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Becoming Response-Able: Inquiring into the Requirements of a Practice of Study

Having focused on the central obligation of the study practice of Campus in Camps, that which makes the studiers hesitate and think in their confrontation with the questioning situation of decolonization, I now turn to the requirements that seem to correspond to this obligation. According to Stengers' theory of practice, every practice can be understood as a reciprocal capture between requirements and obligations. While the obligation makes practitioners hesitate and think, the requirements allow for becoming sensitive to this very obligation, which indeed requires to be addressed in one way rather than another. For this reason, the requirements are not merely social rules followed in the course of practice (e.g., Wittgenstein's language games, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology), but emerge and develop in direct relation to an obligation, something that is at stake; in this sense, the requirements only come to matter in order for the obligation to come to matter too.¹

In order to grasp the requirements of Campus in Camps' practice of study, I will analyze various activities undertaken by the studiers that made them sensitive to the obligation of life in exile and made them hesitate while discussing the camp and the right of return. In the first section, the activity of storytelling will be read through the lens of Whitehead's concept of abstraction and his imperative to take care of our abstractions. The second activity concerns the different photographic exercises that helped in making a comparison between the camp and the surrounding city. After that, the focus will be on the importance of mapping and mapmaking as another exercise in studying the camp, in which the map becomes a matter of study, turning the camp from a living condition into something that can be scrutinized and represented. Lastly, I will discuss experiments with the use of public space in the camp, in order to gain a sense of what it means when space is created as something public, how public space actually gathers a public, and can give rise to varied culture of use.

Taking Care of Our Abstractions

The first activity has to do with *telling stories*. In *The Collective Dictionary*, concepts that are deemed indispensable to understand the lives of the people living in Dheisheh, such as participation, ownership, and wellbeing, were contextualized in various stories that forged connections between their experiences and the meanings of the concept. In order to substantiate the theorization of this activity, this section will draw on the stories that can be found in the booklet *Knowledge*, which contains seven stories that situate the concept of knowledge within everyday experiences of living in the camp.

An important storytelling technique used by the studiers is to dramatize the concept in the different experiences and events in which it matters. Dramatization forbids holding on to any general definition of a concept and necessitates embedding the concept within the contexts or situations in which it is relevant and upon which it exerts its force. Foregrounding the force concepts exert on the way we experience situations underscores the fact that concepts do not merely represent phenomena “out there,” but that they actively intervene in our experience of the situations they render intelligible, which means to be graspable in the specific way the concept calls for, rather than another.²

In the booklet *Knowledge*, telling stories is meant to repel all general definitions elicited by the question “What is knowledge?” Instead, this way of writing requires to unfold the drama of knowledge. The studiers exchanged the “What is?”-question for a manifold of questions such as “Who wants knowledge?,” “How much knowledge?,” “Why do they want knowledge and how does it come to matter to them?,” “And where and when does knowledge matter?” Whereas the general question “what is knowledge?” would demand an answer that supposes to uncover the essence of knowledge, and that would hence fit nicely into a textbook definition of knowledge, the other questions allowed the studiers to situate the concept of knowledge within the diverse dramatic processes in which it emerges.³ This means that they paid equal attention to the experiences that are retained within the concept and to those that have been obscured by it.

In one of the stories, a studier reflected on the notion of “development,” writing that the knowledge generated because of development purposes often maintains and enlarges existing socioeconomic inequalities. Moreover, he wrote that the banner of development obfuscates the way academic knowledge plays a role in and even accelerates this process. Through a story about genetically modified organisms (GMOs), he explained that knowledge produced about GMOs

is often legitimized in view of a solution to the hunger problem. Genetically modifying crops would increase production, so that the harvest might feed more people. However, this “development” quickly runs the risk of making small farmers dependent on big companies that have a patent on the seeds of genetically modified crops. By thus privatizing and commodifying knowledge, the patent plays a crucial role in enhancing inequality, depriving small farmers of their capacity to grow their own produce.

In a second move, the studier opposed the patented knowledge with the knowledge his grandfather acquired in the orchard. Although the grandfather did not possess any degree or certificate in agriculture, he cultivated and planted trees throughout his entire life. The knowledge he acquired through his labor was shared among co-workers and grew in relation to the trees, the seasons, and nutrients. The studier continued to explain that conceiving of knowledge as a private property decouples people from the knowledge that grows via sharing and experience. He dramatized how knowledge can produce a difference, related to thoroughly collective experiences of learning in which even non-human actors (e.g., plants, rainfall, bugs) participate.

In recounting the drama within the concept of knowledge, the studier outlined the network in which this concept can come to matter and for whom it comes to matter and in what way.⁴ To that extent, storytelling situates concepts inside the events, experiences, and relations that make up the fabric of the concept. It is a way of bringing together and passing on a variety of facts without domesticating them inside definitions. Stories can make us think about the way we use a specific concept to explain or justify a situation, or they can lure our feelings toward other ways of experiencing an event. Dramatization lays bare the multiple and dispersed meanings and interests that were drawn together within a concept.

The aim of dramatization, however, is not merely denunciatory—a critique of the commodification of knowledge, for instance. More than a method of general deconstruction of all concepts, it is a way of telling specific stories about specific concepts. Dramatization does not aim to arrive at a “correct” understanding of what a concept really is, but rather at a dynamic and pragmatic insight into how the concept *works*. This means that it analyzes how a concept is used to sanction specific practices (e.g., the scientific knowledge of GMOs), whereas others are delegitimized as inappropriate or obsolete (e.g., the vernacular knowledge of the orchard).

Storytelling, through dramatization, played a vital role in the making of *The Collective Dictionary*. The concern to take care of the concepts we use to describe

our experiences on the one hand, and the concern for the lure for experience that concepts constitute—how they allow us to become affected by a question or an issue—resonates strongly with Whitehead's caution to *take care of our abstractions*.⁵ Studious storytelling can be precisely understood as a way of taking care of our abstractions. Commenting on Whitehead, Stengers explains:

For Whitehead, abstractions as such were never the enemy. We cannot think without abstractions; they cause us to think, they lure our feelings and affects. But our duty is to take care of our abstractions, never to bow down in front of what they are doing to us.⁶

Abstractions, and hence concepts as well, are not a purely intellectual affair, corresponding with “abstract thought” as opposed to “concrete thought.” Whitehead indeed is not interested in “abstract thought” as such: for him, abstraction is a necessary ingredient in thinking, always situated. Moreover, not only thinking, but also perception requires abstraction because it makes recognition possible.

An event, the most concrete fact, for instance, a bird singing his song in the early morning, can be named, but as soon as we talk about it, we use more abstract terms to refer to the actual singing. More precisely, it is due to our abstraction of the bird's song that we can recognize the bird singing. As such, abstraction makes recognition possible, and vice versa. We recognize the bird's song, although we barely have words to describe it. Abstractions make it possible to pay attention to events that otherwise might have remained barely noticed. Of the bird's song, it is possible to say, “Did you hear it? There it is again!” drawing attention to the song, even without recourse to any abstract name. In that sense, “recognition and abstraction essentially involve each other. Each of them exhibits an entity for knowledge which is less than the concrete fact, but is a real factor in that fact.”⁷

Abstractions, therefore, do not inhabit the realm of abstract thought, but are vital ingredients in the occurrence of the event, understood as an actual occasion. They are part and parcel of how we experience what happens, and they sensitize us to what we can be aware of in perception. Abstractions therefore seem to have a double efficacy. First, they allow us to render intelligible and communicate experiences. The abstraction of knowledge, for instance, seemed to render the students at first incapable of perceiving the knowledge of the orchard, only becoming sensitive to it by telling its story.

Abstractions, however, not only “catch” (or “prehend”) events by naming them, they also—and this is their second efficacy—lure our feelings and affects,

make a specific experience of an event possible, constituting in their own way a prehension. Having told the stories of knowledge was an experience that altered how the studiers could perceive events in which knowledge was generated or shared. Consequently, we cannot be against abstractions as if we would have a more authentic experience without them, for it is very much due to abstractions that we can experience what happens in this way, rather than in another. Therefore, it is vital to take care of them, of how they lure our experience.

In *The Collective Dictionary*, the participants engaged in a process of taking care of the abstractions that are at play in their experience of the camp through storytelling.⁸ In doing so, I contend, the studiers aim to overcome what Whitehead has called “The Fallacy of the Perfect Dictionary.” This term indicates the belief that we already know and have coined all the fundamental ideas that can be applied to our experience, and that these ideas can be explicitly expressed in human language, in concepts.

The Collective Dictionary, on the contrary, demonstrates the internal differences of various concepts. It makes clear how concepts collect a multiplicity of experiences that can henceforth affect us in a particular way rather than another, constituting a particular prehension. Moreover, the participants attempted to question these concepts from the point of view of experiences that were until then neglected by the concept, in order to transform its efficacy, to lure our feelings toward other aspects of knowledge, ownership, participation, responsibility, or one of the other concepts included in the dictionary.

In order to omit “The Fallacy of the Perfect Dictionary” and inspired by what Ursula K. Le Guin calls “The Carrier Bag Theory,” *The Collective Dictionary* can be understood as a carrier bag of concepts for living together in the camp. Stories, according to Le Guin, are carrier bags that are used for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living. Containing not only wild facts and messy descriptions, but also remote memories and high hopes, it is often said of stories that they blind us to the present.

Instead of viewing storytelling as deceit and disguise, Le Guin suggests to understand the story as “an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives, and an enlargement of present reality by connecting it to the unverifiable past and the unpredictable future.” Stories do not distract from “what is really happening,” but draw our attention to specific ingredients in the construction of lived reality, affording the possibility to take care of our abstractions.¹⁰

In that sense, stories are carrier bags for clashing points of view without pacifying conflicts, and hence, for diplomacy. Once more in the words of Le Guin (1989b):

Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc. within the narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle, may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process.¹¹

Stories do not aim to settle conflicts once and for all, nor do they aim to explain events so they can stop us from thinking. Instead, through dramatizing concepts, stories collect a manifold of experiences and events to make us pay attention to what is happening, and how our abstractions constitute a specific lure for experience of what is happening, affording to prehend the situation in one way, rather than another. In that sense, unfolding the drama at the heart of a concept by telling stories and making a dictionary means to think with abstractions and hence to take care of them, while becoming attentive to how these concepts operate as vital ingredients of our experience.

Comparison as Concern

The second activity concerns photographic exercises and the making of comparisons. Several activities (e.g., *Common*, *The Municipality*) aimed to compare the neighboring city of Doha to the camp of Dheishah, and to analyze what it means to move from the camp to the city as a refugee. In making use of interviews and photographs, the studiers followed different tracks in trying to (re)construct *rapport* between Dheishah and Doha. The objective was to trace how refugee identity and a sense of belonging changed after people had moved from the camp to the city, and ultimately, how a move to the city transformed perceptions of return.

Grasping the relation between Dheishah and Doha in terms of *rapport* begs the question how *rapport* differs from the more familiar notion of relation. Compared to a relation, the term *rapport* renders the *constructed* nature of the relationship more explicit. Because of the ubiquity of the notion of relation in social theory, it has become the default position to conceive of human beings as always embedded in social, material, and technological networks of relations. Stressing relationality can then be understood as a reaction against what Barad has called *thingification*, the turning of those relations into things, entities, or relata, a view that, she argues, has enormously infected the way in which we perceive and understand the world. Instead, she claims, “relata do not pre-exist relations.”¹² It is only within this and out of this web of relations that relata—entities, objects, humans—can emerge.

In opposition to the notion of relation, the notion of *rapport* underscores more strongly the fact that the relationship is *not* always already there, in the sense that it does not merely pre-exist the relata, but can and must be constructed *with* them. As such, it renders the work that has to be done in order to *create* a relation explicit: going beyond the commonly held view that everything is already related, the notion of *rapport* draws attention to the radically constructed nature of relations, and to the processes in which they are made and unmade.

Referring to Galileo's experimental apparatus of the inclined plane, Stengers argues that its efficacy consisted in putting the height of the starting point of the ball *in relation to* its point of impact on the ground, and hence *to construct rapport*. In Stengers' French, it becomes clearer that this was a deliberate *mettre en rapport* of two variables, instead of a demonstration of a merely necessary relation that was always already there. Whereas Galileo took advantage of the experimental achievement to silence his rivals by claiming that the discussion *why* bodies fall is nonsense and that we should limit ourselves to inquire *how* bodies fall, the question is now whether it is possible to inherit the achievement of *rapport* in a way different from just offending those for whom this particular *rapport* does not matter or matters in a different way.

At two moments, the studiers tried to make a comparison in order to build *rapport* between Dheisheh and Doha. First, one of the participants compared the two using nine indicators: housing, streets, interrelationships, organizations, public space, water, electricity, education, and healthcare. For each of the indicators, the studier compared Dheisheh and Doha in a few lines, followed by a small, often evaluative comment. For the housing indicator, for instance, he wrote that he would prefer to live in Doha because it has more open space between the houses, and people do not live as close to one another as they do in Dheisheh.¹³

However, two issues can be raised concerning this kind of comparison. First, there is the alleged neutrality of the indicators. Although at first, the indicators look quite neutral, they seem to take a fully equipped city as the default position. Hence, one could ask whether these indicators provide an interesting perspective for looking at the modes of living together in Dheisheh, as opposed to those in Doha. This relates to the second issue concerning the often evaluative comments that reinforce the city's superior position: apparently, the camp is entirely evaluated from the point of view of the city. Judging the camp from the perspective of the city makes us recognize an anomaly or exception, but it does not really give the camp the power to make us think, or to produce a difference in our perception or experience of it. As such, these two criticisms can be formulated as a double test that a comparison needs to pass in order to build

rapport. First, it requires to suspend immediate evaluation from an outsider's perspective (e.g., the neutral indicators) and, secondly, to compare without taking either of the terms compared as the measure for the other.

In the contribution that follows, *Visual Investigation Dheisheh/Doha*, a second attempt is made at a comparison, this time using photographs. The first image is a wide camera shot taken from the middle of the street that separates the camp from the city, clearly demarcating the cluttered sidewalk of Dheisheh with the sterile facades of Doha. This style of exhibiting a strong contrast between Dheisheh and Doha is sustained throughout the other pictures. The remaining pictures are always presented two by two. Whereas on the left side, a view of Dheisheh is shown, the right side shows Doha. The different sets contrast the main entrances of the two areas, sceneries alongside the streets, empty spaces in the camp and the city, and the main road separating the two areas.¹⁴

When comparing these pictures, the differences demonstrated between Dheisheh and Doha stand out. The pictures of Dheisheh give the impression of a crowded, disorderly, dirty, overgrown town, cluttered with informal dwellings heaped up next to small alleys. Doha, on the contrary, is represented as an empty, orderly, tidy settlement, that seems to be built according to a strict and fixed housing scheme with big lanes and where public and private spaces are nicely separated.

Now, how does this different way of comparing Dheisheh and Doha pass the double test? In relation to the first concern, the visual representation seems to suspend the judgment that was made all too quickly during the comparison with so-called neutral indicators. The comments under the pictures are minimal (e.g., "Street in Dheisheh") and merely aim to name what is shown, rather than to evaluate or judge. Nowhere can it be inferred that it would be preferable to live in Dheisheh, rather than in Doha, or the other way around. This brings me to the second concern: to what extent is the comparison conducted on the terms of only one of the compared parties? In this regard, both areas get the chance to present themselves on their own terms. The pictures do not seduce the beholder to judge one of the sides from the point of view of the other. Both sides appear to convey a rather uncanny feeling, which allows the viewer to retain some distance toward both the camp and the city.

Therefore, it seems that rapport has been created between a camp and a city that were always already related, and this rapport, comparing certain aspects of Dheisheh and Doha, made the studiers think differently about the always-already-there relation between the two living spaces. The rapport not only made a comparison possible, but also, and more importantly, the comparison

made *new* rapports possible: the comparison allowed to rethink and recreate the relationship between the camp and the city on the one hand, and between the Dheisheh/Doha agglomeration and its inhabitants (on both sides of the border) on the other hand.

The comparison, hence, generates two kinds of rapport. First, there is rapport between the parties being compared. Referring to the Latin etymology of comparison, Stengers explains that “*compar* designates those who regard each other as equals—that is, as able to agree, which also means able to disagree, object, negotiate, and contest.”¹⁵ There is only one rule to be respected in order for the comparison to be relevant, and that is that rapport is built between terms in their “full force” and without “foul play” that weakens one while ensuring the position of the other. Consequently, the terms of the comparison can neither be imposed from above, as neutral, nor can they come from one of the parties because this would require that the other party would describe itself in terms of the other. It is instead in the *border zone*, where each party presents itself in its own terms, in its divergence, that “comparative” friction can arise: friction being in this case the capacity to disagree, object, negotiate, or contest—in short, to compare.

Secondly, there is rapport built between the comparison and those for whom this comparison comes to matter. Commenting on Stengers’ interpretation of Galileo’s inclined plane, Verran argues that the constructed rapport between the height of departure and point of impact authorized claiming that what is measured lent itself to measurement in order to convince an audience. The apparatus did not only testify of a natural phenomenon, but also, and most importantly, proved to be a persuasive participant in a polemic. That is why she calls the experimental achievement a participant-comparison, drawing attention to the fact that the comparison did not merely *represent* a state of affairs, but was called upon to *convince* rivaling opinions, to discredit the knowledge of philosophers and theologians as unscientific speculation and belief.¹⁶ The question now is whether a different relation is possible, whether these representations can participate in another way, not to persuade those gathered, but to make them think.

In other words, it seems that the pictures have managed to present both the camp and the city in their divergence rather well, without reducing one to the other. Moreover, they made the studiers capable of starting to think about the relation between Dheisheh and Doha as two diverging but interweaving entities. Drawing out the divergence between the city and the camp, each on its own terms, with full force, without foul play, through a translation into a visual

idiom, allowed to generate a sense of where and how the two intermingle as well, for instance, in the construction of a shared sense of belonging.

Interestingly, *The Municipality* contains an image that imitates the style of the first picture of the series. It is again a wide shot of both Dheisheh and Doha on opposite sides of the street, which thus becomes a *border zone*, a space of friction.¹⁷ Below the image it is indicated that the left-hand side is Doha, whereas on the right-hand side, Dheisheh is shown. However, in contrast to the first picture, this image does not allow one to make a clear distinction between the camp and the city based on the picture alone. The beholder needs the additional information given below to discern the two, and even then, each side of the street seems to mirror the other. However, this does not mean that both are “in fact” precisely the same, that there is no difference between Dheisheh and Doha, or that the refugee identity effectively *identifies* people dwelling on both sides of the border zone in the same way. Instead, the picture opens up a border zone for friction to arise, to make people disagree and discuss what it means to live as a refugee in a city or a camp.

The sharp contrast demonstrated in the pictures did not participate in a way that silenced (like the rapport constructed by Galileo did) but rather in a way that initiated a learning process concerning the question of what it means to be a refugee when living in a city, instead of in a camp, and which consequences this bears for the right of return. The contradiction between camp and city evoked in the initial comparison was transformed into a contrast, affirming both sides, instead of denouncing one in favor of the other. The comparison required paying attention to the specific ways in which camp and city diverge, but also to the senses of belonging that exist and come into being *in-between* the inhabitants of the camp and those of the city.

Milieu, Milieu

A third activity concerns the making of maps. In *The Unbuilt*, studiers made an inventory of the empty spaces within Dheisheh in order to identify sites for possible interventions. Their concern was the so-called forum of the camp, “the place in which people used to talk, to plan, to demonstrate, and to organize social and political practices freely and without being restricted by a certain vision or agenda.”¹⁸ Historically, the origins of Dheisheh’s forum trace back to the “street” as a locus of demonstration during the first years after the establishment of the camp. Thereafter, it moved to the youth center, built in 1969, which hosted social,

cultural, and political activities and discussions. The youth center could perform this role as a forum until the first Intifada in 1987, when it was shut down by the Israeli military, who believed it to be a stronghold of Palestinian political activism. At that moment, the forum, as a site of debate and contestation, moved to the prison where many young inhabitants of the camp were locked up.

The investigations conducted in the course of the mapping experiment were aimed at surveying potential sites to recreate such a forum. The studiers photographed the unbuilt plots that were found, and the resulting photographs, together with the map, constituted the primary study materials. The map delineates the territory of Dheisheh on which different plots of empty land are marked in black. As such, the map shows where the unbuilt spaces can be found, how big they are, and how they are situated in relation to one another. Pictures convey an impression of what these sites look like. By doing this, the studiers transformed the environment of the camp into a kind of middle around which different people could gather. They made the milieu as environment, the camp, into a milieu as middle, the map, entangling these two meanings of milieu in the process. Now, how can the activity of mapmaking be grasped from the perspective of a study of the milieu?

At first glance, the meaning of milieu seems to be continually fluctuating between these two poles: environment and middle. Serres, however, arguing that every middle is an environment for another middle, warns for such an all too dichotomized understanding of milieu. Middle and environment are indeed always expressed relatively toward something else—environment or middle, respectively—and hence should not be absolutized. Understanding the milieu in this way, as a system of relations without a center around which the system would be organized, prevents exaggerating the importance of the middle as a central point of orientation. The milieu indeed lacks any fixed, stable orientation; it does not provide a foundation. Instead, it is an ever-emergent system of interdependent relations.¹⁹ In the words of Ingold, the milieu as a whole can be conceived as a meshwork, whereas the milieu as a middle is a knot amidst the many other knots that make up this meshwork, “a knot in a tissue of knots, whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other knots, comprise the meshwork.”²⁰ As such, the milieu is a meshwork of interdependent relations that is always generative of new connections, new knots.

Next to its connotations of interdependency, indeterminacy, and generativity, Ingold adds an understanding of the milieu as a medium in the chemical sense, as that which causes a reaction to take place. Drawing more precisely on James Gibson’s psychology of perception, Ingold conceives of the milieu as a medium

affording perception and action. It is not what we perceive or what we act upon, but rather what we perceive *in* and what we act *with*.²¹ The sky, for instance, is itself seldom an object of perception. It is indeed not so much what we see, as what we see *in*, a milieu of visual perception. The light of the sky is itself not perceived; it is instead what *affords* perception. Whereas the former directs our attention to the surfaces of things, the latter “redirect our attention to the medium in which things take shape and in which they may also be dissolved.” The milieu, here understood as a medium, is thus what affords something to happen.²² Now, how can these different meanings of milieu help in understanding the activity of making maps in Campus in Camps?

In the process of mapping and photographing the camp, the different meanings of the notion of milieu entangle. It is by drawing a map and taking pictures of Dheisheh that the camp as an environment is visualized and becomes something that the participants can behold. Put differently, the camp as an environment becomes a middle itself around which people gather. Here, the discussion revolved around the question of how the camp can create a forum through the regeneration of its unbuilt spaces. Furthermore, even the third meaning of milieu, namely medium, can be discerned in the activity of mapmaking. The map as medium indeed affords the studiers to gather around a common concern—what they have called the forum of the camp—so that they actually make the camp present in their conversation. The map makes it possible not only to discuss *about* the camp, but it makes the camp-as-map a participant in the discussion. It becomes something to think *with*.

Indeed, maps do not only function as spatial representations. Maps also, and most importantly, help to create a social or political space that is or can be operative in the process of relating to the present otherwise, affording the imagination of different possible futures: “Maps connect heterogeneous and disparate entities, events, locations, and phenomena, enabling us to see patterns that are not otherwise visible.”²³ Maps allow people to make sense of the world they inhabit. By underscoring the social space that maps disclose, Turnbull argues not only that maps “grasp” reality in terms of understanding, but also in a sense that it can be administered and governed. As such, the map cannot be localized *outside* the reality of the camp, but becomes an essential operator in its becoming.²⁴

In the words of Whitehead, “the novel entity,” the map, “is at once the togetherness of the ‘many’ which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive ‘many’ which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes.”²⁵ The “many” of the milieu as environment are synthesized,

drawn together, into the “one” of the milieu as middle, the novel entity of the map. The mapping of the milieu, however, does not simply entail a redoubling, or the superimposition of a blueprint. The “novel entity” of the map draws together the “many entities” of the camp as a living environment; it connects heterogeneous and disparate entities, events, locations, and phenomena.

More importantly, still, the map is situated “disjunctively among” the many entities “which it leaves,” which it represents, and is therefore not situated *outside* of the camp. Mapping is never a neutral activity, and the map does not grant its beholder a so-called objective point of view—a view from nowhere from which it is possible to go everywhere. Maps are situated representations that form an active ingredient in the becoming of the places they map. In that sense, the map is “not forged in the ascent from a myopic, local perspective to a panoptic, global one, but in the passage from place to place, and in histories of movement and changing horizons along the way.”²⁶ At this point, still another understanding of the milieu comes in, namely the milieu as a *point of passage*.

Retaking the issue of passage in the visual idiom of the knot and the meshwork, it seems that the camp is drawn together by and in the map like the meshwork is drawn together by and in the knot. Different strands come close and entangle in the creation of the knot. Neither the map, nor the knot, however, are definite endpoints in the process of mapping and tying respectively. Rather they are points of passage that force one to slow down on the way to a future still unforeseen:

Knots are places where many lines of becoming are drawn tightly together. Yet every line overtakes the knot in which it is tied. Its end is always loose, somewhere beyond the knot, where it is groping towards an entanglement with other lines, in other knots.²⁷

The notion of milieu thus denotes not only the environment that surrounds us, the middle that we can pay attention to, and the medium that affords us the capacity to perceive and act. It is also a place of *passage*, of indeterminacy and, hence, of present-oriented possibility. In that sense, speaking with Serres, the map enables “learning in this blank middle that has no direction from which to find all directions.”²⁸

To that extent, a more positive rendering of what Turnbull has termed the social space of the map can be given. Turnbull is right in arguing that maps do not only represent reality, but actively shape it in the practices of administration and government that they afford. It would, however, be limiting to curb our understanding of the social space of the map to its repressive functionality.

It is indeed possible to conceive of this social space not only as an arena of subjugation, but also, and more interestingly, as a forum where it is possible to think about the future of the camp *with* the camp, made present now as a map. Mapping made it possible to discern possibilities for reinstalling a place for discussion and debate within the infrastructure of Dheisheh, a physical forum, by raising the question of what it would mean to create such a place within a refugee camp.

In conclusion, to understand the map as “disjunctively among” the entities of the camp which the map synthesizes (as I tried to do based on the quote by Whitehead) entails that mapping decelerates the speed with which ever more and ever new relations come into being within the generative meshwork of the camp, affording to slow down around the camp as a map, as a middle around which people gather. To situate this map among the other entities underscores the fact that it does not afford the possibility to reach a point outside the camp, an Archimedean point that, due to its exteriority, enables some sort of transcendent judgment. The fact that the map is “among” other entities requires understanding it as a new knot in the meshwork of the camp. It is here, in the transformation of the milieu as environment into the milieu as middle, a new knot in the meshwork, that it is possible to discern the fourth understanding of milieu, namely the milieu as a site of possibility and indetermination, a point of passage.

Making Common Use

The fourth and last activity that will be discussed consists of the reinvented uses of sites under scrutiny (e.g., the Arroub Pools, the Fawwar square, the Al-Feniq garden). The investigations conducted during the preparations for the publication of *The Square* are taken as a starting point to think about practices of use and the possibility of common use. In the course of this initiative, the studiers reflected upon the meaning of public space in the camp in relation to a specific square commissioned by UNRWA. The challenge was to find a fruitful way of gathering in this open space that was until then in principle public, but in practice barely used.

The studiers tried to think about the meaning of public space within a camp in relation to the public square constructed in Fawwar in 2007. Fawwar had the reputation of being a rather conservative camp in which women were often assigned the role of taking care of the household, while staying at home. Hence, most of the women were very skeptical about the establishment of the square.

They argued that they would have no right to the square since they were simply prohibited to be present in public spaces.

The experience that an external authority—UNRWA—cannot simply make a public space via the construction of a square instigated a learning process around the question of what it means for a space to be public. Moreover, it raised the questions of how the presence of the square normalizes or legitimizes the camp, and how such a place can be used so that it is not just “made free” by an external authority, but taken in hand by a community of people?

After a discussion in the Women’s Center that helped to articulate the unease that the women felt in relation to the square, they decided to research which new uses would be possible through *using* the square, rather than taking the feeling of exclusion as a critical point from which to denounce the square’s “publicness.” The action they organized consisted of three activities: cleaning, cooking, and an English class. In the early morning, the women started to clean the square. At first sight, this seems to be a banal act, but noteworthy is that it acquired a specific political importance in the course of the Egyptian revolt. The day after President Mubarak was forced to step down, protesters began cleaning Tahrir Square. The alienated “public” space, a space installed by and associated with the fallen regime, was reappropriated by the people.²⁹

Inspired by this gesture of care, the women cleaned the square in Fawwar in order to regain a sense of ownership over the place, to feel at ease in a place where until then they mainly felt they did not belong. By using the square, by cleaning, cooking, and learning English, the women started to turn the square into a commons, and it is through the social relations fostered there that the meaning of the square also changed. Whereas before the publicness of the square had alienated the women, the square was now again taken in hand as a commons.

In his reflections on use, Agamben emphasizes that use does not define an instrumental or intentional relation between a subject that makes use of an object being used. Instead, use is an action in which both agent and patient become indistinguishable, generated through the activity of use.

Every use is first of all use of self: to enter in a relation of use with something, I must be affected by it, constitute myself as one who makes use of it. Human being and world are, in use, in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; in the using of something, it is the very being of the one using that is first of all at stake.³⁰

In other words, subject and object of use find themselves in a relationship of interdependency toward one another. Thoroughly enmeshed with each other in the course of use, they entirely depend on one another for as long as the activity

of use takes place. From the moment one of the components disappears or is subjugated to the other, authentic use becomes impossible.

It is in the use of the square as a commons that the community that gathers there constitutes itself as a community of commoners, as people dependent on and affected by this common space. Also, it is while using the square as a commons, that the space is taken care of, and regenerated by new possibilities of common use initiated by the participants. While experimenting with the square, the women did not so much inquire what public space is in general, or who they are in relation to this public space that they do not feel they have access to. Making use of the square forced them to reformulate these questions: what is this square where we do not feel we belong, and correlatively, what are we capable of in making use of the square?

In doing so, a culture of use came into being around the public square. In her work with Tobie Nathan, Stengers coined this term to grasp what it means that people gather in order to discuss and debate about the possible uses of a force of which the efficacy is unstable and dependent upon how it is used. Nathan distinguishes three phases in the coming into being of a culture of use. First of all, a force of which the efficacy is ambivalent, capable of both fostering and ruining, curing and poisoning, manifests itself. In a second phase, a collective concerned by this force constitutes itself in order to investigate the modalities of control over this force experimentally. The third and concluding phase coincides with instituting a culture of use. This means to give shape to a continuous process of learning how to use this force. In this context, Nathan refers to the appearance of Dionysius in Ancient Greece, an event which required the people to learn how to worship this strangely forceful deity, but it is also possible to think of cultures of use in relation to the appearance and allure of a public square in a Palestinian refugee camp.³¹

The public square commissioned by UNRWA constituted a new force in the camp, one that moreover could easily be converted into a threat due to the normalization of the camp it might entail—"the camp is a living environment like any other, since there are even public squares." Therefore, it was necessary to think about possible uses of this force. Accordingly, a collective concerned by the force of the public square, the women of Fawwar, gathered in order to learn what it means that this square is a *public* square, and to learn that such publicness can never be taken for granted, but needs to be achieved.

Concerned with the possibility of a shared use of the space, and vigilant about an understanding of public as "for anyone" (from previous experiences, they had precisely learned that they were excluded from such an "anyone"), they tried to

reclaim the square, partially appropriate it through use. In that sense, a culture of use came into being. Stengers explains:

The culture of uses, and not just uses justified by a diagnosis or aiming at an end, is a problem of collective interest, which requires a collective knowledge. This can be called a collective expertise in the old sense where the expertise referred first of all to a knowledge derived from experience and cultivated in its relationship with experience.³²

In this respect, cultures of use are never about individuals acquiring insight into an unstable force, but about collectives that produce knowledge in relation to this force—a drug, a god, a square—around which they gather. This knowledge, secondly, is experiential. It cannot be derived from a general rule or a faraway objective, but should be related to actual experiences of use. This requires an experimental inquiry into how this force can be used.

It suspends every moral consensus (“it is prohibited to use drugs,” “Dionysius does not deserve to be worshipped,” “the construction of a public square normalizes the exceptionality of the camp”) and opens the way for a different kind of *consensus*, one that cannot be derived from a general rule but has to be achieved throughout processes of use during which a collective lets itself become affected by something. Put differently, consensus here does not mean that everyone agrees, but refers to the etymological meaning of consensus in which we find *con-*, meaning “together,” and *-sensus*, from *sentire*, meaning “to feel.” Consensus therefore denotes the experience of collectively being affected by something. In other words, it does not mean to think the same, but *to think together*.³³

Even more than the interdependency between who uses and what is used, it is the generativity of use that becomes apparent. Use is a thoroughly generative process, instead of an extractive one as it is usually conceived. The use of the square is not extractive (it cannot be exhausted), but is generative: it generates new, common relationships between the people and the square, new activities that can be performed there (such as learning English), and new social bonds between the people that have gathered. The use of the square as a commons thus enables the coming into being of new relationships between people and the square, and the emergence of a sense of belonging. The process does not attempt to extract the potential of the square to the fullest, nor does it exclude other possible uses; rather, it activates the space in a way that it is no longer public in the sense that it is commissioned by an external authority, “for anyone,” but in the sense that it is constructed to gather a public.³⁴

The activities of the women (e.g., cleaning, cooking, learning English), however, in no way coincide with a prescription for future use. Since the use is common and generative, there is always something that exceeds every possible definition of the use that can or could be made. Common use—using something as a commons, not as private property—generates not only the commons—the square as space made public—and the commoners—the women as agencies belonging to the square, as gathered in the square. It also generates, and maybe most importantly, a practice of *commoning*—future processes of use of the public square.³⁵

In the aftermath of the event, the women started to raise questions about what other kinds of activities could be organized in the square and how they could keep it open for other people that might be interested in organizing activities. In that sense, “every use is a polar gesture: on the one hand, appropriation and habit; on the other, loss and expropriation. To use [...] means to oscillate unceasingly between a homeland and an exile: to inhabit.”³⁶ Making use of the square, making it common, means to inhabit it in the sense that the women regain a sense of belonging to the square that nevertheless does not exclude other people, but, on the contrary, opens the possibility of co-engaging in this collective process of use, this practice of *commoning*.

What a Questioning Situation Requires

Which requirements can now be extracted from these activities, that each in their own way aimed to respond to the questioning situation of decolonization and make the studiers sensitive and hesitant vis-à-vis the obligation of life in exile, in defiance of all too rash, obvious answers of others? Four things can be distinguished that seem to be of importance in all four of the activities discussed above, and that could be called the requirements of Campus in Camps’ practice of study.

First, there is the requirement to gather people, to bring them together in a specific arrangement. People were brought together not only to tell stories, but also to discuss the future of the camp’s forum around different maps they had made. The second requirement has to do with observing. Observing here does not just mean to have a look from a distance, but to actively engage in making the camp present in one’s thinking, for instance, using photographs and maps. Thirdly, studying the camp seemed to require materializing the experience of living in the camp via written accounts, pictures, and maps. Materializing the

camp made it possible to turn the camp into a veritable touchstone, to let it object or resist when specific interpretations or propositions were made. The fourth and last requirement is then to experiment, to try out new ways of relating to the camp and the situation its inhabitants find themselves in. The last activity, in which a culture of use around a public square took shape by taking it in hand as a commons, is probably most emblematic.

Hence, gathering, observing, materializing, and experimenting operate as constraining requirements on the ongoing processes of thinking, making studiers responsive to the obligation of life in exile. While studying the camp and its questioning situation of decolonization, these requirements afford the possibility to think about the camp differently, instead of just recognizing it in terms of an unfulfilled right of return. More precisely, this practice of thinking made possible by studying the camp, induced a shift in the narrative of political action because it made the insistence of the commons more directly felt, as a future-oriented possibility, and as an alternative to the all too obvious liberal-democratic return to the private house of the past. In that sense, and quoting Ford, *Campus in Camps* provided an “occasion for politics”: its practice of study paved the way for a different style of relating to the camp and altered the mode of struggle without becoming itself political.³⁷ Whereas before the inhabitants of the camp were confronted with the contradiction between the right of return, and the experience of living together in the camp, studying the camp in all its dynamics, and giving it the power to constrain thinking, transformed this contradiction into a contrast, making possible futures different from the ones already imposed by others.