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## A World Where Many Worlds Fit. A section on the counter-globalisation movement for the Taipei Biennial 2008, curated by Oliver Ressler

The trope “A World Where Many Worlds Fit” goes back to the Subcomandante Marcos, when talking about the Zapatistas’ struggles in the Lacandonian Rainforest in Mexico. Since their uprising in 1994 the Zapatistas have been fighting for a less-hierarchical, autonomous world with more options to offer in democratic decision-making processes. They fight against an existing world, which calls itself “democratic”, but should rather be seen as a form of sophisticated oligarchy that functions especially in favour of the interests of the political and economic elites. In other parts of the world the stick that punishes people who envision another world is usually not so visible. But, this can change suddenly when those in power assemble in the framework of the summits of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), World Economic Forum (WEF), or the G8. Though the decisions made by politicians and business leaders at such meetings affect the lives of all people in the world, the negotiations take place hidden from the public gaze, behind fences and under massive security with the protection of thousands of riot-police. These gatherings have become a symbol for the undemocratic and illegitimate formation of global capitalism.

At each of these summits individual and collective singularities from all over the world come together in order to express their opposition to the way global decisions are taken and realised. These mobilisations of attendance at summit meetings are the movements’ most visible public appearances. According to most narratives, the action taken against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 launched the birthplace of the new movement. The events at Seattle articulated a form of resistance and protest of the centres of capitalism that proved strong enough to shut down the WTO summit there. Since 1999 this global movement has shown up at each meeting of World Bank, IMF, WTO and WEF – unless the scared politicians decide to meet in the mountains, in deserts, or in dictatorships in order to avoid publicly shown dissent at their summits, which were originally introduced for publicity purposes. Even though this movement is the first that is truly globalised, it is usually described as a counter-globalisation movement. It can actually be called the “movement of the movements”.

At the demonstrations, counter-summits and mass blockades many individuals and collectives come together: media activists, clown army, pink block, naked block, black block, anarchists, socialists, Trotskyists, members of ATTAC, human rights activists, feminists, migrants, indigenous people, artists, etc. Many activists switch between these identities. All these singularities have their own images, banners, different public appearance and slogans, that do not only represent something, but contribute to the creation of effective blockades and to the creation of a space. This space is both one of representation, as well as a space for action that in the best cases also spreads to other areas such as the local neighbourhoods of the activists. This new social subject, sometimes referred to as the “multitude”, builds horizontally organised networks and has a radial transformation of society in mind.

Oliver Ressler

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[A World Where Many Worlds Fit](#)

[A World Where Many Worlds Fit  
\(Un mundo en el que caben  
muchos mundos\)](#)

*A World Where Many Worlds Fit* attempts to present a global movement as an example of collective intelligence through a variety of artistic practices, and wants to function as “a space for thinking”. The 12 artists involved in the project demonstrate a strong commitment to social movements and do not position themselves as “neutral” in relation to them. Many of the included works focus on the cities that have now become known for past demonstrations, counter-summits and/or blockades and are used as shorthand descriptions for these events: Seattle, Prague, Salzburg, Genoa, Buenos Aires, Gleneagles, St. Petersburg or Heiligendamm. The exhibition can be seen as a kind of course, which addresses important steps of the movement of the movements.

Whether or not this globalisation of resistance will be successful in the future will depend on whether upcoming summits can be mobilised to show our dissent to the world and our desire to create other worlds. As Tazio Mueller eloquently outlines [\[1\]](#), it will be essential for the global movement to develop a critical and convincing anti-capitalist strategy to fight climate change, as this is a central issue of world-wide importance that the G8 exploit to legitimise their meetings in the public, and that “asks the question of property and class struggle” and “talks about collective social transformation”. If we manage to bring such an agenda into public debate, the movement of the movements will probably also play an important role in the political landscape in the ten years after the upcoming G8 summit in Maddalena in Italy.

#### **Artist's works in the exhibition:**

##### **Christopher DeLaurenti (USA)**

###### *Four Protest Symphonies*

An audio track by Seattle-based composer, improviser, and phonographer Christopher DeLaurenti permeates the exhibition. *Four Protest Symphonies* is a series of front-line recordings made at various actions, including the World Trade Organization protest in Seattle in 1999. Spattered by pepper spray, enshrouded in tear gas and pelted with rubber bullets, DeLaurenti was engulfed in a maelstrom of drums, slogans, chants, screaming and violence. These are cemented with combative field recordings of the various protests, art actions, police transmissions, National Oceanic And Atmospheric (NOAA) weather alerts, radio broadcast anomalies (splashes and sprays of tape hiss, enigmatic numbers glossolalia, crude phase encoding), and wild card audio snatched from the airwaves to compose a vivid sound-scape of dissent.

##### **Noel Douglas (GB)**

###### *Whose World? Our World, 2008*

The artist, designer and activist Noel Douglas presents an installation based on graphic material that he has produced over the last seven years as part of his involvement with different social movements. The banners, posters, t-shirts, books and magazines included in the installation have been used and disseminated during many recent anti-capitalist and anti-war protests. In *A World Where Many Worlds Fit*, Douglas arranges these objects in a nine-metre long vitrine. Displayed on a panel in the vitrine are numerous spreads from books and magazines promoting and popularising the ideas of

the movement. Alongside these are laid out the popular “Regime Change Begins at Home” playing cards, which satirise the playing cards handed out to troops by the US military in Iraq. On the floor of the vitrine thousands of “Capitalism Means War” dollar bills are spread out, these were handed out during the major demonstrations against the impending War in Iraq held on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003. On the glass window, a vinyl tape with the text “Ceci N'est Pas Le Capitalisme” (This is not Capitalism) frames the work. This tape was used at demonstrations across Europe and the US as a temporary street “line” to hang posters from. Shown here hung on the walls, these posters called for demonstrations against the G8 and instead for participation in the European Social Forum. There are also those that simply visualise the problems of capitalism using a more direct agit-prop approach with many proclaiming one of the central slogans of the movement, “Another World Is Possible”.

### **Etcétera (ARG)**

*To eat, to create*, 2008

The Argentinean artist/activist collective Etcétera presents documentation of their Buenos Aires based street actions in an installation that includes information about the original local context and situation. Since late 1997 Etcétera has implemented a poetic, absurd and surreal artistic practice into street actions that take a crack at important issues such as social injustice and human rights agendas. Their work became even more pertinent in the midst of the enormous economic crisis that peaked in 2001 and that sent Argentina spiralling down to levels of emergency and starvation.

Etcétera's actions, like many enacted in the public space, are ephemeral and circumstantial. They re-imagine the activity of the street as a performance in a specific space and a specific time. As a result of the dissemination their amazingly humorous and bitter sparks of activism into cultural institutions, artistic circuits and the web through videos, cartoons, pamphlets and manifestos, Etcétera have inspired numerous kindred spirits and related projects.

### **Petra Gerschner (GER)**

*History is a work in process*, 2007/2008

Petra Gerschner produced a photo-documentation of the activities made against the G8 summit held in Heiligendamm. She celebrates the work of activists, who aim to become the subjects of their own history, by literally illuminating them in the form of a light-box with a precise selection of four photos.

“Join the Winning side – Smash Capitalism”, reads a light-installation on a truck in one of the images. This slogan represents the approach of the global movement to not only comment on social conditions, but to also actively change them. The work attempts to transpose the energy and enthusiasm of the activists and hints at the possibility that with collective experience and action, resistance is feasible and can be successful. At the same time Gerschner raises questions about the visual representation of the movement of the movements in the collective global consciousness.

In a second work, a digital print from the series *What does memory mean to you?* (2001/2006), Petra Gerschner lays bare the demonstrative power of state forces by

confronting political advertising and slogans with pin-ups, which all came together in the public space during the protests against the World Economic Forum in Salzburg.

### **John Jordan (GB)**

The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army: Operation "HA HA HA"

One of the works in the exhibition that ventures beyond a documentation of the activities of the *movement of the movements* is by the British artist/activist John Jordan whose practice merges art and social engagement, and favours transformative actions over representation. He is one of a number of artists who consider themselves part of the *movement of the movements* and intervenes wherever and whenever possible. Jordan's installation consists of documentation from the *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army's* operation "HA HA HA", which took place during the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005. The central element of the installation is a large canvas map that shows the area around the G8 summit, which was used by activists for organising protests. Two video monitors are placed on opposite corners of the map, with pink ribbon connecting them to locations on the map where the activist's events occurred. One short film shows a performance of police and clowns competing in a strange game together, and the second documents clowns magically breaking through a line of riot policemen and occupying a road.

### **Zanny Begg (AU) & Oliver Ressler (A)**

*Timeline Piece*, 2008

*This is what democracy looks like!*, 2002

A timeline of the global movement, spanning from the momentous actions against the World Trade Organization Conference in Seattle in 1999, up until today, is laid out by Zanny Begg in a 12 metre long wall drawing. It is a kind of framework for *A World Where Many Worlds Fit*, that not only sets up a relationship between the various works, but also tells its own stories. Embedded in Zanny Begg's huge timeline is Oliver Ressler's video *This is what democracy looks like!*. The video presents the events of July 1, 2001, which took place surrounding a demonstration against the World Economic Forum in Salzburg in Austria, where 919 demonstrators were encircled by the police and detained for more than seven hours. In the video the demonstrators take the role of active spokespersons and describe what was happening from their own individual perspectives.

*What Would It Mean To Win?*, 2008

This film, a collaboration by Zanny Begg & Oliver Ressler, was made on the blockades of the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany in June 2007 and focuses on the current state of the movement of the movements. Combining documentary footage, interviews, and animation sequences, the work is structured around three questions pertinent to the movement: "Who are we?" "What is our power?" and "What would it mean to win?" The protests in Heiligendamm seemed to re-assert the confidence, inventiveness and creativity of the movement of the movements. In particular the five finger tactic – where protesters spread out across the fields of Rostock in order to slip around police lines –

proved successful in establishing blockades on all roads leading into Heiligendamm. Staff working for the G8 summit were forced to enter and leave the meeting by helicopter or boat thus providing a symbolic victory to the movement.

### **RTMark (USA)**

*The Archimedes Project*, 2001

The objects and photographs of the “anti-corporate corporation” RTMark chronicle the corporation's commitment to direct intervention. For the protests during the G8 summit in Genoa, RTMark produced pink, blue, black and purple mirrors that were distributed to a thousand activists. The mirrors focused and reflected sunlight at police helicopters and other aggressive assault vehicles, as well as into the eyes of attacking police.

The work is titled *The Archimedes Project*, after the ancient Greek mathematician who reputedly used several large mirrors to focus the glare of the sun at invading Roman ships, burning them to a crisp and thus saving the city of Syracuse in what is now Sicily, Italy. The Italian press hilariously characterised these mirrors as weapons and included them amongst the police's other official weapon classifications, which included cell phones and Swiss army knives.

### **Allan Sekula (USA)**

*Waiting for Teargas*, 1999

Allan Sekula's slide installation *Waiting for Teargas* was produced from the photographs he had taken during the protests against the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference that took place in Seattle in 1999. Sekula's concept was, in his words, “to move with the flow of protest, from dawn to 3 a.m. If need be, taking in the lulls, the waiting and the margins of events. The rule of thumb for this sort of anti-photojournalism: no flash, no telephoto zoom lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure, to grab at all costs, the one defining image of dramatic violence... The alliance on the streets was indeed stranger... varied and inspired... There were moments of civic solemnity, of urban anxiety, and of carnival. Something very simple is missed by descriptions of this as a movement founded in cyberspace: the human body asserts itself in the city streets, against the abstraction of global capital. There was a strong feminist dimension to this testimony, and there was also a dimension grounded in the experience of work...”

### **Gregory Sholette (USA)**

*WTO Action Collectible*, 1999

Gregory Sholette's *WTO Action Collectible* comprises a “commemorative” action figure and an accompanying poster that refer to the police tactics that labelled unarmed protesters as violence-prone during the now legendary Seattle World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in 1999.

Sholette's plastic figure – which comes equipped with interchangeable “action arms” that are useful for deflecting tear gas grenades and an authentic “radical” mascot

carrying a Molotov Cocktail – also makes reference to the long, if little known history of militant political resistance in the United States: from the great rail strikes of the late 19th century to the National Student Strike and mass demonstrations of May 1970 that followed the shooting deaths of anti-Vietnam war protesters by National Guardsmen at both Kent and Jackson State Universities.

### **Nuria Vila & Marcelo Expósito (ESP)**

*Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance*, 2007

This video focuses on various forms of protest that occur across the European continent. It brings into play femininity, and blurs gender-expectations. As a work about a particular moment of joy and expectation at the global movement's early days, *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance* questions the social order through unanticipated role reversals and confuses the response of the media and the police to label such forms of protest as violent. As the artists write, "Tactical frivolity sought to undo classical anarchists vs. police, one-to-one confrontational tactics, by multiplying front-lines and making an extremely ironic use of femininity and kitschy representations of the body in direct action. Music and dance provided this radical redefinition of street protest not only with a powerful tool to practically dissolve or détour police violence, but also with the strongest possible image (and soundtrack) to realise how street demonstrations can become the unleashing of the body's desires in the moment of protest itself". The work demonstrates that resistance can result in a lot of creativity and fun, which is important to draw in larger crowds who are not necessarily active and who normally see activism as a sour and professional exercise of a singular political inclination.

### **Dmitry Vilensky (RUS)**

*Protest Match – Kirov Stadium*, 2006

In his video *Protest Match – Kirov Stadium* Dmitry Vilensky focuses on the heavy security tactics enforced upon the Russian Social Forum that ran parallel to the G8 Summit in Saint Petersburg in 2006. These tactics included the detainment of former delegates long before their arrival in the city; coercion of print-shop owners to not print pamphlets, blackmailing and arrests. The video reviews the situation at the Russian Social Forum in the Kirov Stadium, the space that was offered by the authorities. A series of interviews with Russian political activists discuss this particular event, where it was impossible to demonstrate and where even participation in the forum became a perilous pursuit.

On September 12, 2008, between 2 and 4 pm a round-table discussion with participating artists will take place in the framework of the Taipei Biennial: With Zanny Begg, Noel Douglas, Petra Gerschner, Oliver Ressler, Dmitry Vilensky and Federico Zuckerfeld & Loreto Garin Guzman from Etcétera.

The 6th Taipei Biennial is curated by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun.  
Organizing institution is the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts.

Dates: 13 September 2008 - 4 January 2009

Press preview: 11/12 September 2008

<http://www.taipeibiennial.org>

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[1] In: "What Would It Mean to Win?", A film by Zanny Begg and Oliver Ressler, 40 min., 2008

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