In the creation and social use of thresholds a potential spatiality of emancipation emerges. Social struggles and movements are exposed to the formative potentialities of thresholds.

Fragments of a different life, experienced during the struggle, take form in spaces and times with threshold characteristics. When people collectively realize that their actions are becoming different from their usual collective habits, then comparison becomes liberating.

But these thresholds, these heterotopias, are bound to the inconsistencies and twisting ways of social change. In them, the radical otherness of human emancipation is confronted, approached and explored.

Can the city of thresholds become the spatial equivalent of an emancipating project based on the negotiation between different but open identities in the process of collectively inventing the future?

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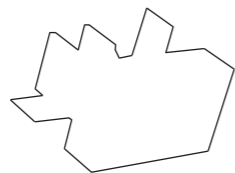
Towards the city of thresholds

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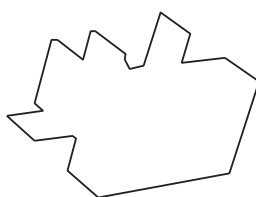# TOWARDS THE CITY OF THRESHOLDS

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of Thresholds' (a version of this chapter can also be found in the e-journal *Spatial Justice/Justice spatiale* no. 2, online: http://jssj.org/06.php).

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INTRODUCTION

Spatiotemporal thresholds and the experience of otherness

While attempting to consider the role space has in the potential emancipating transformation of society, radical thinking and action tend to take for granted that space contains, delimits and thus identifies social life. Spaces of emancipation are mostly envisaged either as freed strongholds to be defended or as enclaves of otherness in an urban spatial order. It is important however to think of space not as a container of society but as a formative element of social practices. Imagining a different future, means, therefore, trying to experience and conceptualize spatialities that may help create different social relations.

People not only experience space but also think through space and imagine through space. Space, thus, not only gives form to the existing social world (experienced and understood as a meaningful life-condition), but also to possible social worlds, to worlds that may inspire action and express collective dreams.

Seeking to explore, then, the ways in which space is potentially connected to the process of emancipation we cannot be satisfied with the discovery of alleged 'spaces of emancipation'. If emancipation is a process, it has to generate dynamic transformations and not simply institute defined areas of freedom. Spatial characteristics rather than concrete spaces can possibly become the focus of such an exploration. It is exactly at this level that the idea of threshold emerges as a concept which captures the spatial dynamics of emancipation. As will be shown, threshold areas mark changes, indicate comparisons, regulate and give meaning to the act of crossing as an act which produces changes.

This book's main argument is that in the creation and social use of thresholds a potential spatiality of emancipation emerges. Social struggles and movements are exposed to the formative potentialities of thresholds. Fragments of a different life, experienced during the struggle, take form in spaces and times with threshold characteristics. When people collectively realize that their actions are becoming different from their usual collective habits, then comparison becomes liberating.

Struggles implicitly or explicitly aiming at changes in common life do not only create temporary enclaves of otherness. Otherness is often experienced as the inhabiting of in-between spaces and times. In a self organizing neighborhood these spaces and times are created in assemblies, demonstrations or common meals. In a rebellious Zapatista municipality, thresholds become the means to invent the future now, as new forms of collective self-determination create ambiguous forms of

coexistence in space.

To be able to approach otherness in its potentially liberating comparison to dominant regulating values, means to be able to invent passages towards otherness. It also means to be able to understand otherness as a process rather than as a state. One can speak of an important art that the emancipating movements need to investigate, an 'art of doing' that helps people understand, discover, create and appreciate otherness.

It is in their everyday encounters with otherness that people develop an art of negotiation based on the creation of in-between spaces, i.e. thresholds. And it is this art that is being collectively practiced to its maximum potentiality in the periods of liberating change.

We can think of the city of thresholds as the always emergent work of such a collective art when combined with efforts to create a liberating future. An emancipated 'public culture' will hopefully create out of these thresholds towards otherness bonds of solidarity and new forms of common life.

Beyond borders

Many thinkers seem to describe the imposition of boundaries in human settlements as a natural phenomenon. Some of them, observing animals in the process of defining their territory, suggest that a kind of natural will imposes marks on nature as boundaries of an area where a single being or group reigns supreme. Territoriality then is supposed to be a natural need arising from the urge to survive while fighting against enemies or rivals.

It is true, indeed, that the demarcation of an area goes hand in hand with its description as a potential site of fighting. The act of marking out an area seems to be an attempt to ward off a fight but at the same time necessarily constitutes a declaration of war.

However, humans creating settlements do not only define boundaries in order to secure inside them a community which senses the hostility of the surrounding environment. Boundaries are created also to be crossed. And an often complicated set of ritual acts, symbolic gestures and movements accompanies the crossing of boundaries. Invasion is only one among many other possible ways to cross the borders. So we could agree with Georg Simmel that man is not only "a bordering creature" but also the 'creature who has no border" (Simmel 1997a:69).

The creation of an enclosure contains, in Simmel's words, the "possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom" (*ibid*.). If the bridge and the door exemplify as material structures this ability to separate and connect at the same time – since "the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating" (*ibid*.) – then we must start to understand bordering as an act that contains many possible meanings. Not only the declaration of war on otherness but also the possibility of crossing the bridge towards otherness. Not only hostility but also, perhaps, negotiation.

An exile, feeling always away from home, would probably describe a quite revealing border consciousness. Hear an activist who was forced to leave South Africa:

> Indeed, the experiences and products of exile could be a dissolvent of bor-
> der consciousness. It could be a way of reconnoitering, shifting and exten-
> ding the limits. (Breytenbach 1993:76)

An exile understands that borders possess the power to cut people away from the places that define them, their history, their identity. But while away and not permitted to come back, the exile realizes that identity is not a totally circumscribed area marked by a permanently identified structure of characteristics.

Identity constructed in exile is assimilating new experiences, discovering new criteria, checking new targets. Identity thus becomes not an area defined by a boundary, but – to use a Bakhtinian term – it assumes a *chronotopic* quality. Identity in exile is open to otherness, it is forced to face otherness.

Of course an opposite experience is also possible: in a foreign land, an exile may attempt to seal off his or her identity. This attitude will surely erect walls, freezing identity in an imagined state of unpolluted innocence. Travelling mentally towards his imagined homeland, an exile is always absent, creating around himself boundaries even more rigid than those he has escaped or has been ostracised from. And fighting to preserve this small imaginary enclave of sameness from imaginary or real invasions, an exile may thus actually strengthen the idea of borders as a site of clashing forces: forces that at the same time define and exclude.

What is it that the experience of an exile could reveal concerning border consciousness? Mainly that social identity is constructed through a process that is radically influenced by the reality of relations defining what could be called "the borderline of identity". This borderline, as in the case of spatial frontiers, can be permeable or extremely controlled, can be a limit or a starting point, a place to be and to communicate or the entrance to a no man's land extending between two opposing worlds that do not share common points, even when they are in contact. Identities can be described as corresponding to defined areas and the status of this definition through the use of differing borders actually constructs the character of identity. A fixed and unambiguous identity is a closed identity, an identity with rigid borders. An open identity is mainly not one that has no borders but one that is enclosed in flexible borders offering meeting points with otherness. This kind of identity could, as we shall see, be described as possessing a threshold quality. And actual spatiotemporal thresholds would be the places where identities may open in acts of negotiating encounters with otherness.

Such a line of thought would give a new meaning to the words of a very well known theoretician of modern geography, David Harvey: "The relations between 'self' and 'other' from which a certain kind of cognition of social affairs emanates is always … a spatiotemporal construction" (Harvey 1996:264). Indeed: not only because identities are understood as circumscribed areas defined by the quality and the specific place of their borders but also because very concrete space and time relations make identities visible and materially effective. That is why the identity of persons or peoples can be forced to change through changes imposed on their spatiotemporal awareness.

Thresholds as social artifacts

As social constructions, the different ways of defining and controlling space not only mirror different social relations and values but actually shape them, participating in the construction of concrete, socially meaningful experiences. Identities then are not only sets of beliefs or ideas but are actually embedded in the social environment influencing different practices and different ways of life, producing therefore material results. Studying the logic of different spatial arrangements as characteristic of specific societies one can discover not only the uses and meanings of space but also the logic of creating and sustaining different social identities.

Pierre Bourdieu has observed that in societies lacking "the symbolic product-conserving techniques associated with literacy" these social dispositions "are inculcated through an interaction of inhabited space with the bodies of societies' new members" (Bourdieu 1977:89). Space then becomes a kind of "educating system" that creates what we have so far been referring to as social identities. But, it is important to realize that such identities are the product of a socially regulated network of practices that, secreting their logic, actually weaving again and again distinct characteristics.

So, when Bourdieu studies the Kabyle house, he does not study it as the material index of social symbols but as the sum of the possible practices that produce a world of values and meaning. The Kabyle house then is a series of spatiotemporal conditions that acquire their social status when they define the meaningful movement of social bodies. The house endlessly teaches the body and is erected again and again as a universe of values by embodied performances.

To prove this double relation of the body with inhabited space in the creation of space's symbolic attributes, Bourdieu chooses to observe the symbolic function of the house's main door. The threshold is the point where two different worlds meet. The inside, a complete world belonging to a distinct family, and the outside, a public world where the fields, the pastures and the common buildings of the community lie. These two worlds are not only symmetrically different, opposing each other as woman to man or darkness to light, but actually meet in order to "fertilize" each other. The important fact is that the threshold acquires its meaning as a point of both contact and separation through the practices that cross it. These practices actually create the threshold as meaningful spatiotemporal experience, depending on who crosses it, under what conditions and in which direction. Men cross the threshold of the main door only to leave the house, to go to the fields where they belong, facing the light of daybreak as the door faces east. Women cross the main door only to enter the house facing the wall opposite the main door called the wall of light. Both men and women perform their acts "in accordance with the beneficent orientation, that is from west to east". And this is possible because, as Bourdieu demonstrates, the threshold establishes a symbolic change of the orientation of the house, that is a change in its relation to the outer space. The threshold then "is the site of a meeting of contraries as well as of a logical inversion and … as the necessary meeting-point and crossing point between the two spaces, defined in terms of socially qualified body movements, it is the place where the world is reversed" (Bourdieu 1992:281-282).

As in the case of the Kabyle house, the spatiotemporal experience of the thresh-

old is produced by this potential of communication between two different opposing worlds. Existing only to be crossed, actually or virtually, the threshold is not a defining border that keeps out a hostile otherness, but a complicated social artifact that produces, through differently defined acts of crossing, different relations between sameness and otherness. If inside and outside communicate and mutually define each other, then the threshold can be considered as a mediating zone of varying size that exists in-between.

The anthropologist Victor Turner, following Arnold Van Gennep, has described these in-between lands as possessing the status of *liminality* (from the Latin word *limen* = 'threshold'). The condition of liminality is characterised by the construction of transitory identities. In Turner's words, "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (Turner 1977:95).

Every passage creates the conditions of a threshold experience which is essentially the suspension of a previous identity and the preparation for a new one. Passing through a threshold is an explicitly or implicitly symbolic act. It is, therefore, also a gesture towards otherness: not only spatial otherness, as in the case of emerging from a house into the outside world, but also temporal otherness, as in departing from the present for a more or less unknown future.

"Rites of passage", as Van Gennep has named them, accompany the passing of initiands from one social identity to another, and most of the times are connected with an actual, ritually executed, crossing of spatial thresholds (Van Gennep 1960:26). If then this act of venturing towards otherness is performed in and through thresholds, couldn't we assume that thresholds are the place of negotiation with otherness? Thresholds can be the systematic scheme through which societies symbolically construct this experience of negotiation and, at the same time, the material artifacts which allow this negotiation to take place. Thresholds could offer the schematic and at the same time realistic description of encountering and negotiation areas created between permeable and evolving identities.

Approaching otherness

Approaching otherness is a difficult act. In all societies, such an act is represented as full of symbolic and material dangers. But approaching otherness is also a constitutive act of every social encounter. And every society or social group would appear to be characterised by the ways it controls and formalizes these acts of encounter. If the encounter is considered only as the necessary step to verify and deploy hostility between groups of people, then the act of crossing borders will be only an act of symbolic or actual war. This form of encounter characterizes communities that describe everything outside them as potentially hostile. It is not by chance that these communities build shelters protected by material or symbolic walls with drawbridges that are drawn most of the time. Contemporary gated communities are an obvious example of such an attitude.

If, however, the encounter is part of an effort to embrace otherness without an intermediary phase of mutual recognition and negotiation gestures, we may end up with a virtual extinction or assimilation of otherness. In contemporary consumer culture everybody is forced to be on the move, chasing ever new products, ever

new sensations. As Zygmunt Bauman points out: "Consumers are first and foremost gatherers of sensations" (1998:83). What appears then as a new desirable sensation is a kind of fabricated figure of otherness. Fabricated by the media, by the advertising images, by the continuous, consumer oriented, education of the senses. Towards such an otherness, the citizen-consumer is all too eager to cross the borders. And with a similar attitude, guided by desire-propelling exoticism, the consumer assimilates otherness while touring in a foreign land, only to add new sensation-trophies.

In order to approach otherness in an act of mutual awareness, one needs to carefully dwell on the threshold. In this transitory territory that belongs to neither of the neighbouring parts, one understands that it is necessary to feel the distance so as to be able to erect the bridge. Hostility arises from the preservation and increase of this distance while assimilation results from the obliteration of distance. Encounter is realised by keeping the necessary distance while crossing it at the same time. The wisdom hidden in the threshold experience lies in the awareness that otherness can only be approached by opening the borders of identity, forming – so to speak – intermediary zones of doubt, ambivalence, hybridity, zones of negotiable values. As Richard Sennett remarks: "In order to sense the Other, one must do the work of accepting oneself as incomplete" (1993:148).

These zones may require gestures that are not performed as indices of identity characteristics but mainly as acts of approaching. Therefore, the gestures will have an equally hybrid status, describing an intermediary identity offered as meeting place. This intermediary identity is perhaps what results from the "subjunctive mood" that Turner connects with liminality (Turner, 1982: 84). Intermediary identities are performed only to test the other's will of contact. They are performed not to hide or to deceive but to offer ways to depart from a fenced-in self towards a self constructed through the encounter.

Sennett describes civility as the "treating [of] others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance" (1977: 264). If we understand civility as part of an art of building thresholds between people or social groups, then we can agree with Sennett and his defence of a new public culture. This culture would be characterized by this continuous effort to preserve otherness and to create in-between areas of negotiation. And a curious, difficult to define, *theatricality* seems to be performed in such gestures of reconnaissance and mutual approach. A theatricality in the Brechtian sense seems to dwell in thresholds: one does not only depart from himself to be somebody else, one actually shows this temporary transformation as a gesture – a *Gestus*, in Brecht's vocabulary – of seeking to understand what is other than him or herself. Theatricality will thus be the common element in the behaviour of both liminal actors during rites of passage and contemporary strangers groping their way towards each other through a modern version of civility. The human ability to become other is at the foundation of such an experience of a "subjunctive mood". This socially constructed ability helps people to meet others without forcing them into precast identities. Being able to become other, even if one returns again to one's former self, is being able to accept otherness and, potentially, being in a position to construct a relationship with the other *as* other. Isn't imagination after all this curious staging of reality that creates thoughts and feelings out of non-existent happenings, actually performed in the mind? And isn't this an

exploratory encounter with otherness in its purest form?

An emancipating spatiality?

This book is divided in three parts which are supposed to correspond to three interconnected areas of research concerning the threshold spatialities of emancipatory processes. The first part is organized around the idea that contemporary urban space is discontinuous: to understand spatiotemporal experiences we have to work with concepts which may capture this inherent discontinuity. Chapter one explains how, in this context, rhythm and exception are appropriate terms if we aim at finding not only the characteristics but also the potentialities of the dominant urban model, that of a "city of enclaves".

What the second chapter of this part reveals is that both rhythm and exception are not only the means to establish a dominant spatial order but also forms through which spatialities of resistance are created. Focusing on the experiences of the aftermath, exile and immigration, this chapter explores spatiotemporal discontinuity as a possible ground of encounter with otherness. Otherness, understood as a relative term rather than as an essence, is actually the result of a distinguishing comparison, which is shown to prosper in periods in which collective habits are destroyed or suspended.

The second part problematizes the ways in which an encounter with otherness can take place in the context of urban experience. Making use of Walter Benjamin's unfinished study of 19th century Paris, the opening chapter attempts to understand the metropolitan experience as inherently dynamic and ambiguous, containing both nightmarish elements and liberating potentialities. Through an antithetical description of the bourgeois "private individual" and the "flaneur", two distinctive attitudes towards public and private space are exposed. Both attitudes are equally compared in terms of their dependence on the manipulation of individualizing traces in metropolitan life as well as their participation in the creation of (private or public) 'auratic' urban phantasmagorias. A precarious "study of thresholds" is evoked, considered as a knowledge constructed through the ambiguous experience of the flaneur-as-allegorist. This study can possibly explore the dynamics of urban experience by pointing to the revealing trace-aura dialectics that permits the surfacing of a third, in-between element, the threshold. A "city of thresholds" can thus possibly describe the perspective of a "redeemed" urban modernity.

Taking walking as a practice which exposes someone to the experience of otherness in the city, the next short chapter further explores the spatiality of threshold. Porosity as a spatial quality and passages as spatial artifacts are the terms introduced in order to focus on the act of crossing which essentially creates thresholds and activates threshold potentialities.

What follows is a chapter on one of the crucial points of the book's main argument: thresholds mark processes of transformations of social identity. Anthropology is the discipline that has theorized the difficult relationship between self and other as a culturally determined relationship. Approaching otherness (cultural as well as historical) is a crucial problem in social sciences. In this chapter, approaching otherness is shown to be equally a crucial problem in the tactics of habitation. Distance, the appropriate distance of encounter, is necessary for differences to persist without

being a block to negotiation and mutual understanding. The ability to recognize the appropriate distances in space and time critically influences the theatricality of social interaction. This ability is actually acquired and improved in the varying conditions of threshold creation. The in-between space of thresholds is thus explored in this chapter as a potential stage in which encountering otherness means visiting otherness, rehearsing, testing and exploring otherness.

The third part of the book tries to bring together the findings of the two former parts in an effort to reveal the importance the term threshold has in the understanding of the spatial aspects of emancipating practices. Reformulating Foucault's definitions of heterotopia, we can consider as heterotopic all those spatial experiences that "rehearse" a future of human emancipation. Hence, the first chapter of the third part focuses on the threshold character of heterotopia. Beyond and against the city of enclaves, heterotopic spaces mark thresholds in space and time where dominant order and control are questioned.

Testing the idea of heterotopias, understood as thresholds towards radical otherness, the two remaining chapters analyze two exemplary cases: the actions and words of the Zapatista rebellion, and the practices of the December 2008 youth uprising in Athens. In both cases it is shown that multiple and ambiguous collective experiences have produced their heterotopic spaces inside and beyond dominant capitalist spaces. As in both cases collective identities were put into crisis, heterotopic experiences were indeed connected with transformations and identity comparisons characteristic of threshold theatricality. Can we thus speak of glimpses of a potential city of thresholds?

It is possible to describe the social experimentations that take place in heterotopias as essentially constructing the temporary thresholds that lead into the future as otherness. But these thresholds, these heterotopias, are bound to the inconsistencies and twisting ways of social change. In them, the radical otherness of human emancipation is confronted, approached and explored. Think of the Paris Commune of 1871, think of the settlements of the *pobladores* squatters in the Chile of *Unidad Popular*, think of the Lacandona jungle as a Zapatista heterotopia, or, perhaps, think of the streets of Seattle, Genova or Athens at the time of huge dissident demonstrations. All of them temporary thresholds, all of them heterotopic gestures towards an emancipating otherness. Can indeed the city of thresholds become the spatial equivalent of an emancipating project based on the negotiation between different but open identities in the process of collectively inventing the future?

PART I

CHAPTER 1

Exemplary metropolitan rhythms and the city of enclaves

Rhythms, social practices and public space

The idea that city-space not simply contains or supports social life bur also expresses those social values that are necessary for social reproduction is well formulated and documented in the social sciences. It seems that this idea is already part of various forms of social knowledge, as well as forms of knowledge oriented towards specific practices, such as, for example, the knowledge of real estate vendors, municipal technocrats, advertizing experts and, of course, politicians. However, from this knowledge, we can draw questions and findings that can be used for a different (or perhaps complementary) research perspective: are there ways in which the city space can express and support practices and values that are different or even opposite to the dominant ones? Is space actually formed not only by forces of reproduction but also by forces and acts of resistance or cultural differentiation? Can we possibly speak of spatialities in which social reproduction fails, spatialities moulding alternative cultural values, spatialities in which new hybrid forms of public culture emerge? To be able to search for such different spatialities, to be able to locate practices which appear to secrete, express and use such spatiotemporal conditions, we need to explore city space by locating its dominant characteristics but also its points of rupture, where those characteristics are disputed, suspended or reversed. From this perspective, the discussion on the contemporary crisis of public space may offer a useful starting point. Probably, what is at stake here is not simply the actual or potential use of existing physical configurations but the ways in which space is created through inhabiting practices and shared forms of projection (e.g., collective memories or dreams).

We can understand public space as a coordinated system of spatial distinctions that correspond to crucial social distinctions (cf. Bourdieu 2000:134). But, can we effectively understand social relations and how they are politically mediated without actually observing how public space is constantly produced and interpreted by social actors as the experience of public life unfolds? In that case, we would need concepts that capture the ways in which public space is "performed" in everyday practices, concepts that can reveal changes not only in spatial forms but, principally, in spatial practices. And those concepts must undoubtedly be suitable for capturing transformations in the public character of public space that leave no observable or

permanent marks. How can we conceptualize temporary constructions, such as for instance the "red zones", that are created in exceptional circumstances only to be removed shortly afterwards? Don't these spatial markers affect public space even when they seem to be absent? How can we discern their possible or actual mutations?

In order to answer this kind of questions, we need to be able to integrate time into public space, not simply the empty time of clocks but the socially meaningful time of performed practices. Red zones, which can serve as a crucial example of the ongoing transformation of metropolitan public space, can thus be conceptualized as constructions of a characteristically new social space-time. Red zones are actually performed; and through their performance, it will be argued, a new model of citizenship and governance is being enacted.

The logic of red zones

When Pierre Bourdieu insists that there is a distinct and distinctive "logic of practice" which is different from the logic we employ to interpret practice, he stresses the inherent temporality of every meaningful social action (Bourdieu 1977). Revealing the "fallacies of the rule" that tend to reduce practices to cause and effect relations, he shows how practices make use of time intervals in order to take advantage of varying circumstances (*ibid*. 6). Thus, practices, as series of interrelated acts, are defined by their tempo, by the way they unfold in time, by the ways they employ and simultaneously reproduce socially meaningful distances in time. Anthropologically, "making use of time" means understanding how rhythms of practices ensure a strengthening of human social relationships and how individual or collective performances can be based on differentiating variations of dominant rhythms. The return of a gift, for example, establishes a variable rhythm of reciprocity that can affect contestable power relations. Ritual acts can in general be considered as communal manipulations of social rhythms, despite the fact that these acts often appear focused on natural rhythms.

Rhythm seems to be a promising concept in an effort to connect a theory of practice as meaningful performance with the experience of time and space. Metropolitan experience can thus be understood as the result of differentiated practices of habitation performed in distinctive rhythms. We can indeed borrow from Henri Lefebvre's loosely constructed project of "rhythmanalysis" this defining statement: "Every rhythm implies a relation of a time with a space, a localized time, or if one wishes, a temporalized place" (Lefebvre 1996:230).

Using the concept of rhythm we can understand the characteristic qualities of public space as being created through recurrent social practices. These qualities are perceived by social agents and become involved in their acts only insofar as they can integrate them in the rhythms of social life. Can we understand a marketplace without the everyday rhythms that define it in different times of the day? Can we understand places in which collective decisions are being taken (ancient agoras, post-1789 National Assemblies, modern forums, etc.) without knowing the rhythms of the assemblies, the connection of these rhythms with production rhythms, the interdependency of those rhythms with rhythms of combining rituals and so on?

Space is thus defined, or rather comes into being, as a socially meaningful arti-

fact, in the process of being "temporalized" through inhabitation rhythms. Space is recognized as familiar, or becomes appropriated because occurring incidents can be understood as similar to those that have already taken place there before. Rhythmicality is a way of understanding the present and the future as being punctuated by defining repetitions.

If we follow Lefebvre, we can distinguish between two forms of repetition that define two major types of rhythm. "Cyclical rhythms" have in general cosmic origins. They can be considered as ways through which recurrent natural phenomena are being conceived as obeying laws of rhythmical repetition. These laws make them predictable and therefore socially usable. Cyclical rhythms have "a determined frequency or period" (Lefebvre 1996:231). There is a tendency to identify these rhythms with traditional societies where social life is organized and understood as repeating itself. In this case, social rhythms follow closely the rhythms of seasons and the corresponding productive duties. In his famous distinction between cold and hot societies, the former lacking the idea of history and therefore enclosed in a constantly self repeating universe, Lévi-Strauss considers rituals as "a machine for the destruction of time". Alfred Gell is perhaps more accurate in noting that in such societies "it is not time that is destroyed, but its effects" (Gell 2001:27). Cyclical rhythms, as social artifacts, use the experience of time in a way that coincides with the image a certain society has of itself. It is not that the inhabitants of cyclical-rhythms societies do not pay attention to the passage of time and its effects. Rather, what they do is give a specific social meaning to this passage of time by connecting it with the recurrence of social acts necessary for a specific form of social reproduction.

"Linear rhythms", according to Lefebvre, are "defined by consecutiveness and the reproduction of the same phenomena, identical or almost at more or less close intervals" (Lefebvre 1996:231). In other words, "the linear is routine" (*ibid*. 222). Regulated work rhythms (mechanical as in hammer blows or bodily, as in rowing) appear as linear rhythms that can be extended infinitely. In modern societies a concept of time essentially connected with historical conscience can be attributed to a linear conception of time. This time is "empty" and "homogeneous" (Benjamin 1992:252) because what defines it is the linear rhythmicality through which time is measured. In this case, everyday experience of time regulated by clocks and routinized in measured, repeated acts, can only have quantitative differences from the time of history. Within this framework, commentators can speak of an alleged "tempo of history" speeding up.

Routine is obviously a form of predictability. In modern societies though, the myth of novelty is offered as a substitute to the experience of routines. Rhythmicality is banished as restraining and anonymous, whereas originality appears as the true mark of identity. Yet, imposed working and living routines are methodically regulated. Imposed order in time as well as in space is only half-concealed behind a well calculated randomness. In its prototypical form, this condition is exemplified in the structure of the advertising message: You are urged to buy something which you know is produced in massive numbers, by being convinced that it was created "especially for you" (your identity is supposedly verified, created through this act of buying).

The partitioned city and the "framing" of identities

In the much-heralded "postmodern" metropolis, public space appears as the site of a phantasmagoria of freedom. Chaos and randomness, as opposed to the supposedly modernist quest for universal order, are elevated to key positive characteristics of an emerging urban environment. The apotheosis of privatization and the consumer ideologies of individualistic hedonism that accompany it, transform the practices that used to "perform" public spaces into practices of self gratification. Those practices tend to represent the city as a collection of chances (and places) for consumer satisfaction. Nevertheless, as Peter Marcuse among others has showed, the "postmodern condition" goes along with a new "partitioned city". Urban chaos goes along with a fragmentation of the city that is far from random (Marcuse 1995:244). The modern metropolis is increasingly becoming a conglomerate of differently defined enclaves. In some cases, walls literally separate these enclaves from the rest of the city, as in the case of large department stores and gated communities. Walls can also be of "pride and status of rule and prejudice" (*ibid*. 249), as in the invisible walls defining ghettos[1], suburban neighbourhoods and gentrified recreation areas.

One of the basic attributes of the "partitioned city" is that it destroys what appears to constitute the public character of public space. Public space, as created by the practices that inhabit it, "is always contestable, precisely because whereas there are criteria that control admission to its purview, the right to enact and enforce those criteria is always in question" (Hénaff and Strong 2001:4).

The partitioned city is full of privatized public spaces in which public use is carefully controlled and specifically motivated. No contestation is tolerated there. Users of these spaces must often be checked and categorized, they must follow specific instructions in order to be allowed access to various services and facilities. A shopping mall or a large department store, for instance, contains such quasi-public spaces. A company-owned town or an enclosed community, separated from the network of public spaces that surround them (streets, squares, forests, etc.), controls local space by limiting its use to certified residents. Holiday resorts often exhibit former traditional public spaces in theme parks featuring rural or village communities. Public life is reduced to a conspicuous consumption of fantasized identities in a sealed-off enclave that mimicks a "holiday city". What defines those spaces as sites of "public life" is not the clashing rhythms of contesting practices (that actually create the political) but the regulated rhythms of routines under surveillance. The publicly exhibited identities of the users are enacted in accordance with those rhythms that discriminate and canonize them.

Social identities are performed in this quasi-public space of the partitioned city. Different categories of people are allowed to enter the various enclaves and the fact that they are allowed to be there is already one crucial indicator of their identity. Residential enclaves can define recognizable urban identities, especially when inner or outer forces homogenize the residents producing visible distinctive characteris-

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1 Loic Wacquant's concept of "advanced marginality" attempts to understand contemporary ghettos as "isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands at the heart of the postindustrial metropolis" (Wacquant 2008: 237).

Pict. 1. Paraisopolis, São Paulo – Adjacent enclaves of the rich and the poor.

tics. In this respect the suburban areas of American cities, the shantytowns of Africa, Latin America or Asia, the gentrified residential areas of different European cities, and the immigrant ghettoes all over the world equally attribute visible urban identities. Public space in these areas is eventually separated from the rest of the city and its use is essentially restricted to the members of the corresponding community of residents. Gated neighborhoods and impenetrable *favelas* obviously take separation to the limit[2].

Identities are both spatially and conceptually framed. A frame is spatially characterized by the clear demarcation of a contained space versus an outer space: what lies outside the frame does not contribute to the definition of the inside. Our experience of pictures, both in modern news coverage and advertising images, strengthens this socially inculcated intuition. A frame defines a situation, a subject, and eventually specifies information, attributing to it the status of a meaningful message. Framed messages are not connected to each other. Advertising messages float all around us on top of buildings, in magazines or even on human bodies. News photographs also appear next to each other in a temporal or spatial juxtaposition that produces the image of a fragmented – or should we say partitioned – world. Framed identities therefore correspond to the experience of a partitioned urban space where residential enclaves appear to be or rather are fantasized as completely independent of their surrounding public space.

Contemporary metropolis, however, presents itself to its inhabitants as more a network of flows than a structure of places. As Castells has shown, the "space of flows" constitutes the dominant structure of distribution of function and power in contemporary society (Castells 1996:428). "The new dominant ideology", Castells explains, insists on "the end of history and the supersession of places in the space of flows" (*ibid*. 419). There still exist however, albeit ideologically dominated, experiences and practices of places as identity supporting spatialities. Besides describing a life divided between parallel universes (space of flows versus space of places), Castells is careful in describing an essential link between the mobility of managerial elites and their need to inhabit secluded enclaves "establishing the 'in' and 'out' boundaries of their cultural political community" (*ibid*. 416).

The experience of urban enclaves appears only as an extreme exception in a city where movement prevails over localized inhabitation routines. But, is this really so? First of all we must distinguish between those for whom movement is a privilege and those for whom movement is an obligation (Bauman 1998). We must also distinguish between different kinds of movement defining in each case the horizon that limits them. Is it inside an enclave, traversing the city, connecting house with work, connecting posts of status around the world (as in the case of travelling managers or academics) etc.? (cf. Castells 1996:417) What seems to be even more important, is to observe how each potential or actual movement influences the formation of different urban identities. Not all of these identities become temporary because somebody is on the move. Rather, some of them are strengthened when

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2 For Teresa Caldeira, contemporary São Paulo, one of the most segregated great cities in the world, is characterized by "a new pattern of urban segregation", "the fortified enclaves, which are privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work" (Caldeira 2008:65).

they are performed while moving from one place to another. The identity of a successful businessman or of an international politician obviously belong to this kind. In this case, a spatial frame is also a defining structure. Even though these identities are not circumscribed by the enclosed space on which they are performed, actually a series of well defined enclaves constitutes the urban space of various cities where businessmen and politicians are expected to be found. This series of enclaves (corporate buildings, selected restaurants, lobbies and so on) constitutes a kind of topologically functional frame outside of which the rest of the city appears as almost non-existent[3].

There is, however, a whole range of contemporary urban spaces where the rules of urban identity formation do not seem to apply. People are always passing but nobody understands them as places that define their users. An apparent and generalized anonymity seems to prevail. In airports, supermarkets, motorway service stations or hotels, most people are only in transit, as if the part of their lives that unfolds there were "in parentheses".

These places, where a solitary anonymity is performed, fabricate nonetheless defining characteristics of contemporary urban identities. Those transit-identities of the motorway traveler, the supermarket client and so on, construct the type of the average modern city dweller. Explicit or implicit instructions for use always accompany these spaces, addressing each one individually but eventually, as in every advertising message, fabricating recurrent characteristics. Non-verbal messages are especially powerful as markers of those characteristics, such as advertising images in department stores or company logos in chain fast food restaurants or service stations. Transit identities are thus not the product of chance experience; on the contrary, they distill what is typical and recurrent out of what is contingent and personal in the experience of urban "non-places" (Augé 1995).

So, these identities are framed too, enclosed as they are between socially identified spatial and temporal parentheses. This framing has something of the framing of snapshot pictures. No matter how arbitrarily chosen, these pictures somehow lose their contingent character as soon as they are shown, and appear as recognizable typical scenes. Family and vacation albums are full of such photographs: "In front of the Eiffel Tower", "Our baby walking", "Daddy's first fishing success"... Arguably, modern urban identities are framed spatially and temporally according to practices that transpose the experience of the partitioned city into the experience of partitioned identities. Metropolitan enclaves are of various kinds, used by certain categories of city-dwellers (defined either in terms of target-groups or for general public, exactly as in advertisement) but are always perceived and performed as defining frames that seemingly ignore the urban fabric that surrounds them. Actually, however, their status is founded upon their relations with the surrounding environment and these relations are regulated by concrete checkpoints.

A carefully designed system of control is absolutely necessary for the regulation of socially defining rhythms. More than by walls, metropolitan enclaves are characterized by checkpoints. One has to pass through control, prove his innocence in

3 Proposing a "sociology of immobility", Bryan Turner understands "enclave society" as a society in which "governments and other agencies seek to regulate spaces and, where necessary, to immobilize flows of people, goods and services" (Turner 2007: 290).

Pict. 2. Korogocho, Nairobi – "Advanced marginality".

advance, as Marc Augé (1995:102) brilliantly remarks, in order to be allowed to use these enclaves. Similar checkpoints punctuate the city: you can see them in airports and in office buildings, in supermarkets and in banks, in clubs and in theaters, not to mention of course guarded public buildings.

Checkpoints are those modular elements of a prevailing rhythm that produce a new dominant experience of "being in public". By marking everyday routines, checkpoints define at the same time distinct routes for different categories of inhabitants of the partitioned city. Toll posts or underground station checkpoints mark the everyday movements of many city dwellers. The rhythm of the supermarket cashier marks, similarly, an everyday normalizing ceremony of shopping.

Collective and seemingly individualized identities are enacted in the process of participating in such rhythms. Even the temporary identities of the traveler or the purchaser are marked by the act of crossing identifying entrance points. There, one has to show his or her passport or pay-card in order to be allowed a seemingly liberating anonymity – "the passive joys of identity loss" (Augé 1995:103).

We can easily discern in those new urban rhythms, regulated by identity-control checkpoints, the emergence of new linear rhythmicalities. The interesting thing however is that these linear rhythms function as generators of almost ceremonial practices of identity confirmation. No matter how functionally necessary those control points are, their existence generates the performance of practices devoted to ritual repetition. As in the case of "prophylactic rituals" (Turner 1977:168-9 and 1982:109-10) devoted to protection from unexpected natural disasters, checkpoints appear above all as points of self-evident protection: protection from practices which are unpredictable, other, different – in other words, protection from "arhythmical" practices. Checkpoints appear to protect normality from its opposite, society from what should appear as outside, foreign and therefore hostile.

A "state of exception" becoming the rule

The contemporary dominant ideologies of security evoking a looming anti-social threat are obviously finding fertile ground for our everyday addiction to normalizing checkpoints. What this phobia, deliberately spread throughout the world, is adding to the status of metropolitan public space is the inauguration of a state of emergency with no apparent end. Checkpoints become metastatic, police blocks punctuate the city, public sites are heavily guarded, immigration control is everywhere. Wars, mostly generated by outside brutal interventions, cause massive movements of people. Checkpoints are always there to identify, separate and subordinate helpless people by ceaselessly searching for the "infiltrating terrorist". Security, elevated to the status of the most important goal, justifies these metastatic control points as markers of exception. This situation, however, is in essence concretizing a potentially coherent new model of governance in the making (Vecchi 2001). The state of emergency turns out to be a test. What will be a new mutation of the partitioned city is justified by recourse to exceptional conditions that demand exceptional measures, measures that suspend basic recognized civil rights.

Agamben's (2005) idea of exception can be used as a means to understand and conceptualize the contemporary city of enclaves. Central to this idea is an essentially juridico-political understanding of exception: exception has to be compared to a

rule. According to Agamben, however, exception is not the opposite of the rule, rather it is the founding condition of the rule.

There is a historical component in this reasoning as well as a logico-mathematic component. Exception can thus be traced as a specific condition of power imposition, as the history of the state of exception clearly shows. Historically, the state of exception describes moments or periods during which law is suspended in the name of society's protection from internal or external crucial threats. During a state of exception, authority (a sovereign authority) is justified in taking such a decision (to suspend the law) in its promise to reinstitute law and order as soon as the threat is eliminated. This situation however, according to Agamben, reveals what is essential about authority: the legitimated ability to decide when and for how long the law will be suspended. In this act, authority reveals itself to be the precondition of law and not vice-versa.

During the state of exception a very peculiar relation between law and power is revealed. It is not that naked power simply replaces the regulating force of law. Law is present in its suspension as a legitimated force, a power to impose certain actions and prohibit others, a power to punish. The force of law as a legitimate force is passed over to the executive power while law is simultaneously suspended. A kind of ambiguous zone of indeterminacy is thus created "where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other" (Agamben 2005:23).

Agamben characterizes this situation as a "threshold of undecidability … at which *factum* [concrete events and acts] and *ius* [law] fade into each other" (*ibid*. 29). It is interesting to observe how and why Agamben employs in this context the image and concept of the threshold. For him, a threshold appears as an intermediary zone where supposedly distinct areas (in spatial terms, inside and outside; in juridical terms, law and anomie), lose their margins and "blur with each other". Had he used the image of border or limit, he would have described the state of exception as a situation of trespassing, of exceeding or crossing a limit. The exceptionality of the state of exception would have been conceived as the complete outside of law, the complete other of law. Agamben, however, insists that the law is present in the state of exception as the legitimating element of a sovereign decision. Law is present in its suspension. In the threshold-like condition of the state of exception, opposing parts are co-present and indistinguishable (as their defining perimeters are replaced by a zone of indistinction) and thus no longer exclusive. In terms of the historical analysis of the exception, the threshold is an in-between period during which crucial differences (between law and anomie) are suspended.

There is, however, a certain inconsistency in using the image of the threshold in historical terms. If the period of threshold is an in-between period, "before" and "after" should exist as concrete and differentiated periods, their essential difference being created by the act of passage from the one to the other. But the state of exception is supposedly not a period that produces qualitative differences and changes, rather, an intermediary period of difference during which a threat to the social *status quo* is eliminated. This period of difference mediates between two periods of order, that is, two periods which share the same defining characteristics.

We know from anthropology that the social experience of threshold-crossing is an experience of change. This change does not have to be a collectively created

change, as in an uprising or any other qualitative leap in terms of social relations. It can be a change affecting specific groups of people in specific periods of their social life. Anthropologists have provided us with many examples of spaces that house periods of ritualized transition from one social position or condition to another. Famously, Van Gennep has described as "rites of passage" (Van Gennep 1960) those ritual acts connected with spaces that symbolize transitions (for example, from childhood to adolescence, from single to married life, from the status of the adolescent to that of the citizen, the warrior or the hunter). Ritual acts supervise the passage from one social identity to another, thus ensuring the overall stability of society and the corresponding social relations. In Agamben's threshold however, there seems to be a kind of circular movement. The state of exception in a way equates "before" and "after" as it is supposed to ensure that after this in-between period order is restored as before. The state of exception renders before and after in-different: not different and thus mutually exchangeable.

In terms of a logico-mathematic analysis, the period of a state of exception presents itself as a logical paradox: opposing terms such as inside and outside, terms that are logically mutually exclusive as in set theory, have to be described as possibly indistinguishable. Agamben attempts to use a "complex topological figure" as the Moebius strip to represent this state "in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another" (Agamben 1998:37). In this image there is a slight shift towards a different understanding of this zone of indistinction. As on a Moebius strip, where one has to move (literally or speculatively) along the strip to discover that opposites "pass through one another", so in the state of exception a movement between law and lawlessness creates the dynamic situation of a temporary suspension of law. In other words, the logico-mathematical analysis of this threshold period gives to Agamben's use of the threshold image-concept a dynamic component that is more close to the actual social experience of crossing thresholds. As we will see throughout this book, it is in the performed or virtual act of crossing that the threshold is constituted as a space of potentiality.

In Agamben's conceptualization of the state of exception this element should have been crucial, since it radically influences the understanding of a further antinomy inherent in the history of the state of exception: the exception becoming the rule. How can a temporary state, a state characterized by a temporary condition and legitimated as a crucial part of the necessary rights of sovereign power, become permanent? And, since in terms of history nothing can be described as immune to change, what does it mean exactly to characterize a condition, a state, as permanent?

Probably, what Agamben has in mind is that in the temporary character of the state of exception, law and lawlessness must be equally present in the process of "passing through one another". The zone of indistinction he describes should be understood rather as a mechanism than a state. Law and anomie are constantly compared during this period. The mechanism constantly empties a period from law (as it is suspended) because the force of law is necessary to impose the state of exception. In a way, law is continuously present and at the same time power suspends it. The zone of indistinction therefore is an active zone of blurring the differences

because differences exist, differences are socially perceived and posited in order to be suspended. This mechanism's fuel, so to speak, is the legitimating temporariness. The mechanism works only because it constantly withdraws law from a situation where it is still regarded as the necessary force for ensuring social order.

Exception versus thresholds

When the state of exception becomes the rule, the mechanism turns into a "killing machine" (Agamben 2005:86). We could say that in this case the mechanism is immobilized. The constant passing through the opposing elements (spatial as well as juridical) comes to a halt. Instead of being an area of active comparisons, the zone of indistinction becomes an area where opposing elements coincide.

What Agamben wants to describe with the image of the camp as not simply a historical case but a model is exactly this "permanent" coincidence of law and anomie: suspension no longer needs to offer any justification. What the camp represents is the final obliteration of a crucial distinction: the distinction between exception and rule. Exception becomes normal. "The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule … a permanent spatial arrangement which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order" (Agamben 1998:169).

That the camp is a "permanent spatial arrangement" essentially means that it is no longer a zone of indistinction, given that the comparison between outside and inside (spatially as well as juridically) is no longer possible. "The camp is a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable" (*ibid*. 170). There is a slight difference in expression that actually reveals a qualitative leap. If the two terms "have become indistinguishable" then the zone of indistinction as a zone where opposites pass through one another is stiffened in a state where the opposites cannot be differentiated any more. "Have become" describes a resulting state rather than a process.

The camp is not a threshold state. The camp, to coherently follow Agamben's symbolism, should not be characterized as a space of exception (as Agamben himself explicitly states) but rather as a space of normalized exception. The paradox of the camp is different from the paradox of the state of exception. The camp remains "outside normal order" (*ibid*. 169), but at the same time it constitutes and contains a localized "normality", an exceptional law, a law that holds only inside this gigantic enclave.

What is so terrible about the Nazi camps is that they were so functionally organized as lethal machines. Administrative reason in its terrifying efficiency has defined the logic of this enclave of mass-murder. The Nazi camps were neither the first nor the cruelest machines of mass murder involved in civil wars, genocides or imperialist expeditions; however, they can help us to understand a specific urban-administrative mechanism through which "exception becomes normal".

When exception loses its threshold character, and thus loses an inherent characteristic threatening a process that has to repeat itself, when, in other words, exception becomes the rule, it also becomes a secluded enclave. For those spatiotemporally contained in the enclave, the law "outside" simply does not exist. For those outside this enclave, the enclave can be either a potentially fatal trap (if this enclave

takes the form of camp) or a potential zone of protection (if this enclave takes the form of a secluded area of privilege).

The camp can be taken to represent the limit towards which the city evolves only if we accept as a crucial characteristic of contemporary urban life the inhabiting of disconnected and enclosed enclaves. Otherwise the camp, considered as a model arrangement for defining and confining people without rights ("bare life"), has a concrete history that can indeed include today's detention centers for "illegal" immigrants (treated as non-citizens). What we can gain from understanding the camp as a model is necessarily connected to our ability to distinguish between these two levels in the use of such analytical model.

An urban enclave is a clearly defined area where general law is partially suspended and a distinct set of administrative rules apply. The force of law is present in an enclave as a protocol of use. Experienced from the outside, i.e. experienced as an outside, every urban enclave appears as an exception. Exception is made apparent in all the forms by which access to the enclave is regulated: general rules or common rights do not apply; upon entrance one must accept specific conditions of use, specific obligations and forms of behavior. It is as if the city, considered as the uniform locus of sovereign law, is replaced by an urban archipelago comprised of enclaves where exceptional measures define different forms of suspension of law.

Experienced from the inside, i.e. experienced as an inside, the urban enclave is a secluded world, complete in its uses and defined by rules especially created for its inhabitants. Exception, to continue the comparison with the camp, is thus normalized. An urban enclave is usually a carefully planned system of human relations regulated by protocols of use. While such protocols have the appearance of administrative or functional directions for use, they essentially constitute a localized legal system in place of a suspended general law[4].

Accordingly, urban enclaves are not simply places where general laws do not apply, but places where localized rules, having the form of functional decrees, normalize an exceptional status which becomes permanent.

Is there a specific urban order from which enclaves depart? First of all, urban order has not ceased to be a project to govern the contemporary city. Legal acts in support of zero tolerance politics are exemplary of such a project based on the re-institution of a general law defining the status of urban citizenship. It is interesting, however, that this project is inspired by the regulating efficiency of protocols for the use of the enclaves. The city itself can thus be legally and administratively fantasized as a gigantic enclave.

Order can also be projected as a system of delimiting obligations, as a restraint of freedom for those inhabiting privileged enclaves. Exception can be welcome to inhabitants as a defining mark of their privilege[5].

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4 Atkinson and Blandy observe that gated communities are "characterized by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management". (Atkinson and Blandy 2005:178; see also Minton 2009:74-77).

5 *The World* is a floating "residential cruise liner", the ultimate enclave of the super-rich (Atkinson and Blandy 2009:92-110). "Moving out of public space, via gated communities and other secessionary modes of governance, has created places that are spatially embedded within, yet contractually outside many of the arrangement of state functions" (*ibid*. 108-9).

Generally speaking, the construction of spatial as well as legal orders is always a process open to social antagonism. What seems to be a crucial characteristic of current administrative practices and logic is the acceptance of a dynamic condition of ordering based on two premises: the localized order of urban-island enclaves and the regulating power of metastatic checkpoints which merely impose a partial and precarious order on the urban sea surrounding those enclaves.

Indeed, refugee and immigrant detention centers constitute a kind of containment which marks "a radical crisis of the concept [of human rights]", as Agamben (2000:19) insists. But perhaps what is more important is the fact that the camp as a model of an enclave of normalized exception metastasizes in every aspect of city life. We don't have to be refugees reduced to bare life to be treated as enclave-confined users. We are trained in accepting as legitimate "site specific" protocols of use without reference to general (or universal) rights. We tend to consider as normal the fact that exception is organized in spatial terms as an area where only specific rules apply.

We learn to adapt to exception without even considering what we live as exception. This is how "red zones" become normal: routine control procedures and limited access rules tend to characterize access to the city centre or to specified areas guarded as potential "terrorist" (whatever the word is taken to mean) targets. Checkpoints and surveillance systems in shops have become normal. Body searches even at athletic events have become normal. It is in this direction that the state of exception is generalized and becomes a rule. It is not that we generally live in a state of emergency (even though lots of people do, as for example the Palestinians and the Israeli people). Rather, it is that we are constantly deprived of a crucial characteristic of urban space which also happens to be a crucial characteristic of any legal culture: the ability and the opportunity to compare, to dispute by comparing, to investigate the ways limits are imposed. Thresholds can be both spatiotemporal urban experiences and areas of actively experiencing indistinctions: spatial and juridico-political indistinctions alike.

If we are to investigate the liberating potential of the experience and conceptualization of thresholds, then we should clearly understand thresholds as always being crossed. A dynamic image of threshold crossing can help to locate the potential of change in the mechanism (and not in the state) of exception. If Agamben's use of the threshold image can only be taken to describe a state, then exception can only be understood as a trap. Exception, in this case, describes "a passage that cannot be completed, a distinction that can be neither maintained nor eliminated" (Norris ed. 2005:4).

It is crucially important to understand the state to exception as a dynamic mechanism which only once it is immobilized can be transformed to the setting of an exclusive inclusion (Agamben 1998:177). In this context, Walter Benjamin's thought that "our task [is] to bring about a real state of emergency" (Benjamin 1992:248), acquires an interesting meaning. Taken not simply as a historically specific appeal for anti-Nazi mobilization, Benjamin's sentence can perhaps summarize the task of creating thresholds in history. On those thresholds past and present are not connected in a linear way. The present is just one of the possible futures the past contained. Discovering hope in the past is the ability to locate ourselves in the past's unrealized

potentialities. "Being aware of historical discontinuity is the defining characteristic of revolutionary classes in the moment of their action" (Benjamin 1980, I:1236). Thresholds in history are created out of this awareness.

In this understanding of historical thresholds, the exception triggers a transformative disruption of normality. Exception, thus, can be the spatiotemporal condition of change, of difference. In place of the state of emergency's cyclical sequence of normality–exception–return to normality, in Benjamin's "real" state of emergency normality is replaced by exception leading to possibility. Exception thus destroys normality instead of becoming normality's supporting mechanism.

Red zones as normalizing exceptions and the "city of thresholds"

Red zones appear to belong to these kinds of spatial formations that have nothing to do with the rhythms that organize public spaces. No cyclical rhythm seems to govern their emergence, no linearity calculates their presence in the modern city. Red zones instantiate a form of temporal conception which is not based on repetition, i.e. rhythmicality, but on exception. Red zones are erected in exceptional cases and represent the "state of emergency". Red zones though, are not as exceptional as they seem. Rather, they constitute "exceptional" cases of a whole category of urban rhythms that tend to define the characteristics of today's urban public spaces.

Red zones are only the extreme case of ubiquitous checkpoints in the city. On the occasion of a major meeting of world leaders, the city is divided into forbidden and accessible sectors. The new "forbidden city", an enclave "temporarily" marked by fences, walls, surveillance cameras, police barricades, searchlights, flying helicopters and so on is becoming the image of a publicized utopia of complete security. On the body of the city, the mark of a new project of subordination is inscribed. All the more so, because the city is increasingly becoming ungovernable. Urban conflicts erupt in major cities and the police assumes the role of an "interior army". It used to be Beirut, Jerusalem, Belfast, Los Angeles, Paris or Rio; but nowadays urban conflicts and riots, urban violence and racial clashes are everywhere. As Agamben (2001) remarks, modern authorities tend to adopt the model of the infected medieval city, where zones of progressive control were erected, leaving part of the city to the plague while securing disinfected enclaves for the rich. In 2001, Genoa, with its prototypical red zone, appeared as an "infected city". The new world order, utopian and nightmarish, is based on zones of varying control, where checkpoints attempt to introduce the globalizing rhythms of neoliberalism. The utopia of absolute governance is tested at various scales in cities as well as in continents. Eventually, a partitioned globe is strategically designed to emerge.

Red zones are temporary constructions aimed at permanent results. As the "terrorist threat" (which, as a term, is designed to encompass indiscriminately any threat to the status of the new order) is a constantly renewed threat, exception becomes the rule, emergency becomes canonic. While red zones appear as exceptional when compared to ordinary urban rhythms, they in fact inaugurate new urban rhythms in view of a heavily mythologized new metropolitan order. Exception thus becomes the model of repetition.

Jon Coaffee has revealingly shown how the economic core of London, the City, has evolved into an enormous enclave defined by an urban "ring of steel" (Coaffee

2004:276-296). As "counter-terrorist" urban policies have evolved from temporary responses to Provisional IRA threats and acts, to more permanent measures taken after 9/11, the City has gradually become an area "excluding itself from the rest of central London, through its territorial boundedness, surveillance and fortification strategies" (*ibid*. 294)[6].

Red zones deliberately dramatize threat as a recurrent exception. As with pro-phylactic rituals, what the red zones ceremonially act out is a demonized otherness. Those violating others, those potential or actual trespassers, are described by the mere existence of the red zones as outsiders, not to be allowed in the "forbidden city". Law-abiding citizens are asked to comply with the measures, consenting in the suspension of their "right to the city". They are asked to participate in a ritualistic purification of the city, in the exorcising of the evil, which, as in most rituals, appears as both unnatural and beyond society. Red zones ceremonially describe the new citizen: just as the supermarket cashier (itself a checkpoint) defines the purchaser, the airport check-in defines the traveler, and the police block sanctions the autho-rized driver or the legal immigrant, so does the red zone aim to define the new citizen. Always eager to abandon his or her rights in exchange of a feeling of security, this new citizen accepts a permanent state of emergency. The wall erected by the Israeli government in Palestine[7] is only an extreme case of a red zone concretizing a permanent state of emergency, circumscribing through a series of checkpoints the social life of the new citizens. Red zones are purposely presented by the media in the form of a coherent spectacle which praises state violence as justified and effective[8].

The display of absolute control contradistinguishes the image of power cre-ated by the neoliberal mythology. No more leaders parading in open cars or shaking hands with common people. Modern politicians exhibit themselves mostly through the media, posing as benign, humane, but also determined. The images ceremonial-ly reproduced by the red zones are images of exclusion and distinction constructing the profile of a quasi-feudal power that paternalistically promises to provide security above all. All those constructions of control, completely out of scale and functional only in the case of a civil war scenario, constitute a new fortress, a castle for the governing elites. This mediatized castle, however, is only the extreme case of the protected enclaves of the partitioned city (Davis 1992:221-60).

What the anti-global movement has achieved, challenging the acceptance of red zones, has been to reveal their pedagogic use in forming the characteristics

6 An analogous security "enclavism" is occurring in New York, especially after 9/11. Security zones define both public and private corporate buildings in ways that destroy public space (documented for instance in Németh and Hollander 2010).

7 The Israeli wall is indeed a "temporary" security measure which is becoming permanent. "The Occupied Territories are trapped in a time loop where temporariness becomes permanent and exception becomes the rule, where no reality is fixed, no rules are clear, and no legal definition is stable" (Weizman 2005: 241).

8 For Kurt Iveson (who uses as an example the red zone created in Sydney in September 2007 during an APEC Leaders Meeting), "physical regulatory measures … far from being kept secret, … were endlessly circulated through a wide range of media interventions" (Iveson 2009:243). The protestors also used the media to their own means, to interrupt, expose and fight the red zones: they thus "combined actions in the street with action on the screen" (*ibid*.).

of urban dwellers-citizens. Their role in support of an emerging model of government remains to be actively shown. All of the movement's practices show explicitly enough the transformation of public space into a series of controlled enclaves culminating in the mediatized Castle of World Leaders.

To borrow a term from Edward P. Thompson, we can observe a "countertheater" (Thompson 1993:57 and 67) created by people's symbolic acts of civil disobedience in front of red zones. Demonstrators may sometimes show through the theatricality of a controlled clash that red zones are actually drawing lines inside the society and not between the society and an external vicious enemy. By doing so, they refuse to play the part of the plague in a sanitizing city and unmask that what appears as a modernized prophylactic rite is in effect the metastasis of those discriminating rites of initiation that most societies call citizenship.

Citizens before the fencing politics

Contemporary city-dweller identities are framed and framing. Their borders are carefully defined and correspond to the defining perimeter of the spatial and temporal enclaves in which they are performed. Not only do checkpoints enforce the discriminatory effect of a fenced spatiotemporal perimeter, they also actually test urban identities in their recurrent performance constantly proving, as it is, their efficiency in defining recognizable citizens.

Contesting contemporary identities would thus mean contesting their repeated performance enacted in framing enclaves. A different public culture, based on mutually aware and open identities would need different spatial experiences. Public space would have to be transformed from a series of enclaves, indifferent to each other, into a network of communicating areas. A permeable membrane instead of a frame would have to indicate the perimeter of these areas. Instead of checkpoints that discriminate, passages that connect would have to ensure spatial and temporal relations as necessarily formative of interdependent identities.

Liminality, the experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory, can provide us with an alternative image for a spatiality of emancipation. Creating in-between spaces might mean creating spaces of encounter between identities, instead of spaces corresponding to specific identities.

The act of recognizing a division only to overcome it, yet without aiming to eliminate it, might become emblematic of an attitude that gives to different identities the ground to negotiate and realize their interdependence. Emancipation may thus be conceived not as the establishing of a new collective identity but rather as the establishing of the means to negotiate between emergent identities.

From Van Gennep's seminal study on the "rites of passage" (Van Gennep 1960) we can borrow a revealing knowledge: societies have to instruct and guide their people when they change social status through crucial events in their social life. Birth, marriage, death of a relative, coming of age, entry into a professional community, army service, acquiring the status of citizen, warrior etc., all mark specific identity transformations. As these transformations are crucial for social reproduction, and as they have to be combined with tests and the inculcation of relevant knowledge to those who are destined to change, societies devise ways to regulate those transformations and ensure that the process will always be repeated without

threatening social cohesion.

Victor Turner, drawing from Van Gennep's theory, has focused exactly on this threat: it seems that transformation already contains the seed of dissent, the seed of deviation. People experiencing the changes connected with social identity transformation, people having to pass from an intermediary period during which they are being prepared for their new social duties, can possibly discover ways to challenge dominant identities. Especially in the process of abandoning former identities, often expressed by the creation of an in-between community of equals with no differentiating characteristics (*communitas*, in Turner's terminology: see Turner 1977:169-170 and 1982:26-27) there exists a threatening spark of collective rule transgression. In the experience of communitas initiards sense the power which suspends the rules of identity: they are not-any-more but simultaneously not-yet. Their social obligations and rights are suspended, for they could reveal a threatening awareness: identities are constructed and people can communicate and act together without them or exploring different ones from those for which they are prepared. Emergent identities are identities to be learned, that is why so often initiation through rites of passage is connected with impersonations and disguises[9]. Rehearsing identities is, in the corresponding rituals, a very strictly regulated procedure. But people unavoidably acquire a very important social dexterity: to be able to become other, to be able to be in someone else's place. It is here that the power of inhabiting thresholds, in-between space-time, lies. To be able to experience a change in identity, to be able to rehearse, test, check and visit otherness means potentially to acquire the power, to negotiate with otherness. For Turner (1982:27) these initiating visits to otherness revealingly expose learned habits and can open identities to unexpected changes.

Recognizing, opening, creating and inhabiting thresholds can become an important characteristic of emergent emancipatory spatialities. Opportunities for encounter with otherness, which activate comparisons, negotiations and inventive transformations, are necessary for any attempt to go beyond existing social taxonomies and values. Throughout this book, the idea of a city of thresholds will be explored. It will be argued that by this term we can describe a multifarious process of spatiotemporal creation through which emancipatory experiences may arise. Can we perhaps recognize glimpses of such a process in current urban mobilizations and demands? And can we locate the potential or actual characteristics of urban movements that would support this view?

The fragmented and ambiguous experiences of protest that opposed the growing tendency to fence and control open public spaces in Athens might offer us the opportunity to answer these questions.

Local authorities and the government aim to prove that Athens is safe for its inhabitants and for visiting tourists. This had been particularly evident in the context of preparing the city for the 2004 Olympic Games. In a localized version of an international security mania[10], allegedly "uncontrollable" public city parks were surrounded by tall fences controlling access through gates to be closed at night. In the case of the Philopapou cliff, where some important ancient ruins are located, this

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9 Specifically, Turner (1977:95) writes about "liminal entities", "threshold people" and "liminal personae".
10 See Samatas (2007).

was presented as an effort to protect them. The fences, however, were mainly a form of enclosure in the prospect of establishing entrance prices to what used to be an open public space. Pedion tou Areos, a park in the center of Athens, was presented as a dangerous area to be controlled, while in fact it is a place where public life is rich and varied. Policing the park meant chasing stigmatized minorities such as poor immigrants or homosexuals out of the area.

Many local residents both in Philopapou and Pedion tou Areos demonstrated against the growing fencing politics. In many cases people gathered outside parks and collectively destroyed the newly built structures. Through acts of urban civil disobedience, socially as well as culturally differentiated people jointly opposed the transformation of public spaces into controllable and discriminating enclaves. They equally refused to accept the privatization of parts of those public spaces (an arbitrarily growing athletic center in Pedion tou Areos or large areas of Philopapou region colonized by restaurants and coffee-shops). The interesting thing about these mobilizations is not only their unpredictable acts of actually demolishing fencing constructions but also the diversity of people involved. No political party initiated those demands and those acts, and neighborhood assemblies were organized with no formal or institutionalized support. In the Philopapou area, a few residents took the initiative to call for a neighborhood meeting. Five hundred people responded and in three cases (on 3 November 2002, 10 March 2003 and 12 September 2003) the assembly collectively voted to tear down the fence and promptly did so. Eventually, out of various similarly mobilized groups a loose network was formed aiming at the coordination of efforts.

In these acts we can see the characteristics of an urban movement spontaneously formed in response to major governmental intervention in a neighborhood. This urban movement indeed "makes urban demands which challenge existing policies and practices" (Pickvance 1995:198). However, the demands are not limited to a neighborhood enclave of outdoor public space but aim to ensure unrestricted public use of similar spaces all over the city. To quote from the declaration of the People's Committee for the Protection of Pedion tou Areos: "We want the park to be a free public space, accessible to all Athenians, easy to use, safe and beautiful".

These mobilizations explicitly oppose the model of tourist-oriented public space which in various forms has already forced residents to leave gentrified areas around the city center, as in the Plaka and in Psiri. Instead of contributing to local demands for security, policing the streets and eventually supporting homogenized collective urban identities, these movements create – consciously or not – passages in public space. Their organization mirrors a form of public coexistence of differentiated identities that aim at mutual recognition. Their acts also seem to defy the framing effect of the targeted spatial constructions, defending the essentially porous character of the perimeter of these spaces.

From the city of enclaves to the city of thresholds

Might not we consider these anti-gating movements part of a multifarious and sometimes even contradictory dispersed effort to oppose the partitioning of city space? The measures taken during the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union, or during the 2004 Olympic Games, in the form of an imposed state of

emergency continue the policy of fencing and controlling public space, pushing it to its limits. Athens city centre is becoming a highly controlled area with temporary fences becoming permanent in many cases while police blocks keep on proliferating.

Actively opposing temporary red zones is a way of refusing to accept a partitioned and always surveilled public space. The multicolored blocks of young activists of "alterglobalization" movements expressly show that public space should be the place where different identities are allowed to communicate, meet, exchange ideas and longings and act. A potential city of thresholds sometimes emerges when public space is occupied and organized by all those different people. Both symbolically and practically, these groups create an open to all, porous public space in the streets and squares of the city. If a new form of governance is being tested in the temporary-permanent construction of red-zones, a new form of emancipating culture is spontaneously tested in public space. In the migratory and ephemeral practices of social movements explicitly or implicitly oriented towards urban demands, this public culture is ambiguously performed. The more these acts of essentially urban protest spread in the city, the more we can hope for passages, as public thresholds, to replace metastatic checkpoints. And, perhaps, instead of the "bourgeois utopia" of completely secure urban enclaves (Davis 1992), or the fantasy of identity-conferring ghettoes as strongholds to be defended from the rest of the city, we can see emerging the heterotopias of porous public spaces. An open city is a city of thresholds (Stavrides 2002; 2007).

Contesting the prevailing mythologies of terror and security may eventually mean contesting the partitioned city as the image and the locus of a new globalized order. In the process of opposing barricaded public space, new spatial experiences may emerge. Instead of checkpoints, passages may be created. A city of thresholds can be a city where public space functions as a network of intermediary spaces, of metropolitan thresholds where different and interdependent collective identities can be performed in mutual awareness. Actions of civil metropolitan disobedience may realize temporarily those urban thresholds as places of otherness, opposed to the normalizing urban identities ritually enforced by red zones.

Perhaps, in the renewed project of social emancipation, we can replace the rhythms that define checkpoints with those that define turning points, with those thresholds where a new concept of time will emerge. Walter Benjamin calls this time "Messianic", only to describe a new epoch marked by a crucial rupture in social time. As we will see in chapter 3, Benjamin's concept of time is based on the spatiotemporal experience of thresholds. His study of urban thresholds can become a part of a possible research on the liberating potentialities of threshold spatiality. Can we indeed imagine, in this context, a new kind of social time awareness which will emerge as multifarious and polyrhythmical collective identities secrete the spaces of their encounters?

CHAPTER 2
Inventing rhythms, inhabiting exception

Inhabiting rhythms

Dominant rhythms and localized exceptions seem to create the conditions of a prevailing urban order in contemporary big cities. Spatial discontinuity does not produce chaos or unpredictable spatial arrangements but, on the contrary, constitutes a different kind of spatial order in cities which tend to take the form of an urban archipelago. Can rhythmicality, however, characterize forms of common life which divert from dominant habits? Can spatial exceptions create opportunities for alternative or dissident inhabiting practices?

When Walter Ruttmann released his film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* in 1927, he could claim, in accordance with the modernist model of the "total work of art", that it was a cinematic symphony composed of the rhythms of the city. He presented the different kinds of mechanic as well as human repeated movement as elements of a sequential structure that characterizes everyday urban life. The film attempts to capture the recurrent practices of everyday Berlin in the inter-war period. From early morning, when the train arrives in the central station, to late afternoon, the city appears to function as a gigantic machine with every cog and wheel having its own distinctive rhythmicality.

Ruttmann introduces into his film a very specific kind of documentary view. Putting an emphasis on movement synchronism, he not only interprets the city as a well-ordered spatiotemporal structure but also attempts to criticize certain aspects of mass behavior: a direct comparison with animal behavior is introduced in cases where mass behavior is reduced to analogous instinctual flock attitudes (passive as in cow and sheep flocks or aggressive as in dog packs). Mechanic or organic, full of vitality or passive, creative or destructive, every observable urban rhythm has its role in an overarching synthesis: the city's symphony, the city as symphony.

Even so, in Ruttmann's work there are notes of dissonance within the symphonic continuity. The suicide of a young woman upsets the flow of traffic. Although it is a silent film, we can imagine certain sounds stopping, others suddenly erupting – a cry, a commotion, an unexpected medley of disparate voices, a solitary splash in the river, where the unfortunate girl falls to her death. Thus, from the inner workings of the repetition that defines and describes the rhythms of a large city, a temporary otherness emerges. An event?

Is it perhaps that this unsettled symphonic reading of the city is indicative of the daily practice of living? Is it perhaps that we create this comforting feeling of repetition ourselves, reducing the unknown to what is already known, already experienced? We project the notion of continuity onto our experience of time, reinforcing our certainty about the succession of moments in time (Bachelard 2000:19). In reality, however, succession is nothing but sheer irregularity, discontinuity. It is through our memories that we retroactively project continuity – a logical flow of succession – onto the past (*ibid*. 28-29).

Rhythm is a form of duration, in which the discontinuity of the subordinate sections is incorporated into a predictable sequence. In rhythm, continuity is generated because of the discontinuity that renders the sections comparable. Thus, life may appear as being continuous and uniform, but on the level of elementary transformations, life is wavelike.

Interestingly, *Berlin*'s opening sequence "compares" the natural rhythm of waves with the mechanic rhythms which characterize the movement of a train arriving to the city. As Michael Cowan shows (2007) central to 1920s' discussion on the importance of natural rhythms was the image of waves: in this discussion, proponents of a return to organic rhythmicality (as opposed to the alienating dominant experiences of artificial "machinic" rhythms) used the image of the "undulating flow of waves" to describe natural rhythms as structured in a flow-like continuity (*ibid*. 231).

Rhythm, understood as undulation, is a formative element of experience. Rhythm has an impact on the manner in which the senses shape their relationship with the material world. Rhythm drives hear, touch, and vision. The rhythmicality of breathing drives the sense of smell, as the rhythmicality of swallowing affects the sense of taste.

However, rhythm is not simply identified with repetition, but with a specific experience of repetition that is socially meaningful. For Lefebvre, "rhythms imply repetitions and can be defined as movements and differences within repetition" (Lefebvre 2004:90). This claim may be interpreted as a schematization of the relationship between rhythm and time. The underlying idea is that this relationship may be represented in spatial terms. Movement combines points in space with points in time. Any sequence of movement is based on the fact that both points in space and points in time are discrete, different.

When we, as humans, attribute a repetitive character to movement, we consider those different points (understood as spatio-temporal unities, happenings) as similar. Nevertheless, we continue to experience them as discrete. Clearly, whatever seems to happen always "again", unavoidably and necessarily, happens, in fact, only once. Repetition as a socially meaningful diagnosis describes an inherently impossible condition. But, in its impossibility, diagnosed repetition represents a dramatically crucial human effort: to understand the present and predict the future – because the only thing that we actually know – albeit feebly – is what has already happened. Rhythm, despite the sense of similarity it conveys between what precedes and what follows, is based on the distinction between these two things, a distinction relating

to their different positions in time and space[1].

In recognizing rhythm as an active means of understanding repetition, Lefebvre points out the dialectic between sameness and otherness. It is human memory that enables us to recognize the rhythmical. Memory does not have a particular role to play at the extreme limits of linear, mechanical rhythm, because "mechanical repetition works by reproducing the instant that precedes it" (*ibid*. 79). However, when rhythm connects differentiated time periods, memory is essential to retain the sense of repetition. In cyclical rhythms, it is memory that compares what has elapsed so as to identify the completion of a period, and therefore to identify periodicity. This ability to identify through comparison is essentially an ability to make difference the driving force of repetition.

This power of memory is what makes rhythm part of the process of creation – rather than an impediment to creation. The rhythmical quality of a sound can indeed generate a sense of temporal order. In the same way, the rhythmical aspect of a texture can define spatial organization – for instance, a floor pattern. However, if the rhythm of perception is not defined in a linear way, if recognition of the periodic nature of a stimulus is already loaded with preconceived meaning, then we can discover or even invent rhythms in the process of experiencing and recognizing meaningful repetitions. We don't merely follow rhythmic instructions – rather, we are in constant need of rhythms in order to appreciate the meaning and form of social space-time.

This is the paradoxical social significance of rhythm: it incites collective behavioral patterns and simultaneously shapes specific individualizing habits. I repeat the way I light a cigarette, the way I blink when I look at you, the way I sigh or laugh. I repeat my mannerisms.

Children's relationship to space can perhaps reveal the way in which rhythm essentially gives form to individual experiences. Children do not get tired of repetition – of repeated sounds, grimaces, and stories. But each repetition is already a variation, a discovery. Can we be mesmerized by a repetition of the same thing, as children do? Can repetition surprise us every time, like a new lease of life?

Walter Benjamin sought to recapture children's ability to see the city as a new place each time, to rediscover it by creating temporary worlds in their games (Benjamin 1985a:315 and 52). Can rhythm offer us new opportunities to see again, to feel again, to think again about something we saw, felt or thought? Perhaps, then, we can recognize the rhythmical quality of differentiation rather than repetition (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:346). If our city, our house, the spaces where we live, do not merely exist but are different each time we experience them, then everyday life can actually be a place of potential creativity.

Comparison establishes relations intended to confirm repetition, but also relations that may seek new repetitions in place of others. How extended is the cycle of repetition? Who defines its limits? To what extent can regularity include differentiation in order to highlight that interim period when we are not sure at which point the cycle ends? And once we know the cycle has ended, which elements of what

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1 In this context, Bachelard's idea of "quantum becoming" can be very helpful: "Qualitative becoming is very naturally, quantum becoming. It has to move through a dialectic, going from the same to the same via the other" (Bachelard 2000:102).

has happened before will be repeated?

If we can imagine potentiality as a condition for breaking out of established habits, this is because we are trying to shatter certain expectations about repetition, not because we deny the expectation of repetition in general. Perhaps potentiality exists only as an expectation of a possible rhythm whose periodic nature is not yet apparent. Perhaps certain actions or events are experienced through the anticipation, or the hope, of their repetition. This is how we can manage our relationship with otherness. We can neither conceive nor feel absolute otherness or absolute newness. However, we can truly recreate our world by inventively recognizing its multiple periodicities.

Did Ruttman try to make a documentary film on interwar Berlin? Or was his observation of city rhythms a way to reconstruct a deeper urban reality, almost in accordance to Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical project? Siegfried Kracauer, commenting on the film, believes that the contrast between natural and mechanic rhythms is limited by Ruttman's montage to a series of formal and structural correspondences devoid of any significant or revealing value (Kracauer 2004:184-185). David Macrae, however, convincingly argues that it is the inherently filmic power to discover and read reality which is at work in the film. Thus "rhythms … reveal their own deeper realities" as they give shape to "the processes active throughout the broad ranging life of and lives within Berlin" (Macrae 2003:269). This can indeed be a possible way through which the art of filmmaking can sustain a renewed awareness of the creative aspect of reading urban rhythms.

Habits, habitation and otherness

The act of habitation seems to be constantly reaffirming a certain familiarity with the world. Recognizing a place as inhabitable, in the broadest sense of the word, means regarding it as an appropriate locus of habits. Place is therefore considered as relatively stable in its form or predictable and controllable in its changes. Habitation is indeed connected with habit. A certain kind of recurrence of practices, combined with a permanence characterizing spatial relations, appears to constitute what we can call inhabited space. Habitation appears to be sheer rhytmicality.

However, what if inhabitation practices are actually practices of appropriation in a constant confrontation with what always escapes prediction, with the spatial and temporal aspects of otherness? What if habitual practices are actually practices of accommodating to a recurrently emergent otherness? The future seems to be tamed through habit; but, is it really so? Can we expect that what we know and are familiar with will continue to be present the next day?

Our social education is not based only on establishing habits. Social reproduction would have been rather impossible if we simply had to learn and obey rules. What our education has to ensure is that we perform in different situations according to recognizable patterns. Otherness is thus a constitutive element of the process of behavior formation.

Can we then perhaps say that habitation is not only the establishing of habits, as the word etymologically suggests, but also the accommodation of what escapes habit? Accommodation is, after all, a word used to describe places that can be utilized as dwellings. An act of dwelling is an act of compromise, an act of settlement

Pict. 3. Asian migrants in Athens – Temporarily creating urban thresholds.

(in both meanings of the word, but essentially the one connected with an arrangement), an act resulting from a negotiation and, simultaneously, an act that creates the ground for future negotiations.

Memory seems to be a prerequisite for an act of inhabitation. But if we understand this act as inherently time-bound, a process rather than a set of habits, then memory must be much more than a sheer repertoire of prototypical acts to be repeated. Adapting oneself to varying circumstances might mean being able to compare circumstances. Rarely do similarities suffice to indicate paths of action. Analogies between circumstances are rather those that generate various forms of recognizable practices. Our socially inculcated ability to deal with otherness depends on these so-called "scheme transfers" from one part of our social experience to another. According to Pierre Bourdieu, "*habitus*, understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions" supports a vast array of different acts through "analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems" (Bourdieu 1977:83).

Memory seems more to offer these schemes than provide preformed moulds into which the polymorphous social reality can be rigidly classified. Memory thus provides the dwelling practices with forms of action, repertoires of possible tactics actualized to deal with differentiated circumstances. Memory develops the means for habits to be formed and transposed through analogy to different social contexts.

An "aftermath" appears to be a situation resulting from a decisive and usually disastrous blow to the flow of habits. This blow is connected to a quite literal suspension of habitation time. What we have in an aftermath is the awareness of a rupture, a stop, and at the same time anxiety about the future. The experience of otherness seems to prevail.

Memory is strongly disconcerted when involved in a situation of aftermath. Available schemes usually get paralyzed when confronted with conditions that appear to be completely different from those already experienced by individuals or social groups. Memory, both individual and collective, has to accommodate a major traumatic trace that upsets memory routines, habits of practice based on recognizable schemes.

If however habitation practices are not simply the opposite of the experience of otherness, then we can discover, hidden in an aftermath, the possibility of a time-awareness already present in everyday life. The experience of time discontinuity connected with the aftermath is already part of dwelling practices. Habit is always imposed against the differentiations produced by time; it is always established in the process of defining time as rhythmically constituted. Memory, according to Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, is essentially influenced by those diverse rhythms of social and urban life that constitute the present. "The succession of alterations, of differential repetitions, suggests that somewhere in this present is an order which comes from elsewhere and reveals itself" (Lefebvre 1996:223)[2].

Humans weave time into a coherent medium of social reproduction. Their experience however has always to deal with ruptures, turning points, unparalleled circumstances. Let us imagine people in a situation of an aftermath, not as com-

2 Accordingly, "every rhythm implies the relation of a time with a place" (*ibid.* 230).

pletely helpless in front of a totally and unbelievably new experience, but rather as suddenly confronting the social logic of time that characterizes their society. They might hurriedly attempt to bridge the gap between the past and the future that an unforeseen present has created. Or they might start questioning themselves about the very foundations of their habits as practices to accommodate otherness. And this last attitude might provide them with the means to rethink how social conventions and schemes of behavior have formed dwelling practices as well as dwelling values.

What the aftermath is catalyzing is the awareness of the constructed nature of habits. In the experience of one's world distrupted or even destroyed, one is forced to see yesterday's habits as meaningless. The inherent artificiality of habits is thus exposed. It is not because of a generalized cynicism that prevails in human interactions today, as Paolo Virno suggests, but due to a situation that lifts the veil of legitimization supporting established habits that we are able to see "the naked rules which artificially structure the boundaries of action" (Virno 2004:87).

An experience of the aftermath: inhabiting a "state of exception"

The aftermath has to be a new spatial experience: for an aftermath to be experienced as a rupture in sequence of habits, new conditions of dwelling must emerge:. Space has changed. Space has become other, it has become difficult to appropriate, unhomely. It is actually through space that we experience the time rupture that marks the aftermath. Space that used to be familiar becomes unhomely only to hypostasize time as other.

A certain kind of uncanny feeling might be considered to appear in the experience of an aftermath. If we are to accept Freud's hypothesis, "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien but something which is familiar and old established in the mind" (Freud 1975[1919]:24). The experience of the aftermath might produce a "return of the repressed", suddenly exposing the work of the unconscious focused on hiding the fact that inhabitation is always a process generated by an emergent otherness. In a way, this feeling is the opposite of a generalized collective nostalgia for "home" produced, as Vilder claims, in response to the modernist campaign against the "unhealthy preoccupations" of memory (Vilder 1992:64). Modernists tried to eliminate all those spaces and objects in the house that could eventually mediate an "unhealthy" relation with the past. Nostalgia does not reveal the existence of otherness in the center of dwelling practices, quite the contrary, it fashions a mythologized essence of dwelling that only knows sameness, repetition and safety.

We can perhaps understand the power that experiences of the aftermath have to upset the social regulation of space and time by examining a specific case of aftermath that directly asks for new ways to deal with the spatiality of memory. Our case also reveals that we need a reassessment of architectural thought and practice in the face of collectively experienced spatio-temporal ruptures. Are we to close the gap, preserve it, architecturally commemorate it, or attempt to transform it by creating spatialities of a different historical awareness?

In Gyaros, a small desert island of the Cyclades, Greece, a highly indicative collective experience of aftermath unfolded at the end of a devastating civil war. Starting in 1947, a huge concentration camp was constructed there, comprising five differ-

ent settlements situated in neighboring bays. Barbed wire and guards separated the settlements, made of military tents and a few barracks. There, hundreds of inmates had to live under extremely difficult conditions; they were forced to work on the construction of their own future prison buildings, or simply bullied into carrying stones from the mountains to the sea as a form of torture. Accused of supporting the left wing guerillas and the fighters of the National Liberation Front (EAM), those prisoners belonged in one way or another to the defeated of the civil war (Svoronos 1972) .

Gyaros was conceived of as a prison-island for political prisoners. In the first period of its use (1947-52) around 15,000 prisoners were kept in Gyaros, usually transferred from other urban prisons. Most of them were accused of participating in crimes that they had never committed or were simply sentenced as "enemies of the state". In the 1945 Treaty of Varkiza, the left wing resistance army agreed to be disarmed. However, violating the treaty, the new Greek army organized by the British explicitly supported right wing terror. This politics culminated in the 1947 government's decision to outlaw all left wing organizations. Martial courts passed sentences on many people in a virtual "state of exception" that remained effective at least until the end of the second phase of the civil war (this phase was characterized by the decision of Greek Communist Party to respond in arms). During this period many were tortured and at least 20 died in Gyaros while many others were transferred to die in prison hospitals. Gyaros was closed down in 1952. It reopened in 1955 and was shut down again in 1962 as a result of protests and appeals mainly from Europe. During the military dictatorship (1967-1974) Gyaros was used again for political prisoners (6,000 inmates, including women) who were incarcerated there for almost a year. A general outcry, both in Greece and abroad, resulted in the closing of the prison and the concentration camp by the end of 1967. After a brief re-opening of the prison in response to student mobilizations during the last year of the dictatorship, Gyaros was ultimately closed down not to be used again.

The winners of the civil war created in Gyaros a place beyond and outside the rest of society. Sentenced as "social enemies", and deprived of all of their fundamental rights, prisoners suffered in a "state of exception". Denying them basic human rights, the newly formed post-war Greek state was actually paradigmatically defining the "boundaries" of legitimate action for its citizens. These "others" were to be excluded from society, therefore not protected by the laws that guaranteed their status as prisoners of war. Exception was to illustrate and legitimate the state's exclusive right to use violence. This situation could be described as the "voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency" which, according to Agamben, characterizes modern "state power's immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts" (Agamben 2005:2).

Post-war Greek society was founded upon highly discriminating politics that permeated public life and crippled civil society. The winners did not include in "their" aftermath anyone who dared to oppose them. The prisoners in Gyaros, however, did not simply exist in an aftermath situation that equated to a collective "bare life", a term which describes the legal status of the Nazi camp inhabitants, "stripped of every political status" (Agamben 1998:171). No matter how traumatic the "exception" in which they were forced to live, their life was secretly organized in a way that affirmed

their values and dreams for a more just society. In the everyday habits of the Gyaros camp, life unfolded at two levels. Prisoners had to obey the rules imposed on them and at the same time they were tacitly creating their own rules and the structure of their own social bonds. If we accept James Scott's argument, dominated people invent ways of acting that have a double meaning, disguising behind gestures of conformity practices of resistance, usually "low profile forms of resistance". What Scott terms as "infrapolitics of subordinate groups" (Scott 1990:19) can be attributed to the everyday habits of prisoners.

Collectively, prisoners were thus able to improve with every available means their dwelling environment. A hidden solidarity actually produced spatialities of equality and mutual support. They even managed to build some kind of public space, such as outdoor stages on which recreation performances took place, indirectly helping to raise prisoners' morale. Those spaces essentially differed from those functionally linked with the enforcement of discipline by the camp authorities.

Interviews of ex-prisoners prove that they were aware of a major rupture in their lifetime. What is interesting is that they managed to create, in a collectively written "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990), their own time of new collective habits. Their values in that situation of aftermath were tested in a new dwelling experience, in the organization of everyday life. Well awarene of exception they were living in, prisoners tried to test their own ideas about the future as different from the then present society that violently denied them. We can perhaps say that their experience of the rupture was projected upon a will for rupture, a will to concretize the future as other – which means, restarting the time. The prison-island was meant to constitute a violently imposed spatiotemporal rupture in the life of the exiled. This rupture would construct a space-time of exception that could be prolonged arbitrarily. However, the left exiles, projecting to this incarcerating enclave their own vision for a liberating social rupture, have transformed it to a threshold: in their everyday hidden solidarity they were opening holes, communicating passages, in every spatial and temporal perimeter which was punishingly controlling their life. While inhabiting exception they were implicitly or explicitly fighting to make it porous, permeable. A precarious and contradictory condition indeed. However, sparks of a different public culture became visible as ephemeral thresholds opened the brutally imposed uniformity towards liberating otherness[3].

Can space activate memories of discontinuity?

Recently, a research team of architects teaching in the school of Architecture at the

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3 Michel Agier has noticed similar practices in his studies on UN refugee camps in Kenya. He has observed how people have inhabited exception by creating new forms of sociality and by re-negotiating collective identities: "The camp engenders experiences of hybrid socialization" (Agier 2002: 336). He insists however that there are unsurpassable limits which prevent the camp to evolve to a new form of city and which sustain in people a feeling of uselessness: "It is the liminality of all situations of exodus that gives a frustrated, unfinished character to this type of 'urbanization'" (*ibid*. 337).

National Technical University of Athens[4] became involved with the problem of finding ways to reconstruct the deserted Gyaros as a place of collective memory. How can one indeed spatially inscribe in the landscape of this camp-island a will to commemorate? A careful study and many interviews with survivors did not produce evidences of major heroic events. Heroism was rather to be found in everyday acts of common people. In the various periods that Gyaros was used as a camp or as a secluded prison (such as during the 1967-1973 military dictatorship), people left traces of a collective dwelling on both their improvised shelter constructions and the built environment.

The great prison house that today looks empty and haunted, surrealistically dominating the contour of a small desert island, is just the empty cell of a mundane everyday suffering. What the memories of the prisoners retain are not events but rhythms, rhythms of an everyday life resisting annihilation through the habits of a collective dwelling experience. People remember how cooking was arranged by the prisoners themselves, how work was divided among them, how they secretly organized lessons of various kinds, or how they circulated information from the "outer world". Memories of a different dwelling culture mark the experience of the aftermath in Gyaros. In the paralyzing otherness of the camp, life continued in a different register. New imposed routines mingled with collectively chosen ones, equally new if compared to the ones people had to leave behind.

To recover the traces of collective memory, buried under a collective forgetfulness that has blurred for the younger generations the events and results of the Greek civil war, might mean trying to condense this past experience into a monument. Monuments tend to mark places putting emphasis on events, on acts and heroic deeds. Monuments are "instruments of memory" since they constitute "rhetorical *topoi*", "calendar spaces set aside to commemorate important men and women or past heroic events" (Boyer 1994:343).

A different perspective could be attained through an emphasis on the ways crucial events have altered the life of real and common people. If memory is to be stimulated by specific spatial arrangements, then one could search for a new spatiality that encourages the awareness of time ruptures. Pointing to the memory of discontinuity as it is experienced through a radical change in rhythms of social life, this spatiality has to "monumentalize" dwelling. Dwelling however cannot be monumentalized unless we completely change the content of the experience of the monumental. This would mean considering as memorable or as worth preserving the incomplete and mundane constructions of a hard life, the traces of insignificant everyday acts. One should preserve the small low walls the prisoners have built to secure their tents from the strong winds. One should make it possible for visitors to recognize places important for the daily routines of imprisonment: an old fig tree on which a prisoner was tied to be tortured, a well behind which one could hide for

a while to rest, the remains of an electric station in which an improvised radio was hidden providing access to hopeful news from the outer world, a series of outdoor washtubs, a detention spot exposing the punished prisoners to the burning sun.

Such trivial monuments show how history is lived by people through experiences of discontinuity as well as recurrence. A possibility for temporal discontinuities to rearrange collective memory lies always dormant under experiences of extreme historic ruptures. What we need to remember from Gyaros is the fact that people were forced to abandon the habits of their own memories. What we need to remember is that these people were forced to devise new habits for their survival and that these habits have created a new collective culture. This way, the mundane becomes monumental in its meaning. Memories of discontinuity, as well as the experiences of discontinuity that characterize this period, may mark a collective contemporary awareness. Such an awareness might mean discovering in the aftermath both the devastating effects of a distinction between winners and losers and the foundations of a conformism that marked civil society in a period that has demonized otherness. If we are to understand everyday life as consciously flourishing in a constant negotiation with otherness, then the experience of the aftermath at Gyaros can be highly instructive.

In the experience of the aftermath people are forced to suddenly become aware of time not as a flow marked by habits but as a series of turning points, a series of discontinuities mediating differentiated rhythms. Every turning point, and especially the turning points that dramatically mark an aftermath situation, forces people to compare "before" and "after". This comparison is not simply targeted in marking temporal indicators in a succession but is actually focused on "before" and "after" as mutually exclusive, as essentially other. If memory is fundamentally the locus of comparisons, and analogy is just one form of comparison that attempts to reduce otherness to a recognizable similarity, then comparing "before" and "after" might mean understanding both past and present as open to otherness. The aftermath forces people to rework an interpretation of the past, and the only way to avoid its paralyzing effect is to realize that the experienced situation is not the only possible outcome of what has already happened.

Otherness is included in the past as a potentially other future which was not realized. A turning point, a crossing in time, marks potentially different future perspectives. To explain a disaster thus means to neither attribute it to fate nor regard it as historically inevitable. As Benjamin urges us to think, especially in a moment of danger, in a situation of crisis as in an aftermath, a sudden "profane illumination" may reveal new meanings in the past as it is compared to the present. "To articulate the past historically … means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin 1992:247). The historian "grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (*ibid*. 255). A constellation of past and present actually reveals a past not hitherto realized, a past full of opposing possibilities.

In order to preserve the time-awareness of thresholds in history that experiences of the aftermath activate, we need to develop a memory focused on discontinuity, a memory that records the aftermath as a turning point. This memory of discontinuity

is "rhapsodic"[5].

This memory cannot be condensed in inert structures, it cannot be attributed to places or to emblematic monuments. It unfolds in spatial practices that compare spatial experiences. Comparing places means to become aware of their differences as well as their similarities; it means to realize their interdependence, however different they may be. Commemorating the experience of an aftermath thus means to activate through spatial practices a spatial hermeneutics that is essentially based on the differentiating experience of time.

Instead of searching for places to commemorate, Gyaros forces us to think of routes that may offer to visitors an articulated spatial practice that encourages spatial comparisons. Scattered stones, remains of barbed wire, a ruined guardhouse or a small outdoor fire stove offer the mundane spatial articulations that recite a collective experience of dwelling habits created in the face of otherness. The spatiality of a visiting route is thus not conceived of as a connecting line between glorious destinations (as in a sightseeing tour), but rather as a walking experience that allows you to understand the contrasting qualities of a landscape of hope and terror. Sometimes signs are needed in order suggest comparisons, but once you realize the tension, once you understand that memory has to deal with opposing possibilities, both in the past as well as in the present, you end up performing your own ambiguous spatial as well as temporal experience of comparison. The simple fact that extracted stones can at the same time symbolize the agony of torture as well as the everyday resistance of collective dwelling habits, reveals the power of comparison that can interpret history by experiencing spatial correspondences. Traces cannot be deciphered unless space is perceived as overdetermined in its meaning. Traces do not simply add up to each other, they also compete with each other. The past has left marks that have actually constructed a multiplicity of overlapping spaces.

To activate a memory of discontinuities thus means to retrace conflicting past rhythms which have inhabited conflictual spaces. In front of us lies not a text to be deciphered, but a multiplicity of time-spaces to be perceived in a hermeneutical constellation that reactivates possibilities. In such a context, to remember means to understand and perform spatial practices as constructing and constructed. In the aftermath of a devastating past, such a creative hermeneutical constellation may resurface as a spatiotemporal experience open towards historical otherness.

In the experiences of exile, uprooting or disaster, life habits are violently suspended or destroyed. Spatial and temporal discontinuity threaten the characterizing rhythmicalities of common life. Do these conditions inevitably create and legitimate forcefully defined enclaves of exception in which people are, explicitly or implicitly, imprisoned? Is exception only and always a trap?

When people manage to inhabit exception, when people manage to perforate the defining perimeter of their enclave, they can transform exception into a potential threshold. Thresholds connect and separate, thresholds compare. People inhabiting exception seek to activate this comparing power of thresholds in order to open the self-contained secluded and controlled locus of exception. Comparing, they can

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5 In Benjamin's words, "remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative … but must … essay its spade in ever new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers" (Benjamin 1985a:314).
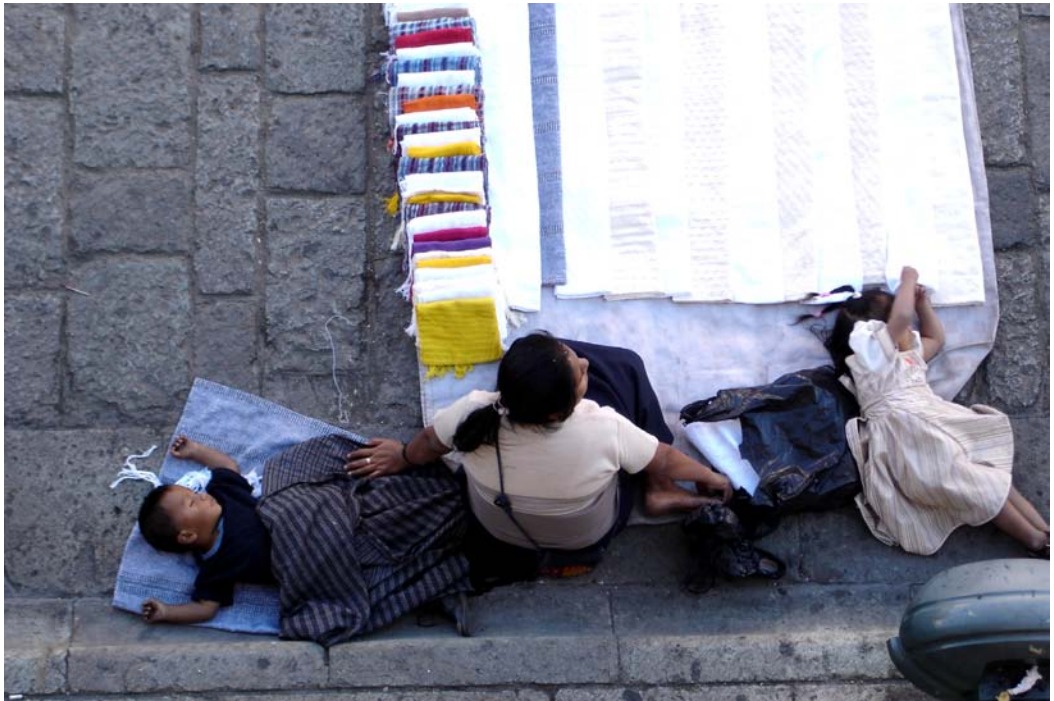
Pict. 4. Indigenous woman in Oaxaca, Mexico – Life on the threshold.
(Photo by John Davis)

invent, improvise, and probingly discover otherness, not simply outside the defining perimeter but as a relationship between "inside" and "outside". An encounter with otherness emerges, thus, which is opposed to the experience of being engulfed by otherness as happens when exception closes around you. Exception is condemnation: life completely given over to otherness.

In the process of inhabiting exception, new rhythmicalities may emerge. If these are, however, rhythmicalities that deviate from imposed habits, then they are constituted by and through performed comparisons. Rhythms become creative responses to violent ruptures of time since they are in a constant negotiation with experiences of temporal discontinuity. Exiles, immigrants, displayed populations, victims of natural or human inflicted disaster, have to live with these experiences. But they can discover in themselves the possibility to live differently, to live in a continuous inventive negotiation with otherness.

We can learn from the efforts and often contradictory behavior of people inhabiting exception. If we want to understand how thresholds, as spatiotemporal artifacts, can encourage liberating encounters with otherness, then these exceptional collective experiences (or rather these collective experiences of exception) are extremely valuable.

People, trapped in exception, devise ways to live and react, to open the engulfing enclosure that surrounds them. In their acts, the prospect of a city of thresholds can be only vaguely present. But, the city of thresholds can only be an always precarious, uneven and multiform process of human emancipation. Different experiences and different forms of collective action can contribute to it, as long as they create opportunities for encounter between collective identities which are open to mutual awareness and approaching negotiations. Being able to creatively deal with otherness, as immigrants and exiles do by inhabiting exception, is a prerequisite for every attempt to imagine and pursue a different, liberating future.

Collective memories of discontinuity will be of great value, if we are to understand the city of thresholds not only as a future possibility but also as a latent promise already contained in the past. In the next chapter, Walter Benjamin will help us locate in modernity's betrayed liberating promise a major opportunity for the city to become a place of collective emancipation. The city of thresholds, precarious and ambiguous as it is, could have been the cultural pattern through which modern cities would become performed spaces of human emancipation. As we will see, it was modern city's spatiotemporal discontinuity that sustained not only the promise of emancipatory inhabiting practices, but also the nightmare of a new normative spatial order and the equally disenfranchising glamour of urban phantasmagoria.

PART II

CHAPTER 3
Walter Benjamin's thresholds

Traces and individuality

Memory, this ability to compare past and present, can, as we have seen, reinterpret and create rhythmicalities, it can inhabit and divert exception. Memory gives differing meanings to experienced spatiotemporal discontinuities. Benjamin's emphasis on historical discontinuity, along with his "archeological" search in urban modernity's recent past, gives to memory a paradoxical role, essentially based on memory's power to compare, discovering in the past passages to a different future. In his attempt to see in modernity's break with the past the possibility of a liberating future, we can trace the theoretical importance of thresholds: those moments in time and space when and where the promise of a future which will not repeat the past emerges.

There is an ongoing discussion on the qualities and characteristics of modern urban culture. We can, indeed, understand modern city life as a multiform diversity of individualized practices, which, erupting mainly during the 19th century, created an impression of urban chaos and formal indeterminacy. If, however, we aim at discovering patterns in modern urban experience, as it was formed and expressed in public behavior, then we need to search for those theoretical tools that can effectively deal with the diversity of urban experiences. In this research, we can follow a well marked path: we can utilize a bipolar analysis in order to classify forms of urban experience. Depending on the premises of each employed theory, the opposition of public versus private may become central or, alternatively, traditional versus modern, visual versus tactile, mental versus bodily and so on.

We can, however, attempt to establish distinctions that permit the surfacing of in-between elements. Similar elements can effectively present urban experience as essentially dynamic and in-the-making. Benjamin's theoretical propositions may be used in such a context, since his "dialectics at a standstill" offers us an insight into urban experience through the study of emblematic figures that not only represent antithetical attitudes towards city life, but actually live in precarious urban thresholds. Understanding modernity, as promise and nightmare at the same time, meant for Benjamin that urban modern experience contains elements of both. Urban life cannot simply be analyzed as a coherent structure of recurrent experiences but should rather be understood as a hybrid synthesis of potentially liberating and, at the same time, "re-enchanting" experiences. Eventually, urban experience can be conceptu-

alized through the use of terms such as "threshold", "caesura" or "passage" that can effectively combine, as in Benjamin's thought, spatial as well as temporal aspects of those inherently dynamic elements that mould city life. Such a theoretical perspective can perhaps provide us with a method inherently influenced by its object. And this may have been one of the main Benjamin's contributions to our understanding of modernity.

Metropolitan experience is a shock experience. City space-time is experienced through the traumatic mediation of shock. Already in the nineteenth century, big cities constitute an unprecedented spatiotemporal condition. Being in public space increasingly becomes an ordeal. Individuals have to cope with an accelerating tempo of fragmentary impressions which are smashing the spatial and temporal continuity of traditional collective experience. Individuals have to learn how to respond to demanding stimuli, adapting their public behavior to an emerging metropolitan experience. The result is a kind of anesthetization, according to Simmel and Benjamin, that leads people to assume a so-called "blasé attitude" in order to be safely able to absorb ever-increasing assaults on their senses (Simmel 1997a:69-79).

Individual consciousness, under these conditions, is disengaged from collective memories and common experiences. No experience is allowed to leave its mark in the depths of individual memory, no experience is compared to previous events, no experience acquires its weight and meaning in the context of shared traditions. Conveniently stored in individual memory, such "depthless" experiences are always recallable through a conscious memory able to classify and control them (cf. Benjamin 1983:117). Experiences thus become their own yardstick: each one self-contained and singular.

A bourgeois cult of individuality is necessarily connected to a cult of individual experience. Individuality is supposedly constructed out of an accumulation of distinct and presentable experiences. And commodities are advertised, sold and consumed as mediators of recognizable experiences that eventually construct life-story profiles. No matter how individual experiences are regulated through consumption, they function as indicators of personality in a society that makes individualism its prime legitimating ideology.

However, even though experiences in metropolitan modernity are individualized, no individual marks can be traced on the body of the city. Individuality is condensed in a fleeting presentation of the self in public space, a transitory and ambiguous appearance that many times needed to be deciphered by a physiognomist's gaze. Individuality leaves no traces in public space. It is only in the interior of the private shelter that bourgeois individuality can be lastingly presented, and for that to happen traces of individual experience need to be preserved.

As Benjamin observes, the private individual (*der Privatmann, le particulier*) "makes his entry into history" (Benjamin 1999b:19) creating in the domestic interior a private universe. And this universe is like a shell (Benjamin 1999:220, compare Benjamin 1999d:264), a cavern (Benjamin1999:216), actually it is a case (*étui*) (Benjamin 1999b:20) where an obsession with the preservation of traces prevails[1].

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1 "Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city … It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost" (*ibid*.).

What is this obsession with traces? And how is it connected with an 'addiction to dwelling' (Benjamin 1999:220) that prevailed in nineteenth century, making every private individual feel homesick even while being at home? (*ibid*. 218). "The collector is the true resident of the interior" (Benjamin 1999a:9). This Benjaminean phrase summarizes the attitude of the nineteenth-century private individual towards his or her private shelter. Collecting is a way of attributing value to traces. Collected things are stripped from any use value and can only convey the impression of taking hold of past experiences. Things represent those experiences through the marks, the traces that they bear. In this way "collecting is a form of practical memory" (Benjamin 1999:205). And this memory that reconstructs out of an ordered series of objects a sequence of time, is in a crucial way analogous to the memory that records everyday shock experiences. Both kinds of memory are inclined towards an ordering function, both "struggle against dispersion" (*ibid*. 211) both actually protect consciousness from the traumatic experience of a dismantled social time.

The collector attempts to control and to order the past. He[2] thus tames past relics, neutralizing the power objects have to display history as a form of comparison between different past epochs. The collector brings together what he considers as belonging together. In a somewhat futile effort, since every new acquired item may jeopardize instead of verifying the collection's order, the collector brings what is far in time in the present, very near. He eliminates the distance that exists between his time and the object's time. And this happens because the object is petrified (*ibid*. 205) as the seal of possession extracts it from the flow of time. Collecting, thus, is a gesture of preservation and "of all the profane manifestations of 'nearness' it is the most binding" (*ibid*.).

Benjamin defines the trace as the "appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be … In the trace, we gain possession of the thing" (*ibid*. 447). It is this power of traces that the collector activates. But he reverses the process: it is not observed traces that bring near the thing which left them behind, it is objects, "things", which bring traces of the past near, into the collector's present. What is lost in this process however, is the essentially relative character of traces: traces don't belong to things, traces are not identified by the things that bear them. We, as interpreters of the past, observe and understand as traces certain changes in objects. We have therefore to compare different past periods in order to be able to discover, name, describe and evaluate traces. The collector's obsession with traces and his "tactile instinct" (*ibid*. 206) are both expressions of a will to possess. The collector is primarily an owner[3]. In collecting, a certain compensatory behavior unfolds, which aims at the elimination of a feeling of loss. And this loss has to do with the elimination of individual traces in the experience of urban public space. Resisting this loss, the private individual builds a shelter for his individuality. And he accumulates tokens of this individuality in the form of collected objects. These objects speak about him. Their history ends up in his acquiring them, and he represents their fate. So, these objects are not valuable because of the traces of bygone times,

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2 We will follow Benjamin's own gendered language.

3 A kind of sublimated owner indeed, since his objects are detached from use, "freed from the drudgery of being useful" (Benjamin 1999b:19). Or, perhaps, the owner par excellence, since his attitude expresses not only a practice but also an ideology of possession.

but because somebody, the collector, reads in these traces an origin and a fate. This makes the collector a connoisseur, someone who can bestow on objects a "connoisseur value" (Benjamin 1999:9, 19). Owning things collected means thus verifying the status of a peculiar individuality that can acquire meaning only because it supports a distinctive talent of choosing. The collector not only exhibits but actually builds his identity out of the collected objects.

The private man as collector arranges his domestic interior as a gigantic still-life. Let us remember: both everyday objects and artworks are present in the still life paintings of 17th century Dutch art. Objects are meticulously exhibited, arranged as they are in a setting that presents their characteristics through a peculiar "art of describing" (Alpers 1983). No matter how ephemeral their appearance may be, depicted objects are immobilized. The flow of bourgeois domestic time is interrupted and the depicted scenes assume an emblematic character. This is what makes still life paintings appropriate mediators of a "tremendous pride in possessions" (*ibid*. 100 and Berger 1972). The private man as collector performs an analogous exhibition of objects extracted from their use context in a gesture that reminds us of the ethos of still-life (or *nature morte* if you prefer). His canvases are in effect the cases that he obsessively uses to frame domestic objects.

"What didn't the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for! Pocket watches, slippers, eggcups, thermometers, playing cards –and in lieu of cases, there were jackets, carpets, wrappers and covers" (Benjamin 1999:220). Indeed, the house itself becomes an enormous case where the individual finds his place prepared, much in the same way that the outline of a pipe in a pipe's case awaits for the actual object.

Encased in his private shelter, he himself encasing every object that presents him to others, the private individual is trapped in a historically specific power of traces. True, "to dwell means to leave traces" (Benjamin 1999a:9) as Benjamin proposes. But the private individual, in an emphatic fetishization of traces, ends up being controlled by traces. Much in the same way that a pipe's contour in a pipe's case precedes the actual object, the domestic interior as case precedes and pre-orders domestic life. The individuality constructed out of a collection of objects ends up being a typified individuality much in the same way that an object's case, no matter how it appears to be specifically and distinctively prepared for it, is actually a typical case for a typical object.

The case, instead of preserving traces as markers of time and use, renders objects unapproachable, kept away, preserved. Objects attain an exhibition value, actually a "cult value" (Benjamin 1992a:218), presenting an illusion of individuality. Objects become the markers of a mythologized individuality[4]. In a sisyphean enterprise of seeking individuality in an alienating world, the bourgeois private individual is actually falling victim of a mythology of traces. Traces of collected objects act as markers of aura, that is they destroy the "appearance of nearness" in a recreated "manifestation of a distance". "The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth", to use the other half of the already mentioned crucial passage. Traces thus become vehicles of aura, nearness is transformed into distance and a

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4 Benjamin insists: "The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions" (Benjamin 1999a:8).

kind of re-enchantment of the interior happens as metropolitan phantasmagoria takes possession of the domestic universe[5].

Whereas "in the trace we gain possession of the thing: in the aura it takes possession of us" (Benjamin 1999:447). This is not however the aura of tradition. This is more of an aura of invented tradition intended to integrate the universe of bourgeois normality into the frenetic ephemerality of modernity. Indeed, in the artificially created aura of interior phantasmagorias surfaces the drama of modernity: the promise of emancipation and Enlightment is belied in the nightmare of re-enchantment. Phantasmagoria, propelling a fetishization of consumption, is restoring a magical belief in object relations that can effectively replace human relations[6].

Bourgeois domestic interior is arranged as a domestic showcase where objects on display present their owners. Showcases and museum exhibitions share one common element: an arrangement of objects becomes meaningful because it is supposed to present the spirit of an epoch. Fashionable goods on display, thus, are taken to present a modern spirit. Showcase arrangements change often, of course. However, the logic of the arrangement remains the same, therefore always recognizable. Display always makes objects appear as unapproachable, preserved, out of the flow of time. Showcases can be described as "museums of the present" (and advertising constructions can analogously be considered as "monuments to the present"). Bourgeois domestic interiors combine the ethos of museum collections and the phantasmagoria of modern showcases. Phantasmagorias of the interior are thus meaningful object arrangements which, no matter how fast they may change (due to the ever increasing tempo of consumption), bear the aura of a "modern tradition".

In such a tradition, bourgeois hegemonic values impose themselves as the horizon of normality while subverting modernity's liberating promises of change to the ephemeral whims of fashion. Perhaps those phantasmagorias can eventually be thought of as museums of the owner's present. And they can effectively create the image of an individuality that is not constructed out of 'family narratives' or memories of distinctive acts, but out of a display of possessions. Bourgeois identities are thus understood and presented more in terms of space than in terms of time.

The flaneur and urban phantasmagoria

As a figure, the flaneur is in many ways the opposite of the private individual. The flaneur lives in public space. The streets, the boulevards and, above all, the Parisian

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5 "Phantasmagorias of the interior" become in this way the private man's "universe" (*ibid*. 9).
6 According to Rolf Tiedemann, "the concept of phantasmagoria that Benjamin repeatedly employs seems to be another term for what Marx called commodity fetishism" (Tiedeman1999:938). Benjamin, however, was more interested in "the expression of the economy in its culture" (Benjamin1999:460) than in the laws of capitalist economy per se. Therefore, he considers phantasmagorias of the interior, not simply as the result of a bourgeois domestic economy (connected to both consumption and production) but as the product of an expressive behavior that transfigures commodities to mediators of modern myth. And this myth is creating, out of the reality of commodity fetishism, a culture that constructs individual mythologies by manipulating object relations.

arcades are his home[7]. In a way, the flaneur seeks and produces at the same time marks of individuality not in his private shelter but out there, in metropolitan public space. He observes and often writes about city-life while being "jostled" by the crowd, inside "an immense reservoir of electric energy", as Baudelaire describes metropolitan crowds (Benjamin 1999:443). A true physiognomist, he seeks out what is distinctive, what is particular in the everyday panoramas of city life as they unfold in front of his eyes. He attributes value to small incidents, he explores fleeting images, fleeting gestures, ephemeral and chance encounters. The flaneur thus becomes a sublimated detective (*ibid*. 442). His passion for minute details revealing small dramas or well hidden misdeeds makes him the perfect tracer. His hypersensitive sight interprets everything as a trace.

Whereas the private individual collects in his private shelter traces of a studiously fabricated individuality, the flaneur searches for traces that will reveal individual trajectories in public space. The individuality that he seeks out in the streets is the very same fleeting individuality that dissatisfies the private individual who feels that there are no individual traces in public space. And whereas the private individual dedicates the phantasmagorias of interior to a 'monumental' individuality that resists the transitoriness of modern life, the flaneur discovers in the depth of this transitoriness traces of an ephemeral, anonymous – if this is not a contradiction in terms – individuality. Immersed in public phantasmagorias he likes "to read from faces the profession, the ancestry, the character"(*ibid*. 429).

The private individual as a city-dweller crosses public space with his eyes "overburdened with protective functions"(Benjamin1983:151). Eyes that have lost the ability to meaningfully communicate and return the gaze, are eyes that are only used to inform, protect and guide. A protective anesthetization prevails in the behavior of the city dweller[8]. Being in the street means being able to conform to rules, to adapt to typical situations with minimum involvement. On the opposite, the flaneur empathizes with the crowd (*ibid*. 54). He feels the energy, the sparks, the dangers, the passions. And this attitude is expressed through an aestheticizing of metropolitan life. The flaneur is a aesthete. He views everything as aesthetically meaningful. That is why he presents himself in public through gestures of emphatic theatricality: taking a turtle for a walk, dressing sometimes as a dandy, appearing strange in the middle of the crowd, playing with imitative behavior, vanishing and surfacing again in many disguises. Zygmunt Bauman is right to suggest that "the job of the flaneur is to rehearse the world as a theatre, life as a play" (Bauman1994:146).

This attitude, as opposed to that of the private individual in the streets who, anaesthetized, cannot feel or recognise auratic elements in metropolitan landscape, is an attitude of auratic appreciation. City life resumes in the eyes of the flaneur a peculiar aura. Through a day-dreaming gaze that reintroduces a perspective between the flaneur and the fleeting metropolitan images "a unique manifestation of distance" is perceived. What for others is protectively presented as ordinary, for him becomes strange. Everything assumes the status of a work of art, every object becomes able

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7 "The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafes are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done" (Benjamin 1983:37).

8 "There is no daydreaming surrender to faraway things in the protective eyes" (*ibid*.).

to return the gaze.

Such an aestheticization of metropolitan experience makes the flaneur a possible co-producer of urban phantasmagoria. Adding through his gestures or writings to the spectacular character of a culture dedicated to "commodity worship", he may eventually become a mediating figure in the re-enchantment of public life. "The flaneur-as-idler is thus doubly phantasmagoric: in what he writes (the physiologies) and what he does (the pretence of aristocratic idleness and the reality of bourgeois commercial interest)" (Gilloch 1997:156).

The decline of aura connected to anesthetization and alienating shock absorption is positively reserved in a constructed metropolitan mythology: The modern "transitory gods" (Buck-Morss 1991:259) only participate in a fetishization of newness necessary for the cult of consumption. And newness "is the quintessence of that false consciousness whose indefatigable agent is fashion" (Benjamin1999a:11).

Public phantasmagorias are enhanced by the flaneur, this peculiar intellectual-aesthete, who makes his profession to pursue the novelties of modern life. Everything he observes is above all marked by a halo of newness, originality. This turns out to be a quest for individuality and distinctive particularity, a quest for fashionable novelties in every aspect of public life (dressing, behavior, the arts, city places, views, technological gadgets etc.).

The dialectics of de-enchantment

This is not however the only possible role for the flaneur. He is not necessarily someone who, in a tension between an empathetic relation with the crowd and a distantiated aesthetic gaze, actually contributes to a mythologizing metropolitan aura. In Baudelaire's allegorical gaze a new kind of aura seems to surface. The allegorist is opposed to the collector in aiming not at the construction of a signifying order but at a meaningful dislodging of acts and objects from their context (Benjamin1999:329). The allegorist, hollowing out objects of their mythology, exposes them. He alienates objects from their habitual use only to expose alienation as a general characteristic of city life[9].

The flaneur- allegorist is not simply letting himself become possessed by the thing, that is, letting a phantasmagoric aura overcome him. He attributes to things an aura that exposes them, an aura that reveals the potentialities hidden beneath the mythologizing surface. The flaneur-allegorist uses the ways and the language of myth in order to reveal the mythic element in the culture of modernity.

Decontextualized images of metropolitan modernity assume the status of emblematic ciphers, where meaning becomes the product of revealing correspondences. This is how the image of the prostitute can become an allegory of commodification and images of the boulevards can serve as allegories of modernity's inner contradictions. "The setting that makes all urban humanity a great extended 'family of eyes' also brings forth the discarded stepchildren of that family … The glitter lights up the rubble and illuminates the dark lives of the people at whose

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9 He thus "loses every intimacy with things" (*ibid.* 336). And as a wanderer, he rediscovers the look of children always dazzled in front of the metropolitan scenes and always inventive in their appropriation of the outmoded, the discarded, the insignificant.

expense the bright lights shine" (Berman 1983:153).

Myth appears to work in a similar way. Attributing to acts and objects the "unique manifestation of a distance", (Benjamin1983:148) myth actually constructs "ceremonial images" (*ibid*.) out of which a uniform meaning of life is imposed. Allegory can be an antidote to myth, as Benjamin (1980,I:667)proposes only by using myth's constituent elements: images. However, allegory deprives images of any ceremonial value, using them instead as a means to bypass mythical obstacles. Allegory thus becomes a form of knowledge through images, which may bring into light what due to the work of myth remains collectively unconscious. And in order to reveal what is socially repressed, allegory has to employ images that through associations may circumscribe the meaning of collective dreams. Those dreams are not simply interpreted allegorically but read as "distorted representations" as Weigel suggests (Weigel 1996:103).

 The allegorical gaze does not aesthetisize, being thus an unwilled collaborator to advertising spectacles, either staged in International Expositions or dispersed in metropolitan landscapes. The allegorical gaze purposefully distorts, much in the same way that the meaning of a dream is concealed behind a distorting mechanism. The allegorical gaze therefore does not simply demystify. It uses mythical elements in order to reveal the dominant myths. The auratic force discovered by the allegorical gaze is not the product of the mystifying aura of commodity fetishism. Rather, its force results from revealed correspondences, from chance encounters which illuminate new possibilities for deciphering the culture of modernity.

In order for the specific aura of the allegorical approach to be able to surface, a very delicate treatment of experience appears necessary. Benjamin is attributing this treatment to the genius of Baudelaire. Or, is he perhaps projecting his own ideas to the work and practices of an extremely ambiguous and talented poet of the nineteenth century? In any case, this idea is revealed in a somewhat enigmatic commentary on Baudelaire's criticism of paintings: "Baudelaire insists on the magic of distance; he goes so far as to judge landscapes by the standard of paintings in the booths at fairs. Does he mean the magic of distance to be pierced, as must happen when the spectator steps too close to the depicted scene?" (Benjamin 1983:152).

Here we find a suggestion about the ability of the allegorical gaze to destroy through aura itself the deceptive aura of metropolitan phantasmagoria. This may happen in the fleeting moment of a sudden revelation. And it will have the form of a peculiar clash between absolute distance (magic distance, auratic distance) and absolute nearness. A peculiar dialectic of aura and trace is at work here. The flaneur-as-detective feels empathetically close to the crowd. "Botanising on the asphalt" (*ibid*. 36) he steps too close to the scenes of urban life. He observes, touches, smells, hears: he is immersed in the materiality of the city. This attitude exposes what is hidden, demystifies, and eventually contributes to a withering of aura, since the "appearance of nearness" prevails over the "appearance of distance". "The desire of contemporary masses to bring things closer spatially and humanly" (Benjamin1992a:217) as described by Benjamin, is "also a stepping too close to what is depicted", whether it is reproduced works of art, architecture of, indeed, film. The public, as an "absent-minded examiner" (*ibid*. 234) who is not absorbed by the work of art, is correspondingly not possessed by the work's aura.

However, tracing on the surface of things, experiencing closeness, is not enough in order to understand, all the more so if understanding means discovering the hidden potentialities of past and present. One needs, to use a Baudelaire's phrase, the "useful illusion" (Benjamin 1983:51) of the magic of distance. The simultaneous experience of distance and nearness, perhaps seemingly indicates an impossible position. Or, does it indeed indicate a precarious position where under the tension of two conflicting tendencies one can suddenly realise the ambiguous status of reality? Reality is not what remains after lifting the veil of myth because myth is a constituent element of the historically specific reality of modernity. This reality is revealed in the process of piercing the veil for just a fleeting moment. This reality is present in the act of its momentary redemption by an allegorical gaze.

A "study of thresholds"

Trace and aura oppose each other, in the same way as the experience of nearness opposes the experience of distance. In the dialectics of their simultaneous influence a third element emerges. This element is not a synthesis of opposites, it rather constitutes a field of force activated by opposites. That is why this element can be invoked in a so-called "dialectics at a standstill". Where tension between dialectical opposites is the greatest, thinking coming to a standstill recognizes a "dialectical image". This third element must have the revealing power of such an image (Benjamin 1999:463 and 475).

In the middle of this force field, an always precarious, dangerous, constantly in abeyance and almost impossible to occupy place surfaces. Benjamin attributes to it the status of a "caesura" (Benjamin 1999:475) that indicates a possible passage: a threshold. It is in the power of thresholds to unite what is separate and to separate what is different (Simmel 1997a:68-69). To experience the power of thresholds means to realize that nearness and distance are simultaneously activated in the dialectics of comparison: the separating action of thresholds differentiates adjacent areas. Nearness, therefore, is operative in creating the distance of difference. At the same time, however, thresholds unite, bring close those areas that difference tends to keep apart. Thresholds create out of distances a nearness without which differences will never be able to constitute themselves as mutually "others".

The trace-aura dialectics can thus be crystallized in the concept of threshold. This concept can express the dynamics of temporal and spatial discontinuity. Recognizing turning points in the past, where potential alternatives to past history are revealed is a crucial element in Benjamin's critique of historicism (Benjamin 1992:254). Can't we infer an analogous treatment of the mythologized metropolitan experience? Winfried Menninghaus proposes that Benjamin's work can be "construed as a multifarious 'study of thresholds" (*Schwellenkunde*) (Menninghaus 1991:309). In such a study, the flaneur, the "connoisseur of thresholds", is himself a figure on the threshold (Benjamin 1999a:10). Immersed in urban phantasmagoria and at the same time distantiated from it, the flaneur embodies the ambiguous power of thresholds. His position, very near to and very far from the metropolitan crowd, enables him to experience the illuminating sparks ignited exactly on this verge.

The allegorist flaneur not only appreciates the threshold character of specific urban places but actually, in the art of loosing himself in the city (Benjamin 1985a:298)

decomposes the unity of urban phantasmagoria. He thus invents points of rupture in urban space, passages, thresholds. Deliberately destroying the continuity of any urban trajectory by refusing to accept what constitutes a trajectory's meaning (its destination), the flaneur experiences the city as fragmented and dispersed[10].

By combining near and far, by comparing fragments of space as well as fragments of the city's history, the flaneur reads the city not as the coherent text of "progress" but as the multifarious allegory of modernity. The allegorical gaze does not discover an alternative narrative but many new constellations of meaning, each one of them pointing to the inherently ambiguous, contradictory and potentially emancipating character of urban modernity.

Involuntary remembrances emerge in experiences of temporal discontinuity. According to Benjamin, "he who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself as a man digging" (Benjamin1985a:314). The excavation site thus becomes a threshold to the past, and every unexpected finding mediates a re-emerging of past experiences[11]. In the experience of involuntary remembrances, a threshold opens toward the past. In a revelatory momentary flash, past becomes suddenly near while traces appear emphatically legible. However, no matter how forceful the experience that "calls it forth", the past remains distant, unapproachable, radiating the aura of its uniqueness. Perhaps we can understand Benjamin's concept of actualisation (*Aktualisierung*) (Benjamin1999:392, 460) as the piercing of the unavoidable magic of distance that separates us from the past, by "stepping too close" to the material concreteness of the traces left by past experiences. Actualisation, which aims at blasting open the continuum of history, can thus be considered as an act of creating thresholds that unite while separating past and present. Those thresholds can indeed be characterised by the "now of a particular recognisability" (*ibid*. 463).

It is by no chance that the *Arcades Project* focuses on a type of urban space that possesses the characteristics of a threshold. The arcades, existing between public and private space, between street and shop, are home for the flaneur and at the same time urban phantasmagorias for the private individual. Above all, however, the arcades present in a concrete form the ambiguous character of modernity as hope and hell simultaneously. According to Caygil, Benjamin "read this prematurely archaic form of architecture speculatively, that is, as containing latent unrealised futures". (Caygil 1998:133).

In the dialectical image of the arcades the "tension between dialectical opposites is greatest" (Benjamin1999:475). And this fact makes the arcades an appropriate locus for the precarious experience of a 'profane illumination' where distance is pierced by nearness and collective dreams reveal their liberating potential exactly as they are pierced at the moment of a forced awakening. Dwelling is dialectically presented in the arcades only as a possibility. On the threshold, between public and private space, the potentiality of a modern liberating dwelling experience flashes illuminatingly.

In the essay *Experience and Poverty*, Benjamin calls for a "positive concept of barba-

10 Combining those fragments in unexpected ways, flanerie provides the ground for sudden revelations. This is how, "in the course of flanerie, far off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment" (Benjamin1999:419).

11 We have already encountered in chapter 2 Benjamin's idea of rhapsodic remembrance.

rism" that may profit from the growing "poverty of experience" in modern life in order to encourage a new, liberating start, "by clearing a tabula rasa" (Benjamin 1999c:732). A new housing culture is needed for such a new start, a housing culture hostile to the "coziness" of bourgeois domestic interiors.[12] Glass becomes the appropriate building material for such a culture, being the enemy of secrets, the enemy of possession, the enemy of aura, the enemy of the interior-as-collection. Glass is simultaneously an enemy of traces, making it difficult for the owner to leave his mark in his domestic environment (*ibid*.).

Can we possibly imagine that Benjamin was actually thinking of glass as the material to realise this precarious piercing of the magic of distance by absolute nearness? Glass, indeed, exposes, bringing the interior very close to the exterior. Glass, however, preserves the "useful illusion" of the "magic of distance" becoming a kind of screen on which the faraway is projected as in a "view", a panorama. Being thus the enemy of aura and trace at the same time, glass is actually in the centre of their dialectical opposition.

Can we discover in these thoughts an alternative to nineteenth-century dwelling experience, an alternative that attempts to embrace twentieth century's optimistic "transitoriness of dwelling" with its "porosity and transparency"? (Benjamin 1999:221). This idea, clearly, should not be identified with the nightmarish reality of Modern Movement's housing blocs, hotel rooms or office towers. Benjamin was perhaps trying to integrate a heroic affirmation of modernist values (which capitalist modernity has twisted in order to confirm to the myth of progress) into a philosophy that focuses on revealing discontinuities.

Glass appeared to him as the element that could mediate this experience of discontinuity both in time and space: between inner and outer space, glass forms a precarious threshold always being virtually crossed, a threshold that separates and unites public and private, nature and culture, inside and outside. Maybe for Benjamin the glass panel assumes the role of an allegorical threshold, a threshold which represents the revealing potential of the dialectics of nearness and distance. Glass could thus express as a "dialectical image", the "piercing" of "the magic of distance". Unfortunately, the reality of the modernist glass-culture, did not bring forth the threshold character of this modern building material. It is more in agreement with Benjamin's ideas to admit that *Glasskultur* was a potentially liberating culture, provided that society had moved towards an emancipating future. In Bloch's words: "the broad window full of nothing but outside world needs an outdoors full of attractive strangers, not full of Nazis; the glass door right down to the floor really requires sunshine to peer and break in, not the Gestapo" (quoted in Heynen 1999:123).

Benjamin was neither simply lamenting the "decline of aura" in the modern world nor simply condemning modern illusory phantasmagorias. With his image of the piercing of distance by nearness, he was perhaps pointing to the revealing power of exposed discontinuities both in historical time and metropolitan space. He was not for a redeemed aura, nor for a re-enchantment of the world by modernity's myth of "newness". He was not for transitoriness either, as long as not every ephemeral present reveals a "weak messianic power" (Benjamin 1992:246) that may open it to a pos-

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12 In such bourgeois domestic interiors, the inhabitant is forced "to adopt the greatest number of habits – habits that do more justice to the interior he is living in than to himself" (*ibid*. 734).

sible, radically different future. In the power of an allegorical gaze that pierces urban phantasmagoria the experience of modern dwelling is disenchanted. And forever shaken is the monumental order of the interior as a private-shelter collection.

Can we perhaps imagine that a redeemed modernity, respecting the inherent transitoriness of modern dwelling without reproducing the non-places of metropolitan alienation, could create a modern city of thresholds? And can we perhaps understand this city as epitomizing an experience of discontinuities that may orient collective behavior towards an alternative emancipating public culture?

CHAPTER 4

Navigating the metropolitan space: walking as a form of negotiation with otherness

The metaphor of navigation

A metaphor appears as a convenient way to describe through the use of a familiar image an unfamiliar experience. This is probably why so many metaphoric terms and expressions are used in the emerging "internet language". And no doubt a lot of them emanate from the simple and easily graspable idea that cyberspace is something like a vast and unexplored sea in which every user will seek his or her way. It is interesting to compare Rayner's view – "there is no hypothetical space in cyberspace. The 'as if' that creates such space is flattened by the fiat of digital systems" (Rayner 1999:289) – with Robins', who criticizes as "conservative and nostalgic" descriptions of the internet that could be considered as an "electronic variant of the Rousseauist dream" (Robins 1996:98). Both are actually analyzing metaphoric presentations of a concrete experience, the experience of "net surfing".

Metaphors, however, do not only help us to approach the unknown as analogous to what is already known, transporting, as the etymology of the word indicates, characteristics and meanings from familiar areas of experience to unfamiliar ones. Metaphors, in a way, "pollute" through an image-centered comparison, the experiences they mediate.

Not that everyone surfing the net imagines herself over the waves of a California beach. It is very probable, though, that the navigation metaphor creates a kind of understanding that constructs a whole ideology or a set of value-invested cognitive schemas, through which the internet experience is molded. A metaphor moulds effectively the way we grasp an experience as socially meaningful, therefore possessing a certain social value. Lakoff and Johnson conclude that "human conceptual systems are metaphorical in nature and involve an imaginative understanding of one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:194).

Experience, understood in this way, is actually lived differently, depending on the different meaning and value attributed to it through metaphoric descriptions. Metaphors sometimes become so powerful and so effectively integrated to the appearance of an experience that they end up being considered as literal descriptions. Just think what it means to describe the mode of doing something as a kind of route: we say, forgetting the metaphor we use, "I will do it my way".

The image of a sailor riding over the waves, finding ways to discover new lands,

the image of a *cybernaut* cruising the wondrous seas of information, is surely power-ful enough to instill in the act of internet browsing the positive values of an adven-turous and heroic navigating experience that promises pleasure and, most probably, profit.

Can we however possibly discover a different, latent potential in the metaphor of navigation? Can we then perhaps transport this potential from the virtual space of the "net" to the actual space of urban environment? And can we thus imagine ourselves navigating the material world instead of the immaterial one? Is it certain that a buried collective memory of an actual sea navigation cannot revive with a new meaning in the metaphoric appreciation of a quite modern experience, the experience of traversing the metropolitan space?

The ancient Greeks seemed to value a lot the deeds and experiences of an able sailor. Just think of the *Odyssey* as, among other things, an ode to such an extraor-dinarily skilful sailor. And it seemed that the Greeks used the image of a competent sailor navigating an unknown sea as an image appropriate to depict the more gen-eral characteristics of a peculiar and distinctive wisdom. This kind of wisdom, mul-tifarious and inventive as the wisdom of an experienced navigator should be, was not the wisdom of philosophers, but an everyday intelligence, appropriating every means available in order to cope with changeful situations. *Metis,* as it was called, was a kind of inventive competence acquired in practice, immersed in the universe of social practices, molded though practice. Differing from a reflective intelligence that has the time to reconsider and plan for the far future, *metis* is an intelligence that must guide decisions on the spot, within limited time, exactly as in the case of a sailor facing situations that mostly require fast and accurate decisions.

This intelligence must also be multifaceted, resourceful and cunning, because situations to be confronted are multiform, versatile and open to unexpected events, however typical their form may appear: "there is no doubt that *mêtis* is a type of intelligence and thought … it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation, or rigorous logic" (Vernant and Detienne 1978:3). So, somebody equipped with *metis* possesses the ability to be as inventive as the circumstances demand.

The navigation metaphor instills in the practical intelligence of *metis* one crucial image. To be able to take advantage of an unexpected, strange situation is to be able to find a way through and perhaps out of the situation. Navigating thus means being able to discover the signs to guide you (as in the case of the archetypical sailor watching the stars), being able to seize the opportunity in order to profit from a situation (like the archetypical sailor swiftly rearranging the ship's sails), being able therefore to invent a passage, to establish a route in what appears as a hostile un-known environment (like the archetypical sailor governing the ship in open sea).

For the ancient Greeks, the image of an unknown sea with no recognizable points of reference, with no seashore in view, was an image of absolute alterity. That is why it was an image considered appropriate to describe metaphorically the

Nether World. To cross the sea, the sailor must actually invent a passage, a *poros*. Navigation thus acquires the form of an activity paradigmatically confronting alterity and therefore providing meaningful images of an intelligence coping with the everyday emergence of otherness. Knowing how to behave in work, in public space, during war, in the market, at court or in the athletic games and exercises meant for the Greeks knowing how to behave in differing circumstances.

Not only were there different persons who developed different strategies in different social circumstances but also the gods always intervened, often involving and frequently using mortals in their quarrels. So, navigating your way through the circumstances could eventually mean creating passages of escape or approach, thus regulating a potential relationship with the surrounding otherness. And this otherness equally encompassed both the unpredictable whims of the gods and the multiform interests of mortals.

One crucial characteristic of this sailor's art, this ancient art of navigation, is that it is constantly on the move. It is a kind of mobile art. And to be mobile is being always different from oneself, inventively different. This art is the art of changing in order to cope with change. It has nothing to do with the ability of the chameleon to adapt to the surrounding environment, though. *Metis* is a form of taking hold of the situation not because someone is powerful enough, yet equally not because someone is so hopeless as to only try to give up whatever distinguishes him or her from the surrounding social environment in order to face the alterity of others.

The ancient navigator uses the ruses of *metis* in order to negotiate with otherness, to create passages, often aiming to propitiate the gods and the sea alike. The ancient navigator thus provides an archetypal image of the everyday politics of social interaction. And his/her practical intelligence is perhaps indicative of a quite ancient wisdom, the wisdom of a social coexistence based on constant face to face negotiations.

Crossing passages to otherness

Does this mean that the navigation metaphor should lead us to a new way of understanding how to deal with the experience of otherness which is erupting everywhere underneath the homogenizing blanket of globalization? If dealing with the otherness inherent in every modern social encounter means not only confronting everyone as a potential enemy but also being able to negotiate, judge and estimate what is other in others, then this navigational intelligence of *metis* offers a model of action rich in nuances. "Navigating the material world" constitutes not only a convenient metaphor, with the air of heroic colonialism filling its sails but, essentially, a metaphor instilling in social interaction a new or equally quite old form and value. Is it then, possible for us to conceive of navigating the metropolitan space not as an adventure-seeking activity but as an activity of paradigmatically constructing a relationship to otherness? And if this activity is actually a passage-creating activity, is it perhaps at the same time an activity that is based on the ability to inventively become other in order to cope with otherness?

In ancient Greek, the word for passage is *poros*. A ship that crosses the unknown sea called *pontos*, as for example, the ship of the Argonauts, is a *pontoporos* ship (a ship literally creating her own route as a fleeting passage). If one cannot find his or

Pict. 5. Malecon avenue, Havana, Cuba – A multifarious urban threshold.
(Photo by Stamatia Papadimitrou)

Pict. 6. Walking as invention – Occupied Navarinou Park, Athens.
(Photo by Ioannis Papagiannakis)

her way, one stands in front of what appears to be unknown, "other", being in doubt. The Greek word for doubt is *aporia*, literally "lack of passage".

Otherness therefore takes the form of a seemingly unapproachable land. Passages to otherness, however, do not tame or eliminate otherness. They may only create, with the help of a resourceful intelligence, intermediary spaces in order to approach otherness: spaces of negotiation (we must not forget that the Greeks were actually negotiating with their gods, they were not simply afraid of them).

In English, "aporia" may be described as an attitude characterized by "an awareness of opposing or incompatible views on the same matter" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*). Cannot we then perhaps say that aporia is actually a form of heterogeneity awareness? And couldn't we consider the discovery of a necessarily temporary solution to the problems posed by heterogeneity as the discovery of a precarious passage, a *poros* ? The art of navigation is the art of transporting aporia, not the art of eliminating it. As the passage closes behind the ship, so does the passage to otherness. Always temporary. A social artifact created on the move.

There is another meaning for the Greek word *poros*. Actually this meaning can be considered as a metaphoric use of the word. *Poros* is the "pore" of the skin (a word obviously deriving from the same Greek root). Pores are the passages that connect our body to the surrounding environment. A body in aporia would thus be a body hermetically sealed in itself, very much like a mind in aporia which cannot discover passages to the otherness that constitutes every allegedly unsolvable problem.

The metaphoric potential of porosity is equally rich. When we describe something as porous, we consider that it is communicating with its environment. And when Walter Benjamin described everyday life in Naples in one on his famous "city portraits" he used the word porosity.

> As porous as this stone [the stone of the shore by the sea] is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. (Benjamin 1985b:169)

> Porosity results not only from the indolence of the southern artisan, but also above all, from the passion for improvisation, which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved. Buildings are used as a popular stage. (Benjamin 1985b:170)

In the passages ("passages?") just quoted, porosity appears to describe the core characteristic of an everyday life oriented towards the fleetingness of ordinary circumstances. Not however the typical, repetitive circumstances that normalize, but those circumstances that bear the distinctive marks of an occasion. That is why porosity results from the "passion of improvisation", this everyday theatricality, this art of coping with ever differing situations, becoming inventively other without losing oneself.

In such a human sociality where "a grain of Sunday is hidden in each weekday" as Benjamin observes (*ibid*. 172), social interaction becomes something more than a series of prefixed and schematized procedures. Social interaction characterized by porosity preserves the qualities of otherness in a relationship between the same and the other. And thus, as in the navigator's art, porosity is the creation of passages, of

poroi and of "pores" through which every individual socially equipped body breathes the air of inventive interaction. In the generalized mobility of Neapolitan life as Benjamin sees it in the 1920s, a metaphor of the bodily mediated experience of the modern city emerges. Porosity is the key to this metaphor, as the quality of both material and immaterial elements of this experience. Porous are the buildings and porous are people's habits. Porous are the streets and porous are everyday encounters. Porous are the omnipresent staircases, porous the families and the relationships in open-air markets.

Negotiating choreographies

When we recall that Benjamin was a theoretician of the art of wandering, then we can perhaps understand why porosity and navigation coincide in a metaphor that is essentially a metaphor for modernity's hidden liberating potential. As a walker, as a metropolitan wanderer, the flaneur is the figure equipped to appreciate this hidden promise. This idiosyncratic pedestrian loses himself in the city only to discover, hidden behind the metropolitan phantasmagoric façade, the false promises that have propelled modern civilization. The flaneur in "the chorus of [his] idle footsteps" (de Certeau 1984:97) has a feel for passages, a feel for thresholds (Benjamin 1999:416). He actually discovers and invents passages even when he recognizes them as points of rupture in the city's fabric. The flaneur disturbs the continuum of habit as well as the fabricated coherence of the urbanistic *ratio*. Walking thus assumes the status of a paradigmatic act which reinvents discontinuity at the heart of uniformity, an act that therefore discovers otherness at the heart of homogeneity. The flaneur has a feel for passages because he has a feel for heterogeneity. True, he may fall victim to the deceptive heterogeneity of appearances that imitate pluralism in the modern metropolis. But while navigating in the metropolis without following obligatory itineraries, one can potentially discover ruptures in the projected uniformity of modern urban phantasmagoria.

It is not enough to acknowledge the power of every individual spatial practice to concretize individual though anonymous "ways of use" or "styles of use", as de Certeau (1984: 100) does. We have to see in every walking act not only an idiosyncratic rhetoric but also a power to express a move towards otherness. To walk in the modern city, no matter how strict the rules delimiting pedestrian movement are, always contains a grain of unpredictability, a mark of individuality. The predominance of chance encounters and the complexity of contemporary city-life makes it necessary for city dwellers to develop an inventive navigating intelligence. Walking – not only wandering – opens often unnoticed but sometimes explicitly felt potential passages towards undefined destinations. This revealing and exploratory encounter with otherness gives to walking gestures an expressive power.

Dance theory can perhaps help us to locate the possible modalities of such a walking expressivity. Tracing the history of modern dance's interpretation of pedestrian acts, Susan Leigh Foster distinguishes between three different forms of theatricality involved in the process: the first one characterizes modern choreographies which are based on the "blending of pedestrian and dancerly elements" (Foster 2002:128). This is a theatricality in which the effects of theater are transported into everyday pedestrian acts (*ibid*. 131). We could say that in this case walking is seen in

a new way, it is appreciated as theatrical.

The second one, according to Foster, is an alternative theatricality constructed together with an alternative viewing practice. To privilege characteristic pedestrian movements in this context means not only to imitate trivial quotidian walking gestures but to try to make of the flow of movement the guiding principle of dance improvisations: "letting the dance happen" (*ibid*. 132), thus, extracts from walking a structural principle rather than a repertoire of formal elements.

In the third kind of theatricality, an emphasis is put on the discontinuity of movement: "choreography conducts an anatomical investigation, not of the body, but of its movement" (*ibid*. 140). Recognizable pedestrian gestures are reflexively presented (*ibid*. 142): this means that movements are connected both with individual bodies that perform them and with the structural characteristics that make those specific movements recognizable.

What this interpretation of modern dance's inventive research can perhaps show is that walking, this act of artful connection of places, can be understood and employed as a form of individual presentation which goes beyond the expression of individual moods, sentiments and orientations. Walking is a form of bodily practiced negotiation with otherness; it is a form of addressing others.

In this kind of gestural theatricality, the actor-walker not only presents him- or herself but also creates a temporary stage on which the other is implicitly invited. "Acting-out" a walk can thus become a negotiating gesture towards the otherness of those who pass by.

Baudelaire, the poet-flaneur, describes *une passante* in her erotic implicitly theatrical walking:

> *Tall, slender, in deep mourning, with majesty,*
> *A woman passed, raising, with dignity*
> *In her poised hand, the flounces of her gown;*
> *Graceful, noble, with a statue's form.*

A pedestrian spatial practice is taken to be expressive not simply because somebody chooses to address somebody else but because every gesture, no matter how trivial or "functional", can be taken as demonstrative, as revealing hidden intentions, as orchestrating its own meaning. Ambiguous and elusive or powerful and demanding, this kind of meaning can only emerge in an urban setting where strangers are likely to meet. It is assumed or deliberately transmitted as people in such a setting do not simply walk, they navigate.

Benjamin's navigation is both similar and at the same time symmetrically inverse to the ancient Greek navigating intelligence, *metis*. It is similar because it creates a negotiating and inventive relationship with otherness mobilizing a multilayered time-awareness. And it is symmetrically inverse, because whereas *metis* navigates through otherness creating passages, Benjamin's navigation seeks actually to discover the otherness hidden beneath the uniformity of modern urban phantasmagoria. Benjamin essentially seeks to open modern social life trapped in the myth of human progress to the otherness of human emancipation.

Navigating the metropolis may be considered in terms of a distinctive experi-

ence, but may also provide us with a metaphor to evaluate and understand such an experience. The navigating image may thus constitute a metaphor describing the creation of passages towards, in the direction of, otherness. Navigating essentially means negotiating. Or perhaps, as in the theatricality of Neapolitan life or in the resourceful ruses of an inventive sailor, navigating means attempting to approach, to discover, to face otherness. What makes walking a practice which may condense navigating act's metaphoric potential is the fact that negotiation with otherness is not the result of a carefully constructed plan. This negotiation happens as people walk, whether they temporarily improvise to face unexpected encounters, whether they decide to express an interest for somebody as they pass, or whether they let their moves be expressive, purposefully or not, addressing everybody or nobody. Walking, understood as navigating, epitomizes a particular embodied wisdom, the wisdom that understands social identities and behaviors as constantly in negotiation, creating out of differences and similarities the fabric of human interaction.

CHAPTER 5

Theatricality: the art of creating thresholds

Approaching the other

Thresholds mediate a relationship with otherness by marking passages in time and space. In the inventive social interaction characterizing life in the Naples between the two World Wars, thresholds appear to function as – often temporary – urban stages where encountering othreness is practiced. Is perhaps this encounter with otherness an act based on the socially acquired ability to become other, the ability to assume, check, express or even deny identities? And is it perhaps that thresholds, because of their inherently comparative and relational character, provide the ground for these gestures and acts of becoming other? Are thresholds the spaces such a negotiating encounter creates? Are thresholds those precarious theatrical stages in which a theatricality of encounters develops?

Theatricality is connected to the temporal dimension of human interaction, it emanates its time of unfolding and, as all practice, it is defined by its rhythm. Theatricality is not ascribed to a homogeneous time; it rather intervenes in its flow, accelerating or decelerating it, even suspending it (at the moment of the "strike", a theatrical strike, a *coup de theâtre*) or reversing it (embedding elements of the past or the future into the present). How else could theatricality, this art of becoming other, approach otherness? How else, considering the most radical expression of otherness is its unpredictability, its escaping the net with which we attempt to entrap reality, could theatricality help us to be in "the place with the scent of the other … For a little while, at least"? (Cixous 2005:182).

Josette Féral argues that "theatricality as alterity emerges through a cleft in quotidian space" (Féral 2002:97). Actually, this cleft produces a meaningful interruption in the continuity of quotidian space-time. As we will see, the interruption does not simply establish an "inside" and an "outside", but an in-between space in which a comparison between in and out, identity and otherness, real and possible can take place. Theatricality emerges as a process of comparisons that reveals the inherently relational character of every identity creation.

Let us purloin from the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch a concept which will clarify the statutorily temporal singularity of the theatrical approach of the other: the concept of modesty (*la pudeur*). Approaching the other requires a certain restraint. "Intimacy at first sight is like a premature child: it is quickly weakened, as it has not

entered, in order to acquire depth, in the purificatory zone of trials and disappointments" (Jankélévitch 1996:166). Modesty, therefore, is a sense of postponement and, at the same time, a postponing sense which delays and approaches its target indirectly. This dilatoriness is not a product of hesitation or fear; it is a product of circumspection: "modesty is the circumspection of the soul which regulates transitions and classifies targets" (*ibid*. 75).

The other is not transparent. The language or the gestures we address to the other are not transparent either and, consequently, not unequivocal. It is the continuous postponement, the periphrastic and tentative reference to the other that sets off the field of the encounter. One hides in order to reveal, disguises oneself in order to unveil. For communication is made up not only of what we wish to say but also of what we wish to hide. As we administer what we show, as we disguise ourselves to reveal a self which seems to rise to the occasion, we necessarily deviate, we one-sidedly obscure or illuminate. All this procedure does nothing but highlight communication as a field of action. As action always addresses others, it is always assessed in the course of its development, continuously being modified according to the reactions of those others.

A relation is indeed a temporally structured exchange, as it unfolds in a time which is controlled differently by those who shape it. Modesty, this postponing circumspection, handles a meaning which can reach the other only through obstacles. Obstacles force one to attempt to unlock meaning, attribute it to the otherness of the other and, as such, accept it as something not already familiar. In a relation between different instances of otherness, meaning can circulate only under disguise. A lot of effort is needed, continuous comparisons and transfers are necessary in order for meaning to reach the other side, in order for it to bridge the distance with an always precarious construction. Meaning hovers in mid air, for the visiting of otherness is always accompanied by the danger of error. Visiting otherness is the very matrix of the conceptualization of time, and it possibly constitutes the essence of the event as a foundation of temporality. That is why it is only as a practice which creates time and is defined by it that theatricality can be compared to a periphrastic modesty which conducts the disguises while shaping its path through the obstacles (Jankélévitch 1996:45).

The postponing disposition creates a temporal distance which offers itself as the field for the realization of the encounter, as the field for the establishment of communication considered as an action of approaching otherness. Temporal distance appears as a precondition for the approach. As Jankélévitch points out, the outright encounter is necessarily temporary and superficial. Could it be then that distance is itself the condition for the encounter? Could it be that the encounter requires distance, spatially as well as temporally?

Distance and democracy

The fact of difference is already considered in terms of distance. The other belongs, or is taken to belong, elsewhere. To put it in other words, it is only because of distance that we can describe the other as other. Absolute proximity, i.e. intimacy, turns the other into the same as us, familiar, recognizable. So, if we wish to accept someone in his or her otherness, we must not eliminate the distance which separates us.

The wager of the encounter is played precisely on this distance. If the distance is big, it becomes obvious that the encounter is rendered impossible (we will see that the encounter is also rendered impossible when the distance is marked by boundaries-barriers). But if the distance disappears, the relation is short-circuited. What is different becomes identical, the difference which cannot be reduced to the same disappears. Only if the distance between these two limits continues to exist, can the encounter possibly take place. Only then, as a spark between two poles, can the sparkle of approach be born.

It is obvious that the definition of such a distance does not correspond to any measurement; it rather corresponds to a sense, to a socially inculcated intuition. The necessary distance is rendered sufficient to the extent that it defines a field of exchange, a field of interaction.

Massimo Cacciari describes this distance through an image: the instances of otherness are as islands floating in an archipelago. Distances do exist: each island is defined as a dominion and its relation with the surrounding islands is mediated by the sea. However, the sense of participating in a greater whole, what is called archipelago, transforms the islands into instances of otherness oriented towards one another. Here, the sufficient distance describes a condition of vicinity: "the idea of vicinity encloses a necessary distinction of places" (Cacciari 1999:47).

Cacciari considers the abolition of distance to be a characteristic obsession of the figure he calls *homo democraticus*. In his own way, he essentially conveys the "tyranny of intimacy" described by Sennett (1993:337-340). However, he also believes that, at the same time, this obsession destroys all vicinity. For vicinity is born by distances capable of creating relationships. With his omnipresence, the *homo democraticus* renders the existence of the stranger not only intolerable, but also inconceivable (Cacciari 1999:160). Indeed, it is the certainty that anything can be reduced to a common norm, to a common matrix, which stigmatizes the other as a deviation. In the equalizing discourse of mass democracy lurks a homogenizing discourse. Whatever is beyond homogenization, whatever is rendered non-recognizable, simply does not exist: so we have either absolute proximity or absolute remoteness (such that the other is permanently located somewhere else). The distance of vicinity, a distance which renders entities distinguishable, a distance which renders differences distinguishable, is crushed between these two poles. The stranger is either assimilated, i.e. turned into the same, or becomes a stranger to the extent of becoming inconceivable. Augé describes this condition as a crisis of otherness, as an inability to symbolize the other, as a crisis of meaning, in the sense that the other is inconceivable. And we have seen, meaning is a product of negotiation (Augé 1999:132).

So what is the possible answer to such a threat? Maintain distances? Keep the others at a distance, thus ensuring the impossibility of expropriation of their otherness? Could it be that this attitude conceals a danger inverse to the one caused by the global expansion of mass "democracy" and globalized cultural uniformity?

Distance, difference and racism

Deeply inscribed in the cultural subconscious of the West is the feeling of difference from the people it began to study. In western civilization, the ethnological interest walks hand in hand with the approaching of the others as different from "us". Explor-

ing its foundations, ethnology inevitably faces the problem of distance. Is distance necessary for the other to be understood as another? Could it be that the other is a product of this distance? And what happens when distances are lessened or eliminated?

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the scholar who most sensitized ethnology towards the search for unified structures in human thinking, the anthropologist who recognized in "savage thought" values equivalent to the scientific one, attributing to people once considered barbarians, savages or primitive, virtues equivalent to those of the western people, was the one who established, in his late work, the anthropological view as a "view from afar". And it was Lévi-Strauss who, in the name of cultural difference and its usefulness for the evolution of culture, asked for these distances to be kept. In his own words "All true creation implies a certain deafness to the appeal of other values, even going so far as to reject them if not denying them altogether. For one cannot fully enjoy the other, identify with him, and yet at the same time remain different. When integral communication with the other is achieved completely, it sooner or later spells doom for both his and my creativity" (Lévi-Strauss 1985:24).

It is obvious that such an opinion defends identity – cultural identity to be more precise – as a clearly defined field, capable of distinguishing human groups. Their constant and close association, their continuous exchange, can cause an equilibrium of passivity, such as the one resulting after the equalization of temperature when the flow of heat from the hot to the cold body has been completed. According to Lévi-Strauss, vicinity, in a way, neutralizes differences. However, the relations between instances of cultural otherness were never relations moved by the content of otherness itself. No civilization is imposed due to one of its values; nor is any cultural synthesis only a product of cultural exchanges.

Civilization is a field of antagonisms which refract or transform competitions of economic and political power, just as relations between civilizations are hierarchized or hierarchical. So, in order for someone to conclude that distance preserves particularities, one needs to perform an abstraction. One must forget the powers of imposition that can operate from a distance, overlook the contests of hegemony in which, by choice or not, any cultural entity is involved. The problem of distance is a problem of power and a problem of identity administration.

For places of encounter to be created in the intermediate sufficient distances, one must renounce two pretensions which prevent negotiating encounters between different people: the pretension of predominance and the pretension of having a definite, closed and invariable identity. So, the distance of encounter presupposes conditions for the opening of the identities and for the elimination or questioning of the power relations between different identities[1].

The distance of vicinity, as a distance for visiting others, brings dominions in touch, dominions which define identities by their boundaries. Sufficient distance is the one which allows for the breaking of these boundaries without causing a diffusion of dominions. It is, ultimately, a distance where sheer power negotiation (a relation between unequal instances of otherness) is transformed into a negotiat-

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1 We will see in chapter 6 how Foucault describes disciplinary power as a process of classification and control of identities. In this inherently spatial model of power relations, distances between identities create social taxonomies and regulate hierarchies.

ing encounter (a relation between instances of otherness communicating on equal terms).

Oddly enough, Lévi-Strauss's line of thinking offers arguments to contemporary racism, a *racisme différentialiste*, as Balibar calls it (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991:36). According to such a logic, it is not biological heredity which justifies the boundaries between social entities, but irreducible cultural differences. In the name of such irreducible differences, that is, differences which cannot be negotiated and blended or cannot coexist, this new differentialist racism searches for the isolation and purity of those it considers culturally superior. The others have the right to difference, they have their particularities, as long as they leave the country, as long as they stay where they belong (immigrants, refugees, all those who are permanently driven away as others).

Four steps towards the different

It is obvious that neither the sole invocation of difference nor the concern for its preservation can guarantee communication amongst different instances of otherness, necessarily leaving negotiation at the mercy of open confrontation which is often, if not always, waged between unequal parts. Strangely enough, the conservation of otherness can be imagined only as the horizon of a relation between different instances of otherness. Otherwise, confrontation – for, naturally, there are no safe distances, neither metaphorically nor literally – will always reduce all particularities to those of the most powerful[2].

The search for a sufficient distance must come to terms with the idea that it will be a distance which not only defines a safety zone, a no man's land, but a distance which is crossed again and again. This distance is a field of coming and going, a locus of trial, a field of visiting. This continuous movement between self and other is described by Todorov as a "universalism of itinerary" (Todorov 1993:74). Let us see more in details his reasoning regarding the distribution of such a reciprocating course from self to other. The experience of anthropologists studying a society which is different from their own offers the pattern for the description of an encounter relation with otherness. And, according to Todorov, the development of such a relation is marked by four steps (*ibid*. 83-84).

The beginning, the first step towards the different, cannot but lie in one's tendency to distance oneself from society and the self. According to Todorov, this is the motive of departure. Without this first feeling of distantiation, there can be no movement.

The second step refers to the first approach to the other society. One dives in it trying to understand, communicate, etc. However, one carries one's own ways of acting and thinking, one's own categories of conceptualization. They will be deployed in the first place, for they are the only ones available.

On the third step, one goes back to one's own place. Even if the return remains

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2 Iveson argues for "a critical politics of difference", which will have to support "oppressed groups who seek to have their values and needs included in public space" (Iveson 2000:234) not simply by equating differences but by creating the ground for negotiation and communication while protecting the most vulnerable from an all-pervasive cultural imperialism.

only mental, this movement seems to be defined by a reversal of the course of approaching. However, this return inaugurates the process of a second distantiation. The emigrant observer sees his own society – and the identity given to him by the latter – through different eyes, almost the eyes of a stranger. If he does not give in to the schizophrenia which possibly arises by such an experience, then this new distantiation will offer the opportunity for the conciliation of these two apparently incompatible aspects of his experience and, at the same time, their ways of conceptualization.

The fourth and final step refers to a new approaching of otherness, enriched, one could say, by the evaluation of the first visit, whereby the others are neither a deviation from the ecumenical values that he considers his culture represents, nor an exotic model of a new set of values. Then, without losing from sight the horizon of universalism (that is, the horizon which renders communication and meeting in advance necessary and legitimate but also feasible) this person will be able to study the society of others as well as his own, and compare. So, Todorov concludes, "Knowledge of the others is not simply one possible path towards self-knowledge: it is the only path" (*ibid*. 84)[3].

Thus, the visiting of otherness constitutes an action which not only preserves a distance; it also weaves a relation on this distance, a relation which opens up the particularity of the visitor itself, leaving it exposed before the other. And, if we also imagine that the other might begin his own reciprocal course towards the otherness of the visitor, then this reasoning has the possibility of describing the relation towards otherness as a symmetrical departure of the one towards the other. The distantiation from oneself and the return to a self which is not the same anymore will be the horizon of such a departure[4].

Theatrical distance

The opening of identities and the effort of approaching the identity of others is, as a social practice, of an innately theatrical nature. Departing towards a different self,

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3 Starting from Benjamin's notion of historical discontinuity, Susan Buck-Morss sees the "human universality" horizon as being explicitly verified when people have to face ruptures in their culture: "It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits" (Buck-Morss 2009:133). This enforced visit to otherness makes the inhabiting of exception, aftermath or uprooting, as we have seen, an inventive practice open to new forms of solidarity.

4 According to Richard Schechner, "Acting, in most cases, is the art of temporary transformation – not only the journey out but also the return" (Schechner 1985:125). There are however culturally important forms of acting which are explicitly focused on transforming the actor. Schechner refers to initiation rites as "transformation performances" (*ibid*. 127). The idea of visiting otherness, as explored in this chapter, offers a unifying formulation for the understanding of various degrees of transformation connected with acting. It is the social context which gives meaning to acting as a form of negotiation with otherness and therefore creates the ground for meaningful deviations, transformations and "returns".

one offers it as a field of encounter[5]. This self is already different from the one used as a starting point, but it is also different from the selves of the others. The meeting is carried out through such tentative disguises provided that the terms for the particularity of the meeting parts is preserved. Particularity thus can be understood as an identity in constant movement.

We can consider that the theatrical skill which processes approaching disguises practically defines a first distantiation from oneself considered as the locus of a circumscribed identity. This distantiation corresponds to what, in Todorov's reasoning, constitutes the driving force of departure. The approaching attempts dictate movements, invented behavior and gestural experiments which literally construct aspects of a self capable of creating the field of communication. So, these attempts have a disguising theatrical character, since they construct characteristics and features of a devised self, performing them "in view of" the encounter. Thus, the intention of the other to correspond is put on trial, since there is a gesture of appeal made towards him. In essence, this approaching theatricality tries to turn distance into its stage. However, theatrical action itself, when not trapped in the equating illusion that conceals the profound power of comparison which feeds it, emphasizes its theatricality in a theatrical way. Such theatricality keeps the founding comparison – which forms the disguising activity – operative, when not only does it establish itself on stage but it also points out of the stage[6].

In such an inventive approach of the other, the theatrical disguise is not only a gesture of concealment or misleading. It is, at the same time, a gesture of pointing out the activity itself, revealing the distance which is turned into a stage. The theatricality of any tentative approach is a theatricality exposed theatrically, for it is this dynamics of comparison, enclosed in the core of the theatrical, which theatrical behavior wishes to exploit. Thus, it emphasizes comparison; in other words, it points out the very distance that separates instances of otherness and distinguishes them. The distantiation which inaugurates a doubled theatricality, i.e. the movement which, in a theatrical way, displays the theatrical character of the approaching action, annuls the closed nature of any misleading disguise.

Theatrical approaching behaviors take the form of constructions, inventions, disguises which do not intend to deceive, but to explore ways of acting in the direction of otherness suggested by the other, patterns of action which "stage" encounters. Theatrical actions can show that the reality of the encounter is not separated from the operations which form it. The encounter does not "happen" after some first inventive theatrical gestures have produced, in one way or another, results. The encounter – on the whole and in all its aspects – is a field of operations, if it wishes to conserve the force of comparison which moves it, if it wishes to preserve the

5 Schechner's performer learns "to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality" (Schechner 1985:123).

6 As Tracy C. Davis shows, there is an extended discussion linking Carlyle's first use of the term "theatricality" with Brecht's and Boal's ideas of a critical theatre. In this discussion, theatricality is not synonymous to mimesis but involves "an alienation from character and circumstances" (Davis 2003:153) which effects "a critical stance in the public sphere, including but not limited to the theatre" (*ibid*. 145). Davis sees theatricality's self-reflexive power not in the actor's performance but in the spectator's "active dissociation" (*ibid*.) from what he or she witnesses.

Pict. 7. Havana, Cuba – A small "threshold café"?

Pict. 8. São Paulo, Brazil – The barber shop as stage.

otherness of the meeting parts. The skill of approaching disguises is not only a convenient tool for the encounter, but also its necessary horizon. The whole field of approach between instances of otherness has the form of a mosaic made from theatrical micro-movements, movements of negotiation. Its meaning, which is woven without necessarily being expressed, will thus constitute the tie, the cohesion, the constructed and constructing horizon of the encounter.

The doubled theatricality of the encounter corresponds, in essence, to the double distantiation Todorov identifies in the form of the reciprocal approach of otherness. The second distantiation – the one that occurs when one sees one's own society through the eyes of a stranger – practically reveals the relative character of any role, therefore its essentially constructed nature. Through the eyes of a stranger, what was until recently familiar and evident is rendered strange and unjustified.

However, he who returns does not simply adopt the identity of a stranger and its perspective. Visiting otherness does not amount to assimilation to otherness. It is the dynamics of comparison that activates a new behavior, one that tries to handle the distance between two cultural systems of reference on stage. Thus, he who returns does not behave as an "other", but as someone who knows other people exist, as someone who knows his identity is formed solely in relation to others. And so, in his behavior, he points out the theatricality of the approach as a double theatricality. For the second distantiation, the distantiation of awareness and not of loss in an unbridgeable division, shows in a theatrical way, inside the game of negotiation, that the others exist and that they have an influence on behavior through the constant interweaving of intermediate instances of otherness which are under constant negotiation[7].

Thus, this reasoning does neither discharge in an absolute denial of difference (which aims at submitting the instances of otherness to a normative ecumenism), nor an absolute affirmation of difference (which leads to the relativism of coexistence but also to *racisme différentialiste*). It is important to understand the relation with otherness as a relation of acceptance which can exist only to the extent that the encounter is attempted. The outcome of the encounter, either in the form of synthesis or in the form of new antagonisms or new balances, is not predetermined. However, in order to explore a relation with otherness, otherness must be accepted as such. And this can be the underlying effort of an approaching theatricality.

Todorov claims that such a constant movement between two poles of otherness creates people who feel constantly exiled, "uprooted" (Todorov 1993:74). They belong to neither the country they visit, nor the one from which they departed. He is right, but only if we accept that such an attitude, in producing open non-recognizable identities, leads to a temporary exile, an estrangement from those who insist on safeguarding boundaries of a common self-sufficient and non-negotiable identity. Such a temporary exile corresponds to the experience of the encounter; however,

7 For Féral, "Initially, theatricality … is a performative act creating the virtual space of the other, the transitional space discussed by Winnicot, the threshold (*limen*) discussed by Turner, or Goffman's 'framing'. It clears a passage, allowing both the performing subject as well as the spectator to pass from 'here' to 'elsewhere'." (Féral 2002:98). Intermediate instances of otherness, created in and for the encounter, employ the power to create "virtual spaces of the other" in order to establish relations with actual, experienced forms of social otherness.

it does not predetermine the future of a relation which could result from such an encounter. For this encounter can lead to compositions and mutations, as well as displaced antagonisms. Temporary exile, then, will be a form of describing the sense of moving away that the adventure of an approaching theatricality conveys.

Proximate otherness

The symbolic handling of distance essentially defines the relations between people and groups. It is established as a way of telling apart the familiar, the friendly, the remote, the hostile. All norms of behavior, be they manifest or only hinted at, define distances: the wisdom of "propriety" in a relatively closed system of reference, such as the traditional neighborhood, is condensed, according to de Certeau and colleagues (de Certeau *et al*. 1998:21), in a sense which describes "how far is not going too far" (until what point is one allowed to go, without "going too far", as we would say).

Social distances always end up describing distances in space: how often one is supposed to approach a stranger in the street, how one hugs a friend or one's wife, how close to the salesperson one gets or from what distance someone greets another person etc. Distances are "kept", according to the renowned expression, in keeping with the directions which mark the expressivity of the body itself. Distances are essentially established as bodily relations. At the same time, however, they exist to be crossed. A "praxeomorphic" measuring system (Bauman 1998:28) conveys a special significance to the concept of near and far. And it can, proportionally, recognize the degree of kinship as well as the differentiation of the surrounding space in a graded relation between more private or more public spaces. Such a system, which emerges in practice and offers practice a necessary provision, practically measures the distances to be crossed. "[T]he only void space that exists exists by nature of the action undertaken in order to cross it" (Virilio 1997:59).

The perceptive, empirical sense of distance in the practices of inhabiting space turns into a sense of symbolic relationship. The effort needed to cross the distance is itself turned into the measure of this distance. So, perceptively and empirically, distance corresponds to the different forms of body-environment relations. These different relations are recorded by the bodily organs in their effort to estimate, cross and use space. Bodily experience renders the distinction between here and there acceptable as an evaluative distinction, thus offering an empirical basis to the symbolization of near and far, close and beyond.

At a time when the perceptive distinction is affected by the "pollution of distances" (Virilio 1997:58), which renders the intermediate space in-different, the symbolization of otherness as a condition of distantiation or graded nearness undergoes a crisis. Certainly, the crisis of otherness understood by Augé as a crisis of symbolization of the "other" (Augé 1999:132) has definitely also been affected by the crisis which the blurring of distinction between "far" and "near" introduces into the symbolic mechanism. Even more, the crisis of otherness as a crisis in approaching the other is closely related to the incapability of symbolizing distance as a field which is crossed and exists to be crossed. Instant proximity destroys the encounter with the other just as excessive distantiation creates impassable boundaries. Maybe we should consider that a skill corresponding to a dilatory circumspection is needed

for the processing of distance as a necessary condition for the encounter. Such a skill would support a space-creating circumspection, a circumspection which not only handles distances but also constructs distances capable of hosting the relation with otherness. Without such intermediate spaces, without the skill of differentiating them or creating them, it seems that we are losing the capacity of communicating with difference, with what is other in others. If the visit to otherness is a voyage which has its own time and space, which defines a field of maneuvering and consecutive approaches, then to cancel this field renders the visit problematic, if not unfeasible.

Baudelaire and the clown

Theatrical behavior offers the social individual such a dexterity of distantiation. Theatricality, depending on the awareness of distance between the self and the presented self, which distinguishes it from imitation, needs this particular distance between two selves, or two behaviors or two expressions, which will render the comparison active. Without the catalytic presence of comparison, the theatrical "as if" turns into imitating loss[8].

Already in an actor's body, in the micro-scale of his movements, the sense of distance and its skilful handling for the approach of the impersonated role become obvious. "A continuous pulse abstracts the body from a hypothetical meaning and sends it back, from this meaning back to the literally physical presence" (Starobinski 1970:58). Where is the actor's body? Temporarily somewhere else, but we know she is not the one she pretends to be. So does the actor herself. In the distance between the body which, with its physical weight, already exists on stage, and the body that the role constructs, a body which is, oddly enough, the same but so different, the field of impersonation finally emerges. And what is impersonation, if not a visiting of otherness?

Baudelaire tells us the story of Fanfarlo, a radiant actress with whom someone falls in love. But who exactly does he fall in love with? The actress or the roles which she so brilliantly impersonates on stage? From what it seems, neither her nor the roles she impersonates. When she gives in to his love and he gets to know her outside the magic of the stage, when she is proven incapable of recovering the magical properties conveyed to her by the characteristics of the Shakespearean heroes or the characters of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, then he pushes her away contemptuously. She seems "incapable of prolonging the retraction between the true presence and the symbolically revoked meaning" (*ibid*. 61-62).

So Baudelaire's hero had fallen in love with a body on the threshold. It is not only the love inspired by a symbol, a love which falls apart when the symbol is demythologized. It is a love focused on a face-body which is capable of bridging over and over again the distance between here and there, the tangible and the dream. The driving force of such a love does not lie on the illusion of the image but on the intensity which emerges from the distance between the self and the role. The visit-

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8 In a much discussed formulation, Schechner observes: "Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is not not Hamlet: his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of not being another (= I am Hamlet)" (Schechner 1985:123).

ing of the role's otherness, the poetic dimension of the distance crossed again and again by the body of Fanfarlo is what renders her an object of desire. To the man in love, Fanfarlo existed only hovering between her two bodies. When only one was offered to him, he couldn't but drive it away.

The power of theatrical distance, of the distance between two selves, two bodies, is represented in a particularly vivid way by the figure of the clown, as it exists until today in the circus tradition. The clown is a disguised person, his behavior is theatrical. But what role is he impersonating? It is the role of an unreal personality, completely alien to others: this is made obvious by his extravagant clothes and excessive make-up. But it is also the role of a familiar personality. A clown "trips over" just as we all do: he is an eternal blunderer but also a crafty mischief-maker. A clumsy, kind and emotional fool, both young and old. We know that he who impersonates him is not simply pretending to be something he isn't. He is putting part of his soul into it, part of his inventiveness and mischievousness. Not everybody becomes a clown. It seems then that, here, Diderot's *paradoxe sur le comédien* does not apply[9].

So what happens with the role of the clown? Is it simply a role of identification? Actually no, for it is a role at the borderline of theatre, a role of improvisation and the constant irresolution between the impersonator and his appearance. The clown is literally born and lives in the distance which separates the two bodies. On the one hand, he is the limit of a theatrical distantiation which dissolves the boundaries between theatre and the world. So, the clown is an acrobat of impersonation. He knows how to balance in the void between theatricality and life. Maybe that is why he points out the theatricality of life, by driving it to its extremes. If everything is theatre and everything is, at the same time, familiar as life, the clown reveals life as a fleeting pretext: nothing has the stability of an unequivocal meaning. Thus, the clown becomes an objector without a place for his objection to turn into a stance.

Due to this, the clown invades the circus stage in a particular way. He comes from elsewhere; his entrance must be planned with great care. A trick, a gesture, a noisy event mark the passing of the stage itself into another world. "His entrance must depict the overcoming of the boundaries of reality" (*ibid*. 139), Starobinski says. Could it be that this importance of the clown's entrance is another way of underlining the critical hovering above the threshold which constitutes his "theatrical" identity? Could it be that this odd mischief-maker of the stage, so mischievous that he is never totally entrapped by the role's clichés, although his patterns of behavior must be recognizable, could it be that in the way he links the worlds of paradox and intimacy he offers us a model for the self-other relation? With his entrance on stage, the clown crosses the threshold space that separates us, the public, from a different, disparate world, a world of happiness which is at the same time fantastic and mun-

9 "They say an actor is all the better for being excited, for being angry. I deny it. He is best when he imitates anger. Actors impress the public not when they are furious but when they play fury well" (Diderot 1957:71)

dane[10]. For, in the end, the clown can cause an interior resonation of our memories of liberating oddity, of the liberating laughter of carnival as a collective reversal and overcoming of roles (Bakhtin 1984:217-220).

The theatrical city

If we accept the opinion of the historian of architecture Manfredo Tafuri, 20th century theatre seems to have taken special care to look into the relation between what is happening on stage and life in a modern megalopolis. As he characteristically claims, the stage was taken as a "virtual city" (Tafuri 1990:95-112). It was modern theatre that, according to this reasoning, tried to depict the intensity of the metropolitan experience with the avalanche of stimuli it transmits to the human body, either adopting an affirmative attitude towards metropolitan life, or criticizing it in many different ways.

This is no coincidence, given that the way the human body is depicted on stage plays a decisive role in all the above mentioned theatrical proposals. The interventionism of early 20th century vanguards, is marked by the presence of bodies which transmit the feeling of a new life rhythm to their movements and forms. From the nervous, frantic grimaces of the Dadaist performance to the monumental human puppets of Bauhaus theatre, the body is no longer the field for the expressive search of a particular psyche, of the psyche which corresponds to the content of a role; it rather gives form to common sensations, sensations which try to represent, reform or even prefigure the metropolitan experience in its development.

Why does the body acquire such a role? Why does the experience of the megalopolis become immediately – and often painfully – perceptible in the body of the inhabitant? The contemporary experience of the crowd, which floods the streets, subway stations, department stores and public buildings, this experience which defines the personal relation to the city, is an experience of body relations. The rhythm of the movement of masses, the forced proximity and random crossing of paths make up the field of a reflexive behavior of the body which at times seems hypnotic. If one is to analyze the experience of the crowd as a new social convention of handling the distance between two bodies, one will see that this convention is taking the form of a particular expressivity of the bodies. It is precisely the theatricality of this new convention regulating encounters between city dwellers that the theatrical avant-garde of the beginning of the century seems to explore, either explicitly or implicitly.

Let us take futurists, for example. In his *Variety Theatre Manifesto*, Marinetti exalts the shock technique, which could destroy the spatial and temporal unity of the stage (Tafuri 1990:98). The reality of the metropolis, as a welcomed experience of excitement and intense rhythm, is called upon to flow into the theatrical space as an explosion. Chaos is but a polymorphic blend of life fragments. So, a "body mad-

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10 Exploring Shakespeare's theatre in search of a general theory of human action, Kirsten Hastrup (2004:111) interprets the stage as a "site of passage", "a passage between separate worlds and viewpoints, between then and now, between this world and another". "Social agents", she points out, "in general inhabit a comparable site of passage, a momentously unknown present" (*ibid*.).

Pict. 9. Niscosia, Cyprus – Creating an ad hoc everyday public stage.

ness" (*fisicofollia*) (*ibid*. 99) is channelled into the physical action on stage, capable of turning the "madness" of metropolitan life into a principle of un-founding of all value systems. In the name of an aesthetic affirmation of the new world, an affirmation which embraces the praises of the futurists towards the industrial landscape and their consideration of war as a celebration, the body assumes the responsibility of transmitting the intensity and destabilizing force of a contemporary life rhythm (*ibid*.) Futurists acclaim movement, its randomness and polymorphism. In the futurist actions, the body-as-movement overcomes any stability and certainty.

During futurist evenings, amidst a pandemonium of sounds and recitations, the creators themselves, often making a parody of their respectable roles with their expressions, perform aggressive and provocative bodily actions. With the nervousness and intensity of the restless, they exercise an indirect violence upon the audience, causing their reaction. By doing so, they even "direct" the behavior of the audience. In the theatricality of such a performance, the bodies discover and praise the aspect of crowd experience that only war could bluntly reveal: an experience which turns forced proximity into a condition of conflict. In the "reservoir of electrical energy", as Baudelaire describes the metropolitan crowd (Benjamin 1983:132), the futurists provoked sparks, hoping for a bigger, orgiastic, conflagration. Besides, some even launched themselves onto the crowd, causing its reaction, even when the acceptance of futurist experimentations or their reduction to a trend had made the public more passive than the one that used to enthusiastically throw objects and vegetables at the stage (Tisdall and Bozzola 1984).

The clown and the protagonist of the futuristic actions share an intention of parody. We can also say that futurist theatre, as Tafuri points out, sets off once more the theme of the grotesque in the field of the art of theatre (Tafuri 1990:99). However, if the clown works on an impersonating irresolution which makes him capable of activating the audience's mood for laughing at their own selves, the paroxysmal "clown" of futurism has the intention of being a critic of this audience. The futurist clown does not bring into play the distance which separates him from the audience as the circus clown does, but gestures towards an explosive abolition of distance as a field of encounter, transforming the stage into a field of metaphorical or literal battle. By short-circuiting the forced proximity of the crowd, the futurists ultimately projected the model of a theatricality "of war", a theatricality of confrontation and not of encounter. Maybe it is for this reason that they were able to provide true expressions of the metropolitan experience itself, which precisely annuls distances as places of encounter, creating out of proximity not intimacy but enmity.

Neighborhoods and manageable proximity

The theatricality of encounters is above all a theatricality of distances which allow for the encounter. The absolute "strangeness" of the crowd (Simmel 1997b:74) expressed, in its purest form, in the absolute proximity of a crowded subway train, does not generally allow for any movements of approach, but only for nervous hostile reactions and submissive hypnotic gestures. Neither forced intersections in the course of pedestrians or vehicles, nor the instantaneous crossing of distances by the technology of live broadcasting and remote control give birth to places of encounter. In the forced proximity of the metropolitan crowd which haunted the city

of the 19th and 20th century, as well as in the forced proximity of the tele-presence which haunts the dystopic prospect of the future "omnipolis" (Virilio 1997:74), the necessary distance, which is the stage of an encounter between different instances of otherness, is dissipated.

Maybe we should search for the model of a distance-making caution, a caution that the presence of the clown seems to impose on us in relation to ourselves and our lives, in the world of an old regulating wisdom of the encounters typical of the urban neighborhood experience. Indeed, the relations between individuals and groups in urban neighborhoods were regulated by a web of graded relations of proximity. Besides, in the figure of the neighbor, one can recognize the resonance of the concept of vicinity; that is, of the sensation of proximity which gives birth to encounters.

In the neighborhood, the presence of the other resides in the boundaries of a manageable proximity. The other is not necessarily an acquaintance, but there are many possibilities of him or her becoming one through the intersection of movements which organize everyday life in space. The other is not necessarily a stranger either. Participation in the world of the neighborhood turns someone into a potential other in a relation that could be transient, accidental or even regular (as in the repeated accidental encounters at the bus stop, the bakery, the park, etc.). So, the neighborhood is not the locus of mimetic "tribalism" (Maffesoli 1996) – as the homogenizing gated communities are[11] – but a web of spaces created by the multiform tactics of habitation.

The accidental structure of encounters results from intersecting personal routes which organize a personal and, simultaneously, collective inhabitation of the space. "The neighborhood is thus defined as a collective organization of individual trajectories" (de Certeau *et al.* 1998:15). One learns to live in the neighborhood by developing and sharpening the capacity to handle the spatial relations defined by these paths: one must always find "an equilibrium between the proximity imposed by the public configuration of places and the distance necessary to safeguard one's private life"(*ibid*.).

This "dexterity", this capacity of finding the point of balance, is a skill of appropriation of public space of the neighborhood, in which personal paths are embedded in their singularity. Residents must behave in ways which make them recognizable. That will place them in a web of exchanging relations with neighbors, where different degrees of intimacy are developed. The awareness and resourceful administration of this graded intimacy is based on the control of a graded proximity with others.

In his study of the art of coexisting in the neighborhood, Mayol suggests that the weaving of this sense of acknowledgement by the others is based on the ritual confirmation of the rules of "propriety" (*ibid*. 18-23). Propriety defines the stage on which everyone's manners, expressions and body movements will present an acceptable self. In this sense, as in all ritual theatricality, the neighborhood normalizes behavior. "Propriety is the rite of the neighborhood" (*ibid*. 19). However, in the ritualized confirmation of a sense of participating in the neighborhood's universe, specific, individually chosen tactics, which support the presentation of the self, reveal all their

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11 See chapter 1.

diversity. Propriety defines a theatricality of behavior which is not oriented towards the confirmation of roles and hierarchies, but towards the indirect, sometimes, according to Bourdieu (1977:171), misrecognized or, according to Vernant (in Vernant and Detienne 1978), pretentiously calculating, but always oblique and periphrastic negotiation with the small and large differences that characterize the others.

In this sense, although ritual, the theatricality of propriety has the particularity of "regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu 1977:78). Desires are disguised but also secretly subjected to the implicit, non-expressible, rules of propriety. Bodies learn to appreciate distances. Greeting the neighborhood's shop owner has its own small theatricality of encounter, just as the encounter with the hurried neighbor with whom we come face to face every morning, at the same time, on our way to work.

All this multifarious negotiations of distances, which give birth to varied forms of relations, define the neighborhood as a threshold space between the city space and domestic space. As a field of encounters of a graded accidental nature (therefore of a graded repetitiveness), the neighborhood is a space where one learns how to transform distances into controlled bridges towards the others, how to administrate relations with others as relations of vicinity. As opposed to the forced proximity of the metropolitan crowd, the neighborhood creates out of vicinity conditions of encounter, making distance a prerequisite for relation-building.

The neighborhood does not offer this wisdom of inhabitation – which administrates the intermediate distances of vicinity – only to reproduce a closed world where nothing happens. The neighborhood constitutes a birthplace of events big and small. It has its history. The ritual theatricality of propriety does not coincide with the stereotypical structure of mass culture. De Certeau insists on this. However, he reflects, this resourceful, poetic culture of every day life is not only a culture of the habitual which "hides a fundamental diversity of situations, interests and contexts under the apparent repetition of objects that it uses" (de Certeau *et al*. 1998:256). The fundamental variety of inhabitation practices which approach the other with the periphrastic and distance-creating wisdom of theatricality, depends on the birth of events which cannot be reduced to social reproduction norms. What is recognized is compared with what seems unfamiliar.

The neighborhood is potentially open to social change, it is always the stage of minor or major transformations. If the power of "approaching theatricality" can remain an element of its culture, then the neighborhood can remain a field of synthesis as well as a field of differentiating relations. Thus, the much-discussed dismantling of the contemporary city's tissue does not amount to the dismantling of a real or fantasized community of people knowing each other. It marks something more serious: The short-circuiting of the capacity to approach others as others. Beyond exoticism and hostility, and against assimilating mimetic practices, the theatricality of propriety reveals us an art of supporting differences through practices that continuously weave the fabric of common life.

PART III

Pict. 10. A celebrating heterotopia – The end of a large anti-gentrification demonstration in Berlin.

CHAPTER 6

Heterotopias: appropriating Foucault's geography of otherness

Power, order and places

The concept of order is deeply imbued with the experience of space. When we speak of order, we refer to a situation in which there is a place for each thing. Perhaps one of our most immediate experiences is that space is a sum of places. So, the concept of order contains a latent image of a tidy space, the image of an arrangement of places.

In the analysis of power that runs through the work of Michel Foucault, the notion of order (*ordre*) is extremely important. As the author often stresses, he is not particularly concerned with an ontology of power, i.e. with the essence of power, as if power were a condition that transcends history and society (Foucault 1983:217). How is power exercised, how are relations of power created? These issues can be found at the centre of Foucault's interest. However, if power manifests itself only when it is exercised and it is ascertained in the historical relations that constitute social subjects, then how are these relations assembled, what defines them in a historically determined society? The concept of order can come in handy here. In a relational model that does not wish to be perverted towards the ascertainment – completely devoid of prospects for knowledge – that everything is connected with everything in ways that do not obey any kind of normality, it is important to know whether or not relations construct forms of order, i.e. whether or not they are connected in ways that link them as unities, coordinate them, arrange them or line them up.

In his research on the birth of prisons, clinics or psychiatric hospitals, Foucault seeks the historical particularity of a "chaining" of relations of power that corresponds to "disciplinary society", whose characteristics are crystallized in the eighteenth-century western world. However, this chaining, this systematic subordination of power relations to order, does not correspond to an order of places that can be defined as power centres. "Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared" (Foucault 1990:94). That is why it cannot be accumulated in places, it cannot be found in places. Thus, order corresponds to the layout of the field of actions that constitute the exercise of power. In essence, this field constitutes "the system of differentiations which permits one to act upon the action of others" (Foucault 1983:223).

The historical particularity of disciplinary society lies in the fact that the system

of differentiations on which power relations are articulated reaches the borderline "molecularity" of individualization. Discipline classifies and defines the action of people to the point that it separates them. Discipline as a power relation guarantees action on the action of people, defining them as subjects – bodies on which a "microphysics of power" (Foucault 1995:26) is exercised. So, instead of centres of power, order refers to places of exercise; in their molecular differentiation, these places are the bodies themselves of the individuals who form the society. Thus, order, as a condition of relations between places, is a condition of relations between places that define subjects[1], with the double meaning that Foucault rediscovers in the term "subject": a subject of action and somebody who is subjected to some kind of power.

The spatial image that underlies the concept of order does not become a vehicle for Foucault to describe power as the distribution of specific social forces in certain places. It assists in the birth and formulation of a very important view: in disciplinary society, power classifies, shares out, defines, demarcates and controls the compliance of people as an active acceptance of the defining elements that society attributes to them. It is in this sense that power is exercised as a process which constructs the field of the possible action of disciplined subjects.

The spatialization of knowledge

The notion of order and the spatial image that goes with it help Foucault define – on the same level and with the same means – the logic of the distribution of power relations in the social body and the logic of the materialization-perpetration of those relations in specific material environments. Here we can find one of the most interesting possible ways to develop Foucault's work. The author himself admits he didn't follow that path, although he believes it would have been quite fruitful: "space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (Foucault 1984:252). This assertion seems to express the idea that space, as well as the specific material arrangements which define it, is important as receptacle of power relations. It is possible to interpret this claim somewhat differently: in the organizing logic of space we can discover not only the results of the articulation of power relations but also crucial preconditions of this articulation. Foucault opened this prospect of research in the work program of his study *Discipline and Punish*, where he identifies an instance of spatial organization as the model of disciplinary society: the organization of the Panopticon.

Observing the birth of prison in western history, he detects the emergence of a series of detention practices and seeks their common precondition. It is not about tracing a common ideology or looking for a centre of regulation that programs and acts, but rather about trying to find a common matrix (in the sense of a mould), a model which could highlight the common elements of all power relations that sustain a disciplinary society as well as the articulation of those relations. Foucault (1995)

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1 As Andrea Mubi Brighenti observes: "In order to work properly, government needs to territorialize a given population within its own framework of sovereignty. In Foucault's account, this is precisely the aim that disciplines help to achieve. What counts is not space per se, but the relationships among people that are built through space and inscribed in it in the effort to sustain the triangle sovereignty–discipline–government" (Brighenti 2010:55).

discovered this model in a spatial arrangement, an imaginary architectural creation, a system of spatial relations envisioned by Jeremy Bentham as the perfect system of supervision[2]. The importance of this spatial organization, which has inspired a great variety of task-specific buildings such as prisons and asylums, lies in the fact that the person is forced to comply and adjust his or her behavior because of the feeling that he or she can be observed from the tower at any time, without however knowing when that is indeed happening. So, surveillance becomes an interior norm of the observed, it becomes inscribed in the body: "Visibility is a trap" (*ibid*. 200).

The Panopticon "is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form … it is in fact a figure of political technology" (*ibid*. 205). By placing bodies in space, it affects their behavior through its architecture and geometry, virtually classifying the behavior of the enclosed. It is the precondition for the exercise of power upon them.

For Foucault, discipline is above all an art of distribution. That is why "discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (*ibid*. 141). So, it is a specific order in space, in the sense of an active interference in the spatial distribution of people, that gives disciplinary supervision a material form. Foucault finds this power that controls and supervises as well as strictly defines the obligations of the inhabitants in the image of a plague-stricken town. In order to record and control the spreading of the disease, all persons must be in their place, their condition must be reported and their controlled access to the means of subsistence guaranteed. "The plague is met by order" (*ibid*. 197). So, the "plague-stricken town … is the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (*ibid*. 198).

The Panopticon transforms a condition whose legitimation and efficiency was linked to an "emergency situation" into a permanent state, a model articulation of techniques of surveillance with an exercise of controlling power (*ibid*.).

It must be made clear that the model of panopticism is not a spatial condition that can be reduced to the geometry of relations between positions. The Panopticon, Foucault insists, is an ideal social machine. It must be in operation in order to impose and be imposed. So, the spatiality of the model is a performed spatiality, a realization of specific spatial relations by specific subjects that are found in places of power precisely because they "inhabit" these spatial relations. Deleuze claims that, in the mapping of disciplinary power, Foucault activates the notion of a "diagram" as a "space-time multiplicity". "The diagram … is a cartography which is coextensive with the whole social field" (Deleuze 1988:34). For Foucault, the concept of diagram retains the meaning of spatial association, stressing however its potential, process-oriented character. Thus, the diagram could offer the image of a spatial order that is in process. Stuart Elden makes a similar remark on Foucault's idea of spatial ordering: "Foucault's mappings are far from totalizing, perhaps best seen as sketchmaps, ap-

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2 "At the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring" (Foucault 1995: 200). The building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole of its width. Each cell has two windows, one on the inside and the other on the outside. In essence, an observer from the central tower can watch the interior of every cell without himself being visible. All one has to do is place "a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy" (*ibid*.) in the cell, and their activities become exposed to whoever is in the tower.

proximations toward, signposts" (Elden 2001: 115).

Spatiality, thus, emerges as a determining factor in the understanding of the disciplinary surveillance that characterizes a particular articulation of power relations in a specific society, but also in the development and realization of those practices in a given social arrangement. So, the specific architecture of prisons, asylums, factories or schools in this society is not an epiphenomenon of the power relations but simultaneously a term, a precondition and a result of their deployment.

If power relations in the disciplinary society are integrated in the model of panopticism, their role in the conservation of this social regime depends on their efficiency in detecting and classifying individuals and guiding their actions. This way, power relations produce knowledge, knowledge which is not only useful for their enforcement but also results from it[3].

"[I]n the eighteenth century, the table was both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge. It was a question of organizing the multiple … of imposing upon it an 'order'" (Foucault 1973:148). In this operation, knowledge and power provide the foundation for each other; it is not a relation of base and superstructure. Discipline is, above all, an art of distribution and register. Ultimately, the logic of classification, of the organization of human behavior, of people but also of objects and of a city in one order, is both an act of power (of controlling reality) and one of knowledge (of reality). In the same historic period when classificatory knowledge (the detection of the particularities of behavioral types) is brought forward as an issue, natural history is also constituted through the classification of beings (*ibid.* 128-132). In both ventures, vision plays a crucial role. What is visible is collected, classified and at the same time rendered the object of observation and supervision[4].

Natural history constitutes a true "spatialization of knowledge" (Foucault and Rabinow 1984): herbariums, collections and gardens are the material forms the "non-temporal rectangle" assumes, in which "creatures present themselves one beside another, their surfaces visible, grouped according to their common features" (Foucault 1973:131). The timeless rectangle is yet another version of the table, of the tables constructed by panoptical power: it orders in space so as to control and come to know at the same time. And this spatialization of relations is the necessary precondition for the consolidation of identities and characteristics of beings ("characters", *ibid.* 140)[5].

Spaces of otherness?

In the experience of relations defined by spaces that are materialized as places, as well as in the constitution of the way we think and talk about things presupposing a

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3 "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1995:27).

4 "To observe, then, is to be content with seeing – with seeing a few things systematically" (Foucault 1973:134).

5 "Natural history in the Classical Age … constitutes a whole domain of empiricism as at the same time describable and orderable." (Foucault 1973:158). "The structure selected to be the locus of pertinent identities and differences is what is termed the character" (*ibid.* 140).

certain order that defines them, space appears as a condition of association, a condition, simultaneously, of discrimination and comparison. However, according to Foucault, space as an experience and as a concept which nurtures western thought, has its own history. In a short text presented in 1967 before a group of architects and published in 1984, shortly before his death (Foucault 2008:14-29). Foucault attempts a rough periodization of this history. In the Middle Ages, the hierarchization and blending of spaces according to their sacred or cosmic significance gave birth to the medieval space, "the space of localization". In the seventeenth century, Galileo confirms the existence of an "infinite and infinitely open space", introducing an understanding of space as extension. In our time, the uniform space-extension is substituted by space-locations (emplacement). "We are in an epoch in which space is given to us in the form of relations between emplacements" (*ibid*. 15). These locations are perfectly distinguishable and irreducible to each another. Thus, a fundamental heterogeneity runs through the space of modern life.

It is obvious that, in this scheme – which Foucault has left unfinished – there is an emphasis on how space as a social condition constitutes a system of discrimination, a system of differentiation. The way in which relations of power are articulated in such a system is not clearly described. However, what is particularly interesting in this text is a category of spaces that apparently constitute a crucial field of articulation of power relations, a crucial field in which the relation between classificatory identification and heterogeneity is regulated.

Foucault calls these spaces heterotopias and defines them as the "real (*réel*) places – effective places (*effectifs*) that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacement, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements, that can be found in a culture, are simultaneously represented (*représentés*), contested (*contestés*), and inverted (*inversés*)" (*ibid*. 17).

Foucault distinguishes these spaces from the spaces described as utopias, ascribing them a specific, real existence inside society. And it is also evident that these spaces are absolutely distinguishable from all other spaces in which the life of a society unravels. What is not so clear is the place of heterotopias in the intertwining of power and space constituted by disciplinary order, this squaring of the social field and the space of common life. Are heterotopias a distinct kind that finds its place in this order, strictly delimited and stigmatized, or do they constitute another version of the articulation of power and space, different from and antagonistic against the order of disciplinary society?

At the beginning of the Classical Age, in the seventeenth century, Foucault detects a turning point in Western society: the birth of the institution of incarceration, of confinement[6]. As he tries to show with his historically focused researches, commitment gives birth to a new relation of society with what it defines as normal and abnormal, natural and unnatural in human life. By banishing what it considers unnatural, unsocial – madness being the emblematic threat in this equation – society

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6 The institution of confinement is not only defined by the fencing of a space but also by the distribution of people. "Each individual in its place and a place for each individual … Discipline organizes an analytical space" (Foucault 2006:102). It is the coding of a structural organization, as Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983:155) observe.

delimits in its interior an area under surveillance, in which the "dangerous others" are enclosed[7]. The confinement of madmen estranged from society, or of those who are generally considered anti-social, constitutes a spatial determination of the "other", of the radical otherness that is external in relation to society. If the model of the supervised, plague-stricken town could impose a generalized classification and control of the inhabitants, the asylum constitutes a model in which the other is exiled, just as occurs with lepers, but in the interior of a society that strictly delimits the perimeter of a malignant "abscess". The classification of social subjects, of which panopticism constitutes the clearest example, seems to presuppose a different charter and at the same time a charter elsewhere, where the otherness that escapes classification can be found. So, one could identify heterotopias as the places of the other, outside the generalized disciplinary order, where differences do not describe different characters but the boundaries of the social[8].

However, if one wishes to consistently observe the logic of the intertwining of space and power pointed out by Foucault, one must promptly place the asylum and the prison not only outside order but also inside it, within a dynamic system which regulates deviation through the process of therapy and disciplining. It is a necessary outside, in which the findings of an unceasing panoptical observation are constantly analysed and classified.

According to Foucault's definition, prisons and asylums are heterotopias, if we are to focus on the power of contrast that compares them and differentiates them from all other social places. Foucault also distinguishes a special category of heterotopias of deviation, in which he includes those types of institutions (Foucault 2008:18). The absolute otherness of such places does not, however, simply give them a distinct position in an established order of space. It renders them an active factor in the definition of this order. Precisely because they can "reverse" other places, heterotopias do not transgress order, but rather reproduce it. The distinction normal-abnormal as a counterpart of the distinction acceptable-non acceptable and social-antisocial is the motor of classification. Ultimately, those distinctions and the safeguarding of their validity and effectiveness are the object of disciplinary power.

However, Foucault detects the following principle in the prospect of the exploration of a possible "heterotopology": "The heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible" (*ibid*. 19). Here he seems to allow for the formation of a different horizon for the role of heterotopias in the articulation of power and space. It is as if heterotopias were not approached from the outside, considered according to their relation with an outside that distinguishes and separates them, but from the inside, as worlds with their own logic of organization. From such a perspective, heterotopias appear as complex worlds, not only as statutorily external to the ruling order but also as fields of emergence of an "anti-order". What examples does Foucault appeal to in order to show this power of heterotopia? The theatre in whose stages we

7 Such a gesture "did not isolate strangers who had previously remained invisible, who until then had been ignored by force of habit. It altered the familiar cityscape by giving them new faces, strange, bizarre silhouettes that nobody recognized." (Foucault 2006:80)

8 Madmen "upset the order (*ordonnance*) of the social space", as appears in the first French edition of *The History of Madness* (1961), quoted in Elden (2001:126).

see the alternation of different spaces, the cinema with the singular superposition of the two-dimensional space of the screen and the three-dimensional space of projection and, finally, the garden, the oldest example of a space where distinct and different locations coexist[9].

Constitution in turmoil

Through the reported examples, one can single out the particularity of a displaced perspective in the analysis of heterotopias: their place includes interior incompatibilities, tensions. The fact that many places co-exist in one place apparently throws the exercise of classification into a crisis. Foucaullt singles out the zoo as a contemporary heterotopia. He probably refers specifically not to these zoological gardens which present the species of animals for educational purposes, defining relatives and similar environments, but rather to those which seek to stimulate surprise and satisfaction by placing the most disparate animals, exhibits of the exotic and the unexpected, side by side. Animals from different parts of the world, each one in a miniature version of their environment, participate in a collage of places and images and compose a heterotopian superposition of locations.

When, in the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault comments on the famous Chinese Encyclopaedia described by Borges in one of his stories, he observes that it is a kind of "disorder" in which "fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the heteroclite" (Foucault 1973:xvii). He also calls this condition a heterotopia and detects in it the absence of a "friendly space" where a common place could be defined through differences between things. That is why heterotopias destroy the syntax of the word and above all the syntax that makes words and things (the former beside the latter or both facing each other) stand together (*ibid*. xviii).

Although Foucault's point of view in the above references is oriented towards an archaeology of western knowledge, one can observe an interesting analogy between this understanding of heterotopias and the one inferred so far. A peculiar and disturbing ambiguity defines heterotopias: they are characterized by a coexistence of fragments belonging to differing taxonomies. Beyond the dilemma of order-disorder: the "incongruous", "the impossibility to define a common locus" (*ibid*. xviii). At the limits of an impossible knowledge, i.e. at the limits of a disorder which is filled with potential order, heterotopia becomes an explosively heterogeneous place, a place that can perhaps only be defined as pure unrest, a parallel birth and mutual refutation of orders.

Maybe the importance of the reversal that heterotopias entail in their comparison to other real "locations" could become visible here. Insofar as they are locations of otherness in relation to what surrounds them, heterotopias become places that bring relations between instances of otherness to prominence. They not only project their difference, but also render otherness an internal condition of their constant birth.

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9 "The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world". According to Foucault, the modern zoo develops from this heterotopian dimension of the garden (*ibid*. 20).

Many readings of Foucaultian heterotopias, however divergent, can correspond to such an emphasis on heterotopian constitution-as-turmoil. So, geographer Edward Soja does not consider heterotopias as yet another kind of space that can be added to "geographic imagination", but insists that they make us think of spatiality in a different way, different from the current geographic discourse (Soja 1996:163). Sociologist Kevin Hetherington considers heterotopias to be "alternate orderings", in the sense that – in their history – they are put to trial, ultimately leading to the emergence of forms of spatial and social order that are different from those defined by their environment. Following this line of thought, he analyses the emergence of the factory as a modern heterotopia at a time when different forms of space-time order are superimposed in it (Hetherington 1997:109-138).

Benjamin Genocchio wonders whether heterotopias point out the limits of the impossibility of a completely "other" place (Genocchio 1995:42). Stressing the interpretation of heterotopias that Foucault mentions in the preface of *The Order of Things*, he shows how discourse, this system of systems, this field of order that renders possible all other order in knowledge and action cannot represent or describe heterotopias. Beyond speech and space, heterotopias become, for Genocchio, the absolute outside (*ibid*. 43).

Architecture theorist and historian Manfredo Tafuri considers that Foucault's definition of heterotopia in the preface to *The Order of Things* fits with the work of Piranesi, in the "discontinuous montage of forms, citations, and memories" (Tafuri 1990:40), which brings about "this hermetic fragmentation of architectural *ordo*"[10] in his famous plates *Campo Marzio* and *Le Carceri* (*ibid*. 27).

In all these interpretations, heterotopias appear as the disturbance of order. Perhaps the internal tension detected in heterotopias does not characterize locational relations but rather space-time conditions in which the emergence of otherness intertwines with and confronts similarity. Could it be that inside the heterotopian condition the same and the different (inherently relational terms) are combined in multiple relations, which by constantly suspending the order that defines them, become exposed to the tensions that simultaneously confirm this order and deny it? Faced with classification that identifies and detects, the heterotopian disorder, as a multiplicity of possible orders, continues to produce differences. Heterotopias emerge as suspended spaces of otherness.[11]

According to Hetherington, heterotopias are born when a dominant desire for order that is characteristic of modern society has to confront the ambiguities created by the practices that materialize it. The utopian, reformative logic of society itself, which imagines governance in the form of a perfect city where everything has its place, contains an inherent contradiction: "the utopian ideal that lay behind

10 Urbach (1998:352) seeks in heterotopology the ways to discover "how spaces function to identify and devalue particular social forms".

11 Of course, one can find a simulation of heterotopia in the modern world of consumerism. The city of Las Vegas has been considered emblematic of such an odd coexistence of architectural and pictographic settings which represent exotic sites of the past and the present (the big casinos dress up as Rome, Ancient Egypt, the Mythical East or a futuristic colony in space). "New York, Paris and Venice are shrunk down, remixed and repackaged for the consumer of mediated otherness in a space of convenience" (Chaplin 2000:216).

the desire for order was not necessarily ordered in itself" (Hetherington 1997:67). Hetherington recognizes heterotopias as the intersection of alternative strategies for the creation of order; this differentiates them internally just as it differentiates the subjects that operate in their dominion. Heterotopias are thus born as spaces of materialized utopias which are exposed to the contradictions that characterize them but also to the confrontations that undermine any clarity in their objectives (*ibid.* 69).

However, similar interpretations of heterotopias exaggerate the aiming for order, which should at least be considered as expressed through strategies that define relations of power, to the detriment of the recognition of practices imbued with the denial of order, without the model of another, fairer, order being necessarily called upon. If we define these practices as resistance, what role do they play in the creation of heterotopian conditions?

Heterotopias as spaces in suspense

Foucault puts it as clearly as possible: "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 1990:95). However, the relation between power and resistance is not an external one. The relational character of power relations concerns the multiplicity of resistances, and it is because of resistances that the exercise of power is historically differentiated. The incorporation of resistances in the "strategic field of power relations" (*ibid*. 95-96) is consistent with the logic of the necessary intertwining of the opposite poles normal-abnormal in the organization of social order.

However, in the historicity of social confrontations, of rebellions large and small, it is precisely this fundamental distinction between normal and abnormal that is judged, *de facto* and not necessarily because some choose to do so. Resistances should not only be understood as denials or obstacles to the plans of power; they can also delegitimize the classificatory practices through which power relations are articulated in order. Resistance, thus, does not become external to power but, since power and resistance are mutually constitutive, the field of power is created through processes which can be destroyed, reversed or become exposed to the possibilities of confrontation.

In one of his last texts, Foucault suggests that "[r]ather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality" we can "go further towards a new economy of power relations" by "analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (Foucault 1983:211). With this, he highlights resistances as a field that is characteristic of the type of power which they oppose. Against the "objectifying power" that Foucault points out as the modern form of disciplinary power, against the power that attaches subjects to forced identities (*ibid*. 213), struggles appear that precisely deny such forms of definition. These struggles "for a new subjectivity", according to Foucault, have also existed in other times, but what renders them particularly important in modern societies is the fact that they question the most fundamental element of disciplinary society, the nexus classification-surveillance.

Should we then reserve the term heterotopia for the description of power-space relations in the context of the emergence of such struggles, such resistances? Could it be that, precisely when the order that expresses a specific articulation of power and space is threatened by a "disorder" in which "fragments of a large number of pos-

Pict. 11. A self made BMX racing ground in Athens.
(Photo by Babis Louizidis)

Pict. 12. Converting an occupied market building to a public space heterotopia – Athens, former Municipal Market building in Kypseli.

sible orders glitter", heterotopian conditions are born? And, if these struggles upset the order of space as well as social order, it is not necessary to assume that they foretell a new order, unless we identify the social with mere "order". In that case, almost as in a tautology, any practice that causes the emergence of new relations between people would by definition outline a new order. However, it is likely that the actions of resistance create possibilities for new social relations which are not necessarily part of a new social order. Laclau convincingly claims that "any representation [of society] is an attempt to constitute society, not to state what it is" (Laclau 1990:82). When society is represented as an ordered totality, what is left out is the dynamic of change which essentially makes domination (or hegemony) a process open to history. Thus, order is more like a hegemonic stake than a fact.

Heterotopian conditions emerge when heterogenesis intertwines with reproduction. In this context social individualization takes place on precarious ground. Heterotopias are thus born as places of discontinuity, cracks in the moulding classifications of space and time, as heteroclite fragments of space and time come together in the processes that provide a place to emergent social relations.

This way, we can consider heterotopias not as places of otherness but as passages towards otherness.[12] The spatial image of the passage does not present a space through its characteristics only, but rather through its relation to others, to such an extent that it becomes identified with this relation. All passages are "passage-towards". Heterotopias as passages are moving places, places in which whatever is happening has departed from the previous order without a given destination.

Every society protects its passages. As we have seen, through rites of passage societies control and ensure the passage from one identity to another without the order of social reproduction being threatened. However, there are dangers of disorder and infringement lurking in passages. There, control could always fail.[13]

Heterotopias have some of the attributes of places of transition, where those who undergo rites of passage temporarily remain. In these places, as Turner pointed out (Turner 1977:102-106), there is a hovering between an identity that has already been abandoned and an identity for which the initiated has not yet been considered worthy. The trials that accompany this in-between phase, which happen in places symbolically and often materially outside any place, are forms of exercise on how to assume an imposed social identity. In heterotopias, these experiences of initiation to otherness of an impending identity are not strictly predetermined but rather assume the form of a visit to otherness (Stavrides 2002:391), the form of a visit to a world that does not yet exist. It is a trial departure from what is characteristic of oneself without a given destination. In these trials of otherness, identities might shimmer, simultaneously appear and disappear, be expressed and refuted.

That is why it is reasonable to consider that heterotopias essentially host instances of theatricality. There is a trying on of new masks and roles without a definite access to another identity. The art of becoming someone else, not as an art of deception but as the art of searching for new forms of subjectivity, wells up in

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12 "Heterotopias thus mark an osmosis between situated identities and experiences that can effectively destroy those strict taxonomies that ensure social reproduction" (Stavrides 2007:178).
13 For an anthropological well-documented presentation of this argument, see Turner (1982:45).

heterotopias. Heterotopian conditions harbour theatricality as a means to approach otherness (*ibid*. 233-241), a theatricality that does not give birth to identifications but rather to trials, denials rather than assertions of roles, hybrid compositions and unfinished subjectifying practices.

The art of becoming someone else can become an art of survival.[14] Those who find themselves in strategically disadvantageous positions due to the dominant power relations often invent ways to protect themselves from the consequences of control by pretending they don't stand out, pretending they comply with normalizing classifications. Disciplinary power and the classificatory knowledge that corresponds to it could be setting a trap for themselves this way, assuming the adoption of a facet as compliance. The dependence of disciplinary power on panoptical surveillance exposes it to the danger of identifying what is visible with what exists. Control through classification can possibly lose its target, failing to produce reality as it produces knowledge.

In heterotopias, the art of adopting another facet – an art that is nurtured by the resourcefulness of the weak in the everyday game of survival[15] – becomes the motor of a socially crucial visit to otherness: from a strategy of protection, pretending becomes an inventive questioning of the rules of identification, leading to a *de facto* and *ad hoc* synthesis of incomplete and hybrid identities, identities under construction.

In the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century, heterogenesis gave birth to collective and personal identities that evaded normalizing codifications: the *flaneur*, the bohemian, the intellectual, the dandy, the prostitute, are all figures whose presence turned the arcades into heterotopias of modernity.[16] In the collective experience of an occupied factory in present-day Argentina, where the collective control of production and the new relations born through an anti-hierarchical logic are being tried, modern heterotopian conditions emerge. Maybe young skateboarders create their own heterotopias at night on the stairs outside of a bank, on a monument or in a square (Borden 2001:182). Those who protest by blocking roads experience at the same moment this heterogenesis in their extraordinary relation with the city, just as the unemployed *piqueteros* in Argentina, the homeless in Brazil, the French students in the days of May 68 and the rebellious outcasts of the European suburbs and the US ghettos experienced it. And, of course, whenever movements have tried to seek the face of the future in heterotopian conditions, they have discovered the creative power of this trial visit to the "not-yet". This type of experiences were born and continue to be born in the demonstrations of the multiform movement against neoliberal globalization, just as they are born in the Lacandon jungle, in the autonomous municipalities of the Zapatista indigenous rebels.

14 It can become a form of the inventive arts of the weak de Certeau mentions. See de Certeau (1984:24-28 and 40) for the tactics of deception used by workers pretending to be at work in order to temporarily escape from exhausting working conditions.
15 James Scott (1990) offers a systematic analysis of this inventiveness and the "arts of disguise" that distinguish it. See also his direct reference to Foucault, who underlines the theatricality of exaggeration found in the demands of the royal subjects in their complimentary formulation before the king (*ibid*. 93).
16 In respect of this, Walter Benjamin's (1999) analysis of the Parisian Arcades is essential.

In his tenacious research on the connections between power and knowledge, Foucault pointed out the importance of space, not as a field of expression of social relations but as a factor of articulation of power relations as well as a factor of the knowledge that corresponds to them. As concrete experience but also as a concept through which we think of society as a field of interdependent relations, space has its history and therefore is important for the archaeology of knowledge as well as for the genealogy of modern power. Perhaps Foucault did not follow the path of a focused analysis of space in his research; his work, however, sheds light to the importance of such a perspective. As a geographer of otherness, as an analyst of the relations of power that "subjectify" and "situate", he has made normalizing classifications problematic. Spatial and social orders both support and express the exercise of classificatory power in surveillance societies. Foucault has also showed that the field of control is discontinuous, that there are no centres of power but only relations and conditions of exercise that produce acting subjects.

The limited and historically confined effectiveness of normalizing power renders a microphysics of power necessary. A microphysics of resistance is likewise necessary[17], insofar as it reshapes the rules of the exercise of power. Heterotopian conditions that go beyond the symmetrical involvement of power and resistance, create new possibilities as Foucault himself asked for and experienced. "The ship", Foucault says, "is the heterotopia *par excellence*. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates" (Foucault 2008:22). When the Zapatistas organized the First Encounter for Humanity against Neoliberalism in the Lacandon Jungle, they too imagined their heterotopia as a ship. "The awning [of the convention in the jungle] is in reality a sail, the benches oars, the hill the hull of a mighty vessel, while the stage becomes the bridge … Now I am a pirate. A pirate is tenderness that explodes in fury, is justice that has not yet been understood … is an eternal navigating toward no port" (Taussig 1999:257).

The Zapatistas did not wish to protect their ship in the safety of a secret anchorage. They did not wish to entrench it in the arrogance of a well-planned utopia, and rather sent it everywhere, into the dirty waters of the social archipelago (Stavrides 2004), so that it might come across all kinds of vessels of resistance. Sometimes, in these often crude vessels, the future sails, full of hopes and ambiguities, simultaneously here and elsewhere, today but also tomorrow and yesterday. A future that is unknown yet familiar as it is being created with materials taken from the present.

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17 "If it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it" (de Certeau 1984:xiv). De Certeau also speaks of "the network of an anti-discipline" where molecular actions are articulated.

Pict. 13. Zapatista autonomous region, Chiapas, Mexico – During the celebration for the School's inauguration: A heterotopian mixture of cultures and emancipatory values. (Photo from archive of the Campaign for a School in Chiapas)

CHAPTER 7
Identities and rebellion in Zapatista heterotopias

Thinking of how individual and collective identities define the members of a society does not amount to thinking of society as a classification of names, as a group of named and invariable entities. Identities appear and disappear, they are projected in social antagonism, expressing it, diffracting it or concealing it. We must imagine identities as the product of social relations rather than as their precondition, and therefore consider their construction as an ongoing process which is open to changes and confrontations.

Precisely because it is the duration, confirmation or even overthrowing of social relations that are at stake in the creation or annulment of identities, it is not possible to imagine insurgent policies which pay no attention to the social conditions surrounding the birth of specific identities. If an individual or group recognizes itself in features which define the horizon of a promised continuity, then the conservation of this continuity calls for acts of assertion and reproduction. It is through attacking continuity and challenging its self-evident reproduction that dissident politics can set the field for the negation of the established identities.

The manifestation and reassertion of an identity occurs through actions which are socially meaningful: an identity has consequences and it is produced as a consequence. In this sense, identities exist by being performed and thus constitute active elements of the social condition: they interact with social relations and literally happen in the deployment of these relations.

This doesn't mean that identities are born and lost at any moment, neither does it mean that, today, in a society where social relations are expressed with a tremendous complexity of personal relations, each one of us is no more than an amorphous entity that moulds its characteristics according to the different social environments one can temporarily be in. Mechanisms of domination continue to impose recognizable and enduring identities, they continue to classify, prejudge and hierarchize. Nevertheless, the reassertion of these discriminations is not automatic but active, it is produced through actions, through practices which "perform" social relations.

Such a perspective in the discussion of identities cannot easily embrace the enduring certainty which, in the past, defined the politics of denial of the specific society, the certainty that the dominated must react in the name of their own collective identity. If social identities are born and live under conditions of unequal confrontation, and therefore are imposed as the result of the prevalence of one group of

people over another group of people, then it is baffling – to say the least – that those who react should appeal to all that is attributed to them in a condition that defines them as subdued. Identities would be "neutral", that is outside the field of domination, if they described individuals and groups on "instrumental" terms: workers are the people who work, women have specific biological characteristics, immigrants are those who were forced to leave their land, etc. However, a historically specific structure of domination names some people workers and sets conditions for their activities, their characteristics, rights, appearance, discourse, dreams or ways of life. The identity of a woman, as any gendered identity, has a social signification, it is defined by performances that describe and normalize it, it imposes obligations and shapes behaviors.

So, going against what exists, or – even better – appealing to a dream of emancipation and self-determination, amounts to not only distrust established identities but also to recognize the necessary connection between the production of identities and social reproduction.

Such awareness seems to run through the discourse and actions of a contemporary movement which opposes the "monetary society", as the movement calls it. The Zapatistas, the rebels of modern-day Mexico, stormed in the horizon of the international capitalist order, not in the name of a collective identity which sought its reassertion, but in the name of the emancipation of all those who are denied the right to self-determination. Many were quick to classify this movement as part of the struggles for the establishment and defense of a repressed indigenous identity. Since the days of classic colonialism up to the condition of colonialism under globalization that we experience today, liberating movements of all kinds have brought and continue to bring to the fore such collective identities as claimed forms of determination. However, the Zapatistas do not demand the reassertion of the identity of the contemporary Mayas. On the contrary, they consider that the contemporary Mayas will encounter their modern face in a Mexico which will include many others, in a world where "those below" will exchange experiences and dreams of equality and justice.

Those without face

The discourse and political practices of the Zapatistas were born in a time and space that was marked by the encounter of at least two worlds. In the Mexican state of Chiapas, a small group of Marxist rebels, with more or less the characteristics and way of thinking of the armed guerrilla fighters of Latin America, encountered the indigenous communities of that area, mostly made up of people who had abandoned their villages, fleeing from the corrupt local authorities (Gossen 1999:262). The rebels thus came across a structure of communal life which resembled their vision of democracy and emancipation; however, it questioned their certainties on the vanguard, the revolution and the social subjects. The forms of collective resistance of the indigenous, the principle of internal organization of the communities based on the dogma of "rule by obeying", the conception of time which bridges enormous distances between the past and the future at a pace that refers to generations and not to personal trajectories, all these elements modified the group's way of thinking and political projects. Above all, they learnt how to listen, how to wait,

how to respect the particularities of the oppressed drawing from the everydayness of their resistance. On the other hand, the indigenous were imbued with ideas of human emancipation on a global level and began to comprehend the powers that shape the world of capitalist globalization .

The Zapatista insurrection was decided upon by the communities themselves. Not by a liberating army acting on their behalf, but by an army which they manned and which guaranteed their defense. It was their "Enough is Enough!" that the EZLN turned into action, under their word of command and in the name of a common goal.

The Zapatista insurrection condenses the particularity of their politics. It is a politics which is shaped through asking, through asking those who support it and essentially produce it in the big and small moments of the struggle. It is a politics which, wanting to fight this unjust society in ways that will not resemble it, refuses to be carried away by the logic of violence, discipline and hierarchy that defines all armed groups and ventures. Constantly stressing that they are armed against their will, they destroy all perspective of the army becoming the means or the model for the birth of another society. At the same time, because their politics is not based on the idea of a vanguard or paradigm that must be followed, it draws its force from the everydayness of resistance which is resumed in the demand-goal of "dignity", both on an individual and collective level[1]. These particularities of their politics do not shape a specific type of person that they defend. Perhaps they shape the features of a field where different figures can emerge as subjectivities of a new world.

However, how can the Zapatista uprising, founded upon the indigenous communities of Chiapas, be differentiated from an indigenous uprising, an insurrection for the rights of the indigenous? Indeed, since the beginning of the rebellion, the rights of the indigenous people of Mexico have been amongst the central demands. The prospect of the abolition of the constitutionally recognized right to collective ownership of communal land (*ejidos*), under the logic of ratifying the NAFTA agreements, was the spark that set off the explosion of their "Enough is Enough!" However, in defending the indigenous populations of Mexico, the Zapatistas defend the rights of all the oppressed. And in the ignored, silenced and often violated difference of the indigenous, they saw the epitome of every difference (Lascano 2002:13) that those in power destroy if it does not serve the universal terms of "monetary society". The indigenous particularities, in terms of language, civilization, history, political culture and values, became thus not a banner for the fencing of a closed universe, but a necessary ingredient of a rich world that is being destroyed by capitalism.

"All rebellious movements are movements against invisibility", Holloway says (Holloway 2002:156). And it is this general characteristic of such movements that the Zapatistas stressed in their defense of all those "without face", of those who literally did not exist for the Mexican State, unseen, condemned to invisibility, condemned to the impossibility of expressing and demanding that which constitutes them and goes beyond the values and priorities of the society which negates them. The indigenous "without face" are, in a way, the faceless oppressed *par excellence.* Monads only when devoid of characteristics, they compose the masses that make society's

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1 "We will resist! We have dignity! If the dignity of the Mexican people has no price, then what good is the power of the powerful?" (Marcos 2002:50).

mechanism operate, offering their forces in work places and battlefields alike.

So, discourse and practice for the defense of individual and collective differ-
ence. Subcomandante Marcos summed it up in an exemplary way in one of his
most famous postscripts to an EZLN *communiqué*: "Majority postscript disguised as
an oppressed minority: Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, Asian in
Europe … Palestinian in Israel, indigenous in the streets of San Cristóbal … a rocker
in the University Campus, a Jew in Nazi Germany … an artist with no gallery or
portfolio, a housewife alone on a Saturday night in any neighborhood … a landless
peasant, a marginal publisher, an unemployed worker … To sum it up, Marcos is any
given human being of this world, Marcos is all the non-tolerated, oppressed minori-
ties that resist, explode, saying 'Enough is Enough!'. All the minorities, when it comes
to talking, and all the majorities, when it comes to shutting up and taking it. All the
non-tolerated seeking their voice, something that will give back the majority to the
eternally fragmented, us"[2].

The modern discussion on the value of difference and particularity which can-
not be reduced to a general norm tends to describe society as a complex field of dif-
ferentiations. However, the Zapatistas do not only confirm the differences, the ones
that exist and the ones that are crushed, they also ask for differences to meet[3]. That is
why the indigenous demands were never condensed in a slogan such as "Let's fight
for a modern Mayan state", but rather "Never again a Mexico without us" (which was
also central in the great march towards the City of Mexico, in February 2001). Before
the Zapatistas, it seemed that the indigenous agrarian movement could completely
identify with the defense of a common and distinctive indigenous identity. Marcos
describes the Union of *Ejidos* Kiptik, created in 1975 during the Indigenous Con-
gress, as "fundamentalists" wanting to articulate an indigenous identity closed to
internal differences and up against all others[4].

The postmodern critique of "grand narratives" does not necessarily crush the col-
lective dream of a just society. However, in the Zapatista discourse and praxis, such
a critique can liberate from the extortive adjustment of the action of "those below"
to a hierarchical and trans-historical model. Thus, instead of turning into a hymn to
consumption in the name of the reassertion of individuality, the appeal to difference
becomes a measure for the dream of emancipation but also for the means to ap-
proach it. If liberated humanity is defined as a world which can fit many worlds, then
the fight for that future will be a struggle which can fit many different struggles.

In the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, the Zapatistas take on a public
initiative for the meeting of all resistances and struggles against the neoliberal hor-
ror. Their proposal for a "national program of struggle" wishes to be a "left-wing al-
ternative proposition" which will be constructed "from below and for those who are
below". "We will ask them about their life, about their struggle, about their opinion
on what is happening in our country and how to manage not getting defeated" the
declaration states characteristically, asserting the political ethics of the Zapatistas

2 Marcos *communiqué*, May 28,1994. Partial translation in Taussig (1999:264).

3 "We are the revolt of heterogeneity against homogenization, the revolt of difference against
contradiction" says Holloway in his support for a multiform movement which produces "cracks"
on capitalist dominance (Holloway 2010: 220).

4 More about the Unions of *Ejidos* in Cal y Mayor (2002:162 and 216).

who deny the role of a vanguard or a leadership of such a multifarious movement[5].

The mask

The enigmatic phrase "We hid our faces in order to be seen" sums up the politics of the Zapatistas as a politics for the defense and discovery of those "who have no face" in this society. Assuming the place of the invisible that are deprived, along with their visibility, of their role in public life, the masked rebels consciously hide their faces. As many have already observed, the need alone to protect themselves from their per-secutors, official or paramilitary, is not enough to explain the Zapatista fixation with the famous *pasamontañas*, the balaclava. Zapata and his fellow revolutionaries wore no masks, neither did el Che and his fellow fighters. Beyond the protection of the EZLN outlaw fighters and their leadership, the use of masks has acquired a symbolic force which is completely compatible with their political particularity. Marcos points towards such a symbolic intention: "The mask is a symbol which does not result from planning, it rather constitutes a product of the struggle … Nobody looked at us while our faces were uncovered, now they do because our faces are covered" (Montalbán 2001:112).

The Zapatista mask does not disguise, nor does it conceal. It essentially emblem-izes the unity of "those below", of all those who, in their differences, are "everyday, ordinary people, that is rebels". Through this mask that de-personifies them, the oppressed project their invisible faces. They appear in history's fore, not as distinct persons with distinct characteristics, but as persons – simultaneously visible and invisible – who are present in struggles that give them the only identity that can include them without wiping out their differences: the identity of the rebel. "We, the forgotten, have a name… We still hope that now that we have a name, our brothers, you, will tomorrow also give us a face". With these words the Clandestine Revolution-ary Indigenous Committee – General Command (CCRI-CG) of the EZLN addresses the "brothers and sisters", the people of the world[6].

The de-personification of the mask, which does not homogenize but rather gives birth to places of encounter, has a ritual essence. Marcos is constantly sar-castic regarding all those who wonder about his true identity, saying that he fears he might lose his allure. It is a tendency to style that makes him wear the mask, he says, and for him and his fellow *comandantes* to hide their ugliness. In this sarcastic disposition, Marcos seems to invert the dominant adoration of the face. It is as if he is turning the western ritual projection of the face as the centre of personal identity against itself.

Behind Marcos' words, a world with profound roots in the indigenous past endows the mask with magic power. It is not that the Zapatistas adopted ancient indigenous visions of the world and symbolizations so as to entice them into sup-porting the movement. It is rather the inhabitants themselves of the communities in Chiapas, those who make up the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee, the EZLN command and every aspect of the Zapatista movement, who brought

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5 The Declaration can be found in English at: https://webspace.utexas.edu/hcleaver/www/SixthDeclaration.html.
6 CCRI-CG of EZLN *communiqué* March 12,1995.

their culture to the crossroads of their encounter with the western emancipating discourse. Their collective wisdom corresponded to a relationship with the world which is open to difference, open to the awareness that identities are born in their relation with others, they join people and groups in their long journey around the world and are exposed to constant trial.

The indigenous culture, exiled by the conquerors from their religious as well as secular affairs, was forced to hide in invisible practices which, however, weaved the thread of collective resistance. For the indigenous descendants of the conquered Mayas, each person has outside her a powerful, consubstantial soul which accompanies her. This soul usually corresponds to an animal into which one can transform due to absolute kinship, winning over its power and support (Gossen 1999:228 and Taussig 1999:247). One's relation with the animal-soul (*nahual*) greatly determines one's identity, and it is a relation which can interfere in the bonds that exist between the different individuals of a society. *Nahualismo* is essentially a system of relations which regulates the social reproduction and control of the community, that is why it interfered and secretly conserved its continuity during the years of silent resistance against the conquerors (Gossen 1999)[7]. The conquerors did not have the power to harm the indigenous identities, insofar as their birth and reproduction occurred in terms of a faith which remained unseen.

It is interesting to note that this necessary ingredient of identity which is outside the individual, the consubstantial soul-animal, in fact inscribes a destination. However, it is not a teleological metaphysics which operates by normalizing the behavior of the indigenous Maya, but rather a concern to adapt to the outside – which along with the self conforms an entity – a concern which produces a modest behavior. Unlike the Western adoration of the face, the indigenous face is not glorified as a personality. The face carefully expresses the person it characterizes, without revealing its secret relation with the outside that constitutes it. Thus, society is above individuals not because it homogenizes them, but because it offers the safety of their difference, a secret difference – a fragile difference, for it is vulnerable before external forces, a difference which articulates the personal destinations that each person must find without considering them superior to the others. Here lies the root of the moderate expression of the indigenous, the careful "de-personification" in their public demonstrations and, likewise, the protection of the community notables from the hubris of a self-projected exception. Indeed, we may consider the mask that de-personifies the Zapatista leadership as a direct result of this indigenous conception of face. Exposed to the ill-intentioned intervention of their enemies, the indigenous leaders must reject all personifying features so as to rule by obeying: not the leaders but the mediating servants of a community (*ibid*. 261).

The ritual force of the mask which de-personifies is deeply rooted in a collective

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7 This resistance has sustained an explicit reference to a common cultural identity while incorporating elements of the dominant culture of the colonizers by turning them against suppression, as happened with Christian religion. So, as June Nash observes, "The dialectic of continuity related to the ability to adopt changes that allows Mayans to remain themselves is a departure from the discourse of *indigenistas*, which assumes a merging of indigenous and *ladino* cultures that will allow the former to assimilate to the more advanced, or modern, culture of the West, but offers no entry for indigenous traits into modernization" (Nash 2001: 236).

attitude of the indigenous people which also mediates their relationship with others and their relation to their community. Insofar as this relation expressed resistance but also a political culture which impeded the discrimination between the rulers and the ruled, it managed to find its place in an emancipating communal vision. The corrupt *caciques*, the potentates who collaborated with the State and sold off the rights of their people, were considered guilty of precisely such hubris where the personal, as a personal interest, replaced the impersonal role of a ruler who governs by obeying.

An element that distinctly reveals the ritual force of the use of the mask is the act itself of unmasking, the act of its removal. The official Mexican State, in an effort to strike the movement and harm the local and international prestige of its leadership, presented photos of what they considered to be the true identity of Marcos. Without his mask, the legendary *Sub* was but the son of a humble furniture salesman. How confident the State was about the effectiveness of revealing, and therefore demystifying, the alleged "leader" of the rebels! Not one week had gone by from that day in 1995, when thousands of people took to the streets of Mexico City and Chiapas, shouting "We are all Marcos!". Nobody was concerned about the face behind the mask except those who wanted to crush the movement it represented. As Marcos himself stated: "At stake is *what* Subcomandante Marcos is, not *who* he *was*" (Mertes 2004:15). He reduces his role to that of a mediator. "Marcos as a mediator, as a translator, is a window that allows you to bend over and look at the internal world, or look from the inside out to the exterior. Only the windows are dirty … The people see their own reflection on the glass and that is when Marcos turns into a symbol, he becomes what the people wish to see" (Le Bot 1998: 190).

The removal of the mask does not reveal a person, as those in power would believe. Behind the mask there is a void, an open space for the rebels to see themselves. The mask displays the collective, multifarious face of those below. Thus, the mask as the negation of the face acquires a multiplying force. The transformation of the rebels depends on their capacity to win the faces that the powerful have deprived them of. Faces which are not mirrors of a true interior, such as the western mythology of the face as the mirror of the soul wants it, but faces that mirror the outside, faces which are born at the crossroads of the *nahualic* belief in the interference of an extracorporeal consubstantial entity with the belief in a multifarious, just world, the place of encounter of emancipated particularities.

This revelation provided an unexpected stage to the theatricality of a politics which intends to demolish the foundations of the essentialist prejudice with which modern society has suffocated the imaginary of many of those who have turned against it. "The collective manipulation of symbols, either from one side or the other, entails a theatrical representation", says Marcos (Montalbán 2001: 133). The unmasked himself turned into the unexpected director of the scene of the unmasking: it was the State that was revealed in its gesture, proving that it is "those without face" who are behind a collective mask, and not a specific Mexican "conspirator".

Once again, Marcos reveals the theatricality of the mask with an allegory. It is staged at the National Democratic Meeting organized by the Zapatistas in August 1994, in the Lacandon Jungle, the area which is under their control: "When they are alone, the *Sup* [Marcos] makes a sign … Everyone, including the *Sup*, tear off

their ski masks and their faces. A multitude of fierce-looking sailors appears, the *Sup* has a patch on his right eye and begins to limp ostentatiously on his wooden leg". The mentioned *communiqué* is signed: "Pirate without bearings, professional of hope, transgressor of injustice… man without face and with no tomorrow" (Taussig 1999:256-7).

The face which is torn along with the mask is a face and, at the same time, a means, a passage that shows the way, an uncertain destination. The theatricality of the unmasking is a theatricality which proves that what is unveiled is elsewhere. The essence of the de-personification through the mask appears at the moment of the unmasking which, instead of identifying, sums up differences (*ibid*. 263). The mask did not conceal an identity; it rather unveiled a collective reference of many different people. The mask pointed beyond the face of its bearer. It aimed at the emergence of the faces of all those who demand their emancipation from a society which struggles to identify, to control through classification, to define.

The unveiling leads to a revelation, a discovery. That is why the mask remains active as a symbol even after its symbolic removal. Dis-covery? Or is it a disguise which shows the way towards the birth of a new world? Unlike the calling upon the identity of the oppressed, as humble or even as unimportant as the identity of a son of a furniture salesman, here it is about the birth of an identity of the rebels, humble but also infinitely rich. The mask renders the identity possible, it does not conceal it, for behind it there is not a face which represents an identity, but many faces which give birth to identities[8].

In the antipode of the mask which de-personifies so as to show those who have no face are the masks worn by the State. In 1998, after a long period of silence from the Zapatistas, in the text "Above and Below: Masks and Silences" (Marcos 2004), the rulers are portrayed with the masks that conceal the brutality of their politics behind misleading disguises. The nation's political life "has turned into a volatile masquer-ade". "The primary peddler of National Sovereignty" bearing "the mask of chauvin-ism" (Marcos 2004:325) has set out to pursue foreigners, says Marcos as he describes the country's president. "Behind the macro-economic mask, is hidden an economic model" (*ibid*.) which conceals the face of an economy that renders the already poor even poorer.

The State and its staff, those whose faces appear on the news, wear masks which present them as faces. The disguises of the State mislead, they try to fool the domi-nated. The distorting mirrors of power stage personalities that claim they care about the people. On the counterpart of the personifying mask of the rebels which reveals and discovers, the masks of the rulers literally conceal. And when the government's show window is taken over by the bureaucrat-politicians, their faces freeze in the same homogenizing *facade*. When the government's negotiators initially refused to talk to people wearing masks, the Zapatistas answered: but it is the State which always bears the mask (Taussig 1999:134). "The culture of resistance is an answer to the conspiracy of the masks" says Montalbán (2001: 32), commenting on this text. "Silently, these indigenous see and are seen", the text goes on. "After such a silence,

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8 "Marcos has inaugurated a space of intersubjectivity, of intercultural relations between a multiplicity of selves and others that is uniting peoples from all over the world in an unprec-edented 'postmodern' revolutionary movement" (Garcia 2001:172).

these indigenous speak a ship, a Noah's ark, a navigable Tower of Babel, an absurd and irreverent challenge to who crews and directs it, a figurehead on the prow lights a ski mask! Yes, a ski mask which reveals, the silence that speaks" (Marcos 2004:240).

So this is how the mask of the impersonal appearance, the mask of the "ritual leveling" of the rebels can become the new face which unveils, which renders possible the existence of new identities for "those below".

Any face

"The face", Agamben says, "is the only location of community, the only possible city" (Agamben 2000:91). The myth of the dominant central-western civilization considers the face to be the bastion of subjectivity. In a world where individualized destinies lead the many to humbling defeats and disappointment and the very few to the acquisition of power and wealth, the face appears as the emblem of a promise. Become what you are, an advertisement says "Become yourself", meaning "Become what we would want you to be in order for you to buy what is in our interest". In the absurdity of a personification which categorizes, in the delusion of the possession of personal and particularizing characteristics which conceals subjectification as a productive dimension of power, the face remains the most obvious part of an individual identity.

With the political magic of the indigenous rebels, the Zapatistas showed that the face can be the emblem of a collective resistance which allows space for difference. In this sense, we can bring about an explosive encounter of their political culture with the restless and militant thought of Agamben. In his argumentation, the place of politics is a position of exposure. However, not the exposure by which famous men present paradigmatic personalities in public acts. The "whatever singularity" that Agamben mentions is this new figure of politics that represents the perspective of a "coming community" (Agamben 1993). Its emancipating dimension will lie in that, in this community, there is an action and a union of individuals whose difference does not personify them as individuals in the sense of the dominant culture, nor it reduces them to the homogenizing anonymity of a community that does not tolerate differentiations and particularities. In a world where it is meaningless to continue looking for "appropriate identities" as individuality is already an empty shell, Agamben asks us to imagine "uniqueness without an identity"[9]. He says: "If humans could … not be-thus in this or that particular biography but be only the thus, their

9 Hardt and Negri propose the term "singularity" in order to deal with the inadequacies of the term "identity". For them, singularity is defined by and oriented towards multiplicity and is "always engaged in a process of becoming different" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 338-339). Hardt and Negri share with Agambenn a will to conceptualize "co-belonging" by departing from the dominant understanding of community as identity. Whereas, however, Agamben sees "whatever singularities" communicate on the level of a common humanity, a "community of being" (Mills 2008: 133), Hardt and Negri believe in the power of institutions to create a context for [singularities] to manage their encounters" (*ibid*. 357). Institutions are thus open to conflict and do not impose collective identities while, at the same time, they provide the ground for the creation and collective appropriation of the "common" (understood both in terms of common wealth and as shared forms of democratic managing this wealth).

singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable" (*ibid*. 65).

It is not sure that the coming community will be distinguished by the fact of belonging, without its reduction to certain preconditions which characterize its members. Resistance against the essentializing identification of social individuals should not ignore the historicity of each struggle against the identities in which the rulers want to trap the ruled. Only the policies of the insurrect can produce the different paths that the formation of collective identities will follow, beyond the specifications of any power.

In their multilateral confrontation with globalized capitalist domination, with the "monetary world" as they call it, perhaps the Zapatistas are outlining the profile of a coming community. Through the rich experience of the insurgent communities, they constituted a form for autonomy which does not fall into the trap of setting the boundaries of an inside and an outside. A collective identity entrenched in a spatial and political perimeter.

The Autonomous Rebel Municipalities were born through the practical materialization of the defense and protection of the indigenous grounds, of the culture, rights and natural wealth of the indigenous people[10]. Their organization is based on direct democracy and the participation of all. It is worth noting that women, unlike what occurs in the tradition of the communities, take on an active role in the autonomous councils and, with their own initiative, a judicial system is formed that is based on gender equity. Perhaps presenting a model of a coming community which is based on the value of each person, the Autonomous Rebel Municipalities forbade, since their constitution, the creation of permanent poles of power. Authorities are elected and revocable. Decisions are made as unanimously as possible, without forcing choices for which not everybody is ready. And minorities, whenever they arise, are treated with respect.

In 2003, a new self-governing model is applied in the autonomous areas and the Councils of Good Government are created. Their members come from the corresponding Autonomous Municipalities of the areas that have their own centers, the *Caracoles*. Not only do the Councils of Good Government "rule by obeying"; the delegates of the Municipalities also change quite often (in some cases every 15 days), so that the people can be trained in the justice which must serve the insurgent community. The organization of production, of the autonomous education, of health services or autonomous justice is based on the participation and the particularity of each area. Instead of elaborating a singular pattern of administration, what is brought forward is a set of principles which run through the Zapatista ethics of rebellion. Thus, a multifarious mosaic of practices is born, all of them converging in the defense of the dignity of all and of each man and woman separately. Their

10 "Zapatistas and their supporters in civil society are enacting the foundation for a pluricultural coexistence based on their experience as distinct indigenous entities within regions characterized by a multiplicity of languages and customs … The cry for autonomy as distinct self-governing entities is correlated with a mode of socialization in their families and communities where respect for the will of others, including that of children, still promotes an awareness of what autonomy may mean in a collective setting" (Nash 2001: 244).

own version of the particularity of each person considers autonomy as a collective experience in which the oppressed create their own bonds of solidarity. And if the defense of individual and collective dignity emerges as a goal in all the *communiqués* and actions of the rebels, it is because each moment of the struggle depends on all, men and women, living in equality and solidarity. "In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants. In the world we want everyone fits" (Marcos 2002:80); "We don't need to conquer the world. Creating it from the beginning will do. Us. Today"[11].

Heterotopian experiences

This politics inspired many around the world. In Greece, an initiative of practical solidarity towards the Zapatistas resulted in the creation of various collective experiences which can possibly represent aspects of a coming emancipated community.

The initiative "A School for Chiapas" was not only a campaign of solidarity. It aimed at collecting money for the construction of a Learning Center for Educators, but also at contributing with on-site labor for the construction of the buildings. The Center for the Training of Teachers of the Autonomous Rebel Municipality Ricardo Flores Magón was built with the help of the Greek team of solidarity towards the Zapatistas, the campaign "A School for Chiapas". In a symbolic act of opposition to the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, the school's inauguration took place on the 5th and 6th of August, in the community La Culebra, in Montes Azules, Chiapas.

A school in the heart of the jungle, where it is not the civilization of the conquerors that is taught to the oppressed, but the civilization and cultures of freedom of the insurrect indigenous, is a school-heterotopia. The school buildings, constructed with great effort and endless deprivations, are a place of reunion for all those who will learn in order to teach others, who, in turn, will teach yet others; it is not about a knowledge which is based on power, but rather about knowledge and questions based on hope. There is a predominance of the plural form in the Zapatista education syllabus: we must learn about histories, not history, about geographies, not geography, about civilizations and not civilization. It is this plural form that also fuels the heterotopian experience. If their dream was of an absolute outside, this school would have the shape of an introvert arc; it would hide, in its protected holds, the seed for the future, waiting for the waters of the capitalistic flood to dry up. However, this school, with its oblique rooftops and its airy, open walls, is above all a passage, a porous membrane, a crossroads of hope. It is imbued with the anxiety for the creation of another world, disrupted by the contradictions and discontinuities of such a struggle. In it, knowledge is interwoven with the joy of a collective festivity, dispute meets the detailed study of the indigenous traditions and the usefulness of practical knowledge runs into the force of creative imagination.

The account of the celebration of the school's inauguration given by the Mexican author Belinghausen, published in *La Jornada Semanal* on 22 August 2004 as "Homer shouldn't have died", is quite revealing about the heterotopian dynamics of this venture, and deserves extensive quotation:

11 CCRI-CG of EZLN *communiqué*, January 1,1996.

Let us imagine a group of dissident Athenians who will not put up with the militarization of their private lives under security pretexts that reach the limits of paranoia. Who, instead of devoting themselves to constructing stadiums, Collosseums and roads for the merchants of the Olympic Games, decide they will come together with some improbable indigenous rebels located thousands of miles away, at the very belly of the tropical jungle, and together build a modern and exemplary school for the boys and girls of the Tzeltal and Chol people. They, in turn, devote themselves to "promoting education", that is to educating the children of the autonomous municipality Ricardo Flores Magón, which is made up of communities supporting the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Two Greek architects think up a school made out of wood and iron sheets and give it wings. That is, they create an architectural project with the materials that can be found in the jungle. They do it for free and hand it over to a collectivity of Greek citizens committed to the original idea of supporting some Zapatistas who live beyond the Mediterranean and the Atlantic ocean, in a place which, from the Parthenon, must seem like the end of the world. A very well-known end of the world, however, after a decade of uprising and public struggle.

With no money (well, the inevitable minimum), out of fraternity and gratitude rather than mere generosity, the brave Athenians handed over plans, materials and labor power to the indigenous Mexicans, and for more than three years they built together the Compañero Manuel School at La Culebra.
It is not a place for reading. Let us not idealize. Not in Tzeltal and Chol, the area's native languages which aren't usually written, but neither in Mexico's national language. However, big photocopies of odes to Ulysses and Achilles, in ancient Greek and Spanish, are displayed as soon as one walks through the door of the library (of the building that will be housing it). As if the long voyage of this school from a drawing table in Athens were a sort of return journey home for Homer… home being wherever words, struggle and history are cultivated.

And if the Homeric wanderings through the Mayan jungles encountered an impoverished and rotten world, full of war, epidemic and the rapacity of the rulers, it also showed that underlying solidarities and brotherhoods flow together into open seas and reach jungles that do not know the sea. For the second time (the first was in August 1994, in Aguascalientes of Guadalupe Tepeyac) I heard of the ship Fitzcarraldo in the Lacandon jungle. But this time she was not washed away by a tropical storm.

The Tzeltal and Chol people have been rebelling against the Mexican government for eleven years and, although they seem so far away, they are in the first row of the global struggle against totalizing neoliberalism. In their encounters with the brigades of Greeks-turned constructor workers (because that was what was needed), the indigenous Mexicans became brothers and sisters without using false Olympic metaphors, realizing that things can be done well in more than one way. That another world is possible, cheaper, and even better.

And, well, if on arriving at his new and poor home in the Lacandon Jungle, three thousand years later, the blind poet finds it poor and peasant-like but inspired by struggle and joy, he will discover that nothing has been in vain and, as the modern poet of Alexandria would have said, he will have lived the journey. Together with the sons and daughters of maize, he will finally know the meaning of the Ithacas and Las Culebras.

These crossroads are an ingredient of heterotopia. In a sense, heterotopia is an expanded threshold, temporal and spatial at the same time, a transitional space in which the birth of new social experiences occurs in all its contradictions. If the Zapatistas "walk asking", it is because the future is not a far away elsewhere, in an unattainable horizon. In their political thought and action, deeply marked by the wisdom of indigenous civilizations, the path is made as we walk. The communities learn from their mistakes, they not only correct the reality of the struggle with the criterion of utopia. And if, in the 1994 uprising or the "March of Dignity", the Zapatistas did not talk on behalf of others but rather gave the floor and the space to "all those suppressed minorities who are a majority", it is because their political culture considers the birth of spaces of freedom and action fundamental. The Zapatista heterotopias were born in villages and cities along the big march. In the central square of Mexico City, the people created their own – however temporary – heterotopia of solidarity. And each act of rebellion, big and small, creates today its own heterotopia of dignity in a world of horror, no matter how little it may last.

Could it be that a network of such heterotopian collective experiences leads to the materialization of the dream of a liberated world in which many worlds will fit? And is it possible that a school deep in the jungle can signify and materialize, fearless of problems, such a perspective of collective emancipation? It is no coincidence that the construction of this school-passage, of this school-threshold, brought together so many people from countries, cultures, habits and histories which are so far away from each other. If hope brought them together, it is because in the Zapatista communities everyday action is, above all, the most tangible sign of the birth of a culture of emancipation which will not draw boundaries but rather construct bridges.

A visionary dream and a lot of work in Greece and Mexico gave birth to yet another material symbol of the emancipating perspective. All this effort fueled heterotopian experiences at every step. The processes of planning and building the school constantly bridged distances between cultures, distances on the map, distances in the jungle that some had to cover in order to reach the school and work there, distances between the dream and the available means. The school is not a heterotopia; the school was created and lives as a heterotopia. And if there is something that the celebration of its inauguration – with its discussions on the education of resistance and the expressions of joy that accompanied it – represented above all, it is that heterotopia is a path and not a fortress, perhaps a ship but not an ark.

Contrary to Marcos' metaphor, Zapatistas never really imagined their meetings or communities in the form of an "absurd ark of Noah". Such a metaphoric ark could only be understood as a stronghold or a "vivarium" of a precious but secluded otherness. Theirs was not a struggle to preserve a liberated perimeter. Autonomous areas are simultaneously inside Mexico and outside of Mexico's power institutions. In their communities, people of different political beliefs are included: they only have to accept the rules of collective self-management and direct democracy. In the many faces of struggles inspired by the Zapatista rebellion, in the many faces of people fighting for a new world, passages to otherness rather than strongholds of otherness are created. Many ships, not an ark, many ventures into unknown seas not an

established itinerary[12]. Beyond fixed and dominating classifications: inventing the future now by using materials collected from the fragments of today's struggles.

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12 As the Zapatistas say: *Preguntando caminamos* [Asking we walk]. The paths towards human emancipation are many and they are created by movements in the process of their struggle (see also Holloway 2010: 45).

CHAPTER 8

The December 2008 youth uprising in Athens: glimpses of a possible city of thresholds

We haven't experienced the dictatorship but neither have we experienced free-dom. Christmas is cancelled. There is a rebellion going on.

anonymous street leaflet, December 2008

The term "urban conflict" can be taken to include all the forms of social antago-nism when the resulting struggles happen in an urban spatial context. However, is the city simply a container of these struggles or does urban spatiality actually mold social conflicts, giving them form, affecting their meaning and their relations with specific urban rights and demands?

In this final chapter, I will attempt to trace the history of a specific and very re-cent period of urban conflicts in Athens, Greece, where a highly indicative series of phenomena seems to have taken place. What has started as a generalized expres-sion of youth rage, triggered by the assassination of a young boy by a policeman, has evolved into a multifarious and inventive reclaim of city public space. As it is characteristic in most urban conflicts, the city was not simply involved as the setting of actions but urban space and its uses became one of the stakes of the conflict. Either explicitly or implicitly connected with demands related to city life conditions, urban conflicts actively transform the city. The question is: Does the city, in these temporary or more permanent transformations, represent the stakes of the conflict along with the conflicting values of the social groups (or actors) involved in the con-flict? Does the city become the mirror, and not simply the locus of the conflict?

A spontaneous uprising

In the case of the Athens December youth uprising, we may trace the possibility to answer these questions. During the uprising, the city has temporarily become the place where new forms of spatiality have emerged. Spatiality, as a concept, is meant to describe conditions, qualities and characteristics of space in general, not specific spaces. Even though we can locate specific forms of spatiality in concrete places, spatiality describes ways to perform space rather than spaces as concrete arrange-ments of physical elements. So, to speak about the different spatialities of urban conflicts means to consider space as both the result and the precondition of social action. Space happens.

Let us then recollect what happened in December 2008 in Athens, in order to focus on the spatiality of this urban conflict. There is a neighborhood located near the city center, Exarchia, which, since the 1970s has become identified with a youth culture of protest and alternative entertainment. Connected symbolically with the November 1973 student uprising, which culminated in the bloody ending of the National Technical University occupation that took place in the University's main building situated in the area, Exarchia has become some kind of anti-systemic youth stronghold. Today's picture differs, of course, from November 1973's anti-dictatorship action which marked the beginning of the end of the 7-year military junta. Gentrification initiatives mingle with alternative culture and commodification of both entertainment and public space tends to prevail. There are however many outbursts of symbolic action as well as many organized demonstrations that still start from or end in Exarchia.

On 6 December 2008, a police car was passing in front of one the coffee shops were young people meet. Police tactics is generally focused on guarding specific "possible targets" in the area (main political party offices, banks, government buildings etc.) with heavily equipped groups of police special forces (MAT). Occasionally, police raids sweep the center of the neighborhood, either in pursuit of "illegal immigrants" or drug dealers. Most of the times, however, police raids are meant to impose order after a violent demonstration (even though a demonstration often becomes violent because it is attacked by the police).

So, the passing of this police car was not something regular, something to happen unnoticed. What a few boys did was to yell at these policemen some kind of obviously not flattering remarks. But the policemen in the car did something so disastrous that it immediately triggered a huge youth outburst. They parked their car and they returned armed to respond to the insult. One of them took out his gun, aimed at one of the 15 year old students and shot him. The boy died on the pavement.

It took just a few hours for people to spontaneously organize various forms of protest and action. During the same night many fancy shops in the most expensive commercial street in Athens where attacked and completely destroyed. Symbols of consumption were becoming targets all over the city. Collective rage was from the beginning directed against symbols of the affluent society. In the next morning all the schools in Athens and many cities in Greece were closed by students (a result of coordination through e-mail and SMS "rhizomatic" communication). Spontaneous demonstrations of students in all neighborhoods (even in rich suburbs) were performing a kind of either peaceful or violent siege of police stations the days that followed. Police cars were overturned, policemen chased, expensive cars were burned.

What was highly characteristic of this spontaneous uprising was that there were no guiding centers or organizations, although anarchists and leftists were actively involved in most of the acts. Every local initiative had its own means to organize and express a common rage. It wasn't however that every action was simply expressing this rage. It wasn't that everybody who participated was only angry and sad for the brutal killing of a young boy. A common effort to actively express a different public culture was becoming apparent. And this culture contained forms of collective re-

claim of the city.

How could this indeed happen? The key element seems to have been a shared idea of justice, which is felt to be absent from the acts of the state, as emblematically declared by the shooting policeman. No policeman was ever punished in the past for police brutality. Young people were asking for justice but they knew that the police would have not been punished. Young people actually feel in their everyday experience of study and work precariousness that in this society justice is always fleeting. "If we rise up, if our acts criticize the police, the banks, the department stores, it is because all these stand as obstacles between us and real life. We therefore struggle against total injustice" (Declaration of the Open Assembly of the occupied Municipal Building, Peristeri Municipality, Athens, 2 February 2009).

It is as if every aspect of their life experience were somehow condensed in this unjust death. In a period of economic crisis, combined with major cases of government corruption, revealed by the press, in a period when no true alternatives to the political situation were visible, a claim for justice epitomized for young people a more general demand: "We want to live. This society literally or symbolically does not allow us to live".

After the first wave of demonstrations, a second wave of actions involved various forms of occupation of public buildings. There were cases of municipal buildings in various municipalities of Athens (as in Nea Smyrni, Ag. Dimitiros, Halandri etc.) which were temporarily transformed into community centers. Young squatters had attempted to create neighborhood meeting areas where community self organized cultural events took place.

There was the case of the National Opera building which became a place of collective experimentation in the performing acts as well as an information center. This initiative took form as the culmination of a series of arts by a group of young performance artists. What they did is enter in almost every theater of the city demanding that a sharp anti-police manifesto is read before the show.

There was the case of the occupied building of the General Confederation of Workers, as a gesture of protest against the official bureaucrats of the often paralyzed workers' syndicates. And of course, there were the occupied University and school buildings with differing forms of participation, and differing problems of coordination as communication between sometimes rivaling anarchist and leftist sects was difficult.

The quest for urban justice

Out of these experiences, the collective demand for justice in its expansive and diverse ways, has taken the form of actively pursuing a distinctively urban justice. The city was not simply the setting of collective actions and initiatives but became, more and more, a potential collective claim. In all these fragmentary, ambiguous and diffuse initiatives, explicitly or implicitly expressed was the collective will of young people to take their lives in their hands. Urban justice had thus effectively taken the form of Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996). Let us just recall that, for Lefebvre, the right to the city is not simply one kind of rights among others. On the contrary, the totality of civic rights is condensed in this form of right.

It is very important that, as Lefebvre insists, this right presupposes collective ac-

tion in pursuing it and also collective action in actually imposing it. The city is understood as the "perpetual oeuvre of the inhabitants, themselves mobile and mobilized for and by this oeuvre" (*ibid*. 173). The right to the city involves people in pursue of a collective project: to transform the city to a collective work of art. The city thus does not simply become an aggregate of services and goods with the corresponding collective demands for democratic access. Beyond this quantitative understanding of the urban condition is a qualitative critique of the contemporary city culture. Here is where urban conflicts, as the Athens December youth uprising, can contribute to a different understanding of the urban world, giving form to new, emergent spatialities.

When, during an urban conflict, people collectively seek to re-appropriate public space, they are not simply using the city as it is; they are transforming it. Their actions do not only search for space, they invent space. These "performed" spaces, these "practiced" spaces, as they "happen" in the process of the conflict, acquire distinctive characteristics that tend to influence the outcome and the form of the conflict. Emergent spatialities, thus, represent the ways in which participants imagine spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space. The spatialities of urban conflicts are thus both imagined and real. It is very important, therefore, to understand how images and representations of space actively participate in forming the qualities of the spaces created, as urban conflicts transform the city.

One of the dominant modern images of a longed for emancipated community presents it as barricaded in a liberated stronghold: A defined territorial enclave always ready to defend itself. This image, embedded in the collective imaginary of the oppressed, tends to construct a geography of emancipation in the form of a map clearly depicting free areas as defined by a recognizable perimeter. Either as islands, surrounded by a hostile sea or as continents facing other hostile continents, these areas appear as spatially circumscribed and bounded.

This image was often dominant in the history of Athens youth movements: Exarchia was often fantasized as an alternative liberated stronghold. As already mentioned, Exarchia was connected with a very important incident in recent Greek history. In November 1973 the central building of National Technical University was occupied by students who were protesting against the ongoing military dictatorship. What had started as a student strike culminated as a major anti-junta resistance event. Marked by the brutal suppression of the occupation, which eventually led to the fall of the dictatorship next year, the building and the surrounding area became a symbol of youth insubordination. Exarchia's mythology as an "autonomous area" and "youth stronghold" is connected to this symbolism, and many acts of protest and disobedience have been corroborating the neighborhood's fame ever since.

Interestingly, during the December days of 2008, a BBC news commentator referred to the November 1973 student uprising and the occupied "Athens Polytechnic" as "the symbol of modern rebellion". Linking a "latent Greek contempt for the police", with the role of the police during the dictatorship, he attempted to explain the December 2008 uprising as an event fuelled by a kind of gained tolerance for young protestors. He explicitly described universities as "springboards of violence" explaining that, because of the bloody invasion of military junta's tanks in the occupied NTUA area, the post-junta constitution "drafted the right to asylum, which

bans the authorities from entering the grounds of schools and universities". It is true that this "right to asylum" is still effective (schools were never included, though) but there is a recurrent dispute sustained by the media and most government officials on whether this is simply a way of encouraging the production of "lawless" zones, i.e. zones of anomy.

Although the NTUA building was occupied also in December2008, the idea of an "untouchable stronghold" was not crucial in igniting demonstrator confrontations with the police. Both the government and the police, along with reporters as the one already mentioned, tried in many cases to interpret street violence as the result of the "university asylum". However – peaceful or not, whether forced to react to police violence or expressing their anger in symbolic violence – demonstrators did not limit themselves to asylum buildings.

Most of December's collective acts have escaped the asylum enclosure characteristic of many previous student struggles and have spread out all over the city. Students, instead of being under siege by the police in their university asylum enclaves, have reclaimed the streets and the city as spaces of collective action. And in many cases, it was the police stations that were under siege by students and school children.

The December uprising had no center, neither a political center, nor a center in terms of urban space. In direct contrast to the situated struggle of November 1973, which has turned the image of NTUA building to a national symbol of resistance, the December actions were everywhere. Unexpected, metastatic, unpredictable and multiform. During the December days, the fantasy of a liberated enclave, which dominated and still dominates many urban struggles, has lost most of its power. What kind of motivating image has replaced that fantasy?

Emancipation is a process, not an accomplished state. It is indeed crucial to differentiate it from the religious image of a happy afterlife. Emancipation is the ambiguous actuality of spatially as well as historically dispersed struggles. There may be potentially liberating practices but there can be no fixed areas of freedom.

Could we then perhaps visualize spatialities of emancipation by interpreting those appeals for social justice that focus on the unobstructed use of space? Spatial justice, in this context, could indicate a distribution principle that tends to present space as a good to be enjoyed by all. Accessibility can become one of the most important attributes of spatial justice. Any division, separation or partitioning of space appears, thus, as preventing this kind of justice.

True, an emphasis on spatial justice may establish the importance collective decision making has for the social as well as for the physical definition of space. A corresponding imaginary geography of emancipation, however, has to understand space as a uniform continuum to be regulated by common will rather than as an inherently discontinuous and differentiated medium that gives form to social practices. In a somewhat crude form, this imaginary could end up reducing space to a quantity to be equally distributed. And accessibility might end up being some kind of distributing mechanism. We can actually connect this way of understanding spatialities of emancipation with contemporary discourses on human rights or human communicability (Habermasian ideal speech situation included). More often than not, these discourses presuppose some kind of trans-historical and trans-geographical human figure. The same kind of human figure becomes the subject of spatial justice, except

this time such a figure is not viewed as the inhabitant of an ideal city but rather as the free-moving occupant of a homogeneous space.

A different (third) kind of geographical imaginary has emerged out of a criticism of this idealized view for a just city (or a city of justice). Sometimes drawing images from contemporary city-life, this imaginary focuses on multiplicity and diversity, as well as on possible polymorphous and mutating spaces, in order to describe a spatiality of emancipation. Strong roots support this view. A critique of everyday life, already put forward during the 1960s, has provided us with a new way of dealing with the social experience of space. If everyday life is not only the locus of social reproduction but also contains practices of self-differentiation or personal and collective resistance, molecular spatialities of otherness can be found scattered in the city. As de Certeau has put it, "a migrational, or metaphorical, city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (de Certeau 1984:93).

This image contains a view of inhabited space as a process rather than as a fixed condition. Spaces of otherness proliferate in the city due to diversifying or deviating practices. Spatialities of otherness, in such a view, are considered as inherently timebound. Space is neither reduced to a container of otherness (idealized in utopian cities) nor to a contestable and distributable good. Space is actually conceptualized as a formative element of human social interaction. Space thus becomes expressive through use, or, rather, because use ("style of use" as de Certeau specifies) defines users. If an idealized version of spatial justice tends to invoke common rights in order to define space as common good, an emphasis on spatialized molecular otherness tends to posit space as dispersed and diversified therefore not common.

According to this view, emancipating spatialities can be considered dispersed spatialities of otherness. Discontinuous and inherently differentiated space gives ground to differing social identities allowed thus to express themselves. Essentially connected with identity politics, this geographical imaginary "tends to emphasize situatedness" (Harvey 1996:363) as a prerequisite of identity formation. Identities, however, may also entail discrimination. A social inculcation of human interaction patterns is always the scope of social reproduction. Inhabited space, in societies that lack "the symbolic-product-conserving techniques associated with literacy", is, according to Bourdieu, the principal locus of this inculcation of dispositions (Bourdieu 1977:89). Inhabited space however, seems to have resumed this role in postindustrial societies, not because people have become less dependent on formalized education but because city life has become the educational system *par excellence*. A wide variety of embodied reactions are learnt through the use of urban space. Everybody has to be able to deal expressively with the risks and opportunities of city life. Where someone is allowed to be and how he or she confirms to spatial instructions of use, is indicative of his or her social identity. Space identifies and is identified through use.

Urban conflicts and urban struggles can become focused on the protection of specific places as places that contain and represent specific situated collective identities. A working class neighborhood threatened by gentrification or an ethnic minority meeting spot threatened by racist neighbors can become a stake in an urban conflict which involves different groups of citizens and different authorities. December uprising seems to have taken one step further: reclaiming space was not

connected to the preservation of established situated identities. Collective identities, as we will see, were implicitly criticized.

Identities in crisis and the experience of urban porosity

A contemporary liberating effort may, indeed, seek "not to emancipate an oppressed identity but [rather] to emancipate an oppressed non-identity" (Holloway 2002:156). Holloway's reasoning connects the process of social identities formation with the continuous effort of the dominating social reproduction mechanisms to ensure that identities remain distinct and distinguishable. No matter how different historical contingencies affect the resulting identity taxonomies, this effort remains a crucial characteristic of any form of governance. People have to be recognizable, classifiable, therefore predictable, in order to be governed[1].

There is an underlying logic in this construction of social identities. People are grouped and defined in terms of what they are and not in terms of what they might become or are becoming. Identity thus has to be considered as fixed in time. But it is not the duration of time during which the identity is fixed that is crucial: what is crucial is that the rigid definition of an identity allows for no inherent dynamics to emerge. No inherent contradictions can be allowed. One cannot "be" and cannot "not be" at the same time.

In periods of collective struggle, periods during which people seem to question part of the defining characteristics of their lives, some identities, as fixed roles, undergo a crisis. Groups of people may indeed discover during such a struggle that their collective being should not and cannot be described by the identity attributed to them. And they might seek to create a different collective identity. Or they might seek to get included in a different already existing collective identity[2].

Emancipating struggles can open the way to even more profound identity crisis. They may delegitimize the very effort to produce and control closed identities. In the process of an emancipating struggle, people may become aware of the possibility of creating their own life as a process of mutual respect between differing individual histories and life trajectories. If some kind of identity is where they start from, if this identity just identifies them so far, then what they face is an open process in which their dreams and actions overspill from the boundaries of this identity[3].

This has happened for at least some of the collective or individual subjects who took part in the December uprising. Identity crisis was an effect of their actions, their words, their new ways of seeing their defining environment (school, workplace, leisure places, home etc.).

The power of an oppressed non-identity is this power of becoming different without yet entering in the perimeter of a new enclosure. Non-identity is an identity

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1 As we have seen in chapter 7 about Foucault's analysis of power.

2 All these possibilities can be contained in radical identity politics as the striving "for the freedom of identity, the freedom to be who you really are" (Hardt and Negri 2009: 331).

3 For Holloway this makes people realize that they may "exist in-against-and-beyond" a specific collective identity (Holloway 2010: 112).

Pict. 14. Athens, December 2008, outside the occupied National Opera Building – Hooded ballerinas performing.
(unknown photographer)

Pict. 15. Self-managed park of Navarinou Street, Athens – Children playing and watching improvised shadow theater.
(Photo by Ioannis Papagiannakis)

in crisis: An open identity unfolding as an uncertain and ambiguous project[4]. Non-identity is a departure from a given identity, not an arrival to a different one. And, more than that, non-identity is the experience of becoming which includes interactive exchanges with others.

Spaces of emancipation should differ from identity-imposing and identity-reproducing spaces. Space as identity (and identity as space) presupposes a clearly demarcated domain. Space as the locus of non-identity, as the locus of relational, multifarious and open identities, has to be, on the contrary, loosely determined space[5].

It is people who create loose spaces, either by actively realizing some inherent possibilities is certain areas or by creating themselves those possibilities, sometimes in direct confrontation with the habitual use and regulations that define certain spaces (Franck and Stevens 2007). Collectively appropriating a street or a schoolyard by transforming them into an area of unauthorized action and creative encounters, is already a "loosening" of those spaces. And whereas "tight" determinations of use and meaning presuppose inhabitants-users with specific characteristics, the process of loosening of spatial boundaries and rules of use involves a corresponding loosening of user identities.

Loose spaces thus are spaces which do not define but rather permit. Loose spaces are inhabited or created as spaces which provide a ground for collective inventiveness. Rules are suspended or defied. If however space is disconnected temporarily from the set of rules that defines it, then space cannot be taken as the locus of a collective identity which describes its users. And if a specific space can no longer determine its actual or potential users, this space cannot literally or symbolically belong to anybody or any group.

It is this process of suspending spatial definition and spatial belonging that gives to inhabited loose space an inherently relational character. Such spaces can become the locus of comparisons, the locus of communication and mutual awareness, the always in the making, always in-between, always in transition locus of identities in crisis.

Loose spaces become in-between spaces as they are used. Their existence as thresholds depends upon their being actually or virtually crossed. It is not however crossings, as guarded passages to well-defined areas, that may be taken to represent an alternative spatiality of emancipation. It is more about thresholds connecting separated potential destinations. The spatiality of the threshold represents a spatiotemporal experience that can be constitutive of the spaces urban conflicts, as the

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4 Hardt and Negri believe that identity politics can reach a revolutionary dimension when collective identities are self-abolished (Hardt and Negri 2009:332). Identies in crisis can be the first signal indicating such a possibility. Holloway also emphasizes the importance of anti-identification stuggles in the process of fighting capitalism: "Identity is the reproduction of capital within anti-capitalist struggle" (Holloway 2010:113).

5 Ritual acts aim, above all, to ensure that an intermediary experience of non-identity (Turner 1977), necessary for the passage from one social identity to another, will not threaten social reproduction. Through the mediation of purification rites or guardian gods, societies supervise spaces of transition, because those spaces symbolically mark the possibility of deviation or transgression.

Athens December uprising temporarily create.

A "city of thresholds" may be constituted as a spatial pattern that gives form to in-between spaces of encounter, exchange and mutual recognition[6]. Those spaces, once performed, offer an alternative to a culture of barriers, a culture that defines the city as an agglomeration of identity enclaves (Marcuse and Van Kempen 2002). Replacing the checkpoints that control access through interdictions or everyday discriminatory practices, thresholds provide the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives.

We can therefore understand the spatiality of the threshold as a possible characteristic of transformed urban space. Urban conflicts which create this kind of performed urban spaces actually transform the city, no matter how temporary this transformation might be.

Urban porosity redefines the city as a network of thresholds to be crossed, thresholds that mediate between differing yet mutually recognizing urban cultures. It can thus be the spatio-temporal form that an emancipating urban culture may take (Stavrides 2007), and it can be approached both as a potential characteristic of spatial arrangements and as a corresponding characteristic of the spatial practices that constitute the inhabiting experience. Urban porosity may also become a prerequisite of a "relational politics of place" as proposed by Massey (2005:181), as well as a form of experience that activates relationality rather than separation, considered in terms of space as well as in terms of time. In urban pores different spaces as well as different times become related and thus compared.

Urban porosity can describe a possible alternative to the dilemma present in various urban struggles. This dilemma can be so formulated: are we to defend a right that establishes redistribution demands of space-bound goods and services (e.g., transport, health facilities, job opportunities etc.), or are we to defend the right to hold to or develop situated collective identities? However, "distributional issues colour the politics within explicitly identity based movements" (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006:409), as the case of the identity based gay movement of South Africa proves. The latter cannot but deal with "the distributional questions raised by the poverty of significant proportion of their members" (*ibid*. 411). Urban porosity can extend or enhance access rights, developing possibilities of urban-spatial justice or "regional democracy", to use one of Soja's (2000) terms. Urban pores in principle connect, establish chances of exchange and communication, eliminating space-bound privileges. At the same time, urban porosity can provide the means of acquiring relational identity awareness transforming the city to a network of performed thresholds.

Not choosing to defend strongholds but rather attempting to create spaces of

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6 The idea of a possible "city of thresholds" attempts to describe an array of spatial practices that may potentially destroy the enclave culture/reality of contemporary cities. In a different context, Hardt and Negri, see "the defining characteristics of metropolis degenerate when it becomes no longer a space of the common and the encounter with the other" (Hardt and Negri 2009:255). For them "the politics of the metropolis is the organization of encounters" which requires an "openness to alterity" and a capacity to make encounters "joyful and productive" (*ibid.*). The "city of thresholds" as a liberating project, intersects with such a prospect, putting an emphasis on the spatiotemporal characteristics of such negotiating encounters.

encounter, spaces of collective protest and inventive alternative critique, the December rebellious youth has transcended the limits of a specific struggle in the name of a specific group. Exarchia has ceased to be a fantasized liberated enclave. Demonstrations and occupied sites were scattered all over Athens, all over Greece. Solidarity acts appeared in as many as 150 different places all over the world.

In all its differentiated modes of collective expression, the December youth has tried many forms of collective action, has experienced many forms of solidarity. That is why young immigrants found ways to connect with the struggle and participate in their own manner in the conflict. That is why young and older precarious workers recognized themselves in this conflict.

It is not by chance that a few hundreds Romas, those second class citizens who often have a taste of injustice and police brutality, attacked a police station in one of their areas: the December uprising gave them the opportunity to express their own anger and to reclaim their own space (even better, their own distinctive spatiality: their own way of creating, understanding and inhabiting space).

During the December uprising, osmotic relations between spaces of collective action were expressing and producing at the same time osmotic relations between identities. Students were not simply students, workers not simply workers, immigrants not simply immigrants[7] People participating in different collective actions were finding ways to meet and communicate without simply expressing their imposed social identities, without necessarily adhering to closed political, ideological or cultural identities. In open assemblies organized in all occupied places, people tended to describe proposals for action, to describe dreams and values rather than passively describe disempowering situations or criticize others just for being others.

The media presentation of the December events was almost entirely obsessed with a recurrent and paralyzing question: "Who did all these things?", "Who is behind all that?" And the answers were more and more focused on separating the good from the bad demonstrations, the truly disappointed and angry kids from those "others", waiting to destroy the legitimate order.

The problem was that school kids were everywhere but, apart from their rage, there was no way to group them in a collective identity. And school kids were certainly not acting as school kids. Not even as young people, people belonging to a definable age group. Somehow their actions were mixing mature organizing abilities

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7 "The shout heard all over Athens is for those 18 years of violence, suppression, exploitation, humiliation. These days are ours too … These days belong to all marginalized and excluded people, those with difficult names and unknown stories". In this excerpt from an Albanian immigrants' collective communiqué, the effort to transcend a stigmatized identity is expressed in the form of an appeal to solidarity combined with a cry for recognition, a cry against invisibility.

with actions of collective joy[8]. To further complicate things, immigrants participating in violent actions or demonstrations were not only immigrants, but also young people with similar dreams and of course most of them unemployed or precariously employed. In the name of which of their distinctive or common characteristics were all those people taking part in the December uprising?

Well, the media and the government had finally found it: all this was done by people hiding behind hoods. People with erased characteristics, undefinable and unclassifiable, they were simply those outside the legitimate and legitimizing social taxonomy: outsiders, enemies of the society, hooded and faceless[9]. What has started as a panic, because everyday people, next-door youngsters, did things they were not supposed to do (as they defied and mocked power and expressed a complete lack of trust for justice and government), has ended as a reassuring interpretation: it is only a matter of crushing those "outsiders" and order will be restored.

It might be an indeed distinctive characteristic of such urban struggles that they create both to their participants, as well as to those who watch and wonder, a kind of "taxonomy crisis". "Who are these people?" is a question that, in spite of media mythologies, cannot easily be answered, unambiguously or reassuringly.

Is there life after December?

The December ephemeral city of thresholds left its mark in various urban struggles that followed the riot days. One of them, the most characteristic one, is the struggle to transform a large parking lot in Exarchia into an ad hoc urban park. People from the neighborhood as well as activists and environmentalists from other neighborhoods (not all of them directly or indirectly involved in the December uprising but deeply influenced by it) decided to reclaim this urban site and managed to create a truly alternative public space, open to all. Everybody can participate in the open meetings where the layout of the park is being formed, where the rules of the park's use are decided, where the problems are discussed and different views find ways to negotiate with each other.

This collective initiative is still flourishing while managing to keep the threshold character of the place. As no one or no group is expected to be the owner or the sole user of the area, the rules of coexistence and mutual respect have to be collectively invented. And these rules are put to test every day. Identities thus have to be ne-

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8 Hate and anger, characteristic of excluded people, were combined with love-and-hate appeals to their parents: "Please don't get angry with me. You taught me what to do. You taught me that revolt means disorder and destruction. Now that I rise up, it is disorder and destruction that you get … I love you. In my own way, but I love you. I have to make my own world, however, I have to live my own life in freedom. And to do that I have to destroy your world" (School Coordinating Alliance Alexandros Grigoropoulos, *A leaflet to my parents*, December 2008).

9 Demonstrators with improvised tear-gas masks were demonized as masked criminals. We have already seen in chapter 7 how important it is for power to present those who fight against it as outsiders, as dangerous others. Could it be that any fantasized unmasking of those "others" carries the same power of Marcos' alleged unmasking by the Mexican state? Behind the masks were Greek society's kids, ignored by their own society as were the "invisible" natives by the Mexican society.

gotiated too. What does it mean to be a user of the park? Whose needs, defined by whom, should be satisfied, and how? Whose right should prevail? Who becomes a subject of urban rights, especially in the case of a collectively self-governed outdoor public space? How can these alternative rights be expressed? Isn't this, after all, an experiment concerning the right to the city?[10]

The December spirit was a force of resistance inspiring people to see and act beyond the closed horizons of the mainstream politics, transcending sometimes even the certainties of existing anti-capitalist movements.

Navarinou Park was only one among many analogous initiatives which have actively proven that people can demand and create new public spaces. People in Zografou area (relatively near the center of Athens but separate as a municipality), for example, have successfully obstructed the local mayor's decision to construct multistory parking buildings in five of the neighborhood's squares. Although municipal authorities have described them as "minority vandals", young people have managed to destroy this stigmatizing identity perimeter and inspire many of the Zografou inhabitants to join this struggle.

Others have occupied an abandoned botanical garden in Petroupoli reclaiming it as a public space or have successfully defended various areas of public use targeted by gentrification and development mechanisms.

The December uprising seems to have triggered urban struggles characteristic by stakes closely connected to a collective reclaim of public spaces. The cry for justice, during the December days, was heard in public spaces transformed or even invented by collective actions. A demand for urban justice is just one form this cry has taken during the after-December era. This probably happens because in struggles for the defense and corroboration of public space, people can grasp what it means to take their life in their hands. Participation in such struggles is not a matter of expressing an opinion or aligning with others who share similar political projects. It is a matter of helping to produce both the spaces for public use and a new culture of public use that goes beyond the logic of consumption and the priorities of urban "development".

December's legacy also includes forms of struggle that directly translate political aims to practices of public space transformation. During and after the December uprising another figure was to emblematize the struggles of a multifarious emergent movement. Kostantina Kuneva, an immigrant office-cleaner and secretary of the Cleaners Syndicate (PEKOP) was violently attacked, probably by hired assassins. Kuneva soon become a symbol as she belongs to all those categories of people attacked by neo-liberalism: a woman, an immigrant, an independent activist, a precarious worker, a person of unbelievable courage. Many initiatives supporting her right to live, work and full citizenship in Greece, along with a demand for punishing all those who profit from the exploitation of precarious cleaner's work, had the mark of the December spirit.

Characteristically, in four different metro stations, groups of people have blocked for hours the ticket machines, explaining to metro users that the metro corporation

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10 More details about this collective experience as well as thoughts on the problems encountered can be found in the journal *An Architektur* no. 23 (2010), special issue on *The Commons*, with an insert on Navarinou Park.

actually uses underpaid cleaners overexploited by ruthless contractors. Isn't this a form of temporarily imposing a threshold character to the privatized and controlled public space of everyday transportation?

Solidarity with immigrants was and still is high in the agenda of the Greek left and anarchist movement. After December solidarity was even more strongly expressed as more people got involved in specific acts aiming to protect and support threatened immigrants. In the Athenian neighborhood of Ag. Panteleimon, antiracist activists had to fight against fascist groups and aggressive xenophobic residents who wanted to expel "non-Greeks" from the neighborhood. A huge mobilization was also able to protect a large immigrant squat in central Athens, which was being attacked by the same fascist groups with the not-so-well-hidden support of the police.

In both cases, a political struggle was since the beginning also an urban struggle, as the stake was explicitly urban. Supporting the immigrants' rights is directly connected with the effort to support their "right to the city", as the right which epitomizes all other rights. And these struggles actively attempt to convert the city to an inclusive, multiform environment, a city of thresholds.

What the December uprising has shown is, perhaps, that a collective demand for justice can create new forms of active urban justice. Is the prospect of the city of thresholds an adequate description of this potentially emancipating quest? It is really too early to know. After all, a writing on an Exarchia wall justly states: "December was not an answer. December was a question".

Throughout this book an effort has been made to explore the emancipating potentialities generated by the creation, experience and appreciation of the symbolic power of thresholds. We have encountered the concrete spatiotemporal presence of thresholds in everyday attempts made by displaced and disempowered people to breech the enclosing perimeter of their life. And we have observed how people on the threshold imagine and act explicitly or implicitly opposing the dominant taxonomies of identity which engulf their aspirations. Threshold awareness seems to encourage resistance and perhaps can help people in questioning their habits, values, life scopes and behavior. Constituting an always precarious stage for a probing visit to the other, thresholds can be those relational and transitional spaces in which encounters with a different future may happen.

In a possible city of thresholds, heterotopic moments emerge as part of a process of collective invention: the city can be a collective work of art (to recall Lefebvre's famous phrase) in which, perhaps, the future itself can be created as a collective work of art, too. Common dreams of justice, equality and fraternity can inspire and sustain this process. And it is in everyday major and minor struggles that passages towards an emancipatory future are opened and explored. We have to discover such passages, study them, sustain their creation, experience the hopes and nightmares that haunt them. Because, as the "threshold politics" of the Zapatistas continue to show us, "we don't need to conquer the world. Creating it from the beginning will do. Us. Today."

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