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Negotiating speech and organizational practices: field notes and reflections from two counter-G8 (2007) initiatives.

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Based on empirical research around two events that happened in response to the G8 meetings in Germany in summer 2007, this paper examines relations between the organizational practice and the discourses that set up and guided both these events. One of them was a meticulously coordinated blockade action ("Block G8") close to Heiligendamm, and the other a theory-inspired "summit" calling initiatives to unalign from the education agenda of the G8. While the "Block G8" was an action with a clearly determined goal (blocking several roads), the outcome of âsummitâ was left open. Both events endorsed practices of self-organization, aiming to function in a horizontal, transparent, open and inviting, as much as in a critical, manner.
Despite the different objectives of the events, their aims appeared similar, and indeed some similar problems and organizational symptomatologies emerged in their course. By investigating and juxtaposing the conceptualisations and praxes of "Block G8" and "summit", we hope to address strategies for negotiating the conflicts that arose, so as to further the potential for translations of such rhetoric into practice and vice versa.

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Over a three week period during the end of May into mid June 2007, a variety of political and cultural events took place in anticipation of, and response to, the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany. These included alternative summits, workshops, conferences, plenums, art exhibitions, concerts, and of course demonstrations and protests. Two of these events, the *summit: non-aligned initiatives in education culture* and the *Block G8* blockade action have, despite their radical differences, struck us as particularly compelling as they confronted correlations between speech and praxis in regards to self-organization and accessibility, and the discourses surrounding these.

Throughout and after the two events we considered questions around recent conceptualizations of alternative (non-state affiliated and neoliberal-critical) organizational models and how these can be practically realized. For instance, how can other worlds be possible, and what would these require in terms of shifts in organizational strategies and alignments? How can ideas of horizontality and direct democracy function when put into practice in different milieus? What kinds of symbolic capital come into play in different milieus? What role does visibility play with respect to such events and how do they try to circumnavigate the problems emerging from a need to be visible? And how can we conceive of methodologies for organization that avoid replication of relationships of dominance, specialization, and exclusion?

What we were specifically interested in was how we could trace and address the lines of coincidence and rupture occurring between what was said and what was practiced. We chose to investigate concepts that have gained momentum in recent years, yet are idiomatic in the rhetoric of different organizational practices including neo-liberal economic and social policy as well as critical activist movements: such as transparency, accessibility, collaboration, flexibility, and heterogeneity. We wanted to investigate how discourses around those terms are embedded in the organizational practices of particular G8 counter movements that we participated in, and what could be learned from the

symptomatologies that arose.

This text presents a few of our reflections arising from these two specific initiatives, which we both participated in to varying degrees. For this reason we are only able to speak about what we experienced during the events and their immediate aftermath; what we saw, felt, and heard, and what evolved through processes of conversation with others that were present. In addition to these experiences locate our analysis in official documentations; calls to action, websites, flyers, brochures and media coverage to further locate our analysis. The research we conducted is therefore embedded in contexts that are necessarily highly situational and relational, and consequentially partial and fragmented.

Much of this investigation was informed by dialogues and queries, by attempting to negotiate through and around tensions between theory and praxis, or rhetoric and action. While we would certainly not argue that theory or rhetoric in itself does not have the potential to create or intervene in events, our primary concern here was the practical realizations of organizational ideas designed to provide alternatives to dominant hierarchical and representative democratic structures. This focus on the very material aspects of the events and how they developed means that much of this text is informed by observant participation, which is in part manifest by an unfortunate (and perhaps superfluous) relegation of theory to a supplementary position. However, our intention with this text was simply to contemplate some of the structural mechanisms of these two organizing bodies, and to offer our initial responses not as conclusions but as impetus for ongoing exchanges on how we could realize alternatives to the exploitation and domination characterized by the velocity and ubiquity of global capitalism.

A contextualization: the new organization of dissent

The question has always been organizational, not at all ideological: is an organization possible which is not modeled on the apparatus of the State, even to prefigure the State to come?

Both the *summit* and the *Block G8* emerged explicitly from within socio-political and cultural networks concerned with addressing inequalities associated with neoliberal capitalist conditions. In concurrence to this, a concern of such networks has been the reevaluation and reinvention of political resistance, in order to shift away from ideological and organizational structures that replicate hierarchies culminating in dominance and exclusion.

These new organizational models adopted by resistance movements (particularly those critical of global capitalism and economic rationalism) have increasingly developed over the past decade or so. Aspects of these have been visible, for example, since the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994, and spectacularly during and post the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in late 1999. This has been in part influenced by the acceleration of globalization, which has prompted new technologies and socio-political and cultural mechanisms through which activism has been integrally transformed. The Seattle protests inspired and shaped much of the protest actions in the succeeding years, such as counter-G8 activities and protests, specifically through its use of the Internet achieved a gathering of unexpected scale.

What denoted those events such as Seattle as indicating a paradigm shift in the articulation of protest was what was later conceptualized as the âmovement of movementsâ: the temporary convergences of multivalent disparate international individuals, groups and organizations to voice dissent against corporate driven globalization and exploitative models of free trade. This movement not only consists of protest but also incorporates counter-summits, World Social Forums, all kinds of networks, initiatives, activities and structures.

What became clear in the Seattle event was the emergence of new networks and webs of resistance, which were comprised of linked constellations of participants and priorities united in response to the global inequalities created through neo-liberal trade policies and economic rationalism. These networks were predominantly established by independent factions in attendance, detaching themselves from the constraints of traditional representative parties and institutions. Critical of the operations of power in such structures, these networks manifest alternatively to the archetypal hierarchical organization or party models. As David Graeber notes, it is no longer about seizing the power dynamics of the state, but more about âdelegitimizing and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy from it.â

Unlike forms of decision making and representation reminiscent of sovereign governance, networks (as was clear in Seattle) do not have a leader; command and control mechanisms are fluid and decentralized, and are nebulous and open enough to be able to accommodate diverse interests and agendas within an aggregate focused on a singular target. The concentration on ideological affiliation and conflict is replaced with an intention to create different methodologies and forms for organization, participation (as opposed to delegation), consensus (as opposed to majority) and exchange. In this process, a proliferation of hybrid organizational instruments and techniques are constantly being tested and debated.

For Michael Hardt it is precisely this network format, and the arenas opened up by these experimental organizations, that allowed different groups with different agendas to come into contact with one another in a productive way during the Seattle protests. Hardt argues that such networks replace oppositionality with multiple positions; the dialectic is superseded by triangulations of third, fourth and indefinite points of connexion. As he states,

This is one of the characteristics of the Seattle eventsâ¦groups which we thought in objective contradiction to one another â environmentalists and trade unions, church groups and anarchists â were suddenly able to work together, in the context of the network of the multitude.

Although Hardtâs account here may be interpreted as somewhat generous, the adoption of the network format does actively move to transfigure the ways that activist groups and agencies relate to one another, to greater or lesser success. What is attempted through the spaces opened up by these explorations and re-imaginings of constituent powers is a re-invention of notions and practices of consensual and direct democracy.

The G8 in Heiligendamm, Germany, June 2007

So how was this recent history and context of the global resistance networks manifest in Germany? The two case studies we are examining represent constituents of these international alliances. Both proclaimed to be invested in realizing non-hierarchical organizational processes, which involved the deliberate concatenation of heterogeneous participants, new forms of action, transparent processes and open accessibility.

The *Block G8* blockade was instigated during the final days of the weeklong counter G8 program in and around Rostock and Heiligendamm. The larger program consisted of numerous demonstrations attracting crowds of protesters (around 80.000 for the International Demo on Saturday June 2nd; around 15-20.000 at the migration demo June 4th), workshops, an art space, concerts and an alternative summit as well as opportunities for more informal meetings. Three camps were constructed for the campaign at which action trainings, info sessions, plenums and social events were also held. The blockade began on the official inauguration of the G8 summit for 2007, on Wednesday 6th June. It was conceived to span the duration of the meeting, which it succeeded in doing. The blockade itself

consisted of thousands of people sitting and standing, sleeping, dancing and generally socializing on main transport avenues to the meeting place. The event itself seemed to be met with great pleasure by those taking part and it was often relayed that the blockade had the atmosphere of a festival, which was strengthened with sound systems in some parts and a sense of solidarity and caring throughout. The blockade occurred in unison with autonomous blockades, however for many, due to the magnitude of the participants, it became an iconic event. By the end of the series of interventions, it became progressively difficult to distinguish the boundaries of Block G8 from many of the other blockading actions.

The *summit* around ânon-aligned initiatives in education cultureâ was an event held in Berlin prior to the G8, and may be seen as an attempt to organize a meeting in a context similar to the World Social Forum. This format was not based upon protest but resembled more of a congress or conference. It drew upon specific ideas, histories and discourses (e.g. non-alignment, summit, self-organization, un-learning, etc) which involved much academic reference and language. The three days of *summit* were comprised of 60 parallel events that included presentations, caucuses, and workshops. It was re/presented by a language that structured these as radical fora for exchange, debate and action. This was to become possible via access to large amounts of space and a gathering of around 200 people from divergent backgrounds and approaches (art, academia and pedagogy, activism, union organizing, hacking, journalism, sex work, etc), the generous offer of spaces for those to meet as well as the availability of some travel grants. Through the presence and placement of various established academic personalities and a somewhat centralized way of programming, a dominance of certain discourses and practices emerged that seemed to exclude a range of more activist and grass roots approaches and viewpoints.

What relates these two events in our minds, aside from the organizational intentions, was how certain characteristics of centralization and governance managed to permeate the actualizations of what were, at least discursively, promising speculations for practical mobilization and action. While rhetorically almost faultless, some of the manifestations of these sentiments left space for more to be desired. While both events were often pleasurable and provided ample opportunity for dialogue, learning and creativity, we find it important to analyze some of the tensions and contradictions that erupted in order to locate the quite considerable potentials of such endeavors. For, when judged under value parameters of success or failure, these initiatives become less interesting than when their symptomatology becomes exposed for reflection and further experimentation.

Block G8

Before and during the counter G8 mobilizations, which took place over a week in Rostock and Heiligendamm, extensive coalitions of affinity groups and movements were formed to collectively organize and assemble blockades designed not only to disable the traffic of delegates, workers, goods and services to and from the meeting, but also to make the breadth and density of the resistance against the G8 and its mechanisms internationally visible. Comprising one segment of the larger weeklong constellation of counter G8 demonstrations, workshops and actions taking place in and around Rostock and Heiligendamm, the blockade was interesting to us due to its potential longevity and consequences as a protest action. Additionally, more than any other of the actions it was a direct gesture of mass civil disobedience, designed to sustainably reiterate dissent and resistance through the many diverse and not necessarily associated networks and individuals intending to remain in cooperation and solidarity until the objective of blockading as many roads for as long as possible had been attained.

The predominant call for blockading came from an alliance of over 128 groups including radical left, church, environmental and anti-nuclear, trade unions, youth political parties, non-violent action groups and anti-fascist and anti-racist groups conceived under the slogan of âBlock G8. Move. Block. Stayâ.

Whether this was intended to function as the principal blockade of the event is unclear, however what was clear was that due to the sheer quantity of different groups involved in, or supportive of, the organizing process and enaction, and the aim to blockade to function through corporeal mass over any other means, the high number of activists taking part (over 10, 000 covering two major roads leading to the summit, with other autonomous groups blocking two other thoroughfares) ensured both mainstream and alternative media attention.

In order to generate as much participation as possible, a number of calls for the blockading action were circulated by some of the organizing groups, including an umbrella *Block G8* call, as well as from FelS (Für eine linke Strömung/ for a left wing current), the Interventionist Left, and various Antifascist factions. Common to all was a particular evocative rhetoric of global solidarity, heterogeneity and liberation from ideologies of domination and discrimination associated with capitalist and state machinations. Assurances were made to radical and open modes of organization that not only acted to âdelegitimate capitalâs domination, neoliberalism, and therefore the G8â but also, âultimately implies at the same time to reinvent the left and the social movementsâ. It was also argued that the event would arise from new conceptualizations, as outlined in the *Block G8* FAQ,

Block G8 is a completely new concept, woven together from our manifold experiences, incorporating the advantages of many strategies of various political traditions.

In order to look at how a relationship between a delegitimation of neoliberal capitalism and radically new strategic organizational models could be discerned, it seemed necessary for us to examine the rhetoric surrounding âhorizontalâ and consensual, post representative methods of social and political organization in regards to the Block G8 campaign, and directly address issues of flexibility, accessibility and transparency that were made visible.

Organizing Block G8

In their call to action, the Interventionist Left made reference to a broader context of political activism that we have introduced as inferred by the term, which,

âⁱsince Seattle, has been called the âmovement of movementsâ. âWeâ refers to a global constellation of emancipatory politics that extends beyond the left, as well as the older and newer social movements.

Typical of the concept of the âmovement of movementsâ and the resistance against global capitalism are certain strategies for cooperative organization and action. In analyzing the construction for the *Block G8* event, we found it important to do so in the context of what is inferred by the âmovement of movementsâ and how such a discourse operates as indicating alternative models of decision-making processes. As outlined in the introduction, associated with the âmovement of movementsâ is a mode of political organization that espouses horizontality, self-organization, networks, consensus, direct democracy, and multiplicity, over hierarchical or sovereign models, and representational politics. Unlike previous modes of organization in which ideology or the party was central, this form of organization relies heavily on transitory convergences of manifold micro networks, individuals and affinity groups coming from different spaces of the âleftâ spectrum, from conservative to autonomist, under a common goal or intention. In the case of the organization for the *Block G8*, this was reflected in the diversity of the groups in support of, and involved in, the development of the campaign. Aligning itself with this conception of the movements of movements, the praxis of the G8 organizing bodies made attempts at overcoming some of the problems associated with previous âverticalâ organizational processes. However, despite the rhetoric of flexibility, heterogeneity, horizontality, and non-representationality, it became clear to us that some material tensions and limitations nonetheless actualized and required further extrapolation and exploration.

âThis is what democracy looks like?â

One of the catch cries heard resounding throughout many counter summit demonstrations in recent history has been âthis is what democracy looks like!â One of the explicit calls by FelS was for âequal rights for everyoneâ. In thinking about this organization of dissent, it seemed to us to be urgent to investigate what some of the practical realizations of such sentiments might mean for the internal structural mechanisms and strategic processes of the Block G8 action specifically, and more generally in the context of a mass mobilization necessarily made up of singular and collective national and international players presenting polyvalent interests, desires and agendas.

Like many of the recent mobilizations against state institutions and political summits, a preoccupation with global networking and solidarity meant that a significant number of international actors participated in the counter G8 interventions. According to reflections from a debriefing session held in London in late June 2007, this was estimated to be around 30 percent. This percentage was comprised largely of European activists but also included activists from the Asia Pacific region, Africa, North America, South America and Canada.

The presence of international actors in the later stages of the decision-making procedures with no tangible prior involvement exposed an element of disjunction. The fact that the organizational process had begun far in advance of the counter G8 events meant that as international participants with no access to previous meetings, our first instance of contact with the action committee occurred either shortly before leaving for the protest or a few days later during discussions held at the camps (specifically Reddelich).

These plenums were held frequently on the days directly preceding the action, at an even accelerated rate on the day before the event and primarily consisted of interlocutors or spokespeople from each affinity group coming together to apparently consolidate logistical aspects of the action and to act as information carriers between the macro and micro networks and collectives.

Flexibility

After conversing with a number of people involved in the meetings as members of affinity groups, participants of the actions, and through different debriefing forums, certain apprehensions were brought to light, surrounding issues of flexibility, heterogeneity and transparency.

Because of the specific geographical location of the organizing committee (based in Germany), many of the international actors were absent for the long term planning of the blockade. When it became possible to engage in discussion, the procedural operations and forums in which they occurred appeared to be fundamentally striated. Amongst a number of the people we spoke to, there was a general feeling that this inability to be active in the process led to an alienation and exclusion from the decisions that were made. It was frequently commented that it seemed as if the strategies had been rigorously predetermined and sedimented so that any attempt to offer suggestions or alternatives was, while met with hospitality and generosity, nonetheless basically impotent to effect changes. This in itself was not surprising, or even particularly unreasonable. Clearly it was necessary to develop structures and establish certain protocols in order to mobilize a sustainable and functioning mass blockade. What was difficult however was that despite the rhetoric of flexibility and horizontality, as international participants there was an impression that as a central organizing committee had been previously established, it was almost impossible to gain access to or intervene in the action process.

Block G8 did not at any time allude that this would not be as such, and were in fact were openly supportive of actions occurring autonomously to their central blockade. Nor did they advocate themselves as the paramount action. Through all the disparate media they presented themselves as but one option for intervention. Despite this there was the impression that the blockade was to take centre stage, at least quantitively, and all other actions were destined to remain peripheral and diffuse. This may have, in conjunction with a range of other factors, consequentially become the case due to their

sheer presence and visibility in comparison to other initiatives which was partially due to their necessarily high levels of organization and public recognisability (which extended to include a website, newspaper and other material publications, action training days, regular meetings, t-shirts, jingles, banners, badges etc).

Heterogeneity

In one debriefing issued in late June 2007 by some autonomists in Berlin, an acknowledgement was made that due to problems plaguing their own organizational and collective processes and to poor information infrastructures, a number of activists had ended up supporting and participating in the main blockade rather than constructing autonomous actions. It is also not unviable for us to imagine that other individuals, or affinity groups, unaffiliated or unfamiliar with the constellation of established social and political movements, were also spontaneously drawn to the Block G8 initiative, not only in solidarity but perhaps also due to confusion, lack of information, or experience. The intention of the Block G8 to be inclusive of all people wanting to participate in the blockading action meant that it was perceived to be a safer option for activists either less experienced in blockading or not desiring to partake in more aggressive direct action, which constituted almost the majority of attendees. Unfortunately this gesture was tinged with the slightly paternalistic tenor of the organizing process, which ultimately transferred the responsibility of logistics from the participating individuals to the action organizers. Throughout the calls the diversity of the blockade was explicitly asserted. As was written in both the Block G8 FAQ and the call to action

The Block G8 alliance is composed of people and groups with very different backgrounds experiencesâ¦thousands of people from different political, social and cultural backgrounds can take part.

While the legitimacy of encouraging people from all different orientations and positions to participate in unison is not being critiqued here, what became apparent to us in the execution of the blockade over the two days was the assumption of a homogenization of interest and criteria for action on the part of the organizing committee. This was particularly dangerous, as due to unrelated and potentially unforeseen situations, the *Block G8* mobilization became at some stages the most viable and influential option for action for many activists. This was signified by its population in quantitative comparison to other autonomous actions and blockades.

In one London debriefing the comment was made that there might have been a sentiment present of âthey [Block G8] would block people who broke their guidelines before blocking the roads?â This expressedly highlights one of the downfalls of the high visibility (and hence allure), and the rigidity of organization that marked the blockade. Whilst espousing a discourse of diversity and multiplicity, it seemed that some participants felt as though once committed to supporting the blockade, a number of constraints or restrictions were immediately imposed, negating any larger sense of heterogeneity, choice or space for contradiction. What became apparent was an increasing impression of closure and finitude leaving some feeling frustrated with an inability to be differently (perhaps more actively) involved. This was exemplified during the blockade through the spontaneous caucuses held to decide further courses for action (which even at some points began to include core *Block G8* groups), and in the flow of individuals and affinity groups between the main blockades and other locations, lending solidarity to smaller and more precarious barricades and campaigns.

Transparency

The tendency toward inadvertent homogeneity and the reactions surrounding closures in dialogues and dissatisfaction to some extent intersects with what we might consider as contradictions of transparency that were also present. As the Block G8 FAQ stated,

It is important for us to create a situation which will be transparent for everybody.

For the Block G8 action, transparency was presented as a strategic means by which to not only mobilize more members of the public to support, and engage in, the mass blockade, but also as an attempt to gain visibility as a tactic for de-escalation of state repression. What becomes clear in analyzing both the texts and praxis of the *Block G8* is that the notion of transparency is very nearly conflated with visibility and magnitude.

Whereas media and information on very customary elements of the action were made available publicly, and while it was possible to partake in action training, buy a t-shirt, make a banner, download the jingle, or print out and distribute flyers, it was difficult to meaningfully participate in the organizing process remotely (despite the clear online presence of the campaign), and it was almost impossible to find logistical data: proceedings from meetings, information on quality and quantity of input from supportive and/ or participating groups, financial sources, and methodologies of decision making.

The practical motivation for designating decisive facets of the process vague for protection against accusations of illegality and avoidance of state repression is not to be overlooked here. In Berlin and Hamburg, many activists were observed and controlled by police for months before the event, which culminated in a series of raids and confiscations of equipment and materials.

However, the ambiguity (and even omission of) infrastructural constituents such as these also meant that some felt that integral information remained obfuscated. This extended to a more pervasive dissatisfaction when crucial information relevant to the action was not disclosed to all participants until the very last minute. Sharp criticism arose from some activists on discovering that the organizers had notified the police of the termination of the blockade but had not made either the termination point, or the negotiation with the police, public to all participants themselves first. For many, this culminated in a feeling of being non-consensually represented, and in some cases, of resentment and futility.

The risk with making a claim to this sort of transparency is that it becomes easy to assume that an abundance of information signifies comprehensive disclosure. When organizing a situation like the blockades at a summit protest such as a counter G8 it can be tempting to speak of, and for the multitude, to speak of singularities moving together to create something new, but to reduce the thousands of individuals into a faceless mass who can be assumed to have the choice to participate, unthinkingly surpassing the reality of individual desires, experiences, knowledgeâs, suggestibility and insecurities and how these can effect that choice.

This unintentional overlooking of such factorâs, along with other crypto-representational maneuvers was present in another event prior to the Block G8 campaign, the âsummit in non-aligned initiatives in education cultureâ (hereafter summit), and it is to this that we now turn.

Summit: non-aligned initiatives in education culture

Summit was a three day event (24 â 28th May 2007) organized by a group of six people involved in art, theory, and to some extent activism (Florian Schneider, Irit Rogoff, Kodwo Eshun, Nicolas Siepen, Nora Sternfeld, Susanne Lang). The promotional materials that were released in relation to *summit* (texts and calls for participation, websites, posters in Berlin, printed program, flyers as well as interviews and calls on mailing lists and in journals) were written with attention to contemporary cultural, arts, activist and political debates. The *summit* appeared foremost as a project that was inspired by theoretical propositions, and interconnections between educational and activist practices. It aimed to offer a framework for the relation of rigorous theoretical proposals to initiatives in education, activism and art.

In what follows, we will isolate some of the notions and phrases that were used in setting up the event, and reflect upon how they came to shape the event itself and the forms of action and organization they insinuate. One of the main problems we aim to address with this paper is the relation and correspondence between discursive and organizational modes of structuring events or projects. How can a discursive proposal come to determine the facilitation of a project, and vice versa? Attempts to generate new concepts and forms of action occurred at the intersection of various discourses and practices. The privileging of certain concepts over others was not only indicative of individual positionalities but also of a more general distribution of power within the framework of event. Our interest here lies primarily in looking at the vocabulary and theoretical framework the *summit* engaged and the way these assertions and ideas played out in terms of the practices of *organization, hosting, collaboration, inauguration* and *sharing* within the event. This of course begs the question of how this discursive way of setting up the event was envisaged in the first place: whether it meant to be precise, or act more as an inspiration to get to speak and think more creatively about certain things. Creativity neednât conflict with precision â it is however exactly this relation between a creative or performative discourse and its possible relations to concrete context and practice that is at stake.

Collaboration

The use of the notion of collaboration in the context of the *summit*- much like with other concepts- was informed by the prior activities and research of the organizers. In the case of *collaboration*, a text by Florian Schneider , as well as an interview with him and Irit Rogoff mark two points of reference. In the latter, Schneider says

SUMMIT is definitely [sic] a collaborative environment which can be used in order to generate some more fragments of a contemporary theory of collaboration. The theme of collaboration intersects with questions of "interest", "hospitality", "seriousness", "curiosity" etc. on which we are planning a series of specific workshops.

From this we surmised that the organizing committees idea of collaboration is based upon a shared acceptance of different ideological positions and intentions, participation and negotiation, as is stated in several *summit* texts as well as the text by Florian Schneider.
The intention seems to be not to define collaboration as such but to keep elaborating on it, to see what kinds of contracts, expectations, and histories make for what kinds of collaborations. The processes of finding this out would themselves be collaborative. If we see collaboration as a transversal, open, consensus-based and transparent practice that is critical of its own organization and dynamics and dependent on constant feedback between its participants, we might examine this in relation to the organization of *summit*. Familiar questions arise: how does one set up an open collaborative project whereby not only all those involved self-authorize to collaborate, but also actively invest in and decide upon the course of a project? What would it mean to open spaces for collaboration within a three- day formal and informal meeting just before the G8? On one level it would mean making spaces that are accessible and self-organized, self- reflexive, self- regulating as well as connected to current political events and debates, and strategies from activist as much as educational contexts. The notions structuring the event would have to be proposed as open guidelines. The *summit* set out to facilitate this via an open internet platform that was accessible some months prior to the event, where the shaping of both discourse and event could be witnessed and interfered with. An events program that partially auto- curated through an open call for proposals of activities was accessible online, and the suggestion of specific formats such as caucus, workshop, conversation and working group as much as the involvement of persons and initiatives associated with activism as well as academia, education, and art (see the *summit* program) seemed to reflect an ethos of collaboration. Still that was not the end of it: if collaboration were a common framework or moment but not a shared strategic or ideological position, how would the *summit* constitute such a space?

The question is: How can we find new ways of analyzing, recognizing, decision making and working together without a common ground from which to operate?

It takes some common ground to bring people together for a âsummit on non- aligned initiatives in education cultureâ of course, and while the motivations and backgrounds of participants may have been diverse, the majority of participants came from the worlds of academia, art, critical theory, and to some extent activism (people involved in all kinds of autonomist practice). We would locate one of the main problems of *summit* in the fact that a large number of the most visible participants knew eachother via Goldsmiths College London (specifically the Visual Cultures department), with which many contributors and attendants were affiliated (three people from the facilitating committee work within Visual Cultures department). This would have to be directly addressed in order to avoid a clustering of certain visible persons and the uncontested establishment of a dominant discourse. It came to appear problematic insofar as it conflicted with what *non- alignment* (which will be further examined) insinuated.

The last night at the summit (Sunday 28th May) witnessed a heated debate around the representation of smaller as well as local initiatives, a felt imbalance between established theoretical positions and less visible activist projects or praxes as well as a questioning of the *summitâs* engagement with the imminent G8 meetings in Heiligendamm and initiatives and actions that were concurrently happening in Berlin and elsewhere. During this spontaneous discussion, intense exchange and reflection on the event itself came about, whereby a wide range of participants and delegates became vocal and confronted each other as well as the organizers. Much of our critique draws on the comments and suggestions of those who had felt at odds with the setup of *summit*, as most visible during the final debate.

The ways in which the hopes for an open space were disappointed were to our minds largely linked to the dominance of certain discursive modes within the main theatre hall at the HAU1. The hall somewhat functioned as the representative site of what the summit was programmed to be. It was the only space with a centrally curated program, while the other self-curating events (one could register these up to the last minute) could be proposed on an open and on-going basis and were programmed into various spaces around the main hall (according to requirements for technical equipment which was well installed in cafÃ©, workshop spaces, and foyers) as well as in two art-affiliated spaces nearby in Berlin (Bootlab, UnitedNationsPlaza).

The program set out by the organizing committee featured a list of prominent names, no doubt of benefit to the attendance and visibility of *summit*, however the associated events often did not leave space for feedback and hence did not end with lively discussion. It felt like the various smaller self-organized workshops and presentations in other spaces were somewhat disconnected from the more prominent and canonical knowledgeâs rehearsed in the main hall. At the HAU1 theatre, there were mostly three events taking place concurrently, and as a central space, the main hall attracted the largest amount of visitors. It could be entered and exited through six doors, allowing for migration from one event to the other, leaving people the possibility to listen and join into talks in either space. Interestingly, despite feeling frustrated by the course of presentations there, many people still found themselves drawn to the main hall. This is not to say that there were not many fruitful conversations and meetings both within and outside the main hall, but the problem appeared to lie with communication between a high profile program and small events and workshops. Rather than in close exchange with the curated program, the smaller events appeared to somewhat orbit the brilliant discourses at the center. The curatorial strategy of running prominent presentations at the same time as smaller, less visible sessions can function as a mechanism whereby self-responsibility and decision making with respect to attendance are encouraged, however the balance is a frail one. When a difference in prominence between two or more events is too clearly visible, such parallelism can end

up involuntarily confirming and reproducing the prevalence of one thing over another.

For those involved in activist practices particularly, there was a sense of disconnectedness from the immediate local and political contexts (Berlin and the G8), where there were thousands of activists protesting, preparing for actions and running events. On day two of *summit* there was a large demonstration march against the privatization of education happening concurrently which was not noted at the HAU and other venues. It was due to the apparent virtuosity of the main hall presentations that a significant part of the participants felt the main representative space was closed to intervention or other kinds of reference. When discussing *summit* as a host of collaborative processes, we might critique it on the grounds that the space for debate and questioning that would prioritize a reciprocal learning over a univocal learning, as proposed discursively, only partly emerged. It seems to us that further encouraging a spirit of collaboration would have required staging the conventions of theory and art differently, in order to share more diverse references and experiences.

Self- inauguration

How would the different participants and public respond to the proposals at hand, taking into account their differing backgrounds as writers, artists, activists, theorists, union organizers, students, teachers, etc? What does it take to self-inaugurate in a space such as the main hall at HAU1? Irit Rogoff made a poignant comment at *summit* about the kinds of capital required for accessing and participating in such spaces- the access to discourses and vocabularies (i.e. education) as well as the time (i.e. money) needed to participate in an event such as *summit*. It seems, particularly in the context of an opposition to the neo-liberal politics of the G8, a highly relevant and challenging project to open out a space for thinking about, debating and sharing our experience and engagement with the concepts of education, learning and knowledge. A central aspect of this must be opening up these fields and the connected sites as much as possible to persons not privileged with preferred kinds of capital. The attempt to move learning and education away from the infusion of individuals with cognitive capital that counts on global knowledge markets (e.g. liberal arts education that caters to the Creative Industries) seems at the heart of *summit* and was debated quite a bit within and in relation to it. It appeared very hard to move beyond the set of canonical knowledgeâs that were proposed at the center of the event. While aiming to be open, flexible and accessible, discussions at the main hall required a fairly solid knowledge of the specific discourses at hand, as debates in this space were very theoretical. While theory must not necessarily inhibit, the way it is set up appears an urgent problem to address.

In terms of the conditions for responding to any proposal and self- inaugurating in this context, transparency seems key, which in the case of *summit* was attempted but still complicated by the abstract ways in which the event was outlined and formulated- it was not always evident how *summit* was meant to function in concrete terms. *Non-alignment, Self- organization, Self- authorization, Self- valorization, Self- inauguration, Collaboration, un-learning, un-organizing, urgent thought, making theory urgent, history lessons*, etc were some of the terms structuring the debates and underlying curatorial decisions, and attracted much curiosity and interest. They were clearly relevant as proposals, as people from many parts of the world came to engage in them further, with respectively different expectations and investments. It appeared that at the event many felt unsure about inscribing themselves in certain spaces as contributors or vocal presences, because it was not clear what translation could legitimately be attempted between these concepts (which oscillated between being open and rigorously invested) and various discussion formats. While different investments and expectations seem to us desirable, transparency remains a key point when organizing an event that invites for participation, contribution and collaboration. The *summit* website offered a kind of FAQ section, answering five main questions in relation to the proposed vocabulary and call for *summit*, which certainly helped increase transparency. Additionally however, it seems important to address the more general tension between modes of legitimacy and openness as such.

Non- alignment

The main question we found ourselves facing with respect to non-alignment was to what extent the practice of non-alignment, as used to describe the initiatives present at *summit*, would have to be rigorously applied to the organization of *summit* in itself. Considering that the event had been conceived in collaboration with large institutions such as Goldsmiths College/ London University and Witte de With/ Rotterdam, and funded by the Culture Foundation/ Germany, there was clearly some alignment. The invocation of non-alignment was of course in part a historical reference and not meant as a dogmatic or separatist stance, but one might argue that since the aforementioned institutions do constitute established centers for the production of particular discourses around art, culture and politics, this still is problematic. Particularly since it was the network of people surrounding those institutions that were mainly programmed into the main theatre hall, *summit* appeared as somewhat more aligned. We wondered how hosting or encompassing other kinds of speech and initiative would be attempted under these conditions, and how established knowledgeâs would be superseded- as the proposals of âun-learningâ and âun-aligningâ indicated. If the question of (non-) alignment was to be at the heart of the *summit*, then its translation into critical practices of curation, organization, facilitation, participation and speech was to be highly relevant to the success of the event. If the conditions and spaces for organizing and contesting this are not made extremely transparent, the alignments and relations between actors (specifically organizers but also institutions) can come to obstruct processes of engagement.

Summit

The decision to run this event as a âsummitâ seemed to be based on the immediate political context of the time (G8), as well as a certain format of meeting and the roles played by its attendants:

SUMMIT is neither a conference nor an informal forum or open space. It is designed as a gathering that borrows the grammar of the dramaturgy of meetings of heads of state -- just a few days before the G-8 meeting in Heiligendamm near Rostock is taking place.

SUMMIT is an experimental setup designed to find out what happens if individuals, agents and protagonists of a multitude of projects and initiatives come together as delegates but can no longer speak on behalf of an institution, an interest group, a professional organization or a branch, let alone a nation state.

SUMMIT ignores the logics of representation and replaces them with certain notions of access, self-authorization, and collaboration, which we analyzed as main characteristics of emerging new subjectivities that are constitutive for the concepts of "activism" and "participation". [â↓]

To some extent, at least rhetorically, the idea seems to be to turn the exclusive format of a conventional summit on its head, offering the role of delegate to potentially anyone and setting up divergent spaces for negotiation and multiplicity. However the distinction between facilitators/organizers, delegates/contributors and participants/ attendants/ audience was formally maintained during *summit*. Prior to the event, the website encouraged people to register as *delegates*- which meant initially prompting acts of self-authorization at the same time as a representational framework for participation. This of course begs the question of how this discursive way of setting up the event was envisaged in the first place: whether it meant to be precise, or act more as an inspiration to get to speak and think more creatively about certain things. Of course creativity neednât conflict with precision â at stake is exactly this relation between a creative or performative discourse and its possible relations to concrete context and practice.
In most cases, contributors as well as audience came in order to talk about a project, practice or group- so that an exchange of strategies and experiences could take place- however presenting themselves as

single people and not delegates. The typical summit- format as seen at the G8 implies varying levels of access and officially assigned roles, which was hardly what *summit* set out to reproduce. There were moments however when we could clearly distinguish a periphery or second level from a central space. The many attempts to break with this -on the part of organizers as well as participants and attendants- were partly fruitful, such as approaching the architecture of a theatre (stage- auditorium, bar and foyer) differently and proposing amendments to the presentation formats. It however remained clear that it would be down to the facilitating committee to finally decide about the course of events.

Self-organization

There seemed to be great potentials in the modes of self-organization proposed by the summit as well as within activist practices such as the mobilizations against the G8. The ethos of horizontality is vital to such projects, and the creation of conditions to get as closely at this as possible is a difficult task. *Summit* undertook various attempts to live up to practices of self- organization, 1) through making spaces for speaking about and practicing self- organization, 2) through allowing for a part of the program to be non- centrally organized and remain flexible. The *summit* drew together a broad spectrum of self- organized initiatives and hopefully the various debates, conversations and forms of networking that happened (informally as well as formally), can bring forth different links and collaborations that go beyond the three-day space and conditions of the *summit*. Our attempt here is to connect to the debate on the final evening, as continued on the website and mailing list for a short period after the event, as this seemed a vital moment to address.

There was the intention of producing a jointly written and edited declaration at the end of the three days, which would, potentially, be presented to the European Ministers of Education. The conflicts and imbalances outlined above led to a general disagreement over the idea of a declaration. Our impression was that this was not only because of the participants rejection of formats such as declaration or manifesto (and the representational politics this implies) but also because the event only reached a level of intensive communication amongst all involved at the final evening, marking the beginning of a broader debate about how its editing could possibly have been done and who was to be represented in such a declaration. The diversity of approaches amongst participants obviously posed a challenge to any efficient writing of a declaration, and consensus over the discussed matters was hardly achievable or indeed desirable after only three days and amongst such a large crowd. The scale of *summit* probably accounted for many of the problems that occurred- solving these on site would have required enormous efforts and time, and perhaps a commitment to consensus that many felt opposed to. Aside from the idea of a declaration as a way of recording and condensing what had been said at *summit*, and as a starting point for a new project, there are possibilities of creating fora that may build on the process of bringing together initiatives in learning culture, operating alternatively to the commercialized systems of knowledge production and sale. There was agreement about the urgent necessity to establish new modes of sharing and forming knowledge, as well as instigating and furthering platforms, databases or even parallel institutions that would allow for a collection of different case studies in self-organized initiatives, sharing strategies, methodologies and tools. Open source is one of the means by which such this can become possible, and it seems important to find organizational as well as discursive models that correspond to such practice (such as the openâorganization guidelines). The *edu-factory*, for instance, constitutes an attempt to draw some of the projects and research around alternatives to privatized and canonized education, and perhaps the summit mailing list will come to serve as a means to work towards something similar. With all the parties involved in *summit*, there is certainly scope thinking these initiatives further.

Conclusion

In this text we have examined only partial aspects from two vastly different initiatives that occurred in response to the G8 in Heiligendamm. Despite their radical alterity, both developed similar problems in terms of attempting to overcome problems of hierarchy and exclusion associated with centralized representative political models. During the course of the events we became aware of issues emerging from the replication of certain tendencies of models of organization they were deliberately trying to deviate from. These were broadly associated with logistical tensions of concretely manifesting discursive sentiments of difference, openness, flexibility, transparency, and heterogeneity.

We recognize both the *Block G8* as well as the *summit* as attempts to strengthen and further the neoliberal-critical movements and work upon modes of organization that can potentially go beyond traditional resistance. While both were problematic in their facilitation, we believe that there is great potential in developing these kinds of alternative methods for organization. This requires further rigorous and active contemplation and experimentation on how speech and praxis can function in polyvalent, sustained and transitory points of coincidence as well as convergence, so that perhaps theory can be made urgent in practice.

We are aware that in many collectives and initiatives traversing different disciplines, interests, locations and knowledgeâs, viable and promising conceptualizations of organization are being developed and set into motion. In analyzing these two specific events, we hope we can help to widen the scope of reflection on how we actualize what we are saying in situations of resistance and expand the boundaries of these initiatives, so that we may collectively continue to make the possibilities of other worlds visible.

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