PROGRAM FOR A NEW POLITIC

Michael Kliën

PARLIAMENT

A Pioneering Work of Situational Choreography

Sometimes ...

you can't renew an order, as ours clearly needs renewal, until the political imagination becomes capable of imagining and desiring ...

something different.

ROSS DOUTHAT / IS THERE LIFE AFTER LIBERALISM?

the return of the mind upon itself

SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION / SUBSEPTION

is a process emphasized by Carl Rogers in which a stimulus is experienced or responded to without being brought into awareness. According to Rogers, the mind applies unconscious strategies to protect the individual from a negative stimulus before it enters consciousness. We are not exhausted by the social and cultural worlds we inhabit and build.

They are finite.

We, in comparison to them, are not.

We can see, think, feel, build, and connect in more ways ...

than they can allow.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER / THE SELF AWAKENED: PRAGMATISM UNBOUND

UNDER A PARTICULAR FORMATIVE CONTEXT, ROUTINES ARE ESTABLISHED AND PEOPLE COME TO BELIEVE AND ACT AS IF THEIR SOCIAL WORLDS WERE COHERENT WHOLES THAT ARE PERFECTLY INTELLIGIBLE AND DEFENSIBLE.

They come to see the existing arrangements as necessary.

UNGER CALLS THIS FALSE NECESSITY.

In reality, these arrangements are arbitrary and hold together rather tenuously, which leaves them open to resistance and change.

THIS OPPOSITION UNGER CALLS NEGATIVE CAPABILITY. You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.

SIGN PERCEPTION

THIS THESIS OF **NEGATIVE CAPABILITY** ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM OF AGENCY IN RELATION TO STRUCTURE

It recognizes the constraints of structure and its molding influence upon the individual, but at the same time finds the individual able to resist, deny, and transcend their context.

Unlike other theories of structure and agency, negative capability does not reduce the individual to a simple actor possessing only the dual capacity of compliance or rebellion, but rather sees him as able to partake in a variety of activities of self-empowerment.

AFFECT IS FUNDAMENTALLY TRANS-INDIVIDUAL

BRAD EVANS: Among the many contributions you have made in your work, you are particularly known for innovatively developing the concept of affect. How do you understand this concept and why is it relevant for understanding power?

BRIAN MASSUMI: I appreciate the question, because there tends to be a misunderstanding that affect is about only personal experience. Because of that supposed emphasis on the interiority of the individual, it is often thought that affect is by nature apolitical. For me, it has always been the exact opposite. I was attracted to the concept because of how directly political it is.

> IT IS A POWER CONCEPT THROUGH AND THROUGH.

The basic definition that I keep coming back to comes from Spinoza, who spoke of "powers to affect and be affected" as what defines a body and a life. A power to affect and be affected is a potential to move, act, perceive, and think—in a word, powers of existence.

The "to be affected" part of the definition says that a body's powers of existence are irreducibly relational. They can only be expressed in dynamic relation with other bodies and elements of the environment.

The power to affect and the power to be affected are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin. They are reciprocals, growing and shrinking as a function of each other. So from the start, affect overspills the individual, tying its capacities to its relational entanglement with others and the outside.

THE WORD "POWER" HERE IS IN THE FIRST INSTANCE NOT POWER-OVER. IT IS POWER-TO.

Affect grasps life from the angle of its activity, its exuberance, its drive to express always more of a body's powers of existence or potential to be, in an always irreducibly relational way, in attunement with the affordances of the outside.

It is an expansive concept, and a concept of expression. Each act expresses powers of existence, and varies them, affecting and being affected in a way unique to that circumstance, so that every act of being is also a modification that takes its place in an ongoing becoming.

POWER-TO IS THE POWER TO CHANGE.

That is the starting point: a non-limitative concept of power as life-enhancing, and life-changing, through an openness onto the outside.

BRIAN MASSUMI / INTERVIEW WITH BRAD EVANS

EQUIPPING THE IMAGINATION FOR THE PROJECT OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

FREUDIAN PSYCHOLOGY EXPANDED THE CONCEPT OF MIND IN-WARDS ...

to include the whole communication system within the body—the autonomic, the habitual, and the vast range of unconscious process.

What I am saying ... expands mind out-wards.

And both of these changes reduce the scope ...

OF THE CONSCIOUS SELF.

GREGORY BATESON / STEPS TO AN ECOLOGY OF MIND

THE POTENTIAL OF PERCEPTUAL PHENOMENA TO INSTIGATE ACTION

WHAT ELSE BESIDES THE BODY COULD PHYSICAL THINKING LOOK LIKE? THE BLIND FRENCH RESISTANCE FIGHTER JACQUES LUSSEYRAN, WRITING ABOUT THE INNER SENSE OF VISION WHICH ENABLED HIM TO SEE AND MANIPULATE FORMS AND THOUGHTS, FAMOUSLY DESCRIBED IT AS BEING LIKE A BOUNDLESS MENTAL CANVAS OR SCREEN WHICH EXISTED ...

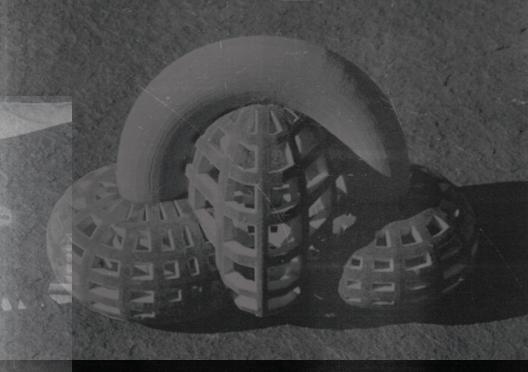
NOWHERE AND EVERYWHERE AT THE SAME TIME.

The blind mathematician Bernard Morin described his envisioning of the process of everting a sphere in a similar manner.

And so it is with the choreographic object:

IT IS A MODEL OF POTENTIAL TRANSITION FROM ONE STATE TO ANOTHER IN ANY SPACE IMAGINABLE.

A CHOREOGRAPHIC OBJECT, OR SCORE, IS BY NATURE OPEN TO A FULL PALETTE OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSTIGATIONS BECAUSE IT ACKNOWLEDGES THE BODY AS WHOLLY DESIGNED TO PERSISTENTLY READ EVERY SIGNAL FROM ITS ENVIRONMENT.



I make this comment in relationship to Lusseyran and Morin to introduce the manifold possibility of our practice. Lusseyran's inner vision enabled him to see topographies and project strategic movements of groups of people.

Morin saw an event in the space of his mind that he then translated with haptic skill into sculptures and subsequently into the universal yet somewhat hermetic language of mathematics.

Their quite substantial bodies, put into action by the force of their ideas, left very discernible traces of those ideas in the real world; from nowhere to somewhere, not everywhere, and no longer exclusively within their bodies.

WILLIAM FORSYTHE / THE CHOREOGRAPHIC OBJECT

PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM

5

begins with the actual circumstances of vision

SEEN ACCURATELY, AMERICAN COLLAPSE IS A CATASTROPHE OF HUMAN POSSIBILITY WITHOUT MODERN PARALLEL.

AND BECAUSE THE MESS THAT AMERICA HAS MADE OF ITSELF, THEN, IS SO ESPECIALLY UNIQUE, SO SINGULAR, SO PERVERSELY SPECIAL

The uniqueness of these social pathologies tell us that American collapse is not like a reversion to any mean, or the downswing of a trend. It is something outside the norm. Something beyond the data. Past the statistics.

It is like the meteor that hit the dinosaurs: an outlier beyond outliers, an event at the extreme of the extremes.

THAT IS WHY OUR NARRATIVES, FRAMES, AND THEORIES CANNOT REALLY CAPTURE IT—MUCH LESS EXPLAIN IT.

WE NEED A WHOLE NEW LANGUAGE— AND A NEW WAY OF SEEING— TO EVEN BEGIN TO MAKE SENSE OF IT. THESE SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES ARE SOMETHING LIKE STRANGE AND GRUESOME NEW STRAINS OF DISEASE INFECTING THE BODY SOCIAL.

America has always been a pioneer—only today, it is host not just to problems not just rarely seen in healthy societies—it is pioneering novel social pathologies that have never been seen in the modern world outside present-day America, period.

WHAT DOES THAT TELL US?

American collapse is much more severe than we suppose it is.

We are underestimating its magnitude, not overestimating it.

American intellectuals, media, and thought doesn't put any of its problems in global or historical perspective—but when they are seen that way, America's problems are revealed to be not just the everyday nuisances of a declining nation, but something more like a body suddenly attacked by unimagined diseases.

UMAIR HAQUE / WHY WE'RE UNDERESTIMATING AMERICAN COLLAPSE: THE STRANGE NEW PATHOLOGIES OF THE WORLD'S FIRST RICH FAILED STATE

THE GOAL IS A SOCIETY IN WHICH GROWTH IS MEASURED BY INTENSITY AND BY THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALLER FORMS

This conception of growth may be described by saying ... that it presupposes that growth consists ...

> In the enhancement of human experience through activity ...

that it exists in inverse—proportion to the scale of the structures in which it occurs and that ... for the immediate future it will be experienced mainly in the form of ...

> divesting human life of its dependency on large and impersonal structures.

At this time in history, social and political blueprints are doomed to failure.

The weight and immobility of existing structures render blueprints futile.

FORTUNATELY, THESE STRUCTURES HAVE THEIR VULNERABILITIES

ACCORDINGLY, I SHOULD LIKE TO OFFER NOT A BLUEPRINT BUT A STRATEGY: THE GENERAL STRATEGY CAN BE DESCRIBED AS THE STRATEGY OF DE-STRUCTURING.

Its overall purpose is to encourage individuals and groups to undertake a new form of experience, the experience of ...

EXTRICATING THEMSELVES FROM DEPENDENCE UPON LARGE-SCALE, RULE-BOUND, BUREAUCRATIZED STRUCTURES AND FROM THE TEMPO OF LIFE THAT THESE FUTURE-ORIENTED, EXPLOITIVE ORGANIZATIONS IMPOSE UPON US.

This strategy is intended as an alternative form of utopianism, but its emphasis falls upon the experience of exploring and inventing new social, political, and economic forms of common endeavor while ...

divesting oneself of the old ones.

It requires a vow of hostility toward the major forms of concentrated power—political, economic, educational, and cultural—and a commitment to seeking new forms of decentralized, localized autonomy.

What is at stake is a post-bureaucratic future.

SHELDON S. WOLIN / WHO'S UTOPIA

Experimentalist Cooperation

We are not yet fully the beings who not only transcend their contexts but also make contexts that recognize and nourish this context-surpassing capability. We must make ourselves into such beings. To do so is the work of democracy. More generally, it is the task of a direction of reform, in society and in thought, by which we shorten the gap between our contextpreserving and our context-transforming activities. Once we have gone far enough in this direction we produce the permanent invention of the future—of alternative futures. To serve as the operational ideology of such an enterprise is the chief practical responsibility of an unshackled pragmatism.

To be fertile and realistic, this reform activity must connect with an actual development: one that embodies the project that most resembles and foreshadows the idea of such a direction of change—change in the very character of our relation to the organized settings of our life and thinking. There is such a project. Its institutional and conceptual expressions remain steeped in the accidents of history—the history of institutions and the history of ideas. It is rich in ambiguity and indeterminacy. We can steer it in directions that are either more inclusive and experimental or more restrictive and dogmatic. Its outcome is the outcome we shall manage to give it, but our future is no longer separable from its.

Call this project experimentalist cooperation.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER / THE SELF AWAKENED: PRAGMATISM UNBOUND

trans-experiential synthesis ...

as a mode of organizing elements of human experience into higher-level designs

PARLIAMENT MICHAEL KLIËN, 2018

STRUCTURE / ANTI-STRUCTURE

As a pioneering work of situational choreography and a subtle exploration of ecological aesthetics, Parliament, offers participants a critically needed withdrawal from normal modes of social action and provides instead an innovative site for 21st-century experimentalist cooperation. Embedded in the immediacy of Kliën's choreographic frame-work, citizen-performers, working in silence, come together to bear witness to and hold council amidst the elemental phenomena and fundamental concerns of collectively lived experience. How are we with our "selves" in this world? With others? Intersubjectively? Trans-subjectively? In our ecological life-worlds?

NEW EXISTENTIAL MAPPINGS

Pointing towards unseen and unexperienced modes of social organization, Parliament traverses, probes and navigates the paradigms that animate our present-day political relations.

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