

renames the subject, seems to complete a straightforward statement about the subject [I]. Yet the clarity and/or certainty ostensibly attained about its identity has to be accomplished here by a term that connotes an excessive form of conflict and uncertainty – for *war* generally strives to destroy existing orders (of the ‘Other’). At the same time, the structure of the friend/foe constellation, which underlies all wars, suggests positions and/or identities that can clearly be identified as ‘friend’ or ‘foe’, and an equally unambiguous relation between the two as an oppositional or dichotomous system of discrete entities. If, however, in the statement at hand, this definition of positions does not serve to differentiate the ‘Self’ from the ‘Other’ but locates them within one and the same subject position or, more accurately, within that imaginary formation whose function is to generate and temporarily maintain this position as a clearly defined identity, then this might offer a new perspective on both the concept of *war* and the relation addressed by it, or the modalities of the involvement of the ‘subject’ in the construction of its ‘exterior’, i.e., in the context of the subject’s socio-cultural political reality – a relationality that can only be read as a mutually constitutive conditionality that generates conflictual processes of continuous redefinition.

### Punctuation mark [!]

An exclamation mark at the end of a sentence serves either to reaffirm or corroborate a statement or indicates an urgency that, as an appeal, implies it is addressing something. Yet whom or what is this sentence addressing? That is to say, whom or what does it concern or refer to, and whom or what does it assail or attack? To the extent that the act of addressing is to be read as both an involvement in and an attack on our own subject positions, it takes, on the one hand, a radical risk that jeopardizes identity and/or existence. On the other hand, it simultaneously indicates an inconceivable scope of action (or negotiation) within the context of what appears to be obviously ‘given’ (the existent). For the attack on the stability of a subject position is also an attack on the stability of every construction of reality, an attack that has a destabilizing effect, but exactly in doing so shows decisive political potential. For the very fact that no construction of meaning and hence of reality is able to rely on some ultimate guarantee – and thus *can* never be anything but a temporary result of hegemonial, conflictual production processes – is the decisive reason for the contestability of all such constructions. Being a decision, any articulation of meaning as production of reality is political precisely to the extent that it cannot rely on some ‘guarantee’ or legitimation – and this, in turn, is exactly what constitutes *responsibility*. Instead of resorting to the production of phantasmatic securities and/or certainties it is thus imperative to risk radical *uncertainty*, or the allegedly impossible. This also means to put one’s own position of identity up for negotiation and, instead of ostensible guarantees, to seek the imposed audacity of a fundamental risk.

Once the subject (as subject *position*) is thought of as based on the logic of language and hence as relational, this inevitably also affects the term *war* in the sentence: *I myself am war!* For just as it cannot be a matter of clearly definable positions of conflict, it also cannot be a matter of a clearly definable conflict. What is at stake here is not a terminable process with a clear goal (the destruction or stabilization of a hegemonial position) but to the contrary: it is the perpetuation of conflict or dispute, in other words, of public discourse. The attack is one in which each individual subject position is always already involved in multiple ways: attacked and/or addressed *as well as* attacking; i.e., an attack that alters all the factors involved. It is exactly here, in this linguistically determined disputability, that the moment of the political has to be located. For what is required is a decision between a reproduction of various certainties and/or reassurances or their relinquishment in order to claim the impossible instead: the imposed audacity of attacking and altering the general conditions that define what can be perceived as being in the realm of the possible [...]

Translated by Wilfried Prantner & Catherine Kerkhoff-Saxon

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# NETWORKED CULTURES

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The worldwide movement of populations, burgeoning social mobilizations and the incessantly changing form of the neoliberal economy are generating the energies of a new world order in which we are all constantly challenged to negotiate reality and make deals. Amidst this disintegration of traditional orders, access to networks and the development of connectivities are assuming an ever greater significance for the way we inhabit and configure our environments: The question as to what forms such connectivity should take is not only theoretical in nature but above all a question that points to the self-induced multiplicity of spaces that is continually generated by connectivities throughout the world and that in the process changes our own spaces of action and continually generates them anew.

The engagement with these developments on the part of art and architecture in recent years has resulted in a new form of praxis founded on collective production, process-guided work and transversal project platforms. Such a ‘disciplineless’ praxis of unsolicited intervention in spatial contexts renders legible the dysfunctional rules of planned spatial and cultural containment and creates an avenue for generating new forms of circulation amidst the political efforts to conceal this failure. It makes use of existing networks, expands and changes them, gives rise to new circuits and thereby sketches a mobile geography of self-determined utilization of space and culture.

What the composite term ‘networked cultures’ marks out in this context is a sphere of relationality between different sets of practices that are not referring to one another through centrally authorised categories – disciplines, institutions, shared histories or geographies – but through the way they collaborate to address contemporary urgencies and create platforms of participation in the sphere of culture. The qualities of such networks arise from the interactions of their contributing components, and these components as such are likewise highly unstable and shaped by interactions. This absence of a clearly drawn centrality mobilises our focus in critical thinking and diverts our attention from constituting categories to processes of constitution, from stable spatial characteristics to emergent properties of spaces, from the production of objects to the production of relationalities.

Looking into this field of cultural production, the project Networked Cultures has generated a range of media to facilitate different forms of articulation, including an online database, a book publication, an audio-visual archive, a documentary and a series of live manifestations of the project in institutional and public spaces. In some instances these manifestations expanded into exhibitions, as in the case of Open Space – Zentrum für Kunstprojekte in Vienna, which brought together a range of works by the architect and activist collective *hackitectura*, Ursula Biemann, and Judith Augustinovic. Their work was set in dialogue with the documentary Networked Cultures to interrogate the meanings of today’s geocultural changes together with the meanings of artistic, architectural and cultural engagement in these dynamics. The documentary traces a variety of strands along which the Networked Cultures project itself has developed. First, attention is focused on the phenomenon of network creativity by following the routes of networks laid out by artists, architects, urbanists, curators and activists. The site that is hereby opened up marks

an arena of engagement with the relationship between space and conflict and leads to an interrogation of contested spaces across Europe and beyond, examining the architecture of conflict, and discussing models of geo-cultural negotiation. Investigating their modus operandi, the focus then shifts to governmentality and self-government by examining the organizational matrix of black markets, informal settlements and the accompanying parallel economy. Responding to these global realities, Networked Cultures discusses the parallel worlds of mobility and migration, 'traveling' communities, digital worlds and other counter-geographies in relation to a politics of connectivity and the emerging 'archipelago of peripheries'.

From the demise of the New Economy and the rise of the global protest movement to the emergence of the militant network of the global jihad and the violent attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon – the manner in which centres of social power have perceived the network has changed. Once viewed as a tool of trouble-free control, it is now feared as a source of uncontrollable danger. In this regard, networks have replaced the most powerful figure of modernity: the threatening figure of the masses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Elias Canetti's concept of the masses as a symbol of being *touché* by the unknown has given way to a trope of being *connected* with the unknown. Increased mobility, accelerated contacts and the declining relevance of spatial distance have allowed new parameters to emerge and generated not only a new connective quality, but also elements of uncertainty and fear: fear of the unchecked spread of global epidemics, fear of terrorist networks and fear of a profound social, financial and military crisis in the old centre of world power. The network has become a diffuse symbol of the enemy, one encrusted with fears – just as diffuse – of disintegration, transmission and contamination. In the widespread talk of a 'war on terrorism', the network has become a useful tool to give fear a place. Of infinite scope, this place can be experienced everywhere – which is why it must also be reorganised, monitored and protected everywhere by political leaders. The use of the 'network' concept cleverly disguises a global policy of regulatory mechanisms that attempts to control network dynamics on the one hand but must provide space for its expansion on the other to achieve its own goals. To cite Bruno Latour, like the border, the network is a concept and not a spatial object<sup>1</sup> – it is a shared fiction that, dependent on the desired type of spatial and social organisation, gives rise to a particular material form.

In 2001 Great Britain introduced a new Terrorism Act to prevent terrorist activities. Section 44 of the Act enables the government to treat any form of deviant behaviour as a state of exception and to deal with it accordingly. Since then, the police have stopped and questioned more than 30,000 people each year without a compelling reason. Emergency authorities are potentially expanded to include all areas of political life and can be used by the police at any time as the legal basis for stop-and-search operations. The Terrorism Act represents an extreme manifestation of the elastic border, offering maximum flexibility in an effort to monitor the interior life circumscribed by the power of the sovereign. This elasticity is designed as a projection onto the future, as a mobile and virtual border that can be executed wherever future conditions make it necessary. The border is directed against a largely undefined exterior whose threatening nature is first ascertained in the act of its execution. This makes the creation of a border into an act of performative knowledge production. The border gains legitimacy, as it were, by establishing a hostile nature; and in its most elastic form, it gains legitimacy from an ideology that envisions a ubiquitously hostile urban environment, one that extends from the micro-areas of urban gang warfare to the hideouts of terrorist networks in the remotest regions.

A desire to challenge this politics of the border by insisting on the existence of border activities and by intensifying these activities constitutes the motivation behind cooperative platforms between contested border areas. The borders of post-state federations, above all the European Union, seem to function as hermetical seals, but these federations in fact pursue a policy that aims for the control and management of mobility. The emerging network of filters and channels ensures that the border is sufficiently porous for the

economic advantages of global migration flows. For greater control of labour and production, the authority associated with the spatial borders of state territory is transformed into a flexible, mobile authority of civic control. Instead of keeping immigrants at bay by means of hermetic seals, such federations use immigrants by forcing them into illegal employment and black markets.<sup>2</sup> A highly idiosyncratic, goal-oriented economy arises on the other side of the border, one consisting of textile manufacturers, telecommunication businesses, refugee camps, labour migrants, intermediary dealers, human traffickers, legal advisors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Forces of production and migration meet in narrow border channels, forming a marginalised territory of contested enclaves, buffer zones, military areas, protective strips and no man's land: an intensified supply and negotiation space of geopolitical warfare, one that aesthetic practices regard not only as their subject but increasingly as a sphere of activity.

An important point of reference are the transnational network activities associated with *Fada'iat* ('through spaces'), a project that regularly holds workshops, seminars and joint happenings along the Straits of Gibraltar. Since 2004, this network of various groups in Spain and Morocco has been attempting to create a multiple social and infographic terrain that allows a community to emerge that can defend itself against policies of spatial division and urban cleansing. One of the most important goals of this initiative – which is formed by architectural and media collectives such as *hackitectura*, *Indymedia* of the Straits and *Straddle3* – is to jointly establish a free, cross-coastal communication zone linking the Spanish town of Tarifa with Tangiers in Morocco – a zone that promotes dissident knowledge and temporarily suspends the clear divide between north and south in the region. The network deploys satellite dishes, WiFi links and mobile architectures as civil technologies in the struggle against the border geography dominating the region and its further implications for all of Europe. Its sphere of action extends beyond any single concrete locality, as shown by the activities undertaken against urban redevelopment policy in the city of Barcelona, specifically, the protests against the axis created for the 2004 Universal Cultural Forum. This axis runs between Jean Nouvel's landmark building Torre Agbar and the new park on the seafront, where buildings by Herzog & de Meuron and Foreign Office Architects have been attracting an international urban public. In the middle of the axis is the former Can Ricart industrial complex, which looks back on a different neighbourhood history and has become the symbol of the tenacious struggle by the local population of Poble Nou to reconquer public space. When the Cultural Forum was built, this local culture was marginalised and vilified as obsolete. Bringing together different population groups at a variety of events, including discussions, exhibitions and street festivals, the protest by the local population was supported by a large network of artists, architects and media activists, who called for collective public planning processes and more sustainable spaces of cultural co-existence. The focus of such protests is not the demand for integration, but efforts to explain the exclusionary process underlying social homogenisation. As Jacques Rancière put it: 'Politics is not about integrating the excluded in our societies. It is about restaging matters of exclusion as matters of conflict, of opposition between worlds.'<sup>3</sup>

In this situation, networks become important platforms of action since they create the opportunity to overcome a dependency on offers of participation and, instead, to actively question the conflictual mechanisms and regulatory powers concealed behind rites of participation. Since the creativity involved in producing such self-empowered participation in urban or geopolitical processes is not pooled in a single central body, but dispersed across networks, the form of involvement in these processes does not operate via central authorisation, but via self-authorized participation in network activities. This has changed the prevalent forms of critical intervention: Only on one level does the fabric joining areas, subjects and interests represent a concrete spatial locality in the sense of geographic proximity. On another level, these urban social movements mobilise a trans-territorial network that sets different nodes of social restructuring in relation to one another. In this politically motivated process, the network is at once the product and

producer of social movements. Instead of representing interests by means of homogenising logics of identity, its strength lies in the joint, cross-border execution of acts of change.<sup>4</sup> These acts show that borders and border regions are highly imaginary constructs, brimming with illusions, false memories and myths. Operating in these areas entails crossing the thresholds of both physical and imaginary space. In her series of 'video geographies' Ursula Biemann studies just how this logic intervenes in a colonial fashion in the spatial order beyond the border – and the way it is undermined by self-created forms of logic. Drawing on a growing archive of documentary video footage, Biemann explores various geophysical conflicts, not in a top-down view, but from the perspective of creating social environments. Such micro-policies of survival trace a complex network of detours, back doors, 'underground relays', hiding places, tunnels and tricks that make up everyday life beyond the border. In her work on the present sub-Saharan exodus towards Europe (*Sahara Chronicle*, 2006-07) Biemann traces the modalities and logistics of the migration system in the Sahara and the risky crossing of this territory. The work focuses, as Brian Holmes writes, "on the people who organize the middle stages of the passage from distant Niger, where she filmed extraordinary shots of the giant vehicles that leave for the Saharan journey with their human cargo perched precariously on top of a high-piled truck bed. The former Tuareg rebel Adawa [...] has been accorded an uneasy position as a desert coyote by the Niger government, undoubtedly to compromise and neutralize him while at the same time channeling the flow of migrants in predictable directions."<sup>5</sup> In the exhibition at *Open Space* we hear Adawa's voice in one of Biemann's videos as he describes the ambivalent logics of mobility and containment and the ways in which they are directly linked to the current global geopolitics, while at the same time we also hear Ursula Biemann – as part of the Networked Cultures documentary – talking about the conflictuous moments involved in 'making such a network visible'. Thus the trans-Saharan migration network appears far less isolated from larger governmental or indeed inter-continental interests and becomes, as Ursula Biemann herself states, "a vibrant process of spatialization performed by the psychic dynamics of anxiety, fantasy and desire, a web made of obstinacy and vulnerability."<sup>6</sup> Exploring the far reaching spatial transformations that effect – and are an effect of – the enmeshment of deregulated global capitalism and the trajectories of transnational migratory movements, Ursula Biemann and hackitectura's works expose the unmitigated impact of these combined economies on human lives. A fact that Luana Muniz, a travesti from Rio de Janeiro, who is at the heart of Judith Augustinovic's installation work *SkinShip*<sup>01</sup>, has come to embody in every possible manner. Working seasonal shifts as a sex worker in Mediterranean Europe for two to three months a year, her travel routine has come to narrate the human exploitation of a global market economy. At the same time these 'business trips' to Europe provide a valuable opportunity for her to continue the dream of being a *travesti*, a state of being that she continuously invests in. The knowledge applied to the person and body of Luana cannot be split into separate entities of what she is, she wants to be or what she seems compelled to do. The creative micro-entrepreneurship demanded from her is deflected in her multiple entanglement with local activism, shop keeping, running her own fashion line, and renting out space to other *travestis* in Rio de Janeiro. She renders herself unintelligible to those who seek to capture her identity within clear borders, within a framework of accepted intelligibility. In what she does there is something that transgresses the discourses and presuppositions that seek to contain her, without dismissing intelligibility as such. Rather, as Judith Butler has argued, she "emerges at the limits of intelligibility, offering a perspective on the variable ways in which norms circumscribe the human. It is precisely because we understand, without quite grasping, that [s]he has another reason, that [s]he *is*, as it were, another reason, that we see the limits to the discourse of intelligibility that would decide [her] fate."<sup>7</sup> The trajectories of Luana's life allude to the fact that while a critical reflection of the conditions of global deregulation is clearly at stake, it is precisely in inhabiting and living out its liminal situations that any resistance against the absolutism of distinction has to depart from. This condition is made tangible in

Augustinovic's series of imprinted aprons (evoking associations with both domesticity and sex/work), that offer snapshots of Luana's daily life, 'tailored' and 'worn' in a way that can never be fully predicted and controlled by the modes of truth that govern our intelligibility. Contending with the ubiquitous zones of indistinction, the transgendered body of Luana Muniz is exposed to all kinds of intrusions and distortions as well as to the possibility of self-determined amalgamation and sovereignty.

"What is potential?", writes Giorgio Agamben, "can pass over into actuality only at the point at which it sets aside its own potential not to be. To set im-potentiality aside is not to destroy it but, on the contrary to fulfil it, to turn potentiality back upon itself in order to give itself to itself. [...] Potentiality (in its double appearance as potentiality to and potentiality not to) is that through which Being finds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it other than its own ability not to be."<sup>8</sup> Networked cultures thus don't come into being through being forced into actuality by an authorial figure or a legitimatising point of origin. Rather, they open up paths that crystallise around something that exists, not as a clearly drawn object, but as an indeterminate region, as a gap that cannot be filled. Circumnavigating a central emptiness, networked cultures are an expression of an ongoing beginning.

## Notes

1. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131
2. Sandro Mezzadra, 'Borders/Confines, Migrations, Citizenship', in *Fada'iat: Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Knowledge* (Barcelona, 2006), 178
3. Jacques Rancière, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', *Documenta Magazine* No. 1-3 (2007), 459
4. Brian Holmes, "'We Are the Media': The Dream of the Transnational-Popular", in *Populism Reader*, ed. Lars Bang Larsen, Christina Ricupero and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005), 23ff.
5. Brian Holmes, 'The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa', online: <http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1166295344> (correspondence 16.12.2006), accessed on 10.12.2008
6. see: <http://geobodies.org>, accessed on 10.12.2008
7. Judith Butler, 'Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7:4 (Duke University Press, 2001), 635
8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 46

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please, refer to:

<http://www.networkedcultures.org>





