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The Leonardo Electronic Almanac is proud to announce the publication of its first LEA book, titled "Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism." The publication investigates the relevance of socialist utopianism to the current dispositions of New Media Art, through the contributions of renowned and emerging academic researchers, critical theorists, curators and artists.



RED ART

New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism

BOOK SENIOR EDITORS

LANFRANCO ACETI, SUSANNE JASCHKO, JULIAN STALLABRASS

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BILL BALASKAS

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Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Volume 20 Issue 1

8 COMMONIST RED ART: BLOOD, BONES, UTOPIA AND KITTENS

Lanfranco Aceti

13 CHANGING THE GAME: TOWARDS AN 'INTERNET OF PRAXIS'

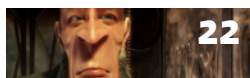
Bill Balaskas

16 SUGGESTIONS FOR ART THAT COULD BE CALLED RED

Susanne Jaschko

18 WHY DIGITAL ART IS RED

Julian Stallabrass



22 GROUNDS FOR THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF CULTURAL COMMONS IN THE POST-MEDIUM CONDITION: THE OPEN SOURCE CULTURAL OBJECT

Boris Čučković

44 POWERED BY GOOGLE: WIDENING ACCESS AND TIGHTENING CORPORATE CONTROL

Dan Schiller & Shinjoung Yeo



58 HACKTERIA: AN EXAMPLE OF NEOMODERN ACTIVISM

Boris Magrini

72 COMMUNISM OF CAPITAL AND CANNIBALISM OF THE COMMON: NOTES ON THE ART OF OVER-IDENTIFICATION

Matteo Pasquinelli

82 MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION AND HIDDEN ROMANTIC DISCOURSES IN NEW MEDIA ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE PRACTICES

Ruth Pagès & Gemma San Cornelio

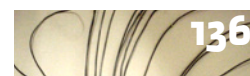


94 GAMSUTL

Taus Makhacheva

124 FROM TACTICAL MEDIA TO THE NEO-PRAGMATISTS OF THE WEB

David Garcia



136

DISSENT AND UTOPIA: RETHINKING ART AND TECHNOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA

Valentina Montero Peña & Pedro Donoso

148 THE THING HAMBURG: A TEMPORARY DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE LOCAL ART FIELD

Cornelia Sollfrank, Rahel Puffert & Michel Chevalier

164 ARTISTS AS THE NEW PRODUCERS OF THE COMMON (?)

Daphne Dragona



174

LONG STORY SHORT

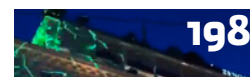
Natalie Bookchin

182 THE DESIRES OF THE CROWD: SCENARIO FOR A FUTURE SOCIAL SYSTEM

Karin Hansson

192 FROM LITERAL TO METAPHORICAL UTOPIA: INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE INNER STRUCTURE OF THE NEW MEDIA ART AND THE UTOPIAN THOUGHT

Christina Vatsella



198

THE POINT SOURCE: BLINDNESS, SPEECH AND PUBLIC SPACE

Adam Brown

214 INVISIBLE HISTORIES, THE GRIEVING WORK OF COMMUNISM, AND THE BODY AS DISRUPTION: A TALK ABOUT ART AND POLITICS

Elske Rosenfeld

224 TAKEN SQUARE: ON THE HYBRID INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE #15M MOVEMENT

José Luis de Vicente



232

WHEN AESTHETIC IS NOT JUST A PRETTY PICTURE: PAOLO CIRIO'S SOCIAL ACTIONS

Lanfranco Aceti

251 »IN EIGENER SACHE« (SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES) MAGAZINES, GDR, OCTOBER 1989 - JUNE 1990

Elske Rosenfeld

266 ART WORK / DREAM WORK IN NEW MEDIA DOCUMENTARY

Karen O'Rourke

A B S T R A C T

One moving image, a video of events in Syntagma Square in 2011, shows a swarm of points of green light, created by laser pointers directed at the architecture surrounding the square from within the crowd, and a second still image with the word 'thieves,' constructed from an array of red dots, is again projected onto the wall of Parliament, the location of speech. The laser pointer, a device intended to trace the progress of speech, and reinforce the agency of the individual speaker in a static visual presentation, is repurposed in the context of civil disturbance to both blind the agents of dominance and stigmatize the architects of crisis. In doing so, an implement of visibility and authority, a straight line emanating from the space of the logos, becomes implicated in the delineation and representation of the space of the public.

This paper represents an attempt to explore and create continuities and discontinuities between the binding-together of individual lasers/pixels in an assemblage, the chaotic movement of the individual laser/pixel, and the concerted activity of people acting in solidarity or chaotic revolt. The paper is constructed in order to implicate the carrier signal – the page, the screen – in the network which founds and funds both order and its opposites, as itself an active agent and producer of its own collectivities.

PROLOGUE

In the early hours of June 22nd 2011, in Syntagma Square, Athens, during a demonstration to accompany a vote of no confidence in Prime Minister George Papandreou's government, photographers captured images and video of the word ΚΛΕΦΤΕΣ – thieves – projected onto the exterior wall of the parliament building from within the crowd. From amongst the restless swarm of green laser dots, images of which had been broadcast round the world as representative of the Greek protests, emerged a

word in red light: an accusation, the projection of an identity. The 'thieves' identified were, of course, days away from signing into law a package of austerity measures which would include the forced privatization of large parts of Greece's public sector – the transfer to private ownership of assets held in common – and cuts in benefits and tax rises. Previously, on May 5th, the taunt had been verbally slung against politicians in an abortive attempt to storm the building: here it was projected – turning the building into a curious kind of



Figure 1. The word ΚΛΕΦΤΕΣ ('thieves') projected on the wall of the Greek Parliament building, Syntagma Square, July 22, 2011. MindTheGap Citizens' Media / Real Democracy GR Multimedia Team. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License (pixilation intentional).

The Point Source: Blindness, Speech and Public Space

by

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placard. ¹ Inside the building, people were speaking: parliament is of course the place of *parole*. On the walls, someone wrote. Suddenly a device which had previously been used in the context of protest to blind the forces of law and order was used for the opposite purpose: to render visible a word. According to the website redteamjournal.com, which represents an organization which “encourage(s) decision makers to consider alternative perspectives to national security issues,” the first recorded use of lasers as a ‘counter optical’ device by protestors was during the ‘Battle for Seattle’ in 1999. ² As ever inventive and responsive, the protestors seemed to have chosen to reverse the direction of this original act of *détournement*, in which a visual aid was converted to a counter-visual weapon.

The protests on the streets of Athens took place in the context of Europe-wide demonstrations against the paradoxical entrenchment of neoliberal economic structures following the crash of 2008. The online exchanges which took place between Spanish *Indignados* and Greek anti-austerity protestors were accompanied by the exchange of messages on placards: the famous ‘*be quiet, the Greeks are sleeping*’ was issued from a distance as a provocation. Placards, posters and other protest materials were produced with a binary function: to crystallize and express the concerns or ideas of protestors in the moment, in the place of protest, but also in anticipation of their appropriation by global media – produced in order to be photographed. The audience for these placards was twofold: they were intended to be received by both non-participant and participant spectators. In the latter case, media channels were themselves appropriated to transmit a message which was received differently depending on the position of the reader.

BINDING & BLINDING

Notions of vision and visibility are deeply embedded in the practice of contemporary protest. Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* would seem to have been required reading for the movement as a whole – but academic commentators have widely deployed the tools of visual critique to analyze recent events. An example of the effectiveness of this approach can be seen in Marinou Pourgouris’ ³ rich and deep analysis of the agency of the *hood* in the 2008 protests which marked the beginning of the Greek unrest: masks and hoods served, in the context of the spectacle of protest, as a sign of “apocalyptic violence,” just as they served to conceal the identity of both protestors and cops – any ‘counter-optical’ device is itself a visual signifier.

Pourgouris’ act of writing represents an attempt to re-unite the ‘intellectual and material activity,’ closing the gap between ‘aesthetics and praxis’ identified by Marx in his formulation of the division of labor. ⁴ Her paper begins with an apology for the incursion of literary criticism upon the political or sociological realm, yet the productive tension between ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ which this critique engages requires the tools of visual or aesthetic criticism in order to pick apart the role of a specific politics of *visuality* in the context of civil disorder. Porgouris explores the links between the blinding effects of tear gas, the concealing effect of the hoods, masks and bandanas worn by the protagonists, and the spectacle of the riot as a broadcast event:

...those who were watching the protestors (police-men, journalists, the public) were always seeing them through a lens or a filter: television screens, camera lenses, or helmets. The protestors were being watched from a distance, as it were, and they came “face to face,” not with people’s faces, but with the always already objectified State Law or technological apparatuses. ⁵

In this paper, which is itself the product of certain *apparatuses*, I intend to centre an object-oriented *critique* – and I use the word in full acknowledgement of the heretical nature of such a formulation for Actor Network Theory (ANT) and its various Object Oriented Offspring – on an object which sits in an indeterminate space similar to the one Pourgouris describes. ⁶ Deployed differently in parliament, boardroom or on the street, the laser pointer both reveals *and* conceals. One can imagine such a device in the context of a stock market deal, as much as a protest. Investigation of the differing roles of this object opens up a paradoxical space between society, locality and representation by performing the simple operation of drawing a line and making a point – it is a double agent, both productive and spectacular: the origin of a *rogue pixel*.

PRACTICAL MECHANICS

I can only imagine the *body* of the device that made the word, but I have worked through several versions of what this machine – the formally bound, materially delimited, part of this assemblage – must look like. On first seeing images of this projection, the machine was

of less importance than the act. As an enthusiastic collector of such *things* I related it to early projection work by Krzysztof Wodiczko, who in 1985 famously projected a swastika onto the entablature of another neoclassical building – South Africa House, on the West side of Trafalgar Square. ⁷ Both events represented the re-labeling of a classical architectural container. Projection rendered the building transparent, revealing the identity of its contents by cancelling out the architectural sign of state power – this building contains ‘Nazis,’ this one contains ‘thieves’ – applying a stamp, a unified identity to the building’s contents. The purchaser of a given commodity imagines that the named contents are singular, monadic, even though they may be, as the small print says, ‘the produce of more than one country.’ Homogeneity, collectivity, becomes an accusation – ‘though you appear to be different, you are all the same’ – in opposition to which a key strand of contemporary protest energetically resists appropriation by conventional political collectivities.

If the machine was not important to me at first, it was because I was engaged by the swarm of laser pointers trained on the architecture. The dots seemed an analogue of the crowd: stochastic, energetic, entropic.

Figure 2. Screenshot from the video *Laser Dance*, Real Democracy Group, Athens (2009), MindTheGap Citizens’ Media / Real Democracy GR Multimedia Team. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.



They seemed to be an autonomous, self-generated representation of fractured, chaotic commonality, and representative of a truly public space. Viewed as spectacle, such function amplified by the organizing function of my laptop screen, the dots were both ordered and chaotic: they activated the framed pixels, like a restless, accelerated screensaver – though rather than the usual spinning Mandelbrots they appeared to testify to either a disrupted, absent or indescribably complex geometrical order: as such, this stochastic activity served as a sign of human subjectivities as yet undescribed by algorithms or modeling. Yet as they arrived in front of me, it was as if they were expected – the screen traced them, welcomed them, ordered them.

Later, in the context of a seminar dealing with the history of public art and ‘new’ media, I projected the word ‘ΚΛΕΦΤΕΣ’ from my desktop. Ad libbing, it struck me as I spoke that the dots that made up the word could have been projected by individual members of the crowd: “look,” I said to my 25 students (who in this text are now reproduced as a collectivity), “in this instance, the projection is produced by a group of individuals standing together and training their laser pointers onto the building. In the absence of sophisticated technology, the simple collective action of a number of heterogeneous individuals has produced a word.” Energized by the poetic potential of this conceit, I repeated it a couple more times in different contexts, then realized that, as I often do, I was making things up. It was me, not the members of the crowd, who was binding together disparities, in this case ideas – that of the collective, the word and production. Led by a desire to dwell on the phenomena of collective action, encouraged by the signs projected by the machine, spontaneous social improvisation seemed the most obvious explanation for the message I was tuned in to – the idea of a rig or assemblage did not fit so well. There is a world of difference between a large group of individuals coming together in public

space to spontaneously associate and invent, and an individual or smaller group hacking together cheap apparatus in a space away from the crowd.

What proved the existence of a *rig* was the trace of mechanical reproduction. Across multiple images of the same event, the pattern of the word was replicated, almost identically, pixel mapped onto pixel almost perfectly, the only interruption being the irregularity of the projection surface.



Figure 3. Thirteen points, and an interloper: the ‘E’ in ‘THIEVES,’ enlargement of figure 1. MindTheGap Citizens’ Media / Real Democracy GR Multimedia Team. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License (pixilation intentional).

From the perspective of current philosophical and critical trends, who cares anyway whether people stood together in solidarity as a human projector, or whether the image was the product of a machinic assemblage? We who *write* and *read* should be used by now to the agency of objects. After ANT, the conversion of human agency into machine function is a mere act of *translation*. The black box can be both an assemblage of technical and non-technical components or a mixture of both.

The more that compromises on wider fronts have to be made, the more human and non-human elements have to be stitched together and the more obscure the mechanisms become. It is not because it escapes ‘society’ that ‘technology’ has become complex. The complexity of the sociotechnical mixture is proportionate to the number of new ties, bonds and knots, it is designed to hold together. ⁸

So, truly, my romantic conceit may still hold firm. But seeking a way of articulating this, back in the seminar, in front of my PowerPoint, my re-projection of a projection, it would seem impossible to explain without doubling back on myself. I would have to begin this line of thought with an explanation of an error. And that would seem to be the most *productive* way to proceed.

READING, RIOTING AND ARITHMETIC

A laser pointer projects light. But to project a word is, amongst other things, to send it forth into space. An actor, (in the theatrical sense) can be said to ‘project’ their voice. One imagines the words filling space, emanating from the presence, the body. A projection would appear to require a projector, but is a singular machine a necessary precondition for the production of a projected text? In a conventional projection

mechanism, a lens array gathers the rays of light emitted by a bulb and funnels them through a nodal point – I have hacked many – but in the case of the rig under interrogation here, each individual laser represents a *point source*: light emanating from an absolutely precise, identifiable spatial origin. The rig under investigation seems to have been produced by binding together over 100 lasers: to make a word, it seems necessary to bind, to adhere, to assemble. Just as the text you are reading now – if you are reading the electronic version – is composed of an assemblage of dots, each with its individual x and y value, luminosity, hue and saturation.

The point of the pointer is to follow the voice. It has its origins in technologies which assist commercial and bureaucratic operations. The presenter accompanies the text, the diagram, the chart, with the pointer, which indicates the focus of attention. Compared to the apparently linear and sequential process of reading – which recent empirical studies have revealed to be discontinuous, non-linear, the association of fragments ⁹ – the laser pointer / projection / speaker assemblage resembles a form of conceptual and rhetorical Karaoke, to which the audience must sing along. The information design critic Edward Tufte considers the role of the projection – specifically Microsoft’s *PowerPoint* – as more to render the audience mute and receive the message of the speaker than to encourage “a thoughtful exchange of information, a mutual interplay between speaker and audience.” ¹⁰

In this light, the laser pointer in the context of the business presentation or lecture is almost like a baton to the head: as the speaker navigates his or her linear sequence of bullet points, the pointer parses the text to signify and communicate a presence: *this is my point, here I am in this text, now*. Drawing members of the audience to synchronously follow the speaker’s content, the intention to clarify a line of thought also

serves to close down tangents, diversions, asides and interjections. The random, dispersed, chaotic act of information exchange itself is – with the aid of multiple presentation technologies – redrawn as a linear process. For Tufte, the ‘cognitive style’ of such technologies represents a huge, flashing sign that insists on the primacy of one-directional information flow over and above all others. What is elided in the current insistence on presentation tech is the spatial and interactive context of knowledge exchange – considerations of how people associate in space, or how the event may flow in time. The ordering of events on screen is prioritized over creating space for audience feedback or contributions, or more open forms of exchange.

The ideal presentation would, for Tufte, include both printed matter in the form of handouts, which would allow participants a degree of ownership over the material delivered, accompanied by a visual presentation serving to support the sharing of knowledge, rather than its ‘banking,’ to use Friere’s famous formulation.¹¹ The use of handouts returns the information to the crowd in the form of a material substrate. Tufte hereby opposes the projected to the printed in a formulation which insists on the qualities of the material object to return autonomy to the bearer.

READING, WRITING AND ‘POLICE FUTURISM’¹²

It is possible to question whether the unification of many separate individual light sources indicates the production of a voice of one or many. Interestingly, the above image foregrounds both the trace of the movement of individual actors, in the stochastic dance of moving points of green light, and the formation of sense – the word produced by binding. The restless points could seem far more indicative of the collective than the single instance of the projected word, which can be assumed to be the product of individual action. Furthermore, the rig produces the crowd as a com-

munity of readers. However, it does so in full awareness of how such reading takes place in a distributed context – such a reading is self-consciously part of the same continuum which bounces placards back and forth across Europe, appropriating media networks as a host for a distributed conversation. But then *all writing is like this* – the written word is the site of a double inflection. Writing is, as the poet David Jones claimed, “trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made.”¹³ Such a position is describable from the position of the poet, the producer or the astute critic. It requires embodied knowledge of how the act of writing is, even at its very origin – the author – a binding together of fragments.

Considering violence, Laclau writes using metaphors that recall the geometry of projections:

*The existence of violence and antagonisms is the very condition of a free society. The reason for this is that antagonism results from the fact that the social is not a plurality of effects radiating from a pre-given centre, but is pragmatically constructed from many starting points.*¹⁴

The social, for Laclau as much as for Latour, is generated by the formation of local bonds, in the context of politicized situations. These ‘many starting points’ converge in the form of allegiances which develop between heterogeneous individuals, in this instance in a multifarious crowd. The notion of the social emerging from the local is echoed by the protestors themselves: in the context of the crowds, bonds were formed, supervening those imposed by the “separated identities and roles imposed on them by capitalist society... they met not as workers, university or school students or immigrants but as rebels.”¹⁵ In this context,

The rebellious experience, the material community of struggle against normalization – when one

*deviant individual became the mediator of another deviant individual, a real social being – mediated emotions and thought and created a proletarian public sphere.*¹⁶

Laclau’s formulation, which opposes ‘radiation’ from a ‘centre’ to a dispersed and diverse field of ‘starting points,’ is visible in the spectacle of the lasered-up masses, but it is again possible to question whether the binding-together of pointers does not to some extent start on the path towards the kind of centralization to which Laclau opposes his notion of antagonistic politics, especially given the issue of *reproducibility*. The above is an echo of Latour’s conceptualization of the how the social bond is produced by “stabilizing the links between bodies by acting on other bodies.”¹⁷ I do not wish to attack the agency or intentions of the individual maker of the rig here – merely to oppose two types of political sign – one which is spontaneously generated, and another which appears comprehensible, sensible – the naming of Parliament, the house of speakers, as the house of thieves: this particular formulation – a reduction of a complexity to a simple identity – is productive of both reactionary and revolutionary extremes. In the light of this act of writing, the other signs seem chaotic: writing produces them as *non-signs*. This difference may well be a function of representation: it is emerges from the gap between spectacle and street. Pourgouris makes a similar point in her cautious treatment of ‘the transposition of the Act to Logos’¹⁸ represented by the appropriation of the voice of the protestors by academia: a reduction of the immediate experience of the protest to a construction of language.

However, what this paper attempts to open up is the potential for the immediate experience of the *objects* of representation to be the site of action or protest. With regard to images, convention dictates that their collective production is the site of action, and their

reception the site of passive reception on the part of an individual. Latour himself remarks that the distillation of spatio-temporal experience into the space of the diagram, lab report or photograph is an immensely powerful act:

*By working on papers alone, on fragile inscriptions which are immensely less than the things from which they are extracted, it is still possible to dominate all things and all people.*¹⁹

However, if the site of reading is re-imagined as a space in which collectivities act on objects, it is materially no different from the street. It could therefore be misguided to think that those reading in seclusion occupy a different kind of space than those in the moment of protest. As capital territorializes public space, the space of the private can, by an act of imagination, be turned back into public space. Returning to the context of my lecture, I can claim to have experienced an event of reading, in which the reception of a text, on screen, in a social context, was changed by the intervention of objects. What material events locate or disrupt the reception of *this* text?

There is a difference between the binary oppositions of *on/off* or *blind/possessed of sight*. The former is a function of the projector (human or non-human) and the latter is a quality of the reader, the receiver. For this to become an opposition, a line has to be drawn and crossed. This *critical* operation – one of the most significant gains of the critical practices Latour disavows – locates the origin of meaning in the space of the reader, not the author.²⁰ The laser pointer which is targeted to blind does not transmit its function from one to the other side of the chasm separating an event from its representation. The mass of points – which for the crowd indicate a sign of their collectivity and the extent of their threat they pose – do not physically threaten the viewer of the photograph.

However the word 'thieves' will be reproduced on the page as it is on the square, ironically via the function of photography to trace what is in front of the lens. But just because the visual data is transmitted through the nodal point of the lens, funneled through the camera of one individual, the photographer, the message it carries need not be rendered indivisible, monovocal – the reader does not have to become complicit with the construction of the technological assemblage of the *screen*. Though the textual *device* covers far vaster distances than the laser, it is crucial to bear in mind the power of writing and reading to articulate the multiple, the heterogeneous, and to be appropriated differently by different collectivities. In which case, contesting the operation and location of *reading* retains a potent political charge. And that is a critical operation.

Following the protests of 2008, a book was produced by Kastaniotis Editions entitled *Ανησυχία* (disquiet), collating visuals, street art and texts produced in the heat of protest. On publication, copies were stolen in bulk by groups of anarchists, who claimed that the book appropriated intellectual property which belonged in the street.²¹ In response, the publishers made the contents available online – making the content free for those who can afford a computer.²² What they chose not to do was to make the physical product available gratis – this would have been prohibitively expensive. The only way in which the same, identical visual material could be broadly experienced for free, for those either in possession of a computer or not, would have been on the walls of Athens, at that point in time – dispersed, stochastic, public. However, this would have limited readership to those with the physical access to the space at that point in time. The difference between catching a glimpse of a poster out of the corner of one's eye as one runs for shelter and encountering it online would appear to be reading in the context of action. However, by locating reading

in a space apparently distant from sites of action, an opposition is generated between those kinds of space where action is productive (the agora) and where action is not happening or does not happen (the library, the bookshop, in front of the screen.) Pourgouris refers to Žižek's opposition of objective to subjective violence – objective violence representing a kind of inaudible background noise which habit accustoms us not to hear.²³ Maybe reframing the object as



Figure 4. Enlargement of screen grab from *Dance of the Lasers*, laser light, stone, JPEG artefacts (from *Laser Dance*, Real Democracy Group, Athens.) Crop and enlargement by the author. Image by MindTheGap Citizens' Media / Real Democracy GR Multimedia Team. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License (artefacts and pixilation intentional).

political makes it possible to become attuned to the level of objective violence in the act of reading. *Here is your screen, on which you read this – it is made of the same things – pixels – which make deals and blind cops.*

PRODUCING A MESS WITH METHOD²⁴

The location of production is multiple. There are key aspects of this paper which will be most significant if you read them on a screen, as opposed to on paper – it is entirely my intention to place in front of you something which will be read differently for two differently equipped readers. With regard to the relationship between printing and the electronic page, Derrida admits that the digitally reproduced text always carries within itself the desire to become paper²⁵ – but then it would not *glow*, it would not *shine*. It may be that the text in front of you is an assemblage of points of light. These particles, bound by the machine in a fixed array, are illuminated from behind by a sheet of electroluminescent film, overlaid on which is a shifting transparency. Maybe you will be reading on a technology yet unimagined, in which case my argument evolves – upgrades? On the Guardian website this morning, a day after revisiting Derrida's *Paper Machines*, I read about the revelation of a prototype device which behaves like a tablet, but resembles a sheet of paper – the PaperTab.²⁶ Coincidence or chaos?

The question of production is paramount: what is produced here – on the streets and on the screen – is manifold, as is its base ('support, substratum, matter, virtuality, power.'²⁷ There are many relationships of base to inscription in this text: the writing on the wall, words on a screen, architecture as the location of speech, the street as the location of political energy. Considering the notion of social space and its production, Lefebvre finds it necessary to problematize

the notion of production and its organizing, rational principles:

[..] first of all, it organizes a sequence of actions with a certain objective (i.e. the object to be produced) in view. It imposes a temporal and spatial order upon related operations whose results are co-extensive. From the start of an activity so oriented towards an objective, spatial elements – the body, limbs, eyes – are mobilized, including both materials (stone, wood, bone, leather etc.) and materiel (tools, arms, language, instructions and agendas) Relations based on an order to be followed – that is to say on simultaneity and synchronicity – are thus set up, by means of intellectual activity, between the component elements of the action undertaken on the physical plane. [...] the formal relationships which allow separate actions to form a coherent whole cannot be detached from the material preconditions of individual and collective activity; and this holds true whether the aim is to move a rock, to hunt game, or to make a simple or complex object.²⁸

The page is a physical plane as much as is the street – as long as it retains its physicality, its body.

Focusing on Lefebvre's opposition between *moving a rock* and *making a complex object* we return to the space of Syntagma Square. In the context of protests, rocks become *projectiles*. Neni Panourgia's fascinating analysis of the agency of stones in the events of December 2008 explores how

[..] the making and self-making of political subjects is a process that presupposes an engagement with both intellectual and tactile materials. One of these intellectual materials is ideology, which stains tactile objects, such as stones and paper, with the heft of its own meanings.²⁹

In a wide-ranging and poetic exploration of the ‘agency’ of stone, Panourgia draws a critical thread through the use of stone in the concentration camps of the Greek Civil War – in which prisoners of conscience were required to build analogues of Greek architecture, as part of a process of ‘humanization’ which would secure their release – to Syntagma Square, and the rock-throwing high-school students. Stones can be thrown in a way that frustrates the neat arrays and rehearsed tactics of the forces of order – much as lasers can be projected from the randomly dispersed positions of members of a shifting crowd. The movement of stones through the air, the debris of stones on the street – an index of disorder – can be compared to an entropic process by which the very fabric of architecture becomes a target – not the fabric of the building, (we are not considering anything like an updated version of the *trebuchet* – it is vital for the effect of these weapons that they are *small, dispersed and fast*) – but the ideas which hold the architecture together – the consensus, the power which architecture reifies. Words, paper, stones, speech and power engage in a dance which is only visible to those with the critical acuity or lens to be able to make imaginative associations between what *remains in place*. Panourgia opposes stones to paper, the paper of ‘university degrees, state decrees, newspapers,’ all of which are rendered valueless by global neoliberalism. However, if stone – thrown or piled – retains its power to produce and activate the public, then so does paper. Looking at images of the event, two significant categories of objects litter the street: stones and paper – in the form of flyers, and receipts.

The thrown stone is a coincidence of object and effect: when it strikes, it makes its point. The laser pointer, however, possesses both an immateriality and a materiality, from its object status – in opposition to the text, which for Panourgia is closer to something immaterial. It has a binary nature, in more ways than

one: as an object in and of itself – a commodity sold on the streets of the capital, by itinerant street sellers (who do not give receipts, strictly a cash transaction), and a dot, a mere point of illumination. Its operation is inseparably optical *and* spatial. From within the crowd, light is thrown from a distance onto stone, producing a coincidence of effect and sign. Though Panourgia, in her text, produces the stone-as-sign through her deft interrogation of its historical trajectory, the laser, as tool, is already productive of both violence and signification. Lasers *en masse* are performative in a way that singular lasers are not, in Austin’s sense of a speech act which also performs an action – such as ‘I hereby declare allegiance,’ or ‘I decree.’³⁰ When, from within the chaos of the crowd, disunited / heterogeneous protestors aim their shifting points of light at a building, producing a spectacular, energetic, restless field, a collectivity is announced regardless of organization or structure.

A poster displayed on the streets of Athens in 2008 – collected in *Ανησυχία*³¹ – shows a cartoon of a riot policeman dispersing a crowd of random stick-figure protestors, in contrast to a ‘body’ composed of red individuals, which looms over the cop, causing him to flee. Such a Leviathan is conventional – this is how solidarity is conventionally represented, and yet it is the upper picture which is more representative of the actual, chaotic spatial dispersion of a strong body politic.

DATA IN THE PLAZA

It is possible to view the display on the Hotel as a form of ‘data visualization,’ in the sense intended by Dave Colangelo & Patricio Davila in a previous edition of LEA.³² However, the mechanism here is not produced, but autonomously generated. Yes, the buzzing lights truly represent ‘a fluid, digital layer that perme-



Figure 5 Protest posters, Athens, 2008. Collected in *Ανησυχία*, Kastaniotis Editions, Athens, 2009. Photograph by Efthimios Gourgouris. © Efthimios Gourgouris. Used with permission.

ates the city' and a 'mix of technology and urban space which creates an increasingly conflated real and virtual space,'³³ but as to whether these, in Lefebvre's terms, are unified by a human productive rationality, is a moot point. The assemblage almost makes itself, it comes together via the presentation of attitudes, objects and opportunities – like reading.

Colangelo and Davila write:

*Traditionally, visualizations have been treated as surfaces for a sole user to view. With architectural projections, these visualizations can be viewed simultaneously by a group of users. Shared experiences within large visualization environments can harness the cognitive and communicative capacity in a group of viewers.*³⁴

The recruitment of the bureaucratic function of the machine in the service of artistic production is not necessarily benign – the difference between Syntagma and the projections described above is that the spectacle represents the creation of a social event and its simultaneous representation: the funneling through a 'surface for a sole user to view' happens after the representation is generated (before it hits the plane of the spectacle – the screen). The spectacle of the lights of Syntagma spontaneously and autonomously achieves such sharing of experience and cognitive / communicative bonding (in a sense it is already that, it is a sign of itself), but avoiding the channeling through a nodal point of power which would render such collectivity comprehensible, controllable, manageable.

Of course, this was another key message which I was attempting to get across to my students: do not assume that the best solution to a problem is to increase the complexity of the mechanical assemblage: electronic art is almost always a hybrid of human and non-human elements. One of the most valuable insights

ANT has contributed to thinking through human interaction is that the division between passive objects and active humans is constructed and conventional.³⁵

In acts of communication the relationship between human and non-human is complex – if technological artefacts give rise to the power to communicate at a distance, acknowledgement of this agency should not give rise to a binary opposition between a material, violent, participatory public space on the one hand (the space where the spectacle is produced), and a passive, immaterial, abstracted realm of reception. Both are potential sites of action. By focusing on the laser pointer in my lecture, I stumbled across an object which could directly communicate between both spaces – as a door *communicates* between rooms. Suddenly the lecture became the street: the *détournement* of projection equipment for the purposes of protest meant that the very technology of my presentation became a potential agent of the flows or movements I was attempting to describe. This distant action had the effect of ensuring that no-one participating in the lecture could consider their role and as passive and presentation technologies as merely conductive. *Something* entered the room through the open door.

DRAWING TO A CONCLUSION

Focusing on the agency of objects is fast becoming a key trope of contemporary discourse, but the rewriting of Syntagma Square as the site of the play of objects, as opposed to people, is deployed by myself and the others I have chosen to recruit in support of my argument because by doing so, it is possible to draw together, on the same plane, a series of apparently disparate events, actors and ideas. In all such contested spaces, the agency of non-humans intersects with that of humans in a way that requires that politics be factored into the equation – no matter whether one

believes that politics itself is *produced*, in the case of Latour,³⁶ or is *productive*, in the case of Marx. However, in the site of action represented by Syntagma Square, Latour's notion that *critique can never be productive* can be challenged by his own formulations. In claiming that 'it is no more possible to compose with the paraphernalia of critique than it is to cook with a seesaw' – Latour³⁷ opposes production to critique, and yet in a strange move which contradicts his earlier statement regarding the power of inscriptions, he delimits the 'paraphernalia' of critique to specifically discursive tools – words, speech, concepts – neglecting non-human paraphernalia entirely, and entirely glossing over the role(s) of the carrier medium, which figures large in Derrida's thinking. Furthermore, in attacking the 'critical,' Latour conjures up an imaginary beast similar to 'capitalism' and 'society' which, of course for ANT, do not exist. As Larval Subjects writes: "the ANT worry is that we treat *concepts* like 'society' or 'capitalism' as themselves, being entities that *do* things, thereby becoming blind to how societies and modes of production like capitalism are put together."³⁸ But 'critique' is as able to come together at the level of the local, the intersubjective and the placed, as any of the intersubjective, local, micro-level networks which Latour pits against constructions of the 'macro.'

Evidently, critical activity *can* also be extended into the realm of the material, a point which Kafka understood when describing a mechanism of punishment which inscribes a legal *sentence*, letter by letter, on the body of the accused.³⁹ With a more powerful device than the rig described here, the word 'thieves' could have been permanently inscribed on the wall of parliament.

Indeed, it could be Derrida who seems more open to the compositional potential of critique by his recognition of the productive agency of the *material* of lan-

guage: much of his output represents a specific call to creativity, to poetic action, to the re-binding of labor with imagination and pleasure which the division of labor itself divorces.⁴⁰ Writing is also a form of hacking. And there is, of course, the notion of play, of *jouissance*. Strapping lasers together and projecting them on public buildings is *fun*. We must never lose sight of the power of fun. ■

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