Making Things Public
Atmospheres of Democracy

Assembling or Disassembling?
Which Cosmos for Which Cosmopolitics?
The Problem of Composition
From Objects to Things
From Laboratory to Public Proofs
The Great Pan Is Dead!
Reshuffling Religious Assemblies
The Parliaments of Nature

edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel
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Ana Miljakić

From Direct to Directed Knowledge
"All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." Marx's famous Manifesto words propounded the end of the bourgeois class, the bourgeois life-style and the bourgeois world order. Marx's image of melting belongs to the heritage of literary and cultural modernism, as it captured visionary grandeur, vague apocalypse, destructive nihilism and the flow of life — all qualities that constituted the palette of the modernist imagination. Furthermore, it is hard to miss in this particular sentence a type of modernist faith in direct knowledge, one-to-one representation, or in the myth of it. Marx believed that when the mysterious and obstetricous ways of "ideology" were removed once and for all, the masses would simply have direct access to knowledge about their conditions of life.

Soon after the October Revolution as close an approximation of Marx's "melting" as history has turned up so far — Lenin held that the proletariat masses needed to be educated and socialized quickly and by any means available. Prior to the revolution, agitation was meant to enhance the political consciousness of the workers; Lenin believed agitation had to be conducted regarding every specific instance of oppression. But after the October Revolution, political education, or the political consciousness, could only equal persuasion and nonnegotiable acceptance of the new order. One of Leninism's defining characteristics was the idea that the intellectual elite had a crucial role when it came to the proletariat's class consciousness. This, Lenin's pedagogical approach, was manifested after the revolution in the drafting of various decrees and laws that involved the employment of radio, television and theater for the ideological education of the vast rural popula-

tion of Russia. The masses needed to be represented to themselves in their full (though mediated) force. Hence, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment was promptly created by the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party in October 1917 and was immediately given a practical task of great proportions: a "Plan for Monumental Propaganda." Lenin saw his plan, launched in April 1918, as an interpretation of Tomasso Campanella's Renaissance thesis Civitas Solis. Campanella's vision of an ideal town, whose frescoed walls would provide instruction and arouse civic feelings, inspired Lenin to call for temporary inscriptions, slogans and evaluations of historical events. Lenin's fascinating blueprint for mass enlightenment included a special heading about May Day parades and annual celebrations of the Revolution. The chief apostle and manager of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment and Lenin's right hand in all matters of culture, Anatoly Lunacharsky, explained why celebrations were necessary: "In order for the masses to make themselves felt, they must outwardly manifest themselves, and this is possible only when, to use Robespierre's phrase, they are their own spectators." 1

These first steps in the formalized process of enlightening the masses are important, for they had great consequences for years to come in all of the states that constituted the Eastern Bloc. Quickly, Marx's direct knowledge became Lenin's directed knowledge, which nonetheless was directly performed, and the idea was directly embodied by the masses.

For years the May Day parades, other parades, the revolutionary celebrations, the sports spectacles (spartakiads) in stadiums and even the stadium celebrations of the Fearless Leader's birthday were an emblem of socialist life. These choreographed ideological supergraphics were performed by well-trained, handsome young people all over the Eastern Bloc. It is no surprise that this has been seen as a particularly socialist type of practice (and space) in recent studies of life under communism. 2

In one sense, to see this space and practice as disciplinarism would be entirely correct. In order to perform the star or the party acronym, the socialist young men and women had to submit to a regime of collective physical exercise. Moreover, this complex event had to have a tone and a mood. And on top of its mass presence and performance, its mass distribution was ensured in films and newspapers, in which the familiar voice-over accompanied the dazzling kaleidoscopic images. But to see these performances as merely or simplistically disciplinarism would fail to explain the genuinely excited and blissful expressions of both the participants and the observers; one sees this over and over in documentations of socialist parades, whether you look in the special media archive in Moscow or among the weekly newspapers produced by Flm News (Filmskie Novosti) in Belgrade. This observation is not meant to diminish the importance of the strong grip of an entire series of state apparatuses involved in producing the deep structure of everyday life in the Eastern Bloc. It is meant to highlight the aesthetic enjoyment these events may have elicited. 3 If we dismiss the very personal aesthetic effect of communal parades, we miss something that was at the core of this type of assembly. Parades were assemblies of sorts, and, in opposition to more onerous disciplinary methods, parades were a relief. They were public, they were in the streets and they indeed managed to communicate or to represent a collective to itself, even as the people participated in a shameless simulation of socialist society.

The parade filled the streets, regardless of whether we were able to trace its origin to some ur-religious, liturgical source or if we saw it as a perfectly modern mass ornament or both. Year after year this river of spectacle ran through the streets, crowded with observers. Its temporal-sympathetic syntax was not unlike that of an ancient Chinese scroll: Even though "events" in it flowed and metamorphosed, every once in a while the "emperor" and the emblems of his ideology would appear and reappear in that flow, unchanged, ideal, projective, and ultimately omnipresent.

Having begun as re-enactments of the Revolution and the May Day spectacles in the Soviet Union, a series of embellished self-presentations of the masses marked the territory of Eastern European cities after World War II. The public, whose participation in political processes had been dramatically curtailed, was presented with the possibility of participating in parades. Thus, these parades had to carry out the gigantic symbolic task of representing participation. The public in this case was not a vibrant participatory and political public, but some of the mechanics of mul-

2 In 1986, using The Communist Manifesto to frame his view of cultural modernity, Marshall Berman found in these lines a modernism not unlike Artaud’s, Gertude Stein's, Kafka’s or Joyce’s. For Berman, Marx’s play between euphoric literary imagination and sober scientific materialism provided a cue to examine his work as an example of veritable aesthetic revolts against the tiat's neoliberalism. See Marshall Berman, All that is solid melts into air: the experience of modernity, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982.
3 The idea of the parade is not however a naive story solely about the education of the masses; it is primarily an organizational matrix, based on vague ideas about freedom and equality, which are expressed in the uniformed clothing, in uniformed kitchens, in military tactics and in the "sprieving walls" of the city.
4 Quoted in Vladimir Tolstoy, Irina Bibilova, Catherine Cooke (eds), Street Art of the Revolutionary Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918-33, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1990, p. 24.

5 Historical time when it comes to changes on the scale of the society and the lessons absorbed by the collective body.

6 The steering of the Winter Palace was the conceptual basis of the Soviet spectacle. The actual accounts of this event don’t usually render it as a very spectacular one, but it has been reconstructed numerous times as well as filmed by Sergei Eisenstein. Historian Richard Struss found accounts of a quarter of a million people participating in the third re-enactment of the October Revolution. Regardless of whether the actual numbers are true or not, it is a fact that far more people participated in the events of the revolution than in the fact that in the 1917 event itself. And that was precisely the point of the re-enactments, a type of embedded historical knowledge.

7 Even though in many cases parades and stadium spectacles were primarily a product of the machine era and its particular version of mechanized masses, it is important to note the persistence in the communist-socialist world turned them into hallmark symbols of the socialist experiment in general.

8 The leisure of the masses, Socialist Spaces, the content of which deals with various aspects of life under communism; points to parades as one of the special practices the logic of which was shared to a large extent by the various communities of the Eastern Bloc. See David Crowdy, Susan Emily Reid, Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2002.

9 For surely their records exude aesthetic pleasure. We rarely wish to admit as such, especially when we are being permanently surrounded by their power if we did.
May Day parade in Belgrade, 1964, film stills from a special edition of Film News (Filmske Novosti). © Filmske Novosti, Belgrade. According to the Film News archive this was the last May Day parade that took place on the streets of Belgrade. After 1964 and until Tito died, the street parade was transformed into a yearly stadium celebration. The parade took place in front of the former Yugoslavia Parliament.

March 9, 1991, demonstration in Belgrade, television broadcasting material, film stills, material courtesy of Studio B Television, © Studio B, Belgrade. This demonstration was met with a violent reaction of the Milošević regime, and followed by a student protest. The first demonstration, presented here, took place on the Republic Square.

Film stills from raw footage of the October 5, 2000 protest in Belgrade, material courtesy of B92. © B92, Belgrade. This footage was broadcast raw on television. The event involved an attack on the building of the Former Yugoslavian Parliament.

After the display of the army, the citizens' parade will take over the wide boulevard.
ticipation were at work every time the masses were organized to occupy Red Square, Wenceslas Square or Republic Square. 10 Perhaps it would not be too far fetched to say that some aspect of the modernist belief in direct knowledge was not entirely misplaced when it came to the lavish communist parades. Perhaps Siegfried Kracauer's idea that the masses could (and needed to) reason their way by means of the mass ornaments they participated in producing was, in fact, a good description of what happened to the communist attempts to manipulate the self-image of the proletarian masses. 11 They eventually saw themselves as a mass and as a collectivity ... exacting happiness.

Back from Directed to Direct Knowledge

It is no surprise to find that a whole century after Marx's manifesto the proletariat was multitasking as subject and representation in Guy Debord's writings on the spectacle. 12 The historically inaugu-

rional moment of the modern spectacle, according to Debord's modernist thesis, occurred with the development of "a radical opposition" between the image of the working class and the working class itself. In Debord's definition, the spectacle emerges precisely in the move from direct to directed knowledge; having placed great value on direct knowledge, he could only get increasingly discouraged by all subsequent historical developments. Regardless of Debord's personal pes-}

sinism, the fact that the communist world was steeped in something like the proto-culture and logic of the simulacrum required every resistance to communist regimes to play out on the battle- 

field of representation.

The protests, the uprisings and eventually the soft revolutions of 1989 and the 1990s that took place in the former Eastern Bloc all occurred in the very same arena that had been regularly occupied by communist parades. In many cases, the partici- 

pants in both the parades and the protests were the same, if only figuratively; they were the public, the masses in both instances. The value of the uprisings in Hungary in 1956, Prague 1968 and all the others in the Eastern Bloc including Belgrade's protests in the 1990s was derived once again from the very assumption of direct represen-

tation. Crowds on the streets were a direct evi- 

dence of dissatisfaction. They were on the streets in order to speak in their own name, claiming back the oldest medium for collective representation: the city.

10 Wenceslas Square in Prague, Red Square in Moscow and Republic Square in Belgrade have each been sites of parades and protests. Both of these rely on a sheer expression of multiplicity, power in numbers, which is what I am calling mechanics of multiplicity. In Révolte de la masse José Ortega Y Gasset claimed: "The concept of the multitude is quantitative and visual." José Ortega Y Gasset, Révolte of the Masse, W.W. Norton and Company, New York and London, 1932.


Whether it was articulated as a need for represen-
tation or as a desire to "live within truth," whether it was blamed on the regimes or on the willingness of citizens to participate in its schemes, the renewed conceptualization of "direct knowledge" began well before the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was at the core of all dissident activity for a decade before 1989. 13 By shifting the terrain of its conflict with the regime from a head-on violent encounter toward the sphere of spectacle, to which Guy Debord defined as the zone of the radical opposition of reality and its representation, protest- ers across the Eastern Bloc disturbed the axiomatic relationship between the violence of the regime and its own denial of it. The message of all Eastern European versions of soft revolutions was about truth and the direct knowledge of truth, and the very tactics of the protests had to engage the simulacral logic of the communist world's use of media. Thus, of course, did not mean simply opposing media; it meant using and co-opting mass media and their logic in order to ensure the geographic reach of the protests and in order to direct the way that the masses and the interna-

tional community would understand the massive displays of dissatisfaction. We could say that the very choreographed events that drew their con-ceptual power from involving direct representa-

tion managed to succeed largely thanks to televi-

sion broadcasting — in the cities where events were taking place, across the region and around the
distant world. Andrei Ujica and Harun Farocki's Videograms of a Revolution is perhaps the most stunning document about the effect of television on the Eastern European revolutions. 14 Not only did their film capture the general mood in Romania and the importance of taking over the control of television, but it also highlighted the value that direct knowledge seemed to have during the Romanian revolution. 15
encompassing sentiment. Some of Tito’s encomiums captured in the newborns fell out of favor soon after the celebra-
tion, but the documentary presents all of them as proud and important. The newborns assures us that the entire city is giddy about the event, eager to watch its young people salute their spiritual leader and consummate chief. Film News, the agency that produced the newborns, was established on October 20, 1944, the day Belgrade was liberated from fascist occupation. The film company turned into a federal public agency later—
one of its crews always available to record Tito’s glamorous life—and quickly became one of the regime’s most important fabricators and broadcasters of five-year plan achievements, progress and collective. Its vision was total, unified and carefully choreographed.18 But by the time the era of protests slowly rolled in, television had squeezed out the medium of the newborns and almost completely and definitively taken all the attention away from it. For the most part, this only meant that the propaganda material became more intimately related to its audiences. Surely people could laugh at it in their living rooms, but they were also exposed to it more consistently and more relentlessly.

Belgrade’s protests missed the momentum of the 1969 uprisings and the spectacular energy of the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Instead, they highlighted the fact that the narrative of communism in Yugoslavia was historically and structurally different than the stories of most Eastern European countries, even though one would not know it by analyzing the May–June paradoxes across the region. Still, the important difference between Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries (with their successful revolutions in the late 1980s and early 1990s) perhaps had to do with the lack of a clearly defined oppressor. It was not the Soviet Union and the local politicians endorsed by it that the Belgrade protests were aimed at. The country was falling apart internally as pan-Yugoslavism was replaced by rampant nationalism and as multiple heirs of Tito’s absolute power showed their inability to redefine the political and bureaucratic structure at the highest level of leadership. The main target of the Belgrade protests in the 1990s was the inward manifestation of Milosevic’s rule.19

Among other things this meant that his com-
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Errata

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