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From Embros to Green Park

On continuous failures. On continuous struggles.

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On the 19th of June, 2015 a group of artists, theoreticians, and cultural workers occupied Green Park cafe in the Pedion tou Areos, one the two central parks of Athens. Almost 4 years after the occupation of Embros theatre in November 2011 this new occupation emerged from and sought to build on the failings of collective struggles during recent years; both failings in the face of mechanisms of repression and failings from within the emergent collective formations of resistance. As stated in the Green Park manifesto: 'Almost 4 years after the occupation of the Embros theatre in 2011 we are activating with our own means a space deserted and left empty for years by the Greek state and propose a 10 day program of cultural and political intervention in the here and now of Athens. This activation refuses a particular temporal horizon and understands itself outside of the logics of ownership. The occupation is not defined by a particular ideology or interest

but rather comes about as a result of the encounters born out the experiments and struggles of the last few years. Thus, we look to, rebuild modes of collectivity and solidarity and reclaim friendship for its political importance. We propose friendship as a model for organizational formations and autonomous instituting that exceeds neo-liberal calls to order' (2015).

The collective that initiated this occupation refused to identify itself under a common name or ideology but rather proposed fluid modes of organisation. Instead of familiar modes of decision-making and cultural production this new formation proposed friendship as an instituent practice that might escape neo-liberal demands. Operations of friendship bring into being ungraspable ambiguities, layers of familiarity, and multi-faceted engagement; an emergent situation through ongoing encounters with others, in close proximity. Most of us were connected through various layers of friendship having met in Embros during the last four years in numerous disfunctional assemblies that challenged romanticized notions of 'commons'. Embros theatre occupied by Mavili Collective in 2011 had a turbulent history and became an evental site during the years of crisis in Athens. The occupation/ reactivation sought to form an incomplete cultural proposal, challenge the exclusions of art spaces, and produce inconcealable and conflictual programmes of cultural, theoretical and artistic production that responded to the here and now of our city. Embros functioned as an artist-led space experimenting with forms, structures and processes operated by Mavili and other collectives. Seeking to remain a space of no demands during these initial months, Embros tried to evade classification and resist the dilemma forced upon us: squat or institution? Almost a year later and after collusions with the State, Embros shifted its mode of organization and began to operate through an open weekly

assembly. The assembly hosted diverse ideas, political positions, agendas and strategies and this conflictual co-existence appeared fruitful at times. However, the assemblies also gradually alienated many people from participating in them. In the last months of 2014 matters deteriorated further and the verbally turbulent assemblies sometimes turned into physical violence with disputes over money and games of domination. Jodi Dean argues that 'holding a space for an indeterminate amount of time breaks with the transience of communicative capitalism allowing more durable politics to emerge' (2012:221). The continuation of Embros through these years allowed durable politics to emerge and battle against each other within collective formations, the State relations and within the milieu of alternative politics.

Green Park sought to engage again with the critical needs of the here and now, and respond to durable formations and politics in the Athenian landscape. Asking: what can we (de)institute from the failings and painful experiences of the last years and how might we intervene at this moment in the impotential landscape of crisis increasingly dominated by new private cultural institutions? As an open ended process refusing to offer solutions Green Park manifesto proposed a site/space 'made up of fluid and flexible methods that refuse the enclosures of formal political representation this action attempts to collectively explore forms of critical artistic, political and theoretical production and their relationship to the public and dominant social narratives. It seeks to rethink the need for and nature of participation. It seeks to remain imperfect and incomplete. It seeks to recuperate lightness, humor, self-depreciation and joyous critique as the foundations of an open process. The activation of the abandoned public building in Green Park, Athens desires politics and joy to emerge in a shared fight for, and from within, marginalised, forgotten and

unexpected places. Deploying friendship as a political relationship in a struggle against cultural and artistic monopolies, "creative cities" and their production lines of co-optation, through this ephemeral collective experiment we aim to co-imagine with fellow city dwellers, the here and now of Green Park and our city' (2015).

Green Park's initial programme created ephemeral precarious structures of co-existence and intervention and proposed platforms, debates and artworks that occupied various spaces of the building seeking to respond to the here and now of Athens. The question of continuity came up again as the 10-day programme was reaching its closing point. One strand of the programme under the title "to be continued" sought to bring together diverse experiences and challenges in the collective struggles of last years in order to rethink questions of continuity. However, before we engage with a then and there we are tied to the strictures of a here and now and the last days of Green Park ironically coincided with the announcement of a referendum, capital controls and events that demonstrated the lack of or the failure of (a)/the alternatives. During these events Green Park remained open making itself available as a space for new improvisatory collective movements and actions as Stefano Harney and Fren Moten write 'its not who's holding you down [...] its who is holding you up' (2015:145).

As this period of time that emerged from the success of the social movements in the last years seems to be now embedding away new questions emerge in Greece, in Green Park, in the city as we engage anew with multiple forms of durable politics, seeking perhaps to discover again 'what might hold us up' at this moment it time. Resistance as Foucault claimed is the process of creating and recreating, of actively participating in the situation - not simply through outside structures we inhabit but in constantly negotiated relationalities of a here and now. Engaging continuously

with the potentiality of failure as we seek to produce new ephemeral reconfigurations of space and time, together with others.

Green Park will host the conference 'Institutions, Politics, Performance' on 24-28th of September 2015. The conference seeks to bring together interdisciplinary theoretical discourses on politics and artistic production that explicitly negotiate with institutions through experimental praxes from within and beyond them. An intense four day programme will include paper presentations, lecture-performances, round-table discussions as well as less conventional informal discussions and events, performative acts, city walks, installations and other live events. Keynote speakers are Athena Athanasiou, Denise Ferreira Da Silva, Stefano Harney, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, Bojana Kunst, Isabel Lorey, Gerald Raunig, Vassilis Tsianos. More information about the conference and the programme: https://institutionspoliticsperformance.wordpress.com/

References

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