— 4 —

Being Social Democratically with Jean-Luc Nancy at the Gezi Park Protests

Marie-Eve Morin

Nancy engages with democracy most explicitly in his little book *The Truth of Democracy*, the publication of which marks the 40th anniversary of May '68.[1] At the beginning of the eponymous essay, 'The Truth of Democracy,' Nancy identifies as the 'real singularity' of May '68 a certain disappointment with democracy itself, whose triumphal recovery after World War II failed to live up to its promises.[2] Nancy calls it a 'scarcely visible but insistent disappointment, the nagging sense that we had never recovered something whose triumphant return seemed to have been announced by the end of the Second World War, namely, democracy.'[3] The target of the May '68 uprisings was, according to Nancy, a 'kind of managerial democracy,' or what he calls elsewhere *ecotechnics*: the management of production, exchange, and growth of the world, now understood as the global *oikos*.[4] While the *polis* was supposed

---

[1] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Truth of Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). [2] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 1. [3] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 4.

[4] Nancy, Truth of Democracy, 1, 49; see also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World* or *Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 94.

to be the place of the production of a 'more-than-life' or a 'good life' beyond the mere satisfaction of needs, it is now reduced to a global, all-encompassing *oikos*, the management of which not only reproduces life, but also produces wealth.

The unquestioned consensus around democracy after World War II was caused, according to Nancy, less by an overall positive evaluation of democracy itself than by its evaluation in relation to 'totalitarian regimes' of all stripes. But what was obscured by this unquestioned support for democracy was the fact that the 'most significant political catastrophes' of the twentieth century, Nancy argues, 'were not the result of the sudden emergence of inexplicable demons' that were absolutely antithetical to democracy and befell it from the outside, but rather the result of an intrinsic vulnerability at the heart of democracy itself. If something makes democracy vulnerable to totalitarianism, then it is not enough to defend democracy as it now is; we must reinvent it.[5] In the few pages that follow this demand, Nancy lays down the terms of the problem and shows how such a reinvention ought to be conceived. The question had already occupied Nancy before, in the central chapters of *The Sense of the World*, in the 'complements' to *The Creation of the World*, in the essay on the Gulf War in *Being Singular Plural*, and of course, in his interventions at The Center for Philosophical Research on the Political, partially collected in *Retreating the Political*.[6] The question I would like to address in this short essay is whether Nancy's thinking of democracy can help us shed light on 'the occupations of the squares and other public spaces in early 2011.' Instead of speaking generally, I will focus on two specific events surrounding the Gezi Park protests that rocked Istanbul, and other cities in Turkey, in the weeks preceding the 'Being Social' Symposium, which took place at Birkbeck, University of London on 28 June 2013: 'the peace pianist' and 'the standing man.' I hope to hint at how Nancy's thinking of democracy, despite its ontological flavour, does indeed reanimate our thinking of praxis and resistance.

[5] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 8

[6] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 101–143; Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997).

The *demos* of democracy as singular plural

The vulnerability of democracy as Nancy diagnoses it comes from its inability to bring to light the *demos* that is supposed to be its principle.[7] Democracy is anxious to present its *demos*. Indeed, if the *demos* cannot be presented or exhibited, then what force can it have against totalitarian forces? At the same time, if democracy requires the presentation of the *demos*, the mode of its presence cannot be that of a thing or a Subject that is present in its identity with itself. Such a presentation would be exclusionary or totalitarian and would contradict the injunction of openness at the heart of democracy, since the people would then exist only as a closed totality. Derrida expresses the paradoxical nature of democracy in the following way:

> Democracy has always wanted by turns and at the same time two incompatible things: it has wanted, on the one hand, to welcome only men, and on the condition that they be citizens, brothers, and compeers [*semblables*], excluding all the others, in particular bad citizens, rogues, noncitizens, and all sorts of unlike and unrecognizable others, and, on the other hand, at the same time or by turns, it has wanted to open itself up, to offer hospitality, to all those excluded.[8]

This paradox is resolved through the process of fraternization, which allows the opening of the 'closed circle of citizens' to all, but only insofar as the foreign is first rendered similar. All are welcome, all can be citizens, provided they make themselves worthy of such belonging by imitating the true exemplar of the citizen. The role of this appeal to exemplarity ('French' as the example to be imitated to become a citizen of the *world*, or 'man' as the example to be imitated to belong to *humanity*) is to give content to the figure of the citizen, and hence to reintroduce some closure within the assertion of universality. Derrida's appeal to a 'democracy to come' then does not mean that we need to search for a democratic regime that would in the future be more inclusive or more universal insofar as its process of fraternization would

---

[7] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 6; The first two sections of this paper summarize the interpretation of Nancy developed in chapter four of my book, see Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 63.

be more effective. Rather, it means that democracy ought to be, here and now, radically opened not only to those who imitate the exemplar but to what or who comes prior to (or regardless) of its identification as friend, as member of the family, as human being, etc. While Nancy's 'unworked community' also puts into question the possibility of a self-enclosed community, Nancy also emphasizes the danger of turning to the empty figure without content of the citizen in order to theorize the openness of community. By refusing to give content to the people, democracy leaves the way open for both totalitarianism and ecotechnics. The former reinvests the empty figure of the citizen with a content. The latter affirms the world's lack of *archē* or *telos*, but only in the form of the general equivalence of all ends and means, which becomes effective under the names of 'planetary technology' and 'world economy.'[9]

Whether democracy presents the identity of the demos by assigning it a content or resorts to a purely formal presentation under the name 'citizen,' in both cases it relies, Nancy says, on the same scheme of self-sufficiency. Nancy explains:

> In the different figures of self-sufficiency, sometimes it is the social tie itself that is self-sufficient, sometimes it is the terms or units between which the social tie passes. In both cases, ultimately the tie no longer makes up a tie, it comes undone, sometimes by fusion, sometimes by atomization.[10]

In the first case, the social bond is subsumed into a 'One,' the people, who can then easily take the place of the monarch, without radically dividing its sovereignty: the people rule as One, each rules and is ruled like any other. In the second case, the citizens are independent atoms that subsist on their own, so that the social bond becomes a superfluous addition.

What needs to be thought lies between these two options: the undoing of the social bond (as that which produces a substance or a whole) without this dissolution being felt as absence or lack, that is, without assuming that this dissolution leaves us only with untied units. Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity attempts to think nothing other.[11] It looks for a thinking of atheism that would

---

[9] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 133.   [10] Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 111.

[11] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1–41. See also Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 48–64.

not be absentheistic, that is, it attempts to think a world without God, where the place formerly occupied by God would not be occupied by another principle—Reason, Humanity, Science, or even the Nothing—but where the transcendent place or position of the principle itself would be emptied out. Such a world would be immanent insofar as it would be without transcendent principle, but it would not be without opening. This opening would open right at the edges of the various ones that are exposed in this world and that form the multiplicity of the world.

In order to think such a 'transimmanent' world, or in order to learn to inhabit the world according to its transimmanence, what needs to be undone is the *desire* for an absolute self-sufficient foundation, or the desire for sovereignty. This undoing of sovereignty is, according to Nancy, already at work within sovereignty itself. Indeed, the theologico-political order, that is, the order in which the political totality is grounded in a transcendent principle that embodies it and presents it with its truth, wavers from within. Such a deconstruction must be differentiated from a secularization of political theology. Or it is necessary to point out that the process of secularization of the transcendent principle—sovereign is first God, then King, then the people—is not merely the transcription of a foundational logic into a secular realm, but also a process of immanentization, in which the grounding transcendence is lost.[12] At this point, the figure of the citizen displaces the concept of sovereignty by exacerbating the problem of self-foundation. The political problem is not so much anymore that of the authority of a ruler in relation to those who are ruled, an authority which in the cases of both the King and the people is derived from an absolute principle, God or Nature. Rather, it is the problem of the self-formation of an instance that is not founded on anything but itself, 'insofar as precisely, the "itself" neither precedes nor founds it but is the nothing, the very thing from which it is suspended.'[13] In a world without transcendent principle, sovereignty shatters itself in trying to found itself in nothing but itself. At the end of the theologico-political there is an opening onto the atheological, that is, for Nancy, onto our being-in-common in the world. This is why Nancy can ask, evocatively: 'What if sovereignty was the revolt of

---

[12] See Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 93 and Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 96–109.
[13] Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 103.

the people?'[14]

The notion of the singular plural that informs Nancy's work provides us with important conceptual resources to sustain the thought of a *demos* between totalization and atomization. At the same time, it is important to understand this notion in all its radicality and complexity. For Nancy, existence is necessarily in common or shared out because only a being that is not an essence immanent to itself, but is exposed to an outside, does not collapse into the black hole of immanence, but succeeds in coming to presence. To exist, to be present is to be caught in a movement of appearing between pure presence and sheer absence. Such a movement (Nancy will call it *être-à*, being unto or toward),[15] if it is to be sustained, requires a limit that separates the existent at the same time as it connects it to itself and to others. This limit, which belongs neither to the inside not to the outside, is the edge where existence happens.[16]

By affirming the singular plural character of existence then, Nancy neither posits a plurality of strict individual points, nor does he dissolve all identity into the mere indistinction of pure differences. Being singular plural means that there is always more than one singularity, but this is the case because each singularity is only what it is by being caught in an infinite process of entanglement and disentanglement with itself and with others. Since it is in this process of differentiation/identification that a singularity finds its identity, such an identity cannot consist of a fixed set of properties. It is important to underline that while the singular plural allows us to understand individuals as themselves plural, it also applies to communities. Indeed, a community is a singularity, always plural and always exposed on its limit or edge to other communities, so that it never closes itself upon itself to become a detached One. Furthermore, what Nancy says of a community also applies to the world as a whole. Any whole is for Nancy always 'a whole of articulated singularities.' Articulation here does not mean organization. It names:

> What takes place where different pieces touch each other without
> fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another,

[14] Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 109.   [15] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 40–1.
[16] See Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Of Being-in-Common,' in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. The Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3–4; Jean-Luc Nancy, The Birth to Presence, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 154–5.

one at the limit of the other … without this mutual *play*—which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them—ever forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole. Here, *the totality is itself the play* of the articulations. This is why a whole of singularities, which is indeed a whole, does not close in around the singularities to elevate them to its power: this whole is essentially the opening of singularities in their articulations, the tracing and the pulse of their limits.[17]

Democracy, Politics, and Being-in-Common

In what way does the thought of the singular plural help us reinvent democracy by allowing us to escape the opposition between the people as a given, identifiable totality and the people as made up of detached, untied units? In *Sense of the World*, Nancy appeals to a politics of the (k)not:

> One would thus demand a politics without denouement … a politics of the incessant tying up of singularities with each other, over each other, and through each other, without any end other than the enchainment of (k)nots, without any structure other than their interconnection or interdependence, and without any possibility of calling any single (k)not or the totality of (k)nots self-sufficient. … Politics would henceforth be neither a substance nor a form but, first of all, a gesture.[18]

Such a politics appears to be coextensive with existence itself. Indeed, it is described in much the same terms as the movement of exposition that constitutes existence itself. Of course, for gestures of tying to be possible, certain conditions must be in place: there must be room for each and every one, 'a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely take place, where there is place for being there (in this world).'[19]

In his later works, Nancy will be much more careful to delineate the sphere of the singular plural against the sphere of the political. Nancy voices a criticism of his earlier position in an interview for the journal Vacarme in April 2000. Speaking of his 1991 essay 'La comparution: Politique à venir,' Nancy says:

---

[17] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 76.

[18] Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 111–12.   [19] Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 42.

> I myself should have a turn at self-criticism: in writing on 'commu-
> nity,' on 'compearance,' then on 'being with,' I certainly think I was
> right to discern the importance of the motif of the 'common' and
> the necessity to work on it anew—but I was wrong when I thought
> this under the banner of 'politics.'[20]

In 'La comparution,' Nancy had equated 'politics' with the multi-
ple and expansive presentations of the in-between. While Nancy
named 'art, thought, love, glory, the body' as such presentations
of the in-common, as *éclats* (shards, bursts or flashes) of sense, the
role of politics was to diffract these presentations, to expose their
being-in-common.[21] Politics, in this case, would be not a specific
activity, but the *praxis* of sharing itself, the *praxis* that keeps open
and engages the space of our multiple expositions. In this sense,
politics does not assume or take over the meaning of existence as
a whole; it only makes room for the sense that existents make in
tying and untying themselves. Still it remains unclear in what sense
politics, which is said to propagate or diffract the 'in-common,'
remains distinct from the various praxes of sense it exposes.

In the *Truth of Democracy*, not only in the eponymous essay
but also in the short piece 'Is Everything Political?,' Nancy is much
more explicit in defining the specific role of politics in relation
to the order of singular plural existence. The sense of existence,
which is not a transcendent signification imposed from above, but
what happens at the limit between singularities when they entangle
themselves with and disentangle themselves from each other, is
decided in the sphere of the in-common and not in the political
sphere. At the same time, the sphere of the in-common can only be
put into play in its singularity and plurality within the open space
of the *polis*, even though its object proper—existence or sense—is
not explicitly political. Politics, then, only gives the affirmations of
singular plural existence their space and possibility;[22] it does not
prefigure or determine the 'Good' of the good life that makes up
political life. Instead, politics allows each and all to 'sketch out, to

---

[20] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Nothing but the World: An Interview with *Vacarme*,' *Rethinking Marxism* 19/4 (2007), 525, translation modified.

[21] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'La Comparution/The Compearance: From the Existence of Communism to the Community of Existence,' trans. Tracy B. Strong, *Political Theory* 20/3 (1992), 390.

[22] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 26.

paint, to dream, to sing, to think, to feel a "good life" that measures up incommensurably to the infinite that every 'good' envelops.'[23] Politics, Nancy says, 'is in charge of space and of spacing (of space-time), but it is not in charge of figuring.'[24] But, while the political sphere does not propose any figures, such figurelessness should not be thought of as a lack; it is rather the precondition for the proliferation of figures: works, gestures, bearings, thoughts, etc. It is for this figureless and spacious politics that Nancy reserves the name of democracy, a democracy that is essentially an-archic insofar as the *demos* does not constitute its given *archē* or principle, but represents rather what foils 'any posited, deposited, or imposed *archē*' in favour of a plurality of absolute gestures.[25]

What we have then is a complex relation between, on the one hand, the in-common as sense and democracy as the condition of possibility of the in-common, and on the other hand, the sphere of the in-common and the concrete policies that arises out of our being-together in the world. This double relation should not be understood as one of foundation. Democracy is, for Nancy, a meta-physics, not in the sense that it grounds beings as a whole in a transcendent principle, but in the sense that it ponders the being of our being-in-common, but without assuming its sense or its destina-tion, without assuming what forms it will take.[26] Here, democracy appears to be abstract and apolitical. Indeed, it is equivalent to the thought of our being-in-common. While Nancy gives voice to this worry, he is clear that to enter into this thought at all is 'already to act. It is to be engaged in the praxis whereby what is produced is a transformed subject rather than a preformed product, an infinite subject rather than a finite object.'[27] Furthermore, this thoughtful decision in favour of being-in-common, commits us to certain 'actions, operations, and struggles' not only against the reification of being-in-common into a thingified common, but also against general equivalence.[28]

Democracy, then, constitutes the condition of possibility of a putting into play of existences. It is beyond the democratic sphere (but never apart from it) and within the sphere of being-in-common that decisions about what it means to live a 'good life' are made

---

[23] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 27.   [24] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 50.

[25] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 31; See also Nancy, 'Of Being-in-Common,' 11.

[26] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 33–4.   [27] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 31.

[28] Nancy, *Truth of Democracy*, 31.

and gestures of existence are affirmed. And it is from the place of being-in-common that policies—of health, culture, or otherwise—can be devised to respond to the senses or values that are affirmed in the sphere of the in-common. But again such policies are not determined by or derived from our common existence since this existence does not form a unitotality. The two levels of politics (metaphysics/democracy and policies) are not only distinct, but each has, in its own way, being-in-common as its 'focal point.'

Gezi Park Protests: The 'Peace Pianist' and the 'Standing man'

On the evening of 12 June 2013, in the midst of protest in Istanbul and as the police and the protesters are facing off and readying themselves for another night of confrontation, a man shoves his piano up to Taksim square, near Gezi Park, right between the protesters and the police, and begins to play. *The Independent* labelled him the 'peace pianist.'[29] As *Der Spiegel* reports, people are 'magically' attracted by the sound of the music.[30] They gather around the pianist, sit down, take off the helmets they were wearing to protect themselves against stones and water cannons, and simply listen to the music, singing along. At some point in the night, the crowd around the pianist is so big that some people are almost 'sitting on the black boots of the police officers.'[31] Witnesses report a radical change in the confrontational atmosphere of the place. A relief of tension is even palpable on the side of the police. Some police officers take off their helmets and put down their shields.

It is difficult to evaluate the political significance of this event. When the *Spiegel* reporter asks Davide Martello, the pianist, what message he wanted to convey to the people on the square, he replies:

[29] Richard Hall, 'Turkey protests: The "peace pianist" trying to bring calm to Taksim Square,' *The Independent*, 13 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-protests-the-peace-pianist-trying-to-bring-calm-to-taksim-square-8656968.html.

[30] Julia Jung, 'Konstanzer Pianist auf Taksim-Platz: "Die Stimmung war gigantisch",' Der Spiegel Online, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/leute/pianist-martello-spielt-auf-dem-taksim-platz-in-istanbul-a-905685.html.

[31] Matern Boeselager, 'Ausgerechnet ein deutscher Pianist rettet die Istanbuler vor dem nächsten Gasnebel,' Occupy Turkey Column, *Vice Magazine*, 13 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.vice.com/de/read/ausgerechnet-ein-deutschen-pianist-rettet-die-istanbuler-vor-einerm-dritten-gasnebel/.

'Talk to each other! Without spraying any gases. Stand relaxed in front of one another, drink a chai and finally begin to communicate. I played for both sides, the police and the protesters.'[32] If the goal of the performance was to prevent a violent confrontation by relieving tension and allowing both sides to enter into a rational dialogue, the most immediate effect of the performance was to silence the demands of the protesters. Indeed, Matern Boeselager reports that:

> Between the songs protesters chanted 'Taksim is everywhere, resistance is everywhere.' But when a couple of people stroke up '*Faşizme Karşı Omuz Omuza* [shoulder to shoulder against fascism],' they were brought to silence, apparently so as to not break the spell. After all police officers were standing directly besides the crowd.[33]

What is nevertheless interesting is the spatial transformation that the musical performance is able to bring about in the square. We start with a confrontational space, where two groups of people face each other along a clearly marked line. In order to prevent protesters from throwing stones at the police and triggering a violent counter-attack, some protesters move closer and form a chain in front of the police officers.[34] The location of the dividing line shifts but the spatial divide is maintained. Police officers and protesters await the event that will shift the tensed order into a violent chaos. Instead, a man positions himself right in-between the police force and the protesters, on the dividing line. What happens is a reorganization of the space: drawn by the sound of the music, the people gather in concentric circles around the man, who now represents the centre of the gathering, up until these circles reach the police officers, forcing their inclusion into the crowd of listeners. From a dual, almost Schmittian understanding of community: 'friends here, enemy there,' we seem to have switched to the unifying model of communal space criticized by Nancy: 'everybody gathered around a common cause or thing.' But if we look a little bit further, we notice

---

[32] 'Redet miteinander! Ohne irgendwelche Gase zu sprühen. Steht euch entspannter gegenüber, trinkt einen Chai und fangt endlich an zu kommunizieren. Ich habe für beide Seiten gespielt, die Polizei und die Demonstranten' (Jung, 'Konstanzer Pianist').

[33] 'Zwar wurde zwischen jedem Lied wild geklatscht und "Taksim ist überall, der Widerstand ist überall" gerufen. Aber als ein paar Leute "Schulter an Schulter gegen den Faschismus" anstimmen wollten, wurden sie von den anderen zum Schweigen gebracht, anscheinend, um den Zauber nicht zu brechen, schließlich standen die Polizisten direkt dabei' (Boeselager, 'Ausgerechnet ein deutscher Pianist').

[34] Boeselager, 'Ausgerechnet ein deutscher Pianist.'

that the dissolution of the tensions between police and protesters, even though it required a moment of unification, allowed for the re-emergence of being-in-common, of a singular plural public space. At the end of the night, Boeselager reports that 'the ferocious warriors have transformed themselves into carefree young people again.' Protestors are walking around in small groups, talking and laughing; some police officers are talking with protesters, and once in a while, some of them even smile; a group of people are dancing on one side; others are playing soccer.[35] This transformation can be seen as the, certainly limited and fleeting, political success of this particular event, since the protests first targeted a decision of the Erdogan government to turn a public space, the Gezi Park, into a privately owned shopping centre.

A couple of days after the performance by the peace pianist, Taksim Square had been forcefully cleared, closed, and finally reopened to the public, but any kind of public gatherings on the square were banned. Then, a man walked up to the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim Square and stood silently for hours while he gazed straight at the portrait of Atatürk.[36] The man was performance artist Erdem Gündüz and his performance became famous as 'the standing man.' Standing there alone, he cannot be said to be part of a gathering. As others came and stood with him, questions arise: Are these people standing together? What kind of community is this? Is it a gathering or not, and are the police entitled to dismantle the 'group'? In fact, after others joined Gündüz in his silent and still protest, the police watched for a while, but then moved in and dismantled what they considered to be a gathering, arresting some of its participants. The next day, the standing man's performance caught on. The *Hürriyet Daily* reports that:

[35] 'Die Demonstranten liefen in Grüppchen umher und lachten, aus den grimmigen Kriegern waren wieder sorglose Jugendliche geworden. Die Polizisten hatten die Schilde und Helme abgelegt und sich auf den Boden gesetzt. An der Statue standen sie im Kreis, umringt von Demonstranten, mit denen sie diskutierten oder sogar einfach schwatzten, immer öfter lächelte sogar der ein oder andere. Auf der anderen Seite hatte sich eine Tanzgruppe vor dem mittlerweile ausgeschalteten Wasserwerfer gebildet, davor spielten ein paar Jungs Fußball.' (Boeselager, 'Ausgerechnet ein deutscher Pianist').

[36] Karim Talbi, 'Turkey's "Standing Man" Protest By Erdem Gunduz Spreads Across Country,' *Huffington Post*, 18 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/18/turkey-standing-man-protest-erdem-gunduz_n_3458390.html; '"Standing man" sparks a static social revolution,' *The Newcastle Herald*, 21 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2013, http://www.theherald.com.au/story/1589022/standing-man-sparks-a-static-social-revolution/?cs=12.

Many men and women inspired by Gündüz's solo protest have held similar protests in several cities including Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir since then. Some read books while standing, others held a sit-in protest and one man dressed in a traditional costume. Some stand for hours, some for a few minutes, but these new silent protests seem to be the new phenomenon of the Gezi Park protests.[37]

The reaction of Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç to this silent resistance is quite telling. He calls the protest 'pleasing to the eye' and 'civilized,' and affirms that since they are not acts of violence, such protests cannot be condemned.[38] At the same time, he worries about traffic disturbances, the health impact of standing for extended periods of time, and finally the loss of productivity: 'We should encourage such protests within the law,' says Arınç, 'However, I think they should stand for five minutes and then go to their work or school in the sixth minute. Eight hours is too long.'[39] Unable to subsume these 'standing' protests under the category of 'political protests' because of the features they display (non-violent, aesthetically pleasing, civilized), Arınç cannot condemn them. Lacking arguments against them at the political level, he resorts to other categories: health, work, traffic. 'Useless' activities, such as standing in the middle of a public square reading a book, can be tolerated, but they should not interfere with productive, goal-oriented everyday life.

When asked about the meaning of his action, Gündüz does not actually state any specific message, but rather emphasizes the importance of the idea of silent resistance and says that he hopes 'people stop and think, "what happened there?"' Gündüz does not hold a placard, does not chant.[40] Remaining silent, he cannot be

[37] 'Group stands against "standing man" in Istanbul protest square,' *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/group-stands-against-standing-man-in-istanbul-protest-square.aspx?pageID=238&nID=49111&NewsCatID=341.

[38] Majid Mohamed, 'Turkey unrest: "Standing Man" inspires hundreds with silent vigil in Taksim Square,' *The Independent*, 19 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-unrest-standing-man-inspires-hundreds-with-silent-vigil-in-taksim-square-8663201.html; '"Standing man" sparks a static social revolution;' Mohamed, 'Turkey unrest.'

[39] Cited in '"Standing man" sparks a static social revolution.'

[40] '"Standing man" inspires Turkish protesters in Istanbul,' *BBC News*, 18 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22949632.

seen as raising any demands. Rather, he comes to presence in the public space, exposing himself as this singularity that he is, and his presentation remains without transcendent signification. Nancy would say, he opens up a place or spaces out the 'there' to receive his presence. If others join in it cannot be because they share the same demands. While Gündüz's performance might appear individualistic, almost atomistic, it does give rise to a sort of gathering, but not one that is unified around a common demand or cause. The participants do not even gaze in the same direction. Rather, they come and stand only in order to present themselves there too: *with* him, but also beside and apart from him. What is being enacted is the presentation of their naked being-in-common.

In an article published in *The Independent*, Kerem Nisancioglu criticized the importance given by the media to Gündüz's action and to the 'standing protests' in general. He recognizes that 'the standing man served to expose the dangerous absurdity of state violence currently taking place in Turkey,' since it led to many being arrested for doing quite literally nothing.[41] At the same time, he deplores the fact that these events have obscured other, politically more potent, developments within the protest movement. Indeed, Nisancioglu argues that the closure of Gezi Park for gatherings and demonstration was a blessing in disguise since it led people to gather spontaneously at other parks around Istanbul, where they held discussions about the future of the movement. These forums, he writes,

> are nothing short of remarkable—prefigurative spaces in which people are experimenting with, and cultivating, new, more extensive, more direct forms of democracy. Drawing on procedures common to the Indignados and Occupy movements, consensus decision making and horizontal organization forms are taking root.[42]

In these forums, public space is reclaimed by citizens against the authoritarian power of the state. Since such local organizations are not bound to a symbolic place like the Gezi Park or the Zuccotti Park, but can gather spontaneously anywhere, and since they are

---

[41] Kerem Nisancioglu, 'Turkey's "Standing Man" captured attention, but protest doesn't stand still—it forms assemblies,' *The Independent*, 25 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/turkeys-standing-man-captured-attention-but-protest-doesnt-stand-still--it-forms-assemblies-8672456.html.

[42] Kerem Nisancioglu, 'Turkey's "Standing Man" captured attention.'

not tied to specific demands and objectives, but are opened to discussions about various demands and actions, they cannot be so easily contained and repressed by state power. Indeed, these local, non-hierarchical community organizations are experiments in direct democracy, in *real* democracy, 'against the subverted nature of representative capitalist democracy.'[43]

If we remember what Nancy says about democracy being the condition of possibility of the exercise of our being-in-common, then the performance of the standing man appears not so much as distraction from these participatory forums, but rather as the political gesture underlying them. If democracy is first a metaphysics, the thought of our being-in-common, before being a way of organizing ourselves politically in order to debate and decide about the content of the good life, then the standing man can be seen as enacting this thought, and through this enactment as opening up the democratic sphere. The performance of the standing man makes possible the participatory, non-hierarchical forums where the meaning of our being-in-common can be debated democratically. By that I am not claiming that Gündüz needed to stand on Taksim Square before people could assemble at various parks throughout the city. Such a claim would be absurd. But in each citizen who attends these forums, we need to recognize the gesture of standing men or women: the presentation of a singularity, the coming to presence of a singular existence. Only this gesture can maintain the singular plurality and plural singularity of the democratic space in which debates and decisions will take place.

[43] Jerome Roos, 'Assemblies emerging in Turkey: a lesson in democracy,' *Roar Magazine*, 19 June 2013, accessed 26 November 2014, http://roarmag.org/2013/06/assemblies-emerging-in-turkey-a-lesson-in-democracy/.