

Special Movement Teachings

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The movement of 1980 appeared at the historical moment when the media had been introduced and accepted and were stepping into their phase of total hegemony. Without being aware of it, this movement flourished outside the reach of the media. For the construction of its structures it did not need the media. Its appeal could, moreover, not be expressed by any organ of the press. Literally everything which is said and written about it misses the mark. The "injustices, insinuations and pure lies" that have been spread about the squatters' movement over the years were intended to summon it to pronounce a truth about itself. That it ultimately complied, however, actually proves nothing. Once something extra-medial is exposed to the media, it begins to become something else.

Characteristic of the post-World War II free west is the disappearance of the crowd, which lives in the street and can suddenly form itself into an entity that can actively perform. From the beginnings of the modern city, crowds of people had hung around in streets everywhere. They were alternately stirred up or kept in check through the use of them as bearers of that which is socially imaginary, whether in the form of revolutionary or as bit player. This danger of the mass as fascist horde or communist proletariat is now being banished by the democratic community through the universal introduction of the media which were developed in the war: automobile traffic and television. Since the 1950s the collective fantasy has been weaned from the historic question within the city's ambiance and focused on mass traffic on the freeways outside the city, where every individual can live out his longings toward space. The crowds of people in the street are being conditioned not to see themselves as a group with the potential for independent action.

The pedestrians have become part of a stream of traffic which may not stand still, must keep circulating. The individual moves as a singular part in this stream. The other becomes a hindrance instead of a potential ally: meetings no longer take place in the street. The ideal of free circulation gets allotted a vector besides, in the form of automobility. Regulated traffic gives the stream a direction. This offers the individual traffic participant the security of being part of a collective project: the conquering of space, freedom of movement without obstacle. When one has taken one's place in the cabin, the other users of the road lose their reality as people who are capable of anything. They are absorbed into the only remaining reality, that of traffic as continuous movement. In both cases, on foot and in the vehicle, the crowd no longer perceives itself as a crowd, but as a medium for transport from a to b.

The free flow of information on television transforms reality one step further. With the introduction of the picture tube the vanished real crowd of street- and highway-users is replaced by the imaginary crowd of the fellow viewers. In order to function the television must evoke an imaginary reality on two levels. On the one hand, it asks the viewers to suppose a reality behind the screen; on the other, one is required to see oneself as part of an audience that is tuned in in every living room. In the imaginary crowd the other is thought up, while with the real crowd the other is swept along.

When the movement of '68 rediscovered the crowd as a potential revolutionary subject, it assumed that this crowd still existed. It had to establish that, insofar as formation of a crowd can still be spoken of, it appears only in the forms of "merge" signs and viewer ratings. This imaginary crowd was designated a consumer society, against which it subsequently went to battle with consciousness-altering substances, from mentality-affectors to terrorist bombings. In addition it turned on the TV for a phenomenon that dated from the age of the newspaper: the action, performed with an

eye to the press hounds, which must turn into a media event.

Yet in the 60s the real crowd also came to the surface of history a few times. There are moments at which a crowd, whether of laborers or chance passers-by, without premeditated council becomes overwhelmed by a desire. This desire manifests itself by establishing that people are waiting for something. When the sign is given, we know what for: the event which is brought about by the crowd in order to get rid of its desire at one time. This event can be prepared for or thought out, but distinguishes itself, following an initiating action, by a chain reaction which exceeds all original intentions. First the event is induced, and it subsequently takes things over from the actors. The usual tree diagram of cause and effect is then abruptly replaced by a causality carousel of incidents and stories in which cause and effect turn out to be interchangeable. The event thus acquires a fatal character: it will happen this way, and not otherwise; it is one-time, local, ecstatic. During the event a compression of time occurs; it takes on an intensity whereby past and future fade into insignificance. It appears as the intrusion of the present on the plodding advance of history. It is an unexpected return of an earlier reality, which is thus experienced as primeval reality. The wholesale chaos during a street riot is experienced by the crowd as an elementary reality, which, independent of the progression of the civilization process or the state of the technological culture, proves indestructibly current.

During such an event, the meeting takes place between the strangers who populate the city. The crowd, which as a stream of traffic had become invisible to itself, recognizes itself anew and reacts as such: it rediscovers its reality in a concrete form. The individuals who, according to Canetti, overcome their fear of touch in the crowd, meet each other as bodies and embrace that experience at once. And this while in the daily order the other was merely an image, a collection of advertising messages regarding lifestyle, status, sexuality, subculture. The accumulation of characteristics everyone makes of himself loses its disciplining impact on the spot. The meeting is an event without closer acquaintance. People just bump into each other and the energy released by this collision gives direction to the further course of events. Others whose existence you had never suspected declare themselves, unasked, in solidarity with your actions, and add through their extreme normality one more scoop on top of the oddity of the whole situation. However exceptional the damage caused in the stories that make the rounds later, the concrete incidents are shorter-lived than the ultimate surprise at how in the world this could have happened. The chain reaction has surpassed every initiating action. The amazement over this can be hardened into a nostalgic attitude, which demands that the events of the good old days, having become inconceivable, will not happen again. But it can also be transformed into the radiance of the promise that the adventure can be relived, that the same event can be staged more times, from beginning to end, but by us ourselves.

The audio-visual media are traffic vehicles like any other. They, like train, auto and plane, produce moving images of an outside world with which we can make no direct contact. The users of the road and the TV screen, closed up in a comfortable cabin or salon, are plugged into the accelerated images with such force that it presents itself to them as a unique, individual viewing experience. Seated on the throne from which they can survey the world, their image of the world is divided into fragments by the constantly changing camera angle. It takes a thorough education to convince them that there are more participants in this traffic who must be taken into account. Reality only returns in the event of a catastrophe: a collision, interference or a blackout. For the rest, everything is imaginary, on the tube or through the windshield, not untrue or unreal, but autonomous. In the TV image the real crowd has not disappeared, but has been reduced to an audience which is shown as scenery for the media spectacle, in order to enhance its realistic effect. If that audience is left out, due to flood or fire, then it will spontaneously show up a day after the event to claim its right to exist in the capacity of tourists of disaster.

The media hunt for the event, which is experienced by a real crowd, to bring it into a scenario on which the crowd itself has no grip: the media event. The reality factor of the original event here appears as the amusement factor of the spectacle, which has no other purpose than to keep the viewers tuned in. The media event is directed news, and can always take a different course than was anticipated, independently of the cameras present. It can be repeated infinitely, in slow motion if necessary. It is global, can be received worldwide; it has no exclusive bond with the place where it happened, does not know the local experience. There is no chain reaction of incidents which branch out in all directions to ultimately spin around. In the media event a flow of items is set into motion, everything gradually rolls together into one single image which will function as a symbol. Whereas the event (ITAL) acquires an ecstatic character, the aura of the media (ITAL) event stays limited to the broadcast itself. It does not compress time, but strives for a permanent timeliness. Insofar as it leads to anything, it leads to the subsequent media spectacles. What's attractive is that it's fully without consequences for the viewers, "risky but comfortable." It derives its impact not from the attack of the present on the rest of time, but from its instantaneous omnipresence, the guarantee that it's receivable worldwide and really being watched. Without viewers there is no media event; the imaginary crowd of the people at home lends the festive character to what would otherwise have just been news. Without this mediumistic extra the viewer immediately gets the feeling of being tuned to the wrong channel.

The media create the space in which the imaginary crowd is called into being. While everyone's individually busy with his own media consumption, the media carry out the ideology of contact. They offer information about the world as shown by them, without strings concoction instead of connection. The media are not out to communicate, but to alienate. They are in capable of making from the most mundane incident a strange spectacle, by conjuring the item's place into a location. But when the audience turns its back on such a media event and starts waving at the camera, this is censored with an instantaneous change of camera angle, because interaction with the media disturbs the reality effect. The contact brought about by the media is by definition media-tized, and thus never more than an introduction, a flood of data. In the media we can get introduced to everything and everyone, but meeting them is not included. The meeting, after all, only feeds off the information exchange; it takes place itself on another level, in the shadow of communication. The meeting is data-free; that gives it its unthinkable quality. It is collision, disturbance of the everyday existence, destruction of nostalgia and promises; it happens, all at once, instantly. "This meeting will not be televised."

The material passed on to the movement teachings concerns squatting in the Netherlands during the last twelve years or so. Characteristic of it was that it stubbornly tried to withdraw itself from the decade of which it undesiredly and unavoidably was a part. The miracle of the movement squatters was that they, on the threshold of the media era, successfully indulged in an extra-medial reality and kept the memory of it alive, in a time when that level of reality was supposed to have long since disappeared.

Squatting was originally nothing more than breaking open a door. Moving into living space without the required permits was considered a fairly normal thing to do. It was done in connection with family or neighbors and caused little stir because it had been happening since the 1960s, and according to some even as early as 1945. No one got excited, except the future residents of the house. No police or mass-journalism stepped in. Everything usually quieted down again quickly.

When things changed in the late 1970s, in that people began to squat without direct relations in or with the neighborhood, that too remained hardly sensational. Though sometimes fifty buildings slated for demolition were broken into in a few months and newly refurbished for inhabitation, the press still couldn't get excited about it. It had little interest in the squatters, and ditto the other way around. Insofar as squatters in a neighborhood engaged in publicity, it consisted of self-copied information and posters. Squatting stood for nothing; it did not present itself as a social protest begging for attention. It

was not a resistance, fight or reaction, but the beginning of something new: the insight that, apart from the political belief in rules, concrete problems can be solved practically. This shock released a true craving for the event, under the motto "from the one comes the other."

Talking over the squat, its preparation and execution, the hookup of the telephone for the alarm network, the collective home repair jobs, keeping police or landlords out of the way - that was all part of such an event: a slow, unsurveyable, gradually accelerating series of meetings with people about whom you found out nothing else except that they would show up in the event it was necessary. These unexpected convergences released the energy with which the craving for the event was transformed into actions. The meeting gave the assurance that you could do almost anything: "Happy Go Lucky Squatting." When you'd let things go fully to hell, you could always phone up for the protection offered by the other from the shit you'd brought on yourself. The aura you had collectively conjured up around yourselves produced the triumphant feeling of being able to survive an event. This aura consisted of the potential crowd of the fellow squatters, the sum total of all those ready and willing, who appeared on certain exclusive occasions as a real crowd at the door waiting for trouble.

In the riot the slow progression of the squatting event in a neighborhood runs at an accelerated pace. The chain of incidents at the beginning of the open-air play had to be brought about piece by piece in order to keep things going, but when the chain reaction gets underway, time is compressed to a series of fragments of maximal intensity. This moment arose when the potential crowd of squatters appeared in the street for a demonstration or a (re)squat and there spontaneously turned into an open crowd to which every bystander could find a connection. The riot also took the media authorities by surprise; they could only come running in after the fact, and this drove the rioters away. This riot is sovereign, because it is not performed for the eye of the media, it strives after no propagandist goals, is not aimed against bosses or the state, but shrieks over the street for its own sake and ultimately leaves its participants behind in the freedom of surprise and the shiver of panic. Afterwards you watch the TV news and the papers are studied for their the pretty pictures. The reports and commentaries were not skipped over, but were written in a language which simply had nothing to do with it. "Hardening," "alienation of progressive people," "future of the constitutional state," "marginalization." No debate got going with the well-meaning "leftist press," either, because it continued to see the "squatters' revolt" through the lenses of its own past. Thus the event, withdrawn from the eye by the cloud of media, is recorded in pictures and stories that will do service for years to come. This was how the original actions entered the imaginary stage.

In the vacuum between event and picture-story the feeling of movement arises. This shared perception balances on the border between an extra-medial, untransferable experience and the realization that this outrageous occurrence, too, will unavoidably be registered in the journalistic exposé. It is the feeling that something is set into motion, without being clear what that thing is and what direction it's taking. It is uncertainty about the range of the experiences, about the extent of the damage caused in the bourgeois consciousness. But a painful apprehension goes along with it, that you have become a movement, that the growth of the open crowd has been called to a halt, its extent becoming measurable for police and opinion pollers. This course of history was countered by planning the next demonstrations, by creating the circumstances in which the chain reaction can get going once more, through the readiness to be carried away by a chain of events which will go in unforeseen directions. Coming events get anti-medial characteristics this way. They will try as hard as they can to withdraw from the film-eye, or won't be able to care less about it at the moment suprême. Cameras become associated with police spies and evidence, and because of that are required to be cut from the action.

But the longing to see the real crowd grow again can also be a reason to direct the focus towards the imaginary crowd. The latter was at the time designated "the public opinion," which could not be repelled with overly rough images. Otherwise "the sympathisers" would stay home or even turn

"against us." This attentiveness to keeping hold of the approval of the real supposed population shifted as it went to concern for the interest of the snapshot- and gossipmongers themselves. They too had slowly but surely become old acquaintances. At the same time the notion of a public opinion began to become vague. The term coincided unnoticed with what until then had been called "the press" and would ultimately become "the media" as such. The media do not so much consist of a collection of press contacts, but form rather the unconscious knowledge that the image- and sound-carriers are only tuned in in the case that the events are staged sufficiently media-genically. Through this the media become a bloc, a notion in singular. The media is the realization that everything is registered, but that only a few fragments will become items.

From out of the feeling of movement, one was in the first instance suspicious about the swift introduction of the title "squatters' movement" in the media, in analogy with workers, students, women and the environment. There was a fear that you would be required to use the term to give direction, scope and substance to your own screwing around, while it had only just begun. In the beginning it was obvious that this term suggesting one body was an imaginary quantity, the senselessness of which was most sharply proven by the allegation that you could join it. It was also clear that "the squat movement" had to be a closed subculture, intended to scare others away, and thus ultimately part of the press campaign for the "criminalization of squatters." When you felt forced to speak Newsspeak, you were inclined to pointedly avoid the word; you preferred to sign as, for example, "the assembled Amsterdam squat groups" which were aimed "At All Amsterdam People." People who spoke "in the name of the squat movement" or about "the squatters' movement" fell flat on their faces. Terms of this sort were only used ironically.

But it is unavoidable that eventually a certain pattern is discovered in one's own behaviors. They not only act on each other, but interfere as well. Knowledge concerning police methods and the mentality of news-gatherers plays as important a role in this as the neighborhood experiences, riot experiences, knowledge of the outlay of the city and organizational structures. Once this sort of pattern is discovered, a frame of reference arises in which future "axions" are evaluated a priori on their feasibility and the degree of hassle you bring down on yourself with it. Slowly but surely your own activities are thus given a goal, and the diffuse whole inside which you operate is given a substance, which crystallizes into a code of behavior. In scarcely a year's time the squatters had acquired a service record for which, if no compression of time had taken place, in a manner of speaking should have taken years of busting ass. All those elements counted together gradually became, in the inside language too, equated with "the squat movement." This is aimed at the conservation of the codes of behavior and prevents them from someday disappearing. The squat movement comes into being when squatters are no longer overcome by a desire for events, but choose to "go on." That becomes the goal.

In the Netherlands of the 1980s, the picture the press has of its own end products becomes an integral part of the information offered. The theory of relativity finds general acceptance in the media: reality changes through observation. The media no longer see themselves as a mirror of reality or as the truth behind public opinion. Press personalities, who with all their technical prostheses put themselves on the screen ever more professionally, use the media to make it clear to the public that news is a product. We can see and hear every day that the media, like other consumer goods, are manufactured according to the industrial/creative process. The worth of the product is evaluated according to its speed, uniqueness, aesthetic and apocalyptic qualities - in short, its topicality - and proven through its viewer ratings - its amusement value. If an event wants to appear in the media, it must meet these requirements.

The squatters who got caught up in a series of events, spectacular or not, had experienced them firsthand and knew that everything depicted about them in the media was a fraud - and that there was a method to the madness. The list of demands the media were imposing on themselves was intuitively

felt to be the standards "registrations" had to meet in order to become news. With those rules there was a game to be played; for example, making authority and order look jerky. The media itself too, after all, handled these things as attack-weapons. And the media caste loved to be considered so important. The real crowd, which had once raised hell in the street, became an imaginary factor to be taken into account in politics, media and squat bar. The coming-out of the media occurred in interplay with the activists' entrance into media-reality. By notifying the press agencies in advance about forthcoming events, it was guaranteed that the reporters too would be on location on time. They demanded in return that mediumistic pictures could be shot. The code of correct squatters' behavior, which after the compressed time of the first events became the notion of "the squatters' movement," began to coincide with the code for correct media performance.

The made-to-fit-the-media incident is the action. This is presented for an imaginary audience watching over the shoulders of the press agents. While a riot takes over the space it races through, an action is a small explosion in the emptiness of normality. If the medial gleam is absent, then it quickly becomes a painfully embarrassing display. It must be said emphatically, however, that this does not mean that the actions were "soft." To be able to continue penetrating the overfed medial consciousness of the viewers at home, the activists found that their deeds had to become more and more direct and concrete, or give the appearance of being such. The "hard action" became the trademark of the squat movement; its effectiveness could be measured against the conquered media-minutes. The free publicity for their own style of action had the unavoidable spin-off that, for example, squatting became a tourist attraction that appeared in the world press, municipal propaganda and travel brochures.

A remarkable distance gradually arose between everyday squatting and the media event for which the action provided the pictures. Even if you'd been involved the whole day, at home for dinner you were outside once more. You yourself were then part of the imaginary mass at whom your heavy action was aimed. The medial space was elsewhere, somewhere you went, on your bicycle. If people felt part of "the squat movement," it became, through the creation of the image which it called down upon itself, imaginary itself.

This was the moment at which the dropouts showed up and gave in radically to the desire to definitively disappear from the stage. A second group was made up of those who wanted to go on, who figured they were able to assume a new form by changing the existing structures and using them for something else. To that end, under the motto "squatting is more than just living," a diverse collection of action themes was launched, which was supposed to give chance solidarities an institutional frame. This was also directed against the tendency, inherent to the "squat movement" concept, of seeing itself as an old-style revolutionary bloc. Ever since the beginning there had been a black helmet brigade which felt it had joined battle with the municipal social democracy. They used buildings and stray figures as instruments for this higher goal, which they never allowed others to bring up for discussion. Finally, another group was busy, outside the course of events, throwing up new structures as before by starting up squat discussion hours in new neighborhoods, moving into buildings, having actions. Gradually the structure of buildings and neighborhoods proved to be transformed by this into a collection of scenes which attracted and repelled each other. When this was finally designated "the movement," the same mechanism of introduction and refusal, acceptance and takeover, occurred as with the "squat movement" concept. The movement, once on its way, could no longer be stopped.

The movement is the memory of the event. It is not the sum of adventures and groups, but an image, reflection or interpretation of the preceding, for the movers themselves as well as outsiders. This creation of an image is by definition media-tized, whether it takes place in "inside" or "bourgeois" historical writing; that group which is carried along in the events and meets each other there knows

that the media reports sheer nonsense about it. Those who, for whatever legitimate reason, show up too late and have to be satisfied by the pictures and stories can all too easily take them to be true. While the first group of squatters was overcome by the events, the latecomers claimed that they were organized by the first group. The context of the legends would have been the result of the political ideology, which was left over in "the movement" as a sort of residue of the events. This remnant would have been the source out of which the preceding had appeared.

The second and following generations of squatters came across as a collection of self-made lawbreakers who were in the middle of the scene-forming phase. The squat movement had already long been an imaginary crowd which people still thought they could join up with, while it had already transformed itself into a "movement," which was concerned with very different things. Within the old guard there had long been no talk of a real crowd or a compression of time. The actions which were done scene-by-scene no longer relied on mutual interaction; even on nights with an enormous accumulation of private initiatives they did not begin to strengthen each other, but continued in their parallel existences, just like the scenes. At the most they produced surprise a day later over the fact that there turned out to be more people with the same shadowy hobby. People sought interaction with the media, not with each other. The real crowd that could increase just like that had become something unknown and creepy, a memory which was brought up again as the discussion over "broadening," in which nostalgia had to be sublimated to the desire for movement. Solidarity, which had once swept over you just like the event, now suddenly had to be artificially induced through taking action themes upon which everyone agreed anyway (fascism, racism, sexism). New initiatives get no further than a remix of good acquaintances and old contacts.

If the movement is the memory of an adventure, the scene is the memory of a meeting. This is ascribed afterwards to a shared lifestyle, and the scene becomes the plateau for the spectacular staging of it. Through the use of the word "movement," a larger context and a historic continuity are suggested, which legitimize and block the behavioral codes of the scene. As lifestyle pur sang, however, it would not need the past; it could shine in the ecstatic experience of its manifestation. But the movement scene cannot see itself apart from the squatting past, because it faces the dilemma that the squat movement has never wanted to trace its own end, or stage it. The scene no longer succeeds in shamelessly turning the present upside down; the dead weight of history makes it insensitive to the prevailing circumstances of the now. The scene is still waiting for the meeting and the event. In order to keep alive the memory and its promise, they still, after laborious reunion discussions and months of preparations, sometimes take part in "medium-sized actions" in connection with organizations. When an event takes place, it overtakes the scenes like a natural disaster. Such a catastrophic riot is actually still unleashed only by absolute beginners who are enthusiastically willing to fetch and carry materials for some totally unknown purpose.

The media does not know metamorphosis. It constructs and distributes mass-produced identities and requires everyone who comes into contact with it to show his or her papers. It challenges its users from series to quiz show to look at themselves on the screen. It has replaced the classic model, in which every individual could be socially placed on the basis of work and sex, with the identities market, where you can be anything you want, as long as you're something and let it show. Activists figured out over time that you couldn't stay permanently current, but that you could get back into the media, as long as you presented yourself time after time under another name and organizational form. Being elusive for press and police was achieved through playing off the media norm of name and intention against itself. Thus it also became less and less lucrative to appear as the squat movement, however staunchly loyal you remained to it in your own circle. This desire to become imaginary resulted in a knowledge of media-machinations, which became second nature, an automatism in which the action only exists once it's been an item. The entry into medial space, to the neglect of the extra-medial, resulted in the forgetting of the possibility of metamorphosis, which was accepted

without a thought by the squatters in the early days. One can consciously and at will switch over from one identity to the other. But metamorphosis has nothing to do with desire or consciousness, with choosing from myriad options. The transformation is possible when one enters the emptiness at the right moment in order to appear elsewhere as something different, without it being established what. The medium of the metamorphosis is the body, the matter itself, and not only its image, or identity. Thus the individual changes into, for example, a crowd-person through breaking with the fear of touch, through a sudden acknowledgement and appreciation of his own and others' bodies, through wiping out the will and the personal biography. The desire for change is not enough for a transformation; once underway the process acquires its own tempo, takes a turn and carries you along. The metamorphosis short-circuits with reality and thus maximizes its intensity. The meeting during the event is the moment of the turn. By accepting the succession of images and identities in the media as some kind of reality, the activist segment of the nation lost the potential to disappear from the stage and lose itself in the process of unforeseeable transformations.

The movement teachings tackle this puzzle of appearances and disappearances in extra-medial reality. Movement teachings are a way of seeing as well as a book, and present delayed insights without asking themselves what good it might do. They are not out to dig up all the stories. There has already been so much written about some events. But their selection is not a judgment of quality. In the material which they have thankfully been granted, the movement teachings seek the moments at which the patterns manifest themselves. The rest is history.