Divided We Share: On the Ethics and Politics of Public Space

#unteilbar was the motto of a mass rally that took place on 13 October 2018 in Berlin. *#indivisible* was used to demonstrate unity against the surge of right-wing populism and against racism and xenophobia. In German, just like in English, *un-* is a negative prefix which means *not*. The suffix *bar* translates into the English *-able* or *-ible* meaning *capable of being* or *able to be done*. The centre syllable *teil* interests me the most here. The verb *teilen* has two meanings: *to share* and *to divide*. Public space is both shared and divided, and people are divided over how to share and divide it.

Sharing: Rituals of Citizenship in Public Space
and the Making of the Nation State

Public space comes with complex layers of history. The *#unteilbar* march started at Alexanderplatz, then continued via the Brandenburg Gate to the Berlin Victory Column, adding to the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperialism, war, and commerce these places have witnessed.

It may not be possible *not* to share the history of a given site, but it is possible to change its function and meaning. Some histories have to be shared. The ways in which they are shared can lead to division and conflict. This presents as much an ethical as a political problem. The hashtag *#unteilbar* drew attention to *teilen*, which means *to share* and *to divide.* We are divided over what it is that we have to share. We have to share what we are divided over. This is the condition of public space. Again, this is as much a question of ethics as of politics.

When something is shared by a group of people, they all become part of it. The nation state was founded on public manifestations of sharing. A common culture, shared in the public space of museums, operas, theatres, parks, or squares, was essential to the concept of the nation state. In the historical context of European metropolises, shared cultures and their legacies were informed by imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. The idea of the modern institution of citizenship was first formed during the French Revolution. Practising the 'ritual of citizenship' was firmly linked to the nation state's infrastructure of such new public spaces.[1]

The concept of citizenship as developed by the French Revolution was reserved for white, male persons. The idea of universal citizenship had exclusionary premises. Classed, gendered and racialized subjects were not citizens. The ritual of citizenship

therefore reproduced these exclusions and spatialized them, making public space gendered, racialized, and classed. Looking back at the beginnings of public space as it gave rise to a shared nation state culture, we understand that being divided over what was supposed to be shared formed part of this public culture from the onset. One such example is Olympe de Gouges's 1791 *Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen*, which contested and expanded the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, the blueprint of the Western idea of citizenship.[2] People are as much united as they are divided by and over public space and its rituals of citizenship. Finding new rituals of denationalized and informal citizenship and new cultural expressions in public space for such divided sharing without epistemic violence or militarized violence presents one of the biggest challenges today.[3] A history of the ethics and politics of public space would examine the formation of the culture of sharing to understand its long-term structures and its changes over time. Such a history of public space in European cities during the long twentieth century extends by far the scope of this essay. Political systems of the twentieth century—imperialism, colonialism, communism, fascist totalitarianism, socialism, or liberal democracy, have each in their own way made ideological use of public space; meanwhile the twenty-first century has witnessed much change of public space effected by globalization, capital-centric urbanization, and the shift to neoliberalism in urban governance. New gender relations along with diasporic or migrant ways of living play a major role in the transformation of public space, its everyday use and cultural expectations towards it.

Sharing: A Keyword for the Twenty-First Century

As seen above, the idea of sharing has been formative to the culture of public space at the beginning of the nation state. For example, the modern institution of citizenship has been shared and performed in public space. Sharing in the twenty-first century has taken on a different dimension altogether. Typing 'share' into the Google search engine on 26 December 2018 resulted in 13,480,000,000 hits. From Facebook to Airbnb, from Uber to open-source tools, from co-working spaces to a traffic concept where barriers between vehicles and pedestrians are removed, the paradigm of sharing has reshaped life, work, leisure, human relationships, friendships, affects and emotions. In short, sharing/shared are among the buzzwords of our time. In 1976, Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams published his seminal book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in which he explored the social and cultural valence of words such as *bureaucracy*, *masses*,

1
See C. Duncan, 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in I. Karp and S. D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 88–103.

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O. de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizens* (Lewes: Ilex Press, 2018).

3
S. Sassen, 'The Repositioning of Citizenship. Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics', *The New Centennial Review* (2003) 3(2), 42. See E. Krasny, 'Citizenship and the Museum: On Feminist Acts', in J. Ashton (ed.) *Feminism and Museums: Intervention, Disruption, and Change* (Edinburgh and Boston: MuseumsEtc, 2017) vol. 1, 74–99.

or *work*. In 2005, Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris presented *New Keywords. A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society.* Even though their update is helpful to understand widely used terms such as *mobility*, *participation* or *queer*, many of the keywords that have come to both define and describe our contemporary realities are absent.[4] Missing keywords include *Facebook*, *climate change*, *crisis*, *resilience*, *sustainability*, and, of course, with regard to the present topic, sharing/shared.[5]

When Facebook was first launched in 2004, it elevated the practice of sharing to a new digital lifestyle. *Share* next to *Like* and *Comment* came to constitute new digital subjectivities, including emergent forms of digitally mediated sociability with its concomitant attention and affect management. It soon became clear that digital sharing was about enhancing self-value, creating a digital personality, and investment in social capital networking. While such public sharing can definitely pass on valuable information or insights, it is also time-consuming and results in constant self-assessment based on likes, comments, or shares. This required new forms of affect management.

In 2008, Airbnb was founded. Even though the market was never far from home, this digital platform has completely transformed the home into a commodity. Airbnb's people-to-people platform turns homes into shares. This means that one inhabits a process of continuously reproducible commodification. Again, much like sharing on Facebook, Airbnb sharing has introduced a new form of lived subjectivity that requires new and skilful forms of personal representation and affect management.

Sharing has not only risen to prominence via digital social networks and sharing economies, but is also celebrated by austerity-based urban governance. When public funding is dwindling, when public infrastructure continuously fails, when private-public partnerships put the public realm last or transform it into branded and corporate landscapes, then the helping hands of the public are invited to share the responsibility for their public space. Social media, sharing economies, and austerity-based governance thus introduce new challenges concerning the relationship between ethics and politics. They are part of twenty-first century subject formations and profoundly influence feelings and expectations towards urban public space.

How to Practice Sharing in the Twenty-First Century City: Urban Hubs, Urban Hacking

While new cultures of sharing have emerged in the wake of digital social media and platform economies, the traditional notion of a shared culture as understood by the modern nation state has not

disappeared. Quite the contrary, it has returned in full force. Right-wing populism and extreme nationalism make claims to a shared culture. This has resulted in new divisions, new forms of hate, segregation, separation, and exclusion. Therefore, new class divisions and rising inequality inform sharing in today's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-generational urban societies. Sharing is an ethical and political battlefield. People are divided over what to share and how to share. Divided, they share. In the post-socialist city of Belgrade where public space gives testimony to the legacies of the Ottoman empire, the Habsburg empire, Titoist socialism, the Balkan wars, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and today's transition into accelerated capitalism, societal responsibility for public space as a commons does not come easily. Architect and researcher Dubravka Sekulic has written about the Yugoslav model of socialist workers' self-management that combined elements of communism and capitalism and made housing a 'social property'.[6] The same held true for public space. The Yugoslav wars and the post-war period meant the end of this model of socialism and the dawn of unbridled neoliberal capitalism. Privatization radically changed the built environment with the impact of developer-driven urbanization and widespread informal building practices. Privatization was an economic shift, but it also changed commonly held cultural values. 'The attitude towards space changed from societal … to a more private form, so from "ours" to just "mine".'[7] The socialist legacy of the modernist housing stock, with apartments transformed into private property from the 1990s onwards, has retained its potential of in-between space. Despite being neglected, the buildings hold the promise of communal use, comfort, and pleasure. Such in-between public spaces test shared labour and the sharing of responsibility. In the spring of 2015, the collective Čuvari parka (Park Keepers) started to clean the Plato park, where they came to play with their children. Their activist clean-up led to their participation in *Shared Cities: Creative Momentum* as they responded to an open call put out by BINA – Belgrade International Architecture Week. A film made as part of their project starts with the following description of their public space in Plato: 'It is great inspiration, even though it is dirty.'[8] They wanted a clean space for their children. So they took their brooms and set to work. Like Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who in 1973 performed 'maintenance art' by cleaning the floors of a museum in Hartford, Connecticut, three Čuvari parka mothers turned maintenance into a public performance.[9] While 1970s feminist art exposed the gendered division of labour, the public activism in Plato in 2015 exposed the lack of public maintenance and the fact that social reproduction is not only needed in the home but also in public space. By overcoming the attitude of privatization of only taking care of what is 'mine', the three mothers initiated a

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T. Bennett, L. Grossberg, and M. Morris, *New Keywords. A revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 217, 252, 287.
5
Feminist scholar Sarah Bracke has drawn attention to the importance of resilience and has suggested that Raymond Williams would include it if he were writing his vocabulary today. See S. Bracke, 'Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience', in: J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, and L. Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability and Resistance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 54.
6
See D. Sekulic, 'Don't Stare So Romantically: On Extralegal Space in Belgrade' (11 March 2014) vol. 38, online, available http://volumeproject.org/author/dubravka-sekulic/ (accessed 26 December 2018).
7
Ibid.
8
Bina centar: Čuvari parka, Video (6 June 2017), online, available HTTP: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VDF2pCJCf0 (accessed 26 December 2018).
9
See E. Krasny, 'The Domestic is Political: The Feminization of Domestic Labour and its Critique in Feminist Art Practice', in A. M. Guasch Ferrer and N. Jiménez del Val (eds.), *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Age* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 161–178.
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I. Kucina: 'Urban Hubs – Infrastructure for Collaboration', *BINA Programme*, SCCM Belgrade, 2018.

process of shared labour so their public space suffered less from neglect. Located between the high-rise buildings, Plato at Mileševska Street became what architect Ivan Kucina calls an 'urban hub'.[10] These are responses to austerity urbanism and lack of public involvement. Kucina reasons that the achievement of such an urban hub is a change in '[the] relationship between the city and citizens in Belgrade', adding that '[it] has been taken for granted that public spaces have to be developed and maintained by the public authorities, and not by citizens. This general attitude has greatly affected passivity and lack of civic initiatives which would aim at improving them.'[11] The network of urban hubs seeks to promote and support citizens' initiatives and the idea of the city as a place of shared interests.

Together with anthropology students from the Faculty of Philosophy and with architectural support from the BINA team, the best place for communal gatherings at Plato park was identified and painted red. A large table was designed and built out of metal and wood. When asked about the park and the table, one of the interviewed partners in the 13-minute film on Čuvari parka calls it 'utopian and idealistic and great.'[12] But he also warns: 'Now what life will bring and how it will be maintained, how it will survive that is on us [sic] and the people who live there and use it.'[13] This example shows how local activism connects sharing with labour, urban space, and digital networks into an urban hub.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Berlin has witnessed tremendous change. The buildings and public space of Berlin reflect the complex legacies of the Hohenzollern Kings of Prussia and their imperial and colonial empire, of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime, the divided city of West Berlin and East Berlin after 1945, and the decades following the reunification. In 1991, the Bundestag's Capital Resolution made Berlin the seat of the German government. The fallow land and empty buildings of the 1990s witnessed a period of activist temporary use and a new culture celebrating the temporary. From the late 1990s onwards, three major trends have changed Berlin: real estate developer-urbanism, gentrification, and mass tourism. In 1996 there were 3,272,888 visitors to Berlin; by 2016 the number had risen to 12,731,600.[14] Against this backdrop, the public space of the urban metropolis is of great interest to global capital. ZK/U, Center for Art and Urbanistics, the Berlin partner of the Shared Cities project, have identified that the revenue from street furniture (bus stops, benches) and outdoor advertisement (billboards), is shared by a few global players. Wall AG, part of JCDecaux since 2009, is Berlin's provider of street furniture and advertisement. This largely defines the appearance of public space as this forms part of corporate, homogenized, developer- and tourism-friendly branding strategies. ZK/U initiated *Hacking Urban Furniture* as an activist

research project in collaboration with artists, urban researchers, administrators, and politicians to suggest new models of taking back urban furniture. The group included artists and artist groups Markus Ambach, Christian Hasucha, *Umschichten*, *Raumlabor* and *KUNSTrePUBLIK*. Projects have been realized in cooperation with *AbBA* (Alliance of Threatened Berlin Studio Houses), *Refunc*, *Open-Berlin,* and *Wildau Technical College*. Ideas, knowledge, labour, and responsibility were shared through the collaboration of many individuals and groups in cooperation with institutions. Awareness raising, outreach, and visibility were shared across many different actors and spread widely much like in digital networks. *Urban Hacking* launched an open international single-phase idea contest, held an exhibition, a conference, and talks, and invited international research partners including Laura Sobral, Benjamin Cope, Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse, Surfatial, Jan Bovelet, Joanne Pouzenc, Mobasher Niqui, Alireza Labeshka, and Ali Reza Hemmat Boland.

Hacking is a tech term denoting an illegal form of sharing with someone, bypassing security, and gaining access to a computer system and network, often with the purpose of altering it. In this case, hacking taps into the globalized and closed system of street furniture and outdoor advertisement in order to reclaim it not illegally but in dialogue with urban administrators and policy makers. *Hacking Urban Furniture* sees the fields of design, community participation, urban administration, and economy as interconnected, and proposes a new model of locally self-managed urban furniture production including reinvestment of the revenue generated. Their concept makes urban furniture a field of production for local artists, designers and architects; includes open source models; lets the community have a say in the 'what' and 'how' of their public space, and allows for collective decisions about reinvestment of revenue into urban, social, or cultural infrastructure. Ultimately, today's model of Public-Private-Partnership, known as PPP, which aligns urban governance to the interest of global capital, could be transformed into Communal-Collective-Cooperations (CCC). *Hacking Urban Furniture* presents the model for a radical transformation of wrestling public space from the interests of global capital.

Sharing: Learning from the Broom, the Table, the Bench, and the Billboard

The *Urban Hub* in Belgrade and *Urban Hacking* in Berlin are both involved on a local level and start from tangible and concrete objects that define public space. All the key objects in these examples—the broom, the table, the bench, and the billboard—can be considered units of sharing in public space. They help people relate

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Ibid.
12
Čuvari parka, 11'41".
13
Čuvari parka, 11'44"–11'57".
14
Senatsverwaltung für Wirtschaft, Energie und Betriebe, 'Tourismus in Zahlen', online, available HTTP: https://www.berlin.de/sen/wirtschaft/wirtschaft/branchen/tourismus/tourismus-in-zahlen/ (accessed 26 December 2018).   15
H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 53.

to each other, to share labour: the broom, to share sociability; the table, to share relaxation; the bench or the billboard, to share information. These objects occupy the world between the people who share them. This follows Hannah Arendt's metaphor of the table. She writes that in mass society, 'the world between them has lost its power to gather them together'.[15] She compares this to a vanishing table leaving people behind, 'entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.'[16] Once people have to position themselves around the table—an object that separates them—it becomes a shared object, a process of sharing. The table is just as much about ethics as it is about politics. *Urban Hubs* and *Urban Hacking* work on the local scale. They make public space a locally shared endeavour. Urban governance, developer-driven urbanism, and the interest of global capital put public space at a remove. The scale of the broom, the bench, the table, and even the billboard makes public space concrete, tangible, and manageable. The broom, the bench, the table, and the billboard imply sharing *and* dividing. The shared broom represents labour that is divided. The shared table is a table divided among a group of people. These examples are templates that can connect into networks and can be tested in different locations. They constitute a public practice beyond the scale of the local, while acknowledging the specific local conditions.

A public space, in the most general sense, refers to an area or a place which is open and accessible to all people, regardless of age, ability, class, ethnicity, gender, or religion. The model of the *Urban Hub* and *Hacking Urban Furniture* could be expanded and used in the future to address issues of sharing as they pertain to the notion of a truly intersectional public space, and the objects that bring people together could be used to debate how and why people who share public space and its objects are divided over their history, their present, and their future. Public space and its objects require working out shared notions of what is right, what is wrong, and what obligations they come with. They form part of governing the relations of people living together in a society. Therefore, public objects such as brooms, benches, tables, or billboards, which have to be kept in one piece and undivided to maintain their physical integrity, support practices of public sharing as they gather people together. Making the care for public space, its infrastructures, and its objects a continued process of sharing turns public space into an ethical and political process.

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Ibid.