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## **Carry on Camping?: Spectacle, concealment and failure in the performance of politics**

**Simon Bayly**

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In 2002, I met an Iranian academic, the partner of a colleague, who had permanently left her country of origin a few years earlier. She expressed a strong desire to participate as a performer in the next production of the theatre company that I was directing at the time. Although she had no performance experience whatsoever, her commitment and enthusiasm were intense. “If I can be on stage, I’ll do pretty much anything”, she said, “just so long as no-one can actually see me.” Out of this alluring demand, we made a performance in which she spoke from inside a pop-up tent, several of which populated the stage and in which most of the other performers spent most of the time.

In the intervening decade, the pop-up tent and the encampment have become the global icon for ‘revolutionary’ politics, ranging from the No Borders and Camp for Climate Action events from 2005-2010 in Europe to the events in Cairo’s Tahrir Square in early 2011 and subsequent urban occupations across the globe. Refugee, transit and internment camps multiplied across Africa, the Middle East and the borders of Europe as new political and paramilitary forces threatened the fragile integrity of post-colonial states. Camps for hundreds of thousands sprang up after the increasing frequency of ‘natural’ weather-related disasters. Glamping (luxury camping) became the new middle-class holiday of choice in Britain and everyone, or so it seemed, camped at music festivals everywhere. Marking this global proliferation of the camp and its growing

cultural visibility, Charlie Hailey's *Camps: A Guide to 21<sup>st</sup> C. Space* provided a 500-page text and image survey, proposing the camp as the contemporary space that most clearly 'registers the struggles, emergencies and possibilities of global existence' (Hailey 2009). In a curious coincidence, just as the tents were going up in Tahrir Square in February 2011, the Camp for Climate Action, a grassroots UK network that had organized a series of direct action camps against large-scale sources of carbon dioxide emissions since 2008, effectively dissolved itself, announcing that it would not initiate another national camp. The most dedicated climate campers were tired and many felt the camp as a genre of direct action and movement-building was tired too and, drawing on the astute know-how of anarchist organizing, felt that it should be quickly retired before its anticipated recuperation. But less than eight months later, the tents went up again, first in New York's Zuccotti Park, to be rapidly followed by Occupy encampments outside London's St. Paul's Cathedral and in hundreds of other towns and cities across the world, only to be forcibly cleared by police a few months later.

The gains and losses of Occupy – as with the events in Egypt and so many of the other forms of protest camp and urban occupation since 2011 - are still being measured by some, forgotten by many. But the measuring and counter-measuring often speaks in the binary language of 'concrete' successes and – more often – failures to realize political goals in a sustained fashion, even when, as with Occupy, the absence of specific goals and demands was claimed as a core strategy that differentiated it from previous forms of protest camp. Rather than further mine the forms and uses of failure within artistic practice, this essay attempt to weave a relationship between the performance aesthetics of the camp, organized around a dialectic of ecstatic revelation and clandestine concealment, and a performance ethics of the camp, organized around a combination of

inspiring but fragile belonging, violent displacement, defeat and despair. Interpreting the camp as a work of art that stands alone, it will attempt to read a constellation of contemporary camps as indeed an emblematic kind of 'negative theatre': a form of political manifestation that complicates and confounds a sense of what might be reckoned a political success whilst simultaneously functioning as the material signature and symptom of a systemic failure elsewhere in the organization of civil society.

While nomadism has long been a privileged theoretical form of radical subjectivity since the work of Deleuze and Guattari in the 1960s, the actual experience of contemporary nomads - migrants and refugees of all kinds - has been subject to increasingly literal forms of lock-down and confinement, often embodied in particular kinds of temporarily permanent camp. In a very literal sense, the camp arises where existing material, social and perhaps even psychic configurations have been destroyed or cannot (or will not), for whatever reason, 'house' a particular constituency of their existing inhabitants. Thus, in a sense, the camp could be interpreted as the physical accommodation of a *failure to accommodate*, in all senses of the word.

The camp's braiding of revelation and concealment (there it is, but what is actually to be seen from its 'outside'?) also expresses contemporary ambivalences about the value, necessity and efficacy of not just of visibility but of the very act of performance itself, considered as the public completion of an intentional action, in both the politics of performance and the performance of politics. Hence the attractions of the clandestine, withdrawal, exit, escape, inactivity and failure within more recent understanding of what it might mean to resist the vicissitudes of the totality formerly known as capitalism (the new inactivist slogan might be: *don't just do something, sit there!*). The question then arises as to what happens when failure as such is made to appear and congeals into

a set of iterative representations. And what happens when, given the academic capital it has already accrued, failure becomes too successful for its own good, when it coagulates into an easily recognizable idiom or actually becomes a bearer of value? Given that familiar impasse, then what might happen between the failure of failure (its recuperation as value, even if only in realm of art) and the complete withdrawal of whatever it is that fails into imperceptibility (the rejection of value *tout court*)? Exploring the camp as an emblematic form of 'failed' political performance makes it possible to ask what it might mean to *act* today without success and beyond failure – whilst lacking the capacity to make a fully convincing response.

Despite their obvious differences, contemporary urban protest camps share an essential identity: they mark the appearance and 'self-placement' of a heterogeneous public in central and symbolically significant urban spaces. Unlike marches or riots, camps involve a particular kind of place-making within which almost the entire infrastructure of material and social existence (from food, shelter and sanitation through to education, political process and ritual celebration) is recreated anew in miniature. To camp in this mode means to live in public with friends and strangers as a symbolic act, in a parallel existence that continues inside and alongside the leviathan of everyday life. These encampments also share similar organizational and social forms, differently inflected in each location but remarkably consistent in many respects. These similarities, based on indifference to existing forms of political party, the axiomatic use of consensus-decision making and absence of a formally identified leadership, have been described upon in dozens of books, special academic journal issues, blogs and email discussion lists. But in almost all these perspectives, the experience of the camp as an ethico-aesthetic environment - capable of exerting a profound emotional and intellectual affect on those

who constitute it - is quickly displaced by the assorted discourses of occupation and their wider political ramifications. Here, I would like to specifically address the camp as what Michel Foucault called a *dispositif* and what Giorgio Agamben calls, in English translation, an apparatus.

An apparatus is:

a kind of formation... that as a given historical moment has as its major function the response to an urgency... a certain manipulation of relations of forces, of a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them and to utilize them.

(Foucault quoted in Agamben 2009: 2)

As such, an apparatus is made up of a set of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, laws, administrative measures and protocols, philosophical, moral positions and so on. While it is not clear, there is a strong sense for both writers that the apparatus is always a systemic form of disciplinary capture, control and governance, rather than one for emancipation or liberation. If so, then the camp in some of its more recent manifestations is more like a minor *counter-apparatus* – a response to an urgency generated out of a crisis that has overcome its hegemonic other. Like the apparatus, the camp as counter-apparatus is also a device of capture and of subjectification, but one that necessarily stages its own formation and dissolution. But before we can go further with this suggestion, there are two serious semantic problems.

Firstly, the very phrase ‘the camp’ carries a burden of history that cannot be simply shrugged off: the history of 20<sup>th</sup> C. internment, massacre and genocide that has also been articulated in the philosophy of Agamben himself. In a number of related essays, Agamben identifies the camp ‘not as an historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past ... but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living’ (1997: 106). Simply through sharing the same name, if nothing else, the multiplicity of camps that populate political space today stand in the shade of this history, facing any attempt to reflect on their aesthetics or ethics with its own ethical difficulty – any properly critical analysis ought not to be deceived by superficial resemblances that privilege generic appearances over specific causes and contexts.

The sociologist Adam Ramdan has investigated the experience of another form of camp not discussed by Agamben but which stands in some kind of basic historical relation to his widely adopted understanding of the camp as an expression of proliferating ‘states of exception’ within the global political landscape: the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere. One of the oldest of these camps is Nahr al-Bared, established as a cluster of tents in 1948 in Lebanon. The camp grew and transformed over the next 60 years, acquired a complex architectural and service infrastructure to become a kind of frontier town and a significant hub in the ‘grey’ economy of the region. In 2007, the camp, home to 35,000 people, was completely destroyed in a 104-day long conflict between Lebanese and Israeli military forces. Interviewing former residents about their experience in the camp, Ramdan discovered an extraordinary range of responses, including one that declared that despite some of the highest levels of overcrowding, chronic disease and poverty in such populations globally that, according to one former long-term resident, “no people in the world lived a better life than we did”

(Ramdan 2010:54). In this kind of response, we are confronted with an experience that refutes a sense of the camp as *only* a space of dislocation, repression and dehumanization and instead offered a paradoxical version that *also* includes particular kinds of belonging, emancipation and joyful affirmation.

According to Ramdan and several of his interviewees, it was it was only after the camp was destroyed that its inhabitants truly understood what it meant to them. It was in the semi-permanence of the camp – the controlled space of displacement, exile and transience - that the idea of Palestine as a past and future place of habitation was most easily cultivated. Once the camp had gone, this task of imagination was made much more difficult. Here, we are faced once again with the uneasy truth of a polity that only grasps itself as such after its own destruction. In a quasi-theatrical twist that no longer seem as strange as it might, Nahr al-Bared is being entirely re-built from scratch by UN, precisely according to the neighbourhood ground plan that had evolved in a largely improvised way during the camp's 60-year evolution into a town.

As well as Nahr al-Bared, the camps that Agamben has in mind stand uneasily in relation to others that his analysis does not recognize but nevertheless surely form part of the 'hidden matrix' of political space that it describes: the music festival, the family holiday camp, the scout camp, groups of dispossessed American home owners congregating in suburban public forests or parking lots, corporate-sponsored hacker camps and so-called terrorist training camps, or any of the other forms of camp collected in Hailey's extensive and disturbingly even-handed compendium, (Hailey 2009). Here, the sheer ideological and contextual diversity of the camp seems to negate any productive attempt at generalization. Yet the paradoxical stories of and from Nahr al-Bared suggest an



understanding of the political meanings and significance of even a single manifestation of the camp that unsettles any simple categorization. This understanding is at once more nuanced but also more ambivalent: the camp as an intensive place of binding and unbinding, of belonging and alienation, of subjection and identification. While there are arguments that would point to the post-colonial blindness of making easy associations between different forms of camp, which are part of complex, singular histories, there seems to be something that nevertheless invites us to find associations, or even to invent them if we cannot find them. For example, the visual and material form of the contemporary protest camp and its mimetic reproduction across different times and spaces is striking – even the blue tarpaulin so familiar in modern encampments of all kinds finds its serendipitous political precursor in the description of the biblical Tabernacle (a portable tent of layered curtains by most accounts) by the Romano-Jewish historian Josephus: ‘and great was the surprise of those who viewed these curtains at a distance, for they seemed not at all to differ from the color of the sky’ (Josephus 1999: 123). On the one hand, we ought to put these kinds of observation in their place as spurious resemblances, veiling very different conditions and contexts: the protest camps seen in 2011 and afterwards in the democracies of the global north are entirely different in their causes and meanings. But on the other hand, is it quite so easy to separate out the camp as a mode of political action (through forms of very public appearance) from its manifestation as a response to an immediate human need for shelter, food and safety?

To enter into the life of the camp is to participate in a series of percepts and affects that both stand alone and are shared with other iterations. The camp is a portable and integrated bloc of sensations, as well as a manifestation of ‘structural’ forces that bind a

singular manifestation to a specific time, a place or an authorial name. A perspective from the theatre permits us to give a greater significance to appearances and to understand that encountering appearance is not restricted to the perspective of the spectator's gaze, but to a more symbiotic relationship between watching and doing, standing back and joining in, separation and engagement. Like the bazaar or street market, the camp does not necessarily give much of itself away to those who just want to look from a safe distance. On some occasions, the walkthrough affords a different view, revealing a variety of openings onto micro-worlds in confined spaces, some concealed or shut off from further engagement, others offering proximity and intimacy that are direct, vulnerable and surprising. At other times, the camp appears almost empty, a ghost town, a sham occupation, an abandoned theatre set, poorly constructed out of makeshift materials. There is no place from which to fully experience the camp, even though its limited size and constrained boundaries appear to offer just such a possibility. Perhaps to *exist* in the camp is precisely this experience: not being able to grasp what appears as a readily available experience.

The second sematic problem surrounding the multiple appearances and meanings of the camp offers an opportunity here. Just after the invitation to contribute to this volume arrived, a friend asked what I was working on. I said I was thinking about working on the camp. She thought I meant 'camp' as in the ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical sensibility that Susan Sontag describes in her 1964 essay 'Notes on Camp'. No, no, I said, not that kind of camp, I'm interested in *camping*, specifically the urban protest camp as a device for recent forms of protest and occupation. But I was also left with the provocative thought that perhaps the urban protest camp *was* inescapably camp: ostentatious, exaggerated, affected and theatrical.

I went back to Sontag's essay. Here is what she writes by way of an introduction:

the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric - something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques. [...] To talk about Camp is therefore to betray it. If the betrayal can be defended, it will be for the edification it provides, or the dignity of the conflict it resolves. For myself, I plead the goal of self-edification, and the goad of a sharp conflict in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to the Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can. For no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyze it; he can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion (Sontag 1994: 274-7).

I sense a 'deep sympathy modified by revulsion' reflected in several of the divergent accounts of the European and North American protest camps of 2011. I sense these mixed feelings most strongly in my own participation in the Camp for Climate Action, a direct action movement active in the UK between 2005 and 2010, whose organizational form and practice are typical of the contemporary urban protest camp. 'Revulsion' here is not meant as a judgment or dismissal, but simply registered as an affective response, related to experiences of the unfamiliar or discordant. During the extended period in which this essay took shape, the political moment of the 'intentional' protest camp-as-occupation appeared to fade as quickly as it had arisen. Some wondered if the 'folk

politics' of the protest camp and city square occupation needed to be supplemented with more organizationally robust political forms - the party - or more practical, economically focused objectives – state-sponsored automation and universal basic income (Dean 2016, Srnicek & Williams 2015). But what has actually endured and proliferated is the camp as unplanned refuge for those displaced by war, violence, hunger and economic precarity. These are the camps that rightly demand our attention today in order that they might, in some future world, no longer need to exist. But in what follows, the aim is to return the ambivalence of the protest camp as a mode of theatricalized political appearing in order to see what might be worth preserving – and to do so without entirely separating it out from the other forms of contemporary camp in whose shadow it necessarily stands. The suggestion here is that the urban protest camp sits awkwardly between two seemingly incommensurate versions of 'camp' as political *nomos*: Agamben's somber exposition of a violent history that distorts the contemporary political space and Sontag's dedication to a playful ephemerality that wants to make a mockery of any kind of serious politics. It is this very quality of *awkwardness* – in architectural, organizational, political, psychological and affective terms – that I find engaging and perplexing as an inflection of a politics and aesthetics of failure.

Sontag adopted the 'note' format for her essay, which consists of 58 theses and I follow her example here. These notes are not an attempt to provide an objective analysis of actual manifestations of the protest camp, although they are informed by a wide range of writing, research and documentation undertaken by those who participated in or observed them. Instead, they are an attempt at creating a speculative portrait of the protest camp as a counter-apparatus. This is a portrait that cannot faithfully represent

the situation of each specific camp context – but one which hopes to capture at least some of the family resemblances between them.

So: some notes on the camp.

1.

Let us propose, without any qualification, that the contemporary urban encampment is a theatrical work of art. If so, what are its characteristics? It has its own stage set, routines, musical genres, props, character types and actors. Obviously, it is occupied with duration and endurance, familiar themes from the recent history of performance. It clearly has its own sophisticated understanding of relational aesthetics, audience participation and social engagement. But these familiar performance tropes are not the most essential aspect of the camp's theatricality. If the camp-as-occupation *is* camp (in Sontag's formulation), then what is most theatrical about it is a sense of the frivolous. As an act of architectural and social *détournement*, the camp is both deadly serious and a joke.

2.

The camp has its preferred space of appearance, its specific stage: the public square or park. As a work of art, the camp stands alone, a make-believe space of promiscuous gathering. It is made up out of all the elements of everyday life – from cooking to washing to sleeping - but also set apart from them. It is the zone of the gathering together and intensification of these elements with the normally separate activity of

politics – to the point of their mutual breakdown and unsustainability.

3.

The camp literally gives character back to the seemingly ‘neutral’ space occupied by officially sanctioned forms of trade, leisure and military display. The camp makes space once more into place: somewhere with a history, somewhere that becomes both a destination and a destiny, populated with acts of intimate physical co-presence that have been so central for the development of performance since the 1960s. Or we could say, the camp messes falteringly with the policing of spatial identities and functions, its place-making tinged with awkwardness and the lack of a secure foundation. Tents seem gawkily out of place in the urban context: the pegs don’t work on concrete, granite or tarmac.

4.

Some argue that the Occupy movement in particular was in danger of fetishizing the camp as both means and end in itself, rather than as an instrument for broader political movement building. Indeed, the production of everyday life in the camp can easily become a full-time occupation for a dedicated camper. But that’s the nature of camping – the banal aspects of living take up most of the time. They are the activities that enable unregulated forms of social solidarity, exchange and action. It’s worth recalling the etymology of the word ‘banal’, the medieval French word for communal facilities – washhouses, wells, mills and ovens – the original architecture of the commons. In London and New York, and perhaps other encampments of 2011, it was ultimately not

the campers that were forcibly evicted but the camp itself. Legal proceedings could not banish people from public space, but only tents, marquees, tarpaulins, backpacks, sacks of beans and stacks of books. After the evictions, it was sometimes possible to return to the square or park as a protestor, demonstrator or marcher - but not as a camper. So the camp itself is both actor and object, its making and unmaking are forms of theatrical labour *and* social action.

5.

On joining the camp, you become a particular kind of actor. You make a commitment to step over an invisible boundary that separates onlooker from participant. You commit to making a public spectacle of yourself – most of all, *to* yourself. The camp offers the means to embellish or to denude the self, to become intensively occupied with an alternative everyday. Some feel the need to always be seen to be busy, to be acting. For them, *doing something, anything*, is as important as what it is that is being done. Others feel the urgent need to do nothing and to do it with an equal passion. Activism and inactivism share the square. In those moments where there is nothing to do, nothing to buy, no police to confront, no building to squat, no workshop to attend, what do you do? What are you supposed to do? What are you supposed to *be*? (Wark 2012). That's the existential essence of the camp.

6.

Everyone who comes to camp looks like they are wearing a costume. Even the police

seem to be in fancy dress. It's not just you - everyone looks and behaves a little like a parody of themselves. This is not a problem; it's just how it is.

7.

Being in the camp means spending time in close proximity with intimate strangers. A love for humanity in general can easily develop, whilst at the same time particular people can be a source of frustration and antagonism. Or vice versa: one feels indifference towards the collective, but love for specific others. Fortunately, both the individual tent and the close-knit, provisional and shifting architecture of the camp also allows for concealment and escape. Unlike at the demonstration or march, you can be physically in the camp whilst at the same time not being part of it. But it's difficult to be in a camp state of mind when you are not in the camp, so one returns to or remains in the camp to keep it alive.

8.

Since it axiomatically proclaims that another world is possible, the camp sets itself up as a complete world in miniature. It must then attempt to create itself as a separate self-sustaining organism. This is obviously impossible - which gives the urban camp its vague sense of absurdity. Within many of the urban camps of 2011, water, waste, sanitation and electrical power management rapidly acquired their own dedicated working groups, followed swiftly by groups for catering, transport, internal communications, security, laundry, legal services, media, education, childcare, libraries, first aid and so on. There is a lot to do and the lists get longer. At the same time, the local



mosque or cathedral toilets must also serve hundreds of campers and visitors every day. Starbucks or KFC is the venue for the media group daily meeting that will produce press releases denouncing corporate greed. The local council provides the street cleaners who will be deployed to wash the camp away when the time comes. Sanitation in particular becomes the scene of confrontation between city authorities and occupiers in Europe and North America – camps will be erased as threats to the health of their inhabitants rather as threats to capitalism or the banking system. In the assemblies and meetings, bureaucracy and governmentality are ridiculed, whilst the processes of consensus decision-making slowly succumb to a creeping proceduralism. The laundry and the rubbish become harder to handle. At meetings, no rationale can be found to silence the hecklers, the drunks or the psychologically unbalanced. Someone mentions the need for rules and a means of enforcing them.

9.

As the camp establishes itself *as* a world, it must also secure itself *against* the world. Flimsy and makeshift, the camp is vulnerable, fragile and insecure, made all the more so through its openness and transparency. In the cornucopia of nylon, canvas, plastic sheeting, string, straw, cardboard and scavenged building materials, things are already falling apart and breaking down as they are constructed. It won't be long before you are reminded that state security forces might be operating undercover in every meeting, complicating every human exchange with a sense of distrust and unease. As much as curiosity and enthusiasm, the openness of the camp invites aggression and violation. The camp 'tranquility' teams plan round-the-clock shifts to deal with noise, unwanted intrusions from fellow citizens and random scuffles. In the 2000s, direct action camps in

the UK and elsewhere spent a lot of effort and resources to 'secure the site', to the non-ironic point of erecting their own hired-in security fencing. This world wasn't meant to be like the other one, but what else can you do? So goes the dialectic of autonomy and dependency, inclusion and exclusion, innovation and imitation.

10.

The camp is a zone of emotional and elemental intensity – human life is on show here in concentrated form. There are moments of existential joy and days of despair. There is the erotic energy of close association and the dread of psychic isolation. There is the satisfaction of building, dwelling and thinking in a single activity. There is decay and disintegration, there is sweat, rain, piss and shit, the cold and the heat, dirt, dust, and the wind. There is elation and excitement in the midst of rational processes of collective debate. There is fear and anxiety in the face of the threat and the reality of physical violence. There is pleasure and desire in the experience of a gift economy. There is boredom and frustration in the drawn out procedures of collective decision-making. There is the sense that the world might belong to you and to everyone else and to no one, all at once. There is loneliness and burnout in the effort to maintain solidarity, to keep up appearances, to tolerate those who cannot tolerate. Burn out and exhaustion are favorite camp tropes – just look at Jack Smith, burnt out and exhausted before he's barely awake.

11.

Every organization or apparatus to some extent rehearses and repeats the lack or need for which it proposed itself as the remedy. Military or 'security' organizations do not work to decrease military activity or to increase security – rather they intensify the arrangements of resources and discourses around militarism or security, further driving innovation in these spheres. So it is that camps appear as places of social aggregation and disaggregation, of the establishment of a collective and its disintegration.

Apparently, a part of the Zuccotti Park encampment, populated by a particular class of tent and occupier, quickly became known as its version of the city's Upper West Side. Stories of camp experience are full of disappointment, anger and alienation as much as elation, joy and empowerment. 'Occupy – The End of the Affair' is how one female camper titles her tender but also bitter reflections (Anonymous 2012).

12.

In his cynical yet optimistic book from 2007, *Species Being and Other Stories*, the pseudonymous Frère Dupont, the purveyor of a niche brand of nihilist communization, provides the perfect aphorism with which to think about the camp: 'Organization appears where existence is thwarted' (Dupont 2007: 55). As a counter-apparatus, the camp is an organization that seeks to make time and space for *existence*, for the ungoverned expression of life. But if it is also true that existence can only appear where organization is thwarted, the camp is an organizational paradox.

13.

In the theatre, in English, we *strike the show* – dismantle the set, put away the props and costumes, pack up the van. We also *strike camp*. Both occasions are filled with nostalgia and sadness. I remember childhood holidays, folding up damp canvas to reveal the worm-ridden, pallid grassy patch on which we had pitched our tent. Strings were untied and tied, zips unzipped and zipped back up, washing lines taken down, swimming things dried, pots and pans put away. Twisted metal pegs left in the earth, refusing to be extracted.

There is a fast-motion video that shows the striking of the 2011 camp in Madrid's Puerta del Sol, taken from a vantage point high up at one end of the square. What was unusual about the *acampada* was its decision to dismantle itself with a cheerful melancholy, rather than be evicted and destroyed, as happened in Cairo, New York, London and elsewhere. I imagine that was not an easy agreement to reach by consensus, or even if it was agreed at all. The video is both comical and desolate. Like most things speeded up, it looks a little ridiculous. The end of the camp. The end of the show.

14.

When the camp is gone, it leaves behind a monument to itself, or rather, a counter-monument: the empty stage where it once was. The square assumes a new hallucinatory identity: the space where the camp took place. The historian of the French Revolution, Jules Michelet wrote:

The Champ de Mars! This is the only monument that the Revolution has left.

The Empire has its Column, and engrosses almost exclusively the arch of Triumph; royalty has its Louvre, its Hospital of Invalids; the feudal church of the twelfth century is still enthroned at Notre Dame; nay, the very Romans have their Imperial Ruins, the Thermae of the Caesars!

And the Revolution has for her monument: empty space.

(Michelet quoted in Mitchell 2012)

Walking the square, days or even years after the camp's physical disappearance, we pace out its configuration and remember: here was the... and there was the.... this is where we....

15.

At the Camp for Climate Action in 2008, the declared aim was to shut down one of the Britain's largest emitters of carbon dioxide, the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station, 20 miles east of London. At the end of a week of camping, planning and many other activities in a nearby illegally occupied field, several hundred people attempted a non-violent invasion, accompanied by a policing operation involving over 5000 officers. Nobody got anywhere near the power station, apart from an intrepid group who rowed an inflatable boat into its wastewater outlet. They found the boat as part of a surrealist treasure hunt organized by some other campers, who had buried several of them in secret locations in the area before the camp had even started.

The next day, everyone packed up their tents, took down the large marquees,

dismantled the toilets we'd lovingly built from scrap wood, loaded 50 bins of composted shit and dozens of piss-soaked hay bales onto a farmer's truck, searched the field for every last potato peeling and cigarette butt. And then they went home.

A few months later, a news item appeared in the middle of various national newspapers. Someone had apparently broken into the same power station, deactivated one or more of the combustion chambers and then walked out the premises unnoticed.

In 2010, Climate Camp staged a much smaller camp on the grounds of the Royal Bank of Scotland head office outside Edinburgh. The bank was centrally implicated in the financial crisis of 2008 and had been bailed out and taken into public ownership at a cost of around 50 billion euros. After an intensive period of self-reflection the Camp for Climate Action effectively dissolved itself, deciding not to hold a camp in 2011. A few weeks later the tents were going up in Tahrir Square.

16.

Of course, there's always time for a comeback. As we never tire of saying in the theatre business, the show must go on, whoever is missing, whatever the accidents and setbacks that arise. For the theatre artist, the opening performance of every production – which always comes too soon - is typically the point of invention and departure for the next one. What was not achieved in this work might be realized in the next; or perhaps the next work permits the artist to escape the limits, the frustrations and the dead-ends of the last one.

What comes after the camp-as-occupation in the post-political era? Or, perhaps an easier question: what was it that made the camp work, in as much as it had particular kinds of effects that seem to reach far beyond its scale? Dupont narrates a conversation with a friend about pro-revolutionary forms of organization and action. They talk about watching their kids' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dupont writes:

We had both noticed the tenderness between the members of the group and then you said you wish you could be part of something like that, the relations caused by theatre [...]. I mentioned my idea for a brotherhood, the form of which would be determined by some type of ritual. You drifted into your own thought at this stage. You hate all that anarchist stuff, or at least the people involved. You didn't want to talk about them. Then, as if from far away, you said it is the deliberate investment in something that is not real that makes it work. It is the sketching out of an imaginary place and behaving within it as if it were real. It is the expenditure of all that rehearsed energy in one performance that causes the specialness. (Dupont, 146)

17.

What did I learn at camp?

I learned that the camp is a space of appearance of something that resembles an authentic public. But it is only a *resemblance* – which is fortunate.

I learned that revolt against a general system is impossible without the simultaneous reproduction of at least some aspects of that system.

I learned that the camp is a theatrical counter-apparatus that has to both organize and disorganize – it brings to awareness the ways in which draws it together and the ways it breaks apart.

I learned that what Wallace Stevens writes of the act of poetic description, might also be said of the camp:

It is an artificial thing that exists,  
In its own seeming, plainly visible,

Yet not too closely the double of our lives,  
Intenser than any actual life could be,

(Stevens 1945: 564)

I learned that the camp is a place of political projections: the attempted retrieval of revolutionary possibilities, of the potency of self-organization, of the libidinal sociality that seems to slumber within the everyday, of an essential human militancy against its current conditions, whatever they may be.

I learned that too much is made of the camp, of what it does and what it means and that its fabric cannot really bear the weight of these projections. The camp struggles with its



own image, which is always more than and less than its actual existence and its inevitable inexistence. Soon after its disappearance, the camp is always claimed, explained and examined, especially by those partial to the theatrical and the performative. The camp will always be analyzed and criticized, understood and recognized, eulogized and finally betrayed, perhaps by those who are of the camp but not exactly in it, like Kant's distant appreciators of the French Revolution.

Above all, I learned that camp is something not real in which one can make a deliberate investment.

This investment has real effects, but they are indeterminate, theatrical effects. They are important in the production of a certain kind of politicized subjectivity and of a restricted milieu that does not take the form either of the political party or the activist network. As Dupont suggests, more like a kind of magic circle – or a theatre troupe. For a political realist, this is the camp's decisive problem: unfortunately, you are not the 99%. You are not even 0.1% of the 99%. Why is it that the majority of the 99% show no interest in you? Why, even after joining in solidarity with you for a day, do they continue to participate in what you see as their own subjugation? Why, after all that has happened, do they not join the camp? (c.f. Dupont 2007:39ff). These are critical questions that anyone in the milieu should research for him or herself. But perhaps the purpose of experimenting with theatricalized rituals of association, such as the camp, is a means by which this milieu might get to know itself better, so as not to repeat itself and its inevitable capture. It may be that the immediate reception and response to these practices beyond this milieu is *not* decisive. An apparatus or counter-apparatus surely takes at least many decades to establish itself.

Organization only appears where existence is thwarted. The camp in all its forms is a mode of organization that is much a symptom of the present moment as it is a place of resistance or dissidence. If organization as such is a response to an original sense of alienation from the present ordering through discontent, the protest camp also realizes, institutionalizes, that alienation as the engine of existence. This means that there is a residue of resentment and discontent that the camp did not, cannot and should not satisfy. Indeed, perhaps its main achievement is to exacerbate it. Such resentment, the wellspring of dissent, is itself a source of perversity that does not run dry. This resentment is not simply a reaction against a particular set of injustices and inequalities. It cannot seek redress through a simple rebalancing or readjustment of the current order. This form of resentment is expressed to confound the means already established for its expression. In a sense, then, we ought to forget the camp as an expression of dissidence. We ought to, in an act of cunning civility, move on. If so, then perhaps the success of the camps of 2011 is precisely their disappearance, their dissolution, their failure. But instead of echoing the aesthetic possibilities and potentials of failure, let us call this kind of failure like it is: defeat. In its plainest sense, to speak of failure is to step into a discourse of self-recrimination and blame, however much we might embrace and redeploy its modes of identification. To fail is to be deficient, to be at fault, to have not accumulated the necessary resources and know-how. Failing, you only have yourself to blame as a consequence of some internal fault or inadequacy. There is a hope that failure might be occupied as subject position that goes against the grain of its binary comparison to success. A hope that failure might be resistant without offering an outward show of defiance. But to be defeated is to have gathered all the resources one has and directed them towards one's enemy – but in that particular encounter, to have

lost. So be it - and if so, then might it not be such a bad idea to carry on camping?

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