalistic project structures and implicit hegemonic attitudes
authorised by European cultural dominance, as well as a lack of
practical experience and competence in trans-cultural and social
work.[147] The same goes for the issue of disability, which has been a
been a blind spot for a long time in museum's representational politics
politics and welcoming practices, neglected in collections as well as
as programming.[148]

Thus, care for the core audience versus care for the weak may be
thought of as the two antipodes when thinking about the political
implications of combining the institution of the museum with the
concept of hospitality: who is welcome under which conditions?
When relating the host of the museum to new guests a central
question has to be clarified: do new visitors have to adapt to the
invited field with its implicit rules and codes of conduct or does this
welcoming gesture coincide with a possible change and disruption of
the field introducing new spatial politics and narrative possibilities?

Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud. **A project's history and mission**

The project *Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud*[149] was intrinsically based on
the idea of a 'Right to the Museum' that is practically embedded in
inclusive language policies. While *Say it Simple* refers to the evaluation
of the newly installed Easy-to-Read text panels, *Say it Out Loud* links to
the language course that was developed for the Salzburg Museum.
Beyond the logics of spatial accessibility, both address communicative
burdens that might not be particularly visible but are nevertheless
efficacious in preventing museum visits or creating positive
experiences. The project was intertwined with the 2016 exhibition *Tell*

[147] For a guide to this new field of work with critical reflections see: Maren Ziese
and Caroline Gritschke, eds., *Geflüchtete und kulturelle Bildung. Formate und Konzepte für
ein neues Praxisfeld* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016).
[148] Sandell, Richard, Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (eds.), *Re-
Presenting Disability. Activism and Agency in the Museum* (London and New York:
Routledge, 2010).
[149] *Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud. Easy-to-Read as a Key to the Museum*, a joint
collaboration between the Salzburg Museum and the University of Salzburg, was
developed by the art educator Nadja Al Masri-Gutternig and myself for the
funding programme "The Inclusive Museum" by the Austrian Federal Chancellery.

me About Salzburg! celebrating the 200-year anniversary of the city of Salzburg officially becoming part of Austria. The curatorial goal of this exhibition was to narrate various (his-)stories of this eventful time based on the assumption 'that every age has to tell history anew and also question previous traditions,'[150] symbolized by twelve different episodes and organised by a group of eleven curators.

This large-scale exhibition project, however, did not only question its own museum collections and foster a critical practice by deconstructing established histories. Far more, it opportunity to scrutinize traditional museum language policies the introduction of an unfamiliar museum text species: Easy-to-Read.[151] With its origin in a self-advocacy movement from the 1970s, where people with disabilities fought for their right to autonomously access information, this text type is characterised by a simplified language structure as well as choice of words.[152] Consequently, the confrontation of traditional museum texts (in German these are commonly based on complex sentence constructions and sprinkled with technical terminology) with this basic language system (with e.g. short sentences, one unit of meaning per line and no foreign words allowed) could not be a more harsh contrast. This clash of cultures on the equivalent introductory text panels in each room also became evident in the first critics' and visitors' reactions. While some saw it as a powerful innovation for an inclusive museum, there were others who sniffed at the strongly simplified 'stupid' text versions.[153]

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[150] Quote from the introductory text panel in the exhibition.

[151] There are a few recent examples of Easy-to-Read panel texts in Austrian museum practice, which have been offered in large-scale special exhibitions such as the national exhibition *Alles was Recht ist* (Schloss Pöggstall, 2017) or as additional text information provided on a regular basis by, for example, the art museum Lentos.

[152] For a comprehensive discussion of Easy-to-Read in German ('Leichte Sprache') see Ursula Bredel and Christiane Maaß, *Leichte Sprache. Theoretische Grundlagen. Orientierung für die Praxis* (Berlin: Duden, 2016).

[153] Personal communication with Nadja Al Masri-Gutternig on May 4, 2016.

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Fig. 1: Wall panels of Easy-to-Read (white) and traditional museum text in German and English (black) within the exhibition *Tell me About Salzburg!* Photo: Peter Laub, © Salzburg Museum

The first concern of the project *Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud* was thus to look empirically beyond these poles of appreciation and disregard. In order to investigate the use of these Easy-to-Read texts in the exhibition, the methods of hermeneutic text analysis, participant observation and qualitative visitor interviews were applied. The second attempt of the project was to actively make use of these texts by offering a language course at the museum developed by the language centre of the University of Salzburg.[154] The course *Tell me About Salzburg – German at the Museum*[155] combined cultural and

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[154] The course was developed by the linguists Margareta Strasser, Denis Weger and Theresa Bogensperger in close cooperation with the language teacher Florian Bauer who was joined by the art educator Nadja Al Masri-Gutternig during the classes.

[155] Theresa Bogensperger, Margareta Strasser and Denis Weger, "Deutsch Lernen Im Museum. Theoretisch Gedacht – Praktisch Umgesetzt," in *Leichte Sprache. Sag es einfach. Sag es laut!*, eds. Nadja Al Masri-Gutternig and Luise Reitstätter (Salzburg: Salzburg Museum, 2017), 44–55. This paper offers a comprehensive description of the theoretical background and the practical realisation of the course. The annex

linguistic learning and took place at the Salzburg Museum from March to June 2017. It was modelled on a traditional academic term course in A2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and 14 weekly appointments of 1.5 hours. The participants, identified as newly arrived people in town with an interest in cultural history, could attend the course free of charge but had to prove regular attendance of 80%, hand in homework and do presentations to receive the confirmation of participation. [156] To understand the characteristics as well as challenges of doing a language course within the museum, students of the parallel university course and myself did accompanying research.

Fig. 2: Participants of the language course working in the exhibition *Tell me About Salzburg!*
Photo: Neumayr/MMV © Salzburg Museum

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offers the complete course materials published open source, both documents can be downloaded at: http://www.salzburgmuseum.at/index.php?id=2101 (12.9.2018).

[156] As the course was given at the Salzburg Museum, which is by definition not a language programme provider, only a confirmation of participation could be given to the participants. Negatively, this is less attractive to people who need official language certificates for visa purposes. Positively, this provides more freedom regarding course content and less formal evaluation pressure.

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Empirical evidence on Easy to Read …

Twenty informal qualitative interviews were carried out in April 2017
to analyse empirically the acceptance of the Easy-to-Read texts at the
Salzburg Museum. While it was easy to convince visitors to participate
in the interview, it was not that easy to interview them on museum
language policies and practices. Rather, the talks revealed that asking
people first about their reading patterns in the museum meant
stepping on sensitive terrain. Simply because of the symbolic power
mechanism of the institution, on the one hand, and the desire of being
'good' and competent visitors on the other hand, it seemed that
people felt obliged to consume the offered texts in full rather than
only partially. This 'ideal' approach was frequently opposite to real
reading behaviour: 'To be honest, I have only read some parts' (V02),
'I was more looking at objects' (V08), 'Only walking by' (V04), or 'I
have to be selective (…) I read what I'm interested in.' (V07) Here,
the inclusive potential of text is thwarted by the civilizing power of
the institution and the visitors themselves who regard their individual
reading patterns not always as officially legitimate.

Coming to Easy-to-Read, another obstacle of the interview was
revealed as a majority of the visitors were not yet aware of this text
type. The interview position was thus transferred to an exhibition spot
where Easy-to-Read and its specificities could be visualized and also
consciously experienced in comparison with the regular wall text.
Being confronted with the question of the possible addressees of this
newly introduced text type, answers ranged from 'For children, for
elderly people, for teenagers' (V01) to 'For non-native speakers,
tourists, people with little time' (V08) to 'For the uneducated, and the
ones who don't want to read that much, for instance myself' (V12) to
even 'For everyone'(V07). Interestingly, and in contrast to the
museum staff who introduced Easy-to-Read mainly for people with
learning disabilities, visitors pinpointed the wide range of second and
third addressees of Easy-to-Read (including themselves as regular
visitors) who potentially profit from this new text policy.

Asking for critical advice on the museum's text policy from the
visitor's side stressed the phenomenon whereby audiences are often in
line with the institutions' decisions. Statements such as 'Everything
fine' (V13), 'Keep it up' (V12) or 'Both texts' (V20) as well as the

reluctance of critique demonstrated the high degree of acceptance of the institution's actions. What can again be interpreted as statements of obedient visitors simply acknowledging the power of the institution can, on the contrary, be seen as a great opportunity for institutional change as it demonstrates that museum visitors are willing to accept new initiatives. A minority of visitors also proposed their own ideas such as 'Short texts, with questions and answers' (V03) or the idea of including images as visual communication tools (V02) based on their personal experience as teachers or non-native German speakers. These suggestions for improvement show the inadequacy of a 'one size fits all' approach. A critical awareness and understanding of the museum's 'voice' clearly needs to take account of the obviously different language levels present among the visitors.

… and Learning German at the Museum

The participants of the language course *Tell me About Salzburg – German at the Museum* were also united by the need and desire to improve their German language skills. When recalling the initial situation of being confronted by a new and complicated language, symbolized by the German text panels in the museum, one participant said: 'What is that? This is so difficult. We cannot read.' (I08) The three main goals of the language course developers therefore were first to mediate reading and learning strategies, second to improve textual skills, orally and in writing, and third to stimulate a reflection on culture and history (I01). Characterising the experience of the course, participants stress the heterogeneity of the group with a uniting goal of 'We are all different people but in the course we are equal. We speak the same language, of course German.' (I02) Thus, addressing the common border of a language can become a tool in building a community rather than a stigmatising issue.

The group forming process is supported by the embodied and communicative practices of learning within an exhibition as 'It's a vivid course. It works, with the strategy of movement. Looking and commenting. And later we have dispute and dialogue.' It's not a surprise that '(l)anguage always comes with communication. No matter what the course is about (…) every

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time you learn something' (I07). The combination of linguistic and
cultural learning lightens the gravity of traditional language courses
through a mixture of linguistic input, exhibition-related tasks and
personal thoughts. This combination provides a communicative basis
that helps to establish relationships between the participants and see
parallel and intertwining histories between the exhibition's content
and their lives. Based on the assumption that culture is a not a static
but complex relational construct, one of the course developers
stresses the overall need in transcultural communication to 'gain
competence in relating your actions with the actions of the others'
(I04).

From access to agency?
Consequently, Easy-to-Read texts or the specifically based language
course in the museum can offer keys to access and work with
information that otherwise might represent a wall or a burden. People
with limited reading capacities (ranging from people with learning
disabilities to children to non-natives or tourists) and different socio-
cultural backgrounds (representing a rising number in an increasingly
migrant society) are invited to synchronize and compare their own
interpretations in line or in contrast with given information. When
Derrida quotes Emmanuel Levinas saying that 'the essence of
language is friendship and hospitality'[157] we can note a basic reaching
out in this sense as the museum recognises the need to break with the
elitist mode of museological address symbolized in the traditionally
difficult 'museum tongue.'

This shift was in a way already curatorially set when the
exhibition on Salzburg's Austrian history refused to present a seamless
and linear city development. Rather, the twelve chosen topics –
starting with traditional alpine Salzburg Sagas and ending with
alternative post-colonial narrations on golden museum objects by the
artist Lisl Ponger – selected very specific angles to tell the history of
Salzburg. This attitude towards asking for personal accounts, also
symbolized by the engaging exhibition title *Tell me About Salzburg!*, was
taken up by the course developers who regarded the exhibition's

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[157] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and
Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 10.

content not as something static to be mediated but as material to be personally engaged with.

Referring to the concept of culturally-sensitive learning, the course explicitly tried to overcome the binary scheme of 'us,' the Austrians, and 'them,' the others, that so often prevail in comparative talk. On the contrary, and also in an ideal theoretical conception (not always realised in practice), it approached the participants as cultural experts in their own right, calling on them to comment on the presented Salzburg history from their own cultural background and knowledge. Practically, this resulted in timelines overlaying decisive moments of personal history with historical Salzburg events, biographical presentations of Mozart's international contemporaries or even producing their own audio guide files where participants talked through an exhibition object imagining its story from a personal standpoint. This active engagement with the exhibition *Tell Me About Salzburg!* thus explicitly aligned personal memories between glory and crisis that do not only characterize cities' histories but also personal biographies of so many – with or without the immediate experience of migration.

While this extends the hospitality framework of the museum through the institution's welcoming and language policies, the question of the specific agency of these new visitors remains less addressed. Here we step into a terrain where the radical turns quite conventional. Agency is mainly given through the possibility of personal meaning-making, in silent thought or spoken out loud to companions. This is fairly in line with what regular visitors do, the only difference being that a diversified textual basis is given as a starting point. Additionally, the course encouraged its participants to produce materials such as the aforementioned audio guide and to give a collective tour through the exhibition showing their personal engagement as part of the concluding event. Again, this is similar to the experience of regular language course participants. Nevertheless, I would like to advocate for the conventional being possibly part of a museum work still aimed at a radical hospitality. By providing different texts and a language course especially for newly arrived people in town, visitors and participants were able to gain agency

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in their role as active spectators. While there are certainly many other
ways to give and gain agency in a more political, activist or
interventionist context, I also believe that in conventional host and
guest relations, radical seeds can be sown that change the institution at
the root of its structures.

From the margins to the core?
The project *Say it Simple. Say it Out Loud* thus showed – via the
exhibition itself, its widened text policies through Easy-to-Read and
the specifically oriented language course – that institutions might be
diversified through voices from the margins. The question, however,
still remains as to whether these efforts are located merely at the
peripheries of the institution or if they are able to change the centre
itself. This problem of power mechanisms becomes especially obvious
when the institutional change regarding the interruption from the
'foreign' ranges from accepting possible alternative narrations from
the margins to including these voices at the institution's core. As
Derrida points out in describing the relation of hosts and its guests,
there is the wide spectrum between the pressure to adapt in the setting
of conditional hospitality (when guests have to adjust themselves to
given scripts and rules) or the possibility to change the codes of
conduct in the setting of unconditional hospitality (when guests have
the right to intervene and act).[158]

The described spatial and communicative politics, with the
welcoming gesture of opening doors to the discursive environment of
the museum by assigning space to different text styles, teaching
methods and interpretations is conceptually and ideally aimed at a
radical hospitality. This is in line with Derrida's pure, unconditional
hospitality where welcoming practices are linked to singular identities,
in which everthing is done '…to address the other, to accord him,
even to ask his name, while keeping this question from becoming a
'condition,' a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simple border
control.'[159] Transferring this concept to practice, I would like to refer
to the cultural educator Carmen Mörsch who has formulated four
premises that should be met in any anti-racist collaboration between
museums and marginalized audiences:

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[158] Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," *Parallax* 11, no. 1 (2005), 6–9.
[159] Ibid. 7.

1. Nothing about us without us.
2. Active redistribution of added values and privileges.
3. Accompanying research or formative evaluation.
4. Diversification of organizational structures.[160]

Looking honestly and critically at our project retrospectively, the impression prevails that these four premises are hard to fulfil. 'Nothing about us without us,' a basic slogan of so many self-advocacy movements from gender to disability movements, implies that participants are crucially embedded in the project structures with a given agency to speak out. Although trying to make their voices visible through, for example, interviews with and statements in the project's book by course participants,[161] I also have to admit that their perspective is less present than ours embedded in academia or the museum world. Regarding an active redistribution of added values and privileges, I can say that participants could claim personal profit by taking part in a course and got the privilege of using the museum as their personal (learning) space. Indeed, formative (instead of summative) evaluation could adapt the course to participant's specific needs and prove that it was meaningful to them. However, I might only guess if this goes beyond the project's duration and radius. For now, I personally have the feeling that marginalized audiences have their place in the museum, but still in the peripheral position of specific projects, in relation to specific persons, and for a specific period of time. Positively, this could be the beginning of changing museums' attitudes if, as the fourth premise calls for, the project also helps in diversifying structures and implementing programmes on a regular basis. Our case study, the Salzburg Museum, obviously demonstrates its intention of continuing its process of diversification: Easy-to-Read text panels are now an integral part of every special

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[160] Handout by Carmen Mörsch on anti-racist collaborations between refugees and NGOs in that area and museums at the annual conference of the regional association Museumspädagogik Ost e.V., Berlin 18–19 November 2016, translation from German to English by the author.
[161] Gruber and Magenau, "Erzähl mir Salzburg! Ein Ausstellungsrundgang mit Stimmen aus dem Sprachkurs."

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exhibition and the language course continues with internal funds from the museum.

More generally speaking, projects going from the margins to the centre and aiming for a radical hospitality may prove to be fulfilled if they are not only nice (to have) but necessary (to live). Museum narrations and relationships that are deeply based on anti-discriminatory-ethics and passionately fighting for inclusive policies will probably not change the core of the historical institution of the museum in a minute but will at least challenge its public conception and understanding of its core audience. So let us proceed …