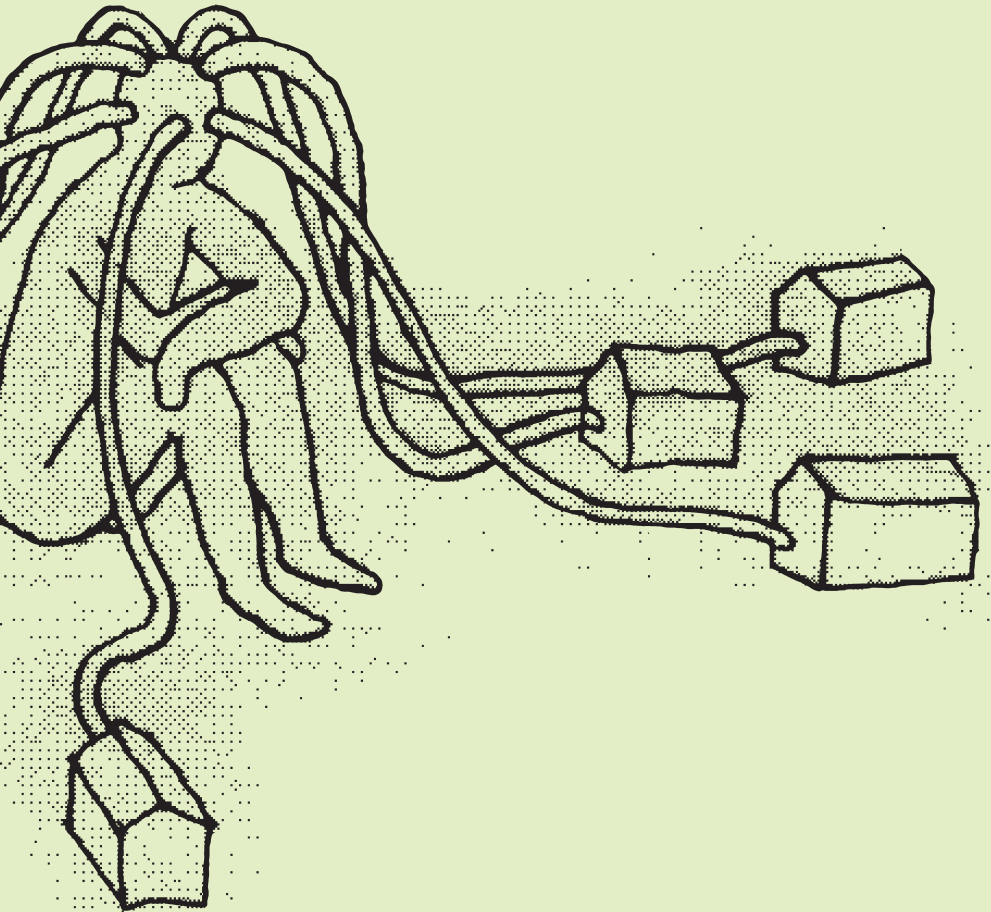


Roc Laseca

Against
Community



We have been forced to live together. We have been kindly invited to be with one another, side by side, mutually observing each other. I think we know the motives too, and recognize the consequences which have derived from forcing this collective, planetary understanding of what we are expected to be. Even so, we haven't lost the desire to live together.

To bring about this obligation, modernity led the individual to be engaged with his own identity and his own consciousness, and simultaneously, with a control of foreign powers. What we are looking at here, isn't just the decisive disengagement with these forms of foreign power in recent times (through a new collective will that discusses the mechanics of representation), but also the

realization that this near at hand revolution is defined by the disengagement of the individual with his own identity and his own consciousness: **stop being what we are, but not to become something else.**

1848

In June, the United Kingdom decided by popular vote to leave the European Union. They will continue being part of the European continent: their island will not move out of the North Sea, but they will no longer be part of the Community alliance. Brexit has simply announced the transition to a new regional climate that has yet to be defined. Catalonia and Scotland have also been spending time trying to redraw their borders. The enormous success of mass mobilizations

in favor of a pro-independence solution has shifted back to measuring collective emotions: despair, overkill, social panic, fear of outsiders... There were also these questions of emotional hypersensitivity which led to the crisis of Syrian refugees: of more than four million Syrians displaced in neighboring countries, almost two million find themselves in Turkey, waiting for a Community decision to let them come into Europe. Of them, 4,500 are rescued daily in the Mediterranean. For the moment, not only are they far from being citizens of any place, they are not even yet refugees (they haven't found the necessary refuge). Their identity is most akin to liminal men and women, human beings in transition waiting for the EU ritual to begin that grants them a more or less fixed collective identity. Paradoxically, they are the first to discover that there is no such thing as a stable identity, much less in the framework of the dissolution of energies of production, the end of the fixed relationship between capital and time spent working or the crisis of the Community project based on solidarity and neighborliness.

This border fever is not only conditioning Europe. On

the other side of the Atlantic, Donald Trump has already announced as a leading idea for his republican candidacy for the presidency of the United States that he will build a colossal dividing wall that will run along and physically separate the 2,000-mile border with Mexico. A large part of the North American population, including some of Trump's party colleagues, have thrown up their hands, not because of the candidate's improbable project, but because of fear and the new racist regulations that this idea instantly conjures up. Those who have publically announced that they would move with their families to Canada if Trump were elected President and a new racist wave were to invade the country are not few in number. Nobody has had the opportunity to listen to those, however, who would move to Mexico in such a case, a country that is as much of a neighbor to the United States as Canada is.

Fear has already been served up and the tragedy has been extended with the inability to redefine the collective project in the 21st Century. It is not just about shaping how we are going to be in view

of the social challenges that face us, but more precisely how we are going to be conjointly, how we are going to be able to continue living together. One of the greatest obstacles that we meet when we come to raise these issues is eminently methodological: we lack a lexicon that is more or less in common to put a discussion about a social future back on the table. The last time the West raised these major questions was in the framework of post-structuralism and a new humanist Marxism, which means the vocabulary that we count on today to be able to revisit themes such as coexistence, reciprocity, new neighborliness or cohabitation finds itself conditioned by the intellectual traditions of the 20th Century which are not able to work in the context of 21st Century community obstacles. Therefore, the next move isn't to do with opposing post-nationalist trends or with demanding a new social sovereignty based on innovative mechanisms that are representative of the people. It's to do with creating new cultural conditions for the birth of a proactive language which takes into account the urgency of the issues that we

have to face. We won't be able to speak about them if we lack a more or less shared lexicon that can produce more or less common actions.

The crisis, however, between shared actions and collective identity is not new. The breach that separates that which we can do and that which we might be is in fact the cause of the singular public sphere that we have had in Europe since the bourgeois revolutions of 1830 and, above all, of 1848. A community is fundamentally a collective identity, a way to be able to say who we are. During the course of the 19th Century, the greatest transformation took place in the domain of this collective articulation: what unites to forge a sense of us is no longer going to be our common traits, but shared fantasies and projections. Community identity is founded when a group's very survival is threatened: collective action is undertaken to confront this threat and to search for images which bind it together. In the crisis of public life during the 19th Century, when shared action and collective identity were broken apart, fantasies as common images arose to construct a sense of the public.

One of the examples which is always given to show this is the well-known work *Liberty Leading the People*, painted by Delacroix in 1831; a clear metaphor of an entire collective being led by an imagined abstraction that is put at the front of the revolt. What is interesting here is not so much the personalized abstraction of liberty as the construction of a shared imagination around her. As Richard Sennett points out: “the more a fantasied common personality dominates the life of a group, the less can that group act to advance its collective interests. [...] Shared imagery becomes a deterrent to shared action.” Tragically, the basis of this peculiar public geography from the middle of the 19th Century has conditioned social stances until today: that which we might communally be shuts off the path to what we can conjointly do.

Social distance

The idea of community is a self-imposed reduction of what we could become conjointly. A reduction that we have interiorized and which we don't expect to discuss much further. We all take for granted that an intimate social environment, based

on individual proximity and collective contact always results in common benefits and emotional improvements. Don't we? What if we were able to imagine that intimacy has been injected as a modern project across our diverse society? What if what we can be has been transformed into a phenomenon of collective identity rather than into a shared action? In what situation would this leave what we understand by community?

In order to try and reply to this question, we might have to start by looking at the impact that intimacy has had on the psychological imagination of public life. For simple natural life (zoe) was already excluded from the scope of the polis and the definition of the perfect community in the classical world. The simple fact of living and politically qualified life were in strict opposition. There is a moment, however, at the threshold of modernity, where natural life and the mechanics and calculations of state power were synchronized. Biopolitics was born and with it the entry of zoe in the sphere of the polis. This arrival was the first collective performance. It was the decisive event of modernity. But it occurred as a

performative fact, and not as a biological one.

Leaving the polis (and bringing about the revolution to come) won't therefore happen as a collective performance. The formal gesture will have to be restored by a biological process which will allow us to question possible new relationships between life and politics.

These potential new relationships will be informed, above all, by future modes of belonging to the community. Because you either belong or you don't belong to the community. You enter or you leave it. You and your beliefs. The community allows us to live among the whole "solitary crowd" announced by David Riesman, share images of who we are and build collectively a sense of us. It is intimate society that allows us to face with strength the paradox of social isolation within mass visibility. We are united with each other, fraternally, we cement a productive intimacy and our actions are based on the tight communal bond that we have established.

Now, our greatest strength is also our most widespread weakness. Even if it seems counterintuitive, intimate society is but a guarantor of

the perversion of the modern communal experience. The illusion of this intimacy, in our current digital conditions that allows us to create tailor-made zones of comfort from each of our IP addresses, is reinforced daily. Incivility, to use Richard Sennett's terminology, arises precisely the tighter the sphere of action is within a community formed by a collective personality. By the image of what we believe ourselves to be. People are united fraternally, and form an empathetic and allied group based on the rejection of those who aren't found within the local circle. This rejection creates further demands of autonomy with respect to the outside world, from which the community protects itself to guarantee its authenticity. This social dynamic is nothing but a legitimate strategy of collective survival faced with the fundamental problem of capitalism: dissociation. To eliminate this lack of awareness between people, the community tries to make the scale of human experience intimate and local again, even today when digitalized and connected online. However, and paradoxically, it is this localism that will negate the capacity

to question the established conditions of our life.

Since the activism of the mid-20th Century, it was believed that the reconstruction of the local community constituted the point of departure for the reconstruction of the politics of society. Even today, the community, as such and as we understand it, holds its own only through internal passion and external withdrawal: that for which we fight to maintain our community is opposed to that against which we fight, to safeguard it from external impurities. From the first fight our community solidarity is born, which unites its members all the more; from the second, the mistrust in those members who change and betray the community. Mistrust and solidarity, in appearance so opposed, are united to reinforce a community project.

Pausing to think about the internal functional structure of the community only makes sense, however, when the way its members act impacts on the construction of the public sphere. Or better still, when the public and the communal are mutually determined, in a gradual, self-conditioned process. This occurs because

who we are is transformed in a highly selective act of imagination. The more local imagination is, the greater the number of social interests and commitments there are to which the emotional logic of the community is inclined. In fact, the more people are committed to the community's passions, the more the basic institutions of social order remain untouched.

What occurs with each of its members? Fundamentally, they are unable to act. To be more precise, they are unable to express themselves beyond their group's representation. To clarify this, we would have to depart from an apparent contradiction: despite the efforts of the emotional psychology of the community, a collective image of us is never solidified. In other words, what we are is in continual transformation, taking on daily new dynamics and making links with other images that increase the experience of our social challenges and aspirations. Yet the community validates the immobility of its members in the name of authenticity and loyalty to the group. At this point, the community feeling can no longer be committed to nor questioned by the concrete

actions of its members, because it has been converted into a definition of who we are as a collective person. Politics is succeeded here by emotional loyalty.

In this context, the peculiar thing is that the roles in the community, which apparently constitute only a means to access power, are transformed into an end in themselves. When the common social positions are established and the roles divided out, the group starts to operate on the basis of this common appearance, starts to believe in it, to cling onto it, to defend it. Intimacy, which binds its members, functions furthermore as a stimulant to reinforce its dynamics: the people start to believe that which at the beginning they pretended to believe.

Moreover, the public sphere is called into question. The public is the result of an adult social imagination disassociated from the ego, and based on the outsider as object of experience. A public geography allows a solid and credible social construction only when this is based on individual expressions, and not on shared roles within the community. These expressions

can only be given in an impersonal setting, where people can act. An intimate and overly personalized environment doesn't leave space for acting and play. Without social distance, intimate society discourages participation by the individual and by the group. Losing the capacity for play means losing the sense of the plasticity of the human condition. Plasticity only comes with social distance. Personal action cannot be given in an already personalized environment. There is no way to participate in the already participated in.

be liked

The opposite of intimate society would not be, however, post-historical society in Alexandre Kojève's meaning of the term, defined by a state of universal and homogenous action which assures personal and social survival. Rather, the reverse: the opening of an arena of dissent and multiple expressions which might build visible collectives and might not have to channel policies about how to be liked. Because affection is not a resource of our bioeconomics, it is a value

that attracts more “likes”, other affections to be valued equally.

This open arena of expression is what has been co-opted by the current neoliberal structure. The material dimension of memory, communication and emotion is disintegrating in the density and speed of the packages of information which are disseminated with the sole purpose of obtaining added value from its people. Furthermore, accumulation in the world of emotional capitalism no longer passes as production of goods, meetings or collective experiences, but goes directly to its mercantile objective: to extract value from its very circulation and from the virtualization of life and emotions.

Emotion is today a techno-linguistic machine. It affects and informs both organisms and markets, it is both a financial and social matter, which measures and determines the value of public debt, the regulation of communal panic or the control of sales of treasury bonds.

This is why we cannot even return to humanist Marxism to critically evaluate the conditions of this context. Marx presupposed the

existence of a force of external control, a power that today is no longer found on the outside: each individual is master and slave of himself, the source and the object of his own abilities, as pointed out by Byung Chul-Han. The neoliberal domain precisely facilitates this circulation to eliminate resistance. That which circulates, hardly generates obstacles and leaves aside the necessity to oppose it. Actual power is no longer alienated: we have interiorized it, it has acquired the form of each digital user, it is friendly, cooperative, and by extension, invisible and untouchable. Why attack what cooperates with us, with our community?

Franco Berardi-Bifo, together with Han, insists that this is why today a revolution is unthinkable.

Consequently, power is immune to all resistance because it makes use of the freedom of community, instead of restricting it. However, the community will have to develop a single body and voice, as we have seen, consisting of individuals that synchronize the system and its *mise-en-scène* despite its apparent global diversity. Society is the opposite. Its infinite members

are not called to stage a choreography and have a single desire. The social is not programmatic, although we want to see in it a collective project which can bring us a closer understanding of what we are.

If there were a solution of continuity, it would come from mistrusting the orientation of the global community, including the well-intentioned logic of sharing with regards to property. Total capitalization of the community has demonstrated that disinterested kindness is no longer possible in a regime of reciprocal valuation which even makes profits from emotions to obtain added value.

We have no other option, therefore, than to work in the social and in the collapse of aesthetics. What other discipline was founded in the study and management of distances (social, formal, affective) besides aesthetics? But aesthetics is not a field of knowledge. What we are trying to do here is to imagine new forms (or rather non-formal ways) to deal again with the world we live in. To try new options, not only to misinform the given institutional structures, but to sound out

other logics that open up between emotions and power.

Counter-aesthetic Museum

When we talk about coexistence, we mean that of codes. Never are we side by side with others, nor living together. What we have are bases of shared codes that have learned to mutually modify each other through contact. Coexistence emerges then linked to belief systems about our bodies and, above all, to their survival. Meanwhile, the new transparent and observable individual that digital platforms and the Internet have turned us into are challenging the traditions we have learned to coexist with. Not for a lack of code, but for a lack of body. This is why we can only find refuge in the museum. The museum is a nerve ending. The nerve ending of a digital body that we no longer own. At least not as exclusive property. This body of infinite identities --absent body included-- has ended up confused with the Internet's systemic spaces of social and material transformation. We no longer visit museums (we lack a body for this): we perform

them digitally every day, and we do it subjected to the reflection of structures given in advance, despite the apparent freedom of conduct and use that the digital provides us. We are not emancipated like the unexpected viruses that alter the structures of the host-museum. There was no way to resist the protocols of museum conduct, to perforate its productive force. Nevertheless the museum is a nerve ending. In other words, it acts between two fields: it is capable of receiving sensitive information to perceive its environment and to mobilize the entire organism so that it acts accordingly.

This is why the museum must anticipate life in its future social, economic and emotional forms and articulations. It must develop its skill to turn continually towards the real, and the real is urgent. Only here will it be a laboratory capable of reversing the current trend of the museum that is currently subordinating the world to its forms of representation, and distancing us from life in favor of the devices that represent it. What we are talking about here is the diverse ways in which an individual can have meaning in a given political,

social and economic system with regard to its capacity to generate exceptions and to facilitate the apparition of other systems of living, other logics of social order. The institution allows us precisely to work from the experience of the outsider, beyond the collective memory sketched out by the local circuit. This, of course, occurs on a very precarious plane, where the museum will have to be capable of moving from the community alliances to the sphere of society: restoring mistrust and solidarity (basic components of the community as we have seen) through participation and collective imagination, more suited to the social sphere. Because if the museum is found in the middle of all things, it is especially found between society and the community.

The precariousness in which the museum works has nothing to do with the consequences of having extracted works of art from its historical context to locate them in an institutional here and now, but rather with operating in a constant present that tries to grasp but cannot cover. The infinite identities of the here and now will oblige

the museum to perform minute by minute its relation with the objects and cultural histories that it accommodates. Its precariousness is its richness. It's what allows us to interrogate daily the basis of cultural history that we are promised and to try to find elasticity in the material conditions of human existence. Elasticity and precariousness

allow us to question the relations which are built day-to-day in the institution. These relations are the basis of the construction of the new community of individual and collective expression. This future community will have nothing to do with what we are expected to be. Nor with what we believe we might be.

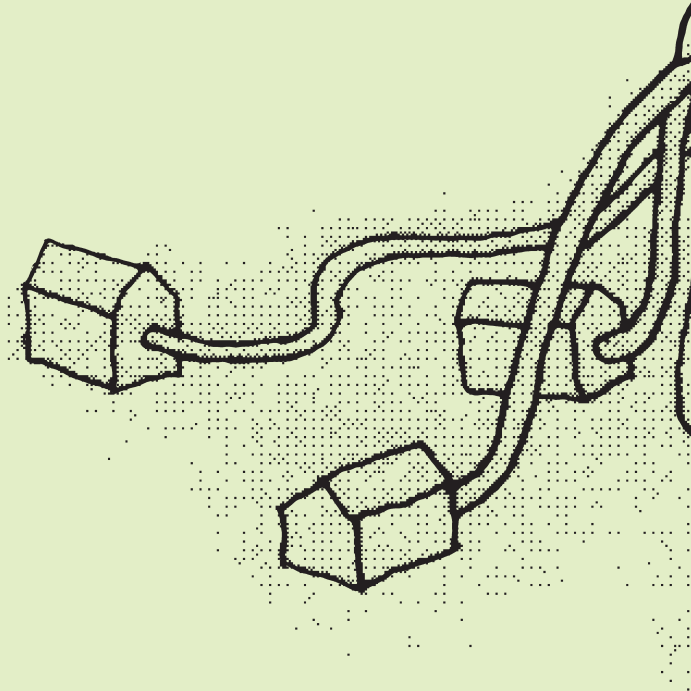
Roc Laseca is an art theorist and curator. His research lies on the prevalence of institutional thought, as applied to art, architecture and museums, on the creation and fall of contemporary communities. A doctor in Art Theory and Cultural Prospective, he studied at Universidad de La Laguna, Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Helsinki University. Since 2013, he serves as Director of Los

Encuentros Denkbilder, the biannual experimental artistic exchange program that takes place in the Canary Islands, for which he has devised each edition with Jannis Kounellis, Joseph Kosuth, and the directors/academic directors of Tate Modern, London, École Nationale de Beaux-Arts, Paris and MoMA, New York. His most recent book "The Unstoppable Museum" has been published by Ediciones Metales Pesados.

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