



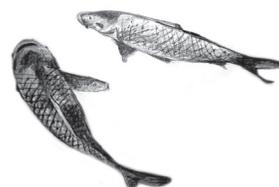
Phenomenologies of Direct Action

WORKSHOP/RETREAT: 10 - 17 JUNE, 2020

Can Poeti, Les Planes d'Hostoles, Girona

“Our house is on fire.” Climate change has produced catastrophic visions of a global crisis unfolding before our eyes whose consequences will be as unforgivable as they will be irreversible. Even as the reality of climate change bears down upon us with increasing speed, it could also be taken as a metaphor for another contemporary crisis of perhaps comparable severity and scope. As the waters rise, the far right has seized upon this moment to move to the center of the global political stage. Their means of taking power have varied from place to place. Some have achieved newfound prominence through dramatic electoral victories, while elsewhere extraparlimentary procedures have served to elevate their status. Whether via the practice of regular representative politics, or with the aid of systematic voter suppression, election rigging, the quashing of dissent, the imprisonment of dissidents, or even coups d’etat, their tactics have differed but their collective ascent is unmistakable. From the Global North to the Global South, both in the former Communist East and the capitalist West, they threaten the shallowest of democratic traditions as well as the deepest.

Such a moment calls for addressing the convergent political aspirations of those seeking to resist and subvert efforts to dismantle democratic institutions from within, locally as well as globally. Study and debate alone are far from sufficient responses, but they may prove indispensable nonetheless. Coming from diverse intellectual and personal backgrounds our working group shares a commitment to comparative analysis as a means toward illuminating the specificities of local conditions as well as historical conjunctures on scales that approach the global. Counting among ourselves sociologists, political theorists, political scientists, historians, anthropologists, scholars in journalism and media studies, our intention is oriented more toward generating moments of contact or even collision than it is defining a concrete research agenda that fully harmonizes our intellectual labor. We plan to gather together next summer around a shared topic of our choosing: namely, the *phenomenology of direct action*.



What resources and tactics do we all share? How can we work together? What happens when the exercise of civic responsibilities associated with normally functioning liberal democratic societies becomes impossible, or perhaps nearly as bad, becomes farcical?

We hope that exploration of the history and theory of direct action can speak to such pressing questions. Our first concerns are not strictly definitional, but rather to situate direct action within a broader field of political life in which it is difficult to distinguish from neighboring concepts, such as protest, strike, or revolt. We aim to investigate the conditions in which direct action appears and becomes subject to modes of knowledge production on the part of other actors, importantly among them being the State, as well as ourselves. Expressing an interest in the study of activities often deemed subversive by the state, we maintain a commitment to making visible and when possible resisting our own imbrication in forms of state surveillance and control.

PARTICIPANTS



Julia Fierman, *Columbia University, City University of New York*

Julia received her PhD in sociocultural anthropology from Columbia University in 2018. She teaches at the City University of New York and is currently working on her first book project, entitled *Peronism Is a Sentiment: Loyalty, Suspicion, and Betrayal in Argentine Politics*. This work is an anthropology of political sentiment that focuses on the intrinsic relationship between affect and ideology in Argentine Peronism and populism more generally.

Workshop contribution:

My paper/project/whatever **looks at** the routinization of protest and political rallies among contemporary Peronists in Argentina. In doing so, I inquire as to how sentiment and affect are modulated through performative practices meant to reinforce the Peronist principle of loyalty. Peronists have consistently reified loyalty as the most important value of their doctrine over Peronism's seventy-five year history. As a movement whose "symbolic birth" consisted of a mass strike and protest popularly known as "loyalty day"—which is reenacted every year—, Peronists commonly express loyalty to their leader, the movement, and "the people" through collective action and public demonstrations (Plotkin 1993). This paper asks what it means to routinize expressions of loyalty, such that political par-

ticipation comes to be largely characterized by the ritualization of public performances of political affinity. Peronist protests, strikes, and rallies are meant to elicit feelings of collective effervescence, spiritual ties of comradeship, and deference and even deification of Peronist leaders. My focus on these political practices is meant to bring attention to the role of affect, sentiment, and emotion in populist politics. Through an ethnographic account of self-described "Peronist militants" dedicated to Argentina's singular form of populism that when it first came to power in 1946, was, according to historian Federico Finchelstein, the first populist regime in history. Through understanding how contemporary Peronist militants understand their ritualized participation in marches, demonstrations, and strikes, I argue that the routinization of sentiment is part and parcel of populism's amplification of the affective dimensions of politics, which challenge liberal paradigms of rational deliberation and its valorization of a pragmatic, unemotional politics.



Valeria Korablyova, *Charles University*

Dr. Valeria Korablyova is Visiting Professor at Justus Liebig University Giessen, Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, Giessen Centre for Eastern European Studies (GiZO). She conducts a research "Post-Soviet Ukraine between population, citizenry, and spectatorship" and teaches two courses: an MA course "Rever-

berations of modernity: the case of Ukraine” and a BA course “Ukraine after 1991: challenges of transition”. Dr. Korablyova is also Senior Research Fellow at Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, Department of East European Studies.

She received her habilitation in 2015 from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, where till recently she worked as Professor of Philosophy. Her research interests include post-Communist transformations in Ukraine and East Central Europe with a specific focus on mass protests and nation-building. She has been holding a number of fellowships in international institutions: at Stanford University (2014-15), the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM, 2015-16), University of Warsaw (2016-17), Charles University in Prague (2017), University of Basel (2018). Her latest book *Social Meanings of Ideology* (Kyiv University, 2014) covers ideological transformations of European modernity, tracing how political liberalism was hollowed out and replaced with marketism as the economic ideology, and reckoning mass protests in CEE as an ideological alternative thereof. In 2019 she published a chapter “Euromaidan and the 1989 legacy: Solidarity in action?” in “The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution” (CEU Press); and a chapter “Contemporary Ukraine: Borderland – Bloodland – Neverland?” in “Cultural Change in the New Europe and Central Asia” (Springer). Dr. Korablyova has taught courses and given lectures at the University of Basel, Charles University, University of Vienna, and Stanford University. She has actively presented her research findings on a number of international conferences (including keynote speeches) and other public fora.

Workshop contribution:

This research is thematically driven with tensions and overlaps between liberal democracy and direct action, while elaborating on that on the material of the post-Soviet region. The classical liberal approach would prioritize recognized institutions and bureaucratic procedures for solving urgent issues over mass protests and disobedience usually ascribed to the leftist ethos. However, some researchers (Pierre Rosanvallon) reckon direct action compatible with the liberal-democratic configuration as an ultimate tool for requesting accountability based on liberal-democratic values. The post-Soviet region presents a special case thereof, as protracted mass protests, came to be known as “velvet” and “colored” revolutions, were not engaging with the state (thus falling out of Krastev’s distinction between state-resisting and state-engaging protests) but aiming to change the existing order for a configuration wedding political values of liberal democracy and the political ethos of direct action. Moreover, the movements in their physical placements positioned themselves outside of the existing order, thus being exemplary heterotopias (in Foucauldian sense), and containing the germs of the order-to-be.

The key questions I am attempting to address are the following: How do mass protests engage with liberal-democratic ideas? Could the political pathos and ethos of direct action be preserved in any institutionalized way after the state of emergency is over? What sustainable political configuration could result out of mass protests? Finally, under the current circumstances is the conflation of liberal ideas and leftist practices feasible as a political alternative to populism and ocular democracy?

I would involve Robinson and Acemoglu’s concept of a “narrow corridor” for democracy to tackle the interplay of a state and a society in the dynamics of mass protests and subsequent changes of political order.



Elena Rodina, Northwestern University

Elena Rodina received her PhD (2019) from the Department of Media, Technology, and Society at Northwestern University. She obtained her Master’s degree in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Oregon and received her BA in Romanic-Germanic philology from Kazan State University. Before starting her work in academia, Elena worked as a full-time, Moscow-based socio-political journalist for weekly magazines *Ogoniok* and *Esquire Russia*. She focuses her research on media resistance practices in Post-Soviet countries, and has published academic articles in *Caucasus Survey*, *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* (*Journal of Slavic Philology*), and *Digital Ethics*. Her area of expertise lies at the intersection of global and political communication, media ethics, and media in security and governance.

Workshop contribution:

I am interested in a very specific case of direct action: when it involves journalists in post-Soviet space spontaneously uniting and organizing a protest, be that political or social struggle. While in Eastern Europe, neutral reporting has never been a strong journalistic feature, with journalists preferring to express their opinions and take sides, it has been increasingly common in Russia and some other post-Soviet states for journalists to rely on their social capital, their rhetorical skills, and political knowledge to organize and perform protest actions, typically against corrupt, conservative governments.

Phenomenologies of Direct Action

These actions vary, from a protest against cutting out a park in Makhachkala, Dagestan (organized and initiated by local independent journalists), to a resistance movement against building a garbage disposal structure in Shies (with local oppositional journalists being at the core of the protest actions), to the Velvet revolution in Yerevan. This intimate connection between journalism and protest has been recently displayed in a case where the reverse happened: a young activist Yegor Zhukov, persecuted by the state for his ideas of non-violent resistance, has been hired by two important oppositional mass media outlets, *Novaya Gazeta* and radio Echo Moskvy. Zhukov is explicit about wanting to continue his political actions, and he does not have journalistic training, and yet, he is now employed by two prominent Russian news outlets.



Matyáš Křížkovský, Charles University

Matyáš is a Ph.D. student at the Institute for Political Theory, Faculty of Arts Charles University in Prague. He wrote a chapter presenting Freedenian morphological approach to ideologies in Tomáš Halamka (ed.): *Jak číst politické myslitele?* (How to Read Political Thinkers?, Karolinum) and the article “The Burdensome Legacy of New Politics in Czechia: The Greens as a Case of Failed Moral Populism” to *Central European Journal of Politics*. During his Ph.D., he taught together with Ondřej Slačálek a course for BA and MA students, “Social Movements” and after that, he taught courses on theories of international relations and on methods and writing.

Currently, he is started to participate in three-year project “Anarchism in the context of Czech Political Culture: Presumptions, Parallels, Influences”, where he will conduct the Freedenian analysis of anarchism with identification and interpretation of its core concepts (like direct action, anti-authoritarianism, autonomy, politics/anti-politics) and apply it further in the diachronic analysis of adjacent conceptualizations of power and resistance in the Czech political culture and by social movements after the 1970s.

Workshop contribution:

Various traditions and attitudes to direct action (from syndicalism through nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience to micro-politics of everyday resistance) could be understood as conceptual building blocks of different ideological formations. The significance

of those building blocks grows alongside the mistrust of traditional ideologies and political representation as such. This mistrust at the worldwide level was clearly visible in 1968 and it seems to grow again in the last decade as a reaction to “multiple crises” (ecological, representative, economical, migrant, etc.). Besides the rise of many protest movements, there is also an apparent rise of various forms of populisms that are (at least rhetorically) trying to (re)establish their direct connection to “the people” and challenge some of the basic ideals of liberal democracies.

During the retreat, I would like to engage in an exploration of what those different traditions and attitudes to direct action could offer us in the current historical moment. Is there any possibility that they could provide a basis for a new political alternative, that would serve neither as a tool for the legitimization of established status quo of liberal nation-states democracies under the global neoliberal constellation nor as a mere disruptor that could pave the way for illiberal populisms with their parochial, authoritarian and potentially violent institutional outcomes? The proposition, I would like to work with, is that a specific tradition of political ecology (theoretically conceptualized as libertarian municipalism by Murray Bookchin, practically realized as democratic confederalism in Northern Syria) integrates direct action with broader indirect institutional architecture and therefore could potentially offer a foundation for more durable alternative than “here and now” anti-politics of contemporary protest movements.



Juho Korhonen, Boğaziçi University

Juho is Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology of Boğaziçi University. In his recent dissertation at Brown University Juho explored forms of and symbolic and definitional struggles around democracy and democratization in the Russian and German Empires and juxtaposed this comparison, on the one hand, against Western imperial and post-1919 forms of democracy and, on the other, against sociology’s disciplinary occlusions, so called “disciplinary amnesia” of these alternative forms of democratic organization and definitions.

Broadly Juho has explored the contestations and transformations of sovereignty across empires and in relation to nation-states, especially regarding those transformations’ and contestations’ effects on

democratization and political, symbolic power and action. This has included work on questions of knowledge production and political transformation in the post-socialist sphere and on solidarities in the European Union. Juho is currently finalizing an article on universal suffrage and the origins of democracy, where he tries to incorporate women's suffrage as a key analytic, rather than a mere incremental step, for the historical sociological literature on democracy's genealogy; collaborating on a project on Armenia's media and political transformations following their 2018 Velvet Revolution; and collaborating on project comparing the Russian and Ottoman empires classificatory and symbolic struggles in relation to their Western counterparts.

Workshop contribution:

What has been the historical relation between direct and indirect action for democratization, especially if we focus in this inquiry on the relation between democratization as a process against consolidation of democracy within and across polities. On the one hand, how has direct action challenged, restricted and confined or expanded and opened up democracy, and on the other how has democracy's consolidation or destabilization redefined direct action? To what extent can direct action not just broaden but also critique and challenge the confines of what makes it direct? Historically this was perhaps the biggest problem of the left before 1919, how to strategically combine indirect and direct action without confounding both and without legitimizing the structures and institution that force this distinction between the two.



Aaron Jacobs, *Brown University*

Aaron Jacobs is historian of American politics and culture, and a doctoral candidate in the department of history at Brown University. His dissertation, entitled "When Lightning Strikes Twice: Cinema, Race, Empire, and the Re-Birth of the Ku Klux Klan" is an attempt to write a transnational history of white supremacy. It examines the public reception of D.W. Griffith's notorious film *The Birth of a Nation*, including its status as inspiration for the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, in order to study the politics of Confederate nationalism, in and beyond the American South.

Workshop contribution:

How might we make sense of the potential differences or continuities between direct action and other forms of everyday resistance taken up by oppressed people (and those acting in solidarity with them)? How do we study direct action as a mode through which subaltern politics can be expressed, without presuming to represent subaltern politics through our act of study? How can we inquire into the many histories and forms of direct action while remaining sensitive to the way in which direct action is sometimes conceived of as an act of urgent refusal of intellectual discussion, discourse and debate, in the name of immediate and even revolutionary demands?



Pablo Ouziel, *University of Victoria*

Pablo Ouziel holds Post-Doctoral Fellowships with the Centre for Global Studies and the Department of Political Science at the University of Victoria and is a visiting fellow at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain, and the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom. Pablo's research interests include public philosophy, collective presences, horizontality, nonviolence and civic democracy. By standing within the tradition of public philosophy, the core of his work is centred on excavating networks of individuals governing themselves in numerous ways that supersede our current structures of representative government.

Pablo's forthcoming book (2021) 'Democracy Here and Now: The exemplary case of Spain', makes the argument that if as researchers we want to study the broad field of democratization and democracies, we need to listen to individual self-descriptions in their own vernacular languages. This he suggests is a healthy way towards understanding particular lifeways and the important lesson that he has learned through his dialogues of reciprocal elucidation within Spain's 15M.

Workshop contribution:

What might we be referring to when speaking about the phenomenon of direct action? Can direct action be considered a democratic act? Is there a certain ethos and sets of practices and commitments that are necessary in order to be able to consider direct action as a democratic activity? What kinds of examples and exemplars can

Phenomenologies of Direct Action

we draw from in order to crystalize the phenomenon of democratic direct action? What distinguishes democratic direct action from democratic indirect action? Is it possible that democratic direct action and democratic indirect action reveal different modes of democracy? A conception of democracy as open (civic/participatory/power-with/direct) seems to draw us towards an understanding of direct action as a necessary democratizing practice that generates, revitalizes and broadens democratic institutions, imaginaries and possibilities. In contrast, a conception of democracy as closed (civil/representative/power-over/indirect) seems to blind us from direct action's contribution to an ongoing process of democratization. Guided by my interest in these questions, and the research

challenges that they pose, through this workshop I am eager to explore the myriad of ways in which direct action, the phenomenon, can be studied without disqualifying those engaged in it in the process. What kind of glocal (global and local) research project could be carried out in order to help us deepen our understanding and descriptions of direct action in a non-universalizing, non-homogenising key? I see our upcoming multilogue as an opportunity to re-formulate these questions in a manner that can carve the way towards a dialogic understanding of direct action in its multiple democratic forms.



ABOUT OUR WORKSHOP / RETREAT

In the form of a “potlatch“, we are planning to retreat from our academic “ivory towers” to Can Poeti in Catalonia which will provide us territorial ground for grasping the “glocal” aspects of our inquiry.

Can Poeti is located on the banks of the river Burgent, in the beautiful valley of Hostoles (La Garrotxa), Catalonia. At the heart of a volcanic region in the pre-Pyrenees. Can Poeti traces its beginnings back to 1781 when its water mill (*Molino de agua*) was built. Restored as a homestead combining rural charm with contemporary comforts, the property is comprised of three independent buildings - A converted Barn (*Granero*), an old Factory (*Antigua Torneria*) and the Water Mill (*Molino*).

CONTACT

Elena Rodina, *Northwestern University*

elenarodina2013@u.northwestern.edu



CEDAR TREES
INSTITUTE



University
of Victoria | Centre for
Global Studies



CAN  POETI
casa construida en 1781