Common Wealth: Beyond Private and Public

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Commonwealth (2009), the latest opus of American literary theoretician Michael Hardt and Italian political scientist Antonio Negri, is a sequel to their previous books *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004). In it they continue their project to analyze the dynamics of globalization from a Marxist viewpoint and in terms of models of resistance. Although art is not an object of their study, the concepts they employ are well suited to describing certain phenomena in the more recent history of visual culture. In *Commonwealth* the authors formulate a number of rather unexpected theses on the relationship between the private and the public. Like many others, they oppose the increasing tendency brought about by globalization to transfer resources that were previously accessible to everybody into private ownership. At the same time they criticize the dominant view that "the only alternative to the private is the public, that is, what is managed and regulated by states and other governmental authorities."[1] Restricting the analysis to the opposition between private and public, according to Hardt und Negri, ignores those things that might be termed "common." They include in this definition "the common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty" as well as "those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects."[2] In their view the dualism between public and private corresponds with "an equally pernicious political alternative between

[1] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), p. 10.
[2] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

capitalism and socialism."[3] They bring the concept of the "common" into play as an alternative, because "contemporary forms of capitalist production and accumulation . . . paradoxically make possible and even require expansions of the common."[4] Given changing conditions of production "information, codes, knowledge, images and affects" in particular require "a high degree of freedom as well as open access to common resources."[5] Because these elements can easily be reproduced and disseminated, they are not only indispensable for the mechanisms of a globalized economy but also harbor the potential to escape privatization and total control time and again.

The Struggle for Resources

In Chile the struggle for control of the common is one of the causes of what curator Ingrid Wildi Merino calls "dislocación," which in Spanish is normally a medical term. In its original sense it denotes, like the English word *dislocation,* the ball of a joint coming out of its socket. It is seldom used in everyday language. However, the many Spanish synonyms for 'dislocación'—*luxación, desarticulación, descoyuntamiento, desencajaamiento, dislocamien, zafadura, détorsion*—demonstrate the broad spectrum of meaning of the term, which is connoted more strongly with pain and violence than the English word 'dislocation' or the German word 'Verschiebung'. It can be used to mean not only a physical injury but also a linguistic misunderstanding, a change in perception, or a geographical shift.

Wildi Merino uses it metaphorically, like Mieke Bal's "travelling concept," in order to refer to how the individual is pulled in different directions in the dispute over the common.[6]

Wildi Merino's exhibition reminds us that the history of Chile has also been marked by conflicts over common resources, primarily copper. Chile is by far the world's largest copper

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[3] Ibid., p. 11.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] See Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide* (Toronto, 2002).

producer. The nationalization of the country's mines, previously owned mainly by US companies, in the early nineteen-seventies under President Salvador Allende was the main reason for the military putsch led by Augusto Pinochet in September 1973. The profits from these mines enabled the dictatorship, which did not reverse the nationalization, to remain in power for almost two decades. And ultimately it has been the recent soaring demand for copper that has provided the backbone for the country to flourish economically. Nevertheless, control of the common by the state by no means implies that everyone stands to profit from it. Even during the brief rule of the Unidad Popular, the alliance of left-wing parties that governed Chile from 1970 to 1973, the conflict between socialism and capitalism was fought in part at the expense of the working class. Miners went on strike after the wage rises agreed by the government lost their value in the face of high inflation and the falling price of copper on the world market and after the government reneged on its promise to couple wages to the cost of living.[7] Now, twenty years after the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of a democratic order, there is still a glaring gulf between rich and poor. In Santiago de Chile the new financial centers and gated communities offer a spectacular contrast to rundown neighborhoods and slums.

The question of how the poor can receive a share of the common wealth stands at the center of various projects aimed at transforming the slums into social housing areas. Javier Rioseco from OOO Estudio has investigated this problem. In his installation *Decreto público no habitable* he allows visitors to experience the dimensions of a housing project of this kind for themselves (ill. p. ##). At the same time the discussions he documents reveal how the inhabitants of social housing are still excluded from the decision-making. Government actors, planners, architects, and representatives of relief organizations—all of them seem to know better than the inhabitants themselves what is good for them. What is clear is that many

[7] See John Hickman, *News from the End of the Earth. A Portrait of Chile* (New York, 1998), pp. 105ff.; Francisco Zapata, "The Chilean Labor Movement under Salvador Allende 1970–1973," *Latin American Perspectives. Imperialism and the Working Class in Latin America* 3, 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 85–97.

people stand to profit from the conflict over the common. Anyone who tries to follow the discussions shown on various screens is continually disturbed by the deafening noise of airplanes. The visitors in the exhibition space thus experience involuntary not only that space, time, air, and water are part of the common good but also a quiet environment and that this is by no means shared evenly among people. Josep-María Martín tried to interfere in this process by means of a kind of artistic intervention. His idea was not simply to document the dispute over low-cost housing for the poor, but also to use his own skill as an artist in the process. His attempt to participate in the process via art ultimately failed. Yet his chronicle *Made in Chile* offers an insight into the complexity of a situation that cannot be tackled using traditional urban planning and architectural instruments.

The views exclusively of Santiago de Chile ignore the fact that Chile is actually a country of enormous distances and huge contrasts and that the economic boom that followed the end of the dictatorship has brought about a new wave of internal and international migration. This is particularly apparent in the mining cities in northern Chile and for harbor cities such as Arica. For her video installation *Arica y norte de Chile no lugar y lugar de todos* Ingrid Wildi Merino chose Arica, the country's northernmost city. Because of its position as a border city and a major port, Arica has become a regional hub, particularly of the drugs trade (ill. p. ##). In Chilean terms it is a large city, with a population of just under 200,000, of which illegal labor immigrants from Peru and Bolivia make up a not insignificant part. Hardly anyone here has a local family history. Wildi Merino calls Arica a "synthetic city." Yet for all its artificiality it has developed a clear identity of its own based on pride in the city and its ethnic mix. The long journeys with the camera in Wildi Merino's video installations show how neighborhoods that have sprung up from nowhere have a special beauty of their own, human dimensions that correspond neither with eurocentric ideas of a unified "cityscape" nor with the cliché of a Latin American megacity. The photographs of the built environment are

juxtaposed with interviews with public officials, sociologists, and anthropologists, who comment on the history and identity of the city. The common, in the form of accessible public space, the beach, a wonderful climate, and, or so it appears, a high degree of tolerance, becomes tangible in the rhythm of the images and the leisurely tempo of the conversations. What at first sight appears to be a typical globalized non-place turns out in fact to be a place for everybody.

The City under Pressure

The UNCTAD building in Santiago de Chile has become an emblem of how common wealth can really be made accessible to practically everybody. Javier Rioseco investigated the history of this building,[8] which was constructed for the third session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)—an organization created in 1964 to represent the interests of the emerging states—which took place in Santiago de Chile in April and May 1972. The meeting was held in the congress center, which was built under the government of Salvador Allende according to the socialist model of a house of culture and which, after the conference had finished, was to serve as a cultural center and meeting place for the city's population. The building thus became a quintessential symbol of the common. It was a homegrown project in the sense that it was built by Chilean architects, workers, and artists using local materials—only the glass was imported from Holland. Built in only nine months, the building was supposed to help Chile catch up with the industrialized world. It was designed to supplement the inner-city complex of university, theater, and museum, and included a large inexpensive restaurant where students from the adjoining university, inhabitants of the surrounding residential areas, and officials could meet. Works of art from all over the world were gathered together, and soon the building had acquired, alongside its

[8] Javier Rioseco, "Programmed Dismantlement of 'Diego Portales' Building," manuscript (Santiago de Chile, 2008).

official name Gabriela Mistral Metropolitan Cultural Center (GMMCC), the nickname "Museum of the People."

When Gordon Matta-Clark—the then still almost unknown son of the famous Chilean-born painter Roberto Matta— arrived in Santiago de Chile in December 1971, work on the UNCTAD building was already in full swing. We do not know whether he visited the building site, but he would no doubt have enjoyed the topping-out ceremony for which a big street party was organized in front of the building (ill. p. ##). The project to build a Museum of the People coincided with Matta-Clark's interest in the subject of the common good. While the building was being constructed, he articulated this in urban performances like *Pig Roast,* a dinner for artist friends and the homeless, which he had already staged in May 1971 as part of the Brooklyn Bridge Events in New York as well as in connection with the artists' restaurant Food, which he initiated together with friends in September 1971. His intervention in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago de Chile was also devoted to the theme of a common good: daylight. We have no documentation of this event, but what he apparently wanted to do was to use mirrors in order to divert the resource daylight from the roof of the building into the dark basement (ill. p. ##). Matta-Clark probably remained aware of what was going on in Chile through his friendship with the Chilean artist Juan Downey. In September 1972, shortly after Labor Day, he and Downey pushed a four-wheeled cart on Wall Street in New York. Passersby were invited to take a seat back-to-back in the vehicle, a combination of moon-mobile, wheelchair, and ice-cream cart. An assistant fitted them with a breathing mask, offering them fresh air to revive themselves after a day's work at the stock exchange. The project *Fresh Air* was thus also about a common resource: air (ill. p. ##).

If one interprets the performance as a commentary on the place where it was staged, we acquire a context into which to place it. US President Richard Nixon's decision de facto to end the Bretton Woods system in August 1971, by decoupling the US dollar from the gold

standard and thus abrogating the system of stable exchange rates, ushered in the phase of deregulation of the financial markets, today generally regarded as the beginning of globalization. This resulted in a growing gulf between social classes in the industrialized nations and had disastrous consequences for the Latin American economies, which relied on a stable dollar. In September 1973, two years after Matta-Clark's visit, attempts in Chile to make the common wealth accessible to the population were thwarted by the CIA-sponsored putsch by Augusto Pinochet. From the perspective of economic history the putsch marks the beginning of the "marriage between U.S. unilateralism and economic neoliberalism."[9] The military dictatorship adopted the laissez-faire concepts of the US economist Milton Friedman and of a series of Chilean economists from the same school, the so-called Chicago Boys. Developments in Chile can therefore be regarded as a kind of test case for global deregulation. In other words, Chilean society became the first society in the world to be subjected unprotected to the full force of globalization. RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) believes that the Chilean example shows "the future of Europe." Their installation *invest & drawwipe* begins with a blown-up advertisement from an edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that appeared shortly after the putsch calling on readers to invest in Chile. The advertisement testifies not only to the greed and cynicism of a system that regards the destruction of democracy as an opportunity to make a large profit (ill. p. ##). The installation— a literally ruined interior—is also a visual illustration of how the raw forces of deregulated markets throw individuals off track and tear apart their spatial and temporal continuum.

Remembering and Forgetting

[9] Hardt and Negri 2009 (see note. 1), p. 275.

The putsch led to the murder, imprisonment, or expulsion of thousands of people, and it also affected perceptions of the city of Santiago de Chile. The national stadium was built in the nineteen-thirties, and for decades was a venue for sports events, concerts, and political speeches and hence a place for the common. Since its use as a concentration camp following the putsch on September 11, 1973, however, it has become a traumatized location. Camilo Yáñez's installation *Estadio nacional, 11.09.09 Santiago, Chile* portrays the stadium once again shortly before its renovation in 2010. The installation raises the question of whether the refurbishment will also obliterate the historical significance of the stadium or whether the place will remain inextricably linked with its tragic past. The face of the UNCTAD building also changed radically when the dictatorship came to power. The building, originally conceived to serve the community, was immediately taken over by the military. Because the Moneda, the presidential palace, had been damaged during the putsch, the military junta moved into the UNCTAD building, which was thus transformed from a symbol of openness to a symbol of oppression. The works of art were either destroyed or moved elsewhere, and the previously transparent facade was closed off. Two years after the putsch the building also received a new name: the Diego-Portales building. This ambivalent legacy can still be felt today. Even after the dictatorship came to an end in 1990 it remained an administrative building, in 2006 part of it burned out, and in the fall of 2010 it was reopened as a cultural center. Still, it did manage to narrowly escape the fate of continuing to exist as a shopping mall and has now at least partially regained its original function as a cultural meeting point, a venue for concerts and congresses, and a library. Unlike its pendant, the Palast der Republik in Berlin, which had been built between 1973 and 1976 and housed the parliament of the German Democrat Republic as well as auditoria, a theater, art galleries, and many restaurants, and which was razed in 2008, the building never disappeared from the cityscape completely. But Javier Rioseco's proposal to preserve the building as a ruin and to convert it into a kind of

public landscaped park was never realized. Memories of the past have been suppressed or absorbed by the rust brown of the perforated metal facade. A few paintings, sculptures, and details like the door handles of the previous building have been preserved, but the new building incorporates them like spoils, as symbols of a triumph over history.

This form of distortion also applies to the way in which history is written, commemorated, and communicated in Chile. In *La biblioteca de la no-historia de Chile,* Voluspa Jarpa shows that the declassification of once-secret files by no means signifies that what went on under the dictatorship will actually be brought to light. And that only part of the information has been made available creates new uncertainty. Starting with the Chile Declassification Project of the US Department of State, the artist shows a wealth of data originating with the US authorities (mainly the CIA) that testify to US involvement in Chilean politics between 1968 and 1991. However, because the Americans out of respect for the privacy of individuals in the secret services and in order to prevent "serious harm to ongoing diplomatic activities of the United States"[10] have withheld some of the information, many passages in the documents are blacked out. So while this project offers a glimpse into history, the names of the actors disappear. The artist has filed data accessible to the public in gray book covers ordered by year and housed on the shelves of a bookstore. Knowledge or lack of knowledge about the past is available everywhere—while at the same beginning gradually to be absorbed by the volume of other data.

A Change of Perspective

Contrary to what observers and historiographers in Europe and the United States may believe, the oppression of the military dictatorship did not silence art. Quite the opposite: the exhibition *Subversive Practices* at the Württembergische Kunstverein Stuttgart in 2009

[10] "U.S. Department of State, Freedom of Information Act, Chile Declassification Project," press release, June 30, 1999. Online version: http://www.foia.state.gov/Press/6-30-99ChilePR.asp

showed that even in the precarious climate of an authoritarian regime important works of art were created.[11] Among the most impressive are the performances by the artists' collective Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (CADA), consisting of the sociologist Fernando Balcells, the writer Diamela Eltit, the poet Raúl Zurita, and the artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo. The group was active during the Pinochet dictatorship from 1979 to 1985. One of their performances in the public sphere was called *Inversion de escena.* On October 17, 1979, eight milk trucks from a dairy factory drove through the city and parked for several hours in front of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago de Chile. While the convoy was parked, they unfurled a white cloth in front of the entrance. The aim of the performance was to draw a connection between the art museum controlled by the Junta and the precarious supply situation and at the same time to show that art still existed, if not in the museum then outside it. In another action called *Ay Sudamerica* staged on July 12, 1981, the group dropped 400,000 leaflets out of six small aircraft over Santiago de Chile. The members of the group stated that they sought in this way to confront the trauma of the destruction of the presidential palace that heralded the end of democracy in 1973. They wrote on the leaflets that anyone working to broaden horizons, even if just intellectual horizons, was an artist. To mark the tenth anniversary of the putsch in 1983 CADA staged the performance *No + (No mas),* which means "no more." During this performance large-format posters bearing the word "No +" together with the depiction of a revolver aimed at the spectators were unrolled. The poster series, which continued for several years at various places, called for boycott and resistance in a general sense, thus demonstrating that people had had enough and were no longer prepared to tolerate the repressions and exploitation by the dictatorship and wished to reclaim urban space as common space.

[11] *Subversive Praktiken. Kunst unter Bedingungen politischer Repression, 60er bis 80er / Südamerika/Europa,* curated and conceived by Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, May 30–August 2, 2009

Dislocación shows recent works by three members of CADA. Lotty Rosenfeld shows her *Cuenta regresiva / 11.09.2006,* a video installation based on a screenplay by Diamela Eltit. Juan Castillo's *Campo de luz* was created by conducting a series of interviews with the inhabitants of the La Victoria district, a working-class neighborhood known for the left-wing attitudes of its inhabitants, in which they were asked them to say how they understood the term "dislocación." In a reference to the convoy of trucks that had driven through Santiago in silent protest for *Inversion de escena,* during the initial phase of the exhibition, a truck drove around the city with the texts of the interviews projected onto the back of it. Instead of the ubiquitous advertising that normally dominates public space in Santiago, the inhabitants of the district were suddenly allowed to have their say. The slogans and art from neighborhood projects adorning the walls of the houses in this city district have meanwhile become a public attraction in their own right. In the second phase of the exhibition the interviews were displayed in front of the studio of the local community TV station, an institution that functions not only as a center of communication but also as a small media school.

Mario Navarra's work also refers to the structure of opposition during the era of dictatorship, in this case to the underground radio stations. His *Radio ideal*—a makeshift radio station housed in a tiny trailer—appeared at a number of different places during the *Dislocación* exhibition and broadcast interviews with its protagonists. The artist not only casts a critical light on the commercial orientation of most radio stations but also recalls the creative energy and imagination that kept the art scene alive during the Pinochet dictatorship. Alfredo Jaar's installation *La cordillera de los Andes (CB)* is concerned with Clotario Blest (1899–1990), a legendary Chilean trade-unionist regarded as the embodiment of opposition to the dictatorship. In the title of the work, which is based on photographs he took of the white-bearded Blest in the eighties, Jaar uses the Andes mountains as a metaphor for the workers' idol. Placing the photographs of Blest in front of a silhouette of the mountains consisting of

neon tubes, he deploys the analogy between mountains and people that has been around since antiquity. He portrays Blest as a monument, as a quasi-natural component of the collective identity, just as the Andes are an integral part of the urban landscape of Santiago de Chile. The broadly held view in certain quarters in the nineteen-seventies and eighties that Chile was proof of the success of neoliberalism and a "miracle" (as Milton Friedman once referred to it in the nineteen-seventies, by which, he later conceded, he had been referring to the fact that a dictator had implemented his thesis of free market economy) or, alternatively, was an experiment that had gone tragically wrong has led to Chile being interpreted as a special case. The "rappel à l'ordre" in the nineteen-seventies was accompanied particularly in cultural circles by a romantic transfiguration of Chile. The exhibition *Dislocación* therefore not only questions the impact that globalization has on the individual and how it changes his or her perception of space and time as well as of language, the future, and the past; it also demands from us, as representatives of an art scene still dominated by Europe and the United States, a change of view, a change of perspective. In other words, instead of regarding the Chilean past and present has distance occurrences, it forces us to see them as part of our own past and present and as inextricable components of our images and language—and hence as something common.