PERFORMING THE COMMON CITY

On the Crossroads of Art, Politics and Public Life

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'...certain kinds of disorder need to be increased in city life, so that men can pass into a full adulthood...'

Richard Sennett, xxiii, 1970

'Per-for-mance means a person who per-for-ates himself and his surroundings (it is simultaneously an analysis, a destruction and an honouring).

Jan Fabre, New York, 1982

Two things block the road to adulthood: families and communities. That at least was Richard Sennett's conclusion when he analysed the problematics of urban life, in 1970. According to the sociologist, human behaviour mostly remains stuck in adolescence. Such pre-adults are afraid of the breathing space of possibilities created by the city air. Adolescents typically shut out chaos or disorder to safeguard their individuality. By maintaining pure beliefs and by strictly adhering to principles, the subject safeguards its pure identity. Adolescents live in permanent fear of the threats that may come from an outside world. Their desire not to project an ambiguous self-image drives them to a kind of hyper-puritan behaviour and a rhetoric in which the self must be continually affirmed.

> ... the degree, to which people feel urged to keep articulating who they are, what they want, and what they feel is almost an index of their fear about their inability to survive in social experiences with other men.
> (Sennett, 1970: pp. 9-10)

Therapeutic sessions with like-minded friends, family members or care professionals perpetuate this tendency of self-articulation into adulthood. This is why the subject remains stuck in permanent adolescence. Today as well, many people engage in serious and prolonged discussions about their own feelings, qualities, likes and dislikes, both with people they know and with people they hardly know, on the Internet or in other media. In short, even today our social environment encourages a continual self-articulation in which subjectivity is shaped by an affirmative expression of the ego. An introverted nuclear family life and relatively homogeneous communities also shield the adult individual from disruptive interruptions that may come from a problematic outside world. Thus the contemporary subject hangs onto an identity. Identity stems from the Latin *identitas*, which indeed means 'sameness'. Through their bonds, families and communities constantly confirm this sameness, in which the unique identity of 'us' can only be expressed by opposing the Other or otherness (this of course doesn't contradict the exception that certain families and communities may have a very destabilizing effect on one's identity). Within the family or community the 'I' cherishes its own self and its own being-right.

Sennett makes an important point by stating that ever since Georges-Eugène Haussmann, urban life has also been spatially arranged in the same manner. In Haussmann's view, large avenues drew strict boundaries between neighbourhoods of different social origins. This rational urban plan not only generated a functional and efficient urban space, but also resulted in segregating the urban multitude into socially relatively homogeneous neighbourhoods of conflict-free communities. Simply put, Haussmann and his many acolytes made sure that city-dwellers could retreat into a relative sameness, thereby excluding the daily confrontation with the all too radical Other as much as possible. The lack of real challenges, irritation, dissensus and conflict brought about by such a segregation also means that biologically adult city-dwellers can continue to wallow in their adolescence. In other words, they can settle down purely and consistently in their own halted identity because no one in their immediate surroundings deals them a proverbial (or real) blow anymore. The social order in which these adolescents have been socialized is after all established and firmly protected and screened off by urban strategies that allow the 'I' to remain in a safe comfort zone, together with its own kind.

Although over the past 150 years, architects, urbanists, social geographers and sociologists have frequently contested Haussmann's views, it is astonishing to see that most contemporary cities still follow the example of the Frenchman's rational plans in some way or other. Even more so: young, enthusiastic architects and urban planners still dare to present fashionably looking plans with a strictly delineated creative urban zone, shopping zone, commercial hub, university campus and administrative zone, and especially a number of spatially well-cordoned-off residential areas (be it for middle-class families, single yuppies or the elderly) in specific urban zones. Ambitious gentrification plans of the past few decades also demonstrate a strategy in which one homogeneous group – usually the lower social class – is carefully deported on behalf of another homogeneous group – especially the middle class or higher income groups. (Sassen, 1991; Hamnet, 1984; Smith, 2002)

And even when such master plans are hard to implement fully because of a historically embedded urban layout, we can still observe how cities are segregated 'organically', often along ethnic lines. Jewish neighbourhoods have historically entrenched themselves within the *Eruv* and in order to meet Chinese people or people with a Muslim background, one needs to visit completely different urban zones. The higher autochthonous middle class will have settled in a recently renovated green neighbourhood. If anything, this begs the question of whether urban planners have actually left Haussmann behind. In any case, we can see, with Sennett, that many cities even today still cultivate the adolescent within us by blocking any adult contact with the Other. The non-intentional, the contradictory and the unknown are still smoothed away as much as possible through urban segregation and functional differentiation. The lack of confrontation in the rational organization of urban life also means that city-dwellers only rarely need to defend their own existence or claim their own space, as this has already been taken care of on their behalf in a well-calculated plan, especially if these citizens belong to the middle class. As a result, city-dwellers hardly need a truly public space in which to account for, argument and time and again legitimate their own individuality. Or, put differently : the segregated city-dwellers hardly need to engage in everyday politics any more. They no longer need to fight for or account for how they shape their own lives and their environment. When one's identity is no longer questioned or challenged, politics become a strictly private affair, which, in a democracy, can be taken care of in the voting booth. In other words, in the functionally ordered city, politics are banished from the street. When the public space no longer provides a platform to confront the alien,

the strange, people with different ideas or beliefs, it is automatically neutralized in a political sense. Or: when the public space allows us to not meet others, but to ignore them or pass them by (as, for instance, with a simple click in the virtual space of the Internet), it simply ceases to exist. Politics then withdraw from daily life and the public space becomes depoliticized.

But why should a peaceful, secluded and apolitical existence within one's own family or community be a tragic thing? At first sight, it would seem to offer only advantages. However, the paradoxical consequence of living in conflict-free or at least confrontation-free zones, according to Sennett, is that it encourages explosions of violence. Those who anxiously hide in their adolescent, pure identity will quickly become violent when they are eventually interrupted in their routines by someone else. Because these adolescents, thanks to their permanent stay in the segregated community, are no longer obliged to express themselves constantly in conflictual situations, they no longer know how to relate to others in an agonistic way. Because of the strong social homogenization of delineated urban areas, the public space loses its function of expressing differences. In this segregated city, these encounters with the Other are suppressed in any case, which means there are no verbal confrontations either. Whether these places to meet the Other did exist in the past or how they specifically looked, Sennett does not clarify, but it is the reason why in *The Uses of Disorder* (1970) he argues for more anarchy in the city. Communities and homogeneous neighbourhoods should be broken open, purely rational divisions be removed, especially to prevent random violent eruptions and solve them in an 'adult' manner.

> It is the mixing of diverse elements that provides the materials for the 'otherness' of visibly different life styles in a city; these materials of otherness are exactly what men need to learn about in order to become adults. Unfortunately, now these diverse city groups are each drawn into themselves, nursing their anger against the others without forums of expression. By bringing them together, we will increase the conflicts expressed and decrease the possibility of an eventual explosion of violence.
> (Sennett, 1970: p. 162)

This statement also makes clear the primordial role of the public space in the city or, in a wider sense, modern society. It provides the possibility to express diversity, thereby banishing blind or random violence. A lively public space that always allows for otherness thus has the important political function to convert antagonisms into agonisms. According to philosopher Chantal Mouffe, this is the basis of every democracy:

> To revitalize democracy in our post-political societies, what is urgently needed is to foster the multiplication of agonistic public spaces where everything that the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate can be brought to light and challenged.
> (Mouffe, 2011: p. 20)

It now also becomes clear what role art and artists may have in this context. After all, artists are particularly good at 'expression', at shaping and articulating opinions, images, beliefs, ideas, et cetera. If they also succeed in projecting curious, unknown and unexpected images and performances into the urban space, they will constantly pull the adolescent city-dwellers

out of their comfort zones. By making them see, smell, feel and hear that everything that is can also always be different, artists, in other words, can time and again *make* the public space anew. It is precisely in the interruption of the daily routine and of the regular social intercourse in the city that the public space originates and is charged politically.

Clearly, an artist's 'message' absolutely need not be political. Simply by the act of pushing the otherwise conceivable, by lending it a possible expression, the public and the political emerges. This otherwise conceivable can be formal, ethical, ecological or political in nature. The point is that the artist introduces something singular, with the result that everything regarded as 'normal' before suddenly no longer seems to be so evident. Or, as I have pointed out many times elsewhere: the artist introduces a 'dismeasure' into the measure that is regarded as 'normal' by an urban culture at a given moment in history. (Gielen, 2015a and b) Precisely in this unforeseen 'dismeasure' lies the political character and the force to generate the public space. At the same time, this means that not all art in the public space is truly public art, in the sense that it creates the space and therefore charges it politically. In short, there is absolutely no need for art to 'interrupt'. On the contrary, the majority of art in the public space is anything but disruptive and so also anything but political. The interruptive character of artistic interventions happens to depend strongly on the contexts in which they are performed. Pitures, sculptures and performances, and other art in public space may both confirm or even fixate the place or neighbourhood in which they are planted, and confront them, open them up. Michel de Certeau has provided some insight into this complex interplay of art, urban publicness and politics with the conceptual work he did in the 1980s. This theologian also paved the way for a more analytical look at Sennett's urban problematic outlined above.


Planning and Use of the City

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), De Certeau unfolds an idiosyncratic sociology of everyday human intercourse by means of two binary oppositions, which will be presented here in a somewhat simplified form in order to describe the relationship between city, politics and the public space.

Michel de Certeau defines *strategy* as an instrument of those in power. Simply put, policymakers and managers design strategies for controlling social phenomena or running their companies, respectively. Things are put on paper in black-and-white or, with regard to the city, are cast in urban development plans. Ideally, the urban fabric is studied beforehand and the results are documented in reports. These reports then set the agenda for policy meetings which again produce written reports that in turn have an influence on recommendations, (urban) regulation and possibly legislation, which is then, in more recent years, followed by processes of monitoring. Just like Haussmann's plans, a strategy's goal is to define social intercourse in the long-term for a geographically clearly delineated area. Following a rational logic, places are given a permanent function via a 'grid' that is superimposed from the top down upon the urban multitude. However, the users of the city develop their own *tactics* to deal with these ready-made plans. In doing so, they bend the predesigned strategy to their own will. As opposed to strategies, tactics are short-term reactions and actions that can pop up anywhere in urban life. For instance, a city tripper may deviate from the prescribed touristic tour to explore a run-down but intriguing dark alley. This adventurer's voyeuristic curiosity leads him to other places in the city, places that the

city government, tour operators and city marketeers would perhaps prefer not to be revealed.

In addition to the opposition of *strategy* and *tactics*, De Certeau posits a distinction between *lieu* [place] and *espace* [space]. *Place* then represents individuality, stability. In particular material or physical elements such as a building, a road or a statue occupy a place and they can only be replaced with something else if the place is ceded or taken. To this French thinker, a place is therefore a well-defined and strictly delineated domain. Think, for example, of the boundaries of a nation-state, but also the walls around a city, or, again, the Eruv around a Jewish neighbourhood. *Space*, by contrast, represents movement, temporality and change. Literary scholar Koen Geldof (1996) calls space the result of many simultaneous, sometimes contradictory operations. Sociologist Rudi Laermans (1996) adds that space is being continuously created by utilizing place, by actively controlling it. Space includes a verb, a process of continuous 'spatialization'. In that process, place is made fluid, entering a state of permanent transmutation.

When we cross both oppositions, the result is an axial figure that enables us to map the relationship between art, politics and the city in a more analytical manner. It gives us a, albeit ideal-typical, typology of urban models in which art, politics and public space each display a specific topology. Related to the art that such urban orderings produce, these are called the monumental, the situational, the creative and the common city, respectively. And, although these urban ideal-types are presented here chronologically, obviously all types may occur simultaneously. For example, today there are no longer purely monumental cities, but there may be several districts within one city that are more like a monumental city, whereas other parts are more like the creative or the common city. In short, the city is always in motion and any typology trying to capture this is missing the complexity of real life, including the schematic structure below.

STRATEGY

	The Monumental City		The Creative City	
PLACE				**SPACE**
	The Situational City		The Common City	

TACTIC
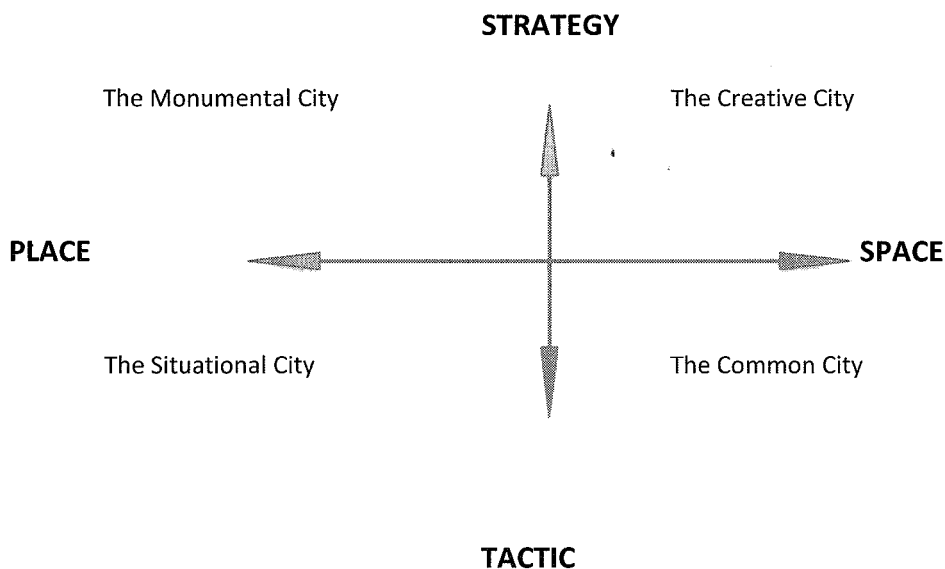
The Monumental City
The monumental city reflects Haussmann's ideal image: an urban organization based on the strategically developed rational plan in which every place is ascribed a well-delineated function. Such undertakings can be found in Paris and post-Victorian London of the late 19th and early 20th century. Such urban arrangements actually do not in the first place represent themselves, but rather the nation-state. In a still young representative liberal democracy,

this nation-state is governed by statesmen who make up an elite group of (former) aristocrats, rising bourgeois and liberals. Both literally and figuratively, these are Enlightened cities, in which rational bureaucracy has its Weberian heyday. The sociologist Luc Boltanski has described the political period during which this rational city was being prepared:

> The period in question was marked both by an increase in the state's ambition to control the populations residing on the territory where it exercised its power, that is, its power over what in the first half of the nineteenth century was beginning to be called society, as a grouping largely identified with the boundaries of the nation-state, and by the development of approaches to governance inspired to varying degrees of liberal tradition. These approaches found support – as Michel Foucault showed (2007) – in new administrative techniques for totalization through the use of statistics or accounting, and in techniques for identifying individuals – i.e., citizens – through the use of identity papers or through the use of physical indications (...). All these techniques were intended to address the problem of managing formally free individuals from a distance, either by making their aggregate behaviour globally calculable and predictable, or by making them individually controllable, that is by ensuring their traceability.
> (Boltanski, 2014: p. 65)

The city of the late 19th and first half of the 20th century is the outcome of this tendency towards rational calculation on the level of the nation-state from the first half of the 19th century. This is why the public *sphere* there to a large extent coincides with what is called the public *space*, a strictly defined place that is 'made free' and organized by the state or city government.

The art found here is preferably a national monument, reminding the city of the grand momentum in which the nation and its people are rooted. This city is predictably interrupted by the art that resides in the semi-public spaces of equally monumental museums, theatres and opera houses. It is only strategically or calculatedly put on hold by regular parades, fun fairs or carnivals.

As Tessa Overbeek, in her interview with Jennifer Miller here, describes the ritual interruption by the annual arrival of the circus, likewise in the monumental city the artistic interruption is mainly of a ritual nature. This means that the artist may disrupt the everyday social order, but only to actually confirm it, as for instance in the symbolic inversion of carnivalesque artistic interventions (Bakhtin, 1981). Such inversions serve mainly as social vents (or sublimations) to prevent truly violent eruptions.

A symbolic inversion indeed remains only symbolic and also well-defined in time and space. Or, in De Certeau's words: the ritual interruption is assigned a permanent place in everyday urban life. The grandeur of the nation-state remains untouched by this kind of ritual art. Even more so: art primarily serves to socialize a population within the existing social order without questioning that order. Following De Certeau, artistic artefacts are assigned a permanent *place* in both the social hierarchy and in the urban zone where such art is allowed. The monumental city, in other words, is also the city of the class society in which monumental art defines the canon that must simulate a culture of national unity which glosses over persistent economic and social differences. Within such a context, art and education deliberately commit 'symbolic violence', in the words of Pierre Bourdieu

(1979), as they must make the members of a lower social class believe that they too have one true culture, i.e. the national high culture that in fact legitimizes an equally high bourgeois lifestyle.

While art in the public space mainly confirms the social order during this period, the state controls the public space with the help of an army of sociologists and urbanists. It is against this rigidly strategically structured city of equally rusty functional places that the first seeds of protest begin to bud in the 1950s, seeds that will grow out to become mature counter movements in the decade to follow. And this brings us to another era with a different relationship between spatial planning and urban behaviour, and therefore to another city.

The Situational City

Among those starting to eat away at the rigid urban grid are the situationists, in the late 1950s. A strategically structured monumental city with fixed, assigned places slowly has to make way for other relations. The still permanent positions of hierarchical institutions, monuments and canon are confronted by a multitude of artists and young activists who reclaim the city through practical interventions and 'inappropriate' use of preordained urban zones and buildings. Revolution is frequently declared against both establishment and bureaucratic structures in volatile manifestos, pamphlets and posters.

Until late in the 1970s and even in the early 1980s, murals and primitive graffiti, together with squatters movements, continued the re-appropriation battle. The monumental city's authority is undermined by all kinds of movements that finally transform urbanity into a situational event. As De Certau would say: place is directly confronted with tactics here. It may be someone walking down the street naked, or a crowd seriously reclaiming the street from King Car, only to disrupt it again with a playful happening. In other words, the situational city is the backdrop for unexpected events and encounters while that backdrop itself still remains rather firmly in place. The police sometimes act forcefully to maintain the existing order.

While the powers that be of both political and educational authorities cling to the traditional hierarchy, an orthodox art elite deploys reactionary strategies to safeguard its own position. The opposition between tactics and strategy, space and place, indeed appears to coincide for a while with the distinction between progressive and conservative, between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, or between left and right, at this juncture.

The institutional critique within the art world can also be understood within this chain of dichotomies. Often singular artists attempt to dislodge the museum and its historical canon with event-based and therefore tactical actions. At the same time, fellow artists break out of the institutional environment of white walls in order to create a new world in the streets and neighbourhoods. In the situational city, art often borders on politics in actions in which private and public spaces are made public at the same time. Or: time and again, these performances make existing places public by dropping unforeseen voices and unexpected images in them, sometimes by presenting and making concrete completely different forms of living together.

Social and artistic struggle, workers and students, proletariat and intellectuals, political and sexual revolution, creative and hallucinogenic transgressions or destructions find each other for a moment in a tactical undermining of authority and the state. However, as we know, the solidarity between the working class and the student movement, just like the lucid distinction between left and right, wouldn't last for more than two decades. The rebellious

higher middle-class individuals who were still in school in the 1960s, would develop into a renewed specimen of the 19th-century progressive liberal over the next few decades. They did understand the message of the situationists, because they translated avant-garde art into design, politics into aesthetics, entrepreneurship into management, and ideology into lifestyle. In private-public collaborations they reached compromises with the state and municipal authorities to make the urban space truly fluid. Gentrification and real estate projects followed each other in rapid succession in a strategic change management that made the urban infrastructure increasingly flexible. Ever since the 1980s, the city has become increasingly fluid, exchanging place for space, and a planning approach made way for spatial or project-like approach of the city. In other words, we now find ourselves in a new urban era.

The Creative City

When, in the 1970s, money became no longer directly linked to gold, real and virtual economies became increasingly separated during the 1980s and 1990s. Money is becoming more and more liquid, while financial flows can hardly be stopped anymore at the borders of nation-states. Quite the contrary, governments are actively promoting the free transnational traffic of capital. But financial flows are quickly followed by streams of people – looking for fortune and happiness – and even by streams of companies, often in multinational conglomerates. Capital flow generates human flow, making the distinction between domestic and foreign policy more and more vague. Often, the nation-state can only watch all this traffic go by, seeing people come and go, companies settle and move, employment rise and vaporize.

Saskia Sassen (1991) is among those who say that the metropolis is becoming the epicentre of all this global traffic. The city now plays the leading role in political management while the nation becomes increasingly sandwiched between local government and transnational organisations, between small creative companies and giant multinationals. While migrants, illegal aliens and every now and then terrorists make the neatly delineated geopolitical place increasingly fluid from below, governments and capital join hands from the top in private-public collaborations that bring down the traditional spatial planning. In the 1990s, the city became a building site where real estate and project developers were sometimes given total freedom.

The so-called neoliberal city was born in the process that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972) would call 'de-territorialization'. Or, in their pathos: the war machines of migrants and illegals on the one hand and stateless multinationals on the other together 'squat' the geopolitical territory. Or, returning to De Certeau: the fixed *place* indeed makes way for an urban *space*. This urban space increasingly becomes a turntable for money and human trafficking, a transit zone for poor illegals and highly educated and hard-working but often poorly paid creatives. The so-called third gentrification wave provided a place for this last group.

By the end of the 1990s, after the relocation of social classes in previous waves, the creative class gets all the attention. The work of Richard Florida (2002) and others provide the necessary semi-scientific legitimization for these third-way politics. The creative city is born. While former socialist such as Tony Blair embrace entertainment and capital, civil servants and urban developers roll up their sleeves to design new creative zones. The industrial lumpenproletariat has to make way for a post-industrial creative precariat, the

unionized labourer for the flexible freelancer, the artist for the cultural entrepreneur, the permanent job for the temporary contract, the welfare state for neoliberal power.

Here we immediately see the paradox of the creative city: while everything appears to become fluid, and mobility, flexibility, inventiveness and creativity are being encouraged by the government, that same – now urban – government tries to forge an alliance with the new capital. The artificial design of urban creative zones, fashion districts, flexible workplaces and lounge bars are all part of a truly political, urban strategy that desperately tries to tame the wild multitude of hip artists, hipsters and other creatives by offering them a fixed *place* within a well thought-out urban space.

From the Groninger Museum to the Guggenheim Bilbao, it is all part of a master plan to bring the city and its economy under control again. Once more, De Certau: in the creative city, space confronts strategy. In this strategy, the public space – where ideally 'anything goes' – is carefully calculated. Although the square looks open, its use is organized by a tight time schedule. While the public space appears to be tolerant of some disorder, cameras meticulously register any possible real unrest.

Whereas mostly socialist, third-way politicians ruled the day with this new-fangled strategy until well in the 2000s, by the end of the first decade of the new century the torch is handed on to predominantly reactionary parties. In the process, the creative city becomes more and more a repressive city. Terrorist threats, in combination with the odd violent psychopathic case, help establish a new regime. Neoliberal and neo-nationalist forces join hands to build on the strategic methods of their political predecessors. This time not with hip rhetoric but with authoritarian vigour. More policing, and zero tolerance instead of turning a blind eye to soft drugs.

And if suddenly a too heavily armed individual appears in the urban commotion, there is always that last, desperate resort: the military. It is rather symbolic that it is precisely this exclusive representation of the nation-state that is called upon now. Driven by nostalgic desire for the monumental city, reactionary politics now re-establish the notion of the nation in attempt to control the uncontrollable multitude of city-dwellers and other hybrids. Indeed, the city has become an impure place within a purely nationalist rhetoric, a dirty stain on the nation-state, the Other within the own body.

And what can artists do in this creative but repressive city? As mentioned earlier, they had better become creative entrepreneurs, which also means not being recalcitrant or causing 'trouble', but rather help solve problems by thinking along constructively. The new artist is not a revolutionary as in the situational city, but a 'realist' and above all a pragmatist. Art in the public space then serves to mark the neighbourhood, too fixate it again with an identity. Or, again in the words of De Certeau: public art is deployed as part of a strategy to force space to become place again. And yes, in the creative-repressive city too, artists are welcome guests in problem neighbourhoods.

Community art is all the rage again. Both third-way politicians and conservatives are only too happy to enlist inexpensive artists to solve the problems caused by their own neoliberal policies. Community centres, small schools and medical facilities are dismantled under the guise of crisis and efficiency and artists may now try to repair the holes in the social fabric (see also De Bruyne and Gielen, 2011). While doing so, well-meaning artistic people often use methods that reinforce the internal feeling of oneness of Sennett's communities instead of promoting the open city which they themselves represent. In short, the only artists that are tolerated in the public space are those creatives that can cheer up a neighbourhood a little, both physically and mentally.

Or, this commissioned artist fits within a wider, indeed *strategic* marketing plan that distinguishes this city from the other one via a more or less phallocentric aesthetics. Grotesque museum architecture, megalomaniac light festivals and spectacular circus acts are supposed to replace the cathedral of yesteryear. The creative-repressive city is indeed first and foremost a touristic city and its public space a consumer-friendly shopping centre with tour operators disguised as artists, independent curators and art programmers. At the same time, this well-marketed and orchestrated creative image serves to gloss over and hide the urban confusion of growing social inequality and ethnic and religious conflicts, while an insidious, repressive – also sometimes biopolitical – approach tries to suppress violent eruptions. Together with multicultural local residents, the community artist is happily singing the hymn of social cohesion, thereby actually – as we know from Sennett – charging the violent eruption. Neither creative nor repressive urban policy can then stop the riots and unrest in the *banlieues* of Paris or the suburbs of London, emulated on a smaller scale in the Brussels municipality of Molenbeek or in and around Antwerp's Turnhoutsebaan. Not a single artist – idealist or pragmatist – is capable of taming this 'common' multitude or predict when it will erupt.

One would need a crystal ball to know for how much longer the creative-repressive city can control the spatialized urban fabric with this strategic tactic. Will it be able to permanently restrain the violent breed and will the creative entrepreneur be able to continue cheering up the public space in the long run? Or will the day come when the creative but rationally calculated and besieged city loses all control? In any case, this speculative thought opens up the theoretical possibility of a completely different city.

The Common City
Dystopia meets utopia when the urban swarming of global flows breaks up the strategic policy. When the cameras that are monitoring the public space in the creative city are smashed, two possibilities present themselves. Either the shards of the smashed camera testify to the criminal hordes, emerging gangs and other riffraff making urban intercourse unsafe, or they symbolize a desire for freedom, for a new social order that can deal with urban life without authoritarian, centralized control. The urban space, which is simultaneously made completely liquid by human flows from the bottom up and capital flows from the top down, opens up the field for a multitude of tactics. Just about anyone can try to appropriate space. When strategic control loses terrain, space and tactics are on equal footing. The city then belongs to everyone and everyone attempts to appropriate parts of it. Perhaps this is the utopia Richard Sennett dreamed of when he argued for more anarchy, in 1970. According to the American thinker, the dystopia of criminal and especially irrational violence will, on the contrary, not occur when the city rejects the strategically enforced order.

> … the potential for 'irrational crime', for violence without object or provocation, is very great now. The reason it exists is that society has come to expect too much order, too much coherence in its communal life, thus bottling up the hostile aggressiveness men cannot help but feeling. These new anarchic cities promise to provide an outlet for what men now fear to show directly. In so doing, the structure of the city community will take on a kind of stability, a mode of ongoing expression, that will be sustaining to men because it offers them expressive outlets. Anarchy in cities, pushing men

to say what they think about each other in order to forge some mutual patterns of compatibility, is thus not a compromise between order and violence; it is a wholly different way of living, meaning that people will no longer be caught between these two polarities.
(Sennett, 1970: p. 181)

The new urban communities that Sennett advocates are special in the sense that they no longer need a 'we-feeling' towards the Other in order to emerge and survive. The constituting foundation for such communities therefore lies outside an identitary reflex. Not sameness, not coherence or consensus, but otherness, internal contradictions and dissensus form the ingredients of a new constituting force. Not 'being' but a continuous 'becoming' is the hallmark of the new social fabric.

As early as the 1970s, Sennett thus all but introduced the notion that is nowadays becoming all the rage again: the 'common', a concept that seems much more suitable than his notion of anarchy, by the way. Not the community but the common modulates the new urban fabric. Or, rather, it is the community of which this utopia dreams. The notion of the common has been expanded upon sufficiently elsewhere (see, for example, Gielen and Lijster, 2015). In short, the common is a space or area that can be both physical and symbolic, both material and mental and may serve as a resource for all.

Philosophers such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2011) or Hans Achterhuis (2010) define this space historically as a place or source of raw material that is free for anyone to use but to which everyone also makes contributions – both private and public players. According to Negri and Hardt, this common is required, not only to keep a culture and community simply alive but to keep it dynamic in the long run as well. This common, however, is not an anarchy in Sennett's sense but still a space that is regulated in order to safeguard its free use. In other words, the common cannot exist without strict rules that protect this space from being occupied by either the state or the market.

However, these philosophers do not specify how this common is to be enforced, which is why their plans have often been dismissed as utopian. This does not preclude convincing reports about the domain outside the state and the market, where the constitution of the common lies. Even more so, historical evidence demonstrates that this space has always only emerged from the interaction *among* people, i.e. in the social sphere. This may seem rather obvious, if it weren't for the fact that this sphere is regarded here as a fully autonomous domain that regulates its own laws and social intercourse regardless of politics and economy. The common therefore originates in an autonomous social space that doesn't submit itself to the laws of either government or capital. Somewhat predictably, the empirical examples of such social constitutions are mostly tactical in nature. This means, along the lines of De Certeau's thinking, that they are mostly of a temporary nature and attempt to appropriate or control the strategically primed space in their own special manner. Or, to formulate it in a way that befits this publication's title: the common is time and again newly constituted in the interruption.

In terms of the city, the plans of the Dutch artist-situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys come closest to such a common city. We may in any case assume that with his New Babylon project he also envisaged some sort of common, as the major part of the urban fabric in it was designated for 'collective use' without any formal function. Besides, this Dutch visionary opposed Haussmann by presenting a disorienting urban space with a constantly transmuting, labyrinthine structure in which residents lead a nomadic existence and – while

creating and roaming – constantly visit new parts of the city to stay there for shorter or longer periods of time. In other words, residents can always make tactical space, thus giving permanent shape to the urban fabric. Whereas Nieuwenhuys, paradoxically, still generated a somewhat Hausmannian global urban plan, today collectives such as Recetas Urbanas in Sevilla completely annihilate this illusion with their so-called 'temporary architecture'.

Fifty years after Nieuwenhuys' wild schemes, we see a multitude of initiatives emerge to constitute such a common. Just like Creative Commons aims to strategically redistribute awarded copyrights and patents, Occupy and communal allotments temporarily re-appropriate the pre-programmed urban space. Some attempts are more sustainable and of a more structural nature than others, but the important thing is that this 'movement' has been gaining force for a while now. New initiatives pop up everywhere, anytime. From the occupation of the University building the Maagdenhuis in Amsterdam to Teatro Villa Occupato in Rome, from Tahir Square in Cairo to Yo Si, Sanidad Universal and Recetas Urbanas in Spain, each time the urban space is occupied tactically with more or less long-term effects. It is not the lifespan of any particular initiative that counts, but the continuous popping up of time and again new movements. The common city is indeed only constituted in the continuous confusion of tactical manoeuvres, in confrontations and dissensus.

Although the administrators of the creative-repressive city prefer to dismiss these occurrences as 'meaningless', 'unguided' or 'hardly viable' because they would be 'little realistic', a growing army of philosophers, sociologists, economists and other scholars regard them as the signs of new forms of administration, even of a new democracy. Political scientist Isabell Lorey (2015), for example, speaks of a 'presentist democracy' which, unlike the liberal representative democracy, takes place in the here and now. Whereas the latter form only promises a better or more democracy for the future, the former is realized in current and everyday action. More and more pragmatic thinkers, such as the political scientist David Held (2006), also regard a future democracy as possible only when social, cultural, political and economic forces continuously balance each other. Businesses, civilians, cooperatives and governments organise themselves in what he calls a 'democratic autonomy'. Many forms of self-government align themselves in this and often also grate against each other. Although Held does not disavow the state, with his point of view he does come close to a political desire that the Italian Autonomia Movement already promoted in the late 1970s:

> Political autonomy is the desire to allow differences to deepen at the base
> without trying to synthesize them from above, to stress similar attitudes
> without imposing a 'general line', to allow parts to co-exist side by side, in
> their singularity.
> (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007: p. 8)

It is precisely the common city that forms the basis for such a democratic autonomy. Cities have always been a melting pot of religions, cultures, classes, political and social contradictions. Urban cultures take shape at the cross-section of trade capitalism, fine arts and careless cosmopolitans as well as exploitation, prostitution, forced migration and deportation. Tensions can be found everywhere in the city. In this urban setting, we can detect the foundations for a rather strange ordinary lived democracy. This democracy could be called 'strange', because it does not fit with the rational organized liberal representative democracy we are used to in Europe and the U.S.

The latter form of political organization is based on quantitative representation and votes. It's a political form constituted in a nation state that claims to have built on a relative homogeneous identity of its population, called 'the people'. Big cities often contradict this myth of 'the people', because of their daily reality of a 'many', a multitude of heterogeneous cultures.

Urban spaces with a high social density are at the same time the playground of a lot of minorities that are not politically represented at all. Such cities are in that sense the Other, the stranger or sometimes the black spot in the sameness of the nation state. It's probably one of the reasons why they say that 'New York is not the United States', 'Amsterdam is not the Netherlands', 'Berlin is not the same as Germany' or 'Brussels does not equal Belgium'. It's a statement that is often made to indicate that the people who live in those cities, their interactions or, in general, their culture, are not at all representative for the country in which those same cities are located.

It are those crowded spots in the world which deliver the daily empirical proof that very different people can live relative peaceful together without a homogeneous (national) identity. Of course there are sometimes clashes, and even very bloody conflicts, but in general urban populations practice every day in learning to live with, or next to each other without having to fight with each other, even when they never make one effort to understand each other. That is the reason why it is probably allowed to say that those crowded spaces are the laboratories of a common city with a kind of daily lived – not peaceful, but agonistic – democracy. Or, again with Lorey: 'a presentist democracy'.

But who are the artists in this common city? Although they may still resemble their predecessors of the situational city, their social context is quite different. Whereas the artists of the 1960s and 1970s were fighting tactically against the rigidity of hierarchic structures and a superimposed, planned experience of the city, by contrast the artists in the common city navigate an extremely fluid domain in which movement and change are the rules. An important difference with the situationists is perhaps that in a fully liquid situation one cannot only criticize, confront and shock but at the same time one must build alternative platforms to stand on. Therefore, artists must be also partly 'constructive'. They must constitute new real worlds, real social, political and economic plateaus in the city from where that same urban fabric can be constantly irritated.

Today, artists only interrupt the city by slowing down its flows and freezing them completely every once in a while. Artists do not perform in the public space, but have to continually claim their place and in doing so *make* space public time and again. In other words, there have to constantly place beacons to demarcate where an autonomous zone is claimed for a shorter or longer period of time, or rather, where places are made autonomous. Artists who can not (or no longer) live off subsidies or off the state but who neither wish to offer their art on the free market, are left to rely on a social network to realize their art. As stated earlier, the social is the basis of the common. This is why artists will have to use the urban social fabric, sometimes even abuse it, to continue to make autonomous work. On the other hand, they will also be able to deploy their work tactically and generate (temporary) autonomous social spaces themselves.

In other words, artists become the cofounders of both artistic and social constructs and in this they may be different from the majority of their predecessors. Ever since the 19th century, artists have been able to behave hyper-individualistically. In the monumental city, their individual existence was covered by a bourgeois morality. And although the artists in the situational city increasingly resisted bourgeois institutions, paradoxically these still

provided them with the logistic and financial safeguards for this hyper-individualistic attitude. In the creative city, it is the free market that supports the individualistic model of the artist-freelancer, whether in combination with indirect stimuli by various governments or not. This implies that in all these 'cities' they can go on nestling themselves in adolescence: either the artists are embraced because of their pure, consistent ideas, as in the monumental city, or because of their independent entrepreneurship in the creative city, or they can give full rein to their adolescent stubbornness in the situational city.

The common city, however, calls for 'growing up'. Here artists must adopt an attitude in and towards a world that is in continuous transmutation; a world that also asks of them to continuously redefine their artistic position. They will have to invent other models in order to survive, artistically as well. And they will not only have to invent them, but also test them in the urban reality. Those who wish to make personal and original work outside of the state and market will be forced into a collective model in which artistic ideas are tested experimentally all the time. It is as if Constant Nieuwenhuys is generating real experimental space in the city in order to effectively develop his New Babylon or at least empirically experiment with it. This experiment then no longer takes place in a secluded lab or studio, but in everyday social life. Besides, apart from Nieuwenhuys, many other artists in the same city are ready to launch their own singular projects: simply a matter of preventing him from any totalitarian or Haussmannian plans. Such experiments 'in real life' are however always hybrid forms between artistic and social settings, with all the risks such undertakings may include. For example, artists may lose their purely artistic ideas in the social process, rendering their ideal plans opaque. This is a risk they will have to take if they wish to bring both their own artistic practices and the common city to life.

Within the new urban context artists can no longer hide in the well-protected theatres or museums of the monumental city, like their bourgeois predecessors, but neither can they build a solid identity anymore by storming these monuments, as in the situational city, nor can they safely retreat into the hip district of the creative city. Their performances will only have meaning when they perforate the city and allow the city to perforate them. This requires a sharp analysis by these artists of the urban social fabric, as well as the courage to destroy it if necessary, but also the generosity to recognize and honour the most diverse social relationships.

When everything is liquid, artists can only work by first laying new ground to stand on. They will have to constitute the foundation for this themselves, emphasizing the 'con' of commune or 'together'. In other words, they will have to generate new institutions that can guarantee some stability or relative security on a collective basis, so that their singular artistic work may flourish. These new institutions in the liquid urban space hardly show any resemblance anymore with the rigid and hierarchic institutions of yesteryear. The autonomous social spaces, independent of state and market, are best understood as circus big tops, erected only temporarily and then put up again somewhere else later. In other words, these institutions are mobile units that only sporadically set up a perimeter. The area within this perimeter is not of a purely physical nature. It is a social domain in which social interactions are also shaped in a different manner. This shaping is more than a deviation from Haussmann's segregated city. Because of the actions of artists, homogeneous communities and neighbourhoods are constantly challenged and stimulated by experimenting with other ways of living and by demonstrating their viability. These lifestyles, by which artists crank up the common city, will in any case be highly hybrid. Just as in circus life, they will integrate private life and work, family and professionals, friends and enemies,

celebration and creative production, art and economy. This same 'circus model' will break up Sennett's traditional family life. Only when, unlike the traditional circus, this itinerant company breaks open its own community and reflectively shapes itself in dissensus – in short, when this neo-tribal crowd becomes political – will the common city become operational. Or when, like the already mentioned Recetas Urbanas – which perhaps not quite coincidentally was once constituted around a circus tent – it deliberately continuously balances on the tightrope between legality and illegality and therefore cannot operate purely artistically or architecturally but is always forced to also think and act politically. Only in such a hybrid, open autarky can artists develop sufficient sovereign power to create personal work and constitute new social figurations. In short, only when they manage to shape such constitutions – that are both artistic and social – will they feed urban life as grown-up artists in confrontation with other residents and passers-by. Within this fluid urban space, artists themselves are the performers *of* a common ground on which they can stand high and dry for a while, together with others. They not only, Like Nieuwenhuys, invent New Babylon but also bring it effectively to life in a New Babylon, a common city that is constantly in the process of becoming.

Although there are concrete examples such as Recetas Urbanas, it is difficult to predict exactly what tactics the artists of the common city will deploy. Anyway, trying to determine them already now would undermine their tactical potential beforehand. This is why this common artist for now remains vague and abstract. However, one thing can be said about his quest with relative certainty: it had better be both artistic *and* ecological *and* economic *and* political *and* social. Artists who play all these fields simultaneously certainly have a better chance of bringing the common to life. And only if time and again other artists project deviating images, ideas, visions and sounds about and of the world into the urban space, will they be able to outline the architectural common city, together with others. The common city only exists by the grace of the unpredictable performances in which a dissonant space of a multitude of voices and counter-voices emerges. Artists build fora of expressions in which they themselves only advance one of those singular voices. Because the common city is only becoming common in ongoing, dissenting singular performances of the common.

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