



Editorial Statement

SAMANTHA VASSEUR

The fourth issue of VVV, entitled *Crowds*, seeks to address plurality both in its absorptive and exclusionary capacities. As a grouping of people more or less anonymous to one another, crowds are accidental entities just as much as they are politicized collective bodies. From an architect's perspective, crowds are a force to be controlled through the funnel of egress. Crowds are an emergency. Yet crowds also emerge as a celebration, a parade, a swarm, a rash, confetti. As indeterminate and unpredictable as they are, crowds are an incentive for movement.

The medieval word for crowd was 'press': c. 1300, *presse*, "crowd, throng, company; crowding and jostling of a throng; a massing together. The verb 'to press', in turn, derives from *prae-* "before" + *stare* "to stand". The crowd pushes you, fulfilling the tendency that amounts to its most salient characteristic. If we are observant etymologists, the crowd is the person standing in front of you, providing visual and motional restriction. Its meaning is thereby inherently nomadic, escaping itself to linger within

whomever blocks the way. In this we find its capacity to continually generate inquiry. Intent assemblies, attentive audiences, rallies in protest, ruled armies, majority rule—all manifest different degrees of docility, unanimity and unruliness.

Elias Canetti discerns the Open Crowd: “A few people may have been standing together—five, ten or twelve, not more; nothing has been announced, nothing is expected. Suddenly everywhere is black with people and more come streaming from all sides as though streets had only one direction.” The crowd pushes onto free electrons, including them in its gush. They are inclusive by sheer number and gross trajectory. All crowds admit of members recalcitrant to their norm, whether by accident or by volition: the coughing spectator in the silent audience, the duffer that spills their drink at the feast, the person trying to cross the road flooded by the parade—all inflect the integument of the crowd. For Rousseau, one is part of society not despite one’s individuality but precisely because of it.

Crowds are not simply accounted for by exceptions involved in a series they think themselves exempt from. An exhaustive appreciation of crowds may address their propensity to exclusion, which brings us back exile, or at least to Marcus Aurelius’ reflection that one can be most alone in a crowd. Swarms, packs, gaggles, formations, rashes, epidemics: crowds are absorptive, closed, surreptitious, public, indifferent, intentional. The epidemic is a crowd that subsumes the former constitution of the crowd. For the architect, the crowd may be the life they ought to control. “Panic is the disintegration of the crowd within the crowd” Canetti apprises us.