Breaking Out of the Specialist "Ghetto": Performative Encounters as Participatory Praxis in Radical Politics

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The cumulative effect of dozens of groups transforming regional culture and daily life along the lines of aesthetic avant-gardes could well prepare the majority to take control of their lives
—Katsiaficas 230.

I open with this comment from George Katsiaficas as it gestures toward the potential of a cultural aesthetic trajectory often relegated to the peripheries of political conversation. Why this relegation occurs is unclear: perhaps it is because creative interventions in the realm of politics have a tendency to be dismissed as frivolous. Or perhaps it is because the political velocities within aesthetic strategizing have long been overshadowed by the canonization of artistic insurrection. Whatever the reasons, closer examination reveals a situation quite to the contrary. Possibly even preceding the avant-gardes, there has been a distinctly militant political flair to specific modalities of aesthetic and performative intervention.

This essay examines one such modality, which I will refer to as a "performative encounter," through two movements, the Berlin Dadaists (1918–1923) and the Situationist International (1957–1972), and some of the German Umsonst (for free) campaigns (2003–). It does so in order to illuminate the political potential that such creative encounters instantiate by opening up new lines of communication and participation.

In the case of the Dadaists, this certain political flair presented itself through none moreso than self-proclaimed *Oberdada* Johannes Baader. Baader took as his prerogative the incessant disruption of political bureaucratic apparatuses to ensure the generation of maximum publicity for the Dada project. Recalling his experiences in the movement, Hans Richter retells the story of Baader's protest against the inauguration

of the Weimar Republic in 1919. Opposed to the further consolidation of German state and military power, Baader announced his opposition at the Weimar National Assembly. Declaring himself representative of the Central Dada Council of the World Revolution, Baader attacked the attending members, comparing Weimar to the Stations of the Cross. Following his denunciations of the German state, he proceeded to distribute a pamphlet entitled *Das Grüne Pferd* (the Green Horse), printed with the slogan "Dadaists against Weimar," to members of the assembly. In the furor that followed, Baader was dragged from the parliament by police, while simultaneously hurling the pamphlets into the assembly and press boxes (Foster 9). In an effort to consolidate his actions, three days following the event, Baader took to the streets proclaiming the Socialist candidate, Philip Scheidemann, as the *Ehrendada* (honorary Dada).

Like their Dadaist predecessors, early interventions of the Situationist International (S.I.) used performative tactics to disrupt conditions reproductive of capitalist relations of alienation and exploitation.[1] These actions took place around the time when the French faction began to conceptualize what it termed the "constructed situation." Motivated by their heritage from the avant-gardes, the early members of S.I. were outraged by what they perceived to be the hijacking of aesthetic experience by economic markets and cultural capitalizations. In 1958, a section of the group (including S.I. co-founder Guy Debord) decided to sabotage the "International Assembly of Art Critics" in Belgium. The group issued a statement condemning the event for its institutionalization and commercialization of art, and called for the uprising of new and subversive aesthetic ideologies. A direct offensive was launched in which the attending critics were bombarded with the mass circulation of the protesting text. S.I. insurgents handed out copies, read the text over the phone, and forced their way into the Press Club throwing pamphlets into the crowd. Leaflets were also thrown from building windows and cars. Police were called, the text was banned from being reprinted by the press, and members of the group were later threatened with prosecution (Situationst International, Action in Belgium).

Around a half-century after the Situationists proposed the "constructed situation" as a means to invoke "real individual fulfillment" through the "collective takeover of the world" (Preliminary Problems), campaigners with *Berlin Umsonst* (Berlin for free), in solidarity with other European groups, were taking over the public transport system. Under the slogan "Alles für alle, und zwar umsonst!" (everything for everyone, and for free!), the "Pinker Punkt" (Pink Point—Ride for Free) offensive of 2005 was a response to the re-structurization of student discount cards and the fare increase (Berlin Umsonst, Interview). The campaign began with the mass printing and distribution of fake transport tickets, topographically identical to the original bearing the *Berlin Umsonst* propaganda replacing the instructions for use. This was succeeded by a sustained sticker and information operation, which climaxed with the occupation of trains and encouragement of the public to travel on city transport without paying.

As part of the attempt to make the action less alienating to a broader public, the titling of the action, Pinker Punkt, attempted to redefine the practice of "schwarz-fahren" (riding black/fare-dodging) by queering its racist and criminal associations. To facilitate free group travel, central gathering spots were set up at various train stations. In Berlin, participation fluctuated heavily from around three to over fifty people traveling together for free over the course of weeks (Berlin Umsonst, Email). Each group traveling had experienced members with them who had strategies to deal with legal issues, and participants were repeatedly informed of their rights and given instructions on what to do in order to minimize any anxiety about state repression. Passengers on the trains were also made aware of the action, so as not to cause discomfort if inspectors confronted the travelers. After the encounters had taken place, campaigners planned a fundraising event to cover the costs of the fines incurred, so as to further strengthen a spirit of solidarity and community (Eshelman).

These three (non-metonymic) examples begin to illustrate what I call the "performative encounter." Beyond their singularities as events—divergent in terms of campaign focus, objective, political ideology, and sub-cultural identification—these instances converge around an ethic central to the praxis form. They purport a certain aesthetic, creative, and affective modality predicated on the desire for emancipation and self-determination. This is enabled through principles of active participation and reciprocal communication. Departing from what is commonly understood as a typical political platform, this modality may be seen as the kind of activity that Brian Massumi speaks of when he calls for "an aesthetic politics" whose "aim would be to expand the range of affective potential" (235).

Massumi's pronouncement for the need of such aesthetic politics corresponds to consternation around the question of specialization coming from within the radical "left" milieu. Essays such as Andrew X's infamous "Give up Activism," Autonome A.F.R.I.K.A Gruppe's "Communication Guerrilla—Transversality in Everyday Life?," and Angela Mitropoulos and Brett Neilson's "On the Borders of the Political—At the Borders of Activism" have all directed attention to the impasses plaguing political organizing. They argue that contemporary forms of organizing, despite intentions otherwise, often still reproduce hierarchies of identification between "activists" as specialists or experts and "nonactivists" (the public) as the unenlightened "masses."[2] In this context, Massumi's proposal for a performative politics capable of breaking the systematic reliance upon "the hardening of division along identity lines" (235) associated with forms of political organization predicated on ideological doctrines or hierarchies of participation, becomes a potential line of flight from the specialist (in this case artist/activist) "ghetto."

But how might such an aesthetic political praxis be thought about given its multiplicitous forms of manifestation? One point of entry is the performative encounter introduced in the three instances above. In order to reveal the significance

of this form to an experience of participatory, affective, and imaginative political action, it is imperative to begin by outlining what the characteristics of such an encounter might be. In terms of performance, such encounters utilize affective maneuvers such as a deliberate use of humor and pleasure, and are performative in the sense of a creative event that brings into being a particular ambiance. All three also indicate a distancing from aesthetic institutions: the avant-gardes consciously reject the dyadic relationship between art and life, and the Umsonst campaigns move away from such categorical semiotics entirely. This is reflected in the materialization of the encounter as ambiguous in identity, which is triggered by the use of quotidian realms or contexts conventionally disassociated from aesthetic activity. Furthermore, essential to such encounters is a quite militant engagement (replete with a criticism of the state, state law, and bureaucratic mechanisms) in socio-political struggle through the communication of resistance as an alternative to repressive conditions. This compels principles of public participation and reciprocity and is underpinned by a belief in the capacity of each individual (not just specialists) to instigate and propel change.

However, it is not enough to acknowledge similarities across these historically different encounters. It is through the mutations and re-evaluations of the performative encounter that it becomes possible to uncover the viability of such tactics for political insurrection. The legacy of such practice has been long, and crucial changes have occurred in relation to organization, intentionality, and ontology. From these vicissitudes, we can ascertain the ways in which the form has developed into its present actualization. Therefore, it is necessary to map out these changes so as to unravel how the relationship of artist/activist to spectator/public has been reconfigured from the avant-gardes conception of the "public" as *audience* of the encounter, the Situationists as *participants* in the encounter, and in campaigns such as Umsonst as *constituents* of the encounter. In looking at this changing relationship, and addressing how it affects the political operation of the encounter, some possible directions are offered for further experimentation with present and future modes of creative political engagement.

To elementarily sketch out the (non-paradigmatic) contours of the encounter, we might begin with the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, specifically the Berlin Dadaists who came together during the end of the First World War. The concept of Dada was brought to Berlin in February 1917 with Richard Huelsenbeck's return from Zurich after the demise of the Cabaret Voltaire (Willett 230). Departing from the predominantly "aesthetic revolt" of the Zurich movement, the Berlin Dada group was immersed in political activity from its advent (Richter 101–103). The shattered climate of Berlin provided an influential setting for a movement comprised significantly of vocal anti-war activists such as Franz Jung and Raoul Hausmann, and affiliates of the German Spartacist Group (later the KPD) George Grosz, Erwin Piscator, John

Heartfield, and Wieland Herzfelde. Already engaged with the publication and distribution of left-wing periodicals such as *Die Freie Strasse* (1915) and the *Neue Jugend* (1916), the possibility of the further merging of the political with the aesthetic was seen as vital to revolutionary mobilization (Willett 28–29).

From the outset, the Berlin Dadaists made clear their disgust for the German bourgeois idolization of art, culture, and idealism. According to Huelsenbeck, this was because it served to keep the populace on its knees in the worship of some transcendental "great spirit" with their faces turned away from the turmoil on the streets (Harrison and Wood 260). In response to what they saw as the troubling ineffectiveness of art to critically intervene in these conditions, they aspired toward the creation of an aesthetic capable of viscerally interacting with the socio-political sphere. This was announced through their rejection of conventional creative modes in favor of new assemblages of aesthetic forms. Live events or performative encounters—the Dada "outrages"—were considered one such means in the reaffirmation of the political dimension to art. Anarchistic performances by the group, such as that of Baader introduced previously, enacted the maelstrom of the political through the aesthetic, presenting "their content through the structure of outside, non-art events rather than to *re*present[ing] the world's events through traditional art genres" (Foster 5). These events were conceived to embody the immediacy of the quotidian and incorporated agitational manifestos, "pure-onomatopoetic or vowel-sound," nonsensical and simultaneous actions, provocative interactions with their spectators, cabaret, cinema, improvisation and "anti-illusionist scenic design" (Gordon 114). As Stephen Foster argues, the performance event was thus seen by the Dadists as a liminal moment acting to rupture the everyday narrative to bring about some sort of change (3–11). This tactic was effectively used by the Dadaists as a means for communicating their dissent in an interactive way. According to Foster, the event acted for avant-garde artists as an "instrument for achieving, in reality or by illusion, a positioning of themselves and their audiences in a hostile and self-destructive world and as a potential instrument of change" (3).

The negation of previous representational modes in favor of the performative encounter was premised upon its determination as a medium through which to immediately challenge socio-political consciousness and ideological persuasion. The self-conception of the Berlin Dadaists as artists of the revolution was unequivocally fuelled by their identification with the uprising of the Bolsheviks and the triumph of early Soviet communism. This equivocation went further than mere rhetoric; as Huelsenbeck announced in his 1920 manifesto with typical Dada élan,

Dada is German Bolshevism. The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunities to "buy up art for his justification." Art should altogether get a sound thrashing, and Dada stands for the thrashing with all the vehemence of its limited nature (Harrison and Wood 262)

Inspired by Lenin's (1902) vanguard—those professional revolutionaries and working-class militants necessary to lead and organize the masses into revolt—the Dadaists considered themselves the aesthetic vanguard of the people. Artists were considered essential figures to the provocation of a revolutionary consciousness and desire for emancipation through their creative medium. This did not mean that they understood themselves as being outside this multitude in any way. Rather, the Berlin Dadaists saw themselves as embedded *within*, and in service of, the revolution. From this identification, the project of the Berlin Dadaists was underpinned by a paradox: their role as provocateurs of social consciousness (as specialists in change), simultaneous with their desire to amalgamate the aesthetic realm and everyday struggles and thus end their autonomous delineation. While negating conventional aesthetic relationships through denouncement of the autonomous organic artwork, unequivocally politicizing the avant-garde artwork, and developing the interventional dimension of the aesthetic for the political, the Berlin Dada initiative did not fulfill its desire for the subsumption of the aesthetic into the quotidian. Art did not become correlative to political life. Instead, the strength of the Dadaist project as one intent on the decomposition of the institutionalization of art, surmises aesthetic philosopher Gerald Raunig, lay more in the way in which it

[…] subjected production conditions to an examination with the desiring-machine, igniting a cheerful deterritorialisation beyond all territorialities of nation and party with its anti-militarist, internationalist, anarchic practice. As long as it undertook this risk within the framework of the strongest attacks on art and under threat of beatings or forced labor for artists specifically within the manageable and limited spaces of art, it remained successful (2007: 24).

Thus, while the transgressive mobilizations of the Dadaists were regaled for their aesthetic instrumentality, their political transgressions were met with less enthusiasm. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari wryly concluded "politics is not the strongest facet of the Dadaists" (1983: 148). The steady recuperation of aberrant artistic gestures back into the canon of the aesthetic institution led, for the Dadaists as with much of the avant-garde, to the foreclosure of any significant intervention into the field of politics through artistic entropy. Their highly publicized nihilism and their self-promoted elevation as revolutionary artists and vanguards made them easy targets for the machinations of fetishization and cultural capitalization. From the perception of Berlin Dada as the *l'enfant terrible* of the avant-garde, in conjunction with the impasses around their contradictory political subject position, it is not difficult to discern how and why slippages between their political and social ideal, and its realization, occurred.

Some of these idiosyncrasies found themselves obliquely addressed in the movement of the Situationist International (S.I.) over three decades later. Where the Berlin Dadaists consolidated their objectives around the sublation of art into life,

the S.I. sought the supersession of both into a new environment. For the S.I.—intent on avoiding an uncritical perpetuation of the avant-gardist paradigm—it was the "purely negative program" of Dada that precipitated its demise through its rejection of any affirmative or even mutable revolutionary ontology. The wholly reactionary nihilism of Dada was considered (initially) strategically necessary, but fundamentally untenable by the S.I. They declared the positive composition of radical subjectivities and non-ideological, a-hierarchical experiential modalities vital to the propagation of emancipatory states (Vaneigem; Situationist International, Debord Report and Editorial).

Unlike the Berlin Dadaists who were explicit in their solidarity with the Bolshevik struggle, the S.I. detected principles of separation underpinning Lenin's structures of organization. The organizational autocracy of Soviet-inspired communism generated in the Situationists a virulent disregard for reformist Party apparatuses such as those the PCF, CGT (the French Communist Party and its labor union) and their associates. The deviation of Situationist operative models from such structures was asserted through their experimentation with creative and aesthetic strategies. These aspired toward the liberation of desire and processes of subjectivation from what Guy Debord referred to as the society of the spectacle. This concept described for Debord the way in which the relations between images were progressively replacing inter-subjective relationships between individuals and collective bodies (and vice versa) as cultural and social experience became circulated in a regime of commodities. Thus, the spectacle acted to mediate social relations between individuals, isolating them from everyday life much in the same way that capitalist economy isolates the pro-ducer from the commodity and its dissemination. This conceptualization signified a migration of Marx's theories of alienation underpinning processes of production/ consumption into the terrain of everyday relationships. For Debord, separation reigned as "the alpha and omega" of quotidian experience dominated by spectacular alienation (1983: 8). Moreover, the pervasive nature of the spectacle led Debord to conclude that it is not some state removed from that of reality, but rather a con-stituent of that reality. As he wrote, "the spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society" (1983: 2).

This colonization of daily life inherent to modern capitalistic production could only be superseded for the S.I. through emancipatory self-determination by the individual and collective social body. From their early inceptions, the Situationists considered one of their "central purposes" the construction of situations as intervention into this mechanism of subjugation and alienation (Debord, 2004: 44). The constructed situation was defined in 1958 as "a moment of life concretely and deliberately con-structed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and game of events"

(Situationist International, 1981: 45). It was a proposition for the deterritorialization of the spectacle and a reinvigoration of desire from its reification by capitalism. From the descriptions formulated by Debord on the spectacle, it is apparent why the Situationists held the opinion that it would be through the experimentation with new modalities of behaviour and relationality through participation, reciprocity, and interaction that the spectacle could be destabilized. The equivocation of the spectacle with the very processes constituent of contemporary experience under capitalism implied that only the most fundamental rupture of this, as was possible through the "constructed situation" could, as William McClure writes, "generate and sustain social forms and structures of value independent of relations instituted under the society of the spectacle" (np).

The Situationists themselves, however, offered little in the way of elucidation in their many texts and bulletins on what kind of praxis might comprise such situations. Tactics of the dérive (drifting) and détournement (linguistic and semiotic subversion) were widely upheld as instances of such events.[3] For the Situationists, these were means of taking aesthetic and creative practice from beyond the institutions and galleries into the social realm, into the cities and onto the streets, disrupting the familiar ways of interaction (typified by passive, isolated inter-subjective encounters and desires subjugated into commodity fetishism) with conceptualization for new spatio-temporal experiences (Debord, 1983: 35–54). Debord argued that such new experiences could only occur if all individuals were singularly conscious of their participation in experiential governance. The Situationists saw this as a necessary move away from the tendency of non-intervention (as reiterated in the structures of the theatre and cinema) in the audience, which required a break in the "spectator's psychological identification with the hero so as to draw him into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives" (Debord, 2004: 47). The activation of each individual as *participant* rather than as spectator marked a shift away from avant-gardist paradigms, which never reconciled their hierarchical separation between the author and the audience. In contrast to this, the constructed situation required more than the representation of the action or ideology by the actor, author, or specialist. As they wrote,

The situation is [. . .] made to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing "public" must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, "livers," must steadily increase." (Debord, 2004: 47)

Despite the recognition of the individual's capacity to mobilize this action, and the collective preparation of the concrete event, Debord (inadvertently haunted by the dialectical specter of the avant-garde) expressed doubt that this movement would erupt from the public itself, at least not initially. Instead, he suggested that some sort of "direction" of the spectators was required to provoke them into participation.

To facilitate this, Debord and the S.I. separated the activity of the "livers" within the situation into a temporary tri-tiered hierarchy, a logistical or functional division as such (Raunig, 2007: 175). At the apex of this division was the "director or producer responsible for coordinating the basic elements necessary for the construction of the decor and for working out certain interventions in the events" (Situationist International, 1981: 44). Subordinated under the director or producer were "the direct agents living the situation, who have taken part in creating the collective project and worked on the practical composition of the ambiance" (44). At the bottom of this organizational hierarchy remained the "few passive spectators who have not participated in the constructive work, who should be forced into action" (44).

What becomes clear from this description is that, as Raunig has suggested, the audience was thereby placed in an impossible position. To address the conflictive nature of this position, Raunig proposes two alternatives: either an affirmation and designation of the audience as such (and thereby using this position as a means for commentary or action itself), or an "opening up" of the position "to the complexity of political processes" (2007: 176). For Raunig, it is precisely the latter that was later achieved by the S.I., seen in the more pronounced politicization in their projects from the late 1960s onward; here he cites the example of their transversals through art and revolutionary machines during their participation in events around the Parisian riots of 1968 (177–178). What Raunig's proposition brings to light, then, is a new consideration of the activity of the Situationist International in terms of the potential the constructed situation opened up in the political realm. As Raunig writes, "Starting from performatively processing the situation and its necessary hierarchy the S.I. developed a practice of a pre-productive opening of the situation and its 'viveurs,' igniting a spark that suspended its organizers" (177).

Although we would be remiss in underestimating the importance of this transversal between aesthetic and revolutionary machines, we must wonder if this "spark" ever wholly suspended the delimitation of its specialist organizers from its nonspecialist participants in a cacophony of insurrection and re-claimation of daily life.[4] While Raunig's observations on the role of the organizer can certainly be seen in the later writings and activities of the S.I., perhaps it is nonetheless useful to return to the question of the audience in those earlier manifestos committed to the constructed situation, and especially to what this may have meant to its playing out. In 1958, the S.I. readily acknowledged that the establishment of a director within the situation was only to be a temporary one, stating, "this relation between the director and the 'livers' of the situation must naturally never become a permanent specialization. It's only a matter of a temporary subordination of a team of situationists to the person responsible for a particular project" (Situationist International, 1981: 44). While Debord stressed that this directorial role was only to be transitory, it nonetheless immediately designated a particular *method* to the situation which was, at any

given time, predicated upon a delimitation of individual roles in a system of value judged by a sympathy to the Situationist doctrine.

In this sense, the claim to collective organization, combined with the call for each individual to "seek what he loves, what attracts him" (Situationist International, 1981: 43), appears contradictory in light of the designation of a lead provocateur in the situation. Rather than being comprised of individuals convening under a common desire or concern—similar to what Massimo de Angelis might refer to under the term "temporary space time commons" (23–24)—what is insinuated is that, as for the avant-garde, there is the possibility for one person or group to impress upon a less "awakened" or "educated" mass the need for emancipatory activity. This, as Guattari indicates, is inherently counter-productive to any desire for a collective ensemble because "the thought of multiplicity, *a collective set-up of enunciation*, is a type of thought unattributable to a given individual or *cast* which must assure the representation of the interests of the masses" (Seem 39).

The division of function based on degrees of specialization is further compounded with the problematic pronouncement that any individual not participating must be "forced into action." More than just placing the audience in an "impossible position," this acts to delegitimize their capacity to *choose* to participate through coercion. It is not necessary to go so far as to impute that the audience is completely denigrated in this movement, but regardless of Debord's intentions, the suggestion of controlled participation rings with paternalism. Even prior to the later magnum opus of Raoul Vaneigem, what this illustrated was the uneasy coexistence in Situationst philosophy of both a rigid dialecticism and the aspirational liberation of a desiring subjectivity. As the Scandinavian faction attested in 1962, the "situationists action programme—at the intellectual level—is suffering from a cancer. The root of this cancer lies in the adherence to old-fashioned, classical and ultra-rigid patterns of organisation" (Jorn et al.). Undoubtedly, the Scandinavian opinion was infused with a particular bias after the expulsion of their contingent by Debord, however such comments remain effective in reminding us to retain a certain caution before upholding those conjunctures of theory and praxis, and the method of their realization, in Situationist production.

Therefore, while the S.I. unarguably made great leaps in overcoming some of the problems associated with the organization of the Dadaist performative encounter—especially through their repositioning of the audience into participant, and their extrication of the aesthetic work from the realm of art—there nonetheless remain questions in terms of the concrete organization and materialization of the constructed situation. Indeed, as S.I. itself acknowledged in 1963, "The SI is still far from having created situations" (Situationist International, 2004: 151). Aside from a handful of anecdotal dérives, notes on activities around 1968, and early encounters such as that outlined in the introduction to this essay, little documentation is

available with which to imagine how the situation might have materially played out. What the conceptualization of the situation did, in terms of its political effect, was decisively transverse beyond an aesthetic realm into the realm of the quotidian and the political. In the constructed situation, the line of flight bifurcated from the avant-gardist intention toward the subsumption of art into life. This is because, as Giorgio Agamben explains, the situation can be seen as "neither the becoming-art of life, nor the becoming-life of art" (77). Rather, it is "a point of indifference between life and art, where *both* undergo a decisive metamorphosis simultaneously" (77).

It was not only the Situationists' transformation of the avant-garde aesthetic endeavor, but also their ventures in experimental organization that aroused the attention of Parisian intellectual circles. Their breadth of influence in terms of a generalist rejection of the subordinative disciplines of political parties, unions, and ideological orthodoxies was picked up on by Guattari—so much so that, according to Raunig, Guattari "found his prototype for his theorem of the 'subject group' in the movement of March 22nd, which was triggered in early 1968 by the Situationist *enrages* [the enraged ones] of Nanterre" (2007: 180). It is through Guattari's post-individualistic theorizations of the subject group, transversality and of collective desire that it becomes interesting to preliminarily examine how a more recent articulation of this performative encounter differs from its predecessors. What such concepts from Guattari provide are a way to discern how the audience of the Berlin Dadaists and the participant of the S.I. is transformed into a *constituent* of the encounter in the Umsonst campaigns, for instance.

Further distancing themselves from those organizational models reviled by the Situationists, the methods adopted in some of the Umsonst campaigns over the past five years have taken on a more everyday vernacular. This is seen in campaigns around public transport such as the *Pinker Punkt* (2005) described earlier, *Nulltarif* (2003), *Stadtrundfahrt* (2004), and around cultural resources such as *Kino Umsonst* (2003), *Le Tigre at the Volksbühne Umsonst* (2004), and *MoMA Umsonst* (2004), among others.[5] The decision to work on this level of the everyday was a strategic one because, as a campaigner with Hamburg Umsonst explained, "we address whoever is there and sees what we do, and we invite people to re-think and to join us" (Dresden and Hamburg Umsonst). For Umsonst, the uncertainty of participants in the encounter signals the necessity for an open politics (neither bound to Marxism nor anarchism, but strongly reminiscent of aspects of both), which is partially furnished through the disruption of an encompassing political ideology in favor of what was described by a Berlin Umsonst campaigner as an "orientation-less left" (Berlin Umsonst, Interview). This is further ameliorated through the incorporation of organizational techniques, which when enacted in juxtaposition with creative, pleasurable tactics, enable a more accessible, less hierarchical platform from which to assemble collective enunciations of desire.[6]

Precisely what Guattari saw as emerging from the experimental organization of the S.I. in terms of subject groups, is what is approached in the composition of the Umsonst campaigns. Through his work at the *La Borde* clinic, Guattari produced an analysis of group formation within institutional environments in which he distinguished two interconnected and morphological types of group: the subjugated group and the subject group. The subjugated/dependent group includes those constantly subsumed to Power in some form (which is correlative of their desire for authoritarianism), and are usually linked to molar activity, being totalizing and, as commentator Mark Seem suggests, "global in ideology" (38). The principal characteristic for Guattari is the groups' incapacity for statement; for the subjugated group only "its cause is heard, but no one knows where or by whom, or when" (1984: 14). This coincides with the alienation of the subjugated group imposed by outside sources, and its subsequent withdrawal into protective group fantasy and insularity (ibid). As Gary Genosko clarifies, the unity of the subjugated group is defined by external interpellation (84).

Applying Guattari's analysis outside of the institutional setting, this according to Genosko, is the problem that confronts the ultra-leftist militant who gets swept into the phantasms typical of the subjugated group and tends to get "hung up on the significations produced by the leadership rather than producing their own signifiers and speaking in the name of the institutions they create adequate to the course of their actions" (96). For Guattari, group subjects/subject groups are conditionally opposed to subjugated groups. These groups are molecular by nature, localized, and generative of processes of becoming-action rather than encompassing structures. Unlike the external determination dictating the subjugated group, the subject group "endeavours to control its own behaviour and elucidate its object, and in this case can produce its own tools of elucidation" (Guattari, 1984: 14). It thus upholds an active position in terms of its own project. This implies that, for the individual participating in the subject group, there is the means for articulation and signification in a milieu of interdependence and difference which is synchronously unified through the collective process. As Genosko proposes, "the subject group is a kind of group in fusion [. . .] come together in 'the flash of common praxis,' in mutual reciprocity rather than mutual Otherness (86).

Through Genosko's description of the collective affirmatively arising out of "the flash of common praxis," we immediately begin to see the potential that Guattari envisaged in this new organizational structure: a rhizomatic, non-representative, non-programmatic common assemblage of singularities. The campaigns of Umsonst respond to the gaps in the experiments of the S.I., in terms of establishing the terrain for a potential subject group in the performative encounter, by way of their dedication to the composition of a collaborative transitory collective. For Guattari, "a subject group is not embodied in a delegated individual who can claim to speak

on its behalf: it is primarily an intention to act, based on a provisional totalization and producing something true in the development of its action" (1984: 33). From their immanent hierarchization of direction/participation in the constructed situation, there was little opportunity for the S.I to overcome the authority of the "delegated individual." From its genesis, this was not to be the case for Umsonst. Conceptualized as a series of campaigns rather than a group or movement, there was far less prospect for permanent membership. Rather, the collective converged around singular events connected to their focus on the privatization of cultural and public resources and spaces, state discourses around economic rationalism and, later, the precarization of life and labor. Revealing the economic and class politics underpinning the segregation of necessity from luxury, and questioning the increasing inaccessibility of the latter (especially with regard to cultural resources and events), each encounter proposed by the campaigners was formulated as a direct retaliation against the disenfranchisement propelled by the neoliberal rhetoric of scarcity rampant in Germany. A principal objective for the Berlin faction, as later with the wider Umsonst campaigns, was the collective appropriation of common space and wealth for everyone, specifically through creative forms of social and political direct action (Hamburg Umsonst, Hier Spielt).[7] What was intended was the encouragement of a "culture of everyday resistance"—the self-valorization of each individual of their own subjectivation through the collective subversion of capitalist conditions. In this sense, it is clear why an exclusive or ideologically demarcated group was not considered strategically appropriate; like Guattari's subject group, Umsonst was "primarily an intention to act," without the entropic, socio-systematic category of the identifiable subject or agent entitled to comprise the action.

This ambiguity surrounding the organization of the Umsonst campaigns does not imply the lack of a militant component to the campaigns. On the contrary, each campaign required significant planning phases. These were facilitated and managed by small committees of campaigners, which is to say that there were still "initiators" of the events (around ten to fifteen people) (Hamburg and Berlin Umsonst, Interview). There is nonetheless a marked difference between how these encounters were established and how the constructed situation of the S.I. was conceptualized. In Umsonst, the management of the campaigns tried to maintain as open and malleable as possible the scope for collaboration, with a principle of transparency and accessibility, and an adherence to non-hierarchical organizational methods. Unlike the S.I. who were vexed by the "misuse" of their moniker, the Umsonst campaigns wanted to generate diffuse interest, discussion, and the reproduction of their tactics and name by other collectives and individuals. Although the publicity of the planning stages was necessarily tempered by the illegality of the actions, in terms of the materialization of some of the encounters, there was emphasis placed on wide publicity

to encourage a large and heterogeneous range of people to constitute the events. This emphasis, however, could not entirely eliminate constraints and failures on the ambition toward immanent inclusivity which was problematized by issues of physical mobility (both in terms of differently-abled individuals and individuals deemed illegal by the state who risked deportation or loss of work through their participation) and the practical limitations on positive publicity for political events.

To facilitate the scope for collaboration to the best extent possible, the development of the encounters attempted to accommodate integrative mechanisms and methods (workshops, research groups, and discussions). This encouraged solidarity and collaboration between campaign organizers and particular groups (including students, artists, minimum wage earners, internees, etc.) that the accelerating processes of privatization specifically made precarious. While these did not always proceed or conclude as initially envisioned vis-à-vis the sustainability of transcommunity relations, this did not deter recurrent endeavors.[8] Workshops were also conducted in collaboration with networks of autonomous groups targeting the areas that the individual campaigns responded to (Hamburg Umsonst, Interview). This format arose in part as an experiment to move beyond prescriptive, abstracted, or ideologically-based political labor by targeting issues relevant to socio-economic and cultural groups often estranged from the established activist milieu. Much focus was placed on connecting people with the implications of structural reforms in their everyday lives and mobilizing them to articulate their dissatisfaction themselves. It was proposed that unified direct action would make this dissent visible and it was hoped that such political visibility could also inspire pluralistic flights of self-determined organization to take place beyond the parameters of the recognized activist spheres (Berlin Umsonst, Interview).

The desire of Umsonst to flee the specialist (in this case, activist) "ghetto" is where we may locate the crux of the paradigm shift in the praxis of the performative encounter that I have outlined. Returning to Guattari's subject group and his notion of subjectivation, it is here that his adjacent concept of transversality becomes especially pertinent. While Guattari's early essays on transversality are indicative of his formulations of institutional schizoanalysis, his comments can also be deployed toward an examination of the politico-aesthetic movement with regard to how we might be able to distinguish the historical from some contemporary instances vis-à-vis group formation through the encounter. For Guattari, transversality was preliminarily understood as the modifications of relations, forces, and environments between groups (and their effects) within and across institutions. Within these institutions, Guattari was intent on discovering the sites of latent power, often not coincidental with the groups manifesting power. What transversality offered such latencies of power was a way to conceive of how this could reconfigure the (vertically organized) institution through the opening up and synthesization of communication between

different groups and singularities. This had distinctly political consequences for, as Genosko explicates,

transversality was a key element of a militant practice aiming at a rupture with inherited models of organization. To transversalize the organization of a given institution is a creative act giving rise to subject groups capable of internally generating and directing their own projects, ensuring that organization remains close to the groups themselves, while simultaneously avoiding the slide into bureaucratic sclerosis (96).

To illustrate how transversality functions in the performative encounters of Umsonst, we can refer to two characteristics intrinsic to their composition: the already mentioned "egalitarianism" concerning the participant as a negation of the artist/activist as specialist, and the dependence on the participant in the constitution of the encounter. In order to understand the campaigns of Umsonst themselves as transversal practices that synchronously disrupt the possibilities of specialist identification (as both artists and activists), we can draw upon Susan Kelly's employment of the term. Kelly uses transversality to speak about modes of praxis that deliberately attempt to de-territorialize the categories, disciplines, and institutions they move across, evoking "new terrains of open co-operation between different activist, artistic, social and political practices" (Kelly, 2005). These transversal modes do not signify a permanent interdisciplinarity between the fields, but rather create temporary mutant conjunctions and coalitions through a movement of accumulation (not absorption), inherently changing the fields and institutions in the process. As such transversality is a vehicle of rupture and convergence in a constant state of becoming, a form or mode of operation constituted through events, collective alliances, and transitory organizations. It is also linked to notions of production, for in this movement it produces subjectivities and "self-engendering practices that seek to create their own signifiers and systems of value" (Kelly, 2005). Umsonst, as a collation of subject groups, enacts this creation of becoming-subjectivity through its transversal elements, which can produce, as both Guattari and Kelly argue, autopoietic and self-valorizing modalities of signification.

The adaptation of such transversal states by radical political groups such as Umsonst and others also recently involved in the networks of protest movements against economic globalization, thus marks a notable shift in artistic and political modes. Simply put, it is here that, as Raunig points out,

artistic-political practices finally seem to have left behind the dichotomy between art and activism. The activists hardly seek their own success in the arts field, nor are they striving for special distinction. Nonetheless, they employ methods and strategies of art history or current artistic practice. These actions create a new terrain of transversality, which is neither part of the artistic field nor of the political field in its narrow sense (2002).

What is demonstrated, then, is an attempt to conceive of practices such as those of Umsonst outside of, across, and between the boundaries enforced by disciplinary

regimes (art, politics) of recognition and categorization. It reads these interventions in a process of constant transformation and re-territorialization of both artistic and political activisms. This is how the performative encounters of Umsonst negotiate the impasses around hierarchical or discrete categories of identification haunting the avant-gardes and the S.I. The question of whether it is art or life, art becoming life or vice versa, even a supersession of art and life, is no longer of critical concern. It is not that art has dissolved into life in a singular, non-divisible entity, but rather that such encounters can be conceived as transversing both art and life, as might said following Deleuze (1995: 44; see also Raunig, "The Many ANDs"). Here the participant in the encounter can be seen as enacting both activist *and* nonactivist identities, in addition to the infinite other mutable multiplicities of identity and relations generated through the processes of subjectivation.

It is this transversal aspect that, for Guattari, furthermore carries the desire of the group (1984: 22). One of the ways in which the *participant* in the S.I. is reconfigured into the *constituent* of the encounter by Umsonst, is through an attentiveness to desiring production. Umsonst has been self-reflexive and analytical about its formation and dynamics of organizational power and semiotics of praxis. It has also, from all appearances, been dedicated to uncovering and actualizing multiple imbrications in public dissatisfaction with state apparatuses and those sites of socio-cultural and public life in which state power is manifest. Navigating away from the assumptions around desire often projected by political movements upon an anonymous public, Umsonst cultivates an exploratory trajectory by locating popular confluences in public attitude and desire; desire for more accessible public resources, transportation, housing and education, desire for self-determination for capacity to participate, desire for more emancipatory commons, for example. The search for such points of commonality and collectivity is integral to any liberation of desire, because in Guattarian terms,

Liberated desire means that desire escapes the impasse of private fantasy: it is not a question of adapting it, socializing it, disciplining it, but of plugging it in such a way that its process not be interrupted in the social body, and that its expression be collective . . . It is not a question of directing, of totalising, but of plugging into the same plane of oscillation (1995: 63).

The capacity shown in the Umsonst campaigns to "plug" into this shared expression of desire in the social body instead of directing or totalizing it reveals the importance of basing the constitution of the performative encounter on its participants. The "collective set-ups *(agencements collectifs)* of analysis or of enunciation relative to desire and its production" (Seem 41) is essential to the "revolutionary job" performed by the liberation of desire. Such collective set-ups are in no way suggestive of the homogenization of multiplicitious singular desires. Quite the opposite, for what is intended is that those polyvocal and heterogenic communities that are affected

understand that their participation is imperative to the collective articulation of particular common desires and demands. This acts to valorize those common desires, encouraging collective action through the performative encounter. In this way, the mobilization of shared action enabled through concatenations of singular desire into the social fabric signals a direction for political resistance that can imagine new conceptions of commonality, community and collective subjectivities, and assemblages of enunciation less evident in orthodox models of political and social organization.

If, as Massumi has proposed, what is required is "a politics of *belonging* instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence instead of separate domains of interest attracting each other or colliding in predictable ways […] a pragmatic politics of the in-between" (223), then it is clear how the performative encounter might help contribute to such a politics. From its conception as a mode to destabilize the autonomy of art and to intervene in the socio-political realms by the Dadaists, the encounter has been a means through which to forge new relationships between individuals and communities united in a common desire for emancipation and self-determined conditions. The extension of these transformative capacities of the Dada event into the Situationist constructed situation helped to develop an ontology counteractive to the alienation plaguing capitalist modes of production/consumption through the revitalization of radical subjectivities. While the Berlin Dadaists were explicit about their adaptation of representational vanguardist relations between the author and her audience, despite all intentions, it was through the constructed situation that it became clear that the specter of a dialectical hierarchy also haunted Situationist organizational tropes.

This specter, however, cannot detract from the positive legacy such movements have left. Contemporary materializations of the encounter, such as those seen in the campaigns of Umsonst, have demonstrated dexterity in negotiating organizational disjunctions. The commitment to composing encounters which are established through participation and predicated upon axis of collective desire; which are transversal and aim toward being non-exclusive, non-representative, and polycentered; which actively produce self-renewing discourses and transitory commons, are all imperative to the consolidation of the kinds of affective politics Massumi is arguing for. Affective politics that can be attentive to relationalities and processes of subjectivation are principal to the facilitation of new forms of emancipatory organization. As Guattari affirms,

either political objectives are the echo of all kinds of struggles, and are associated with an analysis of the phenomena of desire and of the social unconscious within the present organizations, or else the bureaucratic impasses and recuperations will necessarily recur, the desire of the masses and of interest groups go through representatives, and result from representation (1984: 9–10).

Through the methods appropriated in campaigns such as Umsonst, what is revealed are the still partially nascent stages of an organizational politico-aesthetic praxis form that can contribute to the many initiatives and gestures responding to the recommendations of both Massumi and Guattari. These responses are vital for, through their experimental, affirmative, and mutable ethos, they help to mobilize a politics capable of looking toward the composition of collective assemblages of enunciation beyond the "ghettos" of specialization and ultimately toward the liberation of radical desires.

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Notes

1. As Gerald Raunig (2008) recently pointed out, while the tactic may have signified coincidental characteristics, ideologically the intervention of Baader and early Situationist actions bifurcated notably. While Baader's action signaled an incipient demonstration against (but within the parameters of) the state bureaucracy of parliamentary governance and its representative democracies, the encounter of the Situationists already contained vestiges of their later objective toward the supersession of art and politics beyond any kind of reformism or state engagement.

2. To explicate this point further, for X, the self-equivocation of the activist as expert or specialist in social change is a debilitating one, acting not only to alienate the activist from the public and elevate the activist in a vertical relationship of value/authority over the nonactivist, but also acting to estrange political labor from daily life. This dyadic separation of political work from everyday life further compounds the perception of activism as a specialized activity imbued with a sense of militancy, severity, sectarianism, and exclusivity. As Mitropoulos and Neilson have similarly observed, "'activist' is not a term that coincides with those who engage in political activities. Rather, 'activist' is the demarcation of an identity and community that privileges particular kinds of activities, and forms of relation, by defining them as properly political. And what is deemed proper, for the most part, are the kinds of appropriation that make representational claims possible [. . .] one does not speak, or act, for oneself, but for others—and, oftentimes, these others tend to be framed as 'ordinary people' [who] are assigned a unity and homogeneity in similar fashion" (np).

3. As the Situationists clarified in 1958 in their paper "Definitions," "dérive: a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances [. . .] détournement: short for: detournement of preexisting aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of these means. In a more primitive sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres" (45–46).

4. While it is impossible to equate the early experiments of the constructed situation with the later manifestations associated with the 1968 activities, and while there is a marked theoretical shift in terms of how the Situationists considered their participants, based on the little evidence available in terms of documentations over the decade, a certain continuity can be found in some aspects of the materialization of organization. Even during and after 1968, Debord was insistent on the vanguardist-reminiscent role of the Situationists and their ideas of the uprising, and while their influence on the events cannot be denied, this maintenance of a sense of authority or even ownership is precisely the point where it is possible to see the specter of a hierarchical delimitation.

5. The Umsonst campaigns include/d Berlin, Dresden, Freiburg, Cologne, Mannheim, Kiel, Munich, Kassel, Dusseldorf, Lübeck, Göttigen, and Jena among others. The focus here on only Berlin and Hamburg arises from their higher and more sustained frequency and tenacity of interventions and campaigns.

6. For a more detailed examination of this, refer to A. Kanngieser 2006.

7. The claiming of spaces, resources, goods, and services (through stealing, occupying, squatting, borrowing, etc.) from the state. This politics of collective appropriation is marked by a state critical stance (even anti-statist) and involves the subversion of a capital-oriented exchange logic in favor of a concept of seizure predicated on desire and unhindered by financial constraint. Common to these gestures is a highly libertarian attitude, an exuberant and playful negation of the alienation and exclusion provoked through axiomatic consumeristic

machinations, and a very clear social orientation that attempts to move beyond the paradigms of traditional political structures in both theory and practice.

8. This last issue directly confronted Hamburg Umsonst during of a day of protest against state threats to unemployment insurance in 2004. Difficulties were encountered on the action day itself regarding communication between activists and job seekers, with the temperament being not as conducive to exchange as initially expected. This was due in part to the fact that many of the activists involved in the solidarity action were not unemployed themselves at that time, and that many of the people who were, were notably older than the activists and thus had different desires and aspirations from those the activists had projected for them. Rather than furnish the stage for a unified protest then, the approach of the activists led to a response that indicated that many of the job seekers found their position to be presumptive and offensive. This was, as some of the Hamburg Umsonst activists concluded to me, an unfortunate naivety (Hamburg Umsonst Interview). However, while it is often a complex challenge to establish ongoing relationships with marginalized social groups through solidarity advocacy, I would critically caution that this lack of self-reflexivity can inevitably signal a reproduction of the power dynamic between the vanguardist "intellectual" and the fetishized, but voiceless, "worker" inherent to representative Leninist/Marxist derivative politics, precisely the category of politics such campaigns were counter-posed to.