

denounces an industrial society that reserves the understanding of tools and thus any kind of agency to an elite of experts. He calls for the invention of convivial tools which do not degrade personal autonomy by being indispensable, which do not provoke situations of domination and which broaden personal agency. Although written in a very different historical context, the book still provides stimulating theories with which approach contemporary issues.

<sup>13</sup> See detailed program at <http://frenchculture.org/visual-and-performing-arts/events/composing-differences> (accessed March 28, 2015)

<sup>14</sup> LaborinArt, "Running Along the Disaster: A Conversation with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi," *eflux journal* 56 (June 2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/running-along-the-disaster-a-conversation-with-franco-%E2%80%9Cbifo%E2%80%9Dberardi/> (accessed December 29, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Gerard Raunig (after Foucault), "Instituent Practices." My emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter*, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Gerard Raunig, "Instituent Practices."

<sup>18</sup> Tristan Garcia, *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010). English translation by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Joao de Pina-Cabral, "Afterword: What is an Institution?," *Social Anthropology, Special Issue, Rethinking Institutions*, vol. 19, issue 4 (November 2011): 477–94. Available at: [http://www.ics.ul.pt/rdonweb-docs/ICS\\_JPCabral\\_Afterword\\_ARI.pdf](http://www.ics.ul.pt/rdonweb-docs/ICS_JPCabral_Afterword_ARI.pdf) (accessed January 4, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to choreographer and writer Barbara Manzetti for drawing my attention to this verb. She borrowed it from theorist Gilles Tiberghien.

<sup>21</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "Institutions as Sites of Agonistic Intervention," in *Institutional Attitudes: Instituting Art in a Flat World*, ed. Pascal Gielen (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 74.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, published on the occasion of the Museum of Arte Útil by the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands, 2014. Available at: <http://www.museumarteuil.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Toward-a-lexicon-of-usership.pdf> (accessed December 29, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> the TEACHABLE FILE (tF) is a working catalog of alternative art schools and a reference on education-as-art. The file delivers and demonstrates its subject by acting as both a resource for teaching and a student of its users. It forms and reforms itself through communicative action and engaged research. *It is what it is; it will be what it will be.* <http://www.theteachablefile.herokuapp.com/1904/> (accessed April 7, 2015).

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## Producing Subjectivity, Producing the Common: Three challenges and a slightly long postscript on what the common is not

Judith Revel

The critical turn we are facing today—which is a reinvention, a radical reinvestment in modern political syntax—raises oft-recurring questions. One—a question relating to a conception of the common as neither a “natural common ground,” nor “common goods” regulated by positive law, nor a “lowest common denominator” asserting people’s co-belonging to humankind, but as the result of a common construction, of a common production—falls for the most part within what we have in recent years come to call “the multitude.” Regarding the debate on “what the common is not,” and what it could or should be, I refer you to a postscript at the end of this short text. Regarding, however, the very similar questions provoked by the concept of the multitude (concerning subjectivities) and that of the common (concerning what multitudes produce together), I will proceed via brief bullet points.

### 1. Singularities and the multitude; differences and the common: the problem of permanence.

We have bypassed a fundamental challenge too rapidly. Admitting that we want to move away from an *additive* definition of the multitude (i.e., the multitude is one raised hand + one raised hand + one raised hand, ad infinitum), an idea reaffirmed in certain

simplistic versions of the return to ‘bottom-up’ politics, but that we also cannot operate from an *integrative* definition (i.e., the multitude is an integration of singularities into a whole that transcends them: the multitude as the general will), in which the modern system of political representation—in serious crisis today—is rooted, then we must address the way singularities produce the multitude while *permanating* within it, while remaining singularities. Simultaneously, “multitude-making” (*faire-multitude*) implies constructing a new political subjective reality, *and* managing to preserve the ‘flesh’ of its composing singularities. *Faire-multitude* is to think at once the permanence of singularities as singularities, and the multitude they compose and organize. *Faire-multitude* is a problem that is both logical and organizational: What type of organizational system allows us to think the singularities *and* what it is they produce—a system that goes beyond them without overriding them; which, in fact, makes them singularly more powerful (*puissantes*)? The same can be said of the common: when not postulated as an a priori, a condition of possibility for the political community, but as the result of the ‘composed’ action of differences, the common must be both something *more* than those constitutive differences—the common is an exceedance—and anything but an erasing of differences as differences. To produce common—to common—is to create in the form of an excess, of a surplus of reality, something that allows differences as differences—all differences—to recognize themselves as a constituent power within it. It is the opposite of neutralizing differences through consensus building, or by superimposing a purely quantitative (and identity-setting) approach to diversity—quotas, systems of positive or negative discrimination, etc. The common is not the lowest common denominator but the greatest differential common: it is the name I give to the fact that what I produce increases my own agency (*puissance d’agir*) as well as that of others. The danger is then to say: the common is what belongs to me as much as it does to others. If we keep thinking in terms of property (the

common is what belongs to all), we run the risk of falling back sooner or later onto something that transcends the diversity of private interests (the historical genesis of the State). The difference does not correspond to the private interest or the specificity of an usufruct (i.e., in a privilege), but in a singularity of use.

**2. Differences are historical: they are not things but becomings. The common as production: a becoming, the constantly reinvested result of a constituent power that is itself endlessly relaunched.**

While we imagine the common as what the differences as differences produce together, this does not mean we can think of the common as a product, an object, a thing, a stable configuration, a system. The common is the result of an endless constituent movement. It is historical. Without a historicization (the same could be said of “geographization”) of a given configuration of the common, we slip back toward the metaphysics of the community (i.e., the common is what we have in common, since the beginnings of time, forever, and in all corners of the earth). Instead the common is what men and women, in a given time and place, taking into account a given cartography of power relations and strain lines, choose to build together from their differences. Based on this awareness of time and place, of genealogy and cartography, the common is the product of a process all at once constituent and strategic, dynamic and political, in the making and antagonistic. Such an analysis gives rise to many obvious problems: What could governance of the common be in this context? And, in addition, can we envisage a ‘law’ of the common that can measure up to this constituent power of differences as differences? A constituent law, historicized and geographized, and, moreover, devoted to the permanent reading and analyzing of the state of things, i.e., made strategic?

### **3. The compossibility of differences as a condition for producing the common: a construction of forces and not a decomposition of relations.**

For commoning to occur, differences need to compose with one another, rather than decompose each other. This means renouncing from reasoning in terms of private interests, without abandoning reasoning in terms of the permanence of differences: in other words, we must not impose massification, desubjectivation, or normalization as preconditions for commoning. The issue at hand is therefore to understand whether escaping the dialectic of private interest is best assured by dispensing with it altogether, or by ‘dis-entrenching’ the question of the common from the field of thought delineated by the mutually exclusive pairing of proprietary individualism / State property. What is a non-proprietary interest?

The issue is further complicated in that an infinite number of differences already coexist in each singularity (you, me). Before we even construct the multitude, we must acknowledge that a multitude of differences cohabit within each one of us. Yet, in the same way that we make differences varying in consistency and in kind (gender, class, skin color, etc.) work together within us, putting one or the other forward depending on the commoning context (its balances and imbalances, its underlying power relations, its proposed openings), we must invest into the commoning process, on a case-by-case basis, such and such constitutive element of our difference. The common does not rank differences, and excludes none. However, it does choose to mobilize some on the basis of time and place—a choice that is strategic, political, and constantly redefined. The compossibility of differences is assured when none of them seek to seize the exclusive privilege of deciding on the very nature of the common, of setting its definition. Commoning is producing common with tools picked on a case-by-case

basis from a bottomless toolbox, with each tool having its own usefulness. All contribute, depending on different temporalities and requirements, to the commoning process. None are pushed aside. One is not worth more than another. Reworded in a more brutally political way: There is no hierarchy of determinations; there is no hierarchy of contradictions. There is the acknowledgement of each tool’s momentary strategic efficacy, but the configuration they outline is a becoming: it never ceases to change and self-adjust. The common is the name of this perpetual shift. It is an onward creation, strategically organized. Here, a difficulty arises: If we accept that the production of subjectivity and the production of the common, the commoning, are strategic, can we consider them both outside of an antagonistic dimension?

#### **Postscript: On what the common cannot and does not want to be, and on what it could (and should) be**

“The common,” in everyday speech, has the negligible worth of banality: what is common is what is never seen as an object of desire, it is widely available, devoid of rarity or mystery. It gets little recognition, beyond what is perhaps an excess of existence: the common is too present to be noticed, too exposed to be sought after. In French, *les communs* is the traditional name given to the service quarters in bourgeois homes. It is the area kept hidden from the view of visitors (confined to rooms of ‘performance’), the miscellany of the functions unwelcome in the pure theater of social interactions (i.e., kitchens, toilets, pantries, laundries), as well as the space where those who ensure the daily running of the entire household are kept, behind closed doors, paradoxically excluded from the environment they care for. The *communs* is the realm of the shadows, the backstage of a theater in which the serving class has no right to the spotlight, even though the play would not exist without it. However, in philosophical terms, having something in common is also