



Pedagogy of Revelry – Toward Party Studies

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As teenagers, the home was always a potential site for impermissible gathering. Especially when parents would be on holiday, or traveling for work, leaving us at home. This is undoubtedly a typical scenario when it comes to throwing parties; with parents away, teenagers are left to take over. The home becomes a site of sudden transformation, upheaval, as if another type of law emerges, one of teenage life and imagination, which are often relegated to the background (even the basement) when it comes to defining domestic space and the dynamics of family togetherness. While the teenager may have their own room, if they are fortunate enough, allowing for a certain individuation within the family construct, a “free zone” within an otherwise adult organizational logic, when parents leave the entire apartment or house suddenly becomes material for other forms of expression. In fact, throwing a party, in this situation, is to open the home to a different type of family, one conceived less by parental ordering and more by tribal affiliation, adolescent love and loyalty, teenage struggle. Within this scene of the house party, home and family are transfigured. What emerges is never so completely foreseen, comprehensible, or legible – this is the beauty and power of such a scene, such an act: disobedience leading explicitly to states of delirium, new emotion, a raw order. However slight or

expressive, intimate or boisterous, the teenager throwing a party at home mostly oversteps the bounds of proper sociality and the law of family life, giving way to an intensification of experience and the testing of limits.

I start with this particular form of party in order to suggest that parties in general tend towards disobedience, and that they capture a potentiality founded on passion and erotic power. From the social to the spatial, the (electro)acoustic to the performative, the hospitable to the inhospitable, parties draw out challenges to what is deemed lawful or acceptable behavior, putting into question the general order of the proper and the improper. All of which suggests that parties are not only scenes of social gathering or celebration, but also operate as a material ground for the expression of dissidence, rebellion, love, and solidarity, and as such may give guidance to how one may rework the bonds of social subjectification – to perceive a given social order as mutable. The party, in other words, can be seen as a worlding endeavor and as such draws into play what Dimitris Papadopoulos terms “ontological organizing”¹: the manifestation and enactment of being together otherwise. While the party may be a temporary break within the humdrum of daily life, an escape from the usual, I’m equally interested in the ways in which the party impacts onto a social and bodily imaginary by delivering a *criminal* sensation that one may carry back into the world. A sort of divine hangover from which law and order, subjectification and productive life, are seen as banal, that is, refutable.

I’m tempted then to follow the party in a rather utopian or rather, *atopian* way to suggest that it may teach a great deal, affording access to the erotic force of common or uncommon life, of being in one’s body with others; and further, that it may function as a mechanism by which sociality disorganizes itself, acting as a testing ground for a community to come, and supplying lessons on the radical plasticity of social worlds.

In this sense, I’m interested to extract from the cultures or mythologies of partying, and the general enactments found therein, a series of pathways: to approach the party as a scene of invention that moves one into an arena of emergence and raw sociality: a being-in-common that is equally uncommon. The natural law of the party is imaged here less as an expression of “the good life,” but rather, one of danger and destitution: to party must be to risk something. This is what I witness in the teenage party: a type of primal scene – a mythical narrative: the first party – that introduces partying as a dangerous enactment, an organizational radicality, one that brings into relief the often hidden disciplinary ordering underpinning the experience of growing up by drawing out the ever-present threat of capture, arrest, punishment. To take over the home, in that disobedient drive that seeks to free teenage life, is to already know one is breaking the rules. Recalling my own experiences of teenage partying, how often the police or parents would arrive onto the scene to forcefully draw back into shape the broken order of the home.

A WRECKED BODY (ESCAPE)

One arrives, moves into the scene, which is brimming with energy; there are the matters thrown here and there, others arranged according to an intuitive idea; the passing of bottles, chips, and other stuff; a passing from the kitchen to the living room, to the balcony and back, to the bathroom and bedrooms; a general flow of festivity bumping against the walls, being jostled here and there, as the music (for there is always music) thumps and pumps, vibrating the scene, the skin, the neighbors; one arrives, enters this lively dance of commotion, the ebb and flow of laughter and longing, inebriation and hallucination, with the lights turned low,

12 / ¹ Dimitris Papadopoulos, *Experimental Practice: Technoscience, Alterontologies, and More-Than-Social Movements*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

the walls splashed with shadows; it is hot, someone opens a window, the clothes are peeled away, shoes come off as the music kicks up a notch, to get us moving; within this strange collaborative situation things are pushed together, messed up, the life-force of bodily-being is given room, time for joyous as well as painful revelations.

While there are a variety of parties, from dinner to bachelor parties, wedding receptions to birthday celebrations, I follow the teenage house party as a guide, for it may capture (or remind of) the erotic potentiality of the party. Here, the party is more intuitive than thought out, more unsanctioned than operational, more inhospitable than hospitable; it is a sort of *untamed version* whose example may be carried forward into future (adult) gatherings and what we may come to desire from any social get-together. The party, from this perspective, emerges as a fundamental site or experience of rupture by which to experiment with alternative social and bodily principles. From the expression of non-normative behavior, or that of a certain “nocturnal” identity, to the reshaping of time and space into a creative work – the making of a décor or milieu in support of rapture, where partying becomes an act as well as a staging – the party emerges as an aesthetic, material force, one that carries us somewhere else.

Although parties often express a certain fraying of the socially acceptable, they are also fully integrated into the operations of a social world; the party, in other words, is deeply social, at times even scripted, engrained within rituals of celebration, which always mark some form of transition or transformation. The party is thus often situated unsteadily between bolstering a social order and tensing its borders; between subscribing or reinforcing a certain narrative and breaking the vocabulary by which such narratives retain their meanings.

The teenage party is also not without such tensions. With the temporary upheaval of the family home, the party often affords expressions of individual standing within a community of peers captured through drinking games, performative excess, a being-cool, and one’s ability to stand out or pick up partners. Within the teenage party, one may experience the deeply unsettling stigmatization of being unpopular; the isolated figure standing in the corner looking awkward, feeling uneasy in this scene of social performance – this is also key to the general enactment of the party and its tribal, inhospitable character.

Togetherness and loneliness, performances of excess and stigmatization, sexual conquest and drunken collapse, joy and despondency, interweave into an unsteady form whose tensions become the very force of its own pleasure. As an ontological construct, a worlding expression, the party is always moving toward excess – it gravitates, or works its way there, where territorial lines are continuously drawn only to be erased, limits breached or disputed, defining a rhythm, a pulsating beat that continues to a point of exhaustion, a going too far. To party is to work at wreckage.

It is within such a scene, such a construct, that identities shimmer, bodies fall apart or stand out, social forms rupture – these may be grasped as fundamental performativities structuring the party and its force, what I would highlight as its erotic quality. Here, the erotic is cast as a sensuous power emerging between oneself and others, where the body is held within a greater intensity of togetherness. The erotic is therefore physical as well as spiritual, even ecological: an intensity of sensuality that, in the scene of the party, moves to give shape and meaning to experiences of encounter and collectivity. In this regard, the wreckage expressed in partying carries the potentiality of emergence, a going too far that stresses the lines separating pleasure and pain, love and hate. Rather, something else takes hold, is given

traction. In short, the party enables the materialization of a *possible body*: an erotic undoing that impacts onto one's sense of corporeality. As a scene of intoxication and delirium, one commits to a certain disintegration, a falling apart. It is never clear where such an undertaking may lead – one is never truly in control of such enactments. Through the dynamic commingling inherent to partying, the body and the bonds that hold it are unsettled, giving way to an ecstatic charge that is both joyous and violent.

Following the dynamics of the party, the body takes on a trans-subjective, or even anti-subjective perspective: the “party-body” is a body overcome; it works against itself, drawing together passion and dejection, joy and self-destruction, intimacy and loss of control, into a deeply potent construct. A body in pieces, or remade into a new whole? This is precisely the unsteady, erotic logic of the party: holding together contradictory or conflictual forces. In this regard, the body becomes more and less of itself, shot through with feverish (un)doing. Where the body ends up is never so certain, but clearly it arrives near to oblivion. The party, after all, is often the very thing enabling escape from oneself and a logic of self-management.

Here, I follow Catherine Clément and her philosophy of delirium, which she articulates through an elaboration of the musical concept *syncope*, where “a note lags behind and anticipates the rest of the movement.” From such a starting point, syncope is captured as what “creates delay” – it staggers time, introduces gaps, hesitation, a prolongation of suspension: a holding that gives way to an anticipation of resolution. Following syncope as a musicality of delay, Clément applies this to understandings of the body and subjectivity, and importantly, processes of transition: “The difficulty of crossing from one body to the next, from one stage to the next, and from life to death, will always be a test: initiations, love at first sight, depressions, syncopes are used to resolve this.”² Syncope is a “coming out of oneself;” a pause that

staggers temporality and the forward progression of a productive self; rather, syncope is a *being-elsewhere*. In this sense, syncope is underscored as a crisis that carries its own power of return: a “dissonance” whose interruptive force operates as a vehicle for reclaiming a sense of consonance, for reinventing precisely the logic of an order.

Returning to the party, and the notion of the party-body I'm pursuing, delirium performs to undo the daily rhythms of the body, staggering or dizzying a given schema of corporeal being, from the sociality of productive life to the biological practices of a managed self. The party-body, in contrast, is a wrecked body, in so far as it destroys itself. It puts itself into crisis, this body thrown to pieces. At the same time, such crisis is mostly temporary – the party as a construct introduces an instant of dissonance, an eruption even, that carries a sense of return and process of recovery. As such, I'm concerned less with a notion of the party as an expression of collapse, or absolute loss, and more by way of syncope – a “fainting, an eclipse”³ that interrupts and replenishes at the same time. This dynamic of breakdown, escape, wreckage and then recovery, consonance, reordering, is suggestive for understanding the party as a scene of transformation, a testing of limits and an articulation of (re)invention. What I may focus on when it comes to the party then is not only acts of drunkenness and debauchery, but equally the aftermath: the reordering that follows, which is never without the experience of the party itself (never without the hangover, the impress of transgression and breakdown). In other words, in what way do we carry the party with us? How does the erotic intensities underpinning partying influence how one returns to the societal? Might the party, in fact, manifest a certain *general state of revolt*? Where escape turns into a method – a form of engagement.

2 Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 119–120.

3 Catherine Clément, *The Call of the Trance* (London: Seagull Books, 2014).

Syncope, and the delay the party performs, gives way to a logic of transformation, where the body is moved by way of passion, dissolution, aggression, heightened joy – all of this together. From such a view, the party-body locates itself upon a trajectory of change: an othering that, while steering itself toward wreckage, recovers something of the body: that which is often occluded by the obligation of control and self-management.

The wreckage of the party-body is thus, at the same time, a type of healing, a gesture or an act that attempts to recover something of the body: that places the body at the edge of itself so as to not only disorient, but equally, to reorient one's sense of bodiliness as always being more or less than oneself.

Valentina Desideri and Denise Ferreira da Silva suggest, through their “poethical reading” practice, that it is imperative to upset the notion of “the subject” often understood as a separate entity – as the delineation of oneself, as a form of self-possession, even of self-administration – in order to recuperate the connectedness always already shaping and influencing us. For Desideri and da Silva, it is about learning to live with the complexity and uncontrollability of that connectedness, which requires a practice, an “experimentation.”⁴ In this sense, I take the party, and the undoing of the subject it comes to incite or encourage, as such a practice, as a scene of experimentation that may allow for experiencing oneself as inseparable – as always already incomplete: a finitude, and with the capacity for erotic power. The party, as I'm envisioning it, is the site for an absolute loss of control that, at the same time, allows for recovering oneself as more and less than oneself.

AN IMPOSSIBLE COMMUNITY

Can we speak of a natural law of the party? A cosmology of party-life that follows certain principles, however shady? Might we consider party-making as a strange-craft that produces forms of

knowledge as well as sociality – that impacts onto epistemology and the social imaginaries that lead us to each other? As the party is dramatically a social scene (it is hard to imagine a party for one?), how might we understand sociality, collectivity, and even community by way of partying? Within the delirious commingling the party incites, and the general state of revolt, what becomes of the relational and feelings for being-in-common?

Arms outstretched, feet tapping, hips shaking, while others smoke and laugh, stealing cigarettes or throwing matches out the window; who are you and what brings you here?

Jean-Luc Nancy, in his writings on community, or what he terms “the inoperative community,”⁵ gives an indication for approaching the social within the scene of the party. As Nancy outlines, community is to be understood as the “sharing of singularities” expressed as a state of passion not so much defined by a notion of “the project” (a work of identification, a myth of lost origins), but rather, one figured by way of a “social ontology” – subjectivity as always already “interrupted.” In this regard, community precedes any notion of subjectivity and individuation; under the vitality of community one is *unworked* as an individual, leading less to a force of “communion.” Rather, for Nancy, community is the anti-thesis of communion, because communion necessarily puts one to work by demanding allegiance to a figure or narrative of immanence: that one may find completion by way of an internal set of bonds. In contrast, community is defined by a more transcendent condition or quality, by that which is external to itself – the otherness which one is always already touched by.

⁴ Valentina Desideri and Denise Ferreira da Silva, *A Conversation Between Valentina Desideri and Denise Ferreira da Silva*, publication as part of the artists installation *The Reading Room*, Rupert, Vilnius, 2016.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

Nancy's social ontology, and his inoperative community, this community not of work nor communion, but of play and the passion that is only to be found in the fact of things, in the fact of the body as a vitality, is extremely suggestive for approaching the question of the party. While the party is certainly at times a scene of membership, a closed circuit that tries to reinforce itself according to a set of internal meanings and rituals, it is also often constituted by a relation to its own undoing, whether by way of strangers who happen to enter, maybe brought in by an invited guest, or by the fact of its transcendent and rapturous nature: the party as being aligned with an emergent sense of becoming, of excess and abjection, a breaking down and a leaking out. Here, I may highlight the etymology of the word "party," which points to the formation of a specific group: "to part, or to separate" into particular parties (hence, the political party). The party, in this sense, carries the inherent dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, of territorial separation into clubs or associations, and around which particular values and meanings are articulated. Partying is thus to celebrate the fact of ourselves as an associated group – an affiliation whose definition is enhanced by way of festivity: to party is to join the club, as that which is in tension with a greater society.

Within this scene of membership, though, things happen. Doors may be flung open, intruders may arrive, neighbors may slip in or complain; friends may suddenly become strangers, lovers may betray, bullies may enter the scene; and yet such positions are also never stable – friends may re-emerge, in ever pronounced ways, and relationships may return, reinvigorated by the drama of argument or brawling. As with the figuring of the wrecked body, the sociality of the party fuels delirium: a collaborative, renegade and uncontrollable type of sociality in which to be together is to oscillate along an unsteady line where friendships may suddenly fray, fights may break out, new intimacies may be found – the world, in short, is turned upside down. Overall, the meanings that

bring some together are also continually undone, translated, reworked, disputed. The party often pushes hospitality to its limit, where friends may suddenly break things, upset the order of the home, or turn against the host; hospitality is fundamentally strained by the party it creates. This is the risk one must take – the party, if it is to realize itself, must be dangerous and inhospitable.

Leaving the political party behind, and returning to the teenage gathering, and the atopian line I'm pursuing, parties may give way to the inoperative community Nancy theorizes, as that which is defined by interruption, passion, a sociality gone too far. Throwing a party is to literally throw caution to the wind: it is to push together with the secret hope of losing bearings, of dirtying the home – to relish that feeling of letting go. Such inoperative sociality unworks the body and the social bond, displacing or destituting the myth of lost origin by evading meaning, by residing in the moment, fully and completely, and if there is communion it is only to that of the bottle, music, the vibratory force of being-in-common which, following Nancy, is interruptive, inoperative. (This is the fundamental distinction to be made between the party as communion (politics) and the party as community (revolt)).

I want to suggest, at the same time, that the sociality of the party, even while tending towards inhospitality does so according to a form of love: the commingling defining the party, and the inoperative passion shaping its dynamics, puts love into the crowd. I might call it a "polyamorous" scene whose criminal sensations and wild aggressions come to distribute love, shifting from the intimacies between two and toward a general social feeling. The party comes to act as a scene of loving each other, loving the party itself, a getting together that supports and nurtures friendships, as what interrupts us, remakes us. As such, the party may teach how to love more generally, to figure love not only as what one



may share through intimacy, but also what one may bring into the crowd: to love for no reason. The community of passion Nancy outlines is suggestive for such an understanding, where bonds are not necessarily traced by way of heritage, ancestry, investment or history, but are found in the “nocturnal splendor” of the body, as the violent joy that sustains us.⁶

The sociality that emerges in the party is therefore never only social, in terms of staying with the subject, its constitution as a self, and a linguistic order or public discourse. Rather, I may emphasize that sense of tactile partnership and collaboration that emerges with other matter: not only bottles, drugs, or other stuff, which are so vital to driving the party-body along its wavering course, but also, the matter of music and its vibrational force. Music must be captured within the scene of the party as a more-than-social agent – an acoustic, vibrational force that explicitly underpins the party-scene as an ontological endeavor, as a flourishing that spreads itself. From the rhythms bringing bodies into movement to the vibratory waves of sonic energy that assist in binding the scene together, giving atmosphere and deep affect to the experience every party tries to generate, music forces the party into motion. In doing so, music figures the party as a narrative – it assists in defining the spatio-temporal dimension, and the general affect of loving, to give dynamic shape and punctuation to the unfolding the party performs. From within the scene of wreckage and affection, music helps turn the party into a story – a literature of the event that brings all things together, forcing them into an intensified state of erotic sensation and touch.

Such a literature is founded on acts of DJing, as that gesture aimed at the mix. Cutting and scratching all musical matters, assembling and synchronizing multiple beats, superimposing and juxtaposing all types of tonalities and lyrical sentiments, DJing is a performative sonic act fully aligned with the party as an ontological, material, collective and atmospheric endeavor

– as that worlding movement that is fundamentally a mix: from the musical to the social, the bodily to the energetic, one enters the party in order to mix and be mixed, to fall into the mix, stepping to the beat of an altogether different order or groove. Here, DJing might be said to orient those that party by granting a vibratory, tactile, and lyrical thread.

To be a good party is to set in motion an unforgettable vibe, an indescribable rhythm that brings an erotic power to the fore, to ride upon the skin as one brushes against and through the crowd. From within such a scene, I might suggest, the party is deeply social while being antagonistic to society; it may build clubs only in order to rebuild society – to break the nature of its operations by going too far. As such, the party captures an impossible community, a community for and against itself, and may offer insight into the creative, erotic constitution of the common in general. Nancy’s social ontology must be extended, in a deeply passionate and monstrous way, to integrate in its emergent weave all such matters and vibratory forces, radical partnerships and loving intensities, which is something every partier knows: one is never quite alone as long as there is a bottle and a beat.

EROTIC KNOWLEDGE

With the cops outside, and the band thrashing, he bolts the doors shut, hammering nails into the windows, while others are crashed out on the sofas, oblivious to the situation, and some are in the pool, smoking dope in the bushes, another in the kitchen downing Gatorade and vodka, and later on, he walks right into the glass door, feeling smashed even more as his girlfriend breaks up with him leaving him devastated. And she, finally free, taking a swig and enjoying the music.

What is the party's relation to epistemology and the articulations of discourse? If the party is suggestive for a particular study, how does it relate itself to the field of knowledge – is there a specific knowledge path or framework engendered by way of partying, and if so, what might its impact be on the general dynamics of research and education? Can there be such a thing as a scientific view or approach to the party as a cultural form? From felt, erotic experience to the intensification of a generative disordering, the party as I'm outlining gives way to a range of delirious enactments and sensations, which moves the body and relationships toward passion, wreckage, revolt. As such, questions of knowledge may equally be considered by way of excess and the erotic – by what Georges Bataille calls “sovereignty.”⁷ For Bataille, sovereignty is found less through an act of possession, production or labor, as a struggle for self-determination; rather, sovereignty, or what he terms “sovereign life,” is articulated through forms of expenditure: by a compulsion toward excess and the consumption of the “surplus” of production. In this regard, sovereignty exists beyond the necessities of life and the labor one often undertakes in order to fulfill them. Through such a view, Bataille aims at recovering the sovereignty that all persons possess, steering us, by way of the pleasures of the sensual, toward the “miraculous.” As Bataille argues, sovereign life is grounded in the moment: it is a taking leave of the directive to produce, to be always operative, in service of a future to come. Instead, sovereign life is consciousness of the moment and, as such, it is never a work of knowledge, for “to know is always to strive.” For Bataille, the miraculous instead resides in a state of “unknowing”: a nonknowledge that finds expression in what he calls “happy tears,” as the intensity of ecstatic being.

Is not the party a scene of happy tears? Where pain and pleasure, suffering and joy fuse, leading to all sorts of sudden, unknowing articulations: of comradeship and betrayal, of sensual

dizziness and despondent misery, vibratory rapture and brutal breakage – one that firmly situates one within the moment. The party turns the moment into a world of sensation, a common (or rather, uncommon) life that, fundamentally, requires an intensification of presence, a deep hanging-out.

Following Bataille's erotic philosophy, knowledge is based on a leaving of the life of utility: a rupture, a laughter that moves one through the fullness of the senses to arrive on the other side. A taking leave that enables one to live by the moment, in the realization of sovereign life, for the erotic is founded on bringing attention to the ever-emergent, the festivity of shared discovery and invention, the sensual, tactile materialization of joy found in being together that may interrupt utilitarian value as what instrumentalizes towards a future goal. In this regard, for Bataille knowledge by way of sovereign life is shaped less by a logic of production, but rather, by becoming conscious of the moment – nonknowledge as knowledge against itself.

I'm curious in what ways the erotic may be understood as an approach to study. And the party itself as the expression of research. By this I'm suggesting that the party may be appreciated as a scene of concerted doing, or rather, undoing: the presenting or glorification of one's own fragmentation that gives way to a pedagogy, a position of study. To be clear, my intention is not to capture the party as a scene of teaching, in terms of showing how one should party, or to channel partying into forms of academic output. Rather, the pedagogy I'm envisioning is along the lines of what Jan Masschelein terms “poor pedagogy.”⁸ In contrast to the notion of a “rich methodology,” and the relaying of knowledge by way of a hierarchy of expertise, Masschelein seeks to ground learning, “impoverishing” the tower of knowledge in order to stay close to the process of shared discovery. Poor pedagogy thus locates us as a collective body gathered by way of

⁷ Georges Bataille, “Knowledge of Sovereignty”, in *The Accursed Share*, vol. II & III (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁸ Jan Masschelein, “E-ducatng the gaze: the idea of a poor pedagogy,” in *Ethics and Education*, 5:1 (2010): 43-53.

curiosity, improvisation, and the joy of finding out together, and which wields an attentional demand – within the scene of poor pedagogy, one is displaced, continually moved and as such, one must attend to the unfolding emergence of what is found along the way, rather than what is given, stated, handed down. To some degree, poor pedagogy is about getting lost; it is about allowing for a lack of control, and a lack of “intention,” a suspension of the plan, thereby putting knowledge within a framework of “art”: that is, the capacity to manifest, and inhabit, the edges of truth.

Following Masschelein’s position, to study is to take leave of knowledge as commodifiable, as something one works at, to figure instead an ecstatic act of collective concentration. This finds echo in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s notion of study as a “fugitive gesture” that explicitly counters the valorization of knowledge as a commodity (within today’s neoliberal environment).⁹ For Harney and Moten, to study is to upset the classroom as what “calls to order,” and that positions subjectivity and the production of knowledge within a greater sweep of institutionalization. Study, instead, is posed as that which we do as a “speculative practice” and which involves a range of activities, from cooking, cleaning to walking and dancing – and partying. To study, in short, is to draw out “intelligence in motion.”¹⁰ In fact, to study might be to party: with ideas, with each other, with things, and with what we may create from nothing.

In considering the party as a scene of study, as what may keep us attuned to the principles of the moment and the miraculous, a principle of sovereign life as founded on the ecstatic and a state of general revolt, I’m led to pose a *pedagogy of revelry*. To revel is to engage in a form of behavior particularly aligned with intoxication and indulgence, as an immersion in the sensual and the felt, the body and its fevers. Yet, I want to also understand revelry in a more general sense, as the passionate immersion within any form of engagement. The party, in this regard, may

be underscored as a pedagogy of revelry, a commitment to a form of indulgence that figures knowing, and the question of knowledge, in a state of festivity – a concentration that strays from the disciplinary operations of knowledge and instead captures what can be found or made beyond categorization. Here, one does not work at managing the terminology of discourse; rather, one revels in the dissolution of terms and the flow or flood of collaborative invention. The party is therefore posed not only as an object of study, a social and cultural field by which to consider questions about embodiment and community, felt experience and the violence of tribal affiliations, but equally as a pedagogical method itself: within the party, we may find ourselves participating in a collective scene of learning by doing, where time and space are cast as an experimental classroom by which to investigate sovereignty, philosophies of delirium and rapture, a musicology of the mix, as well as the social and spatial practices that work at the affective and vibratory laws of intoxication and the miraculous moment, as aligned with sensual contact, the delirious, and erotic knowing. That is, a scene of loving revolt.

It is from this view that the party, and the question of party studies, may be posed. And yet, I also want to move further, to suggest that the party, in showing us a certain approach to pedagogy, and the issue of learning by doing, may also teach about knowledge in general, suggesting an approach to any scene of studying. To revel might be the basis for any form of experimentation, especially with the aim of staying with the gaps and the delays, and the eclipse of knowledge. To study, in other words, must be *conductive*, fueling the joy and rigor of rhythms of invention and shared passion.

The model of poor pedagogy Masschelein outlines may figure within the scene of the party, as that collective undertaking by which we learn by (un)doing, by being in contact, and by

28 / ⁹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

29 ¹⁰ Ibid.

cultivating a sense for the emergent. This may include, as part of the concentration and engagement enacted together, a sense for having fun, a being-silly: for the party is both serious and stupid, tragic and comic at the same time. In its excessive drive and delirious joy, following the happy tears of sovereign life, the party is an arena of laughter. As such, it must be captured, as Avital Ronell suggests in her work on stupidity,¹¹ as a construct of foolery. For Ronell, the antics of foolishness, of idiocy and not-knowing, play havoc with regimes of intelligibility by drawing out the flesh, insisting on the guttural movements of the appetites, humors, bodily performance, the passionate delights. Held by the sway of stupidity, in which unintelligibility and nonunderstanding give way to a type of beautiful chaos, which drags knowledge down into the “lower regions” – which, in the upside down world of party going, is found at the top of the head (as second sight) – a pedagogy of revelry blocks out the sun in favor of the labyrinth of passion.

PARTY STUDIES (MUTATIONAL)

If I underscore the party as an unstable scene of get together, one shaped by the erotic, improvisation, the monsterring of form or identity, as a general state of revolt, what understandings of social practice as an art might emerge or be captured? If the party is directed by the joy of escape, in what ways might it give guidance to other forms of exit – from the poetic invention of new languages to the radical exit posed by The Invisible Committee aimed at countering “the police state”?¹² If the party is a scene of more-and-less-than-social experimentation, a wild collaboration with all types of matter, even one’s body as it becomes matter out of hand, wrecked, can partying inform a general perspective on “ecologies of sensuality” – the bonds with planetary life, with deep nature, that states of delirium often enable us to recover?

Returning to Dimitris Papadopoulos, and his notion of “ontological organizing” as found within social movements and scenes of autonomous politics and dispossession, from hacker labs to migrant camps, what Papadopoulos underscores as a worlding endeavor in support of diverse forms of life, I’m concerned with how the party affords a particular take on ontological organizing. Even within the more spontaneous and untamed version given expression by teenagers, partying might be said to be founded upon a principle of organizing – the party being the manifestation of a certain engagement with organization, a sense for the making of a scene of togetherness, to open one’s doors to the chaotic joy and which is fundamentally an ontological undertaking: entering the scene of the party is to surrender to the ecstatic remaking of oneself and the relationships that mostly ground identity in certain orientations. At the same time, it is clear that the party is explicitly *disorganized*: as an ontological scene, it is never so socially instrumental, never reliable as a meaningful semantic – it is guided less by a plan; rather, it may explicitly undo the ever-present obligation to be social, and to be organized. The party may appear to be a social gathering, but on the other hand, it is also that instant of anti-social expression: the turning upside down of the world and its meanings.¹³ Ontologically speaking, what the party organizes is its own undoing, the undoing of being and behavior, of form and meaning. As a general state of revolt, it wants to get out of hand, beyond the grasp of a social or family program, an operational, obedient form. In this regard, it is more a manifestation of disorganizing – a spiraling construct of oblivion which gives way to a more-and-less-than-social formation by capturing the social as that which moves beyond or even against itself.

¹¹ Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹² The Invisible Committee, *Now* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2017).

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From a scene of tribal membership to the impossible community, from the wrecked body to the erotic pedagogy of revelry, I'm interested in the party as a proposition for a particular understanding of form and organization, being and becoming, of (under) common life: the party as a mutational principle. While parties are wrapped up in questions of identity, often circling around a politics of identity, of who enters and who is kept out, of who fits in and why, they are also fueled by their own disintegration—by a surplus of identity and desire, a monsterring that moves toward undoing itself and the relations by which identities become recognizable. The formal, ontological, and social narrative of the party is instead one of mutation and alienation – even while immersed in the vibratory pleasures of togetherness, of commingling and hospitality, one enters the party as a process of estranging oneself, as the miraculous lapse of productive being and recognizability. The party, in this regard, is an arena of losing, it appears as a *scene of losers*, a poor scene giving manifestation to a state of anti-social joy.

All things conspire to support the mutational drive of the party – this attempt at living in a state of revolt, of destituting the law of home and family, work and politics; from bottles to music, architecture to bodies, costumes to make-up – an arrangement that brings into play an elaborated material milieu prone to being trashed. Thus, as an organizational proposition, an ontological act, the party is a more-or-less-than-social machine: a generator of mutant formations, a going somewhere that is often too far, leading toward the unrecognizable, those happy tears through which one revels in unknowing. An emergent, wrecked form that extends beyond the social, the “subject” as Desideri and da Silva suggest, the political as such, drawing into play a milieu of actants or revoltants. The party, in this sense, is never a form of life; as an impossible community, it fails to stabilize around a set of beliefs, a language. In this way, the party is a social principle

while being antithetical to the social. Rather than a form of life, it is life itself taking over, prolonging its erotic propensity. That is its beauty – a perpetually unstable articulation that grounds form and meaning in the noise of destituent togetherness.

Lights turned down, someone is sleeping under the table – “Hey, what time is it?” – someone else decides to water the garden, tripping out over the colors, dreaming a teenage daydream, feeling stupid and forlorn, it doesn't matter it doesn't matter, “Braaa...! Keep hangin'!” – that's it, with the lights turned down, to find the joy ...

In tracking the party, I've been moving understandings of delirium, and loving by way of the crowd, as a general state of partying, toward other perspectives, applying such dizziness, and the excess of sovereign life, to a context of pedagogy: to articulate notions of study, a poor education, by integrating a sense for the improvisational expressions of invention, a following that which is breaking down: the party as an act of composing by way of wreckage. From the wrecked body to the impossible community, from learning to live out of control to how to love in the moment and through the crowd; to an erotic knowledge, as a form of learning by doing, by keeping knowledge close to the body and its limits, its affections, to the mutational as a principle of (dis)organizing – a poor order. Such perspectives further include, from out of the wreckage, an understanding of the party as what allows for a type of recovery, even healing. For the party carries the question: *will I survive?* As a ritual of losing control, the party allows one to test oneself and the limits of control – and to do this together.

Party studies, as a speculative framework of shared learning and unlearning, is imagined then as a way of thinking through (if not doing) the complexity of all these acts and gestures, scenes

and sites where festivity is played out, (dis)organized and experienced, made and shared and broken. If we are to approach the very question of social and political ordering, of what's at stake in the creative constructs of community and being-in-common, the party may allow for an array of perspectives, for staying close to the mutant potentiality of identity and disidentification, for breakdown and recovery. For the party provides a deeply experimental scene for rehearsing society's reinvention, supporting an art of revolt.

