Things Activism. A Political Aesthetics of Things in a Posthuman World

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THINGS ACTIVISM.
A POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF THINGS IN A POSTHUMAN WORLD

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Abstract

Starting from a description of art activism, one of the relevant art movements in the XXIst century, as a working model for the possibility of a ‘things activism’, the article is approaching a series of posthumanist reasons to elaborate a ‘political aesthetics of things’ based on concepts derived from the sociology of objects, the object-oriented philosophy, the new materialism, the speculative realism, such as the ‘parliament of things’, the ‘internet of things’, the ‘democracy of objects’, and the ‘political ecology of things’, with the derived fiction of the possibility of a ‘nation of things’. To the extent that ‘humans’ are involved in political protests to respond, for example, to the consequences of the supercilious exploitation or noxious transformation of nature, there are also reactions and participations of natural or artistic ‘things’ or ‘hybrids’ that can be seen as being part of a ‘collective action’ of a ‘congregation of bodies’.

Keywords: things activism, art activism, parliament of things, democracy of objects, nation of things, political aesthetics of things, object-oriented philosophy, posthumanism.

Introduction. Making art as a political decision

Making art is a political decision. If art presupposes a technical knowledge in an aesthetic correlation with a conceptual necessity, then a decision to use these mechanical and intellectual skills for taking a position in the surrounding world could be a compulsory moment of emancipation. In relating to an imposed lawful order of a terrifying

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reality, art strives to become an exceptional way to confront, to resist, and maybe to replace the status quo. Responding not only with creativity and criticality, by using imagination and judgement, but also with a sense of social and existential responsibility, an artist can influence perceptions and can trigger a possibility for transformation.

Different forms of insurgency against the logics of (political) representation are generated by a multitude of social mobilisations raised in opposition to the hegemonic model of the neoliberal economy. Living in a 'protest age' makes someone to be aware that the street movements are not exclusively associated with the reaction of precarious or disadvantageous people, but also with the response of young workers-consumers, subdue to exploitative jobs in corporations or industries, and with the position of other representatives of the middle class that would express dissent and dissatisfaction about the limitations of the ‘representational democracy’ in terms of economic regulations and social policies. It seems that, in order to start or to support a protest, in the streets or online, there is not a need that someone should be informed by a motivating knowledge of the history of dissent, from the movements of the anarchists and grassroots agents to the tactics of the ‘outraged’ and the anti-globalist critics.

Identifying the modes of representation that became undesirable because of the false claims of the representatives and their mass-mediators, Isabell Lorey enumerates:

“1. Current manifestations of representative democracy (government, parties, and participative pacification through elections), 2. Representation as speaking on behalf of others by intellectuals and speakers, who present the concerns of the protesters suitably for the media and can function as contacts for governments, and 3. Forms of organisation that form a unified ‘we’, an identitarian collective subject.” (Lorey 2011)

In responding to these alienated modes of representation, by traversing the effective consequences of the philosophies of the assembly that can determine a sovereignty condition of the crowd raised against the authority of its representatives, someone can intersect with complicated consequences of the post-political theories on the power of dissensus. And then it becomes quite possible to realize that the task of those who
are elaborating arguments for describing the social engagement of the
dissensus could be that to create anarchic preconditions to take distance
from the logic of the protest for a better understanding of the
composition of the assembly engaged in opposition (cf. Latour 2010).

This would not become a difficulty for the legitimation of the
activist movements, as long as the dissensus (usually based on class
differentiation and ideological positioning) in the problem of the
economic inequities and social injustices is more irreconcilable (but,
nonetheless, involved in a struggle), than the dissensus on the different
solutions of the activists to the historical problems of aggressive exploitation,
unstoppable alienation, insatiable accumulation etc. Addressing the condition
of a ‘molecular strike’, Gerald Raunig presents three reasons of becoming
an activist: following the desire to invent new forms of living based on
the cynical need for an ‘aesthetics of existence’, looking for new modes
of organization, in an inclusive, transversal, and polyvocal way, and
working industriously for the re-appropriation of time (2013).

A common view on the description of the nowadays social
movements is that they are manifestations of ‘assemblies of bodies’
(Butler 2011 and 2015, Scotini 2013, Staal 2017, Preciado 2017) that are
mediating abstract demands for emancipation, expressing a concrete
indignation against “the false pretences of representation at the core of a
nation’s constitution” (Scotini 2013). It seems that almost each nation
now is subjugated to a global politics of capital production and
circulation with just a minor formal ‘freedom’ for self-determination.
The governments are representing the interests of the capital and not
those of the people. Most of the people are living under the premises
and effects of an endless capitalocracy established through the perverse
manipulation of the ‘representative politics’ doctrine. Democracy of the
capital is different from the democracy of the people in that the business
decision is based on a vote related to the share owner percentage, while
the social decision is based on a single vote of a single citizen. In a time
of accelerated corruption, a lot of politicians are owned by the capital
machine, which turns the decisions to support corporatist interests
against common people’s demands.

There are different models or approaches of the ‘space’ brought
under discussion to address the condition of the people engaged in
responses to the series of crises provoked by the dominant neoliberal policies. For example, when referring to the people gathered in mass demonstrations, motivated by different political purposes, Judith Butler speaks about the formation of a ‘congregation of bodies’ that are claiming a certain space as a public space (2011). As the public character of the space is disputed, the materiality of the public space is both a precondition of the gathering, and an opportunity for expressing the dissent. Nonetheless, it seems that what constitutes the public space is more a ‘space of appearance’, as defined by Hannah Arendt (1958), in which the space that matters is the space between the gathered people, than a space which is materially build as a public square to facilitate the encounters.

Presenting another model of space, in a contribution for the Disobedience project curated by Marco Scotini, Petcou and Petrescu (2007), from the atelier d’archietecture autogérée, talk about a model of space to be shared with the others which they call ‘alterotopy’. This kind of model, is presented as an acting space, which can introduce other temporalities and dynamics in an ‘auto-poietical’ way. Also with the possibility to call it a ‘third landscape’, as defined by Gilles Clément in his manifesto (2004), this alterotopy is configured and resubjectivated as an interstice in an abstract city.

**Art as activism in between worlds**

On the one hand, this abstracted space for the encounter of the other(s) could mediate both the congregation of a set of relations with stranger people that are following the same emancipatory interests, and the formation of strange relations with objects that are constituting an activist frame for protesting or communicating idea that can make a better and interesting life to share.

On the other hand, to enter with an activist worldview in the world of objects that can constitute the context of the people’s actions, necessitates an experience of uses of the public (urban) space from the perspective of a visible criticism of its increasingly subjection to commercialization, privatization, regularization, and repression.
For accomplishing such critical actions, there are situations when artists are proposing or are invited to respond to different conditions to live in a city, both in relation with its urban structure or planning, and in relation to communities that inhabit urban spaces. One such example is the project conducted by Apolonija Šušteršič in the Hustadt neighbourhood, a suburban zone of Bochum (Ruhr Area, Germany), in 2008-2011. Her HU_stadt Project, based on a 3-year process of negotiations and discussions with the local government, and a series of actions (including fund raising) supported by the local activist group Aktionsteam, started from the idea to question the current condition of the social utopias built in the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the by-products of this project was a Community Pavilion build in Brunnenplatz 1 as a ‘self-organized mini cultural institution’, inviting the inhabitants to re-consider the way of living in that area and the ways of using the public space. As being described at that time by the authors, “the Pavilion is meant to be a place for meetings, a venue for performances and an open-air cinema, an outdoor workshop space, as well as a place for various community activities”.

The artist lived in that area for 3 years, researching conditions for a sustainable public participation of the inhabitants. She encountered a lot of scepticism from the city council, but in the end the pavilion structure was built on public money. The finishes of the pavilion where supported by a foreign ministry of culture, proving that the project was understood in the end as an artistic endeavour. There are no more reports on the actual situation of the Community Pavilion, but the project continue to be related to the history of community work, cultural activism, and dialogical art, as Apolonija Šušteršič intended to contextualise it.

Another project that is addressing the activist presence in the public space is the Disobedience Archive which consists in an open and itinerant video archive, conceived by Marco Scotini in 2004, and which is presenting different recordings of social actions and movements in various locations on the globe. Not being a collection, but rather a toolbox to counteract anti-democratic realities, the archive was presented in different exhibition formats in Berlin at PLAY platform for Film & Video and Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien in collaboration with Transmediale 05 (January – February 2005), in Prague at Prague

The curator Marco Scotini, sees this archive as “an atlas that covers various contemporary resistance tactics from direct action to counter-information, from constituent practices to forms of bio-resistance”, presenting “histories and geographies of social disobedience: from the Italian workers struggles of 1977 to global protests, before and after Seattle through to the current insurrections in the Middle East and the Arab world” (Scotini 2013).

Taking into consideration political oppositions towards the ‘semiotic operations’ of capitalism (Guattari 2012) and the ‘spectacular’ expression of the mediated society (Debord 2002), Scotini approaches insurgent practices from the perspective of the production of subjectivity and history in contradiction with the reality versions of corporate media. In a beautiful conclusion about his archive, Scotini describes the Disobedience Archive as being “not only a sample of struggles and protests but rather an archive of imaginaries, of ways of living, of production, of looking, of learning and self-representation” (Scotini 2013).

Other forms of expressions, along with these uses of a community pavilion and the recordings of protest acts and the presentations of an archive, can be found in different approaches, from the conceptual cartographies of Bureau d’Études to the public installations of Pedro Reyes.

In writing about the French artist duo Bureau d’Études (Léonore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt), Tom Holert (2016) describes their investigative infographic work – that makes use of complex organizational charts of the ‘world government’, as being operated by corporations, supra-national organizations, NGOs, state bureaucracies, the military and prison industries complexes –, from the perspective of a political agency that is conceiving cartography as a ‘form of organization’. Their so called ‘politics of knowledge’ is centred on a ‘local approach’ of production and coding as keys to social performativity of the ‘general intellect’.

At his turn, targeting a plethora of social indignations, Pedro Reyes created a labyrinthine artwork based on apocalyptic scenarios generated
by the global imagination. His work, *Doomocracy*, realised in 2016 at the Brooklyn Army Terminal for Creative Time, consists in proposing a series of situations cum installations in a building referring to “the vernacular American aesthetic of the haunted house” (Thompson 2016), seen also as a performative vehicle, described by the curator of the work as being part Fox News, part Hieronymus Bosch. Using satires filtered through popular and news culture, Reyes re-creates a world of quotidian demons, from the boardroom of the insatiable corporatists to the wood cabin of the obsessed gun owners.

Art activism became one of most practiced and discussed movements, not quite a trend, in the art of the XXIst century. Related to certain states of social distress and political dissatisfaction, expressed in different forms of public protest, the art activism is addressing, in a critical and creative way, a multitude of sensitive aspects of life, like the economic depression and inequalities, the postecological raise of the Anthropocene, the migrationist wave of the political, war, and economic refugees, the educational and cultural decline of the monetarized society etc. Nonetheless, one of the perils of the nowadays activism expressed through artistic meanings, an interpretation approached by many art and political theorists (since Benjamin and Debord), is that the protests could be perceived as an aestheticized and spectacularized manifestation which could impede their practical goals. In this kind of logic, the aesthetic form can obscure the political content.

Besides its vulnerability to the criticism towards the value of an art quality and political impactfulness, the art activism should also confront a certain “quasi-ontological uselessness” (Groys 2014) that is inscribed in the status of art since the tradition that was influenced by Plato’s idiosyncrasy. One interpretative turn can prove the usefulness implied in the aestheticization of practical objects by understanding art as design (2014). In connection with this practical association, Boris Groys brings into discussion the empowering of image making through political design. In order to address a political issue, someone can appeal to an aestheticization of a thing, as interface design, which is quite different from the artistic aestheticization of politics, as defunctionalisation of the practical efficiency, an iconoclastic reaction to an old political regime. The political design, interpreted by Groys, proposes a politicization of
art for changing the reality in its use. Here, someone is encountering a world of objects that could require, possibly for a better understanding of the human world, an exercise of an analogy in which the things become active for a change.

From the world of humans to the world of things

Asking “what would an object-oriented democracy looks like?”, Bruno Latour proposes an exemplificatory enumeration of everyday political issues seen as ‘objects of concern’, things that can be identified with res publica, and that can be considered valuable “to be represented, authorized, legitimated, and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly” (Latour 2005a, 6). As an ambiguous and ubiquitous quality, the representation could be assigned to the right procedures that should be followed in a gathering, or in an assembly of people, or assigned to the presentation of an object in the mind of someone concerned to portray a certain reality as a topic or a topos. Nonetheless, in different artistic representations of different forms of manifested governments, there are conglomerations of objects represented both as physical objects to be used for solving matters and as metaphors to be operated for presenting situations.

One possible response to the actual politics, in terms and practices specific to an activist position that would seek to confront the social order instituted through ideological manipulations and economic speculations, could come from a reversed perspective as a look from the future through the lenses of a posthuman machinery. A posthuman machinery could be understood both as a glorious capitalist investment in the potentialities of technology, and as a computational system that arrives at a self-awareness that manages to control its operation without any human support. In both situations, an intervention of a hacker is needed in order to take control of the machinery for achieving a different diagnosis of the current condition, and, as a consequence, a repair of the system on the go.

Up to this moment, a series of narratives would try to fix the direction to the future, from a ‘liberal democracy’ narrative to an ‘authoritative regime’ one. In the end, it seems that none of the political
orders conceived in this critical time would function as a balance for the economic chances to live a righteous short (as it is) life.

An ideology of development and a compulsive requirement for (self)transformation (Herbrechter 2013, 15) could stand at the basis of an inhuman treatment of the people based on scenarios of life modelling, social control, and economic greed. Apparently inoffensive actions and facts, from liberalization and flexibilization to virtualization and speculation, can harm the constitutive characteristics of humanity.

Talking about posthumanism, besides the metaphysical considerations and the militarization evidences, the discussion goes in the direction of the risks of the globalization processes from the perspective of science exploration with the intention to accumulate capital and to extend privileged wealth without any limit. Although someone can consider that the technologization intensifications and medical advances can be seen as positive approaches for improving the human condition, nonetheless the impact of the planned obsolescence of technological devices and the consequences of the side effects of the medical drugs are just a glimpse of the noxious actions done to humanity from the perspective of financial speculations.

Apart from mutations that can be produced in the human behaviour by technology or in the human organism by medications through the abusive use of financial speculations, other scenarios are contributing to create an image of a strong interaction between the worlds of humans and things. As such, humanoid robots or robotic humans could define a cyborg condition as a constellation of characteristics that can improve the human being or can destroy it through an inverse domination. Implants or transplants can create short-circuits or deviations that can make a body work in difficult conditions, from a hard-working environment to a harsh post-ecosystem.

There are various scenarios that explore narrations about the way we will become or we already became posthumans. Situated between organic nature and machinic science, the human can act intentionally for a transformation, using knowledge and skills provided by genetic engineering and biotechnology, or can be transformed unintentionally, through natural body modifications as adaptation or through artificial consciousness computation as technologic revolution. In almost all of
these situations we can find a manifestation of a political will that can be interpreted as being artistically (technical, fictional, natural or artificial) expressed or produced. As reactions to situations, as environmental changes, or technological revolutions, the political transformations are mediated through manifestations that can be interpreted as art. Conflicting theories about art can argue against such an interpretation, such as the belief in the necessity of an intentional human act to consider that something can be understood as art. But, in opposition, there are other theories that are taking into consideration that we can experience art also outside the human will, such as in natural genetically expressions or in natural landscapes, or in technological fractal computer generated images or sounds etc.

If both politics and art are considered exclusively intentional human creations and acts, than not every other considerations conceived on the bases of contradictory experiences can be explained. There are sufficient and necessary counter-examples and counter-factual perspectives that can prove that politics is not totally related to the packages of decisions in a polis, and not entirely dependent by human democratic negotiations or authoritative impositions. And there are enough illustrations and expressions that can assure an artistic status to natural or technological manifestations.

A ‘Parliament of the Internet of Things’

The smart theories about the ‘parliament of things’ (Latour 1991) or about the ‘internet of things’ (Ashton 1999) present a possibility of political exercise in the world of natural objects or technological processes.

It can be a thought that, if a human can imitate nature to produce art, also the nature can imitate a human to express artistically. In these conditions, posthumanity can take the humans all by surprise without them knowing that they can become more objects than objects. Following this logic, it can be imagined a possibility for an ‘activism of things’, expressed violently through catastrophic events, or peacefully through genetic modifications.
In approaching the theory of the ‘parliament of things’, by starting from a critique of the modern distinction between nature and society – one which is explained through science and the representation of objects, and the other one which is based on politics and the representation of subjects –, Bruno Latour (1991) brought into discussion the possibility of hybrids as phenomena manifested at the border between nature and culture. Latour also accounts on the possibility of a Constitution that would be responsible for a population of hybrids (as machines, laboratories, experiments, cyborgs or tricksters, among others).

Later, Latour (2005) proposed an understanding of objects as being socially relevant, because of the possibility to modify states of affair due to a special agency of the objects. Seen as actants, the things that surround us can influence our environment once that they become a part of a complex of actions that leave traces and influence decisions through processes of mediation that result in networking and formations.

The post-humanist proposal of the possibility of a ‘politics of nature’, which can be mediated through scientific reports, as long as scientists can be seen as talking in the name of the natural objects, as part of a ‘reconciliation’ between human and nature, is conceived from the perspective of an imposition of a symmetric position of human in relation with nature in which objects are also participating in acts because of the adaptive nature of the ‘active subjects’. In this scenario, based on observation and experience, the objects are not always passive, but can determine the outputs of actions because of their differentiated proprieties.

Also, the human subject, as a result of its actions, can be defined according to the objects of interaction or in relation to the things created in a kind of reversible act.

In a world in which a Parliament of Things would be possible to exercise rights of the quasi-objects as hybrids, there will also appear a possibility of a disobedience of objects, a case in which an object can refrain from fulfilling its function because of a creative relation with an artist. In such a situation, an artist will mediate a different meaning or function of the object as this object will inspire a different reading of its nature. In this paradigm, it is not only the scientist who speaks in the name of the object, opening the discussion for a democracy of the
objects, but also an artist could express a position of an object using the medium of a public exhibition.

Concerning the ‘Internet of Things’, the humanity has reached a moment in the history of technology that is described in terms of smart connectivity, connecting devices, machines, and objects in domestic houses and factories, in the context of a so-called ‘forth industrial revolution’. Encompassing everything that can be connected to internet, and being able to ‘communicate’ in networks, the Internet of Things is creating relations between the most simple devices (as sensors or wearables) and automated systems, facilitating a flux of information, a framework for data analysis, and a set of conditions for change and action.

The ability to transfer data without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction seems to make the Internet of Things, in a paradoxically way, both terrifying and desirable. On the one hand, the impossibility to consciously control the connections of ‘things’ through internet protocols is triggering fear and uncertainty. On the other hand, the necessity to facilitate communication of smart or simply electronic objects, for the daily comfort and need for speed, articulate the context for permissions and opens the space for experiencing pleasures.

A playful script, mediated by a political artist, can elaborate a vision on the constitution of a ‘Parliament of the Internet of Things’ which can represent all the hybrid devices, the electric impulses, and the organic materials of the things that will connect the natural order with the technological assemblages.

The entities that could be represented in such a ‘parliament’, from virtual power plants and intelligent transportation to smart homes and smart cities, are potentially all interconnected and interoperated with a strong capability to generate large amounts of data from diverse locations. This kind of political model is superseding the capacities of humans to interact and generate instant objective data in simultaneity and synchronicity. That is why, people will continue to be in the situation to act from an activist perspective in order to accomplish goals that are not reverberating in other people.
A democracy of strange strangers in a political aesthetics of things

In his thesis on the ‘democracy of objects’, Levi Bryant (2011, 19) states that, as in the terms of Ian Bogost (2012, 11), all objects equally exist while they do not exist equally. In this understanding, the objects exist equally beyond the constructive gaze of the human subject, and they do not exist equally as long as they are in the situation to contribute differently to collectives or assemblages. For Bryant there are only objects in the world, the people being a different kind of objects with a different constitution, living among other objects. Nonetheless, the status of an object among objects do not exempt the human from the coexistence with strange strangers (Morton, 2010).

Following these ideas, there is a possibility to reflect on the condition of the artistic objects as ‘strange strangers’ that can create perplexity and curiosity. Even if we can entrust in the agency of these kind of objects, as actants, we can find ourselves in the situation to act back with scepticism or attraction. In this special relation, when two objects encounters, the human object and the artistic object, a third object is created, respectively the aesthetic object. If there are already three objects connecting each other, then someone can talk about the possibility of a collective assembly that can be treated from the perspective of a democracy.

In accordance with the logic of a political ecology of things, as developed by Jane Bennett (2010) there is also a possibility to discuss a political aesthetics of things. As debris in a landscape can exhibit something as a thing-power (Bennett 2010, 4), similar to a call that can provoke affects, based on an experience of impossible singularity of an abandoned thing, so a stack of artworks in an art gallery or museum can communicate affectively a powerful experience of the thinghood. Similar to the semiotics of the materiality and the energetic vitality of a ‘contingent tableau’ (Bennett 2010, 5) formed by things scattered in a landscape, the artworks stand as transmitters of a ‘culture of things’. Along with a “perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power” (the Thing-Power being defined as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle”), Bennet (2010, 6) realize the manifestation of a vital materiality of all the
discarded things that were for humans, once, commodities. In a certain, quite popularized, artworld, the artworks were transformed in commodities, entered the logic of a financial-aura culture, with the collateral effects of a throw-away culture, and the vitality of a conceptualized or crafted matter is speculated.

In describing the structure and the actions of the political ecology or aesthetics of things, there is a need to go beyond the identification of the Thing-Power, which can be brought into the situation to be considered from the perspective of a commodity, and to bring into attention the consequences, ‘the event-space’ (Bennett 2010, 23) of the interconnected things in what can be called, depending on the theoretical perspective, Globalization, Empire, network, assemblage. Seen as “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts” (Bennett 2010, 23-24), following different trajectories in uneven topographies, as clusters of agencies, the assemblages have the ability to produce mutations, changes, bifurcations, and interactions in a (con) federation of actants that supersedes the moral will or intentionality of any subjects.

One of the important questions related to this ‘agency of assemblages’ discussed by Bennett is that if these assemblages would have the capacity to form a ‘culture’, or to ‘self-organize’, or to ‘participate’ in producing effects (Bennett 2010, 34). If other objects than humans can create in a mysterious solidarity, like in a ‘conjoint action’ (Dewey *apud* Bennett), that kind of events that could be relevant not only in an ecosystem, but also in a political system, then we can assess an action as political based on its public outcome.

Defining a public, accordingly to Dewey (1927), as “a contingent and temporary formation existing alongside many other publics, protopublics, and residual or postpublics”, Bennett (2010, 100) brings into attention the processual crystallization and dissolution of a public in a field of political action which is similar to an ecologic system. Bodies or clusters of bodies affected by a common problem are gathering in a ‘swarm of activities’, acting like a collective understood from the perspective of an ecology of human and nonhuman elements (Driesch 1914, 57-58, *apud* Bennet 2010, 101).
From the perspective of a materialist theory of democracy, a political act is defined in relation with a generated effect. If people can disrupt a political order through interruption and disagreement, a situation in which affective bodies can make use of exclamatory interjections (Rancière 1999), the nonhuman bodies can provoke a gestalt shift in perception (Bennett 2010). According to Bennett (2010, 107-108), an animal, plant, mineral, or artefact – which can be misrecognized as context, constraint, or tool, having different types and degrees of power – can sometimes catalyse a public. In this kind of action, a political ecology of things is happening, based on a ‘transversal’ perception of the human and non-human worlds.

In analogy with this ‘political ecology of things’, which can influence the perception on the effects of nonhuman elements in situations determined by political decisions, it can be brought into discussion a ‘political aesthetics of things’, which would describe the effects of aesthetic experiences generated by artistic objects on the political judgements of the day.

The last documenta, the 14th edition of the most elaborated visual arts event in the world, at this time, proposed, as its explorative thematic, the concept of the ‘parliament of bodies’. Presented as being emerged from “the experience of the so-called long summer of migration in Europe, which revealed the simultaneous failure not only of modern representative democratic institutions, but also of ethical practices of hospitality”, this concept generated, along other open form societies, a ‘Society for the End of Necropolitics’. As the other forms, this ‘Society’ was activated as a space for cultural activism, with the intention to create new affects and synthetic alliances in order to “experiment collectively on a radical transformation of the public sphere”.

Even if it seems that the thematic concept of documenta 14 is referring to the injustice suffered by unrepresented humans and undocumented bodies of migrants across Europe, nonetheless, also, nonhuman entities, as inflatable boats, stormy waves, dangerous rocks, freezing barracks, dead cell phone batteries, warm water bottles, tall iron fences, provisional

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paper documents, can be taken into consideration when someone is in the situation to widely report on the political condition of the unfortunate travellers.

So, both human and nonhuman entities are contributing together to the political experience of the migrants of whose condition is an emanation of the dominant Western politics.

In describing the exercises of the Parliament of Bodies, the curator of the public program, Paul B. Preciado, and the team working for *documenta 14*, identified two dramatic derivations of the conjunction between the theory of necropolitics (as discussed by Achile Mbembe) and the philosophy of Anthropocene (coined by Eugene F. Stoermer, and popularized by Paul Crutzen), respectively the theory of Capitalocene (as approached by Jason W. Moore) and that of Chthulucene (as presented by Donna Haraway). These theories became, in the last years, a basic vocabulary and imaginary for developing a critical art discourse against the social, economic, ecologic, racial, cultural, and even civilizational consequences of Western capitalism.

A ‘Nation of Things’

If there is this possibility to conceive a ‘parliament of things’ and a ‘democracy of objects’ for a closer look to the effects of a posthuman world, then there could also be a reason to meditate on a possibility of a ‘nation of things’.

A classical paradigm for defining nationalism uses different understandings of ethnic constituencies, language determinations, and religious practices. Those determinacies are still influencing modes of living related to a kind of a secret need of belonging. Learning behaviours are engaged in assimilating ethnic formations; exercises in communication and free creative skills are used to build connections; and rituals are based on strengthen belief in the same order values. Ethnicity, language, and religion are classificatory categories that cannot be applied directly to nonhuman objects. But objects used in the identification of one’s ethnicity, or in referencing semiotics, or in performing religious rituals can be classified in an imaginary nation of things.
In the definitions of nationalism, the collective memory is prescribed to be exercised in a regulatory way, bringing people in a special state of consciousness that would trigger a respect for a strange forced solidarity in following the effects of a life security pattern provided by the insurances elaborated in the perpetuation of a state. Talking with proud about the glorious moments of a nation and keeping silence about the shameful times that would be transformed in a trauma for the nation, became relevant situations for describing the modularities of identity behaviour (Renan 1992). There is also a possibility to bring into discussion a relevant collective memory of things that supported traces and transformations with effective consequences in the formation of a possible nation of things.

The constructivist paradigm (Hobsbawm 1983; Anderson 2006) is approaching nationalist identity from the perspective of a social engineering that makes use of imagination as invention, which would involve the practice of programming as a mediator between an uncertain reality and a functionalist myth. As long as someone cannot endow things with imagination, at least can explain states or behaviours of things from the perspective of natural programming. Here is where things could develop a predisposition for constructing the space of a nation.

Possible redefinitions of a nation space could take into consideration realistic descriptions of the capital space self-regulated by environmental issues, social engineering, and subjectivity formations. The transformations perceived and scientifically proven in the immediate environment can influence the positioning of the subject in the territories of different spaces, from the space of a nation to the space of the capital. Also, decisions to protect the economical protocols of capital accumulation can determine juridical impositions to operate changes in the structure of the society. At long last, the ideological manipulations of communication products have a strong input on the anxieties that will inform the process of the subjectivity adaptation. Unfortunately, the consequence of the financialization of almost all the living acts, in relation with the environmental ecosystem, the social life, and the subjective positioning, is abstracting the living space up to disorientation and loss. Losing equilibrium in the environment and losing control on the authenticity of one’s subjectivity will benefit the
growth of the capital and will destroy the social articulations from the perspective of an emancipated self. Similarly, the impact of the capitalist economy and way of life in the world of things can have a strong negative influence on the human relations with the objects beyond any possibility for reconciliation through a ‘democratic’ model.

Conclusion

The public space became a place in which people could gather for opposing the politics of governments, or for expressing aesthetic positions through artworks, or for living the urban experiences of a community. In each of these circumstances, there are also nonhuman entities that can influence the experiences of opposition, expression, or simple living. Both people and things are networking and, in this eventful encounters, they are communicating what Bruno Latour identified as ‘matters of concern’. Slogans on boards, objectual artworks, artesian fountains, all that is visible and interactable in the public domain become important entities in a network of actions, as protesting, experiencing, or walking on by. All the presences of people and displays of things could be alike politicized or aestheticized from the dominant perspectives of convincing authorities. Nonetheless, there are relevant points of flight, oppositions and resistances, which rewrite the dominant reading, the discourse of ‘truth’, generated by the hegemonic forces of control.

As a product of market and consumer logic, the urban space can create sensations of satisfaction, vertigos of wellbeing, and instantaneous releases of instincts. But, also, in response to urban spectacles of consumption, other kinds of gatherings in the public squares can generate ripostes through self-produced critical art forms of dissent.

In a network of encounters and reactions, someone can see the elaboration of ‘new subjectivities’, the formation of a knowledge on ‘new materialism’, and an expansion of a ‘new vitalism’. Multitudes of individuals and things are gathered in a constellation of facts and concerns that are connected to a posthumanist world. An artwork can generate the discursive power to mediate between the human intentionality and the visual force of the appearance of a thing. In such a
paradigm, if we can say that the positivist or anarchist scientist is talking in the name of the things, as the established politician or the contingent activist is representing people, so someone can adhere to the idea that the art theorist (the critic, the aesthetsician, the curator) can talk in the name of the artistic objects as syntheses of intentionality and something-more-than-a-materiality.

Traditional aesthetic theory based its discourse on the idea that our artistic experience is infused, if not at least informed, by a sensuous knowledge. Even if our experience of an artistic object – as a product of creativity, instrumentality, and matter – is generated in the mysterious realm of a relation appeared between the human subject and the material object (a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a photography, a textile pattern, a mural, an art installation etc.), the common believe, coincident with the common episteme, is that this experience is exclusively dependent on human attention. In such a condition, the aesthetic attention, with its patrimonial consequences, is the foundation of the existence of the artistic object. But what if this kind of object has a kind of existence which is not quite intelligible for humans even beyond its *noumenon?* If someone is not treating this apory as a phenomenological problem, or as a post-kantian, Meillassouxian problem, as if someone is blocked in a realist speculative explanatory paradigm of the new materialism, then someone can suspend this denouement, this philosophical exercise of imagination, in order to accept that there is an unknown condition of artistic object beyond theories and scientific propositions.

Nonetheless, if someone is accountable by the actual posthuman condition, determined by the cultural construction of modernity, with its neoliberalist and capitalist outcomes, and by their influence on the natural environment, with its species extermination and climate change, then, at least, someone can try to create a new condition, not only to describe its effective development, by changing the perspective on the relation of humans with natural and artistic things.
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