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Collective action beyond demands

Reading Protest Camps with Arendt's concept of Power

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Abstract

For the study of collective political action, protest camps play an important and still not sufficiently recognized role (Feigenbaum et al. 2013; Frenzel et al. 2013). In this paper protest camps' relationship with government will be analysed with recourse to Hannah Arendt's (1990) reflections on power. Arendt differentiates between the concept of power and the meaning of politics in modern constitutions. In the latter, politics is merely a matter of 'limited government', the safeguarding of individual and collective rights against government and rule – be it democratic or monarchical. In her concept of power – in contrast – Arendt describes a collective phenomenon where there is no difference between rulers and ruled. Power is potential (*potenza*), and by definition a collective phenomenon.

In a sense, much social movement and protest activity aims at, and corresponds to, Arendt's notion of 'limited government'. Putting forward demands and requesting limits, social movements take the role of the ruled and appeal to government through protest, law and lobbying. Often, protest camps do precisely this: they put themselves in the way of building projects or they attempt to change government policy in some way. But protest camps also, importantly, point beyond this notion of politics as 'limited government'. In its constitutional capacity as a political space, a protest camp creates the possibility to overcome the very idea of a separation between rulers and ruled, at least within its claimed space, its re-created territory. This is why protest camps, for example in the Occupy movement, did not attempt to formulate specific demands. The aim was not merely to limit government, but to replace it with new forms of political organization. In this way a protest camp can be read as an attempt at a 'new beginning', the political meaning that Arendt gives to revolutions.

Introduction

'A right which nature has given all men,...of establishing new societies, under such law and regulations as to them seem most likely to promote public happiness'

Jefferson cited in Arendt 1990:127.

What is our one demand? This question from the Call for Occupy Wall Street in the Adbusters Magazine in Summer 2011 was never answered. Instead, many other slogans emerged, among them perhaps the most striking: 'This is not a protest, this is a process.'

Occupy Wall Street received much attention for its lack of demands and its focus on reconstituting a political process instead of demanding from government. There was certainly ridicule, more often bewilderment. Bill Clinton suggested the protesters should not only criticize but put some ideas forward or perhaps support Obama in his struggle to push progressive measures through an antagonistic Congress. The press demanded demands even more vigorously, leading to OWS finally approving a list of 'one demands' a poetic collection ranging from the ending of poverty, to the ending of police intimidation on the camp itself. But these were not demands which could be negotiated and there was no action, on the part of OWS, to prepare such negotiations with government, through the naming of spokespeople and representatives, and entering into dialog. Indeed, dialog with the government was not on the agenda.

Across the world and since turbulent 2011, many protest camps have formulated demands, and some did also negotiate. In the longer recent history of protest camps, over the last 50 years or so, protest camps often had a well defined purpose to pursue one single issue, at least initially, be it preventing a nuclear power plant being built or stopping an airport expansion. But many of them, even if their were pursued for the most peculiar of single issues, also expressed something else: People experienced the formation of the idea that what was done in the camp was more than the formulation of a collective demand. That it was indeed a process, a way of doing politics within a new space, a foundational, perhaps constitutive moment of a new body politic.

The American revolution began with a clear demand from government: No taxation without representation. However, also here something else was discovered, something that pointed beyond demands from government. According to Arendt, it was not demands that led to the American revolution and the foundation of a new body politic. Instead it was the discovery of the joy and charm of being free, of 'speech-making and decision-taking, the oratory and the business, the thinking and persuading, and the actual doing' of political action. (Arendt 1990: 34)

The American revolution then, according to Arendt, enabled the experience of being free in a form of political organization where there was no separation between the rulers and the ruled, like in the ancient polis of isonomy. The American revolutionaries had no

prior concept of this freedom, an experience that had been mostly absent from human experience, according to Arendt, since the ancient Greek and Roman republics. The revolution also showed the ability of human being to start anew, to begin something entirely different, perhaps - to put it emphatically - to make history. So two experiences of novelty coincided.

Prior to the Egyptian revolution of 2011, it seemed a bit of a long stretch to relate protest camps, a phenomenon that was until then primarily linked to new social movements in the West, to actual revolutions. However as I try to show in this paper, the earliest examples of this protest form already point to its potentially revolutionary character, the role of a 'revolutionary spirit', which I argue is linked to its functioning as a political space of appearance where the process of politics in its joy and pain can be experienced but which also, due to its peculiar spatial organization that mirrors the territorial nation state, enables an experience of foundation, of novelty.

But while working with Arendt concepts helps to interpret protest camps to some extent, looking at the history of protest camps as a form of political organization also enables a critical reading of Arendt and points to potential extension of the debate. Importantly, the study of protest camps shows that isonomy, as opposed to democracy and other 'archies' and 'cracies', needs to be seen as a somewhat more mundane and global concept than Arendt's emphasis on Greek and Roman traditions suggests and allows. The concept of power as a collective phenomenon that transcends the division ruler and ruled seems to appear in a variety of contexts, and seem to be enhanced in particular forms of organization like the camp.

But what makes protest camps into spaces where this experience is possible in an exceptional way? To answer this question, the conditions in which protest camps have become such a prevalent form of political action need to be analyzed. Furthermore I want to ask what the implications are for governments and political parties in light of these processes.

The paper starts with a discussion of the concept of isonomy by Arendt and the concurrent notion of power as a collective phenomenon that indicates the absence of a division between rulers and ruled. The key political question is how some level of stability can be given to this experience and Hannah Arendt gives a particular answer to this.

In the next step I discuss the history of protest camps and focus on the conditions in which protest camps have arisen as a prevalent form of political action. I refer in particular to a critique of classical forms and institutions of the political, the party and the union, and the concurrent rise of an increasing desire for autonomy that mark the end of the Fordist area of production. Against this backdrop I discuss how protest camps have been central in the attempt to develop and formalize forms of political action that prevent a separation of rulers and ruled, to stabilize an experience of isonomy. These attempts worked primarily through the employment of spatial organization, rather than

formal organization.

Last, I discuss the consequences for Arendt's concept of isonomy, but also, more centrally, for the role of protest camps vis-à-vis the existing political institutions and some possible consequences for this process.

Isonomy and Power

Arendt discusses isonomy as a system of governance and organization that appears in the ancient Greek city state. Isonomy is considered the equality of all citizens as free participants in the affairs of government. It is opposed to democracy, the rule of the people, because in isonomy no one is ruler over anyone else. The equality of the citizens is artificial, not an equality that results from being born a free human being, a natural right, but a right that is artificially constructed in a particular space: the polis. The polis, according to Arendt, forms in fact the only space in which all men are equal by merit of the constitution of this space. Equality therefore is an attribute of the polis and not of human beings. And because human beings can only be free in the isonomy of the polis, freedom is also not an innate right or characteristic of the human character, but an artificially produced condition of the polis. In this sense freedom is, according to Arendt, a priori a collective phenomenon.

According to her definition, a tyrant is not free. While there is no one who can tell him what to do, there is also no one his equal, no one he can be free with. As a ruler emerging from the polis, the tyrant does not conquer the political space in which he then dominates, rather he destroys the only political space in which freedom is possible, depriving himself of freedom in the process.

Freedom, in this sense, also has to be differentiated from liberation and liberty, something Arendt admits is rather complicated. In the American revolution key demands circled around liberation, freedom of movement, freedom of property and due process in law. Demanding these liberties and rights however, according to Arendt, constitute a negative tendency in which government is to be limited.

Civil liberties as well as private welfare lie within the range of limited government, and their safeguard does not depend upon the form of government. Only tyranny, according to political theory a bastard form of government, does away with constitutional, namely, lawful government. However, the liberties which the laws of constitutional government guarantee are all of a negative character, and this includes the right of representation for the purposes of taxation which later became the right to vote; (...) they claim not a share in government but a safeguard against government. (Arendt 1990:143)

For Arendt this is opposed to freedom which constitutes participation in public affairs or the admission to the public realm. The public realm, in ancient Greece the polis, and also the agora, the marketplace, therefore is a key condition of freedom and therefore of isonomy which cannot be thought without these 'spaces of appearance'.

Space of appearance

The 'space of appearance' is a more general concept in Arendt's thought, but it is directly linked to her understanding of the centrality of political action to the experience of freedom. A 'space of appearance' is the result of people speaking and acting together and it is therefore a general human experience. Its function can be likened to a collective mirror of human action and deeds, to witness those deeds, record them and make them real. Without a space of appearance, therefore, nothing is real, for 'whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality.' (Arendt 1998, p.199)

In this sense we can understand the joy Arendt associates with political action in isonomy. It is no less than the only way to confirm one's identity and existence as a free being in concert with others. Politics has an almost religious, certainly artistic role not so much in the administrative running of a body politic, but in the enabling and fulfillment of the human character.

The space of appearance relates to power. While forms of government can vary broadly between different body politics, they all draw their power, their very existence, from enabling a space of appearance. It is in the space of appearance that power arises and power is at the same time the condition for its existence. One cannot exist without the other. While monarchy or democracy are equally dependant on the power that emanates from the space of appearance, they are not, however, as conducive to the fulfillment of the human character. Only in isonomy, in a form of government based on equality, is it possible to fully actualize one's potential. All lesser forms of government where power, while still depending on all, is limited by a division of ruler and ruled, leads to no less than inauthentic, unhappy lives.

Collective Power

Arendt's notion of power then is a collective one. Power emerges from collective interaction and speech in a shared space of appearance. This power is linked to continuous action and speaking together, it cannot be stored or frozen. In a sense it is the living collectivity itself that generates power. Because of this, Arendt considers many things that we usually associate with power as something entirely different. When a ruler imposes his will onto people he does not use his 'power', he actually diminishes his and everybody's power by using violence or force. Power instead always depends on agreement of many wills and intentions and it therefore also not limited by its separation or division; instead the sharing of power within a body politic actually increases it.

The great strength Arendt sees in the American constitution lies precisely in the fact that her authors understood that power is best enhanced by division. The leading idea is that the body politic becomes more powerful when more voices take part. The checks and balances were therefore not based on a mistrust of power and the attempt to limit it,

but rather in the attempt to increase it.

Concerning the question of constitution, it is important to add that Arendt sees the political process, like all human action, as essentially contingent. This results precisely from the character of human action in concert with others. While we can act intentionally, we can never foresee the consequences of our action, as others are not determined in their reaction and action. While this contingency of human action is the very reason for the ability to experience freedom, it is also a very destabilizing factor when it comes to maintaining a political space of appearance. In the process of forming of a body politic, then, the permanent question arises how to make a republic that enables and maintains – after the old rulers are gone – the public happiness resulting from isonomy, from the absence of a difference between rulers and ruled.

A revolution, according to Arendt creates a vacuum of power and this power needs to be filled with new power. Only the making of a constitution of freedom, one that is based on the idea of isonomy, constitutes the revolutionary act, normally taking place after the revolutionary overthrow of the status quo has been achieved. And here she sees the great success of the American constitution in comparison to much other constitutional activity in the 19th and 20th century in Europe. The Americans succeeded in devising a constitution whose aim was not to limit power but to create more power, to ensure that no source of power would ever dry up and that a ‘complicated and delicate system’ of confederation enabled the successful entry of ever new states into it. Europe, in difference, made constitutions inspired by ‘the distrust of power in general and fear of the revolutionary power of the people in particular’ (Arendt 1990:154) which were therefore at best helped to limit government, but never enabled public happiness.

In what follows I want to investigate protest camps as spaces of appearance. This concerns the way in which they generate collective power, as well as the way in which they constitute themselves, i.e. in which they attempt to stabilize in isonomy the collective power created. Here my focus will be on the role of physical space and spatial organization that is contrasted with formal organization.

This also enables a consideration of the role of protest camps in their specific context, historically and perhaps in contrast to a universal history of political action and power as proposed by Arendt. Why do protest camps emerge in a specific period of time, and not in others?

Protest camps as political spaces

David Graeber (2011, p.230) describes two antique forms of protest, ‘popular revolts in ancient Greece and the strategy of exodus typically pursued in Egypt and Mesopotamia’. He also points to a third strategy, a ‘halfway point’ between the other two, pursued by the Roman plebeians: ‘the secession of the plebs, when commoners of the city abandoned their fields and workshops, camped outside the city and threatened mass defection.’ Perhaps an early protest camp, the ‘secession of the plebs’, points to the

power of what Arendt calls 'locomotion', the freedom of movement, to rebel. Essentially a negative demand, this still has nothing to do with freedom and its constitution for Arendt. We don't know how much difference it made that the plebeians, after they left the city, camped out together on the Mars field. Did a political space of appearance develop? Could we detect the attempt to rethink the organisation of the political space towards a notion of isonomy? This would be a fascinating historical research project.

I focus here on similar experiences as they were made by more recent campers. Modern campers certainly experienced the space they claimed outside the city as a political space. This was obvious already in the late 19th and early 20th century, when Scouts in Britain, the 'Wandervoegel Movement' ('wandering birds') in Germany, and the US summer camps searched for a place outside the developing industrial cities, and by implication, outside civilisation. Soon, this new practice developed a political meaning for participants, who aspired to use the experience of camping for social and cultural change in a variety of ways. In contrast to the politics associated with today's protest camps, these early campers often tended politically to the right (Frenzel 2013; Giesecke 1981; Mills 2012; Smith 2006).

But even right-wing early scouts, for example, who were founded as an exclusively male club, soon started discussing the constitution of their own space in that members within the organisation questioned the exclusion of girls, leading to a reconfiguration of the Scout Movement. According to Mills (2012) the internal processes of discussion within the Scout movement were enhanced by the shared experience in the camping space. The formal organisation of the scout movement, outside the actual camps, continued to battle with the power as emerging in the camps.

The Scouts never aimed at overthrowing the political status quo, quite the opposite. Their critique of the status quo also did not articulate itself as demands or protests, rather the camps, from their conception, served the interests of the British empire, or as Rojek (1991) has claimed the mobilisation of the British working class for the empirical project.

Protest Camps as Micro-Nations

The key re-discovery in these camps, regardless of political tendency, was that a territorially bound space in which experience and life was shared, garnered an intense potential power. The new camping spaces helped the formation of participant's identities, could be used to enhance the linkages between political movements and their participants, and allowed for an experimentation with new forms of collective life. By physically occupying a certain physical space, camps mirror the spatial practice of the city and of course the nation-state.

In the history of protest camps, this has led to the curious but constant phenomenon of protest campers claiming their independent republics, or micro-nations. Examples range from the 'Freie Republik Wendland' in 1980s West-Germany, the 'Pollok Free State' in

Glasgow (Routledge 1997), to the 'independent republic of Tahrir (Keraitim & Mehrez 2012) and to the Occupy Camp in London, where a graffito claimed that within the camp's territory the laws of the UK would be 'null and void'.

In contrast to holiday camps or the camps of scouts and political or religious movements, many protest camps have very contentious borders. Protest Camps are sometimes constructed on squatted land, without consultation of the authorities. If they are part and centre of full fledged rebellions, like in the case of Tahrir or on Maidan square in Kiev, the boundaries are actually barricades and fought over.

In most protest camps one can witness the development of contested, guarded and highly policed boundaries of the camp. Boundary-crossing into protest camps often involves passing through proper checkpoints. Entering protest camps, protesters are often searched and monitored by the police; then, on the other side, they are welcomed by volunteers within the camp. This border crossing experience creates a tangible sense of entering new space. The boundaries are also symbolically dramatized. At the 2007 CFCA in London Heathrow, a big cardboard installation of an airplane featured at the main entrance. Above the open door of the plane that led into the camp, a slogan read: 'Exit the system'. Entering the camp, therefore, enables an outsider perspective on the 'system'. From here, 'the system' can be observed, evaluated and criticized at a distance. While such a symbolic distancing doesn't necessitate that all participants immediately identify with the protest camps and position themselves against the system, it enables a separation that is much harder to construct in non-spatially bound organizations. Protest camps enable a radical challenging of the status quo, because they carve out space within the social order to form their own political 'alternative space' (Dale & Burrell 2008, p.231). By carving out their own territory, protesters in the camp might feel to be no longer part of some pluralistic negotiation that takes place within the given society.

From a political perspective, this play-act secession is highly relevant. While few protest camps actually aim at secession, the creation of mock-republics sends a clear signal to both participants and outsiders: The protest camp is no longer part of the process in which politics are negotiated in a given political system. They are no longer 'civil society', making their voice heard and contributing the political process with demands. Instead protest camp enable protesters to be 'uncivil' (Sullivan et al. 2011). Protest camps form their own political space, and this is many cases tangibly felt, in such a way that even people who find themselves in these camps without any revolutionary or secessionist ideas start to identify with the camp and against the status quo. This is particularly the case where the status quo reacts in excessive violence to the challenge by the protest camp.

Camps as spaces of appearance

With recourse to Arendt I interpret the power of the camps as resulting from the fact that they constitute spaces of appearance. There is then, as Arendt says, a close link

between physical proximity and the formation of a space of appearance, a space in which collective power emerges from people acting and speaking together. What remains unclear however is how such practice relates to the emergence and desire for isonomy. The camps of Scouts or political parties show clear hierarchical organisation, often emphasised beyond functionality. Camps are by no means automatically built on a constitution of isonomy, where the equality of all participants is set as a precondition. They have power, because they enable people to appear, but they do not fully enable freedom.

Protest camps, specifically, seem to enable the shifting of protest from one that is based on demands to one that is based on a more radical rejection of the status quo. Protest camps, by merit of their territorial organisation, may be powerful tools to stop certain building projects, but they often exceed such demand based politics, the stuff of civil society, to become 'un-civil' and question the status quo in its totality. Through the creation of tangible boundaries and borders, and the tensions that they may provoke, there is even a dynamic in which the antagonism between the camp and the status quo is enhanced.

But it is unclear what effects this has for the political constitution of the protest camp. If the reason to be together in the camp is primarily found in the opposition to the outside and the outside's reaction to this opposition then there is hardly a process that *sui generis* produces power within the camp. An indeed, protest camps can also be highly hierarchical political spaces, essentially limiting the freedom and power potentially present in the space of appearance. Isonomy is not simply the result of political organization in physical space, so much is clear.

It is important to look further at the conditions in which protest camps have emerged in the last 50 years to better understand their political potential and functioning.

The emergence of protest camps

In the history of protest camps, we can see how protest campers learned, often incidentally, about the potential of this organizational form. In what may perhaps count as the first protest camp, the 1968 Resurrection City, the experience of the political power of the space of appearance in a political camp became really obvious. The camp was established on the Washington Mall by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The camp was part of the poor peoples' campaign, initiated by Martin Luther King, who was assassinated before Resurrection City started. It was an attempt to broaden the anti-racist work of the SCLC with a social justice focus. In Resurrection City poor people of all backgrounds from across the USA came together, invited and mobilised by the SCLC (Chase 1998; Wiebenson 1969). Striking from today's perspective was the internal organisation in which the camp started. The SCLC leadership running the camp were not camping themselves, but were instead housed in a nearby hotel. There was no intention for the campers in Resurrection City to autonomously organize themselves. They had been bussed into Washington and they

were supposed to demonstrate to the media and politicians in the capital the urgency of the social question. Demonstrations and actions were all centrally planned by a leadership that did not even share the daily routines and living conditions.

In the five weeks of the existence of the camp, discontent started to emerge among the campers. A clear example was the conflict in the camp between two security forces. One was put into place by the SCLC leadership, a second one created autonomously within the camp because the official one was rejected by the campers. In this rebellion against their own internal leadership, the campers of Resurrection City articulated their increasing desire to not be represented and ruled, but to abolish the difference between rulers and ruled. Inside the camp, strong bonds grew among participants, and these bonds enabled and eased autonomous organization within the camp. The outside leadership was increasingly seen as unnecessary, if not unhelpful to the self-organization of the camp (Chase 1998). The camp did primarily demand and was planned as a tool to articulate those demands in a professional, innovative way. But the character of the protest as a permanent camp changed the dynamics. What started as a classical top-down social movement organization of the time became a first and unplanned experiment in autonomous self-organisation, leading to open conflict between the leadership and the participants.

During the time that Resurrection City happened, many people felt an increasing unease with forms of political and social organisation prevalent at the time. In this period we see also the emergence of new social movements, characterised to some extent by the search for new organisational forms.

The search for new organisational forms

In the last 50 years an increasing rejection of formal political organizations, like trade unions and political parties, and a trend towards new, more loose and networked organizational forms can be observed. 'New' social movements are characterized by the search for new forms of organization (Böhm et al. 2010; Calhoun 1992; Crossley 2003; Offe 1987). Several factors have been identified as contributing to this development. The dramatic failure of state socialism, as established by communist parties in the Soviet Union and several other countries, to establish a communist order played an important role. In capitalist countries vibrant criticism of formal organization since the 1970s also resulted from grievances with formal organizations in social-movement practice and beyond. The reproduction of male-dominated gender relations and vertical hierarchies in trade unions and political parties on the left as well as their failure to account for the environmental degradation became a major issue of contestation for the emerging 'new left' since the 1960s. Sociological analysis tends to point to a variety of structural factors, like the demise of industrial labour and the rise of services industries which undermined classical union organization (Lash & Urry 1987).

A key concept to describe new social movement organization since the 1970s is Breines' (1989) idea of 'prefigurative politics'. Prefigurative politics focuses on the *way* of doing

politics, its *processes*. The means of progressive politics need to be aligned with its ends. This idea was not entirely new, as anarchist movements had long questioned and challenged both communist and socialist parties for their appraisal of structures of domination within their organizations as well as through the state. The new left in the 1970s took some inspiration from classical anarchism, but also showed greater awareness of the non-western traditions of dissent and protest. Emerging anti-nuclear and peace movements emphasized the development of new organizational forms, and new forms of decision-making, aligned with the political aspirations expressed in left-wing politics (Cornell 2011). The emergence of horizontal decision-making (HDM) and consensus as a procedure in movements across the US since the 1980s points to the ways in which new political movements increasingly attempted 'to change the world without taking power' (Holloway 2002). The aim was to create new forms of organization from the bottom up that could replace the existing capitalist and state structures. In terms of creating alternative organizational structures to capital's organization of the economy, social movements concurrently also attempted a new approach to political economy, where social reproduction became a domain of political struggle (Federici 2004).

Experiments in Isonomy

This shift can also be read as a desire for autonomy, or freedom in Arendt's sense. The rejection of classical political forms was then also a rejection of political action that is instrumental towards certain ends. This form of politics was experienced as increasingly alienating at best, if not outright de-humanizing. The desire for the joy of political process, based on the isonomy of its participants, moved into the foreground. By taking inspiration from anarchist and non-European models of decision-making and debate, with its foci on consensus and deliberation, activists attempted to develop new frameworks for the constitution of freedom. Experiments consisted in the development of highly sophisticated forms of decision-making procedures, but also in new forms of autonomous action, the development of counter-institutions and the like (Cornell 2011). Essentially all of these new experiments emphasized the idea, best expressed by Polletta (2002) in her seminal book 'freedom is an endless meeting'.

One central problem with these experiments in isonomy was, that they seem to not work very well in larger groups. As brilliantly analyzed by Cornell in his study (2011) of the development of horizontal decision-making by the Movement for a New Society (MNS) in the United States, the constituted forms of isonomy lacked the ability to organize larger groups of people beyond localities. HDM, the members of MNS concluded after 15 years of work, did not work on a national-level and rarely on state-level of political action. Many of the new autonomous groups in Europe and the US had similar experiences. But small scale political organizations did not succeed in generating sufficient power to challenge the status quo. Often they fell back into personal life-style politics, losing their critical edge.

In many European countries the result was a return to classical political forms of

organization, in new parties like the Green party that emerged in the late 1970s. While these new parties often put high emphasis on internal democracy, they soon found themselves far departed from the ideas of isonomy, from actually enabling freedom. The inclusion into processes of government led to an increasing professionalization, which increasingly undermined their early aspirations.

Protest Camps and the spatial organization of isonomy

Protest camps developed in the same period and they constitute perhaps the most lasting and to date successful modern experiment in isonomy. Their key strength, as activists discovered, resides in the ability to constitute political spaces of appearance of significant size and durability. They do so by taking the constitution of isonomy into the terrain of spatial organization.

In a first wave of protest camps and site-occupations that emerged in Europe and the USA in the 1970s (Baer & Dellwo 2012; Downey 1986), environmental activists used mass occupations of the building sites of nuclear power plants and chemical factories as a direct action civil disobedience tactic. These site occupations were never meant to be protest camps in the contemporary sense, they really simply aimed at physically preventing the building works from going ahead. But in some cases, like the occupation of Wyhl in Southern Germany in 1975, they became permanent protests, lasting several months. The occupiers had diverse backgrounds but lived together, with a high level of fluidity, eating, playing music, and discussing energy policy. A veritable community of resistance grew, comprised of unlikely partners, including farmers, student activists, bourgeois liberals, feminists, anarchists and members of the radical left. United in opposition to nuclear power and the state that was pursuing it with little to no consideration of popular opinion, the Wyhl occupation was organized not through formal structures and membership, but shared living in a new political space, emerging in the site occupation itself.

The power of this space, first experienced when the protesters occupied the building site in a battle with the police, was obvious from the beginning. The occupation itself had created a power vacuum and as the status quo retreated, powerless against the many, the question arose of how to fill the vacuum. It was successfully filled by the protest camp community. The power emerging from shared living in a constructed community of resistance resonated widely across social movements at the time.

The next wave of transnational protest camps, initiated by the Greenham Common women's peace camp in 1982, generated very similar experiences. Started by a small group of people as a permanent blockade of the entry to a nuclear weapons facility, the protest successfully drew in thousands of people opposed to NATO rearmament. The foundational moment was enhanced and stabilised by pitching the camp as an alternative social space against the military, and Greenham Common explicitly challenged the patriarchal status quo (Cresswell 1994; Couldry 1999). Occupying this space was necessary for the construction of the alternative world of Greenham

Common. In the camp, an alternative order could be imagined and experimented with; it could be tested and designed (Feigenbaum 2010; Roseneil 1995; Roseneil 2000). The power of the camp showed not the least in its ability to shift the political debate over the deployment of nuclear weapons from parliament to the very site of contention at Greenham.

Greenham Common influenced new social movements in Britain in many ways. To the experimentation with isonomy and its spatial constitution, it contributed the idea of decentralisation. In Greenham, this was the accidental result of the need to blockade several gates at the same time. The women needed to camp at several different sites in quite some distance from another. The multiple gate camps developed their distinct identities, catering for different groups and political outlooks among the participants (Roseneil 2000). Decentralisation with a high degree of autonomy for the different gates, allowed for difference in the camp to be managed. Picked up by the German women's peace camp in Hunsrück, decentralisation became established as the neighbourhood structure, created with the specific aim of devolving organization to smaller scales, even within the camp, to enable diversity and localised decision making within the camp (Leidinger 2011). The neighbourhood - or 'barrio' - structure travelled from German 'no-border' camps in the 1990s into the anti-summit-camps in the early 2000s where they became a regular organizational feature.

Discussion

Let me relate this discussion of Arendt concepts to protest camps in more general terms. We can now make sense, I think, of the curious fact that protest camps, while they often voice certain demands from governments, cannot be reduced simply to a tactic of social movement action. As spaces in which people live in close proximity and act and speak together, they form spaces of appearance, and this is where they generate their power and where they become attractive alternatives to the existing body politic. More often than not people joining a protest camp will come to it with very specific grievances and problems. Once they are in the camp, a very different notion of politics may arise, something much more satisfying than demanding from the government, something producing public happiness, that is the character of a body politic of isonomy. We can now also discover the importance of the slogan 'this is not a protest this is process' as perhaps indicating the quest in OWS for constitutional activity, for a foundation of liberty that could safeguard the newfound freedom against the contingencies of human action.

Protest Camps emerge in a particular historical context where the desire for autonomy, freedom in Arendt's sense was articulated broadly. The desire for autonomy leads to a variety of experiments in new forms of political organization, including many procedural forms that aim at isonomy, chiefly the radically democratic attempts of HDM. Protest camps have been shown to be very successful in extending these experiments beyond

the confines of small autonomous groups. They do so by organizing in space, where the space of appearance is constructed in actual physical space and space becomes an organizational device. The constitution of the spaces of appearance is not, like in the American constitution discussed by Arendt, a process of formalization of the procedures of the conduct of political action which compare to the development of procedural forms like HDM. Instead we find also a increasingly conscious use of space and spatial organization as a way of constituting the space of appearance in the camp. In this process some protest camps have been able to fill the power vacuum created by their emergence as body politics and stabilized a constitution of isonomy for some time.

The fact is that protest camps in Western context have never led to an actual revolution. However, more recently in Egypt and the Ukraine, we have seen the potential of camps in aggregating power to such an extent that the status quo collapses. I have mostly spoken about camps in a Western context and here the relationship to revolution has to be understood in a more nuanced, limited way. The experience of power in protest camps starts with smaller victories of the protesters, the claiming of a certain space and the declaration, if ever so ironically, of a secession from the status quo. This is to some extent a revolutionary performance, a play-acting of secession and revolution.

But such a performance can of course not be dismissed as 'unreal', given the importance of speech and action, and the essential theatrical character of political action in Arendt's thought. In this context it is perhaps intriguing that Arendt advocated the institutionalization of 'civil disobedience' in the American constitution. She argued that the association in which people violated the laws to pursue their political opinion evoked the 'spirit of the revolution'. She was equally adamant that political parties had disempowered citizens and that the protest movements of the 1960s constituted attempts to regain the power to politically act.

Protest camps emerge in this period because they allow to stabilize the experience of collective political power in the absence of a division between rulers and ruled. By embedding this experience into the spatial framework of the camp, the experience is enhanced beyond one possible only in small groups. Moreover, a notion of novelty emerges in a foundational moment of secession from the status quo. The mock cities and states that emerge in protest camp become laboratories of political action in isonomy. The process enhances the codification of procedural and spatial forms of organization of isonomy. The political power of protest camps and their increasingly important role in social movement action derives from the combination of novelty with the experience of collective power in isonomy. In this sense they are truly revolutionary in spirit. Whether those camps are really revolutionary or simply play acting at it then becomes a pointless question. The gesture of radical rupture, and novelty is always performed and the question is simply how many people join.

What does this mean for the political class, for governments as they exist, for the rulers

from whom we are separated? One message few politicians understand is, that the political class is standing in the way of the political aspirations and desires of people. Following Arendt, they prevent authentic political lives for the vast majority of people. So from this perspective we could say that whether corrupt or not: 'Que se vayan todos', 'they all must go' as the Spanish May 15th demonstrators so clearly demanded.

It is intriguing that after the camps of 2011 in both Spain and the US, the campers went (back) to neighborhoods to carry the spirit of isonomy to the running of their affairs. The communal level of politics is probably the best place to continue the work started in the protest camps.

But perhaps we can also ask to what extent the political class may learn? Are we able to diminish the separation between the rulers and the ruled in a more reformist and gradual fashion. This would pertain to Arendt's suggestion to institutionalize civil disobedience. In this sense, could we see protest camps constitutionally protected? Currently, the opposite is taking place: governments across the western world are introducing rulings and laws that prevent protestors from sleeping in tents, from camping in cities and from using tents in protest. This shows, yet again, 'the distrust of power in general and fear of the revolutionary power of the people in particular'. It shows, how little the political class today understands about the meaning of politics.

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