Invaders Are Here!

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The scenario of Southern Europe today allows us to imagine the future in a concrete way. In Barcelona, especially, after the local elections of May 24, 2015, the ecology of the city is changing. Against any prevision, *Barcelona en Comú*, a coalition of social movements and the civil society, won the elections and is now immersed in a new world. Hostile in some way, this space is also one where things are possible, where it is possible to ›make stuff‹.

Today, *Barcelona en Comú* has to face the backlash of the corrupt forms of life cultivated by the regime, which is trying to grab onto the state apparatus in order to protect its interests. This attempt shows how much those that Nirmal Puwar has called »space invaders« (2004), for they have broken the homogeneity of public space by invading it from a minority position, are invaders of the state today.

In this context, this generation of invaders has to face both a vertical and a horizontal problem: reacting to the attack of the regime and producing a livable ecology in which to act and etching the institutional space. The same duality of verticality and horizontality shapes the open space: in composing a direct dialogue with the city capable of explaining the complexity and the contradictions of institutional power and at the same time composing capillary dispositives that can allow society to climb the walls of the institutions and invade the administration. It is a matter of thinking this relationship through mechanisms of transversality and assemblage among different lives, groups, stories that are encountering and enriching each other. This is why I refer to it as an ecology.

Talking about »ecology« (cf. Star 1995; Puig 2010) means breaking with any fantasy of homogeneity that can be produced through imagined communities or processes of identification that work on the symbolic level. Ecology

is not a metaphor to talk about something else, but an interpellation to the consistency and efficacy of political action in keeping a complex ecosystem alive. The outcome of the process of transformation at stake here does not depend on the success of one or another agent, but on the force of the ecology as a whole and on its ability not only of surviving but of growing and transforming social life.

THE INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The problem of invading and etching the institutional space is having to confront the effects of the last decades of neoliberal policies that transformed the public administration into a space for protecting private interests. At the same time, this administrative machine is full of minor counterweights, small counterpowers and many partially autonomous mechanisms that can work in accordance with the new institutional project. In the ›palace‹ the strategy has to account for the numbers of seats in the city hall – in Barcelona seven different political forces are represented and no traditional majorities can be formed. The side effects of this multiplicity can be positive since it imposes the construction of an empowering relationship with the administrative forces inside the institution in general.

Council workers – whose public vocation has been literally disrupted by the neoliberal governmentality – can become the connection to counterbalance such a numeric weakness and allow ordinary administration to be the place to concretely change the effects of public policies. The challenge is to identify the transformative forces that live in the administration: to recognize institutional agents, partial cultures and collective desires. These forces can be called upon to play a constituent function in the *change* at stake, to allow this invasion to be more than a symbolic invasion of the discursive field of politics but a concrete action in the life of the city – by changing protocols, values, principles and transforming the effect of public policies.

A POLITICAL SOCIETY

Out of this tension between public policies and urban life, the second question emerges: the relationship between government and society and the effective realization of an administration that governs obeying to those who make and live the city. For without a strong relationship between government and society, this fragile ecology can lose its vital sap. This political space needs to assume a function and a responsibility both with regard to the institutions and to the political organization. In this leap forward, a set of tensions emerges because efforts, expectancies and problems weigh on the machine: the endeavor of a draining campaign, the enthusiasm that rises from an unprecedented possibility, the difficulties of landing and connecting in the complex space of the state. This leap produces contrapositions, problems in terms of cohesion that emerge from incomprehension, contradictions and inevitable accelerations.

To challenge this tension, it is necessary, on the side of reinforcing communication and internal reorganization, to nourish an outside that can interfere, in an invading way, in the institutional machine. It would be a mistake to think of the administrative dimension as being in opposition to the open social space today, and the inside and outside as separated spaces where the function of the outside is to push those that are inside to ›change things‹.

The problem is different: We cannot read the institutional space in molar terms, as separated from the action of society. The intervention into the state cannot just be vertical – along a civil line of representation that intervenes into the state through norms and from there into society itself. The challenge is to link the critical practice to a material operativity. To put the general intellect to work for producing prototypes that can unbalance the serious gesture of the institution. A diffused general intellect capable of building dispositives of articulation and concretely compose differences to allow this ecology to live is essential in order to prevent this institutional leap from being a flight into the abstract or a jump into the dark.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY

If we think about the space we are invading in ecological terms, as forms of life rather than in mechanical terms, another series of practices (of critique) can emerge as well as another set of problems. In Barcelona, the institutional ecology is rich, as a result of struggles, emancipation and processes that historically made this city a place of social and public experimentation. But this institutional ecology is also dry and exhausted.

Neoliberal policies have not ›destroyed‹ and substituted the institutional ecology. They made it into a space of pillaging, exploiting the living forces that emerge from the relation between society and public function to nourish their own worlds: ›make money‹ and move the relationship of mutual support internal to society from the state to the private sector. To do that, they introduced a series of material dispositives that objectivized institutional life: financialization as a material culture. Contracts that precarize, time-tables that break the possibility of a life in common, aesthetical codes that define segmentations of statutes both for workers and users of public services. These – legal, physical, imaginary - objects dry out the institutional space, and the life of those who live and work in the administration, bureaucratizing, nullifying and humiliating these relationships among the people, inside and outside institutions.

This challenge of resubjectivation needs to break a double objectivation, imposed not only on users, but on public servants themselves, to allow this society of multiplicities to build dispositives of autonomy, inside, outside and through the institutions. However, it would not be enough to think in terms of resubjectivation if we do not deal with the materialities of politics. In this sense, the municipal scale is crucial because it allows us to experiment with a molecularity of policies capable of intervening not only in the subjective but in the psychic dimension of the city, in the public and intimate sphere of the urban ecology.

A GENERATION OF MAKERS

It is not about producing new flows of subjectivity for the citizens to rule urban policies; this is about making the city a living form of emancipation – a space of joyful living: This invasive generation needs to be a generation of

makers that puts the force of change in the materiality of things. The problem is that institutional transition and invention cannot just deal with principles, values or protocols. It needs to invade everyday life: the spatial usability or the living aesthetics and emotions that live through urban life. And it needs to use the force of things to intervene in public policies. And to make change irreversible.

Generation M makes stuff. Not through mass production but by tweaking and expanding the capabilities of existing things and processes. The maker's craft: tinkering, stretching, knitting, inventing, weaving, recombining. […] Generation M is all about collaborations that create the very material conditions we live in. But these are neither collaborations between individuals or minds, nor social cooperation. These are collaborations between diverse material forces of living matter and abiotic matter. […] From the sterile environments of network society, cognitive capitalism and the knowledge economy that characterised the previous generation to the wet, contagious involutions of interspecies and multi-material communities. […] Social movements in the M age make a step further. They will not only act politically and institutionally to defend the commons but immerse in immediate, real, material practices for commoning life and the environment. (Papadopoulos 2014: n.p.)

The imagination of Dimitris Papadopoulos in the manifesto Generation M permits us to break apart and reinvent the institutional imagination through the question of transition: How to produce an ecology that changes and invents the city, without dying in the attempt? The materiality of Generation M is the place where we can do politics by taking care of the city, by struggling against the locks that have been changed to evict families, in a space where clothes, colors and smells are allowed to discriminate the inside and outsides of citizenship, through struggles undertaken with regard to school cafeterias and child malnutrition, illness and solitude, or with regard to what kinds of pills are prohibited or allowed in order to govern rage and fear. A city, in the most obscure sites, of sadness and abandonment.

Antonio Gramsci's »force of things« – that is the ability of acting politically for those who do not belong to the civil and bourgeois order of discourse and politics (the slave, the woman, the poor, the subaltern) – gains renewed importance if we think about the capacity of things for changing real life, as part of a broader assemblage of emancipatory forces (Gramsci

1975). We have to invent institutions, knowing that this force cannot be abstract and needs to intervene in the everyday life allowing objects and subjects to express their autonomous capacity of urban production. Beyond resubjectviation, the transition towards another urban life depends upon our ability of composing new social forms, new ways of life, assemblages of active objects and subjects that open new spaces of possibilities: Where to act, where to ›make stuff‹ and change reality? An experiment of *urban forming* that needs to be immersed in the city in order to change it.

Getting lost in this materiality does not mean renouncing a wide political strategy, but recognizing that we need to move from a sectorial to an integral understanding of policies if we want them to change urban life. Intervening in a community means acknowledging the housing conditions, the public health of a place, the labor paradigm and to grasp the fragilities and precarities of social life as a whole. But it also means understanding that the environment is composed of things, objects, infrastructures, dispositives and to work in this environment as a living ecology: *Gaia*. It means imagining education policies and at the same time intervening on the level of the community infrastructure of a neighborhood, improving health and thinking of ways to reinforce the link between public institutions and community dynamics.

This means challenging the fragility of a space through an integral approach to policies. Law and discourse are still fundamental, but they do no longer dominate policy making when we use an ›ecological‹ practice in the institutional space. In order to break the verticality of power, the closed political dialectic between legal objects (contracts, norms, protocols) and ideological objects (communication, abstraction, belongings) needs to be broken as well. An assemblage of subjects and objects is invading the political space, and the force of things, of the fragiles, of the imperceptibles can today drive a concrete and ulterior imagination of urban politics and urban life.

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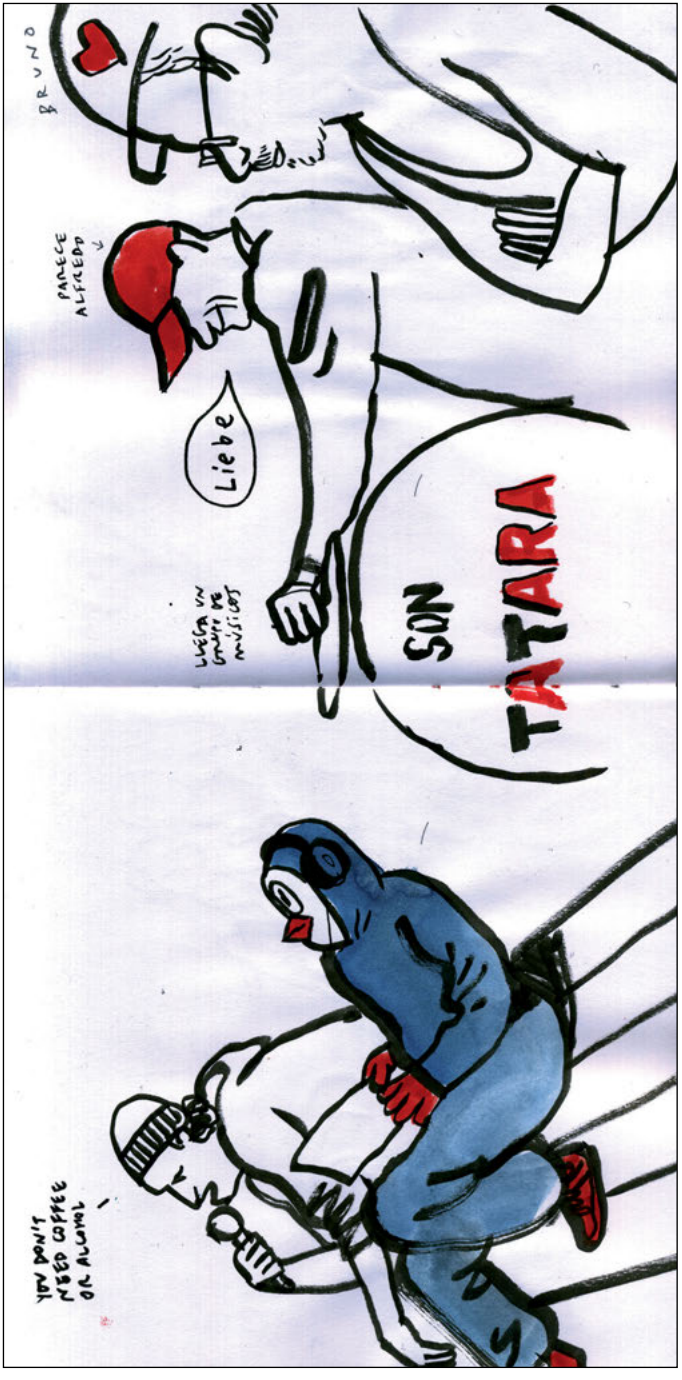
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Liebe
SON
TARARA
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