

EDITORIAL

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What a silly question: “How do we want to be governed?” – But silly questions have their virtue. Posed at the right time and in the right place (say, Barcelona in 2004), they might open up a field of speculation that can contribute substantially to new forms of action, new forms of organisation, new forms of relationality -- forms that are badly needed in order to overcome the insufficiencies, if not downright failures, of “capitalist parliamentarism” (Alain Badiou).

Of course, when we talk about government we have something much broader in mind than what this term usually means. In the 16th century, according to Michel Foucault, “government did not only refer to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed. [...] It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.” (1)

In a way, we want to come back to this pre-modern notion of government. It seems to offer an indispensable tool for reworking many of the false opposites of modern discourse (like micro- and macropolitics or the individual and the state)

So, here is the notion we are working with: a mode of action that does not act directly on other people but upon their realms of action – an action upon an action. Contaminating corn fields with genetically modified crops is therefore “government”, as was the blocking of the roads into Buenos Aires by the movement of the Piqueteros.

Art has a few things to say about “an action upon an action”. Ibon Aranberri’s slide-projection *Fireworks on Powerstation* (2003), for example, invites us to look back at a particular protest-movement of the 1970s, provoked by the building of a nuclear power-plant near Lémoniz (Basque Country). The chain of images seem to read this protest not only as being directed at something, a particular issue, but also as a pretty abstract exercise in “how to constitute a public”. Precisely this level of abstraction (brilliantly related by Aranberri to artistic abstraction under Franco) has to be learned and kept in mind if the political protest movements of today won’t collapse like a soufflé after each new state of excitement.

But “an action upon an action” might also point to situations or political experiments which never had a chance to materialize because they have been terminated like, for example, the Parisian Commune by acts of violence. In her *Projet pour le sujet et le pouvoir (la voix lyrique)* (2001) Alejandra Riera is developing an aesthetic strategy to get access to a historical experience from which we are cut off.

By turning the memorial wall dedicated to the fallen Communards into a transparent screen, her work helps us to realize that historical memory’s rich potential is in our own hands and that some parts of that very potential want to be kissed back into life – through the medium of the aesthetic imaginary.

As these two examples might suggest, “government” is an universal subject. Not surprisingly, when I first met the group of people from Barcelona which MACBA brought together in order to work with me on the exhibition – Joan Roca, Miren Etxezarreta, Salvador Clarós, Noemi Cohen and Merce Tatjer –, my concept was criticized for being too unspecific: “The exhibition could take place in the stratosphere”, one of them said. Which was, of course, true. But the stratospherical aspiration should be understood in terms of the modernist legacy or, better still, as an attempt to recuperate the idea of a universal horizon. However, it is equally true that the various perspectives which constitute this horizon have to be both specific and precise. Otherwise we will never arrive at, and share, a sensibility for the particular dynamics which haunt our poor planet on which, for better or for worse, everything is connected to everything else (the melting ice-knaps of Kilimanjaro to the burning rain forest in Brasil, or the feverish drive for individualization to modern societies totalizing effects).

The particular artworks, performances, and talks MACBA invited me to show in Barcelona had been assembled and commissioned over a couple of years – in the framework of a network of exhibitions called *The Government*, curated by my partner, Ruth Noack, and myself. They had no specific relation to what “government” could mean in Barcelona. But when our little group here started to work on the exhibition it became quite obvious that many struggles, local utopias, artistic procedures, and so on, have at least as much in common as each of them is singular. The urban transformation of Poblenou, for example, its gentrification, the fate of its textile industry and the destruction of industrial heritage are subjects you can find in many, many cities. The group had a chance, in other words, to work out a common space – an exhibition – in which the relation between the local and the global could be made almost literally to take place. To arrive at such a constellation was in the end not so difficult, even if the process involved some hassle from all sides. It was not so difficult because the local contributions by Tatjer (who worked with Sonia Abian and Carlos Piegari, two artists from Argentine but recently immigrated to Spain), by Etxezarreta (who, as an economist, felt a need to transcend the form of academic talk), and by Joan Roca (who had worked for many years with the French photographer Patrick Faigenbaum on a topography of Barcelona) were not localist but deeply aware of the “big picture”, while each of the artistic contributions, realized in the framework of *The Government*, represented a particular viewpoint, focusing as, for example, Sanja Ivecovic’s *Nada Dimic-File* on women’s memory of socialism at a textile factory in Zagreb which is currently transformed into, yes, a business center. To sum it up: over time the false opposition between the local and the global evaporated.

One more point deserving some clarification here is the role of the museum in all this and, even more generally, what role art has to play in political struggles. Let me start with the premise that art has no role at all but that we desperately need its constitutive disfunctionality in order to overcome the political rationality we live in. This is the romantic program: Because art operates outside of any of the given parameters of reason it can contribute to, or even be the medium of, any critique of reason. Of course, I am well aware that this position is a myth. But I am also thinking that there is a strategic reason to act as if this myth were the truth. Otherwise, our political imagination would be confined to what we already are -- which is simply depressing. In short, art builds on the incommensurability between the limits of actual experience and the limitless wandering of the imaginary. Which brings us back, full circle, to our original question – *Com volem ser governats?* – and to the role of the museum where this “limitless wandering” should take place.

You will realize that for this exhibition the museum will look like a scattered event that encompasses three different sites (Institut Barri Besòs; Palo Alto; Centre Cívic de La Mina) as well as some street space. You will also realize that this exhibition will transform itself over time, that the three spaces interact with each other but with different arguments and temporalities. In other words, not only is “an action upon an action” the exhibition’s subject. It also constitutes its very form – a form already implicated by the effort of collaborative articulation which is not an end in itself but the very medium that might transform the audience from a passive, appropriating (or failing and resentful) subject into a collaborative activity. The meaning of art will happen only at the moment of an engagement between work and viewer.

One last word about the collaborative aspect: some important elements of *Com volem ser governats?* derive from *ExArgentina – Pasos para huir del trabajo al hacer*, an exhibition conceived by two artists, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann, and shown in the spring of 2004 at Museum Ludwig in Cologne. This exhibition was developed from within Argentine and can be read as an account of the financial and political or, better, the financial as political crisis that hit the country in 2001. It might serve as a template for the future of the European middle-classes.

There are some people to whom I want express my deep gratitude: to my partner Ruth Noack, who is responsible for much of the intellectual groundwork of *The Government*; to Georg Schöllhammer, my *consigliere*, who helped me to think about dance, local modernities, and introduced me to the work of Sergio Bologna; to Manolo Borja-Villel for inviting me to Barcelona; and especially to Jorge Ribalta who was in charge of the often mind-boggling process which took the form of *Com volem ser governats?*

1) Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago 1982, p. 221

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