

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

### Title

Art practice and citizenship at Park Lek, Sundbyberg

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4771r0p4>

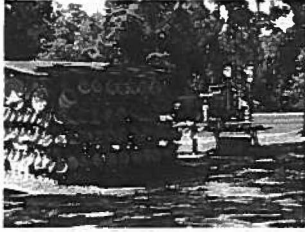
### Author

Holston, James

### Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed



The Phillips Community made baskets sold along the highway. Photo: courtesy of the author.

need to maintain a professional distance from the experiences of others and remain silent about their own. Claire Bishop warns not to get too close.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the community members' feeling of collective well-being—their sense of satisfaction in something achieved through a shared aesthetic experience—is patronisingly cast off, with their sense of unity negatively dubbed “feel-good”. Reducing a project to the shorthand of empowerment, critics

deflate the essential processes of meaning making that have been undergone, and the individual and collective agencies that have been engendered.

And finally, in contrast to critics, who fixate on questions of whether or not social practice works are art, I would argue that it is not so much an issue of form or genre but of giving oneself to the experience and finding oneself in it. Social practitioners—artists and participants alike—understand this.

James Holston. 2018. *Art Practice and Citizenship at Park Lek, Sundbyberg*. In *Public Enquiries: Park Lek and the Scandinavian Social Turn*, 99-110. Mick Wilson, Helena Selder, Somewhere, and Giorgiana Zachia, editors. London: Black Dog Press.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop, Claire, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012.

## Art Practice and Citizenship at PARK LEK, Sundbyberg JAMES HOLSTON

It is evident today that democracy-as-usual is not doing well. Multitudes of people around the world, in many different places, from many different societies, are fed up. They are tired of the gross inequalities that it appears to have generated, the emptying-out of the commonwealth by financial elites that it seems to enable, the low quality of democratic argument, the sound-bite debates that occur at election time, the city council meetings that have little continuity within the communities supposedly represented, and the popular consultations that are not binding and lead nowhere. Citizen frustrations have boiled over into various kinds of revolts. There are the rural rebellions, manifested in recent elections in Europe and the Americas, that fuel the rise of anti-establishment but authoritarian populist parties and politicians. There are also the many metropolitan rebellions that marked the first two decades of this century with massive occupations of urban space and demands for new forms of direct democracy and citizenship. Although the rural rebellions have captured great attention recently, they seem to be grounded in demands by those who feel entitled to, but excluded from, what is already a legitimated consensus of national rule—just one they want for themselves. The evidence is compelling, however, that the metropolitan rebellions are far more radical, marking our time as one of extraordinary and specifically urban revolt in which the city, in contrast to the nation, has become once again the most salient site for a dramatic expansion of political life.

By 'political' I refer to the realm of city-making activities in which residents produce the city through their lives and labours as a collective social and material product—in effect, a commons—and become aware of their rights and obligations to what they have produced. By re-assembling residents—the outraged, the marginalised, the dispossessed—into a new urban commons, the metropolitan rebellions became in effect acts of city making. Venting anger at what transpires under democracy-as-usual, they clogged the arteries of thousands of cities worldwide with condemnations of party politics, neoliberal dispossession, grotesque inequality, state violence, authoritarian urban planning, increasing precarity of life for increasingly disposable populations (the young, old, immigrant and poor) and so on. During their occupations, protesters often proposed alternative forms of convocation and deliberation as experiments to replace democracy-as-usual with new forms of more direct and vital democratic assembling of citizens. These metropolitan rebellions created a sense of urban membership for great multitudes of residents for whom the exhaustion of democracy-as-usual is evident in their various kinds of exclusions from national membership, who reside at the margins of engagement and representation and who feel deeply that they have no public voice.

Kerstin Bergendal's *PARK LEK* project in Sundbyberg, Sweden, is a brilliant intervention into these spaces of both democratic disconnection and city-making occupation. It develops a two-pronged approach: it critically engages with key problems of contemporary democratic citizenship while also proposing alternative configurations that, more remarkably, enable a set of methods for achieving them. *PARK LEK* challenges assumptions about social division among neighbouring residents, about urban development and planning and about municipal government. It contests government both in the sense of public authority and its actions and, more profoundly, in the sense of the management and development of the agencies of the self and the collective.

The *PARK LEK* project challenges contemporary practices of planning as a mode of intervention into social life to the core. In effect, it generates two counterplans. As a result of their participation in Bergendal's project, residents of Hallonbergen produced a counterplan to compel municipal authorities to consider their residentially based vision of neighbourhood life and development. In addition, Bergendal herself deploys a counterplan—one we can call her art practice—by means of which she implements a set of methods, techniques and tools aimed at redefining the nature of urban planning as intervention. Central to her art is a concept of play that entails making (making things, statements, videos, citizens), a redimensioning of the time of play and a reconfiguration of the space of play. These elements conjoin into a significant result: they define a strategy for creating an assembly of people capable of managing their interconnected lives, a strategy that radically defamiliarises the planning process as usual by breaking its authoritarian habits open to the light of new and revitalising democratic practices. Perhaps it takes an artist to achieve such results inasmuch as art has always aimed to disrupt the conventions and routines of consciousness. I would add, as an anthropologist, that Bergendal's art practice is related to my own conception of ethnography as a strategy of research that aims to defamiliarise the taken-for-granted and deadened habits of social life and refamiliarise them with new inscriptions.

In what follows I first consider problems of democratic citizenship with which *PARK LEK* engages, then suggest the conditions under which it might be possible to address these problems and, finally, discuss the methods that Bergendal deploys to do so. The mere aggregation of people into urban neighbourhoods or housing blocks does not produce an assembly of citizens capable of recognising their attachments of mutual interest and articulating them into a deliberated and collaborative course of action. A method is required that generates conditions favourable to the development of such associational forms of political life. Where they do not already exist, the method must entail an intervention into the routines of daily life. Bergendal constructs this intervention as long-term make-believe. In English, a make-believe is usually understood as a playful act of pretending, a fanciful false appearance. But Bergendal's play-art transforms the meaning of make-believe into a making that becomes the foundation of new beliefs in the agency of residents—ordinary residents of average housing blocks in commonplace neighbourhoods—for real measures of self and community determination.

## The Problem of Citizen Making and Its Conditions

Bergendal's *PARK LEK* project directly confronts one of the foremost difficulties of democracy today, namely that of discovering the means by which to transform disarticulated aggregates of people into groups of citizens capable of bearing the weight of democratic decision making. I say 'weight' because deliberation and collaboration are responsibilities and entail labours that citizens must bear. If they cannot, either they forfeit the experience, practice and knowledge of the management of collective affairs that are absolutely essential to citizen making; they tacitly accept a passive citizenship that amounts to subjugation; or they abdicate some part of the legitimacy of their right as inhabitants to partake in the commonwealth. I also say the weight of democratic deliberation because most of us are out of practice, for decades if not generations. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that many people experience political life through the social production of indifference. Overcoming that indifference is challenging. Though many may long for an active Athenian direct democracy of participation, most are doomed to the Roman—that is, to a passive and legalistic citizenship that emphasises private pursuits and public indifference. As a result, most of us know very little of the rigours of active citizenship. Thus, we have to learn how to be deliberative and collaborative citizens through a process of education that requires considerable investments of time, energy, passion and patience.

Almost 90 years ago, in his book *The Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey identified this problem of citizen making in contemporary capitalist societies as "the primary difficulty" for democracy.<sup>1</sup> Using a somewhat different lexicon, he argues that the problem is how to form a public of mutual interest:

Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence [emphasis added] having a common interest in controlling these consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences... on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself.<sup>2</sup>

Absent the assembly of active citizens (my terms), a host of related problems for democratic determination develop: citizens become isolated and segregated from each other, related more by relations of inferiority, inequality and dull habit. They become incompetent in the management of their own aggregate affairs, which are controlled by experts instead; people know neither how to speak effectively about the consequences of behaviour on what they ought to perceive as their mutual interests, nor how to listen perceptively.

<sup>1</sup> Dewey, John, *The Public and Its Problems*, Athens, OH: Swallow Press (Ohio University Press), 1954, p 146.

<sup>2</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p 126.

We see all of these problems in Bergendal's descriptions of the relations she found among the residents of Hallonbergen and Ö as she began the *PARK LEK* project. The city imposes an urban plan for the redevelopment of the neighbourhoods, with major consequences for residents. Do they perceive that they have common interests in controlling these consequences? Can they act on this perception? Can they assess the impact of the urban plan on their neighbourhoods and their lives? Can they organise their mutual interests, based on this assessment, to control the plan? These kinds of questions refer to the enabling conditions that make democratic citizenship possible, and one of the achievements of Bergendal's project is that it brings them into focus, not only for outside viewers like us but also for the residents themselves.

Let me develop Dewey's insights further. To form a community of mutual interest requires more than just aggregated collective action—such as going to a football match, attending a lecture, riding a bus or protesting—which is what humans do naturally as a species, Dewey argues. It requires, rather, developing the perception that the consequences of associated action are of mutual interest, that their apprehension and management benefit from mutual consideration. As Dewey puts it, “we’ and ‘our’ exist only when the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an object of desire and effort”.<sup>3</sup> I would call this outcome a ‘commoning’, and it requires, therefore, a certain kind of communication that we can say constitutes a pedagogy about the impacts of the consequences of human action, and, in turn, about the impacts of mutual interests on controlling consequences. This communication facilitates the development of attachments of mutual interest among people: a commoning. It creates what we might call the ‘felicity conditions’, borrowing from John Austin, that enable people to bring such attachments into existence.<sup>4</sup> Bergendal's art practice creates such felicity conditions for citizenship.

Before we look more closely at felicity conditions and the ways in which the artist's work produces them, let us be clear on the democratic objectives we seek, so that we can assess both the conditions and the methods. Borrowing from others, Dewey identifies two perspectives in the development of a democratic ideal:

From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups.<sup>5</sup>

To individuals and groups, I would add two additional perspectives: that of the assembly and that of the city. Dewey suggests in the last sentence cited above the

need for some grouping of groups, but he doesn't elaborate. A democratic assembly is an associational form that provides both individuals and groups with opportunities and methods—and therefore with capacity—to recognise, articulate, collaborate, deliberate and act upon their mutual interests. It enables individuals and groups, in other words, to establish membership in a political community incorporated by the totality of the assembly and to produce a substantive citizenship in that community that distributes the rights, powers and obligations to members to manage it. The assembly is the stage of direct participation. Without it, democracy must be delegated.

The larger frame of neighbourhood assemblies is the city, and its incorporation as an assembly of assemblies defines an urban citizenship. In most cases, municipal government does not constitute an urban assembly. Rather the latter must be instituted as the organisation of constituent residential assemblies. This organisation is beyond the scope of the *PARK LEK* project, although its counterplan provokes Sundbyberg's municipal government and its other residential neighbourhoods to consider it. Nevertheless, it seems to me that a specifically urban citizenship (with distinctive conceptual foundations and articulations), in contrast to a national one, is a crucial enabling condition for the formation of constituent neighbourhood assemblies. The *PARK LEK* counterplan is insurgent because it reverses the constitution of the city as a political community, working from the parts to induce a new whole into being.

In this sense, I suggest that *PARK LEK* belongs to the wave of twenty-first-century metropolitan insurrections that I invoked at the beginning of this text, indicating that a new form of citizenship is in the making, specifically in association with cities. *PARK LEK* is an urban occupation at a neighbourhood scale that, like these other metropolitan occupations, points to the generation of a new urban citizenship at the intersection of city making, city occupying and rights claiming. I stress that it is not the same as the kind of municipal citizenship that Sweden has had for a long time, which is fundamentally predicated on national membership—though one might argue that the European historical commitments to cities and their residentially based political organisation make them especially productive places for the development of this new kind of urban citizenship, particularly in response to the current emergencies of immigration that have provoked a crisis of national sovereignty and its citizenship throughout the European Union.

As I have argued elsewhere, the new urban citizenship to which *PARK LEK* points arose in cities of the global south beginning about 50 years ago, and has travelled north as cities everywhere have become inhabited by vastly more heterogeneous populations of migrants and refugees.<sup>6</sup> In many of these heterogeneous cities, residents come to understand their basic needs not only in terms of their inhabiting and suffering the city, but also in terms of building it—of making the city's landscape, history, daily life

and politics into a place for themselves—precisely as Bergendal guided the residents of Hallonbergen and Ö to do. I refer to this process of making by the Brazilian term *autoconstrução* (autoconstruction), the construction of house, neighbourhood and city by

<sup>3</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p 151.

<sup>4</sup> Austin, John L., *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, p 147.

<sup>6</sup> Holston, James, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

residents themselves. The many meanings of this autoconstruction often coalesce into a sense that residents have a right to what they produce—a right, in sum, to the city itself. This transformation of need into right has made cities a strategic arena for the development of new and insurgent citizenships. As a result, national citizenships are being reconfigured by conflicts over the terms and aspirations of contemporary urban life. We may see this growing sense of right to the city as both a source and an outcome of the *PARK LEK* project.

With its intense mix of foreign and native-born residents, *PARK LEK* poses the question of what kind of political community could effectively organise the heterogeneity of people that now characterises most metropolitan regions, in which many residents are not national citizens. One answer is clear, given the contrast between the multinationality and multiculturalism of contemporary cities and the often (imagined) singular ethnocultural foundation of nations: membership in the nation-state (national citizenship) cannot organise this heterogeneity, unless all the people of different nationalities—many of them unauthorised immigrants—quickly become national citizens and the ethnocultural bias that frames national identity evaporates. Both changes are highly unlikely. It could be argued that a global human rights association might organise this new heterogeneity. Indeed, many people conceive of the right to the city as a human right that would provide the foundation of such an association. But it seems evident that this possibility of planetary community is remote. In any case, human rights are themselves fraught with conceptual, ontological and ethical problems concerning that elusive notion called human nature, which we would need to solve—if indeed a solution is possible—to give the right to the city this kind of global foundation. However, we need not engage in such philosophical labour to use the right to the city to promote political community. Rather, we need only focus on the city itself as an organisation featuring its own residentially based citizenship which anchors rights to the city and for which nation-state membership, national immigration status, market worth and human nature are irrelevant. Such an urban citizenship, I suggest, provides the most effective and likely foundation of political community by means of which to organise metropolitan heterogeneity.

Thus, we can conclude that the global peripheral urbanisation of the last 50 years has transformed the conceptual frame of the right to the city by articulating it as a right of urban citizenship, grounded in belonging to the city and not to the nation-state. In articulating the right to the city as a right of citizenship, urban residents are also inventing an urban citizenship distinct from the national—and, indeed, distinct from some planetary notion of the human. This formulation of right to the city as a right of urban belonging is, in my view, a most compelling response to some of the most compelling political and social problems of our time. It is precisely this kind of insurgent urban citizenship that inspires the *PARK LEK* project.

The next question is: what kind of citizenship is urban citizenship? Given the supremacy and antagonism of national sovereignty and its citizenship, an urban commons is unlikely to receive formal legitimation from national institutions of law and authority. Rather, it is far more likely to emerge from new sources of association that residents assemble from their shared production of the city in the activities of their lives and labours. The

*PARK LEK* initiative is exactly this kind of new source. In terms of assembly, the city constitutes a vast collective product that each resident has a part in making. This making is the basis of their claim to have a right to the city—a contributor's right to what they have made, a claim that has nothing to do with formal or informal statuses of work, housing or immigration.<sup>7</sup> To the contrary, it only has to do with the active lives of residents. For that reason, residence is the condition that best enables this production of the city as a collective product, an autoconstruction. Thus, the associations that develop among city makers will subvert national prerogatives to the extent that urban residence becomes the principal qualification for membership in the commons, and national affiliation is rendered irrelevant. This mutual antagonism between city and nation—or between principles of urban and national belonging—would seem to be a widespread factor in the recent emergence of urban citizenship.

I consider urban citizenship, therefore, that form of association for which the making of the city is both the context and the substance of a sense of belonging, and I understand this making to be the sum of residents' activities (ie an autoconstruction) and residence to be the primary criterion of membership. In these terms, urban citizenship does not necessarily supplant or negate national citizenship. But, as is evident in *PARK LEK*, it offers a basis of association that is different to the nation-state and much more effective in developing new forms of association, given the contemporary heterogeneity of urban populations. Moreover, it has two important and insurgent consequences: it often leads to a reformulation of national citizenship, and it is available to non-nationals and marginalised nationals.

## Methods: Art Practice and Ethnography

In terms of citizenship, therefore, we may understand Bergendal's art practice in the *PARK LEK* project as an attempt to produce the conditions that enable these four elements—the individual, group, assembly and city—to gain the democratic capacities to coalesce into an urban citizenship. In effect, her art practice is a methodology to do so. Thus we may consider her work to constitute a rhetoric in the classic Athenian sense of the means to turn ordinary citizens (*idiotai* in Greek) into civic and political ones—an 'idiot' being someone who is absorbed in private life, in contrast to the citizen who finds self-fulfilment in the life of the city. In this sense, rhetoric is a method for citizen making that employs a set of tactics for the overt purpose of persuading people to accept an argument or participate in an action. In the case of *PARK LEK*, Bergendal's rhetoric was initially aimed at persuading residents to participate in a consultation that the municipality had launched, and which concerned a developer-sponsored redevelopment plan that the municipal government had already accepted.

This plan called for a densification of the local parks through the construction of approximately 1,100 new apartments.

<sup>7</sup> See Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship*, for a discussion of contributor rights.

The problem with which Bergendal's rhetoric engages is the exclusion of residents from this plan's formulation. The standard municipal consultation procedure invites "locals... to react to a completed scheme, not to participate in qualifying it".<sup>8</sup> Bergendal's objective was thus to persuade the municipality and the residents themselves that the residents' active participation in making the plan was not only a valuable contribution, but also their right as citizens.

In effect, we could say that Bergendal's aim was to transform a process of mere consultation into one of binding deliberation. To that end, she first convinced the Municipal Council to let her constitute *PARK LEK* as an alternative venue for the consultation. She then had the more difficult challenge of engaging the residents. Her initial strategy was twofold. First, she aimed to get them to change their perception of the parks from spaces of separation "not consciously used... [except as] a neutral void that kept the different urban areas separated" to infrastructures of connection that linked neighbourhoods and neighbours with each other and with the city.<sup>9</sup> Second, she wanted to persuade them that they could make a vitally important contribution to the formulation of the redevelopment plan, because there was planning value in their experience and perception as residents.

To convince residents of their value, Bergendal developed a specific set of rhetorical tactics. She used posters to proclaim that residents had a "second opportunity to make their voices heard" about the redevelopment plan through the alternative consultation process she had invented. The posters invited residents to contact her to set up an appointment, at which she would ask them to describe their neighbourhood "as seen from their window".<sup>10</sup> Bergendal recounts:

At the appointed time and place, I simply walked over to their place with my video camera, to listen to and document their point of view and their different forms of knowledge. After my visit, participants received a small button badge, which they were asked to wear for a while. It simply stated "*PARK LEK—I joined*". Some weeks later, I would return with a short video, that mediated their focus and concerns. Approved by them, this film was then published on YouTube.<sup>11</sup>

I recognise these methods as akin to those of an ethnographer conducting fieldwork. They are not the same, but they are related. Indeed, Bergendal practises what anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski termed the "ethnographer's magic".<sup>12</sup> Malinowski's account of the Trobriand Islanders, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, established a lasting set of ambitions for anthropological field research. The ethnographer's magic makes the familiar strange through daring immersions in time and space into the "lives of natives" that disrupt assumptions about human society, and it makes the strange familiar through specific methods of gathering evidence and

relating it to theory. This magician must be a detective, "an active huntsman and drive his quarry into [his nets]", with specific techniques for collecting data and reaching conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

The ethnographer's magic uses three overarching methods. It requires that the ethnographer immerse herself in the daily life of her "natives", living with them for long periods of time, usually in places remote from her own home. This redimensioning of the time and space of research enables the ethnographer to understand "the native's point of view", as Malinowski put it in one of the most famous phrases of anthropology.<sup>14</sup> Thrusting her "nose into everything", the ethnographer learns the natives' language, opinions and conflicts, and gathers their stories, drawings, plans and representations.<sup>15</sup> She compares and checks them. Finding in this manner their gaps and contradictions, she pursues these problems to provoke the natives to contribute more. In gathering data, the ethnographer must have "real scientific aims",<sup>16</sup> that is, she uses modern anthropological theory and not preconceived ideas from "bogus moralities"<sup>17</sup> to interpret the data as evidence on the basis of which the anthropologist derives the "rules and regulations"<sup>18</sup> of human social life. This anatomy of society is nowhere written down as such in a native lexicon, but it is evident everywhere in what natives do and say. The detective-anthropologist has to apprehend it as spoken and enacted, precipitating this knowledge from the stones of social life.

Just as we draw a distinction between anthropology and ethnography, it is clear that Bergendal is not an anthropologist intent on articulating the structures of society. She is rather an artist who bases her art in the *PARK LEK* project on the practice of a kind of ethnography, and who uses ethnography to guide her interventions into public space. At the same time, I also find that she lets us see ethnography as a kind of art practice. She begins her work in *PARK LEK* with a redimensioning of the usual time and space of the typical institutions of art and planning, by immersing herself in the neighbourhoods "on and off for about nine months"—"an expanded investment of time", as she puts it, that altogether totalled four years—so that she can discover and document the residents' points of view.<sup>19</sup> In this immersive investigation, her ethnographic practice

subverts the typical methods, results and institutions of public art. She is an artist because she intervenes in "the public and its spaces" with the objective not so much of articulating an understanding of them (defamiliarised and then refamiliarised through analysis) but of developing methods that the public can use to reanimate itself, to rethink itself into an active citizenship. Her artistic practice is to develop strategies—field methods—for this reanimation.

Bergendal's method of discovery is to identify a social problem worthy of an intervention (both in space and time). In *PARK LEK*, she identified the problem of alienated voice as the grounds for her empirical work, and this discovery led her to develop strategies to build the agency of residents through the cultivation of attachments to each other, to neighbourhood parks, to the planning process

<sup>8</sup> Bergendal, Kerstin, *The Park Play Project*, handout pamphlet, 2015, p 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 4.

<sup>10</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 6.

<sup>11</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 6.

<sup>12</sup> Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London: Routledge, 1922, p 6.

<sup>13</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 8.

<sup>14</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 25.

<sup>15</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 8.

<sup>16</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 6.

<sup>17</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 9.

<sup>18</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p 10.

<sup>19</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 6.

and to the city. By 'attachments' I mean commitments that arise through the discovery of mutual interests among people, and also the confidence in self that develops when individuals—often alienated from political life—discover that their voice matters in common affairs. Bergendal's art of discovery leads to field methods that enable further discovery—that is, they enable the public to discover itself in mutual attachments. To cultivate such attachments, Bergendal develops strategies to encourage residents to articulate the world "from their window", through their eyes.

Having established this perspective in *PARK LEK*, she got residents to realise that their points of view were important to the planning process by juxtaposing and comparing their visions. She published 43 videos of them on YouTube, and assembled these at neighbourhood meetings. When neighbours saw each other speaking out, the assembly of perspectives "awakened a very intense, local public debate".<sup>20</sup> The result was a request from the residents for a direct, collective discussion about the redevelopment plan, which Bergendal organised into a four-day symposium. It was in effect a citizen assembly for debate and decision making. The force of this citizen collective became evident to such an extent that the corporate property developers realised that "the debate had changed their situation".<sup>21</sup> Rather than risk isolation, they agreed to participate by funding a huge architectural model of the area that participants used during the discussion to visualise the various redevelopment proposals.

Bergendal further instigated the collaborative planning process by implementing a series of brilliant rhetorical tactics including model making, drawing, mapping and the construction of an assembly room in a vacant corner of the local shopping centre. She called this assembly room the 'Pink Room of the *PARK LEK PARLAMENT*' and stocked it with local memorabilia to remind residents of the importance of local history and culture. She also arranged for architects and planners to help residents visualise ideas and translate speech into plans. Eventually, she engaged the direct participation of the housing project managers, property developers, urban planners and the municipal council. These tactics constituted an artistic practice.

The result of this unprecedented citizen assembly was the realisation of an alternative planning process and the production of an alternative plan. Through the power of citizen deliberation and direct democracy, this counterplan checked the corporate redevelopment plan. Thus the assembly succeeded in instituting an insurgent urban citizenship. It was a stunning reversal, a victory for 'idiots-turned-citizens' who were metamorphosed by the rhetoric of an ethnographically based artistic practice.

Let me highlight two methods and one epistemic value of this practice for further comment. While professional planners generally talk (at us), Bergendal listens. As ethnographer, she listens and records what people say and do. She develops what I call a politics of audibility to counter

the declamatory speech of planners, developers and politicians. By audibility, I mean the capacity to be heard by others, to reach an audience. A major problem with urban planning is that, although most people affected by a plan are free to speak, most

<sup>20</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 10.

<sup>21</sup> Bergendal, *The Park Play Project*, p 10.

are not heard in the planning process. If the crucial issue is less one of free speech than it is about to whom speech circulates, and how, then the contestation of official planning as usual requires a politics of audibility that reveals the logic of voice suppression and subverts this outcome. It is precisely this kind of audition that Bergendal practices.

In *PARK LEK*, audibility happens with play. The name *PARK LEK*, after all, translates as '*PARK PLAY*'. Bergendal provides the toys—drawing implements, models, cameras, maps, paint, construction tools—and establishes what game theorists call the 'magic circle of play', within which people feel secure to experiment. The Pink Room creates a liminal, protective space for this kind of experimental play. There is not an explicit game in *PARK LEK*, but rather the sense that people can make things happen, try them out, put them together without being censored or humiliated. Moreover, the validation of the play is primarily internal, and not external to the process of generating the counterplan. Hence, it effectively nourishes residents' interest and participation. Play is thus a fundamental tactic for sustaining a creative process in the cultivation of voice, vision and attachment.

Some time ago, I developed a critique of modernist planning and architecture of the type embodied in the Sundbyberg corporate redevelopment plan.<sup>22</sup> My criticism was that modernist planning does not admit or productively develop the inevitable paradoxes of its imagined future. Instead, it attempts to be a plan without contradiction, without conflict. It assumes a rational domination of the future in which its total and totalising plan dissolves any conflict between the imagined and the existing society in the imposed coherence of its order. This assumption is both arrogant and false. It fails to include as constituent elements of planning the conflict, ambiguity and indeterminacy that are characteristic of actual social life. Moreover, it fails to consider the unintended and the unexpected as part of the model. Such assumptions are common to master plan solutions generally, and not only to those in urban planning. Their basic feature is that they attempt to fix the future—or the past, as in historical preservation—by appealing to precedents that negate the value of present circumstance. I argued that one of the most urgent problems in planning and architecture was, therefore, the need to develop a different social imagination. I suggested that the sources of this new imagination could be found by figuring out how to include the ethnographic present in the planning and design processes, and that these sources could be found in what I called the spaces of insurgent citizenship.

*PARK LEK* is just such a space. The counterplan that its assembly of citizen-residents produced is purposefully incomplete. It remains contingent on future assemblies and further deliberations. It tries neither to paper over the conflicts that produced it, nor to eliminate its ambiguities and contradictions. The counterplan leaves all these problems open to further consideration and development. In this openness it embodies the indeterminacy of actual social life and refutes both the premises and practices of modernist total design.

*PARK LEK* teaches us to recognise the sources of a counter to modernist planning in the everyday spaces of residential life. By its very initiative, *PARK*

<sup>22</sup> Holston, James, "Spaces of insurgent citizenship", *Cities and Citizenship*, James Holston ed, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, pp 155–173.

*LEK* became this counter, as both a means and an end of an insurgent citizenship. Bergendal shows us that one method for creating such alternative futures is to search for situations that engage, in practice, the problematic nature of belonging to society and that embody such problems as narratives about the city—to be, in effect, the urban detective I described earlier. This kind of investigation amounts to a redefinition of the practice of planning and architecture, as long as these fields remain obsessed with the design of objects and with the execution of totalising plans and policies. To engage a new social imagination, after the debacle of modernism's utopian attempts, requires expanding the idea of planning and architecture beyond this preoccupation with execution and design. It requires looking into, caring for, listening to, playing with and teaching about citizen experience as lived. To plan an alternative that is possible is therefore to begin with ethnographic engagements. In this case, *PARK LEK* inspires us to start with the lived problems of political community—problems of residence, immigration, citizenship, democracy, development, planning, architecture and government—as the basis for an art practice that intervenes in social life to build citizens' capacities to bear the weight of producing and managing the commonwealth.

