

A conspiracy without a plot

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for CURATORIAL KNOWLEDGES

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Today it is not possible to live except by way of a conspiracy. But equally, it is impossible to live today by way of a plot. To live now, to create modes of life, forms of life, we must seek a conspiracy without a plot, a conspiracy that is its own end, a conspiracy for itself. This conspiracy cannot produce a new person, a new world, a new subjectivity, a new consciousness. Much less can it conform to the plot of others, the plot of the police. This conspiracy can only produce more of itself, and those who enter into this conspiracy without a plot produce themselves through a kind of complicity that takes sides against any plot, any attempt to plot a path, a future for others or oneself. This conspiracy calls forth a complicit love, a love on the side of conspiracy and against the plot, against the police who are called into being by the plot. Complicit love, as Paolo Friere might say, is a love on the side which knows which side it is on, a love for those who conspire, a love that calls forth the police by being against the plot, a love against the police, and in the conspiracy.

And complicit love angles, as Gayatri Spivak might say, toward others without a plot. To have a complicit love is to be within and against any plot, even a plot of love or revolution. It is to feel the power of conspiracy. Complicity is the mode of living that makes us unsafe by unmaking ourselves with others, but it is the complicit love we find in conspiracy that makes us safe to unmake ourselves, to put ourselves in danger. And we are in danger. Because this conspiracy is not secret, not connected to any hidden plot. It hides in plain sight, a conspiracy open to others, open to the world, unmade in complicity, made in complicit love. Its danger is the invocation, the caretaking, the study of complicity as an available, radical, sociality. This radical sociality is not just a matter of friendship, love, or conviviality, not of hyperconnectivity or logistics. No, this sociality is an experiment conducted within and against ourselves, with and for others, a constant invention of the form of sociality not its content, not its plot. This radical sociality is formed by the danger of being against society but together, in a conspiracy, of being against ourselves but filled with a complicit love for our unformed mode of living together.

Our complicity in this conspiracy is what makes the police rotten, as Walter Benjamin called them. The smell of this conspiracy attracts them. The police are drawn to the conviction that there must be someone else, something else, somewhere, somehow, involved, invoked, invaginated in the one in captivity, the one the police sense is more than one, less than one. Because the one who has been captured, who sacrificed, is somehow, through complicity, not fully caught, not fully contained, not fully containerised. This complicity provokes the rot, what Jacques Derrida calls the contamination of law. Driven insane, made vicious by this conspiracy without a plot, the police make new laws, on the spot, on the body, out of fear, out of paranoia, a paranoia that tells them 'there must be someone else, something else, somewhere, somehow.' Because the one caught is more and less than a captive one, more or less than one. There must be *la complicità*, the accomplice.

the accomplice

And there is. There is someone, something, who must be there, that must be there. If we are to live we must live in this conspiracy, as this conspiracy. The accomplice is the being who is not there and yet by being there makes us more and less of ourselves, unsafe, puts us in danger. The accomplice is the one who guides us unseen, on the side. When we are alone in the cell, in meditation, in exile, in hiding, the accomplice guides us away from being only ourselves, being only one, he is the one who unmakes us as more than one, and guides us to live as other than one. And when we are together with others the accomplice guides us to be less than one, less than others, to be possessed by a dispossession, to give access, to give way and make a conspiracy that does not add up, does not count, is less than the sum of its parts, a conspiracy that can never be the whole conspiracy or the one conspiracy, a conspiracy that remains without a plot.

But though the accomplice guides us he is a guide without direction, a guide without a plot and because he guides without direction he guides us into danger, not safety. It is an everyday danger made possible paradoxically by the complicit love the guide provides. We know from history, and from the inferno only blocks away from us now, that to be less than one in the cell, on the streets, in the woods, in the bedroom, is subjected to violence by those with a plot, those who count themselves one, those who get together as one, one nation, one law, one race, those who count the police on their side, those police they count. And we also know from history, and as we know from the inferno miles away from us now, how dangerous it is to be more than one, how dangerous to convey that you are not just you, that there is someone else, something else, that you are with others not as yourself, and they are with you not as one. And even though this is a conspiracy without a plot, or perhaps precisely because it is, you will be shackled, goggled, muffled, droned, or renditioned cut off from others as if you were one, the one the police thought they had, the one the army thought led the plot. Or maybe this danger leads to the daily rendition, the daily beating administered to those who must be up to something, at risk of something, at war with some one. Those said by some one to be beyond reason, who need fixing but are beyond help, struck from the plot.

Or maybe again this danger will present itself through the worst of plots, the plot of all plots and no plots, the plot of an extreme neo-liberalism that appears to be about nothing and everything, and makes and unmakes oneself and others, a violent making and unmaking, a violent drive toward value as the plot, the plot as value, a violent ownership and appropriation of every plot, of every one. What good is complicit love in the face of all of this, why let the accomplice put us in such danger?

After all, the accomplice is the one who got us into this, the one who by not showing up shows that we are not one, and puts us in such danger. The accomplice is the one who produces idle speculation, wild conspiracies, on what must be there, on who must be there, the accomplice has us seeing things, and hearing things. The accomplice shows up as another sense, a scent, a slender path, a trail, a fugitive trail. And this trail, the fugitive trail, cannot know its direction, cannot be plotted. It may be lit by a fugitive star, a fugitive fate, or it may be covered by a darkness, hidden in the neighborhood of those said to have something wrong with them. But however it shows up, this trail guides us to fugitivity, to what Adrian Piper called an escape into the external world, an escape in plain sight, a conspiracy that uncovers itself. This is why we follow the accomplice on a trail without direction, because a fugitive trail goes nowhere, cannot be plotted, but can always be followed, always joined. For the fugitive trail escape is its direction, its fugitivity is its destination and that means its destination, its direction of no direction, its the elastic distance, is the undercommons.

the undercommons

And this is why for all the complicit love you can feel from the accomplice, the accomplice is also a thief, a liar, a fake, a maker of enemies, because the accomplice is herself a fugitive. If we were to find the accomplice, rather than just sense her, we would find her in the undercommons.

The undercommons is not the common. It is what emerges from the enclosure of the common, within and against enclosure. The undercommon is what always escapes settlement, but to nowhere. The fugitivity of the undercommons is a matter of deception, misrecognition, faking, mocking, playing. It lies right in front of us, and all around us, and everyone is invited.

In any movement of enclosure, beings of the undercommon unsettle any attempt to occupy them, and persist in a pre-occupation that settlement needs and cannot abide, that escapes and surrounds the settlement in a conspiracy without a plot. The undercommons unsettles in the carnival of masks, of charcoaled faces, and dumb insolence. The undercommons is not the common, though you can see it from there. And the undercommons is not the common because the idea of accessing the common, managing the common, or a politics of the common, is foreign to those of the undercommons. Their common is fugitive, hacked, within and against, and with and for, full of made-up statistics, false reports, rumors of insurrection and plague. Their common is complicit, conspiratorial, on the run.

The undercommons is the practice of space and time that does not conform to the space and time of sovereign, self-possessed individuals or the states they plot. It is a place and time of beings who experiment with the borders and affects of being other than one, other than the one of the individual and other than the one of the collective. The undercommons is a place of performance, performativity, ensemble, and improvisation with the form of singular and collective life itself. But this performance includes also fakery, magic, fate and deception. Through such acts does a radical sociality emerge, a sociality without the safety of the unity of the one or the many when any such unity may be untrue, conjured, a matter of fugitive deception.

But because the undercommons is also where you find the accomplice, the love that must be missing, it is also a place of study, of invocation, and of caretaking. It is a place to study this unforming and forming of modes of living, a place to take care of these modes and those who make them, a place to invoke the conditions of attention together. The undercommons is where you find these operations of the accomplice. Yet this is study on the run, invocation in the dark, caretaking in a war. Because when the undercommons gets together, we make not only this time and space of caretaking, study, of invocations to new fugitive paths, new fugitive stars, but also the conditions and forms of radical sociality that bring reaction, that call forth the police.

the police

To study in the undercommons, to caretake in the undercommons, to invoke in the undercommon takes the form of making form itself, and to make form itself is to be open to affect in a way that is always vulnerable, always in need of the accomplice, always in danger. To be immersed in affect, to be so affected, dispossessed and possessed, is to be a maker of form as form emerges from the affect opened in the operations of the accomplice. To be affected to the point of making form itself, to be beyond pre-determined form is in turn to be beyond self-determination, beyond the plot of the self, the one. And it is in these states of being affected that those of the undercommons are most vulnerable to the police, but more than that, they are also vulnerable to becoming the police.

Because the role of the police today is to organise such affect into a plot. The role of the police is to plot the course of affect itself. And they organise the affect of others, and of themselves, through the ubiquity of governance on the one hand and policy on the other. Through governance and policy the police are now as Benjamin predicted, ubiquitous. Governance and policy are the forms of plotting, the forms of crushing conspiracies without a plot, that arise in reaction to the radical sociality of the undercommon today, that arise to confront directly the makers of form, to confront directly the circulation of affect and affected bodies in the undercommons.

It is not that the police do not continue to make law on the spot, as Benjamin observed, with the baton, with the command, with the referral. It is rather that today this is not enough to ensure the plot, and perhaps it never was. Neither the violence of state nor the science of state, governance works below both government and governmentality. Governance tries to impose a plot on the affect produced by the conspiracy without a plot. Governance tries to plot those who stay affected, who stay not one, who live outside the plot. And precisely because for those in the conspiracy there is no plot, governance must play the good cop. The trick of governance is to ask for the plot, rather than imposing it through violence or expertise. governance lies in wait, clothes itself in affect, and asks what do you want, what are your interests, give us your voice, your input, tells us what you think, who you are, and then it offers us a cigarette and a cup of coffee.

But when those in the conspiracy without a plot resist volunteering a plot, when they love the accomplice, when complicit love holds them against the police who hold them, the good cop says, 'okay, then I will turn you lose.' This is a threat, not a gift. Because to be turned lose, turned out on the street, is to face the bad cop, the vigilante, the maker of policy. Because policy today is made by the vigilante, or rather policy today is the return of the vigilante, the return of the nightriders. Policy is the bad cop gone rogue, gone to join all those who are one and take it upon themselves to make policy for those in the conspiracy without a plot, those who as Edouard Glissant said consent not to be a single being, not to be one. Today policy is detached from government, even from governmentality. It is rogue, an everyday terror. Anyone who is one can make policy from anywhere by the simple vigilante act of saying those beings over there have something wrong with them. Those beings are not one. Or this being here in my office, in my bed, at my table, in my yard, in my way, this being has something wrong with her and I take upon myself as one who is one to make a policy for her, to organise her affect, to cut her off from others, to make her one in my image.

Whether as the good cop of governance or the bad cop of policy, the police organise affect today, demand a plot where there is none, and see conspiracies everywhere. This is why today the choice is so immediate, especially for those who are supposed to organise others. Today to be a teacher, a performer, or a curator, to be someone who is supposed to organise others is immediately to choose between being an accomplice and being the police.

But how can the teacher who is supposed to organise students, or performer who is supposed to organise audiences, or the curator who is supposed to organise viewers, how can this function of organising others not be, immediately, the police? The answer is that the accomplice operates as an organiser, but an organiser without a plot. Through study, through invocation, through care, operative modes of the accomplice, the accomplice insists and persists in conspiracy. These are only some of the operative modes of the accomplice, but they are modes that confront the

police and confront being the police directly. These operative modes guide us away from the police on a fugitive path, a path that cannot be plotted. These operations of the accomplice elaborate modes of being with and for others, within and against any plot. And these modes call forth complicit love.

study

The teacher is supposed to transfer knowledge, to set standards, to carry out assessments. The teacher is the one who is supposed to ensure students mature, get credit, and graduate. The teacher is supposed to organise the desires, ambitions, and dreams of the students. The teacher is supposed to be the police. So how can the teacher instead operate as an accomplice?

The teacher who is the accomplice is the one who makes study possible. Study is a complicit mode, a way of being other than one together. Study takes place within and against the university, the school, the academy. Study is what these places do not permit, and what persists within and against them. Study is what the teacher who is the accomplice does already with others. Study is learning on the side of others, for others. The teacher who operates in study provides complicit love, makes conspiracy possible for others in study.

And study is a form of learning, of seeking knowledge together that begins in the midst of itself and never ends. The accomplice is the one who helps others to see that study is already going on, that study has started, and that study cannot finish. He helps others to sense that study is always immature, premature, dependent, indebted, affected. In study, knowledge is not just social but a way to make the social, not just collective but a way to experiment with collectivity itself, not just a debt to the past but an activation of debt as a way to enter the future together. Study is the debt knowledge makes without credit, without attribution, without graduation.

The operation of the teacher who is the accomplice is to guide others to knowledge not as something to be possessed, mastered, or accredited. In study, seeking knowledge is a mode of learning that produces other ways of living together. The accomplice makes knowledge fugitive by using it to help others escape into new ways of living. For the accomplice knowledge is a fugitive path, a star that cannot be plotted in the sky, a conspiracy that learns without ends. The accomplice dwells in study and this is why he dwells in the undercommons, because only there is study possible.

From the undercommons the teacher who is the accomplice works within and against his classroom, studio, lecture hall. He will fake grades and steal from the institution. He will say that there is graduation, pretend there is credit, list references. And if the police were to enter the undercommons of the classroom to look for the teacher who is the accomplice, he might be not necessarily be the one who is talking, but rather the one who is allowing others to study through a complicit love. This complicit love is ready to sabotage, to unsettle and create danger whenever knowledge begins to be plotted, but this complicit love is also an open secret, an opening in study to a conspiracy that reveals itself to anyone who wishes to enter it with the guidance of the teacher who is an accomplice.

invocation

The performance artist is supposed to start the rehearsal, organise the audience, begin the show. She is supposed to act out the plot, suspend disbelief, and captivate attention. The performer promises a memorable event and a unique experience for the audience. How can she not be, immediately, the police? How can calling an audience to attention, how can the social rehearsal of attention characteristic of the performance, not take the form of governance, of organising the affect of the audience into a plot?

Perhaps invocation is the mode of operation of the performance artist who is an accomplice, not the police. In the mode of invocation the performance, the social rehearsal of attention, the plotting of attention, is disrupted. In invocation this disruption does not occur simply by substituting one form of attention for another. Rather in this operation of the accomplice, invocation disrupts the way attention itself is formed and experienced. Invocation focuses attention on what cannot yet be attended to. It conjures not another attention but the social conditions of attention in order to put these social conditions themselves in the category of the 'as if'.

By placing attention itself in question, by invoking that which cannot hold attention, be called to attention, that which stays at the level of intention, that which remains preliminary to plot, premature to plot, not inattentive but pre-

attentive, invocation opens up the social making of attention itself to other uses, other experiments. This opening up is what makes radical sociality possible, a rehearsal of another way to make attention collectively, to attend together to another world. The accomplice disrupts not the attention to plotting but the plotting of attention itself. Invocation unforms attention to attend to the not yet seen, the not yet experienced, the not yet rehearsed. The invocation of the performance artist is the rehearsal of the conspiracy without a plot.

To enter this mode of operation, the performance artists uses intention to perform an invocation that keeps the plotting of attention at a distance. She sets the intention to disrupt the plot and this intention opens up the way for the invocation, the active production of a form that allows for a different rehearsal and performance of attention. Her intention is set within and against the plotting of attention: by setting an intention she is within the plot, she gathers attention and puts herself in the midst of it, and yet her intention is to unplot attention.

But the accomplice does not only place herself within and against, she is also with and for the rehearsal of the conspiracy without a plot. In addition to staying with intention she invokes the making of attention through conjuring, fakery, or deception, ways of performing that block the plotting of attention. With these techniques she invokes a belief without an object. She activates, opens, and risks going against any plot of the senses, intelligences, languages or bodies gathered together to rehearse attention. Instead she dares to ask in public how attention might form without a plot, in conspiracy.

The performance artist who is an accomplice does not produce a different attention, she gathers attention differently. She builds with an audience a conspiracy of radical sociality, she gathers with them new forms of rehearsal, for new forms of attention, for conspiracy without a plot. This gathering is her complicit love.

care

The curator too can find a mode of operation to make her an accomplice. Within and against the space she is supposed to make, the viewers, artists, buyers and sellers for whom she is supposed to make room, within and against the production of art works, of art markets, of art worlds. The curator who is the accomplice is the one that operates through care, an ongoing care to make space, a caretaking of space that extends within and against the situation of the singular exhibitions or events, a space for the proliferation of art-making with others. The curator becomes the accomplice when she becomes a caretaker. The caretaker is the one who cares for a space, who inhabits it but on behalf of others, who works within and against the ownership of that space, the absentee landlord of the space. The curator who is a caretaker creates a space for making art, without knowing what art will be made. The caretaker makes something possible, makes more happen, in the space of art-making, through the care of that space, the care with which she fills that space, the care with which she quietly inhabits that space without owning it, lives in it without being at home in it, cultivates it without plotting what it produces.

The caretaker, the accomplice makes a space safe for proliferating art-making not producing art. Art-making with others becomes a conspiracy without ever producing a work of art that makes a plot, a plot of art history, art trends, art scenes. The police try to close down the space of art-making, the caretaker's space, when they smell a care without responsibility, a care without end, a care for the space and what can happen in it, what keeps happening in it, not a concern for what is produced. The police demand to know the plot, see the work, interview the artist, establish the reputation, pay the price. But the curator who is the accomplice keeps the space open with care, so that art starts to come from conspiracy to make conspiracy.

The caretaker makes a safe space for the complicity already at work in art and allows those who make art together to stay in complicity, to remain dangerous to themselves and each other. The curator who is the accomplice provides the care that allows others to stay in the complicity of making art together, as a form of ongoing conspiracy, rather than seeking the safety of being viewers and artists, of plotting art pieces and their display. She does this through a care that takes care without asking for anything, a care that refuses to take credit, a care that makes an art-making space of unpayable indebtedness. This care makes an unfinished space, an unfinishable space, a space not itself, not one, a space that can exist only in social time, the caretaker's time. And this care can be therefore, an uncomfortable care, a care of those who do not quite belong, who have but do not own, who love but do not possess, who work but do not finish, who are together but not one. The curator becomes the accomplice when she helps to produce this uncomfortable care, a care that is dangerous, made together but open to anyone and anything, a beautiful care that enlivens attention, heightens sense till sense and meaning coincide. This is a care without responsibility, a care without guarantees, placed in danger.

This caretaking joins the caretaking already going on in these spaces, the caretakers already taking care, not by becoming valuable, valued, or valorised, but by making a care that forms value. This is a caretaking of a space for art-making as the making of social forms, of modes of making together that form value itself, that invent value as an experiment made in care, under the watch of the caretaker, the accomplice. Under this watch, art-making can suspend whatever value tries to plot, and invent a practice of valuing for itself, with others, a conspiracy of value for itself, in space of caretaking, in complicit love.

complicit love

The condition for our entering into conspiracy, our forming of a conspiracy without a plot, is the complicity of life itself, the fact of complicity that so often produces fear, plotting, the violence of the one and the many, the police. But the activation of this complicity is complicit love. When we act as the accomplice rather than the police, we activate complicity, we make complicit love. Here we have spoken only of three possible modes of operation of the accomplice, but of course there are more, many yet unknown.

Complicit love is a way of hearing things and seeing things others cannot yet hear or see, sense or touch. In these moments of sensation, of complicit love, the forms of the senses open up, and open up for others, with others. Complicit love makes it safe to open, to make and re-make the senses for others, to enter the danger of not knowing where one sense ends and another begins, and where one's senses end and another's begins. Complicit love can do this because it is a love on the side. It is on the side, in both senses, on the side because it so often out of sight, invisible, sensed, and on the side because it is for others in conspiracy and against the police, those who claim to be one, those who plot. It is a love against the enemies of a conspiracy without a plot. When as accomplices we make complicit love we make it possible to live today.