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Occupation as a revolutionary tactic has a long history, from the factory takeovers in post–World War I Italy, to the Sorbonne in May 1968, to Tahrir Square in 2011. The use of “Occupy” as a rallying cry is of more recent origin, however. In December 2008, students at the New School barricaded themselves inside a student center that had been slated for demolition, demanding the university president’s resignation. In the aftermath of their eviction, “Occupy Everything” became the movement’s slogan. The following autumn, students at the University of California schools amplified the call to Occupy, launching a spate of campus occupations and blockades in an attempt to forestall proposed tuition hikes and budget cuts. On walls and banners, the slogan “Occupy Everything, Demand Nothing” marked a break in the usual codes of student protest: faced with the dismantling of public education, students did not so much demand redress for specific grievances as seek to initiate a total transformation of the university, and of the student-administrator relationship. These struggles marked a transition away from a politics of visibility towards one of direct expropriation of space and resources, parting ways with the media-based activism of the previous decade.

The shift in tactics from protest to occupations owes much to French and Italian ultra-left and insurrectionist theory. Sometimes called the “communization current,” this strain of Marxist thought transects several generations, from Jacques Camatte and Gilles Dauvé to the collectives *Théorie Communiste*, *Tiqqun*, and *Endnotes*. Focusing on the nexus of social relations that sustain the capitalist mode of production (wages, competition, exchange, marriage), these writers abandon the view that capitalist relations will be altered only *after* a revolutionary break; instead, they define revolution as the continuous process of instituting communist relations *directly* and *immediately*—from exchange into free giving and taking, from wage labor to wageless life. In this body of literature, “communization” is the name for this activity (revolution *as* activity) of making things available for communal use, expropriating what a community needs without getting it from capital, and without the prior mediation of organized labor or the mass party.

Last autumn, the three of us became interlocutors (we hadn’t known each other previously) in an argument regarding the stakes of the Occupy Wall Street movement and its implications for contemporary art and art history. Informed by the university occupations, we saw the proliferation of encampments as a first step in the direction of communization, and as a spur to rethink the relation between art and politics. Following feminist theorists/strategists Silvia Federici and Selma James, we interpreted this shift as a straightforward reversal of values: from the reproduction of capital through the labor process to the reproduction of society through communization. Here we saw an unfolding politics of care far more

promising than insurrectionist rhetoric alone. At each of the major occupations (Oakland and New York in particular), activities related to communal life—e.g., claiming a common space in violation of the rule of property, finding and organizing the means of subsistence for the wageless and homeless, defending the camps from the police, and so on—were in no way secondary to the exigencies of protest; for many occupiers, sustaining and defending the camps was their *modus operandi* as well as their livelihood. While this might sound like a utopian reading of the autumn uprisings, we are referring merely to the practical activities of the encampments, such as preparing food and disposing of waste—activities that had to be organized on a communist basis because it would have made no sense to do otherwise. Occupy showed that it is possible, and even pleasurable, to *do* communism in the present tense.

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We are thrown back, then, to the history of art, which now reads differently. For us, the horizon of communization provides not only a revolutionary theory and praxis but also a potential exit from the art-historical antinomies of false sublation and bourgeois autonomy, the exhausted (neo-)avant-gardist dialectics of art and life. It also positions anew the notion of autonomy. This concept, once a vital plank in the modernist platform, seems to us to have returned under the sign of Occupy in several problematic guises: as economic self-management, exemplified by the renewed enthusiasm for artists' unions, collectives, and advocacy groups, but also as an aesthetic paradigm—autonomy as line of flight, as institutional flâneurism, as information displaced from one network to the next. From a communist perspective, we find neither of these positions satisfactory. On one hand, the project of artists' self-management maintains the relationship of artist-gallery, and of worker-capital, whereas it is the relationship itself that must be overcome. On the other hand, the aestheticizers of autonomy (if we can be permitted that term) vaunt autonomy *within* capitalist relations, presuming—in our view, wrongly—that these relations cannot be altered by any means.

Beyond these positions, and in opposition to capital and its privileged epistemes, we see a common horizon for both art and politics: autonomy as a material practice, according to which relations between bodies and things are mediated impurely, provisionally, without forms of capitalist valorization—in other words, autonomy as *process*, not as a stable state. Art's usefulness in these times is a matter less of its prefiguring a coming order, or even negating the present one, than of its openness to the materiality of our social existence and the means of providing for it. When its instruments are fine-tuned, art is capable of registering what is false about the world-picture projected by capital, with its transparent universe of isolated selves, each subject an atom in circulating flow. Instead, art insists that the fracas of society cannot be captured in number or concept: bodies are always particular, events flee from capture, and things are not what their commodity-form has us believe.

This, we argue, is the perspective of communization as well. What Marx called “the real movement of history which abolishes the present state of things” is also a movement *of things*—of matter and form transfigured through the metabolism of communal life. Art cannot accomplish this movement on its own, but it *can* meet politics on the grounds of everyday subsistence, coordinating things, bodies, and discourses without yielding to the categories of capitalist valorization (of course it can do the latter, too, as the very existence of the art market attests). In view of Occupy, it should be clear that a new account of autonomy is required, one that places the means of subsistence over and against the global reticulation of ideals and visibilities. Paradoxically, art tends towards autonomy by fixing on what recedes from visibility, what withdraws from evaluation. Tends towards it, but never arrives: from the perspective of communization, autonomy is a horizon, not an end-state or totalizing system. At best, art beckons from *beneath* the present state of things, showing us—sometimes brilliantly, sometimes naively—the world composed of objects and bodies alone, putting to us the question: “Why isn’t this good enough? Why does there have to be Value, too?”

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