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### Critical Engagement and Collective Urgent Actions as European Values

Allow me first to thank above all Roberto Mordacci (but also Francesca Pongiglione and Sarah Songhorian) for their hospitality and invitation to participate actively in the work conducted by this new group, center, institution or “*contre institution*” (this term is mentioned only once by Saint-Simon, but entirely appropriate here, not least because Europe is actually a counter-institution to the institutions of sovereign states<sup>1</sup>). I would also immediately like to mention that the title of my talk given by professoressa Roberta Sala ought to serve mostly as a rough guide. I hastened to offer Roberto the title “Critical Engagement and Collective Urgent Actions as European Values” quickly upon being invited to speak today; but despite rushing, I was late in sending this talk to the organizer. I am, however, currently under the impression that in providing this title, I have acted somewhat

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<sup>1</sup> “They (English people) have in all directions, double institutions, or rather, they have established in all directions a counter-institutions for each institution that held sway before their revolution, and which they have preserved to a great extent.” C. H. de Saint-Simon, *Catéchisme des industriels*, 99. One of Jacques Derrida's last classes, along with one his last published texts, bears the title “Le modèle philosophique d’une ‘contre-institution’,” *SIECLE. Colloque de Cerisy*, Paris, IMEC, 2005.

rashly. As one longtime interested in institutions and institutionalism (on which I have recently completed writing a book, I lead a few institutions, I participate in the work of several new ones – such as with Judith Butler in her “International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs,” I am forever daydreaming about new groups and institutions), I wished to stand in harmony with the title of this workshop, “Social Freedom and European Values,” and Axel Honneth’s great (and now already certainly famous) endeavor (as well as, of course, with Roberto Mordacci’s project<sup>2</sup>). It is rather difficult to claim that these phrases (“Critical Engagement”), and in particular “Collective Urgent Actions,” have always and above all been “European Values,” since they have quite frequently been forgotten on European soil, especially in the century just past. And today as well. Very often, we could put it that way, there has been more consideration for them in the United States of America (might I remind you of the phrase “Old Europe,” which came from the administration and referred to the sluggishness, torpidity, disorganization, and general lack of “institutional thesis” [R. Tuomela] in Europe). In fact, not infrequently were the true guardians of real European values to be found somewhere outside of Europe. This does not refer only to urgent interventions against extreme European violence, but implicitly also colonial conflicts and the just struggle of others to rein in Europe to its ‘optimal’ space (the word optimal here carries scare quotes).

Permit me now to cite two examples that certainly concern the hearing and sight of an individual (their senses, that is), and are necessarily connected to the collective or group or what Honneth calls ‘*die soziale Freiheit*’ (in contrast to ‘*die*

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<sup>2</sup> In the recently published *La condizione neomoderna*, Mordacci uses a wonderful phrase: “*La vocazione epocale europea*” (Milano, Einaudi, 2017, 128).

*negative Freiheit*’ and ‘*die reflexive Freiheit*’).<sup>3</sup> Both examples imply ‘urgent actions’ that, as we shall see, ought to initiate or compel an individual to immediately seek others, engage, and act collectively. The famous passage in which Rousseau describes the philosopher (the ‘disengaged’ narcissist) was only seldom the subject of analysis by European philosophers, with the exception of Rawls and Walzer who therein see the new task of philosophy or a new engagement.<sup>4</sup> I assume that today everyone would find it easy to agree that the concept of philosopher of whom Rousseau speaks in *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* is a bad and narcissistic philosopher. Nevertheless, it implies a true and authentic philosophy and a dedication to the city. Reason that produces self-love, a “philosophy that isolates the philosopher,” to use John Rawls’ words, still remains public reason. Rousseau writes:

It is reason that engenders self-love, and reflection that strengthens it; it is reason that makes man shrink into himself; it is reason that makes him keep aloof from everything that can trouble or afflict him: it is philosophy that destroys his connections with other men; it is in consequence of her dictates that he mutters to himself at the sight of another in distress, You may perish for aught I care, nothing can hurt me. Nothing less than those evils, which threaten the whole species, can disturb the calm sleep of the philosopher, and

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<sup>3</sup> A. Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriss einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2011, 44-119.

<sup>4</sup> Last year, *La Stampa* published a lecture by Norberto Bobbio from 1997 about the relation of the intellectual and power. Interestingly, Bobbio makes simultaneous use of the words ‘*impegno*’ and ‘*l’engagement*’. “Bobbio: filosofi e tecnici, meglio tenerli separati,” *La Stampa*, 22.05.2017. “*Il termine ‘impegno’ può sembrare inadatto a designare il rapporto tra l’esperto e il potere, giacché fa pensare a un’azione volontaria del soggetto che la compie, mentre il contributo che il tecnico dà al politico è quasi sempre richiesto da chi se ne serve.*” On the other hand, the word ‘*das Engagement*’ used by Honneth some twenty times, the Italian translator (in *Il diritto della libertà*) always renders as ‘*impegno*’ (once also translating ‘*der Einsatz*’ with this word).

force him from his bed. One man may with impunity murder another under his windows; he has nothing to do but clap his hands to his ears, argue a little with himself to hinder nature, that startles within him, from identifying him with the unhappy sufferer. Savage man wants this admirable talent; and for want of wisdom and reason, is always ready foolishly to obey the first whispers of humanity. In riots and street-brawls the populace flock together, the prudent man sneaks off. They are the dregs of the people, the poor basket and barrow-women, that part the combatants, and hinder gentle folks from cutting one another's throats.<sup>5</sup>

“Nothing less than those evils, which threaten the whole species, can disturb the calm sleep of the philosopher, and force him from his bed.” Is this not enough? And does philosophy not precisely begin from this point? I am not at all sure that it is not required to set aside this “internalized voice of philosophy” (a moment analyzed in detail by Michael Walzer and Rawls), if Rousseau announces the waking philosopher (or one in a group) who primarily worries about the destiny of the whole city.

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<sup>5</sup> “*C'est la raison qui engendre l'amour-propre, et c'est la réflexion qui le fortifie ; c'est elle qui replie l'homme sur lui-même; c'est elle qui le sépare de tout ce qui le gêne et l'afflige: c'est la philosophie qui l'isole; c'est par elle qu'il dit en secret, à l'aspect d'un homme souffrant: péris si tu veux, je suis en sûreté. Il n'y a plus que les dangers de la société entière qui troublent le sommeil tranquille du philosophe, et qui l'arrachent de son lit. On peut impunément égorger son semblable sous sa fenêtre; il n'a qu'à mettre ses mains sur ses oreilles et s'argumenter un peu pour empêcher la nature qui se révolte en lui de l'identifier à celui qu'on assassine. L'homme sauvage n'a point cet admirable talent; et faute de sagesse et de raison, on le voit toujours se livrer étourdimement au premier sentiment de l'humanité. Dans les émeutes, dans les querelles des rues, la populace s'assemble, l'homme prudent s'éloigne: c'est la canaille, ce sont les femmes des halles, qui séparent les combattants, et qui empêchent les honnêtes gens de s'entr'égorger.*” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, Paris, Flammarion, 2011.

My second example here is also problematic. Aside from providing or confirming the genesis and entwinement of Axel Honneth's three freedoms (or at the very least ensuring the conditions for 'social freedom'), the example seems to me to show that the protocol of collective engagement simultaneously plays a part of the process of its recognition and also overcomes it. Further, my premise is that a novel reconstruction of engagement (and related terms) could advance or ease the shift or introduction into 'social freedom'. Furthermore, as in the case of Rousseau's philosopher, this is another negative example that confirms the necessity of certain conditions, or strictly speaking norms (even if they are not sufficient), for something to be labeled a 'European Value'. For example, 'European values' do not refer to characteristics specific to Europeans (as opposed to all others), of being particularly excited when witnessing violence and having compassion; that is to say, their willingness to urgently mobilize into a group and help one who is in harm's way, or simply resolve the problem. European value would be twofold and concern something else: 1) normativity, since individuals *must* help one in trouble (or ones in trouble), 2) engagement, which precedes the norm but also constitutes it if and only if there is 'communal engagement', if the engagement is free or willing (this is a specific aspect of obligation). Absent these acts of communal engagement, there can be no shift from group to institution, and no norm. If I say, for example, that the institution is a *repertorium* (*répertoire* is a relatively recent French word that means a set or list of elements), then it is presumed that the institution comprises diverse content and that it is potentially defined as a collection of acts – institutional acts. My problem lies with the status of negative or perhaps even violent acts (better still, non-institutional, non-social or a-social, non-collegial acts, or "non-collaborative behavior"). Apart from that, I would like to try to imagine some kind of "institutional acts" that could potentially be in at least partial disjunction with "negative acts." Therefore, I am not certain that it is possible to eliminate such acts, due to which a

group or institution could be “simply bad” (M. Gilbert); but it is perhaps possible that “engaging acts” or some kind of “provocative acts” (and I would like to provisionally outline such activities) improve the institution or further institutionalize it. Not only this. My premise would precisely be that it is these very acts that institutionalize a group (or transform a group into an institution) by reducing or removing negative social acts (which coincide with negative freedom). The more engagement, the more solid the institution becomes.

The second example, then, appears in 1943, in Part III of *L'Être et le néant*. Sartre the phenomenologist spends a few pages in the chapter “L' 'être-avec' (*Mitsein*) et le 'nous'” attempting to constitute a “We.”<sup>6</sup> French grammar (and not grammar as such as he alleges) allows him originality and ease to execute this construction using “Le 'nous'-object” and “Le nous-sujet” (the we-object and we-subject). Sartre is quite convincing in revealing the meaning and distinction of a We conducting an action (seeing others) and others who see and objectivize us.<sup>7</sup> Here is

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<sup>6</sup> For our purposes, I think, it is less important that there is an obvious influence of Husserl and Heidegger on Sartre than a certain echo. In “Engagement” from 1962, Theodor Adorno is attempting to systematize the difference between engagements in the histories of French and German consciousness (thinking) (as he puts it, *in der Geschichte des französischen und deutschen Bewusstseins*). He writes: “The principle of commitment (*das Engagement*) thus slides towards the proclivities of the author, in keeping with the extreme subjectivism of Sartre’s philosophy, which for all its materialist undertones, still audibly echoes German speculative idealism.” T. Adorno, “Engagement”, in *Noten zur Literatur III*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1965. (Interestingly, in 1964, Arnold Gehlen writes about engagement in an entirely different way in “Das Engagement der Intellektuellen gegenüber dem Staat.”) At the very beginning of the text, Adorno differentiates between engagement and tendency (*Tendenz*). Engagement is characterized by the production of an attitude (*eine Haltung*) (“to work at the level of fundamental attitudes”), as well as Sartre’s “task [being] to awaken the free choice of the agent, that makes authentic existence possible at all” and the production of an alternative, which is “to demonstrate the irreducibility of freedom” (*die Unverlierbarkeit von Freiheit*).

<sup>7</sup> “Furthermore the philosopher who wants to study the “we” (*Le philosophe qui veut étudier*) must take precautions and know of what he speaks. There is not only a We-as-subject (*un nous-sujet*); grammar teaches (*la grammaire nous apprend*) us that there is also a We-as-complement – i.e., a We-as-object (*un nous-complément, c'est-à-dire un nous-objet*). Now from all which has been said up till now it is easy to understand that the “we” in “We are looking at them” (*le nous de «Nous*

his example, which is supposed to ensure the existence of a group and collective intentionality:

I am on the pavement in front of a café; I observe the other consumers and I know myself to be observed. We remain here in the most ordinary case of conflict with others (the Other's being-as-object for me, my being-as-object for the Other) (*l'être-objet de l'autre pour moi, mon être-objet pour l'autre*). But suddenly (*tout à coup*) some incident occurs in the street; for example, a slight collision between jeep and a taxi. Immediately at the very instant when I become a spectator of the incident, I experience myself non-thetically as engaged in "we" (*je m'éprouve non-thétiquement comme engagé dans un nous*). The earlier rivalries, the slight conflicts have disappeared, and the consciousnesses which furnished the matter of the "we" (*la matière du nous*) are precisely those of all the consumers: "we" look at the event, "we" take part (*nous regardons l'événement, nous prenons parti*). [...] The "we" is experienced by a particular consciousness, it is not necessary that *all* the patrons at the café should be conscious of being "we" in order for me to experience myself as being engaged in a "we" with them. (*Le nous est éprouvé par une conscience particulière; il n'est pas nécessaire que tous les*

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*les regardons*) cannot be on the same ontological plane as the "us" in "They are looking at us" (*le nous de «ils nous regardent*). (...) In the sentence, "They are looking at *me*, (*«Ils me regardent*)" I want to indicate that I experience myself as an object for others, as an alienated Me, as a transcendence-transcended. (*comme Moi aliéné, comme transcendance-transcendée*). If the sentence, "They are looking at us," (*«Ils nous regardent*) is to indicate a real experience, it is necessary that in this experience I make proof of the fact that I am engaged (*je suis engagé*) with others in a community of transcendences-transcended, of alienated "Me's." (*une communauté de transcendances-transcendées de «Moi» aliénés*)." J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Washington, Washington Square Press, 1956, 414-415. J-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, Paris, Gallimard, 1943, 486.

*consommateurs de la terrasse soient conscients d'être nous pour que je m'éprouve comme étant engagé dans un nous avec eux*).<sup>8</sup>

The biggest mistake in this scene lies in Sartre's conclusion: for a group to be truly compact and well constituted it is insufficient for someone (anyone: Sartre, for example) to be the only one aware that they are its part, that they belong to it. What is necessary for a group to be at all, is collective awareness of all individually that they all belong to it, and collective attention and intentionality of all individually and simultaneously (M. Gilbert); which is not achieved in Sartre's example. The group dissolves at the moment it is constituted only because Sartre does not mention true engagement in solving the issue that arose due to the incident, and potential help for the injured. Sartre's diminishment of the importance of the incident that takes place (he calls it a "*collision légère*" [a fender bender]), *de facto* prevents the constitution of a group through a joint mobilization of all who would thus have an obligation to help those in peril. Since the incident is insignificant and since the damage is quite small, since there is no change, the group simply has no time to self-thematize (which would otherwise be an association that attempts exclusively to bind and repair connections between group members). Even though Sartre uses the word 'event' – there is actually no event.

By contrast, let us imagine the incident that took place as terrifying, greatly damaging, and yet that the passers-by and "*les consommateurs*" still did not *urgently* (this word is crucial) constitute a single group that could act and conduct itself 'with compassion'. Help was thus late and the violence was ultimately not prevented or not mitigated sufficiently quickly. Why is that so, and would such a scene even be

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 413-414; *Ibid*, 485.



possible? Is the ‘weight of the event’ or ‘intensity of the event’ asymmetrical to the constitution of the group?

Look at Article 223-6 of the French Penal Code, passed a few years ago (there is a similar law in Italy, passed even earlier), specifically its first part. In question is “the notion of non-assistance to a person in danger and omission to help a person in peril (*la notion de non-assistance à personne en danger et l'omission de porter secours à personne en peril*):

The same punishment will be given to anyone not helping a person in danger while their own life or that of a third person is not put in jeopardy by so doing, having the opportunity to help either by themselves acting or calling others to help (*Sera puni des mêmes peines quiconque s'abstient volontairement de porter à une personne en péril l'assistance que, sans risque pour lui ou pour les tiers, il pouvait lui prêter soit par son action personnelle, soit en provoquant un secours*).

Although the author of the law used language in this Article to refer exclusively to an individual in danger and the individual who abstains from help (such ‘infractions of abstention’ [*infractions d’abstention*] are quite rare in penal codes; that a person X, despite having the intention to do something, in fact does nothing – the very definition of a negative act<sup>9</sup>), their intention is to punish all individuals who are not capable of unifying and constituting as a group. Only the constitution of a group (unification increases power and strength) can remove fear,

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<sup>9</sup> In one of his last texts, Gilbert Ryle writes: “What is interesting is the class of acts (if they *are* acts) which consists in the agent’s intentional *non*-performance of some specifiable actions. For example, I *postpone* writing a letter if, without having forgotten the task, I do not write the letter now, although I could write it now. I cannot, in this sense, postpone *your* letter-writing.” G. Ryle, “Negative ‘Actions’,” *Hermathena*, n. 115, Centenary Number, Summer 1973, 81.

thus preventing even greater danger. In order for this to be possible, it first seems necessary to me to abandon – as quickly as possible, at that – old romantic notions about empathy (or compassion) as a drive or capability to ‘take the place’ of the victim, or ‘put one in the place’ of the damaged party or one who is in pain and who suffers. We are dealing with something else entirely. I think that the group, that is to say social and disciplined action, a multitude of engaged acts, can bring individuals closer together (such acting could *a priori* be empathic and compassionate), thus reducing violence and pain.

This article of criminal law, however, implies something much more significant than a mere hidden demand for urgent constitution of a group capable of stopping violence. Just as the legislator relies on there being empathy in each individual for a person or persons who are in peril or danger, with this article, he announces the necessity for institutionalization of a small imaginary group that could always provide systematic help as well as prevent or reduce the possibility of danger occurring. The condition for a group to be able to transform into an institutional entity refers to the increase and intensity of engaged acts. Included in the act of helping a frozen homeless person or a migrant in need of a place to sleep is also the demand and the pledge (*gage, pegno*) that all others should help all those imperiled, that is, to reduce and prevent poverty in our city through the engagement of all.

I think both of these examples, with their latent tension in the transition from the individual to collective and social acting, are good problematizations of what we have yet to define with the attribute ‘European’ or to use Roberto Mordacci’s phrase, *la vocazione epocale europea*. First, is there some “pre-normative” space? (This again is my overly ambitious statement today, although it refers to freedom, compassion, grouping, institutionalizing, etc.) I assume that we would easily agree that the norm or the Article I have cited still only represents an attempt to reduce violence – for I could be simply relieved of responsibility if I indeed cry for help,

even if my helpless call does nothing to prevent or stop the violence; further, the norm obligates me no more than to attempt to stop the violence taking place before me. If we complicate the matter a little further with Adorno's distinction (*Engagement-Tendenz*), it seems to me that we create an opportunity to step into what Axel Honneth calls "Social Freedom."<sup>10</sup> As opposed to engagement in engaged art/literature, "tendency" (although the German original does not have scare quotes around the word *Tendenz*) "is intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions – like earlier propagandist (tendency) plays against syphilis, duels, abortion laws, etc."<sup>11</sup> Adorno's remark regarding Sartre's artistic action still does not dissolve the engagement protocol or notion; it does specify however, the conditions of work, when and how is individual engagement possible, or when and how freedom can be transformed into collective urgent action. What are such acts? Such acts alter something and bring about social change.

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<sup>10</sup> German Idealism, specifically Hegel, but also Kant, do not only echo in Sartre; they can be found in French philosophy in various places, even when they are systematically rejected: "Human freedom is essentially unheroic. (...) Freedom consists in instituting outside of oneself an order of reason, in entrusting the rational to a written text, in resorting to institutions. Freedom, in its fear of tyranny, leads to institutions, to a commitment of freedom in the very name of freedom, to a State. (...) To conceive of and to bring about a human order is to set up a just State, which then is the possibility of surmounting the obstacles that threaten freedom" (*La liberté humaine est essentiellement non héroïque. (...) La liberté consiste à instituer hors de soi un ordre de raison; à confier le raisonnable à l'écrit, à recourir à une institution. La liberté, dans sa crainte de la tyrannie, aboutit à l'institution, à un engagement de la liberté au nom de la liberté, à un Etat. (...) Concevoir et réaliser l'ordre humain, c'est instituer un Etat juste, qui est, par conséquent, la possibilité de surmonter les obstacles qui menacent la liberté*).

E. Levinas, "Freedom and Command," *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, 16-17. E. Levinas, «Liberté et commandement», *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Vol. 58, n.3, 1953, 266. This sounds like Rawls, but is actually Emmanuel Lévinas.

<sup>11</sup> In German, the subject of the sentence is engaged art: "*Engagierte Kunst im prägnanten Sinn will nicht Massnahmen, gesetzgeberische Akte, praktische Veranstaltungen herbeiführen wie ältere Tendenzstücke gegen die Syphilis, das Duell, den Abtreibungsparagrafen (...)*."

Allow me to call such acts “engaging,” above all because they change the institution (alter it but simultaneously create it) by introducing new rules. Even if it is sometimes very difficult to develop or differentiate an action or event, an engaged act is one that decidedly creates something new, such as a real event. Although “commitment” or “joint commitment” is translated into French and German sometimes as “engagement,” I am positive that these cannot be synonyms.<sup>12</sup> I would claim that “joint goal,” “collective intentionality” or mutual obligation are not the basic characteristic of such acts. Rather, it is that these acts produce an obligation in all members of a group (and in those who have yet to become so; meaning, it is imperative to engage all), that is, that they oblige the group as such (“group agent”) to form a new kind of obligation. To be engaged means to count on all others and work such as to produce a great stake or burden (*gage*, *pledge*, *pegno*),<sup>13</sup> which ought to reiterate obligation and institutional responsibility even in those we have labeled hold-outs, subversive or are simply violent.

Therefore, I insist on there being an entirely imprecise or uncertain number of different unclassified activities that have the capacity to:

a) not only encourage or obligate another (or others) to identical or similar action, or reciprocal reaction, but also to produce a pseudo obligation that implies a joint, group action (“to do something as a group”), and

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<sup>12</sup> Howard S. Becker, also in the early sixties of the past century, writes his anthological text, “Notes on the Concept of Commitment” (*The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, n. 1, 1960, 32-40). Sociologists, he says, use this term to designate a “consistent line of activity” of an individual.

<sup>13</sup> Or hostage (*hostage*). This is one of the most important meanings of the word pledge. More interesting still is the word *toast* that holds in itself both the call and response to call, as well as the community beyond all obligation.

b) not only obligate members of a group to do something together, but to exceed the borders of joint commitment of the group, *a priori* obligating non-members or all potential and future participants towards joint and coordinated action.

What are these actions like, then, the ones that engage others (all others) or that have the capacity to commit (to bring together, collect and bind even those who are not present in one place simultaneously)? Let me describe and list, that is, assume a few meanings of the verbs “commit” and “engage.” These verbs in the first-person plural imperative (let us “describe,” “list,” “assume”), which could be uttered sufficiently loudly by any individual at the same time suspending their own speech in the first-person singular (only a “we” can replace “I;” and only an “I” can utter the pronoun “we”), could together represent a kind of obligation for all those who are potentially within earshot and understand the utterances. The way these verbs are used potentially connects, mobilizes and invites others to individual agreement or action, but at the same time (also) summons them to (the same, common) answer. Their joint answer or joint action is confirmed not only when each of us conducts a given activity (e.g. describing, assuming or listing meanings of the words “commit” and “engage”) or else when they, simultaneously and with total commitment, abandon and concentrated activity collectively perform the “assuming,” “describing” and “listing.” It is also confirmed when these three imperatives are repeated or simply uttered: “let us describe and assume and list.” The first-person plural imperative is one of the initial, unconditional conditions of institutionalizing the work of a group or of joint commitment. Yet certainly not the only one. Verbs such as ask, suggest, entreat, supplicate, appeal, demand, order, as well as prove, argument, justify or defend (not even necessarily in the imperative) could encourage to engagement and potentially to joint commitment.

Engaged action would then be the one that is above all public or announced (for it cannot be a kind of negative social act or a secret, an undisclosed action performed in silence). Further, it is provocative in nature,<sup>14</sup> really a call or message to all, to others (*com-mittere* can mean to send), a prompting of all to come closer, to join (not only members of a group, but also those absent), because “to commit” precisely means an action that encourages or obligates others to do something together by doing so as members of a future committee (“joint commitment obligates the parties one to the other to act in accordance with the commitments,” M. Gilbert). However, engaged action is specific in that it supposes this type of great or grand work, adherence (“giving one's all” “committed to the end”) and abandon (a kind of sacrifice for others or with others or towards others, or in their stead, sacrifice as bringing closer, but also as work that calls others to join, repeat our action and thus construct future joint work) – all with the goal of bringing us closer to others. (The word *engager* comes from the verb *vado*, with the German word *wadi*, Latin *vas*, *vadis* meaning “*je m'avance vers quelqu'un*,” “I am advancing towards another;” P.

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<sup>14</sup> The origin of the *acts of engagement* could probably reside in the Roman Republic's pseudo-institute of *ius provocationis*. These acts obligate and connect above all those who are not yet part of the group, who have yet to become so, yet are nevertheless always present. This is decidedly not the same kind of obligation as exists within an agreement (a result of a promise, money lending or various other kinds of transactions), nor the obligation of the actor in joint commitment. *Ius provocationis* is the right to challenge. Meaning that this is a right confirmed or conducted through a call or challenge. The right of a Roman citizen to address the people or call to the people for help, thus opposing the decision of the magistrate or judge (above all when concerning violence, torture, death or high treason), refers to two laws: “Lex Valeria” from 300 BC and “Lex Sempronia” from 123 BC. “Provoco” – to call, challenge, invoke a third entity (using the vocative case) is a good example of a social act *par excellence*. Certainly “provoco” and the institute “*ius provocationis*” are directly tied to what we today designate as “provocative.” If a person produces or issues what we call a “provocation” or a “provocative act,” their intention is to gather those not present or to make their call reach those still not there. This call, voice, exclamation to others (to some third) is the basic characteristic of a social act. When Horatius challenges with “provoco!”, aside from a social act, a performative act has taken place (with which Horatius triggers a public institute), because the police that came to arrest and beat him is obligated to stop (to stop the violence and introduce an inquiry, discussion and more justice), just as those who hear Horatius’ call have an obligation to answer and approach him.

Kemp.<sup>15</sup>) We advance towards or are brought closer to others either when we become bound to them or bind them to us, when we “invest” or “place something” into or before others, when we “*mettre en gage*” / “pledge” or “*donner en gage*” / “give a pledge.” We advance towards or are brought closer to others either when we become bound to them or bind them to us, when we “invest” or “place something” into or before others, when we “*mettre en gage*” / “pledge” or “*donner en gage*” / “give a pledge.”

What does this mean? What does it mean to place a pledge or burden (guarantee, bail, *hypothèque*; “*engager, c’est hypothéquer*”) before another or before all (the whole community), and to what extent is that a form of modest violence and forcing others (or all) to choose to join or not some specific action? What kind of action does not principally have to be in strictly direct relation with another (“if I am doing something, then you or he must do likewise”), but which certainly binds me to another (and the other to me), such that it jointly obligates us to conduct it (“if I act, then we all act,” “if you act, then we all act”)? If my public activities involve collecting money for the care of gravely ill children, organizing temporary shelter for war refugees from a neighboring state, or if I often visit slaughterhouses to protest against (the way of) killing animals – would not all these activities be called engaged (and “activist”)? Each could represent “personal commitment” (*engagement*

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. Kemp, *Théorie de l’engagement*, Vol. 1 *Pathétique de l’engagement*, Paris, Seuil, 1973, 16. Kemp fails to mention a much more interesting meaning of “engagement” that draws this protocol fatally close to the words *institutere* and *instituto* (institution). *Instituere* (*einsetzen*) 724, Vol. 4 is continuation, the production of heir (W. von Wartburg, *Französisch Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Basel, 1966, Vol. 4, 724), while Gaffiot says this same thing by insisting on some uses in Cicero that refer to “*se créer des amis*,” and to “continuing” in the sense of “chain-linking” not “repetition” (“*continue comme tu as commencé*”). *Dictionnaire Gaffiot*, 1934, 833. If several families band together of their own accord to (as a group) remove trash together from the city of Torino, they are calling others to join them (‘friends’), to do as they do (‘repetition’ is really linking and creating a chain of institutional gestures), which further implies the possibility of creation of an alternative ‘contre-institution’ whose many and diverse actions produce a cleaner city.

*personnel*), and at the same time, none could be performed individually, but would always require smaller or larger groups of people (“joint commitment”). However, this transformation of individual into group agency need not necessarily be the most significant characteristic of these actions. The beginning of the explanation of this transformation was long ago constructed by Kant, where he speaks of duties to oneself as such (*Pflicht gegen sich selbst*), of debt or obligation to oneself that always precedes and underpins/conditions any possible obligation to others (which he will call external duty).

Far more complicated, but also perhaps more crucial, is the set of actions that could be located at that point in English where two complementary words or strategies overlap and at the same time diverge: engagement and commitment. Personal engaged action (crucially perhaps in contradistinction to the French *engagement*) remains personal, such as me being engaged in my career or caring for the ill. Only a handful of people, in my more or less immediate circle, will recognize this engagement, and in recognizing the engagement might feel that it is “a thing of public importance,” and thus an obligation to join in. Commitment or joint commitment, for it is always in the plural, calls for a different kind of obligation. Namely, for example, when I call a lunch meeting at a nearby restaurant of our Group for Social Engagement Studies of Belgrade’s Institute for Philosophy, and promise to attend the beginning of the meeting, then I am truly engaged and all those who answer the meeting call will confirm my action, thus also becoming engaged. But the joint commitment of our group (“to act in accordance with commitments”) occurs only when the actions of the group produce sufficient reason or obligation for those who do not initially belong to our group, or those who are still not at the scheduled meetings, to necessarily join. If our group truly acts together, if it is jointly engaged (such action always referring to the vital connections and relationships that hold the community or the group together), then I am obligated to join it, to become



engaged (“if all act, then I act”). Such an obligation is different from a non-perfect obligation, because the person that gives charity or uses polite protocols or helps the poor in no way produces the identical obligation in me. By contrast, the engagement of a group could never leave me indifferent.