



Performance as Delegation: Citizenship in ‘Lloyd’s Assemblage’

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With an annual turnover of 7734 million Euros in 2016, Hapag-Lloyd is one of the world’s biggest container carriers. Its business activity, first and foremost, is logistics. This large-scale transportation company is based in Hamburg. In 2012, the city of Hamburg itself held nearly 37 percent of the company in shares. This, in fact, makes Hamburg citizens one of the company’s major owners.¹

Logistics can be interpreted as one possible conception of the art, science and practice of moving things. It is like ‘choreograph[ing] a ballet of infinite complexity played across skies, oceans and borders’ (UPS 2010), claims the well-known UPS commercial of 2010. However complex and expansive it may be, this choreography of things remains largely invisible and unnoticed – similar to what Keller Easterling states in her notion of infrastructure space. The term describes spatial infrastructures that manage and control the relation and movements of objects and thereby govern human behaviour: ‘Contemporary infrastructure space is the secret weapon of the most powerful people in the world precisely because it orchestrates activities that can remain unstated but are nonetheless consequential. Some of the most radical changes to the globalizing world are

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being written, not in the language of law or diplomacy, but in these spatial infrastructural technologies [...].’ (Easterling 2014, p. 15).

In as much as logistics is part of spatial and choreographic infrastructures of this kind, its very quality lies in an unnoticeable efficiency – the fantastically frictionless secrecy of operating underneath the radar of a general public concerned with seemingly more important matters. All the while, it is on the basis of these largely invisible choreologicistic infrastructures that Western liberal subjects act as apparently free and autonomous citizens.

Thinking of Hapag-Lloyd, one might mention the fact that in the mid-19th century the name ‘Lloyd’ was used as a general term for a shipping company. Yet, it also points to an actual place and person: Edward Lloyd, who, in 1688, opened a coffeehouse on Tower Street in central London. One could argue that this forefather of modern choreologistics, by opening a coffeehouse, took part in the foundation of an important spatial technology of citizenship; for in both the Habermasian discourse on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and in Richard Sennett’s *The Rise and Fall of Public Man*, the coffeehouse holds a key position in the emergence of a modern bourgeois public sphere. Concurrent to the realms of power of the state and economics, the public sphere is posited as a normative ideal of inclusive deliberation and thereby allows for new and different practices of citizenship (Habermas 1962).² Richard Sennett explicitly highlights the performative dimension of the 18th century public sphere (Sennett 1974; Cvéjic and Vujanovic 2012). And the coffeehouse, as Craig Calhoun argues, is important to this specific performance of citizenship as part of its ‘institutional base’ and as ‘a new infrastructure for social communication’ (Calhoun 1992, p. 291).

‘But where does the coffee come from?’, post-colonial scholar Nikita Dhawan asked in a recent talk in Hamburg (Dhawan 2016), referring to the coffee sold and consumed at Lloyd’s and other coffeehouses all over Europe, that fostered the emergence of a modern public sphere? It is obvious what she hints at: beginning in the 17th century, coffee is industrially produced in Asian and South American colonies, based on exploitative slave trade and work. Both the luxury crop and the workforce needed to plant, maintain, harvest and refine it are taken from West Africa (and Ethiopia, where coffee supposedly originated from), made eminently transportable, and forcibly exploited. Only in as much as coffee thus becomes affordable as a mass product can it fuel the performance of the coffeehouse as spatial infrastructure of the public sphere. But what are the

implications of this entanglement of a bourgeois public sphere with colonial enterprise? Is there a structural, or *only* a historic dilemma at the heart of modern liberal citizenship? Who is allowed to perform in what role and function? And who is forced to work at the invisible choreologic base of what Arendt terms ‘the space of appearance’ (Arendt 1958, p. 199), unnoticed and never to appear themselves?

In the following, it is argued that citizenship is always situated in multiple assemblages that include divergent sets of invisible – often exploitative – infrastructures and choreologic modes of abduction. In as much as any act of citizenship can only exist based on these infrastructures, it employs modes of delegation that, voluntarily and involuntarily, stay invisible. Citizenship is then necessarily based on other delegated performances.³

Thinking about the constitutive dilemma inherited from the 18th century coffeehouse and the (exclusive) performance of citizenship it allowed for might be a way of challenging an easy conception of delegation that is central and constitutive of modern politics.

In political terms, delegation is that specific form of outsourcing that explicitly implies transfer of legitimation or authority to someone else, or a body of higher order, while at the same time implementing modes of accountability. The following definition is given in the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science*:

[...] delegation occurs in politics whenever one actor or body grants authority to another to act on behalf of or to carry out a function for the first in the political process. In such general terms, delegation is ubiquitous and a defining feature of politics beyond individual actions. Voters delegate to elected officials in representative government; governments delegate to ambassadors in foreign affairs; legislatures delegate to committees the authority to study policy issues and report bills and to the authority to make policy. (*International Encyclopedia of Political Science*, 2011, p. 548)

Yet, when looking at the logistical choreographies that emerge in the name of Lloyd’s, we can shed light on another, more problematic dimension of delegation, one that is not based on voluntary transfer of legitimation or authority, but rather on practices of exploitation and abduction. Generally speaking, we here deal with delegated performances and exploited bodies located in epistemological, ontological and geographical realms and regions that are actively negated, and therefore excluded from

the practice and legal framework of citizenship itself. How do we account for all of that? Or do we potentially have to move beyond counting, accounting, and accountability, beyond credit and credibility, to deal with this largely invisible, yet highly political dimension of citizenship and delegation?

In order to tackle these questions, we here sketch out how one specific choreologic network – that will be called ‘Lloyd’s assemblage’ – is at the heart of the modern performance of citizenship. Lloyd’s, we here speculate, could be the point of departure for understanding the entanglement of the notion of bourgeois public sphere, coffeehouse culture, coffee-plantations, colonialism, slave trade and, finally, insurances, financial trade and risk management. Can a notion of performance as delegation help us to take the emergence of ‘Lloyd’s assemblage’ into focus?

PERFORMANCE AS DELEGATION

Generally, a performative is a discursive, gestural or bodily act that participates in the generation of a social situation. A performative ‘does’ what it names, it enacts what it means. Nonetheless, any such performative creation or production is bound by conventional social procedures that have to be iterated (Austin 1982; Derrida 1988). A performative is thus always composed both of moments of repetition and of drift, or shift. Within the arts and cultural sciences, the notion of performance is often linked to the promise of experimentation or transformation (Fischer-Lichte 2008). It entails the possibility of altering conventions because it does more than to merely represent them. Concurrently, it can be read as the imperative to become effective, governed by convention and context from its beginning and thereby fostering dangerous neoliberal regimes of ‘self-responsibility’ (McKenzie 2001; Butler 2015, pp. 5–12).

In its history, the concept of performance is most often related to two central notions: execution and embodiment. When talking of performance as execution, we claim that an action matches an already existing quantifiable standard or that it follows a pre-written social script. Talking of performance as embodiment, we highlight the physical-material presence and the taking into service of bodily capacities. In performance, a material body is put on the line: it becomes visible, it exposes itself, gains voice and agency, all the while being rendered subject to contextual judgements, norms and conventions.

In linking performance and delegation, we argue for a shift away from the old opposition of performance and representation – where it is performance that exceeds practices of representation. This reflection might serve as counter-argument against easy celebratory claims of the ‘transformative power’ of performance, sometimes articulated within artistic theories of performance. As Lepecki reminds us in his most recent book (Lepecki 2016), we have to take into consideration how performance is constituted by a ‘structural paradox’: it ‘can be read as both experimentation and normativity’ (McKenzie 2001, p. ix). By contrast, we here want to focus on actual and real-worldly distributions of agency that performance enacts, shifts or sustains.

It is in the vein of Adam Smith, maybe, that we can then talk of performance as delegation and thus as a specific mode of a ‘division of labour’ (Smith 1993): performance always entails the possibility to delegate work, in the sense of making someone else execute a task. This is what choreographers normally do – they hire dancers, highly trained bodies that can successfully execute virtuosic movements. Regarding the social realm, the nexus of script and delegated execution is developed further in Judith Butler’s theory of gender: While we are interpolated by a hetero-normative regulatory matrix that shapes our behaviour, this matrix becomes effective only insofar as we actually perform it in our daily routines (Butler 1990, 1993).

But let us deepen, or rather turn around the logic that is analysed here. As Bruno Latour and others have argued, in executing an action – contained within my daily performances (that are surely highly pre-scribed in social terms) – I always rely upon a heterogeneous field of co-operating entities, a milieu or network that enables these actions. Within this theoretic framework, to perform means to become the delegate of a wide array of enmeshed, inter-connected bodies, human and non-human. Already in 1992, Latour explicitly speaks of delegation to non-humans when analysing the socio-political power of technology (Latour 1992). But most explicitly, the aspect of delegation is expressed in his model of mediators, which is at the base of his understanding of agency. In mediated agency, Latour argues, ‘action is [...] shifted or *delegated* [my emphasis] to different types of actors which are able to transport the action further through other modes of action, or types of forces altogether.’ (Latour 2005, p. 70).

Latour’s concept of delegation as transfer or translation of agency makes apparent how any form of expression, including performance, is predicated upon the take-over of a potential that is – at least partly –

located in the surrounding milieu. Interestingly, in a text from 2010, Judith Butler develops a similar idea in relation to performativity. Here, she speaks about the performativity of economics that, according to her, necessarily relies upon organizations of human and non-human networks, including technology. In her analysis of pricing patterns, a performative always activates a broad network of entities, human and non-human alike:

Hence, even when Bernanke speaks, it is not simply that a subject performs a speech act; rather, a set of relations and practices are constantly renewed, and agency traverses human and non-human domains. What this means, though, is that performativity implies a certain critique of the subject, especially once it is severed from the Austinian presumption that there is always *someone* who is *delegated* [my emphasis] to speak or that performative discourse has to take the form of discrete verbal enunciation. (Butler 2010, p. 150)

The concept of a ‘sovereign’ speaker is lost, for one presumes that agency itself is dispersed. At the very crossing point of performance and delegation, we are thus able to formulate an extended notion of performance. Here, performance names the historic and artificial process in which a set of relations between bodies – their practices of moving and reacting with one another, the institutional structures that thus emerge and their technological and choreologic dimension – is constantly renewed.

In short, a system of relations, that one could also term assemblage, re-generates itself over time, performatively and through its performance. Any such assemblage exists only insofar as it is built from interacting components, yet at the same time acts both as a resource and a constraint to those components. As forms of co-functioning and co-evolution of divergent parts, assemblages both enable potential movement and action, as well as inhibiting other movements or action-possibilities of their components. Indeed, Manuel De Landa – whose conception of *agencements* might be deemed rather technical but is used here for its abstracted clarity – writes: ‘[...] a whole provides its components with *constraints and resources*, placing limitations on what they can do while enabling novel performances.’ (De Landa 2006, pp. 34–5).

Within an assemblage, agency is distributed and will thus constantly be taken over by other components; it is delegated upwards, downwards, but most notably, delegated sideways or transversally. This means that for the

performative to become effective, the whole network has to be activated. With this notion of performance as delegation within assemblages, one can now explicitly account for the fact that acting or performing is not only a voluntary act of appearance, but always involves an involuntarily component. One becomes a delegate of an assembled field of differently abled bodies, of heterogeneous networks too manifold and too big to be made fully transparent. In as much as one takes over agentic potentials, thus one acts beyond being able to pay back what we will here call one's 'agentic debts'.

In arguing for an understanding of performance as delegation (and vice versa), we have outlined a possible use of the concept that is different compared to the political conception of delegation mentioned above. While delegation is a prevalent and necessary mode of transferring authority and legitimation in modern politics – a transfer of authority that constantly has to be checked, monitored and balanced by means of instituting modes of accountability – in this model, delegation always begins with a distribution of agency. As agency is always predicated on the activation of manifold sets of relations and comprises material, technological, animal and human entities, in as much as I perform, I thus become the delegate of a distributed field of agency without necessarily having been legitimized to do so and beyond being fully accountable.

When assimilating these arguments into our discussion of citizenship, what becomes apparent at this convergence point – the point where performance can finally be understood as a takeover, as borrowing, reception, acquisition, and transfer of agency – is a structural dilemma. Citizenship necessarily begs for transparent and well-balanced modes of exchange of legitimation and authority regulated by delegation and its counterpart of accountability. Yet, as performance – that is in its dimension as practice – it always implies the collaboration, the usage or using, the mediated transfer, or, even more so, the exploitation of a wide field of other and differently abled bodies and entities, and maybe does so beyond fantasies of full transparency or accountability. These forms of exploitation will often include modes of choreologicistic abduction, even if they may not be limited to those.

LLOYD'S ASSEMBLAGE

When Edward Lloyd established his coffeehouse in 1688, it was quickly frequented mostly by men: sailors, merchants, ship-owners and businessmen in the shipping industry. Lloyd – because he was at the centre of the information flow – was able to provide them with reliable shipping news that also took shape in the form of a newspaper named Lloyd's, published thrice weekly. For this reason, it was here that important agents of the growing shipping industry gathered to discuss insurance deals. The dealing that took place eventually led to the establishment of insurance markets such as Lloyd's of London, Lloyd's register and several related shipping and insurance businesses.

Compellingly, at the very moment in history when the slave trade is being established on an ever-bigger scale, we find (among other things) the very coffeehouse of Lloyd's (and its infamous offsprings) at the centre of the gigantic colonial enterprise. As Eric Williams, the famous early anti-colonial historian, reminds us in *Capitalism and Slavery*: 'Lloyd's, like other insurance companies, insured slaves and slave ships, and was vitally interested in legal decisions as to what constituted "natural death" and "perils of the sea".' (Williams 1944, pp. 104–5).

While only able to briefly sketch these entanglements here, what we can take into focus when looking at what may then be termed 'Lloyd's assemblage', is the installation – performatively and as performance – of a whole new set of relations, practices and technologies. Elucidating 'Lloyd's assemblage', we begin to see that the 17th century on the one hand witnessed the emergence of a bourgeois spatial technology of citizenship – namely the coffeehouse which helped to spawn its nowadays emphatically welcomed offspring, the public sphere. On the other hand, these structures are inherently entangled with entirely different sets of materials, practices and technologies. They include the foundation of the Atlantic slave trade and its related legal frameworks – which are hinted at in the above citation, and which can easily be linked to what Achille Mbembe terms 'necropolitics', that is, modes of sovereignty that reside 'in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die' (Mbembe 2003, p. 11). Furthermore, 'Lloyd's assemblage' is constituted by new techniques of accounting for risk: the concept of insurance or, more generally spoken, risk management, which is, at least in its early form, born from within the shipping industry (aside from fire insurances). In his fantastic and alarming book, *Specters of the Atlantic*, Ian Baucom narrates the terrifying events on board of the slave ship *Zong*,

where, in September 1781, 133 slaves were thrown overboard for the Liverpool owners of the ship to be able to file an insurance claim for their lost cargo. And, indeed, Baucom closely links these events to the workings of insurance companies such as Lloyd’s and a newly flourishing market for financial trade based on speculation established in the 18th century (Baucom 2005).

What becomes apparent, first of all, is how the modern performance of citizenship has never been a national affair in the first place. Political theorist Aihwa Ong has argued that citizenship – which used to be a relatively coherent assemblage of rights, entitlements, a nation state and its territory – today becomes more and more disarticulated from its original entanglement with the nation state and is thus reconfigured:

We used to think of different dimensions of citizenship – rights, entitlements, a state, territoriality, etc. – as more or less tied together. Increasingly, some of these components are becoming disarticulated from each other, and articulated with diverse universalizing norms defined by markets, neoliberal values, or human rights. (...) The space of the assemblage, rather than the territory of the nation-state, is the site for new political mobilizations and claims. In sites of emergence, a spectrum of mobile and excluded populations articulates rights and claims in universalizing terms of neoliberal criteria or human rights. (Ong 2006, p. 500)

Ong’s argument can be extended. Modern citizenship has always comprised multiple and international infrastructures of domination and a largely invisible and exploitative choreography of logistics. In its peculiar choreologicistic logics, ‘Lloyd’s assemblage’ turns everybody (and everything) it transports into liquid quanta – to be shipped, insured and eventually disposed of as ‘cargo’. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, in their essay ‘Fantasy in the Hold’ remind us, it is through the shipping of slaves that practices such as ‘containerization’ – the technology for the capture and transportation of this paradigmatic ‘commodity that speaks’ – lay the foundation for modern logistical capitalism and world-spanning systems of domination and exploitation of whoever or whatever cannot be counted or categorized as ‘person’ or fully-human. For that matter, ‘modern logistics is founded with the first great movement of commodities, the ones that could speak. It was founded in the Atlantic slave trade, founded against the Atlantic slave.’ (Harney and Moten 2013, p. 92).

If, in fact, as we want to suggest, a modern performance of citizenship is predicated on the cooperation and exploitation of multiple bodies, bodies that are actively or unknowingly excluded from the Western public sphere by being rendered mere material of choreographic modes of abduction, what consequences does that have for the notion and practice of citizenship? Today, one could think of the super-exploitative conditions under which the tablets and smartphones are produced that actually provide the material infrastructure for some of the highly mediatized public protests of the last years (Dhawan 2016). How can we identify the inherent logics of these choreologicistic assemblages?

What is installed in ‘Lloyd’s assemblage’ primarily is a way of accounting for risk, accounting for the risk of cooperation as bourgeois citizens – which is a cooperation that is predicated on mediated agency, not to say domination. It happens at sea, and, as Burkhardt Wolf tells us: ‘The land is full of dangers, whereas the sea yields risks’ (Wolf 2013). Now, dangers can be overcome, but risks can only be calculated, they have to be counted and accounted for. And is this not the mode of operation of ‘Lloyd’s assemblage’, of logistics in general? Its logic resides in the desire to manage, that is, to quantify and render quantifiable the risk of capturing, transporting and speculating on all these different commodities that speak, these mute or muted objects that ask for participation nonetheless, and that we involuntarily become delegates of in our daily performances, political or not. How is it that we want to account for these movements, these other performances, this work and generativity, these local and global, human and non-human forces that our performance as citizens bases itself upon, but which might, at least partly, stay oblique, beyond transparency, beyond critique? How can our sense of delegation, as risk that needs to be calculated and governed in the name of (financial) speculation, be complemented with another take on delegation – one that welcomes it as debt that cannot be paid back?

‘The [...] transport of things remains, as ever, logistics’ unrealizable ambition,’ Harney and Moten remind us (Harney and Moten 2013, p. 92). With this claim in mind, and thinking back to a conception of logistics as ‘infinitely complex choreography’, I wonder how to propose an even more speculative notion of choreography, one that overtly affronts the choreologicistic modes of abduction and exploitation outlined in this text. How to think of choreography as a mode of documenting, as a practice of care and trust, as a certain giving up on agency? Is it the art of listening to other, nonlinear, unmanageable movements, never to be

captured fully? And, while performance used to carry the meaning of freely placing one’s own body in the spotlight, on the line, on the street – could it become the practice of taking responsibility of one’s entanglements beyond what one can rationally account for? How could *we* do so? *We* citizens (of Hamburg, or other cities), who come to realize that we have been and still are, more than ever, silent accomplices of choreologistics, every day, not only as share-holders of Hapag-Lloyd.

NOTES

1. The city has less bearing on the company today, as it sold some of its shares and also because of a planned merger of Hapag-Lloyd AG with its competitor UASC (United Arab Shipping Company) in 2017. Yet the three biggest shareholders of Hapag-Lloyd AG – the Chilean shipping company CSAV, the City of Hamburg and Kühne Maritime – still have an agreement to pool 52 per cent of the shares in Hapag-Lloyd in order to take key decisions together (Welt 2016; Hapag-Lloyd 2016; World Maritime News 2016; Onvista 2016).
2. It is important to mention Nancy Fraser’s critique of the Habermasian notion of bourgeois public sphere which puts into question the normative ideals implied for the public sphere from a gender perspective (Fraser 1990).
3. I take the notion of delegated performance from a lecture by André Lepecki, given at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, February 2013 (Lepecki 2013). In the lecture, he uses the notion of delegation in relation to work by Bruce Nauman and Santiago Sierra to designate an entanglement of practices of command, the production of subjectivity and an embodied dimension of performance. Furthermore, Claire Bishop published an article entitled ‘Delegated Performance’ in which she utilizes the term to describe artistic practices that are based on hiring non-professionals to perform (Bishop 2012, p. 91). In this paper I hope to give a somewhat different, more extensive meaning to this notion.

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