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**COMMUNITY AS COMMONING, (DIS)PLACING, AND
(TRANS)VERSING: FROM PARTICIPATORY AND
'STRIKE ART' TO THE POSTDIGITAL**

The issue of community is remarkably relevant to that of contemporary art in general and poetry in particular, especially given the recent trends in art and/ as performance that dissolve the latter in the (radical) (re)shaping of communities and commons, to the extent to which there is no border left between art and political action or community (re)formation.

But who are the members (if distinguishable) of this community, what is its structure and/ or processuality (if any) – in case we adopt the art-as-community-as-event angle –, and what kind of potential commonalities and (re)positionings can they trigger? If we think of the ways in which the “Occupy” type of actions and phenomena have related themselves and/ or have been perceived in relation to the issue of communities we will be sometimes presented with two different (and potentially conflicting) facets. On the one hand, the way in which such events are framed by the participants or activists themselves sends out a certain kind of messages related to the community they want to address, shape, or activate. The idea of the “complacency of 99%” sometimes targeted in such actions, for example, is symptomatic of a potentially totalitarian view of the ‘masses’ which, at the same time, in indistinctly ‘rallying’ against the 1% does not actually escape the “naïve togetherness” that certain movements or philosophies¹ indulge in. This brings us to the second aspect of such a phenomenon, the way in which it is perceived and further articulated by the criticism and theory they prompt during the action or “occupation”, as well as post factum. For Yates McKee, for instance, such actions, events or movements along with what he terms “strike art” speak of and reshape ‘our’ (post)human condition, what he actually calls the “post-Occupy condition”, and it is that condition that informs the ways in which we (could) rearticulate our (sense of) community. Community is therefore the action itself, and consequently, collective art, where art gets to mean (new forms of) life in common².

¹ See below, for instance, the discussion on Mark Nowak and Kaya Sand’s political poetries in the context of “relational aesthetics” versus “relational antagonism”.

² Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, London – New York, Verso, 2016, p. 5.

There are several concurrent or sometimes conflicting aspects involved by this emerging (if not prophetic or apocalyptic) paradigm of community as art. First of all art has to be liberated itself, from itself – as it is stated more than once in the book by quoting³ and then appropriating once again⁴ a notorious MTL statement from “#OccupyWallStreet: A Possible History” – as well as from the art system. The latter is actually not fundamentally ‘evil’ but still, “[t]apping their [the institutions’] potentials and organizing their resources requires its own tactical art of cunning”⁵.

Second, there is the crucial involvement of artist and their art in radical movements and campaigns as part of Occupy and post-Occupy. Here the subject under discussion becomes paradoxically both ethereal and down-to-earth, as radicalness remains a strong imperative and social and political change is expected to address and hopefully solve specific issues while the art of and for that purpose maintains an aura of ineffability that keeps it (and the movement) safe from any categorical, formulaic, prescriptive, or ‘established’ (and therefore potentially in collusion with the establishment) stasis⁶. Art – while being liberated from “the enclosures of the art system” – is therefore embedded in “the living fabric of collective political struggle”⁷. This embedding consists of ways of action in which art *is* political struggle and radical action *is* art. Occupy is seen as art, while collective resistance is redefined as collective invention which involves art as a new form of life in common.

Thus militant action both addresses certain contemporary issues and involves a processuality and performativity aimed at, if not a “coming community” (in Giorgio Agamben’s terms further discussed below) then at least a commons or collectivity that cannot and would not be rooted in compromise, conformity or

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 1, 34.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 242.

⁵ Paul Chan quoted in Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 242.

⁶ In fact not only art, but radical political movements may characteristically refrain from any discursive articulation or dialog. Here is for instance what Peter Fleming wrote on the issue: “And yet... so much silence. Why would we want to theorize it, practice it, conserve it, use it, strategize it, share it, enrich it or occupy it? I want to experiment with the idea that silence might be suggestive of an emergent kind of sub-commons, no doubt transitory, but crucially collective. Its commonality is founded on the shared misgiving that the neoliberal project now gains sustenance from any kind of communicative participation between it and ‘the 99%’. In its last dying stage of development, corporate hegemony even welcomes critical discourse into its language game, as long as it abides by prefixed rules. Accordingly, I want to propose that the silent commons is anything but reserved quietude or fearful seclusion. At the present juncture at least, in which a myopic economic formalism has colonized so many modes of social representation, mute opacity in the face of an invitation to ‘participate’ might tilt towards something transversal, truly communal and classless (Peter Fleming, “Common as Silence”, *Ehemera. Theory and Politics in Organisation*, XIII, 2013, 3, p. 629.

⁷ Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 238.

complacency, and not even in self-idealization⁸. This processuality/ performativity of action rubs off on the art that contributes to the coming into existence or simply is identical with this coming and continuously (re)shaped and questioned collectivity. In “strike art” and within the post-Occupy condition the issue of community turns into one of emerging collectivity, and in the context of action and occupation (of public spaces), the latter approaches the sphere of “multitude” – in Hardt and Negri’s terms – and even crowd⁹. In *Declaration*, Hardt and Negri describe occupation as “a kind of happening, a performance piece that generates political affects”¹⁰, further encouraging this overlapping of collective action and art¹¹.

Still, however this “new” (post-Occupy) condition and its attendant collective action as art may be, it has been brought about and made possible, as McKee himself points out, by the history of traditional avant-gardes, and then by the “neo-avant-garde” – the Situationist International (on the heels of Dada and Surrealism), and, in the US, the Yippies, the DIY of Guerilla Television, the New York Radical Women and the San Francisco Diggers, the Art Worker’s Coalition, ACT UP, etc., and the New Anarchism of the 2000s. While, as McKee argues, Occupy “took the avant-garde dialectic of ‘art and life’ to a new level”¹², a statement backed up by quotes from artist Thomas Gokey (co-initiator of the post-Occupy Rolling Jubilee debt-abolition project) – “[the] wild collective creativity of the park”¹³ and “[w]e need an affirmation to be paired with this negation. We need to start articulating and building the alternative way of living and being that we want”¹⁴ – the specific relevance and potential novelty identified by the author may sound if not disappointing at least nothing of a new hat: “Occupy and its afterlives would be unthinkable without a certain proximity and entwinement with the art system and its attendant tensions and contradictions”¹⁵.

⁸ Cf. Slavoj Žižek’s address to Zuccotti Park in which he urged “don’t fall in love with yourselves!” (quoted in Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 238).

⁹ The term has been replaced in 21st century sociology by the more nuanced one of “gathering.” Sociologist Clark McPhail for instance has written that: “The most characteristic feature of human behavior during [...] all gatherings I have observed, is not the unanimity or continuity of “the crowd”. It is ongoing variation in the proportion of individuals alternating between acting alone and acting with or in relation to others” (Clark McPhail, “Crowd”, *Contexts*, VII, 2008, 2, p. 79).

¹⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*, Argo Navis Author Services, 2012, p. 18.

¹¹ In terms of outdoor collective encampment, Tahrir Square took all previous movements to an unprecedented scale and level of intensity. “It functioned simultaneously as an aesthetic spectacle, a mode of physical self-defense against the state, a living infrastructure of social reproduction for its participants, and a prefigurative zone of common life at odds with the oligarchic and authoritarian order it was opposing” (Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 89).

¹² Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 32.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

The assumption behind the statement above comes indeed from a substantial tradition of performance/ participatory/ radical art in that it advances the idea that contemporary condition can be described and consequentially affected by social engagement and community triggered art. And indeed, to map the diversity of interrelations between the two – art (and the art system, as in the quote above, or not) and society/ community – and their potential relevance to present and future movements, one needs to revisit the art history related to these approaches. A telling analysis in that respect could involve for instance the commonalities and (critiquing) distances between the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) and the Situationist International (SI). Claire Bishop argues that although GRAV deployed a “situation”-related terminology and borrowed consistently from SI's political rhetoric while their own methods of spurring viewer participation proved “experientially somewhat pedestrian”¹⁶, “GRAV's artistic propositions aimed to engage with the general public in a far more generous fashion than the SI's cliquish events” (idem), as the latter were predicated by the intolerant condemnation and exclusion of those working for/ with the established art institutions. What at a first glance could pass for a Situationist advantage on GRAV and even post-Occupy – the movement's preference for social action and relevance against or beyond institutionalized art – can actually turn out to be nothing else but an instance of crippling dogmatism and intolerance. On the other hand, as Bishop points out, in spite of GRAV's wider coverage of the general public, they also qualify as sad illustration of a widely spread paradox with participation, namely that a work opened to viewers' manipulation and alteration becomes a “highly ideologized convention in its own right, one by which the viewer in turn is manipulated in order to complete the work ‘correctly’”¹⁷.

What is in our opinion of most consequential importance in both movements commented above is the participatory quality of the art involved and its socially engaged performance/ action. Participatory art is actually Bishop's book's main focus and an important part of her argument is that the participatory is the most salient feature of (as well as best term for) all contemporary art “in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material”¹⁸. The participatory comes in the western world as a reaction to (in Debord's situationist terms) the society of the spectacle by disrupting its fetishism and commodification and by opposing its (economic and political) departmentalization and atomization with a collectivizing or community-based approach. What follows from this is the dismantling of the individualist/ personal/ ‘original’/ ‘genius’ author and its disintegration/ reassembling into collaborative/ collective teams, groups or even masses, and

¹⁶ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, New York, Verso, 2012, p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

therefore the (ideal/ complete) fusion of the latter with their viewer(s)/ reader(s) (and in contemporary digital space related contexts, users). But significant elements of this paradigm can be dramatically mutated in different political, cultural, and artistic contexts. Here are two examples in this respect, one from the Soviet Union of the 1970s (provided by Bishop herself) and the other from the Vienna of the 1960s.

Let us start with the latter, as this may facilitate a smoother transition in our argument from west to east. *Wiener Spaziergang* (Vienna Walk) by Günter Brus (1965), although not included in the city's comprehensive municipal program for art in public spaces, otherwise a remarkably rich resource on the subject, has been recently revisited as "one of the seminal performative works in Viennese urban space"¹⁹. The walk/ performance took place in an age in which, as VALIE EXPORT²⁰ points out, the galleries and museums were impracticable for innovative artists and therefore the urban space became a necessity while also making addressing new different audiences possible in the context. Brus's performance consisted, as the self-explanatory title indeed specifies, of no more than a walk around downtown and particularly in historically and artistically significant areas of Vienna, but a walk that was nevertheless – just as the artist expected – ended by the police who took him into custody. Why did that happen – Brus was actually wearing a suit painted white with a dark line down the middle of both front and back, deviating from the waist down and following the right leg in the front while the offset line went down the back of his left leg; the line also divided his face, as well as the top and back of his head. Brus later on explained that he concentrated everything on himself and thought of his body (within the performance) as "intention, event, and result" altogether²¹.

What is participatory about this performance? As Neuburger elucidates, Brus's outfit has a complex and layered significance, and so is his bearing, alluding among other things – even if sometimes by contrast – to both the public order of the time and various avant-garde and performance traditions. Although silent he actually hints at previous Dada and Surrealist public "literary walks" in Vienna expressing a "conscious otherness"²², and, although showing little psycho-geographical interest in the city, his thus being in contrast to the flâneur or Situationist²³, is a subtle way of referencing other locale-, politics-, and history-

¹⁹ Susanne Neuburger, "Performing Vienna". Translated by Tim Sharp, in Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (eds.), *Performing the Sentence. Research and Teaching in Performative Fine Arts*, Vienna, Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 35; see also the bibliography in Neuburger's footnotes.

²⁰ Quoted in *Ibidem*.

²¹ Quoted in *Ibidem*, p. 36.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 36-37.

²³ A significant distinction here is the one between "stroll" and "walk," the latter being a (post-)minimalist device described by Thomas Bernhard as taking the protagonists from "special Viennese situations to those with a heterotopian character" (*Ibidem*, p. 37).

focused demonstrations having a special significance to the Viennese community/ies and various more or less locally related episodes in art history.

Is this participatory art? Definitely not in terms of face value, since Brus not only does this on his own and does not try at all to get any reaction or participation from the passersby, but also declares afterwards that he focused strictly on himself. Yet, as we have just seen, his performance is profoundly and relevantly community oriented, and is also part of an ongoing tradition while also eliciting to this day continual interest and (re)assessments. Community-relevant (or even -coagulating) art is not necessarily (explicitly) participatory, but it may still involve a subtly different kind of participation. That is, Brus himself participates in various artistic legacies and trends indeed, and does so quite in the manner of a (not actively participating) viewer; he is ('just') a passerby who observes both the psycho-geography and the art history of the place without much of a(n apparent) response, and his outfit is reflective of this ambivalence – performer and viewer, shrewd chronicler and indifferent street-walker (without the artistic/ ideological panache of the flâneur), both cutting a shocking figure and blending in (while in the car that brought him to his point of departure he ducked at every crossing²⁴), mirroring the place (and its politics) while also setting foot in the city as if on a stage²⁵, etc.

This takes us to our second example, the performances/ actions of the Collective Actions Group (CAG) – *Kollektivnye Deistvia*, or *K/ D* – of the late 1970s and early 80s. These actions followed a somewhat standard format, a group of 15 to 20 people were invited by telephone²⁶ to take a train to a place outside Moscow and then walk to a field where they would attend, after waiting around for an indeterminate amount of time, a minimal, mysterious, and most of the times hard to identify event. On their return to Moscow the participants would write an account and their interpretations of the event, which would become the topic of further discussion and debate among the 'performers' and their 'audience'²⁷. Andrei Monastyrsky, the foremost theorist of the group, would write sophisticated theoretical articles on the (semiotics of the) events that would be collected together with the others' accounts, interpretations, and discussions alongside schemas, photos, and even lists of videos, in volumes coming out in both Russian and

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ In an age in which the phones in communist countries were universally tapped one can only wonder (in amusement) what the secret police did to follow up on these communications – did they run stakeouts in the field, were they as confused as the participants, and what did their reports on the performances look like? On the other hand, the group's books themselves may be read as collections of informant's reports, the KGB could have simply purchased those ones for the record. "Boris Groys has observed how CAG's performances were 'meticulously, almost bureaucratically, documented, commented on, and archived'" (Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 159).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

German every 3 to 5 years, the latest of which (the eleventh) was being assembled a few years ago, as recorded by Bishop²⁸.

There are a few aspects related to these actions relevant to our discussion. First, the audience is not the ‘masses’, the “99%” or the wide/ random crowd/ collectivity/ community [as (re)generated/ coagulated] around the performers, but a small number of strictly selected participants that are actually part of the artists’ circle. Second, the participants were not invited to get involved in the performance in a way that blurred or even did away with any social distinctions/ divides and fostered a collective experience (as is generally typical of western participatory/ community-oriented art), but quite on the contrary, were allowed or sometimes even asked to do something of their own choice in response or as contribution to the event, and also asked afterwards to reflect individually and write on the experience and its (speculative) meaning(s). And third, the artist’s authority or authorship is disrupted through the latter’s own attitude towards the event as something they witness too, which occasions a special switch in places between the artists and the participants.

While Günter Brus focused strictly on himself, which turned him into a one-of-a-kind spectator, CAG carefully selected and considered their ‘audience’ and focused mostly and consistently on the latter’s freedom (of reaction and interpretation) and the creation of “that ‘inner’ level of perception”²⁹, which turned themselves as well into spectators of the participants’ unwitting actions or “appearances”. At one of the group’s actions, *Appearance* (1976), the ‘performers’ appear somewhere in the distance and start approaching the ‘audience’ that could not tell whether something was happening or not, and when the figures approached the group they assured the latter that the event had taken place. Monastyrsky later explained that what happened in the field “was not that they (the organizers) had appeared for the participants, but rather, that the participants had appeared *for them* [author’s emphasis]”³⁰, a concept which was further developed and complexified in *Ten Appearances* (1981).

What links CAG’s actions to Brus’s *Wiener Spaziergang* is the reshaping of the author/ organizer as (performer-)spectator, and a pronounced emphasis on the individual/ personal/ subjective (body and/ or experience) as collectively relevant. This commonality between the Austrian artist and the Russian collective is probably so much more worth noting in the context of the divide that Claire Bishop notices between western and eastern participatory art (eastern here meaning Eastern European and Russian under communism, from the mid 1960s to the late 1980s). Whereas the former was positioned as “constructive and

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

²⁹ Monastyrsky quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 155.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

oppositional response to spectacle's atomization of social relations", the latter was rather "existential and *apolitical*, committed to ideas of freedom and the individual imagination" while "framed as *shared* privatized experience [author's emphasis]"³¹. While the goal of these notes is not to challenge Bishop's subtle and much needed distinction, this comparison may turn out useful in getting a more nuanced picture of east-west differences and commonalities, while helping in approximating the concept of community in a contemporary (cross-)art(form)/(social-political) action contexts.

We are particularly interested here in exploring the existential "qualifications"³² involved, one of which is the subjectivity of the performer/organizer and the spectator (sometimes one and the same or interchangeable), a subjectivity that is not the 'original'/ essentialist one of the genius/ creator but an interactive, other-oriented, participatory, processual, performative, improvised one. When the performer/ organizer is a writer there is a particular kind of subjectivity involved, and there is also a special kind of relationship between the community that writer conceives of or writes about, and the community they live in and/ or articulate around them.

Milo Sweedler has a relevant and intriguing approach in that respect in his book *The Dismembered Community*: he looks into the communities certain authors – Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Michel Leiris, and Laure (Colette Peignot) – writing major works on community, lived in, and the way in which their relationships (to each other and not only) shaped (and in fact dismantled/dismembered) both their philosophy of community and their community per se. In his funeral sermon, as it were, to the College de Sociologie (which was dissolved in 1938), for instance, Bataille, argues Sweedler, significantly alludes to his relationship with the also recently deceased Laure. Both the College and Bataille's lover Laure have been disintegrated, torn apart, by the one who sought (to build) a community with(in) them. What happened to them both is described by the term Bataille himself used for torn apart or dismembered communities – *dechirement*. But this tearing apart also involves Laure's manuscripts and correspondence with Bataille from which the latter borrowed her concept of communication and then used it in order to refashion his vision of community, and as a result, he switches from seeing communication as a means to the end of community to considering community a means to the end of communication. And thus, Sweedler concludes, "Bataille sacrifices community – be this the community of brothers (the College de Sociologie) or the community after which that community is modeled (lovers) – to 'communication'"³³.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

³² Giorgio Agamben's term which we will look into more closely a bit later.

³³ Milo Sweedler, *The Dismembered Community. Bataille, Blanchot, Leiris, and the Remains of Laure*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2009, p. 131.

Communication cannot therefore prevent community from *dechirement*, quite on the contrary. In fact, if Jean-Luc Nancy writes – Sweedler reminds us – that “[t]he gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community”, in the sentence opening *The Inoperative Community*, for Bataille – I as revisited by Nancy – community is all about dissolution, dislocation, and conflagration. “What unites people?” asks Sweedler quoting Denis Hollier who in his turned quoted Goethe. “That which tears them apart, one would be tempted to respond, paraphrasing Bataille”³⁴.

While in the case of Bataille, the negative or anti-communal nature of community can be traced in its being modeled after the most private society of lovers, other radical depictions of the dismembered (or... dismembering) community go even deeper into the private sphere in search for premises of certain specific (political) commonalities in the very foundation of subjectivity. Those are areas in which, in various ways, radical and (post-)Marxian thought recycles, concurs, overlaps or conflicts with Christianity. Alain Badiou has written about the “community effect” (via Freud and Lacan) belonging to communist militant activity whereby intense participation of the subjects transforms them into members of the “glorious body”, an obviously theological formulation occurring alongside equating the communist “we” with the Christian concept of the “invisible church”³⁵. References to the Bible and the saints are not uncommon in such an author – he shares for instance the reference to Francis of Assisi with Antonio Negri, another major name in communist theory. The language of militantism and that of prophecy or messianism (in the footprints of Walter Benjamin but not only) mix naturally in these philosophies, as Slavoj Žižek for instance (the celebrated editor of the two volumes of *The Idea of Communism* cited hereafter, the first volume co-edited with Michael Hardt) speaks of “divine violence” (again via Benjamin), while the communist “idea” and the leaders as incarnated projections of the people’s powers unfortunately lead Badiou to endorse Leninism and even Mao’s personality cult, (which he deems preferable to that of Stalin...)³⁶. In the same train of thought, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri employ the term “exodus” to describe a sort of line of flight taken by the suddenly uncontrollable multitude escaping from the domination of “Empire” inside the Imperial territory itself³⁷. There is also (“Christian”?) love in communism and,

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

³⁵ Cf. Etienne Balibar, “Communism as Commitment, Imagination, and Politics”, in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, New York, Verso, 2013, p. 20.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

moreover, there is desire³⁸, “communist desire”³⁹. The anatomy of the latter is also messianic and eschatological. Jodi Dean has identified two major kinds of communist desire, the first one being described by Negri’s “Spinoza- and Deleuze-inspired emphasis on the productive desire of the multitude of singularities”, while the second is “the desire of the philosopher”, which tags “Badiou’s emphasis on the eternity of communism”⁴⁰.

A perhaps most interesting and intriguing response to such Christian-Marxian/ Communist commonalities comes (in the same volume edited by Žižek) from Bruno Bosteels. Bosteels revisits Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” and draws on the ideas of the Argentine philosopher Léon Rozitchner to reach a number of quite radical conclusions. While Marx has pointed out that there is still a Christian foundation that lives on in the secular state – since the dualism of the latter involving the private and public spheres (and even the separation of Church and State in America) prolongs Christianity’s dualism of celestial and worldly⁴¹ – Rozitchner went on to stating that “The Christian Spirit and Capital have complementary metaphysical premises”⁴². This is not just saying, alongside Max Weber, that there are significant affinities between capitalism and Protestantism, but that “capitalism simply would not have been possible without Christianity [...]”⁴³.

This allows Bosteels to ‘unmask’ reference names such as Badiou, Negri, and Žižek as being “deeply entangled in the political ideology of Christianity” and therefore “unable to illustrate the militant communist subject except through the figure of the saint”⁴⁴. What actually lies behind Christian theology – Bosteels argues via Rozitchner – is nothing else but mere terror and domination masquerading as grace and freedom, and these ingredients make up not only the fabric of capitalist society, but even (western) societally constituted subjectivity,

³⁸ Love and desire actually play a significant role in Giorgio Agamben’s conception of community (as we have seen they do in Bataille) as well, see below.

³⁹ Communism originally shares this with surrealism, but one could identify possible Christian connections here as well, as grace represents a (both superior and overwhelming) manifestation and fulfillment of desire; the Eastern Orthodox term for that is “charisma” (Romanian derivative, “har”), a word whose ancient Greek root (“favor,” “grace,” “to rejoice at”), can ultimately be traced back to the PIE root *gher, “to desire.” Also, in Agamben’s “coming community”, the key concept of “whatever being” “has an original relation to desire” (Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 1).

⁴⁰ Jodi Dean, “Communist Desire”, in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism 2*, p. 90.

⁴¹ Bruno Bosteels, “On the Christian Question”, in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism 2*, p. 44.

⁴² Quoted in Bruno Bosteel, “On the Christian Question”, p. 49.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

and therefore, genuine communist revolt would start by “turning the power of the subject against the domination of constituted subjectivity”⁴⁵.

But is “constituted subjectivity” still there nowadays, as deeply and traditionally structured by political/ religious manipulative patterns? And what relevance can the notion of capital as secularized Christian metaphysics – seducing as it may sound in its paradoxical formulation – still hold in a global, multicultural, nomadic, migrant, and transnational world?

Such theory seems to be unaware of models of community – and subjectivity – like the one developed by Giorgio Agamben. Agamben dismisses any attempt to constitute (the “coming”) community in terms of common features, projects, or identity/ ies. In fact, in Agamben’s view, such potentialities and processes nullify substantive identities, making possible, for the first time, a community of pure singularity without exclusion.

Still, for all these advantages, Agamben has been criticized – along with Jean-Luc Nancy – for modeling his theories on Heidegger and the latter’s notion of community as destiny⁴⁶. In fact, it is perhaps interesting to note that although a possible solution to the question posited by the above cited Marxian authors (equating of capital with culturally constructed subjectivity in western Christianity) may come from Agamben’s concept of whatever being and the community of singularities, it is precisely the theorists of political resistance that reproach the latter with this very solution. Agamben is seen in such approaches as failing to provide a convincing account of collective resistance to oppressive power, a failure stemming from “a prioritizing and over-valorizing of the figure of passivity” and resulting in “the conspicuous absence of any plausible model of collective praxis”⁴⁷.

We need to observe though that the author’s allegedly messianic stance (the one in the *coming* community) as well as his emphasis on destiny are by far more nuanced than they would appear according to such criticism. In a world whose paradigmatic stance he sees to be the concentration camp, the “single destiny” of “all nations”⁴⁸ is – in a one-of-a-kind revamping of Guy Debord’s “society of spectacle” – the “transformation of politics and of all social life into a spectacular phantasmagoria”⁴⁹. On the one hand, therefore, destiny is an ambivalent notion whereby pervasive dissolution and the society of phantasmagoria can be turned

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Brian Elliott, “Community and Resistance in Heidegger, Nancy and Agamben”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, XXXVII, 2011, 3, p. 259.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 260.

⁴⁸ Jessica Whyte, “«A New Use of the Self»: Giorgio Agamben on the Coming Community”, *Theory & Event*, 2010, 13, online publication, unpaginated. Pro Quest Database, accessed September 5th 2016.

⁴⁹ Agamben quoted in Jessica Whyte, “«A New Use of the Self»”.

into the actual opportunity for the coming community to emerge, while on the other, the realization of such destiny is possible specifically due to the whatever being's freedom from any communal destiny:

[“Whatever being” is seen by Agamben] as marking the possibility of a human community free of any essential condition of belonging, *common destiny* or work, or principle of inclusion and exclusion – a being-together of existences, rather than a community of essence, as Nancy describes it [emphasis mine]⁵⁰.

Moreover, what we actually learn to be remarkably characteristic of Agamben's whatever being is its place beyond both destiny and chance, in the common passage between ontology and ethics, in its manner of being, of making “free use of the self”, and its (in medieval Latin terms) *maneries* that engender it as our second, happier nature:

The being that does not remain below itself, that does not *presuppose* itself as a hidden essence that chance or destiny would then condemn to the torment of qualifications, but rather *exposes* itself in its qualifications, *is its thus* without remainder – such a being is neither accidental nor necessary, but is, so to speak, continually *engendered from its own manner* [emphases in the original]⁵¹.

What are the qualifications such being – as part of the community of whatever singularities – exposes itself in; and what is that characteristic *manner*? As Whyte elucidates, a key yet largely unexamined concept in Agamben's theory is the one of “use”, as “whatever being” “makes use” of itself in escaping politicized identity and the “hold of sovereign power”⁵². Agamben draws on Paul here and on verses in the apostle's epistles such as, “Art thou called being a slave? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather”⁵³, where, as Whyte explains,

While it would be possible to read the phrase “use it rather” to signify a use of freedom, Agamben argues that what is to be used is the condition of slavery itself, which is nullified by the messianic vocation, stripped of meaning while remaining factually unchanged⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Although we find in Jessica Whyte's article part of an accurate possible response to the criticism on Agamben from authors like Brian Elliott, we should also note here that Whyte in her turn criticizes the Italian philosopher for not considering the kind of identities that can still endure or emerge in a post-capitalist world. “While Agamben's account of the spectacle enables us to see possibilities for a transformative relation to our own time, and to avoid nostalgic attempts to return to past certainties, I suggest it is inadequately attentive to the differential temporality of spectacular capitalism, in which the post-modern co-exists with a resurgence of social forms, identities and classes that, in the heady days of progress, were believed to have been consigned to the past.” (Jessica Whyte, “«A New Use of the Self»”).

⁵¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 28.

⁵² Jessica Whyte, “«A New Use of the Self»”.

⁵³ I Cor., quoted in *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

The “qualifications” that Agamben talks about pertain to “being a slave” or to any other kind of political/ized identity that “whatever being” both annihilates and accepts (in the sense that it does not change “factually”), thus escaping controlled fixity while also exposing itself in those very qualifications. For whatever being therefore, qualifications also represent its own self, and another source for the idea and even the phrasing is identified by Agamben himself to be Plotinus, “it [‘the one’ in Plotinus, or ‘whatever being’ in Agamben] does not remain below itself, but *makes use* of itself as it is [emphasis mine]”⁵⁵, further interpreted by the author as “the free *use of the self* [Agamben’s emphasis]”⁵⁶.

In this context, the “coming community” and the ways in which it “exposes” the “whatever singularities” that are its members remain rather impervious to that kind of criticism that reproaches Agamben’s theory with “the conspicuous absence of any plausible model of collective praxis”⁵⁷. It is precisely in the absence of a “plausible model” that the praxis resides – in resisting any pre-established or prescribed program – that a community of singularities can come into being and escape sovereign power’s political hegemony. The post-Occupy condition just as post-Occupy art significantly confirm this, in that it “can be characterized in the most general sense as an extended process of learning, a ‘training in the practice of freedom’, as MTL calls it, but one that is immersed directly in the risk and contingency of movements as they unfold”⁵⁸. Post-Occupy militancy is thus also a method to investigate the current situation and discover while enacting – through (as Agamben would have it) its “manner of being” – possible future ways of collective life and viable community/ commoning.

This specific kind of community in which decisive is “the idea of *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence [emphasis in the original]”⁵⁹, is, in Negri and Hardt’s terms, a ‘multitude’, and the various types of members of the latter can be read, by applying Agamben’s theory, as whatever being’s possible ‘qualifications’. And since there is no essential commonality, community (as engendered by multitude) can only be founded and kept functional by non-essentialist ‘manners of being’ and non-preestablished *maneries*, that is, by spontaneous ‘freewheeling’ action; or, in today’s radical action terms, by turning even community and commonality into action – by ‘commoning’.

Let us indulge here in a brief digression on – and an anticipation of the hereafter analyzed relationship between poetry and community – a certain possible implication of commoning, namely that this translation of common into action could be applied to place as well. Place plays in a way relevant to this topic an

⁵⁵ Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁷ Brian Elliott, “Community and Resistance in Heidegger, Nancy and Agamben”, p. 260.

⁵⁸ Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 239.

⁵⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, pp. 18-19.

important albeit more philosophical role in Agamben's theory. In revisiting Amalric of Bena's late medieval heresy that purported that the apostolic description of God as "all in all" is a continuation of the platonic doctrine of the *chora*, an all-inclusive all-bearing *topia* of every entity, Agamben concludes that "God or the good or the place does not take place, but is the taking-place of the entities, their innermost exteriority", and therefore, salvation is "the coming of the place to itself"⁶⁰. This com(mon)ing of place may gain unexpected significance if we revisit it after borrowing and repurposing the concept of "placing poetry" from Ian Davidson⁶¹. In his development and exemplification (by analyzing George Oppen's poem "Route") of the concept of "placing poetry", Davidson seems mostly preoccupied with "circulating entities" which represent or bring about the "place of travel [that] becomes place", such as the car (or the invading Nazi tank in Oppen's poem) "continually placing its occupants in different contexts"⁶². While journeying and movement are obviously major and recurrent figures in place poetry, I find more relevant to our discussion a question that Davidson asks a bit later in relation to placing: "Is it possible to conceive of a language that is on the move, which users are always placing, but is never placed?"⁶³. This latter direction is perhaps more useful in examining contemporary place poetry – and not only –, but it still needs to be taken to the next level, particularly with a further emphasis on "placing" read as an action expressed by an intransitive verb, place-in-progress, place-as-process, and specifically, place-as-performance, especially if corroborated with studying the dynamism and processuality instilled and explored by poetry in (and as) place/ing.

Communing is yet instrumental not only in redefining placing, but in analyzing displacement and its relevance to contemporary acceptances of community as well. According to Yates McKee the practices of commoning involve a creative reinvention of democracy whereby "democracia real YA!" can be indeed articulated in terms of commoning, communization, or even communism in recent theory "provided we understand democracy as being at odds with current forms of state power as well as fantasies of 'the people' as an all-inclusive harmonious consensus"⁶⁴. The theorists McKee draws upon are Siltrín and Azzelini and, of course, Hardt and Negri. From the latter he takes over the way in which they read Occupy as a declaration of independence by (in their own terminology) the "multitude" that has opened onto correlative commoning

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15. One could perhaps not irrelevantly rewrite this as "the com(mon)ing of place to itself."

⁶¹ Ian Davidson, "Introduction", in Ian Davidson, Zoë Skoulding (eds.), *Placing Poetry*, Amsterdam – New York, Rodopi, 2013.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 20.

processes and practices. Hardt and Negri describe four “subjective figures of the crisis”⁶⁵, the represented, the mediatized⁶⁶, the indebted, and the securitized, to which, interestingly enough and quite relevantly to our discussion, McKee adds a fifth category: “the displaced (those dispossessed of the territorial bases of subsistence by foreclosure, gentrification, privatization, colonization, and environmental disaster)”⁶⁷. It is not for no reason that an author researching the commonalities of art and radical collective protest/ (post-)Occupy underscores the importance of displacement, which could actually be translated in the above discussed classical community related terms into Bataille’s and Nancy’s “dislocation”.

Displacement is relevant in this context as it delineates a number of undecidabilities related to performative/ participatory art qua radical action as involving (non/ multi-)place or being site-(un)specific. Why undecidability – because as we have seen in the cases of Brus and the Russian CAG there is an ambivalent relationship to place in such performances/ events, and this is actually part of a much wider contemporary context that acutely conditions issues of community, collective initiative, and commoning. In the case of the Situationist International for instance, Guy Debord’s fold-out map *Psychogeographical Guide to Paris* (1957) is a non-topographic discontinuous network of various places that cannot serve either as a proper Parisian guide – and so much the less, as Claire Bishop notes, as a record or a report of a state of affairs⁶⁸ – or an insight into Debord’s own subjective perception of the cities (and in this it critically differs from the Surrealist *Map of the World*, 1929)⁶⁹. Another more recent and in certain respects similar example is the electronic archives of 16 Beaver and specifically the transcribed notes of Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri from the open seminars and report-backs given there (in person or via livestream) by friends involved with the “movement of the squares” in Europe and North Africa⁷⁰.

What links these two examples is not only the (elusive/ disruptive/ idiosyncratic) site-specificity, but the ways in which place or site (we will return a bit later to this distinction) both disintegrates and rearticulates as a – gapped yet ever-expanding or dynamically processual – network of more places and/ as events or “evental sites”, and therefore a radically relevant if conventionally

⁶⁵ Quoted in Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 19; see also Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Declaration*.

⁶⁶ In a review of the book, Nikos Sotirakopoulos criticizes that in presenting this category the authors never took into account the possibility for computational apps and tools – be them (corporate) products of Empire – to be used by multitude for radical purposes, which is as we will see a bit later quite relevant to our topic (Nikos Sotirakopoulos, “A Review of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Declaration*”, *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest*, I, 2013, pp. 101-103).

⁶⁷ Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p.19.

⁶⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 85.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, pp. 90-91.

dysfunctional map. Place itself – even beyond psychogeography or the radical movements (“of the squares” and not only) – has actually been (re)defined in contemporary theory along quite similar lines.

In *Ideas of Space in Poetry* for instance, Ian Davidson has reviewed such definitions and closely examined their relevance to and instantiations in modern and contemporary verse. In these approaches, space is a “dynamic simultaneity... constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales from the global reach of finance and telecommunications [...] to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household, and the working place”⁷¹, while places are, consequently, “moments” and “particular articulation[s] of those relations”⁷². The latter – and thus also the communities they underlie – are implicitly charted and ostentatiously disrupted in Situationism, as seen above, and/or escaped, displaced, and relocated-refashioned in new revolutionary contexts and networks generating different, larger communities of choice, as in the case of 16 Beaver.

The resulting ‘incomprehensible’ maps actually display an unavoidable, anatomic obscurity stemming from a non-categorical logic of negation and disruption. What is perhaps most relevant about those ‘maps’ is not so much the ‘realities’ or social relations they purposefully mis-chart, distort, or attempt to replace, but the processuality and performativity they enact. What Deleuze and Guattari have written about maps in general is apparently even more accurate about these particular graphs: “The map is open and connectible within all of its dimensions. It is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, [...] reworked by an individual, group, or social formation”⁷³. And as already seen in the 16 Beaver transcribed meeting notes, such maps or graphs potentially contain what Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight”, ways of escape as well as ways of living under the specific “territorialized” circumstances thus freeing up (psychoanalytical but not only, also political and social) “blockages” and encouraging flows (psychic again, but involving “revolutionary energies” as well⁷⁴. Davidson aptly employs these concepts in revisiting for instance Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* and breaking down the complex and layered meanings of “projective verse” with its crucial geographical and spatial poise while also observing how the poet’s denial of the subject signals a rhizomatic approach “implicit in the poem as a ‘field’ made up of various flows and energies”⁷⁵.

⁷¹ Doreen Massey quoted in Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 29.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ Quoted in Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Cf. Yates McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 91.

⁷⁵ Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*, p. 69.

But since in contemporary theory space and place are, as we have seen, themselves fluctuating and intersectional, from creating and experiencing the poem as a field of energies to drawing an even closer connection between poem and place there is only one more step left. While analyzing Alice Notley's poem "Go In and Out the Window", Davidson realizes that the ways in which the poem goes back and forth between various places refusing to embrace any fixed identity or locality for the speaker makes the poem acquire certain features of place and that is how, moreover, "the poem itself becomes the place, albeit one that is conceptual rather than physical"⁷⁶. As we have seen above, in community-driven action and participatory art place is already an iterative, processual, and performative network of places, and therefore, a poem having the same characteristics, working as a network of places, is a place in itself. Davidson does not go that far, but advances a very useful working hypothesis: "I am however suggesting that to think about the form of the poem as having some of the qualities of a place, as well as a representation of place in its content, allows a broader range of responses to place within a broader range of poetics"⁷⁷.

The connection between poem and place may in fact go beyond the content of the latter and beyond representation (through the former). More recently, authors like Neal Alexander and David Cooper have elucidated how after more than two decades since the spatial turn in literary studies, criticism examines not only how a literary text describes or interacts with a place – and more interestingly perhaps, how the latter conditions the language and form of the former – but also how it contributes to the (re)generation and articulation of its meaning(s). A poem of place is [(part of what) generates] that place while the place and the landscape can be in their turn 'read' as poems and (literary) texts. "Literary geography thus interests itself variously in the spaces of the text and with texts in space"⁷⁸. The authors therefore provide a more refined taxonomy of the poetry of place and, although their analysis as well as the contributions to their book all focus on post-war British and Irish poetry, these classes can prove very useful in dealing with poetics of place elsewhere as well.

The first category is the poetry employing toponymy as integral part to the lyrical practice of emplacement, with two subclasses (based on a distinction borrowed from poet and critic Peter Barry), involving the use of setting and geography respectively, the former dealing with generic places (or "non-places") and the latter being more "loco-specific". The second category is defined by the "imaginative importance given to the spatial practices of walking, witnessing, and

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁷⁸ Neal Alexander, David Cooper (eds.), *Poetry & Geography: Space & Place in Post-War Poetry*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013, accessed through online subscription privileges, no page numbers.

mapping which occur within place”, and the third involves “a self-reflexive preoccupation with the relationships between material landscapes, linguistic signifiers, and poetic forms”⁷⁹. The sections of the book roughly follow these distinctions, and it is quite relevant to our topic that the first of them is titled “Placing Selves: Identity, Location, Community”, although issues of community are also addressed (sometimes even more pertinently) in the other sections as well; and although one would have wished for the conceptual and speculative level of the argument in Anderson and Cooper’s introduction to be maintained throughout the other contributions as well, which is not always the case, and the poets illustrating the editor’s place poetry categorizations to be further analyzed in the book, which again happens only in a few cases, the collection represents a really significant contribution to the topic.

If the poem and the place are either one and the same, or significantly enmeshed as interactive and converging networks that involve, (re)dis/ un/ recover, (re)shape, (re)generate communities on various levels and in various senses, what is the place *of* the poem in the equation of place, community, participatory art, and radical action that we have explored above. Jules Boykoff has written about poets as “experimental geographers” and their role in re-composing the political-historical space⁸⁰, and, interestingly enough, he places the discussion in the context of site-specific artistic practice. After drawing on Miwon Kwon’s description of three dominant paradigms (that quite often actually overlap) – the art-in-public-spaces model, also derisively referred to as “plop art”, the art-as-public-spaces approach in which site-specificity is a key feature (sometimes also involving use-value), and the art-in-public-interest model, characteristically featuring “a collective, collaborative spirit across a wide range of media”⁸¹ – the author argues that, while critics have applied these categories and particularly the last one to visual arts solely, they should be widened to include certain poets as well, namely the poets “working with and through spatial politics”⁸².

Boykoff actually focuses on the work of poets Mark Nowak and Kaia Sand and relevantly enough, he frames their poetics quite in the terms our discussion has gravitated around so far – collaborative approaches and participatory art/ performance/ processuality, the artistic/ aesthetic enlarged and/ or translated into political action, the interplay/ convergence of interrogated/ reshaped/ subjectivities within collective initiative or (non-essentialist) community/ commoning:

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ Jules Boykoff, “Poets as Experimental Geographers: Mark Nowak, Kaia Sand, and the Re-Composition of Political-Historical Space”, in Ian Davidson, Zoë Skoulding (eds.), *Placing Poetry*, 2013.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 224-225.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 225.

Both Nowak and Sand use poetry to jumpstart collaborative, dialogical relations that invite reflexivity and refashion subjectivities in ways that enable participation not only in aesthetic intervention but also in larger political processes aimed at social change⁸³.

What Nowak for instance does significantly, in Boykoff's assessment, is employ "art theft" and (poetry/ discourse) "sampling" in his projects across all sorts of borders while targeting and involving the "displaced" and the "dispossessed"⁸⁴. Nowak thus "*draws contour lines between sites of labor exploitation [emphasis mine]*"⁸⁵ both on the page and on the stage, but as the critic shrewdly remarks, the poet moves beyond that textual and performance-oriented framework when for instance doing creative writing workshops with the Ford autoworkers in Minnesota and their coworkers in Ford factories in South Africa, thus initiating (in the poet's words) "transnational poetry dialogues" between "workers in these seemingly disparate, discrete locations, allowing workers to *infer connections and realize common interests [emphases mine]*"⁸⁶. The subversive interactive and processual networks – between places and people and (emerging) communities – already explored above are also copiously present and active in this case as well, and they are perhaps so much the more relevant to poetry in as wide a genre-related context as possible since in Boykoff's analysis they proliferate and operate even beyond both the textual and performative⁸⁷ dimensions of verse while still remaining fundamentally informed by poetry.

And yet one may not for no reason suspect there is still more to the poetry-art-place/ site constellation than (literally or not) meets the eye. In *Fieldworks. From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics*, Lytle Shaw analyzes how the poetry of place has evolved towards site poetry in postwar America while refining and developing both concepts by internalizing approaches typical of site-specific art. Place as coherent, stable, unitary is opposed and gradually reworked or integrated into the more fluctuating, volatile, and inter-discursive notion of site (with its

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 226.

⁸⁴ Concepts borrowed from Homi Bhabha (see *Ibidem*, p. 233), but as we have seen also extremely relevant, especially the former, to the "strike art" documented by Yates McKee.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 238.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Daniel Kane has significantly written about the role of performance (and) poetry in both tapping into and establishing a (sense of) community in the Lower East Side of the 60s (cf. Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome. The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 2003). An arguably opposite approach to the societal and communal role of performance is presented by Sabeth Buchmann and Constanze Ruhm who explore the potential of (ongoing) rehearsal in uncovering and deconstructed established relations of power and imposed social identities (cf. Sabeth Buchman, Constanze Ruhm, "Subject Put to the Test". Translated by Karl Hoffmann, in Carola Dertnig, Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (eds.), *Performing the Sentence. Research and Teaching in Performative Fine Arts*, Vienna, Sterberg Press, 2014).

interconnectedness and ever larger scales), while the vertical history and the “digging” in Williams’s *Paterson* and Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* (and the ‘specific place’ thereof, Gloucester) were replaced in the case of certain New American Poets by ambiguous “places”, either “empirical locations or the bodies of the poets who brought these exterior locations and their social formations into focus”⁸⁸. More significantly, Shaw assesses poet-artist Robert Smithson’s work as essentially instrumental and influential in the shift from place to site and the complex continual refashioning and enmeshing of the two in poetry to the present day. It is particularly relevant how the analysis unveils the crucial role of language (along with the linguistic turn in the humanities) in developing the aesthetics of site-specificity in art and how Smithson – in his writings on Donald Judd’s art and his own cross-genre work, while for instance significantly stating that “language ‘covers’ rather than ‘discovers’ its *sites* and situations [emphasis mine]”⁸⁹ – redefined site as not necessarily physical but, more consequentially, discursive, as relevant to the “‘immanent’ relationship between art objects and the discursive fields with which they want to be in dialogue”⁹⁰. This, argues Shaw, has contributed to the emergence of a wide range of contemporary practices among the poets recently influenced by the younger artists engaging in “discursive site-specificity”⁹¹, particularly the Flarf poets, urban(ist) (post-)conceptualists like Rob Fitterman, and absurdist archeologists (or as Shaw terms them, “overcoders”) of architectural/ urban discourses like Lisa Robertson⁹².

Poetry (contemporary poetry at least) is therefore proved to be (‘genetically’) integral part of the art-action-community-cross-artform paradigm, and not just occasionally – even if in the most fine-tuned fashion – examined with the tools of (politically charged) visual and site-specific art criticism, as was the case in the above cited book chapter by Jules Boykoff. But what is perhaps most intriguing about this trans-genre commonality is the intricate genealogy it comes with, namely the fact that the simultaneous complication and refinement of poetry at the intersection of place and site was originally triggered by the site-specificity in art, and particularly by *discursive* specificity, which was itself brought about by the linguistic turn (as well as by the cross-genre and cross-disciplinary work of certain artists-poets) in the humanities. Hence it was ultimately language and discourse – and thus the ‘traditional’/ distinctive matter and medium of poetry – that effected the paradigm-shift in poetry.... Poetry thus underwent a fundamental transformation through its trans-genre and cross-artform porousness made manifest

⁸⁸ Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks: from Place to Site in Postwar Poetics*, Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2013, p. 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 233 et infra.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pp. 248-255.

by the inextricable congruence (if not identity) with place and site as catalysts of the com(mon)ing community.

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We have seen so far what happens to poetry and/ as place of commoning when (its transition to) site is framed by discourse, but what if space itself undergoes a similar metamorphosis, turning into a(n) *n*(on)-space of sites, not of places? What kind of discourse informs that space, how does it (if it does) frame the sites thereof, and how are communities generated/ modeled by those sites?

This space could be none other but digital space as accounted for in recent theory by authors like Stephen Kennedy. Kennedy describes digital space as going beyond the real-virtual binary opposition, and the digital as pertaining to a non-representational paradigm in which the traditional visual bias of western culture is no longer operational since the realities and environments involved function according to the laws of sonic economy. Sites in this space, as *websites* and not only, become dislocated places and floating locations⁹³ and experiencing these realities is significantly different from place and site as discussed so far, which deeply affects the ways in which both communities and the powers-to-be operate and interact as well:

[The government] present themselves as subject to technological effects. But this was not the case: they were neither inside nor outside but remained and still remain an important player in a network of statements and practices that combine to form technological discourses that are *inhabited, constructed and responded to simultaneously* [emphasis mine]⁹⁴.

This different way of inhabiting bears upon the nature of place, which becomes fundamentally if not totally qualitative (as opposed to traditional quantitative representations of place within space), and what happens in digital space is that the qualitative characteristics of place are translated onto the space itself. This radical shift makes possible a dramatically different, expanded experience of the real which comes with its own reformed ontology:

The argument being made here is that having highlighted the qualitative nature of place in order to challenge Descartes' position of volume as space, Leibniz then retreated to the relative safety of place as a fixed point. So 'place' for him is that fixed point. But what happens if we amplify the qualitative characteristics, not to counter Cartesian logic but to affirm the uncertainty surrounding the fixed nature of place, or to put it better, to extend qualitative thinking from place to space itself – so that now even space is not quantifiable? *This is what digital space is: not a realm separate from the*

⁹³ Cf. Stephen Kennedy, *Chaos Media. A Sonic Economy of Digital Space*, London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 35.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

*real but a qualitative aspect of the real that mediates spatio-temporal relations [emphasis mine]*⁹⁵.

This is the theory of relativity for the cultural-political universe, and one would expect a revolution of similar magnitude in discourse (be it technological as in the previous quotation or not) as well. In the site-oriented poetics analyzed by Shaw, as we have already seen above, there was a transition and mix between the rather static and fixed qualities of place and the dynamic processual characteristics of site, but then site was also, as part of its distinction from place, framed by discourses, and those frames were rather static in themselves [a perception actually implicitly shared by the author himself since he describes “ourselves”, that is, the practitioners of discursive site poetics, as “soft architects”⁹⁶]. Even when a specific discourse or discursive frame is seen in its processuality it still remains an exterior reality that the poem absorbs and ‘records’, since no poet actually contributes (even subversively) to the actual development, societal negotiation, or disciplinary domain of that given discourse (say the one of urbanism). In digital space, on the other hand, there are radically different kinds of settings, environments, and interactions – discourses are, as already quoted above, inhabited, constructed, and responded to simultaneously.

Rather than framing we are therefore dealing with a perpetual reverberation, contamination, and propagation of discourse in a space that not only goes beyond the apparent fixity and representationality of place, but even does away with extensibility itself, with spatiality in its conventional (Euclidian) sense, and thus with any spatio-temporal limitations: “The digital world is, unlike Descartes’ objectively extended world, non-extended and not susceptible to spatio-temporal restraints; it is self-organizing and self-perpetuating”⁹⁷. Discourse in this world is uncontained and contaminating, flighty and mercurial, fragmented and echoic, made up of echo[ing] statements, or, in Kennedy’s own terms, “echostates”⁹⁸.

Echostates and sonic economy are for Kennedy also the best instruments to tackle the issue of community. By applying non-linear acoustic thinking and “deep listening” (a concept borrowed from Pauline Oliveras) as a way of following both the sound and the political economy of the urban environment, he identifies and explores a novel connection between Coventry and Detroit, two motor cities physically far away from each other but very close on other levels made available by digital space and technology and their spatial-temporal mediations working with qualitative features and parameters. What is perhaps most relevant to our discussion about this approach is that the specificities of each place and their

⁹⁵*Ibidem*, pp. 45-46.

⁹⁶ Lytle Shaw, *Fieldworks*, p. 257.

⁹⁷ Stephen Kennedy, *Chaos Media*, p. 43.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 74 et infra.

respective communities are maintained in the analysis (Coventry and Detroit are each dedicated a subchapter titled “The importance of place”⁹⁹) and at the same time integrated into the more recent “expanded communities of interest”¹⁰⁰ uniting the two cities. Place is thus (both maintained and interactively) translated into site, while the latter starts to float across a qualitative non-representational space spanned by coherence and resonance:

The collision [of punk and reggae] occurred in a particular spatial context as people, objects, money, materials, emotions, configured, dispersed and reconfigured as part of a sonic economy, as the industrial practices that formed around large-scale manufacturing and the fusion of related social forces and population flows were discontinued and cleared, to be superseded by new practices that were beginning to emerge. Such collisions were contiguous [...] in spatio-temporal terms, common to time and place: in this case, Coventry in the 1980s. But they also occurred in a noncontiguous space, demonstrating common defining characteristics ‘inherited from one another’ and by so doing demonstrate how coherence and resonance can be identified in a non-representational manner. It is in this way that Coventry and Detroit cohered – at the quantum level – as echoes of each other...¹⁰¹.

These coherences and resonances across digital space (re)configure various kinds of communities, of which the post-industrial sonic/ musical one(s) connecting Coventry to Detroit represent just one possible example. But as part of the digital space environment, the general issue of online communities has been approached in the more specialized fields of Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning as well. Such studies are by definition more pragmatic than the ones we have mentioned so far, aiming to produce computational applications and tools for assessing various characteristics of those communities and help make predictions about them, such as, for instance, how long a member will stay active in a community or what would be a user’s future level of activity in a community or across a number of communities. All of these evaluations and predictions are based on computationally processing the language (alone or alongside other elements, such as feedback received or various online histories) of users in various communities. “Vibrant online communities are in constant flux” starts for instance an article on user lifecycle and linguistic change in online communities¹⁰², already employing some key words in our discussion so far, the resonance across digital space along with the fluctuating, processual nature of the latter and of its places

⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp.138-142 for the former and 143 et infra for the latter.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 141-2.

¹⁰² Cristian Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Robert West, Dan Jurafsky *et al*, “No Country for Old Members: User Lifecycle and Linguistic Change in Online Communities”, in *Proceedings of the 22nd international conference on World Wide Web*, 2013, pp. 307-318, <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2488416>, accessed September 5th 2016.

and (web)sites. The applications developed by the authors analyze and classify linguistic change at both user and community level and can measure user's distance from the language of the community while also employing linguistic change as a predictor of user lifespan. Among the benefits of the research listed towards the end of the article there is a substantial section of implications for sociolinguistics.

Another even more recent publication argues that while intra-community has received consistent attention in the last years' research, multi-community engagement has been rarely approached although "people usually interact with *multiple* communities both on- and off-line [emphasis in the original]"¹⁰³. Among the most appealing findings is the fact that, in terms of multi-community engagement "[u]sers post to less similar communities over time, but relatively speaking, departing users prefer more similar ones"¹⁰⁴. In terms of language evolution the authors employ cross-entropy with vocabulary-varying language models to reach a very interesting conclusion: while in single-community settings, users right after passing through the "adolescent" stage (in which they learn the linguistic norms) suddenly "grow old", refusing to adapt to the evolving language of the community, in multi-community contexts, quite on the contrary, users "stay young", consistently adjusting and growing closer to the community's language.

Such brilliant conclusions – which are not surprisingly in keeping with Kennedy's idea that to experience the digital space is to inhabit, construct, and respond to it simultaneously – would be extremely useful in studying poetry in that space¹⁰⁵, so much the more so as these results are arrived at by dint of language-based automated analysis. Yet poetry computational analysis is still in the inceptive stage in which the machine learning part focuses on processing elemental features such as meter and rhyme, and there is still little concern for the data's magnitude and consequently barely any data-intensive and/ or comprehensive approach to the genre. *The Graph Poem Project*¹⁰⁶ is one of the few initiatives that tries to do that (while also developing computational apps and classifiers for all

¹⁰³ Chenhao Tan and Lillian Lee, "All Who Wander: On the Prevalence and Characteristics of Multi-community Engagement", in *Proceedings of the 24th International World Wide Web Conference*, 2015, p. 1. <https://chenhaot.com/pubs/multi-community.pdf>, accessed September 5th 2016.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ A tie-in (of this research on multi-community engagement) with the concepts of convergence and polymediation in recent media studies (cf. Art Herbig et al, *Beyond New Media. Discourse and Critique in a Polymediated Age*, Lanham – Boulder – New York – London, Lexington Books, 2015) may have led to a wider and very interesting discussion, but here we need to regretfully note the gap that seems to be there quite often between researchers and authors working in the fields of Digital Humanities or Media Studies, NLP or Machine Learning, and E-Literature or Digital Art.

¹⁰⁶ See MARGENTO, *Nomadosofia/ Nomadosophy*, București, Max Blecher, 2012; MARGENTO, *Poetries and Communities*. <http://artsites.uottawa.ca/margento/en/sample-page/>, 2015. Retrieved September 4th 2016; MARGENTO, *The Graph Poem*. <http://artsites.uottawa.ca/margento/en/the-graph-poem/>, 2016. Accessed September 5th 2016.

poetic features) by applying graph theory in both poetry computational analysis¹⁰⁷ as well as poetry generation (and creative and digital writing¹⁰⁸). The network (weighted multi)graphs in which the vertices are poems and the edges are (feature-related) commonalities between the vertices, are developed in ways compatible to the already discussed chaos media's categories of coherence and resonance, with the caveat that the "echostates" in this case (include but at the same time) go beyond the discursive echo statements described by Stephen Kennedy, as they also involve qualitative – poetic and textual – as well as quantitative (statistic and wider digital) features. Also, the concept this approach is based on – graph – has been a recurrent notion in our criticism and the way in which networks for instance have already proved notably useful in this writing is part of that same constellation of interests, explorations, and experiments.

The *Graph Poem* is also developed on the same platform and in close concomitance with another initiative titled *Poetries and Communities*¹⁰⁹, which speaks to if not their codependence then the way they consistently complement and fuel each other¹¹⁰. But if through this connection the (graph) poem touches on place or site-specificity and radical action/ political resistance as well¹¹¹, what about the opposite line of inquiry? That is, when the issue of community in/ across digital space is examined in close correlation with those of place/ site and resistance¹¹², where does poetry stand, is it relevant to the issue in its own right?

If we take the same example of chaos media, the answer is a yes that may prove really relevant in quite a few respects. The very economy of digital space actually displays that in a fractal way: the atomic level of the echostates is informed by an elemental poetic reality, as the "echo" in the term stems from

¹⁰⁷ Cf. for instance Chris Tănăsescu, Bryan Paget, Diana Inkpen, "Automatic Classification of Poetry by Meter and Rhyme", in *AAAI Publications, The Twenty-Ninth International FLAIRS Conference*, 2016, <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/FLAIRS/FLAIRS16/paper/view/12923>, accessed September 5th 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. MARGENTO, *Nomadosofia/ Nomadosophy* and the experiments beyond.

¹⁰⁹ MARGENTO, *Poetries and Communities*, 2015. <http://artsites.uottawa.ca/margento/en/sample-page/>. Retrieved September 4th 2016.

¹¹⁰ Mathematical models have been employed before in the study of community, for instance by Dyke and Dyke (cf. Chuck Dyke, Carl Dyke, "Identities: the Dynamical Dimensions of Diversity", in Philip Alperson (ed.), *Diversity and Community: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2002) who use the Mandelbrot set to establish a fractal non-linear model for communities.

¹¹¹ In fact there is skepticism that DH in general or specific projects in the area really do that, and suspicion that they actually play into the neoliberal and corporate economic and political hegemony; see below.

¹¹² Although not specifically addressed here, the topic of resistance has been allotted a full chapter in Kennedy's book (Stephen Kennedy, *Chaos Media*, pp. 49-72), before also playing a significant role in the one dedicated to the Coventry-Detroit connection.

Gaston Bachelard's poetic of space¹¹³, while on the macro level the overarching model is again the one of the poem now conjoined with that of the wunderkammer/cabinet of curiosities, or indeed the curiosity shop in "a sonic economy of unpredictable but nonetheless patterned and rhythmic harmonies that form, disperse, and return as echoes in the 'curiosity shop' that is the lived digital environment"¹¹⁴. This store is the Balzacian ocean of (every)thing(s) that make up an endless poem assembled (or we should perhaps add, more likely navigated) not by the genius Byron but by Cuvier the naturalist (in an argument drawing on Jacques Rancière's considerations on the multi-temporality of contemporary art to describe digital space¹¹⁵).

This idea of digital space as the grand all-inclusive poem is consonant with how certain digital and/ or internet-based poetics have been critically assessed as being characterized by boundlessness, excess, and limitless inclusion and fragmentariness. The particular case of digital poet Alan Sondheim is for instance exemplary in that respect, since Sondheim publishes (or used to published until a few years ago) monstrous quantities of text in various venues to the dismay, despair, or revulsion of certain readers or fellow (electronic) poets. But his work has been highly evaluated by at least as significant other critics and poets and located somewhere symmetrically to other (Jewish or not) major avant-garde and/ or exilic writers such as Walter Benjamin. Although not an actual refugee like the latter, Sondheim's work has been read – by Maria Damon – as fundamentally 'diasporic' in its most characteristic features, its blended impure mix of ('broken?') languages (not only natural ones, since he is among other things the father of codework) and styles, his "diasporic heteroglossia or quick-witted though disfluent polyglot bricolage"¹¹⁶, the "boundarilessness that makes people uncomfortable" (idem) and amounts to...

[a] message in a hundred million washed-up bottles of faded sting, and a touch of Whitman's "Look for me under your bootsoles" with all the s/m undertones implied when the clause is transplanted into a technologically mediated, contemporary sexual/textual landscape¹¹⁷.

One of the most significant traits of such diasporic¹¹⁸ (e-)poetries is their way of not only employing but also internalizing (digital) technologies, and indeed their

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 74-77.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 73-74.

¹¹⁶ Maria Damon, "Alan Sondheim's Internet Diaspora", in Carrie Noland and Barrett Watten (eds.), *Diasporic Avant-gardes. Experimental Poetics and Cultural Displacement*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

¹¹⁸ Another substantial and more general – although not as relevant to our particular discussion here – connection between poetry and diaspora has been developed by Christopher (Kit) Kellen, who also

way of becoming technologies in their own right. As Barrett Watten has observed, Walter Benjamin “never really surrenders intention, even as he is lost in the quotable archive”¹¹⁹, whereas Sondheim does not choose texts but “techniques that generate texts”¹²⁰. Sondheim’s work – along with the poetry of other digital poets, and especially what C.T. Funkhouser has termed “poems of the Web, by the Web, for the Web”¹²¹ – thus acquires certain salient features of digital space itself, in that its principles of expansion and development (through codework, hypertext, and beyond) are ‘chaotic’, machine-based, and algorithmic¹²².

Yet in writing on Sondheim’s diasporic digital poetry Damon also acknowledges the difficulties involved by not dealing with an actual exilic condition. The heralded abolition of the real-virtual divide (and actually the

advances an opposition between literary canon and community (Christopher Kellen, *Poetry, Consciousness and Community*, Amsterdam – New York, Rodopi, 2009). A more articulate and relevant inquiry into a particular case of poetry communities is carried out by Lytle Shaw in *Frank O’Hara. The Poetics of Coterie*, where he argues that “[t]hrough its sense of real or imagined social infraction, coterie introduces a self-reflexive component to the study of community” (Lytle Shaw, *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2006, p. 7).

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

¹²⁰ The issue of non-intentionality is of crucial importance in digital poetry since the age of John Cage’s first experiments in the field (even before he got to actually employ computers besides computation in his conceptual pieces) and would deserve a separate discussion. Suffice it to say though that even major figures such as John Mac Low have taken it with a grain of salt and refrained from or have been ironical of any single-minded attitude. Mac Low for instance once said that even if there is no intentionality in the poem there the intention to put together the algorithm that generates it (cf. O’Driscoll, “By the Numbers: Jackson Mac Low’s Light Poems and Algorithmic Digraphism”, in J. Mark Smith (ed.), *Time in Time. Short Poems, Long Poems, and the Rhetoric of North-American Avant-Gardism, 1963-2008*, Montreal & Kingston – London – Ithaca, McGill – Queen’s University Press, 2013, p. 109 et infra).

¹²¹ C.T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, New York, Continuum, 2012, p. 179 et infra.

¹²² We need to note though that Sondheim’s works – like most digital poetry projects actually – still source certain texts or corpora, which bares the imprint of the author’s selection. In our view (and that is what we try to accomplish with the *Graph Poem* initiative) the mission of (post/ trans)digital poetry is not to extract but to dive into the database and perpetually expand it, which is mandatory if one wants to construct poetry projects that acquire the basic features of digital space itself, namely to be self-generating, “self-organizing and self-perpetuating” (Stephen Kennedy, *Chaos Media. A Sonic Economy of Digital Space*, London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 43), it should not breach the coherence and resonance by establishing itself as something different, autonomous, and/ or standing on the outside. Also, to the diasporic we need to add the nomadic to make sure no fixity, frozenness, or (de)limitation gets in the way of the sonic freedom and its unstoppable lines of flight – since “[t]he days of anything static, form, content, state are over [...] and [a]ll revolutions have done just that: those that tried to deal with the state as much as those that tried to deal with the state of poetry.” (Pierre Jorris, *A Nomad Poetics*, Middletown – Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2003, p. 25) The nomadic bears in it both the idea of unimpeded mobility and sharing/ using in common, since etymologically the word means “[roaming to find] pasture, pasturage, grazing”, from an Indo-European root *nem-, “to divide, distribute, allot,” (cf. *Online Etymology Dictionary*) hence it involves sharing [pastures, goods, lands], and therefore... commoning.

irrelevance of that binary opposition) within digital space does not seem to work here, a concern which is also relevant to a current academic conversation regarding the place and scope of Digital Humanities (DH) after a publication made speculations regarding the ways in which DH makes room for an alleged takeover of academia by neoliberal forces¹²³. The polemic is not necessarily of interest in terms of this article's investigation, but some of the responses to the allegations above definitely are. Brian Greenspan's article "Neoliberalism, Virtual Collectivity, and Digital Humanities" for instance opposes such claims by looking into the evolution of DH and arguing that the shifts that have taken place in the field over the past decade brought on new practices and approaches that elude such narrow categorizations and accusations.

What Greenspan does though consider should be indeed reformed are certain current approaches and practices that make up, with a term borrowed from Richard Grusin, the "dark side" of DH. Among them, crowdsourcing as has been articulated and implemented so far is one of the main culprits. Greenspan elaborates, while also quoting from a Jodie Dean 2012 article: "The ideology of open access and participation regulated through crowdsourcing platforms and accessibility protocols allows digital humanists to indulge in 'a fantasy of multiplicity without antagonism, of difference without division'"¹²⁴. Participatory ethics in DH raises similar concerns and in fact surprisingly involve similar formulations as those deployed in participatory-art criticism, an area in which Claire Bishop in the above cited book has also warned about the pitfalls of (Nicolas Bourriaud's) "relational aesthetics" and advocated in exchange for "relational antagonism", "predicated not on social harmony, but in exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony"¹²⁵.

Greenspan argues that there are DH initiatives that avoid those pitfalls and to this effect he presents in the article a number of projects developed by him and his team in the Hyperlab at University of Carleton, projects that "develop new ways of *sourcing the crowd* [author's emphasis]", and do so by "using mixed reality media to explore images and representations of collective belonging, and to engage with crowds of *real* people gathered together in *real* places [emphases mine]"¹²⁶.

Is this a step back from the conflation of the real and the virtual into digital space? Not really. Just as the post-digital does not entail the end of the digital or (simply and only) a return to the analog, the returning preoccupation for the 'real real' is far from representing a weakening of the interest in or importance of the digital and of digital space. To the extent to which post-digital represents the

¹²³ Quoted in Brian Greenspan ("Neoliberalism, Virtual Collectivity, and Digital Humanities", Forthcoming, 2016) along with a resource of published responses.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 79.

¹²⁶ Brian Greenspan, "Neoliberalism, Virtual Collectivity, and Digital Humanities", p. 3.

advent of an age in which digit(al)ization has actually become ubiquitous and thus involves various forms of integrating and/ or repurposing the analog and older media¹²⁷, this concern (that does not indulge in idealization)¹²⁸ regarding real people in real places is also symptomatic of a stage in which the digital is being or attempts more and more consistently to be immunized against (virtual-reality-or-not sanctioned) escapism or solipsistic narcissism. And it is particularly relevant that such preoccupations and their attending DH projects gravitate around issues of community, collectivity, and place.

For Greenspan is far from being the only one expressing such concerns and exploring possible ways of dealing with them through new and unconventional digital apps and tools. In a book from 2012 N. Katherine Hayles was already arguing in favor of combining radical or unrepresentational digital approaches to place and mapping with the already existing (be they conventional, corporate, and monopolist) tools (thus turned around) for the sake of precisely that radical/subversive purpose¹²⁹, while in a very recent publication, Marie-Laure Ryan looked closely into digital maps as narrative generators and into various recent ways of connecting stories to real space through digital technology¹³⁰ while also, just like Greenspan, examining the relevance of computer games to issues of space, narrative, and digital media¹³¹. Ryan draws relevant parallels to the world of poetry and literature in general while speaking of digital projects dealing with place and narrative, such as conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* and novelist Georges Perec's *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*, both referenced in analyzing the generative cartographic project Les Trucs as a tool for narrating through real-time updating of the map¹³². Issues of community and collectivity are in their turn examined especially while critiquing [murmur] and other locative narrative apps and exposing their potential setbacks in delivering the 'spirit' of a place in a collective memories and people's stories packaging and thus obscuring the ways in which the latter are continually negotiated or "fashioned by

¹²⁷ Cf. for instance David M. Berry and Michael Dieter (eds.), *Postdigital Aesthetics. Art, Computation, and Design*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, particularly Florian Cramer's chapter.

¹²⁸ Greenspan acknowledges that "[w]hile none of these projects is likely to transform our user base into viable long-term communities, they can at least allegorize that process by mixing virtual networks with embodied crowds in the streets (Brian Greenspan, "Neoliberalism, Virtual Collectivity, and Digital Humanities", p. 9).

¹²⁹ Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Think. Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 175 et infra.

¹³⁰ Marie-Laure Ryan, "Space, Narrative, and Digital Media", in Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/ Spatializing Narrative. Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet*, Columbus, Ohio University Press, 2016, pp. 115 et infra, 127 et infra.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 103 et infra.

¹³² *Ibidem*, p. 125.

each of us individually”¹³³, and interesting predictions are made about how the future advancement of for now “rudimentary previews” of customized maps such as Memory Maps will bring into existence smaller communities or “groups” of (private) users rather than having any relevance to a general audience¹³⁴.

This recently growing interest in the ‘real real’ and in physical places as interacting with or being performed in digital space has also spurred significant research into the issue of the hyperlocal. A more specialized recent article in DH focusing on hyperlocality tries for instance to fill a gap in the current computer science work in ways extremely relevant to our topic. Dissatisfied with the “homogeneous clusters of fixed entities that erase the particularity of a singular place”¹³⁵ the authors want to account for “the dynamic, temporal aspects” of locales as “performed” in social media, while trying to explore “the relation between *physical places* and their social media *hyper-local representations* [emphasis mine]”¹³⁶. Robert Smithson and site-specificity get referenced once again as they help to distinguish between two kinds of visual data on the internet: “native”, that is, “contemporary geotemporal digital image (the image which has spatial coordinates and a time stamp)”¹³⁷, and “nomadic”, images stripped away from their original source.

Performance in such an approach actually comes to mean two different but concurring things. First, it is performance (as) site-specific art, as in for instance the actual street art of Banksy in various public places in New York in 2013 along with the correlated “dispersed real-life and online events that mirrored each other”¹³⁸, and second, the performance of place as hyper-locality, namely “the ways in which the physical place marked by him [Banksy] is communicated via social media platforms”.

The nagging dilemma of such an approach involves the authors’ paradoxical preference for “native” digital imagery (as corresponding to the neo-avantgarde’s desideratum of site-specificity) and their inevitable conclusion that in social media the visual is always “nomadic”, and therefore redolent of the passé modernist paradigm of (ideally) non-local and non-temporal art. Therefore, although the objectives – such as bringing back specificity and the temporal dimension, if not processuality to place as site – along with the computational methods and results of the research are remarkable, the conclusions are not entirely convincing or

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

¹³⁵ Hochman Nadav, Lev Manovich, Mehrdad Yazdani, “On Hyper-locality: Performances of Place in Social Media”, *Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence*, 2014, 2, <http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/081-on-hyper-locality-performances-of-place-in-social-media/onhyperlocality.pdf>, accessed November 22nd 2016.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

consistent with the premises and the operational procedures. The visual bias of western culture, for instance – critically exposed as we have seen above by authors like Stephen Kennedy and others –, reigns here unquestioned, which prevents the authors from exploring the echoic nature of repurposed/ shared images/ memes on the internet, or the sonic economy of digital space, whereby reverberation and noise render the concept of origin groundless and irrelevant.

Place turned into site becomes actually nomadic itself in digital space, and is therefore far indeed from being stripped of its specificity and (temporality/) processuality; quite on the contrary, it is precisely nomadism (and the qualitative, floating nature of locality) that plays an instrumental role in performing the specificity and performativity of place, site, and space altogether. Furthermore, focusing strictly on the visual and on visual art prevents one from distinguishing between contemporary nomadism and modernist alocalism and atemporality. Cross-artform poetics and politics as foregrounded above may prove their utility here once again, for if one balanced the visual data and visual art bias in Hochman, Manovich, and Yazdani's article with the anatomy of nomadism in contemporary poetry – in particular the way in which Pierre Joris has outlined nomadic poetics as radical disruption of the modernist aesthetics of fragmentariness and collage¹³⁹ – the conclusions regarding the nomadicity of the hyperlocal in social media would be more nuanced and pertinent.

The simultaneously strong and subtle connection between community, participatory/ performance art/ poetry/ action, and place/ site as explored in this article continues therefore in the post-digital age, but continues to be as always negotiated in ways that consistently refashion each of these terms while fundamentally informing digital space and our mediated experience of reality.

¹³⁹ Cf. Pierre Joris, *A Nomad Poetics*, Middletown – Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2003, p. 39.

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COMMUNITY AS COMMONING, (DIS)PLACING, AND (TRANS)VERSING: FROM PARTICIPATORY AND ‘STRIKE ART’ TO THE POSTDIGITAL (Abstract)

The article examines the concept of contemporary community as commoning, at the intersection of action, performance or participatory art, place, site-specific, and (post)digital poetry. This involves a brief review of traditional avant-gardes, 20th century engaged art, and recent political-art movements. In the process of this analysis, the participatory emerges as a subtler, more nuanced, and less predictable phenomenon than usually accepted. Also, performative subjectivity is traced as either the source of anticommunal community (in French theory), or mere Christian-capitalist construct (in communist philosophy). Agamben’s theory of the coming community is therefore examined as possible response to both these stances, with its relevance to contemporary movements, including post-Occupy. Commoning – paralleled to placing in poetry – turns out to be of critical importance in present-day community especially with correlatives such as displacement and undecidability. Place, space, and map(ping) are therefore radically redefined in the context, and contemporary poetry appears to be indissolubly related to the process: the poem of place is the place, and poetry becomes the site of the com(mon)ing community. Site (and discourse)-specificity in poetry occasions a shift in focus to digital space, its sonic economy, and the communities and floating locations/ sites thereof. Site and discourse fluidity have brought about a paradigm in which the poem and its related apps tend to expand and turn into digital space itself, while in more recent postdigital evolutions, a new political concern for the ‘real’ reshape community, site, and performance/ participatory art or poetry in a continuous interactivity and interdependence.

Keywords: community, commoning, participatory art, performance studies, poetry of place, site-specificity, digital space, digital humanities, e-literature, the postdigital, GSI, NLP.

COMUNITATEA CA ÎN-COMUN-ARE, (DIS)LOC-ARE ȘI (TRANS)VERS- ARE: DE LA ARTA PARTICIPATIVĂ ȘI “STRIKE ART” LA POST-DIGITAL (Rezumat)

Articolul examinează conceptul de comunitate ca proces de *comunare* (*commoning*), la intersecția dintre acțiune politică, performance sau artă participativă și poezia locului, cea specifică unui sit, sau (post)digitală. După o scurtă trecere în revistă a avangardelor tradiționale, a artei angajate din secolul XX și a recentelor mișcări politic-artistice, în cadrul analizei, participativul se profilează ca un fenomen mult mai subtil, nuanțat și imprevizibil decât e perceput în mod uzual și, în plus, subiectivitatea performativă este identificată ori ca sursă a comunității anticomuniale (în teoria franceză), ori drept construct capitalist-creștin (în filosofia comunistă). Teoria lui Agamben privind comunitatea care va veni este examinată ca posibil răspuns la ambele perspective de mai sus, odată cu relevanța ei pentru anumite mișcări contemporane, inclusiv cele post-Occupy. *Comunarea* – asemuită cu *locarea* (placing) din poezie – se dovedește de o importanță capitală în comunitatea contemporană,

mai ales alături de corelative ca dislocarea și indecidabilitatea. Locul, spațiul și harta/ cartarea [*map(ping)*] sunt în consecință radical redefinite, iar poezia contemporană se arată indisolubil legată de acest proces de redefinire: poemul locului e locul, iar poezia devine situl comunității comune, (de)venind [*com(mon)ing*]. Specificitatea legată de sit (și discurs) în poezie prilejuiește o schimbare a registrului spre spațiul digital, economia sonică a acestuia și comunitățile sau siturile și locațiile flotante aferente. Fluiditatea de discurs și cea a siturilor a determinat instalarea unei noi paradigme, în care poemul și aplicațiile computaționale circumscrise lui tind să se extindă până la identificarea cu însuși spațiul digital, în timp ce în evoluțiile postdigitale mai recente, o preocupare de natură politică pentru „real” reformulează comunitatea, situl – și arta sau poezia performativă/ participativă printr-o neîntreruptă interactivitate și interdependență.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunitate, comuniune, artă participativă, performance studies, poetica spațiului.