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URBAN KIBBUTZ, MUTUAL AID AND SOCIAL EROTISM

Social imagination for a collective society

Tectum

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I   Introduction

We assume that the individual's creative thinking and productive act-
ing within a community is motivated by social phantasy. On the one
hand, this definition of social phantasy subsumes singular actions. Yet
on the other hand, it emphasizes their importance for communities. A
phantasy has to be supported, accepted or rejected by the community.
We speak of collective and individual phantasies. Both sides depend
on each other and are on a permanent exchange mode. It is our thesis
that this relationship is out of balance. The social aspect of the phanta-
sy has comfortably settled in Western welfare societies. One might call
that an achievement. Yet it can also be seen as the decline of the social
itself. Are there any social ideals that do not vanish in the feasability of
wishing? If we recognize the 'not-anymore' of the social as a question
to be discussed, we almost simultanously become aware of the power
of the 'not-yet' of former social utopias. Phantasy itself is not a social
element but a cultural and artistic way of creation. We know that this
creation follows its own rules. As soon as cultural creations have un-
dertaken their way from idea to implementation, they are socially ef-
fective. We can conclude that social life is characterized in this way. To-
day we look at a state of society that reflects a worn-out social phantasy.
Why is that?

In order to understand the term phantasy we need to introduce a few
more thoughts. To illustrate the way phantasy works, it is helpful to fo-
cus on the process of how thoughts emerge and ideas develop. Look-
ing at them closely we can demonstrate how those individual achieve-
ments are registered within communities and how they are supported
or rejected.

First, let us focus on the term creation inherent in the 'acting part' of
phantasy. There are many different meanings to creation. We can sub-
sume them under the metaphor creations. The metaphor of creation is
closely linked to its origin, to the well or spring that provided for its
material. In German the verb *schöpfen* (meaning to take water from a
well or spring) is closely related to the noun creation, which is *Schöp-
fung*. Bearing that in mind, we also have to realize that creation as a
process does not stop because the spring or the well dried out. It can
rather be said that within the process the creative impetus is material-
izing in thoughts and actions and hence is transforming to something

different. By appearing in that way every kind of phantasy is dissolving itself from its origin. The state of a society after this process is characterized by passivity, indifference or isolation and thus reflects this development. In order to draft new social and cultural ideas and gain pleasure in designing, we need a spiritual and emotional state that catalyses and transforms where resistance and stagnation want to hold on to a status quo.

This book's essays feel the need to open up the discussion and offer realistic estimations.

Achim Trautvetter introduces the discussion on the actuality and development of traditionalized social phantasies. When writing about new urban Kibbutz concepts he looks at its development at a late moment of its history. Yet, he follows the historic traces of these movements. He is able to show a correlation between anarchist phantasies of the 19th century and new communitarian modells in the urban spaces of the 20th century. With regard to the Israeli phenomenon he also does include and reflect the shift of perspective from Europe to Israel. Trautvetter demonstrates that the new urban Kibbutzim have evolved from traditional models whose original social phantasies have worn-out and were not able to adapt to other economic developments taking place simultanously.

New urban Kibbutzim do not serve as an answer easy at hand when discussing the failure of socialist-anarchistic communities. Yet they are an experiment to counter-read the social phantasy of the founding generation with Israel's requirements of today. The paradox between practicability and disqualification of a social phantasy cannot be solved but only made use of and be reflected for the practice in urban communities. The new urban communities actualize the question of how social phantasies are motivated and remind us of the widely spread living and anarchy movements one hundred years ago. Those did not have an urban vision but rather a landscape (Tessin) and a mountain (Monte Verità) being their focal point (Szeemann 1978).

It is more a hill than a mountain, but definitely the atmosphere of an abandoned landscape, that inspired a group of young Israeli artists to work on the social phantasy of their grandparents in the project discussed in Anna Maria Maier's essay. The specific feature of this essay is that the figure of the artist is put to test with regard to her or his cre-

ating and activating role within social phantasies. The artistic simulation of a kibbutz on the hills of Jerusalem by the artist collective Bait Rek – Empty House asks about the social and utopist potential of artistic work. Can it serve as a possible source for bringing back the social into phantasy's focus?

Referring to the questions and motivations of the artist collective the essay follows up on the controversy that spans between the realms of society and art and traces those developments back to the counter-cultures at the turn of 19th and 20th century. Today's disenchantment and economically exploitation of those former important frictions and spaces of phantasy is discussed critically. The essay thus debates the simulated reactivation of a social phantasy deemed worn-out and parallely examines the gradual integration of countercultures and artistic phantasies into the economic exploitation cycle. Seen as a performance between utopia and crisis, its materials enable to recognize a multi-layered fabric of historic and current ideas, geo- and sociopolitical agendas, local and global movements, artistic and philosophical-theological tensions. This reading demonstrates how a certain timidness towards a serious call for change is obfuscated by artistic and crafty action. With the strong focus the collective puts on the pro and contra of their own role as ameliorative designers of society and even more so with their staging of a Kibbutz as a temporary, aesthetic theme park, they legitimate the failure of their project and the contents they refer to – thus making a mockery of the quest for social utopias.

The contribution 'Memes, Genes and Codes' by Arthur Engelbert provides a conceptual foundation for discussing the achievements of societal phantasies by looking at two ways of coding: at the inscribed hereditary information (genes) and the conditioned cultural information (memes). 'Memes, Genes and Codes' is a chapter from the Book "Help!".[1] In advancing this approach Engelbert introduces the term "eroteme" that enriches the analogy of genes and memes by a third way. The notes of conversations that Engelbert had with the mathematician and physician Adalbert Tomaschewski in Berlin this year enable a different perspective on the mechanisms of social phantasy. This perspective shifted from the mountain of truth (Monte Verità) to the dilemma

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[1]   "Memes, Genes and Codes", in: Engelbert, Arthur: Help! Gegenseitig behindern oder helfen. Eine politische Skizze zur Wahrnehmung heute. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012, p. 26–35.

of a relational observer position in a laboratory. "Erotemes" visualize something that was covered by focusing on Genes and Memes. "Erotemes" are relations of social phantasies within reality even though they are abstract relations. In artistic concepts they can anticipate their time, reinvent themselves and produce role models. Tomaschewski unfolds the idea of the "Erotism of the Social". We have picked up this notion. It is about the strategic expansion from a social to a speculative phantasy. This describes how the individual as well as communities are located in a continuation back and forth between lust for offense and progression on the one hand and yearning for failure on the other hand. Both the individual as well as the community are chained to this paradigm. Hence, societies live in a state of permanent (self)violation and (self)satisfaction. 'Erotemes' help us to understand this principle as they negotiate between memes and genes. At the horizon of possibilities, a perspective of regained freedom is shining, in a meteoric manner, taming the interdependence of lust and satisfaction by means of speculative phantasy.

II   Achim Trautvetter: New Urban Kibbutzim

A model for communitarian concepts in urban spaces

> "For the last three decades we have felt that we were living in the initial phases of the greatest crisis humanity has ever known. It grows increasingly clear to us that the tremendous happenings of the past years, too, can be understood only as symptoms of this crisis. It is not merely the crisis of one economic and social system being superseded by another, more or less ready to take its place; rather all systems, old and new, are equally involved in the crisis. What is in question, therefore, is nothing less than man's whole existence in the world.
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> A crisis of this kind cannot be overcome by struggling back to an earlier stage of the journey, but only by trying to master the problems as they are, without minimizing them. There is no going back for us, we have to go through with it. But we shall only get through if we know where we want to go."
>
> Martin Buber, Paths in Utopia

Society in Crisis and the Quest for Answers

The economic crises conceals the social crisis. Following the manifesto of the 'Invisible Committee' (see Invisible Committee 2010) or the Hardt's and Negri's proclamations (see Hardt and Negri 2013) social crisis has reached a point from where radicalization and collective reorganization is inevitable. This becomes evident from new forms of protest that have risen within contemporary European societies. Examples would be the uprisings in French banlieues, the student protests and squatting activities in Spain, the Occupy-Movement, the struggle for civil rights in Turkey following the confrontations in Istanbul's Gezi Park or the turmoil of Greek society as it boarders collapse.

All these diverse reaction to the social crisis have one thing in common: they catalyze disruptions and dislocations by, among others, economic ills and social injustice. They do result in new forms of social and political actions that translate into the resurgence of particular modes of organization. The reinvigoration of the the anarchist-socialist concept

of mutual help propagated by the Russian thinker Kropotkin more than a hundred years ago (see Kropotkin 1904) is one pertinent example. Initiatives aiming at transformations of society as a whole have emerged across the globe. Athen has seen alternative basic structures being forged by Greek citizens (see Völpel 2013) and in Spain squatters transform houses into collectively owned homes (see Negrete 2013). Mumbai, Istanbul and Mexico City have similarly seen – as Marco L. Rosa shows exemplarily in his book on 'Handmade Urbanism' – the emergence of communitarian projects (see Rosa and Weiland 2013).

In doing so, the actors draw on collective forms of organizations transcending spontaneous reactions to social crises. They have better to be understood as reflected approaches culminating in an emphasis of responsibility and a deep awareness of sustainability and subsistence.[2] Within these newly emerging approaches we find the ideas of mutual help, participation, cooperative action as well as a call for liberation from exploitation and domination that resonate with the founding ideals of the Kibbutz[3] and its original theoretical underpinning.

These very founding ideals were my impulse to devote this work to the phenomenon 'Kibbutz'. Particularly as here questions were and are engaged that are discussed with new verve by collective movements across the globe:

> *How can human beings live together in urban spaces taking social justice, collective responsibility, subsistence and environmen-*

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[2]   Although the notion of subsistence is within debates on sustainability frequently used to index 'subsistence economies' achieved through a return to self-sufficient community gardens or urban farming and as a solution to social and ecological problems, I will use the notion in a broader sense. Writing on the urban communities in Israel – which rarely maintain community gardens etc., but rather rely on generalized economic models of solidarity – subsistence is better to be understood as broader measures to safeguard the provisions for the community by the community.

[3]   Kibbutz (pl. Kibbutzim) is to be translated from the Hebrew as 'gathering, clustering, commune'.