The optimism emanating from the opening quote, which I fundamentally share, confronts a grim landscape of universal cynicism, toxic capitalism and liberal, fake ethics. Those seem to be the reigning kings of the world we live in. Or in other words, “shit-is-fucked-up-and-bullshit.” The sentence, as found in the placards of some of the Occupy protesters, can be read in different ways. On the one hand,

“The raw awareness that you have the power to change the world is more important than any other resource. Self-determination must be established on a daily basis, by acting back on the world that acts upon you — whether that means calling in sick to work on a sunny day, starting a neighborhood garden with your friends, or toppling a government. You cannot make a revolution that distributes power equally except by learning firsthand how to exercise and share power — and that exercising and sharing, on any scale, is itself the ongoing, never-concluded project of revolution. What you do today is itself the extent of that revolution, its limits and its triumph.”

one could see it as the epitome of modern cynicism, which Sloterdijk has famously described as "enlightened false consciousness"; in this case, the informed consciousness that ‘shit is fucked up’, i.e. things are going quite bad and everything is out of control, we are not in control – no one is in control – and those in power are ‘bullshitting’ us while selling out to investors. There is no way out… we can’t do anything but continue expressing our cynical critique and turning our back on reality to focus on our own, already difficult, survival. On the other hand, the sentence could also be understood as the necessary denunciation of an unacceptable state of things, a loud cry that signals a profound disappointment and acts as the starting point of a search for justice, one that could thrust things towards what Simon Critchley has recently called an ethics of commitment and political resistance.3

It is certainly an active stance that I believe we should take, and one that avoids falling on the side of active nihilism: it is not about bringing this world down, destroying it and putting a new one in its place, but rather about transforming it radically from within. We have to imagine (and make become) another future, using the imaginative space of architecture, through the direct engagement in here-and-now situations. My suggestion is that sharing, displacing, caring might be important and necessary ingredients of such a demanding endeavour. In what follows below, I will try to sketch out what I mean by each of those verbs and the implications of such a performative approach for spatial practices.

In the second version of the ‘ars industrials’ manifesto, Bernard Stiegler describes a process through which capitalism has become structurally self-destructive, or in his own terms, toxic. The speculative logics of the system in which we live have progressively shifted to a radical short-termism that engenders a kind of systemic stupidity or beastliness.4

In his account, the consumerist model enters into a self-destructive crisis because of its inherent need to instrumentalize desire. Desire is ultimately turned into drive, which steers both the speculator’s disinvestment and the consumer’s practice and sense of disposability. The manifesto says: “Like the behaviour of the speculator—who is a capitalist who no longer invests—the behaviour of the consumer has become structurally drive-based. The consumer’s relation to objects of consumption is intrinsically destructive: it is founded on disposability, that is, on disinvestment. This disinvestment liberates a drive to destruction of which the consequence—insofar as it is the destruction of fidelity to the objects of desire […]—is the spread and the systemic and destructive articulation of the drive-based behaviour of consumers as well as speculators, and such that it engenders a kind of systemic stupidity or beastliness.”

In a society in which everything becomes waste, which Stiegler calls “a toxic and addictogenic society”, the victims/addicts can no longer take care of themselves, less even of other things or people around them. They become absolutely and chronically irresponsible.

The manifesto continues with a plea for a renewal of the genuine impulse to “take care of the world”, and the proposed solution is referred to as an “economy of contribution”, an articulation of a series of conditions and procedures for exchange in/through which it is possible to care for oneself and for others again, a new economy that would therefore produce “positive externalities” on the basis of a fundamental re-thinking of the techniques and technologies of the digital world, that should be put to work for the construction of a new “public thing” or power (Chose publique).5

Although I find Stiegler’s critique and description of the process of dissociation quite useful and compelling, and I am particularly sympathetic to the notion of contribution, I disagree with his almost exclusive focus on economy and his apparent acceptance of capitalism as a given that is here to stay. I think it is useful to recall the validity of the scientific analysis of capital car-

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2 “Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.” Sloterdijk, Peter (1987) Critique of Cynical Reason, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 5


ried out by Marx, which tells us that any fights against capitalism must be carried out in the sphere of the political. The crucial question is therefore: Can we imagine a politics that differs radically from the demands of capital? Badiou disagrees with Stiegler regarding the sites of our endeavor: “[T]here can be no economic battle against the economy. […] All the efforts to construct an alternative economy strike me as pure and simple abstractions, if not simply driven by the unconscious vector of capital’s own reorganization. […] Every proposition that directly concerns the economy can be assimilated by capital, […] since capital is indifferent to the qualitative configuration of things.”

Global capital is not interested in the qualities of space, but sees it merely through its potentialities for surplus. Globalization has in fact generated broken territories, it continues to fragment and disintegrate spaces, places and lands. Instead, as spatial practitioners – and as inhabitants of the world – we must be (we are) particularly interested in the qualitative potentials of space and we must therefore start by inhabiting the places in which we are intervening. We have to acknowledge the specificities of the particular locations in which we happen to develop our actions. In short, we must engage actively in ‘making’ sites. And when I refer to ‘locations’, I am not thinking of them in reference to the oppositional logics of global/local, nor as a kind of multiculturalist fascination for the exotic qualities of some other ‘different-local’ that has to be protected, recuperated and/or tolerated; I am thinking about them as expanded and expansive ‘sites’, as localized complex assemblages of intra-acting things, people, spaces, discourses and events, that change with us as we act within them. I am thinking about them as sites of encounter. The economic analyses or proposals are not enough: politics requires a demand and a location.

We have to exercise and share our power in such sites of encounter. A power that relates to other powers alike and confronts those that are hegemonic. A power that challenges and displaces hegemony. And we make such sites through our presence, our interests, our care and our gaze; in and through encounters, they shift and become… alive, traversed as they are by lines and relations. A multiplicity of actors acts together in these sites. Subjects develop as subjects in their commitment to the situation, as a reaction to an emerging demand. And we are, as subjects, simultaneously distributed and bounded – our minds always extended in and through the relations we have with everything and everyone else… These sites we make are therefore necessarily relational and political. This is why I prefer to imagine and think of a relational ecology of contribution than to entertain alternative, albeit alienated ‘economies of contribution’.

Sharing and caring are closely related, we share because we care, we care through sharing. In relationship to our ‘sites’ and to our spatial practices, the kind of sharing that I am imagining is not so much about material things or means, but rather about a sharing of ourselves, an openness to sharing ourselves in the situation, an openness to ‘openly becoming’ in the situation, i.e., letting others take part in that becoming, an openness-to-being-open. All of this sharing implies that the ‘sharer’ in question cares about the situation. Or as Badiou will put it, he/she is ‘faithful’ to the situation. For in Badiou’s ‘ethics of truths’, someone commits him/herself to a situation on the basis of an event that will place an (ethical) demand on him/her. His, is an ethics that shifts – like we are trying to do in architecture – from the nominative to the active: the subject ‘becomes’ in his/her fidelity to the situation; the ethical subject is formed in the process of remaining faithful to the event. A subject that shares.

This subject and this ethics displace, respectively, a dominant privileging of distance and objectification that is characteristic of modernity, and a moralizing, abstract universality of a liberal ethics imposed from without. She inhabits the situation, she gets close, she cares, she gets entangled in it and with things and people with which she intra-acts and develops relations of affinity. And she does that with and through her body. Equipped with her

7 See for instance, Bourriaud, Nicholas (2002), Relational Aesthetics, pp. 21, where he says that: “In observing contemporary artistic practices, we ought to talk of ‘formations’ rather than ‘forms’. Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.”
9 According to Donna Haraway, affinity is precisely not identity: “related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity,” and “in that sense, my kinships are about keeping the lineages going, even while decenterizing their members and turning lines into webs, trees into esplanades, and pedigrees into affinity groups.” HARAWAY, Donna (2004) The Haraway Reader, New York, London, Routledge, pp. 13 and 6, respectively.
ethics of commitment, she resists the science of enlightenment and objectification, because “[t]he price of objectivity is the loss of closeness. Scientists lose the capacity to behave as neighbors of the world; they think in concepts of distance, not of friendship; they seek overviews, not neighborly involvement. Over the centuries, modern science excluded everything that was incompatible with the a priori of objectifying distance and intellectual domination over the object: intuition, empathy, spirit de finesse, aesthetics, erotics. Out of all this, however, a strong current has remained effective in genuine philosophy for ages; in it, to the present day, flows the warm current of a convivial intellectual and a libidinous closeness to the world that compensates for the objectifying drive toward the domination of things.”

Something of this libidinous closeness to the world operates and is part of the sharing and caring that I am thinking. There is warmth, intimacy and closeness. There is a becoming that embraces an internal duration but that suspends abstract time. - We must slow down. - And this closeness can be seen as a form of generosity; another step towards our unfolding ecology of contribution. A generosity in which what we give is our openness, our caring and our sharing; one in which the ‘gift’ is not what we give but an unexpected emergence that depends on what we share, on what we contribute. Or what Rosalyn Diprose has called ‘corporeal generosity’: “an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness. Primordially, generosity is not the expenditure of one’s possession but the dispossession of oneself, the being-given to others that undercuts any self-contained ego”. This way of thinking generosity challenges our individualistic economy of exchange: the impulse to share and the fidelity to the encounter pre-exist the situation; generosity is in Diprose’s terms “a pre-reflective, non-volitional openness”, and as such it is entangled with our sensibilities, affectivities and bodies. It precedes and exceeds the terms of what Badiou calls ‘the state of the situation’, or the dispositions of normative and existing, hegemonic power. It signals another opening for its potential displacement.

These forms of generosity, sharing and caring are interested in the radical contingency of small and not so small encounters – in fact, encounters in plural and regardless of scale – and rehearse a politics of (active) listening: one that unfolds not as a passive position but precisely as a caring attention that enables engaged response and further action. This attitude is also necessary to understand the potential for radical innovation that is forming in a situation and to mobilize it in order to transform the world.

Our situation, our relational and political site, has allowed a subject to emerge through her fidelity. Her declaration of fidelity to the situation enacts her commitment: she is now an active component of the site. And she is committed to act responsibly. Her disposition to share and to care – her generosity – allows her to develop a situated knowledge which enables her to engage in responsible actions.

This situated, formed and informed interest to participate and contribute to the situation in order to transform it meaningfully puts the subject in a privileged position: one from which it is possible to push and displace the state of that situation, challenging the established powers and normative structures that define it. From such a committed position, she questions what ‘is’, she cares about what could be and what ought to be. An anarchic non-acceptance of the state of the situation emerges from a caring generosity that opens up the subject’s self to the situation, making her responsible again.

Situations, that are generally thought and structured on the basis of descriptions and prescriptions of ‘objective knowledge’, as well as through binary oppositions of the either/or kind, can be therefore questioned, activated and re-thought. Illegitimate power can be located and resisted. Alternative descriptions of the situation can be given, or invented. Objective descriptions can even be suspended. Instead, conflictive and situated conversations of a more dialogical kind can be articulated, and binary oppositions displaced by more playful, inclusive and amphibian both/and/it-depends.

For instance, where we to randomly select a site such as that of contemporary architectural theory and practice - or else, science studies... or philosophy - with their actors, structures

10 Sloterdijk, Peter (1987) Critique of Cynical Reason, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 140)
12 The knowledges, structurings, classifications, distributions and divisions that dominate a given situation on the basis of the interests of those governing the situation is what Badiou refers to as ‘the state of the situation’.  
sharing, displacing, caring - Alberto Altés Arlandis

and hegemonic powers, we would find ourselves amidst proponents of radical autonomy on the one hand, and radical contingency on the other; in-between those who advocate a return to the critical tradition, or those who claim the new religion must be projective and post-critical; those who are convinced we should operate from within, and those who think we should remain pure and purely outside; those who will fight for radical difference, and those who will cry for equality; those who might “dry out and die on the high ground of a dogmatic certainty of absolute (linguistic) knowledge, or drown in the sea of skeptic (unjustified praxis-oriented) relativism”.¹⁴

Instead, I would rather choose to keep a degree of independence, autonomy and freedom while simultaneously acknowledging and caring about the contingencies of the smallest details and encounters, just as I would prefer to work from within but entertain various ‘distractions’ that could bring me into ‘moments of outsider-ness’ and perhaps an unplanned critical distance, very helpful in practices of documentation and judgment. Discourses of radical difference can be enriched and expanded through serious engagement with the notion of the Same; the so-called projective practices in architecture run the risk of devolving into “the merely pragmatic, and to the merely decorative, with astonishing speed”¹⁵, unless they develop alternative or parallel models of critical assessment and engagement, and furthermore, both critical and projective are to remain extraneous and incidental unless they embrace the embodied and active registers of the performative, expanding their knowledges, fields of practice and abilities to make/sense. It is possible to imagine “amphibian creatures”¹⁶ whose practical and situated knowledge can not only adapt to the liminal landscapes that emerge in and around these combinations, but are formed and developed precisely in the multiplicities of these encounters.

This amphibian creature, like our situated and faithful subject, creates herself through her movement/practice, along the lines of relations and through ‘littoral landscapes’¹⁷, and in the unexpected energies of encounters, gifts, and events. Nevertheless, she has to create herself with others. While she inhabits the situation, she dwells. She necessarily co-exists.

“Self and Other complement and complete one another. There is no Absolute Category; no Ego, no Society – but only a chaotically complex web of relation – and the ‘Strange Attractor’, attraction itself, which evokes resonances and patterns in the flow of becoming.”¹⁸

A tension emerges here between self-creation and dwelling, between an individual process of becoming and a necessarily collective co-existence or dwelling-together-with-others. An ecology of contribution might be a non-oppositional, amphibian way of managing such a tension, something that we could think through contemporary developments within anarchism pointing towards existential or ontological anarchy, as the creative construction of an entire art of living, or the deployment of poetic imagination in everyday life: “[A] condition of free creativity generated through motility and revolt, can only be conceived and realised by the poetic imagination and, as far as words are concerned, can only find expression in poetic language.”¹⁹

The ‘contributors’ participate in their ecology on the basis of their individual and faithful commitment to a situation, one in which they are genuinely interested. They contribute as part of their own subjective development and only in as long as they continue to be interested. Contributing as becoming. Yet, contributing is also a part of something else that emerges out of the interplays of all contributions. This something else cannot be fully determined a priori, nor can it be fully controlled. It is born out of the relations and free-flowing contributions, and it exceeds the powers, expectations and possibilities of those who contribute. This something else is only possible through the real time articulation of the contributions, displacements and care shared by the subjects that take part.

It is not an individual that forces others to adapt, nor a collective that forces the individual into forms of co-habitation, but an ever-shifting balance based on sharing, displacing and caring in which contribution is the active register. Contribution as performative.

Besides being performative, I believe that contribution is necessarily fragile. Even more, it must endure its fragility. There is something fragile about the fact that it all depends on the individual contributions, something that cannot be guaranteed. Yet, this lack of guarantee, this fragility, can only be dealt with or eliminated through the setting up and deployment of various mechanisms of power and control. It is only in its fragile uncertainty that contribution remains a free-flowing ecology. Fragility is its power. A different power.

A power that resists and challenges traditional, managed and administered power, by means of distributed, emergent and partial ownerships, contributions and dispositions – by means of a resilient fidelity that is capable of locating and resisting the diverse forms of corruption and wear that can threaten the continuity of an ‘evental’ site.

An ethics of encounter is not a universal ethics, a totality or a frozen set of moral principles that steers our behavior, but a passion for reality, a fidelity to the encounter as a situation, as a site, as an event. The ethical demand raised is precisely to stick to the encounter, to care about the meeting. To endure.

As I have started to sketch here, such an ethics could emerge from the articulation of sharing, displacing and caring; respectively understood as a sharing of oneself in the situation and with others; as an ability and a force that pushes the state of things an questions what ‘is’ by focusing on what could be and what ought to be; and as a fidelity to the situation, a persistence and a willingness to stay put and to care about the things that matter. Imagining such an emergence might seem again too multiple a desire, but all the terms are necessary if difficult or dangerous. We must embrace the logics of both/and/in-different-ways to become simultaneously ‘of-the-world’ and critical; situated, grounded and in constant movement: “So, I think my problem, and “our” problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a “real” world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness.”

Enduring fidelity, enduring the encounter, enduring fragility. Or in other words, a special kind of stubborn persistence: “[...] it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.”

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intravention, duration, effects

contributors
Editors

Alberto Altés Arlandis is a registered architect, a researcher and a Lecturer at Umeå School of Architecture. He studied architecture in Valladolid, Barcelona and Delft, and is currently working on a PhD dissertation entitled “Dissenting City Narratives: Interplays of Space, Film and Politics”. His work interrogates the loss of critical and utopian impetus in architecture and explores the possibilities of the moving image as an apparatus of spatial critique and encounter. Together with Oren Lieberman he directs the “Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention” at Umeå School of Architecture exploring and making architecture as a relational, political, social and ethical practice that unfolds in the making of the world in/through intraventions.

Oren Lieberman is Professor of Architecture and Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design at the Arts University Bournemouth and a Guest Professor at Umeå School of Architecture, where, with Alberto Altés, he coordinates the “Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention”. He has a BA in philosophy and psychology, and a MArch from SCI-ARC. His work focuses on performative practices which entangle knowledge, methodologies and techniques from various disciplines, including architecture, performance, geography, anthropology, and sociology. He is interested in how architecture’s processes of relational/contingent production participate in the construction of political practices and the establishment of the “common”.

Guest Contributors

Francesco Apuzzo was born in Naples, Italy in 1972, he studied Architecture in Berlin (TU Berlin) where he graduated with a Diploma (Masters) in 2003. He was awarded the DCI Prize for Best Diplom Thesis. He has been in practicing partnership with Axel Timm since 2004 and a member of raumlaborberlin since 2005.

Karin Berggren is an architect and researcher. She studied architecture in Barcelona and Göteborg, and graduated from the master’s program ‘Design for Sustainable Development’ at Chalmers School of Architecture. Her master’s thesis resulted in a book entitled ‘Stories, Images and Architectures: Real and Fictional Account of the Fabrication of the Swedish Suburbs’ dealing with the problems around the media image of stigmatized Swedish suburbs. She is currently involved in research related to housing segregation and the developments in Swedish post-war mass housing areas.

Antonio Collados Alcaide is Doctor of Fine Arts at the University of Granada (2012) with a PhD on collaborative art practices and critical spatiality. Researcher and Professor in the Department of Sculpture at the University of Granada. He is the co-founder of ‘Aulabierta’, and other independent cultural initiatives in the city of Granada such as ‘TRN-Transborder Artistic Laboratory’. He coordinates with Javier Rodrigo the cultural-research project ‘Transducers’. He has edited and contributed to numerous publications and national and international research projects about cultural policy, artistic practice and collaborative artistic and educational processes in public space.
Hélène Frichot, PhD, is a researcher and teacher in Critical Studies in Architecture at the School of Architecture and the Built Environment, KTH, Stockholm. She has co-curated the Architecture+Philosophy public lecture series in Melbourne, Australia since 2005. Between 2004-2011 she held an academic position in the School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University. Her research examines the transdisciplinary field between architecture and philosophy (while her first discipline is architecture, she holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Sydney, 2004). Hélène’s published research has ranged widely from commentary on the ethico-aesthetics of contemporary digital architecture operating within the new biotechnological paradigm, to the role of emerging participatory and relational practices in the arts, including critical, creative, and feminist spatial practices. She considers architecture-writing to be her mode of practice.

Susan Kelly, PhD, is a Lecturer in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, London. Her research looks at relationships between art and micropolitics, rhetoric and practices of organisation in situations where questions are asked and answers are given. She makes performances, public time-based work, installations and videos, she writes and publishes and convenes events and performative investigations. She works both independently and collectively with the Micropolitics Research Group and the Carrot Workers Collective among others. Over the last nine years she has shown her work in Belfast, New York, Toronto, Helsinki, Prague, Dublin, St Petersburg, Krasnoyarsk, Tallin, Zagreb, and elsewhere.

Peter Kjaer is a Danish architect. He was the rector in Aarhus School of Architecture from 1998 to 2005, where he was later the Head of the Department from 2006 to 2009. More recently he has been part of the founding and development of Umeå School of Architecture, where he has also been the rector from 2008 to 2013, positioning the school where it is today. He is also a member of the steering board of “aarhus arkitekterne” and AHO. Presently he is the artistic director of “Open_Architecture”.

Per Nilsson is a philosopher, Associate Professor and Vice-Dean at the Academy of Fine Arts, Umeå University, Sweden. He obtained his PhD in Philosophy in 2001 at the department of Philosophy at Umeå University. In 2009 he published “The Amphibian Stand: A Philosophical Essay Concerning Research Processes in Fine Art” (Umeå: Häström Text-Kultur, 2009) a book in which he starts developing some of the concepts that he is still using in his ongoing research and work on the Philosophies of Art. Since 2012 he leads the research project “Amphibian Decreations in Choreography and Philosophy”, which he develops together with the choreographer Björn Säfsten and the dancers Anja Arquist and Sophie Augot.

Javier Rodrigo Montero is an art educator and researcher. Coordinator of the cultural and pedagogical project ‘Transductores’ in all its different international venues: Granada, Medellín, Quit. He has lectured and coordinated workshops in different universities, cultural centers and MA’s internationally (Spain, Costa Rica, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, EEUU). Editor and writer of “Desacuerdos”, “Dialogical practices” and the two volumes of ‘Transductores’, as well as author of various articles and book chapters on cultural practices, collective pedagogies and political interventions. He is also a community worker in several projects about youth action research, critical mediation in museums and collective production. Partner with institutions like Museo Nacional Reina Sofia, MACBA, Fundació Pilar i Joan Miro, etc. Javier likes biking, slow food and overall slower politics and education.

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