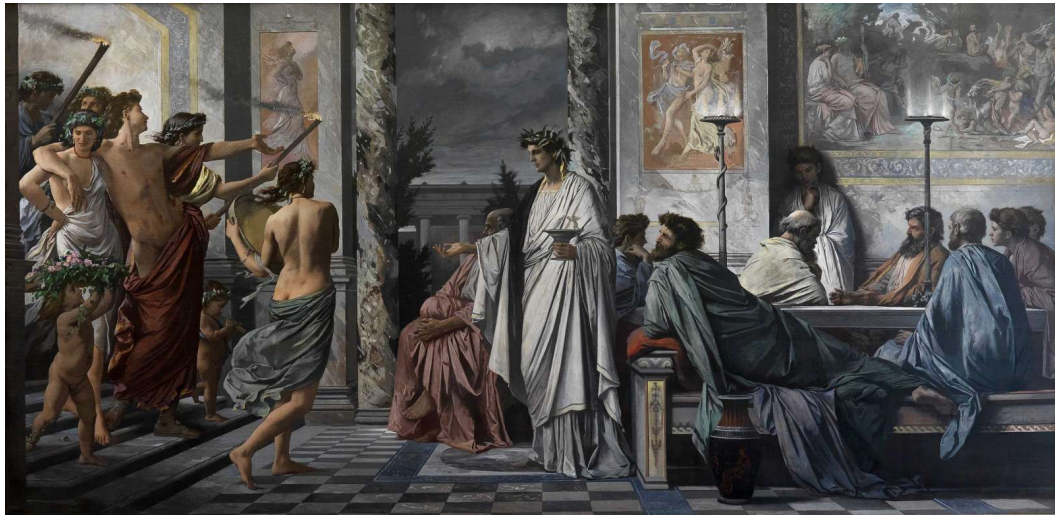


Oxana Timofeeva

Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #4



Anselm Feuerbach, Symposium, 1869

For Sharing The Space

I belong to the university. My classes are usually twice a week. When I teach in the morning, I really enjoy seeing how students are slightly waking up during the seminar. Some of them had a long way to here, through the resistance of the city, took public transportation, some holding cups of coffee or thermos flasks of strong pu-erh tea, some trying to hide the traces of the sleepless night – I prefer to think that they were partying and having sex, but, of course, I know the truth: they were reading books and writing essays. Someone always carries the flu; people cough and sneeze: we live in windy and rainy Saint Petersburg and never stop infecting each other.

I teach contemporary philosophy. We begin from Parmenides by Plato. You might have doubts that Plato is a contemporary philosopher, but yes, he is. Philosophy is about sharing time, as well as sharing space. In Plato's Dialogues, people meet and talk. He describes the places where they meet, their appearances, their dresses and footwear. His main protagonist is Socrates, a true philosopher, so loved by many, but sentenced to death by the local authorities on the count of "corrupting the youth". How did Socrates corrupt the youth? Simply like that: he made them think. For this, a personal dialog was needed. Not a lecture, but what we

now call seminar, colloquium, or, better, as it was originally referred to by Plato, symposium. Plato's "symposium" is actually a feast, a party. Many things happen during this symposium – someone gets drunk, someone is trying to seduce, someone is falling asleep. Lots of corruption, indeed, and no censorship except everyone's personal will to retain dignity.

That's how I see an ideal institution: really far from sterility. No only philosophy, but culture in general is corruption, or, as Hegel says about the enlightenment in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, contagion. The process of learning and teaching demands full bodily presence. An institution in a proper sense is this: an organization of full collective bodily presence, with its internal modes of retaining dignity. We have to breathe the same air and share the same space, otherwise, believe me or not, the space will collapse. When your "zoom" is over, and you realize that there is nobody around, you can see how it collapses already; for the space to exist, more than one body is needed.

The pandemic outbreak reveals that externally imposed self-isolation is in principle anti-institutional: trying to preserve the bodies from contagion, it blocks their contacts, the necessary moment of corruption and life that is needed for the very space to exist. I see the possibility of a future where not only philosophy, but all education and culture will move online; this model perfectly fits capitalist ideology of sterility and individualism, but I cannot say that I like this model of the future. I will definitely prefer making true love and getting infected than masturbating alone, even to the best cultural porn ever.

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