

POLITICAL IMAGINATION LABORATORY: Visualizing and Contextualizing Ethnographies of Social Movements

14 – 16 October 2016, University of Perugia, Italy

CALL FOR PAPERS AND VISUAL PROJECTS

DEADLINE: FRIDAY 1 JULY 2016

What visions animate contemporary activism? How to visualize or to contextualize the political imagination of contemporary social movements? How to uncover those utopian aspirations, strategic and/or ideological horizons that too often pass implicitly, silently or invisibly? Inspired by both visual and ethnographic fieldwork, our “Political Imagination Laboratory” aims to explore and interrogate the shifting political imagination of contemporary social movements and forms of activism.

“The Lab” invites anthropologists, filmmakers and activists to submit **papers** or **visual projects** (completed documentaries or works in progress). Proposed presentations should engage with ethnography and/or fieldwork related to different forms of social movement research that address the imagination of contemporary activism around the world. The selection will be based on the quality of content, methodological innovation and relevance in the sense that it will allow the laboratory to promote a dialogical and experimental comparison of different methodological and conceptual approaches.

This 2-day workshop will take place at *Dipartimento di Filosofia, Scienze Sociali e della Formazione* (FISSUF), University of Perugia, Italy, and will alternate paper presentations with film screenings, roundtable discussions and work-in-progress visual expositions. It is organised by the team of the “Peasant Activism Project” (financed by the Economic and Social Science Research Council [ESRC] and hosted by Queen’s University Belfast), in cooperation with the network “Anthropology and Social Movements” of the European Association of Social Movements (EASA) and “Controguardi – International Festival of Anthropological Cinema”.

Background: A Laboratory to Explore Shifting Imaginations

The fragmentation and autonomization of many contemporary political struggles seems to reflect the end of far-reaching alternative political horizons, the end of the hope that an alternative society can exist. What should we do? How should we think? Where can we find inspiration? Yet, these questions remain vital for the contemporary political imagination. The apparent advent of the end of meta-narratives hides the often *de-facto* naturalization of the neoliberal trajectory as the only possible universal experience. But has the future ceased to be a promise, as common-sense goes?

Many contemporary political thinkers conceptualize social justice as micro-political struggles for difference or as the recognition of particular identities; “culture” and “identity” have been transformed in an object of rights and claims imagined as particularist struggles. Along these lines, social science research focuses on power dynamics less embedded in state sovereignty but rather in micro-political dynamics of governmentality in every-day life, biopolitical experiences or infra-political resistance. Thus, universal claims for justice stress more frequently continuity, small steps and gradual change, attempting to establish, cultivate and affirm forms of life that offer an alternative, a concrete utopia. Peasant movements for land allocation, indigenous requests for recognition, appear often as an expression of these micro-political struggles over identity politics. Similarly, LGBT-claims for equal rights can entail different levels of political

struggles. At first glance, many forms of contemporary activism seem less concerned with visions of a new society or with the establishment of a new “hegemony” of any kind.

Yet, social movements continue to extend the horizon of what can be thought and done. In one realm, it could be asked whether a new wave of neo-rural and peasant movements is able to re-invent key-concepts of neoliberal ideology, such as the replacing of the idea of “consumer” with “co-producers”, competition with solidarity as a driver of innovation, and so forth. In an interrelated realm, the post-anarchist search for autonomy and insurrection poses new questions: The different local expressions of world-wide occupation movements, from the “Indignados”, Occupy Wall Street to the Tahir-Square gatherings seem sometimes able to create temporary autonomous zones with innovative connotations. In yet another realm of activism, alter-globalization struggles seems to inspire a new generation of activists who envision a “different world” from different angles. Can these tendencies shake the stasis? Can activists reinvent the dynamics of political legitimation? In which every-day practices, activities or extra-ordinary events the imagination becomes visible? How can film-makers visualize ideas, expectations and utopias of social changes? Can concrete practices of freedom replace the location of power in state sovereignty? What underlying expectations and visions animate contemporary forms of activism?

CALL FOR PAPERS AND VISUAL PROJECTS

We invite both **papers** and **visual projects** (completed documentaries or projects in progress).

PAPER PRESENTATIONS: Please submit your abstract (max. 300 words) for a paper of about 20 minutes before the deadline of 1 July 2016 to: lab@peasantproject.org. The abstract should also include your academic affiliation and role.

VISUAL PROJECTS: Please submit your (audio-)visual project (completed documentaries or works in progress) with a short description (max. 300 words) before the deadline of 1 July 2016. In order to stimulate debate, videos of ca. 30 minutes will be preferred; for longer completed documentaries, a short version would be more adequate. Please upload your video to a cloud drive with the link to: lab@peasantproject.org (or by surface mail to: *Political Imagination Laboratory, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Scienze Sociali e della Formazione* (FISSUF), Piazza Morlachi 30, 06123 Perugia, Italy).

Notification of accepted presentations: 30th July 2016.

LOGISTIC INFORMATION

The workshop will be hosted at “Palazzo Stocchi” of the *Dipartimento di Filosofia, Scienze Sociali e della Formazione* (FISSUF) of University of Perugia, located in the historic centre of the city. If your presentation is accepted, we will offer you accommodation free-of-charge in a University-owned guesthouse for visiting academics located at a 10-minutes’ walk from the conference facility. Most meals will also be covered. However, you need to arrange transportation to and from the conference by yourself and we cannot reimburse these costs. The city of Perugia is located in the centre of Italy; these airports are located nearby: Perugia, ca. 30 minutes; Florence, ca. 2 hours; Pisa or Rome, ca. 3 hours.

Further Information: www.peasantproject.org; email: lab@peasantproject.org