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ARTLEAKS GAZETTE 2

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ArtLeaks Gazette 2 (An)Other Art World(s)? Imagination Beyond Fiction

Introduction

While the first issue of the ArtLeaks Gazette sought to draw attention to the systemic abuse, repression and exploitation inherent in the contemporary art system, with this issue we take the next step in thinking more critically in the direction of how this system could be transformed, and meaningful ways of engagement in the art world today. Some of authors that we gathered for this task explore what it means to re-claim the institutional space, to disrupt the business as usual of auction houses, big galleries, or even take over corrupt state institutions in the long term. Others look towards artistic education outside the private academia as key to creating real social alternatives and ways of thinking and doing an engaged art, opening the possibilities for resistant political subjectivities.

Similarly as it is the case of post-Occupy era activists who grapple with common issues of the ephemerality of their actions when transforming public spaces in cities across the globe, so do these present-day cultural workers strive towards finding depth-reaching strategies to transform culture and society. It seems ever more important today to insist on the yet not consolidated openings and alternatives engendered by the social movements of the past few years, in which art and culture played important roles.

Our original questions for the open call: What are the conditions and possibilities of alternative art worlds? and How can we engage and use our imagination, at the same time avoiding the traps of utopian thinking? have been answered by artists, activists, and thinkers coming from the Global North and South, from both Eastern and Wester Europe. Our intention is not to globalize our publication as a goal in itself, rather, it has been ArtLeaks' politics from the beginning to shine more light on historically marginalized or unknown problems and articulation of solutions located beyond the finance capitals in the so-called West or Former West.

Our aim here is to present the reader with different strategies of art workers whose ideas and visual languages go against the grain of the usual aesthetics and discourses. Emphasizing the international character of a growing resistance calling for a different way of making art, running institutions and therefore doing politics, these art workers translate their aspirations into a renewed cycle of struggles.
Finally, we conceived this issue as a tool for connecting and mapping different active groups and initiatives, which do not necessarily come together into a composite solution to all our problems. Rather we envision that the zones of overlap and tension between ways of organizing, alternative economies and alternative art production will work towards strengthening cultural and political ties between different groups and sectors of the present-day artistic working class. We imagined the ArtLeaks Gazette as a useful tool for coordinating these struggles and perhaps to begin imagining how an international union of art workers could function. While capitalism has been internationalized, artists' struggle continue to be local/regional and remain atomized. Our publication therefore seeks to provide a possibility for imagining a larger, international union that can offer resistance and solidarity.

We thank to all those who have contributed and assisted us to put together the second issue of the ArtLeaks Gazette!

http://art-leaks.org

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ART WORKERS
OF THE
WORLD
UNITE!

SELF DIS→ORGANIZATION & STRIKE!

The Occupied Museum

Noah Fischer
With comments by Artur Żmijewski

This text is informed by individual and collective practice– particularly since the Occupy Wall Street Movement of September 2011. I hope its assumed that the groups discussed here: Occupy Museums, Horizontal BB7, Debtfair, Winter Holiday Camp, and Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F) contain divergent views. Here I share my pathways with them and through them, and my vision of our horizon.

Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F): March 2014 action: "Rebranding Guggenheim" with OWS illuminator. Photo: Noah Fischer/ Winter Holiday Camp: members and staff with "Diplomas." Photo: Gabriello Csoszo

What happens when a political art practice collides with a global movement? My answer is Occupy Museums, initiated in the most optimistic moment of Liberty Square and still developing as a movement-affiliated practice long after the tents were banished from public space. Like the OWS movement in general, Occupy Museums (OM) challenges the structures and languages of economic inequality in a highly visible cultural arena. This depends on rewiring embedded social assumptions such as contemporary art's default to luxury asset and a widespread obedience to the professional aura of Neoliberal institutions. OM is therefore a march from the conventions of the artworld toward a revolutionary mode. Yet conversely, we've sometimes managed to complicate and refine OWS-style protest aesthetics and tactics to an art form.

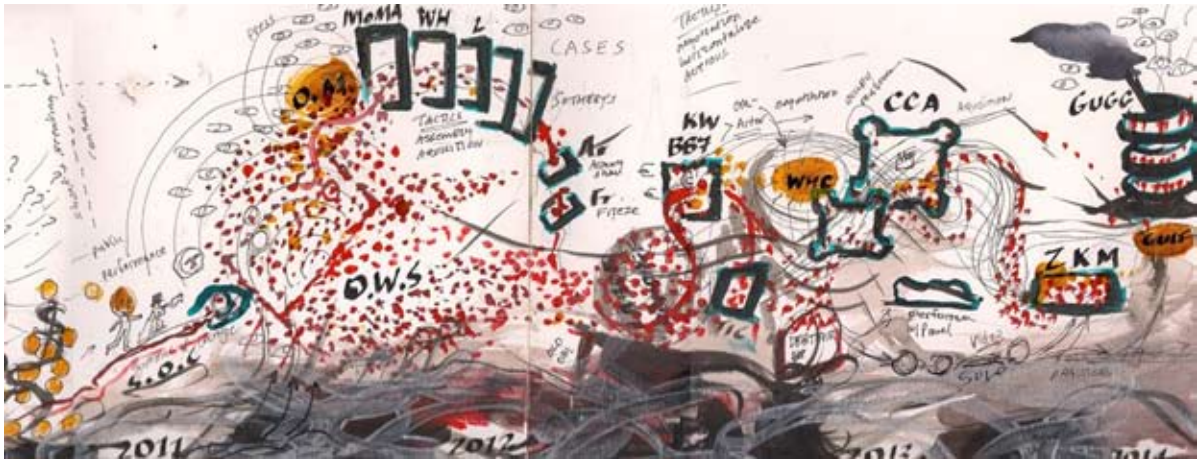
But who is this "we", and what does it mean to be "movement affiliated?" In my view, it's something like holding a dual citizenship. Despite the well-known breakdowns and failures of the Occupy Movement, there exists a large post-Occupy community which has reached a perspective from which we cannot so easily re-integrate into normative post-crash Capitalism. So almost by default we've become an entity: self-imposed outcasts perhaps, but with a clear mission and some resources. OM has been busy developing new dimensions of this mission, burrowing deeper into the artworld through a series of collaborative "cases" and picking up actors as we go: blossoming into an international network which can access many levels art world power. As an international group, we constantly research new campaigns, waiting for the right moment to meet up offline and catalyze live situations with new tactics, risk and in the flesh. Our strength lies in motliness: we are famous and unknown artists, museum guards who paint and sculpt, academics, wierdos, curators, lawyers, parents, debtors, but most of all, people claiming a personal stake in changing the status quo. Desperation is not unknown to us. In truth, we vibrate with anxiety. However, we found a way to channel anger and fear into nonviolent and thrilling action. Into functional politics. Gradually we discovered many resources within our loose network. We discovered joy in the craft of beautiful actions, so that our practice even appeared with the urgency of a high-energy art movement that seemed no longer possible in this stale market-friendly era. But more than a movement perhaps, we are holding up a territory, temporarily re-offering or unveil-

Museums under construction: Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, David H. Koch Plaza at the Met, Photo: http://www.guggenheim.org/abu-dhabi

ing the public space covered over by the private sphere. And finally, I realized that our post-occupy network in its energetic visual pulsing and dense communication structure and collective memory had become a sort of machine for propagating a new culture. So I propose to think of this entity not as a protest called "Occupy Museums" but as an institution: the Occupied Museum.

A Crisis

Many museums are quiet temples where it's still possible to be touched by the flow of time and hear the whisper of the muse; schoolchildren make pilgrimages for a chance to stare into the eyes of ancient Etruscan Noblewomen or 17th century madmen or just globs of colorful paint: a generative contact with cultural meaning. But these days, meaning-creation is undermined by the well-known crisis of market-generated inequality. In order for artworks to circulate as highly speculative assets, and for oligarchs to rise in social power by way of museum boards, certain boxes must be checked. Museums guarantee historical standing—the key metric for market value. Even as global exhibitions and artfairs proliferate, we are seeing a small cadre of art institutions and shortlist of artists trading evermore heavily



Occupied Museum practice, a movement flowing through and around institutional frames. Drawing: Noah Fischer

on their apparent rareness; emptied-out but highly visible brand names. But this visibility depends upon the invisibility of labor abuse and debt relations churning at the base of the art-globe pyramid. Value and labor is sucked upwards by precise instruments, but unlike the financial industry which is rightly perceived as crooked, the art world and market is masked by the rhetoric of genius and creativity and the benevolent aura of art. This veiling trick makes museums irresistible for Late Capitalists.

Museums can't help but express their times. We know that the phenomenon of art masking over economic inequality stretches way back to the Colonial pillage of the Global South when they quickly filled up with stolen objects, temples, even people. But that was a century ago or more, before the rise of the middle class and institutions that serve them. However, when we look at today's newest institutions (just to use American ones as examples) we eoncounter obscene vignettes of a new oligarchy: a Guggenheim branch for jetsetters touching down in Abu Dhabi- to be built by bonded migrant labor; the public space of the largest US museum- the Metropolitan- redesigned and named after Tea Party funder David Koch; the New Whitney Museum perched on top of the connecting station of the brand new hydro-fracked gas pipeline brought into NYC by Bloomberg-One couldn't think up better parodies.

Museums are like canaries singing: our culture is in crisis! It's troubling to realize that art museums, among all the Neoliberal institutions have proven especially adept at veiling and normalizing economic social and environmental injustice.

The Occupied Museum

The Occupied Museum unveils this incredible obscenity as blockbuster exhibition. It exhibits the private dividing lines that permeate the faux-public space of Neoliberal institutions. From this mission flow art forms: the spontaneously unfolding performances, epic disruptions, scripted press interactions, illuminated facade projections, community agreements, collective sculpture, painting, and writing. The Occupied Museum understands art in the age of a world-widening economic gulf as necessarily the outcome of conflict. It exhibits and records the creative clash between visible and hidden populations and between visible and invisible art histories.

The Occupied Museum owes only one thing to the public: departure from the display of Capitalist business-as-usual. Sometimes the most important exhibitions are intricate, aggravating horizontal group processes which explore the potential democratic (crowd-expressing) functioning of the frame in which we understand art. Sometimes the usually hidden absurdity of power relations provide brutte-spectacle: police appear en masse in front of MoMA, curators retreat, and the main gate shuts in the face of an elderly black lady and 6 artists (during opening hours) at the Museum of American Finance on Wall Street. Other exhibitions seem to reproduce all the aesthetic spectacle of a blockbuster show, but a disruptive and uninvited one: Philip Glass mic-checks the end of his opera on the streets in front of Lincoln Center while police standing in a long line barricade off a public plaza; hand-drawn dollar bills rain for minutes inside the "debt spiral" of an aggressively globalizing Guggenheim and the stunned audience pauses in hushed quiet.
The police usually appear to close the exhibitions. Art and all its accompanying privileges make an effective alibi: arrests are rarely made.

First Occupy Museums assembly at MoMA, October 20, 2011 (Noah Fischer in coin mask). Photo: Jerry Saltz/ OM member Max Liboiron Marching with Queen Mother Dr. Delois Blakely, Community Mayor of Harlem, with model of her home at 477 W. 142nd Street to the Museum of American Finance Photo: Noah Fischer

From Claiming the Streets to Unlocking the Zoo

Standing in Liberty Park in early October 2011, there was wide understanding that the Occupy Wall Street Movement pointed to more than the 2008 financial sector abuse. We were concerned by a crisis of the entire public sphere, and only starting at an obvious "ground-zero." Experience had led me to believe that the visual arts; one of the world's largest unregulated markets, was central, not tangential to this crisis.[1] Strikingly, just as the crash was wreaking increasing havoc on the middle class as unemployment benefits ran out in 2011, art auctions were setting records, and private museums were popping up like gaudy magic mushrooms. It was clear that the mainstream artworld was intimately connected to the mechanisms of economic inequality. However, in Liberty Square, Puerta del Sol, and other occupied squares around the world, many people had a collective vision of art transitioning beyond Late Capitalism.[2] I thought that rather than primarily highlight the auctions, galleries and art fairs (the obvious targets of the private market), to instead challenge the authoritative public-facing "temples"- where cultural capital is extracted from the public sphere on which all the speculation depends. Museums owe their authority to their public mission and to the existence of canons: the very narratives which are susceptible to conflicts of interest. Like ratings agencies, these are exactly the kind of tools that Wall Street players like to manipulate in order to win every time.

Three weeks after the Occupation had begun, all this bubbled up in a hastily written manifesto and call to action I posted to Facebook called "Occupy Museums!" This went viral, was published in newspapers nationally, and soon became an OWS style horizontal action group, meeting on Mondays in the private/public indoor space of 60 Wall Street which was the hub of OWS organizing. From October 20th, 2011, a group of 10-20 people went on a kind of weekly action rampage, cooking up different ways to pull MoMA, Sotheby's, Lincoln Center, many NYC museums into the growing public conversation about inequality, labor abuse, and deterioration of the public sphere.

At first I thought to simply extend the phenomena of Liberty Park to the museum, holding general assemblies on the sidewalks in front of MoMA.[3] These were institutional collisions. We represented a known entity-at the time filling the newspapers with daily stories. We counted on our network's abundant resources: free printing, reclaimed public space, internal organizing lists, and our own media (livestream, blogs, social media) plus key relationships with mainstream press. We stood in solidarity with the OWS governing structure, seeking consensus in assemblies or working groups[4]. At the first Occupy Museums action at MoMA, high level staffers came down to talk to me alone and quietly, as if I could represent the concerns of a grassroots phenomena. I simply told them we'd be back next week with even more people. Looking back to this early stage, we were basically evangelists from what seemed like a radical new culture. But movements unfold in stages and this was only the honeymoon stage.

Horizontal meeting at BB7 2012 photo: Max Liboiron/ Media working group at Horizontal BB7 photo: Noah Fischer

The Horizontal 7th Berlin Biennale

Around the metal tables of 60 Wall Street after runnig meetings with hand signs, we'd talk unofficially and we often discussed what an ethical museum might look like. Maybe Liberty Park was already a kind of museum? Occupy Groups were already finding playful ways to archive its unfolding culture. Certainly our action assemblies were effective Culture-Machines for including lots of voices and veering toward spontaneous outcomes. However, we had no chance to know whether contemporary museums could be transformed from the inside since there weren't invitations coming from the 1% funded US museums to come and occupy them. However, pretty soon, one arrived from Europe. We accepted an invitation from curators Joanna Warsza and Artur Zmijewski[5] and twelve of us[6] arrived at the Seventh Berlin Biennale a month after it had started, and after the press had long declared it a failure.

Artur Zmijewski: *We were trying to invite people from different 'protest' movements and convince them to 'take part' in the 7th Berlin Biennale. Our people were travelling to Madrid, Barcelona, New York, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and so on to meet and talk to people from Indignados and Occupy Movements. We started this work in 2011 and on this direct way the process of trust building began. In the interview with Noah Fischer conducted by Joanna Warsza, Noah was talking about MOMA curators who are confronted with Occupy actions, but do not want to meet activists. So, we decided to invite activists. But with certain hope, that they can do what we are not able to do – to open the art institution and start a process of the transformation of it. I did not want to exhibit them, I did not want to create a ZOO – I wanted to offer them the institution itself - Kunst-Werke - which they could hack and use freely for their purposes. That's how the invitation was formulated. The first action by Occupy Berlin was the occupation of Biennale's press conference. It was a proposal by two representatives of this group: Grischa and Mario. We accepted it and during the press conference members of Occupy movements started to moderate it. They presented their manifesto and started open debate with*

journalists about "what each of us can do for global change". It was a first moment when the art institution was really challenged by the autonomous action. As a Biennale we paid a certain price for it – we lost the sympathy of journalists.

NF: Before leaving for Berlin we hosted a discussion at 16 Beaver entitled "Occupations and Institutions- an Open Discussion with Occupy Museums." Generally the OWS community had been highly skeptical of any sort of institutional collaboration of involvement and the meeting at 16 Beaver was highly critical. Holding a "pure" autonomous position had been symbolically effective. Yet this was a moment to face the inevitable clash between inside and outside. We were preparing to go not as invited participants but more like warriors: unafraid of conflict. On arrival at the KW, we were led to a large bare-bones exhibition room in which to lay down our sleeping bags at night (passing KW visitors each morning to brush our teeth or take showers). The lower level main space was set up with circular benches for our assembly along with army tents and poster making stations. The setup felt exactly like a human zoo. This was mostly due to its unfortunate architectural layout. Visitors would watch us from a viewing platform elevated about the large pit area. This reduced the assemblies to performing behaviour of (surveilled) activists, and it seemed to fit in with Zmijewski's most cynical projects. However, in retrospect, the visibility and tension of this zoo was helpful. It was a catalyst for the situation to unfold antagonistically- the discomfort of the collision between movement and institution could not be hidden. Soon we moved our meetings from the zoo-space to the KW's upscale courtyard near Dan Graham's glass box cafe and there we planned actions at Deutsche Guggenheim and Pergamon Museum.

At the same time, I began a series of private negotiations with Artur. I saw that the negative press was to our benefit, that we were in a position to help him "save" the Biennial. I challenged Artur to go farther into his open concept and unfreeze the institutional frame which appeared to have cynically captured the movements. If this was not his intention, he might readily accept a radical path out of his own trap. When Artur seemed interested, our group formulated a proposal called "You cannot curate a movement"[7] which stipulated that he and Joanna step back as curators and join us to try out horizontal direct democracy in the whole institution of KW, or as far as we could go. The offer was accepted.

Artur Zmijewski: *I would say that they had some interesting tools, but these tools were not tested inside the formal institution. They had experiences from the squares, but not from daily work inside the formal institutional structure. So, the opportunity for Occupy Movement was to use their tools developed on the squares inside the institution of culture. It was not easy – for example the majority of activists were busy with "asamblea bureaucracy" – they had group meetings every day, but without conclusions. They did not know how to drill a hole in the institutional walls. Occupy Museum was the first group busy with the institution. Via their actions Occupy Museum was constantly provoking us – they asked us to write them an official letter from KW [signed by the BB7 curator and the director of KW] that they are artists and that their action is a part of the BB7.*

They wanted to give it to the police in case of troubles. We signed such documents, but we were not informed about the scenario of planned action. Finally we had a meeting in front of former Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, where they made one of their actions. After the action they started to talk to me and started to treat me as an 'empty figure' of art functionary, blaming me that I'm paid by the German government and that I cynically built a human ZOO in KW. It was a difficult, but interesting moment, when the negotiations between us started. The whole conversation happened just on the street, when the group was surrounded by police which was protecting the main entrance to the Guggenheim gallery. As a result we had a "street" or "square" agreement: we were to meet the next day and both sides would have proposals ready to be discussed. I wanted to propose them to be curators of BB7 together with me and Joanna Warsza. Their proposal was more radical – they wanted us to became 'former curators', and to decide about the Biennale and about KW together with Occupy movement. Because both proposals were quite similar, it was easy to find a consensus. We agreed on the activists' proposal. We became former curators and activists started to penetrate KW.

Horizontal BB7 outside of KW: Occupy Museums 15 June action at the Pergammon Museum. Photo: Max Libroiron/ "Occupied Banner" overpainted artwork in the courtyard, later displayed on the façade. Photo: Max Libroin.

NF: The horizontal process began with a series of general assemblies attended by a wide range of KW workers and public including director Gaby Horn, former curators, cleaning staff, and museum guards. There was a mixture of skepticism and excitement and those present consented to try the experiment for a limited time. We quickly formed working groups to try to merge with the workflow of the KW: there was a media and communications group, a focus on direct actions, on managing the space of the KW itself and on the research to make KW's budget fully transparent. I was in the media working group along with Artur, M15 activist Hector Huerga, and the whole KW/ BB7 media team. It became possible to change the official website and send collectively written texts as official KW press announcements to their complete mailing list. Of course, horizontalizing the institution's PR messaging center was a lot easier than navigating the deeper institutional levels such as building maintenance and accounts payable not to speak of the guarding and

display and insurance of the rest of the art in the Biennial. However, unprecedented research had begun. Occupy Museums member Tal Beery canvassed the KW offices with a questionnaire, repeatedly interviewing Director Gaby Horn about the budget. We were experimenting from the inside- trying to reformulate museums based on what we had learned about cooperation and public space in the squares.

Artur Zmijewski: *Certain period of time when the KW employees, former curators of BB7 and activists from Occupy Museum were working together I would call 'carnival'. The whole process was long – we were working one year to make 3 weeks of this carnival possible. But the institution became partly open and temporarily horizontalized. Activists from Occupy Museum tested their tools and shared their knowledge with us. We were able to practice alternative institution together with them. Political reality is brutal – after this experience KW went back to its former shape quite fast. But a few of the permanent KW employees decided to quit their job. After the experience which they had during BB7 they were not able to continue work under the same conditions.*

NF: It wasn't clear how much of the horizontality had been real, how much of it was a game in the KW sandbox. It was clear that the general public was confused about what had happened–having been largely left out of the entire affair. The meetings, collaborations, attempt at horizontality between artists, staff, and public, and of total financial transparency dissolved soon after we left, presumably most old rules either never changed since we didn't penetrate the institution enough, or were reinstated precisely on the exhibition schedule following our departure. Even when it appeared that the museum guards had been given a raise in wages following their speaking up at the assemblies, I was skeptical that the happy concrete outcome might also mask a lack of engagement with the heart of our direct democracy proposal.

Artur Zmijewski: *It's a bigger problem. I did not realize on the beginning that KW and BB7 are one institution even if they look like two entities – there is a permanent loyalty game. Employees are loyal to the director – when the new curator of the Biennale comes, they have to transfer a part of their loyalty to him or her. A mix of this loyalty and trust allow them to follow curatorial proposals. In case of Occupy Museum proposal, it became a problem. Curators agreed to be 'former curators' – they made a kind of risky step. Loyalty and trust allowed KW employees to follow the process, but not fully. The mid of biennale is a moment in time, when BB curator starts to lose his or her authority – loyalty of the employees goes back fully to the director of the whole institution. Even if they participate in the transformation of the institution, finally they would rather declare that 'it was nothing significant for them'. The curator will disappear in a few days – they will stay with the director. This loyalty game is another level of the Occupy Museum intervention. One of the employees who quit his job in KW after BB7 was a head of press department. He actively took part in the horizontalization process. Maybe he became more loyal to the transformation process, than to the boss and he was not able to invert it.*

NF: Skeptics reduced the Occupied BB7 to a performed politics. On the other hand, much effective resistance is essentially performance, visibly attempting the impossible and in so doing, making power relations obvious and therefore malleable. Horizontality at BB7 had uncovered potential strategies but also exposed mechanisms for dismantling or minimizing radical change as Artur describes above. Another example: consumption-focused art media geared to make single pronouncements on exhibitons could not effectively communicate the unfolding direct democracy process. So unlike many actions, we couldn't effectively use the media as a tool. If we were to re-launch an Occupied Museum, we had to learn better strategies to co-create the narrative.

Meanwhile, the energy of the movement continued to dissolve, leaving us on an uncomfortable cliff of political relevance. A few further significant "cases" which I do not have space to discuss here occurred at Momenta Art in New York[8] (which was cut short by Hurrican Sandy and the resurgence of the Occupy Movement in response to that crisis) and Truth is Concrete in Graz[9] but we did not succeed in getting much farther than Horizontal BB7 in 2012.

Winter Holiday Camp (WHC): Merging with an Institution in Crisis

In March 2013 I received an email from Artur Zmijewski requesting a meeting in Warsaw. I was summoned to join Artur and Pawel Althamer in planning a radical exhibition at Zamek Ujazdovski (CCA) to follow the development of the Berlin Biennale. The CCA was itself undergoing a public crisis. Director Fabio Cavallucci was locked in a struggle with nearly the entire museum staff, the Solidarność union was going public about the matter. We began the project by forming an international working group, about half Polish and half from abroad, rich in experience of institutional practice. After months of research trips and daily communication, which included interviews with many museum staff[10] who revealed the dire

Planning first intervention of uninvited Winter Holiday Camp at CCA. Drawing: Noah Fischer/ WHC members with "Institution in Crisis" suspended sign in front of CCA, December 2013. Photo: Gabriello Csoszo

precarious labor situation in detail, and after we decided to publicly support the workers, the project was cancelled (with a budget-alibi). Our group decided to go anyway, uninvited.[11]

When possible, uninvited practice is probably the best case for radical political practice in museums. This scenario doesn't include any "debt" to the institution so when antagonism arises, we can proceed in the struggle with our full toolbox and our freedoms. In the art world, invitations, favors, and connections among a highly networked community of competing individuals, creates significant blocks to harder edged political practice. Because of the high concentration and thus scarcity of opportunity and money, the very real possibility of alienation or even excommunication from a good position in the arts network often creates a losing equation for radical politics. The professional network is just too densely inter-surveilled. A counterstrategy is to build up value and resources in a parallel, radicalized network so one has less to lose by speaking out and acting without permission-one can "fall back" on a radical safety net.

In the first days, meeting in a café near the museum like a band of insurgents plotting the overthrow of a compound, we decided to re-frame the entrance to the castle with a suspended sign that read "Institution in Crisis." Occupy Museums member Tal Beery and I fashioned it from sticks, which the whole group had ritually gathered in the Polish woods. This welded the conflict onto the museum's own visible brand, and at the same time, announced an arrival.

An essential situation for initiating the Occupied Museum is a truly open public meeting: it breaks hierarchic stratification. When we Artur and I encountered director Fabio Cavallucci in the galleries and offhandedly suggested meeting, our seed was planted. We occupied the meeting, growing it into a public event with the press, staff, friends all invited. In this meeting we strongly voiced the fear and desperation of the staff in front of both director and workers, breaking through a

Winter Holiday Camp: Director Fabio Cavallucci signs the document to acquire WHC into CCA's permanent collection while Artur Zmijewski, Paula Struginska and Noah Fischer look on /WHC: all staff meeting with the BB7 banner in center, later to be overpainted by children.

culture of fear and silence. When the director tried to leave, he was blocked at the door by artist Joulia Strauss who menacingly clutched a steel trident. We had prepared a strategy. Our main aim was to offer the Winter Holiday Camp project itself (including the meeting we were in) to the director and the acquisitions committee as an artwork, and a Trojan Horse.

The acquisition tactic made use of a much adhered-to institutional rule of speculation, whereby value and importance is attached to a thing once it is officially collected by an institution. Usually museum collections are treated as value-enhancing stamps of cultural capital, however being in the collection comes with a kind of permission, a collected artist becomes something of a diplomat for the institutional brand, bearing a trace of its authority.[12]

However, hacking institutional logic contains an inherent problem in relation to the public sphere: it's usually non-visual, unspectacular, unsexy. It means embracing bureaucracy: long meetings in which an activated agenda struggles through the filters of group dynamics. They are often far more interesting to those involved than "outsiders." Unfortunately these outsiders are the general public—who may not have time on their hands to jump into the process. Thus, in the midst of WHC, we needed to create a stronger connection to the Warsaw public as we had failed to do in Berlin. Our opportunity was the exhibition called Fragment: Collection which had never been officially opened.[13] We used social media to autonomously host an opening – the "Opening of the Open Institution" inviting local artists, CCA curators, and even the Director to prepare speeches for our uninvited event in their museum. There was little they could do to stop the snowballing legitimacy of the event in the eyes of the local artists and public. We conceived of the opening as a ritual. Occupy Museums member Imani Brown led a voodoo cleansing dance, banishing spirits from the CCA galleries and offices with candles and incense. Artist Agnieszka Polska whose work was displayed in Fragment: Collection, sprinkled vodka

WHC Ritual assembly led by WHC member Imani Brown during "Opening of the Open Institution" to clean Zamek Ujazdowski of evil spirits. Photo: Noah Fischer/ WHC members Joulia Strauss, curator Marek Gozdziewski, and Imani Brown with WHC tridents that would later block Cavalucci's egress from the first meeting. Photo: Gabriella Csoszo

on each office door as a large group danced through the museum's restricted office level. Pawel Althamer painted with children, irreverently spray-painting a mural (actually, overpainting the central banner from BB7 displayed in an image above) in the middle of an installed gallery of artworks. We had opened something.

Visual Aesthetics Revisited as Political Tool

Occupy Museums actions had generally downplayed the importance of visually beautiful or highly-produced aesthetics. Instead, our actions opted for the functionality and performativity of group communication, for example, use of the human mic. If we needed signage it was often made in haste and there were only a few times we made anything like visual art, and then often by mistake.[14] Since the days of the park, we had defaulted to the OWS "pizza box" aesthetics which was partly due to urgency, partly as a visual sign of solidarity and a rejection of slick corporate aesthetics. Experience told us to be careful with visuality: the moment we had stepped into the Zoo-like "Occupied" space at BB7, it was clear that all the signage representing activist activity was working to counter-effect, the signs in the KW seemed like scalps collected by the institution rather than signifying empowerment. Visuality and its mute ease of circulation was just too-easy a target for co-op-

March 2013 Drawings in preparation for WHC. Pawel Althamer, Artur Zmijewski, Noah Fischer.

tion.[15] But an anti-visual position could fall into dogma, repellant to audiences and therefore politically unproductive. I felt that Occupy Museums wasn't necessarily a "post-studio" practice entailing stepping away from visual art practice. And there was irony in the fact that a group of artists had essentially assigned ourselves unpaid part time office jobs- consisting of meetings and digital work (heavy use of Google Docs and Skype) rather than hands-on art making. To be fair, I've come to enjoy meetings, and especially the ubiquitous collective writing practice, but it seemed that art was a missing ingredient in our practice.

Pawel Althamer and Artur Zmijewski often take out paper and inks in meetings and practice a spontaneous form of painting/conversation. This dance with the subconscious proved quite effective for brainstorming strategy in Warsaw. Group paintings became the official document of acquisition of Winter Holiday Camp by the CCA (image above), while a series of paintings we given out as thank you gifts to staff members. Unused galleries were filling with collective murals. In Warsaw, the Occupied Museum now claimed an abundance of visual art, distributed through a gift economy.

Public Space on Museum Walls?

Walls are museum's most powerful tools and they could perhaps also become ours. But I knew that touching the walls, coming close to the revered art objects on them was close to a social taboo which could brand the wall-toucher as anti-civilization; destroyer or art; dredging up images of the 16th Century sackers of Rome. At ZKM Museum's "Global Activism" exhibition (co-curated by Joulia Strauss), we first employed the tactic of "wall-chatting" / "exhibition supplementing." We began pinning note-sheets from an activists assembly onto the exhibition walls, right next to artworks which were canonizing the recent years of global activism. Artur and I began to draw with fat markers and paint directly on the curatorial text, sparking the whole assembly to join in on a massive "wall chat session." We wanted a single institution's voice opened to additional commentaries.[16] The whiteness of museum walls- the space between installed artworks-represents the taboo of purely private untouchable property- a property which is shifting from the public to the private domain. Recently built "speculative museums"[17] such as New Museum in NYC often feature larger expanses of such white space, echoing blue chip art galleries. Does it devalue the public's experience with an artwork to claim this patch of public space? Wall chatting seemed instead to add social value. We repeated this tactic later in a Global Ultra Luxury Faction (G.U.L.F) action at the Guggenheim New York, taping a silver mylar manifesto to the Guggenheim's exhibition walls near the curatorial text. Later, G.U.L.F organized a more ambitious wall action where we taped colorful graphics next to the exhibited paintings of the blockbuster exhibition "Italian Futurism: Reconstructing the Universe," calling on Trustees to support fair labor in Abu Dhabi. The taboo of an uninvited addition to the walls charged up the manifesto with political relevance: people immediately assembled to read it and security guards ripped the graphics down within minutes.[18] The tactic hit a nerve. Luckily we had taken snapshots.

Horizon: A Debt Market Underneath the Museum

Occupying the "Temples of Culture" seems effective for shifting a conversation the first step, but this conceptual shift has limits. Beneath (or perhaps above) the temples lie the shark-infested waters of the market, and the most daunting challenge on the horizon is shifting the economic behavior that propagates inequality. Money

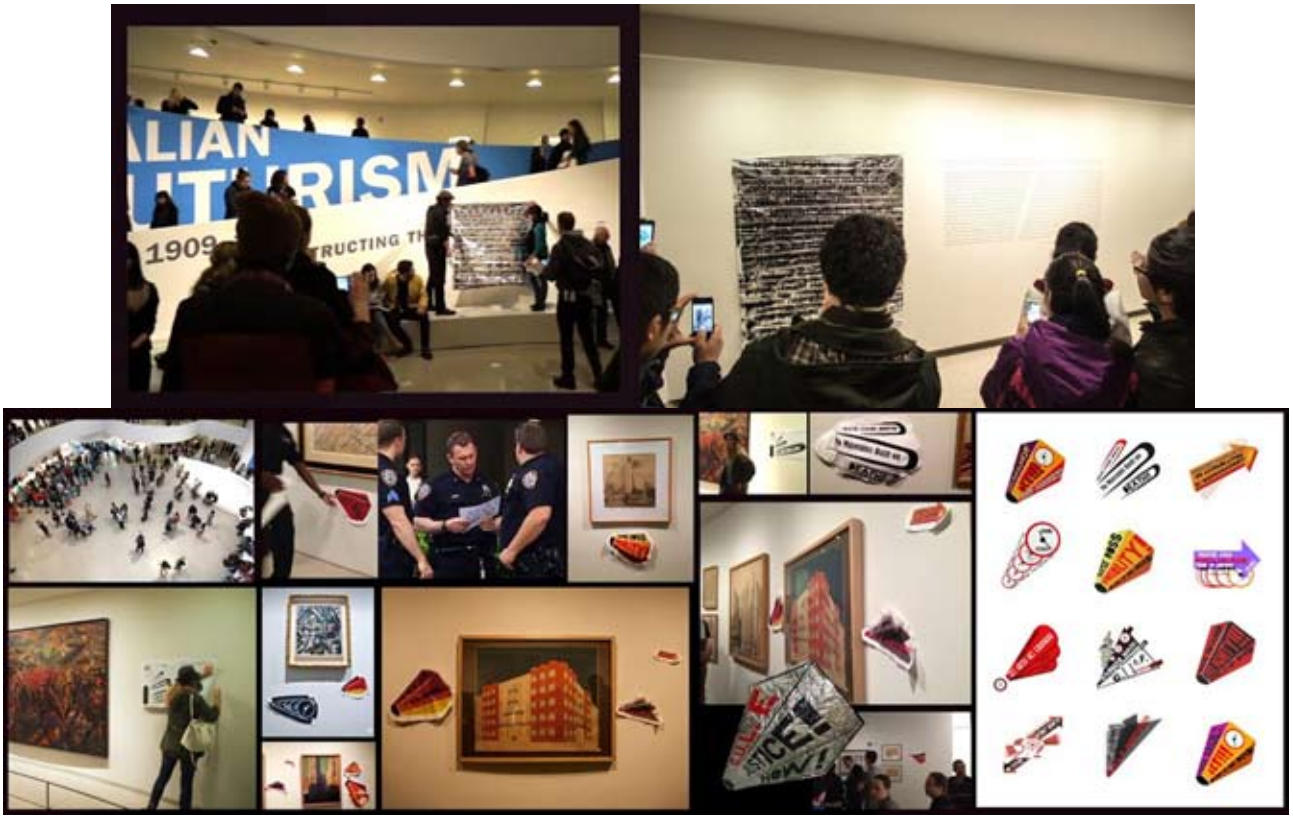
is a social relation. Personal debt churns in the "dark matter" of the invisible part of the art world, circulating as lifelong relationships to banks which greatly modifies daily life, creating a constant power imbalance. This can be seen from the micro to macro scale. Like many US based artists, I am deeply in debt for my masters degree, and in early 2013 inspired by Strike Debt's Rolling Jubilee, I began to model an exchange system that tie the value of art objects to the debt of their creator, aiming to

"Wall Chatting" intervention: at the "activist summit of the ZKM exhibition "Global Activism," January 2014. Photo: Noah Fischer

replace speculative value with mutual aid. In Spring of 2013, Occupy Museums developed this concept into a modified art fair called DebtFair, where artists revealed their debt information publicly on a website, and attempted to exchange art objects directly for debt bailouts: a crude statement which we hoped would also actually work. There was enormous potential to create an artists "debt-community" and we were inundated with information from hundreds of artists who are deep in personal debt from credit cards, mortgages, but mostly student debt. However, acting as a volunteer service organization on that scale has so far proved beyond our capacity.

Holes in the Wall of Impossibility

The selling out of the public sphere by Neoliberal institutions (from government branches to global museum branches) can be thought of as a crisis which also creates certain opportunities. We are seeing institution's social legitimacy quickly dissolve in a cloud of labor abuse and conflict of interest at auction. Massive PR campaigns are increasingly required to cover over this weakness. However, the status quo is providing us with an ever longer list of perfect targets. We see public space at the Metropolitan Museum soon to be inscribed with the name of David Koch, who is busy undermining democratic elections and we wonder just what might cause the right shift for the public to reject his patronage and the zombie museums he will create. Some new perspective is needed. Our practice hacks existing frames to open the Occupied Museum which is a visible stage for public unrest and public creativity to reverse the deterioration of truly common space.



G.U.L.F: February 22nd action, Noah Fischer and Paula Chakravartty hanging anti-labor abuse manifesto beside curatorial text for Futurist exhibition, Guggenheim Museum NYC. Photo: Nitasha Dhillon/G.U.L.F: May 24th Action "Supplementing" the Italian Futurist Exhibition with Noah Fischer's designs. Photos: various G.U.L.F members.

It's true that uninvited art practice and self-proclaimed institutions are nothing new: the Situationists, Art Workers Coalition, Asco, Repo History, and artists Martha Rosler and Coco Fusco are only a few local examples. However, along with the challenges of post crash financialization and deterioration of public space has arrived a new movement.

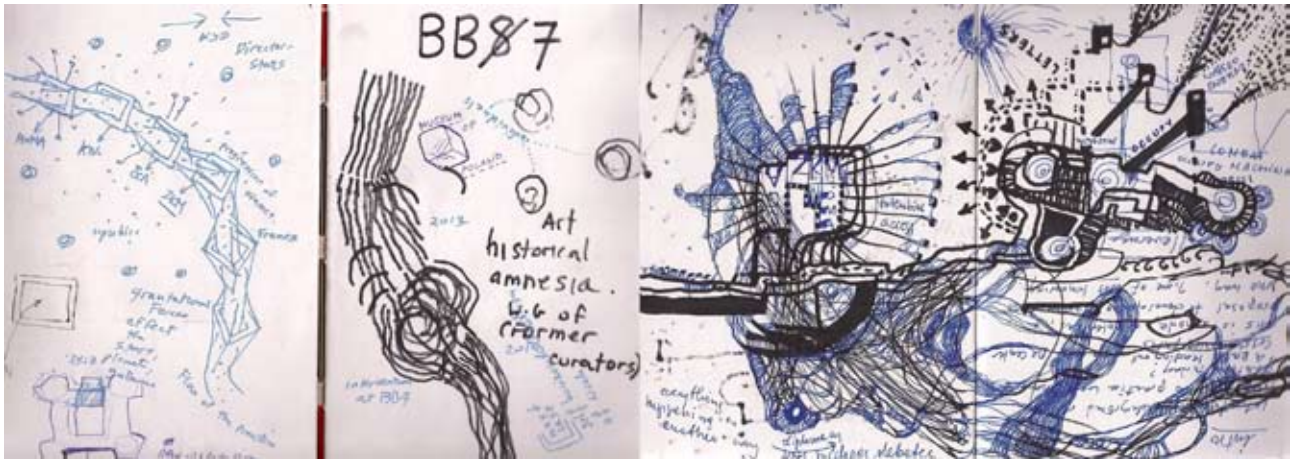
Occupy showed how rising global inequality in a newly connected era can combine to create Instant simultaneous mass movements, capable of crossing the substantial gulfs of geo-political specifics (the differing aims of Zucotti, and Gezi for example) and even after the season of protest has ended, there's more reason that ever for those people currently gaining little benefit from the pyramid of abstracted value and precarious labor, to shift practice outside existing the frame and jettison their current professional goals to begin "hacking visible frame" on their own. Our actions are movement focused: aimed at inspiring others to join us in any number of ways.

When I hastily wrote the first Occupy Museums manifesto from the euphoric height of the Movement, much of the press reacted with vitriol or dismissiveness:

even those who generally agreed with the Occupy Wall Street movement positioned Occupy Museums as misled art haters, (and themselves as "defenders of art.)" A few years later, it seems like assumed wisdom that the arts just like finance is infected with economic inequality and that institutions with backward positions on labor should not go ignored. Recently, we have even seen some wins.[19] The issues of out-of-control student debt and global labor abuse are gaining traction. Yearly auction spectacles are routinely seen not as indicators of general market success but rather as an exclusive party going on at the disconnected top of the pyramid. And many are waiting for the next crash and wave of protest.

Sustainability is of major concern. Some activists in my network are living on food-stamps, battling fore closures or rental evictions themselves as they struggle against the PR machines of mega corporations. It's an unfair fight. At the end of the day, resources are needed to live a basic healthy life, and here is where cooption-the institutional "throwing of bones" to activist artists works so well–because almost all the resources to be had are in corporate funded museums or non-profits or in the pockets of rich collectors.[20]

This is why Post-Capitalist support networks, physical spaces, self-proclaimed institutions, and most of all, value systems, are needed to support a robust shift. The Occupied Museum tries to offer the following resources: strengthening the post-Occupy network through morale-producing actions and calls for participation. Refining a set of horizontal communication tools for grassroots organizing. Capturing high-visibility of top museums and politicizing it. Access to the mainstream press where otherwise hidden subjects and realities can be exhibited. The potential for collective/historic spectacle which nurtures recaptures meaning.[21] Identification



Collaborative drawings of the Occupied Museum trajectory and strategies: Artur Zmijewski and Noah Fischer.

of a number of allies inside of existing institutions, A long list of open source action tactics for individual and groups, Open-source research for horizontality in institutions.

On a broader level, we try to offer permission. The critique of museum's social legitimacy is meant as a green light to artists and citizens everywhere to autonomously occupy the visible centers of culture; to experiment on your own. I imagine a movement by "dark matter" artists to re-use in any number of ways the most corporate of museums and other faux-public spaces, a mass culture of uninvited interventions and "supplemented exhibitions" blossoming until participating in the sanctioned art frame becomes passé, and the energy of art goes outside the frame and the support system of exchange shifts to mutual aid debt bailouts.

All this concerns a particular definition of art. I believe that art wasn't meant to forever degrade quietly into luxury asset; rather, today's counter-revolutionary absurdities can wake us up into reclaiming a meaningful avantegarde practice. Art contains the tools to break through the faux-public mirages when such illusions appear. Art contains enough humor and urgency and contemplation to connect directly with people's realities and mythologies at the same time and thus function as an effective political tool even when formal political process itself breaks down, which is exactly what's happening now. The Occupied Museum is a forum to exhibit such art in the world's major museums, immediately. Each time a small group of people successfully deploy tactics which break through entropy to open an exhibition of the Occupied Museum, a new page of the institutional manual is written; new labor codes and art histories are recorded.
The lights of the Occupied Museum are slowly flickering on.

Noah Fischer's sculptures, actions, performances, writings and collaborations explore the official rhetoric and currencies regulating behavior within Capitalism. In the early/mid 2000's he exhibited kinetic light/sound installations and collaborated with Berlin-based theater group andcompany&Co. Spurred by the financial crash and mass exposure of financial inequality in 2008, Fischer exited from the private art market to experiment with uninvited practice in public space on Wall Street and this led seamlessly into the Occupy Movement. He initiated action group Occupy Museums in October 2011 which has carried out actions at MoMA, Guggenheim, and the 7th Berlin Biennale among others. Fischer is currently organizing international campaigns with Occupy Museums, Global Luxury Art Faction (G.U.L.F), and creating a sculptural currency for an alternative debt-based economy. He lives with his wife Brenda and Daughter Luna in Brooklyn, NY.
http://www.noahfischer.org

Endnotes

1 A decision to bring my practice outside of this frame after working with commercial galleries had delivered me to Occupy Wall Street in the first place. In the Spring of 2011, the Aaron Burr Society and I developed a series of collaborative performances orating about economic inequality and redistributing money (coins) on Wall Street while wearing a coin mask, called Summer of Change. By the last performance in the series, the Occupy Movement had begun, and I joined it as a talking coin. http://www.summerofchange.net

2 Alexander Carlvaho organizer or first OWS Arts and Culturel Working Group, Email October 3, 2011:

"Many of us in the movement believe we are at the brink of a new aesthetic school. A new historical art period, that reaches beyond the nihilism and hopelessness of post-modernism to a time of agency, belief, and hope. Virginia W. once wrote that "around 1910 everything changed" to announce that modernism came to make a revolution. Maybe we, in 2011, a century after, may be entering the same flux"...

3 These first actions we planned with the Teamsters Art Handlers Union in Solidarity with their struggle against Sotheby's action house. OWS and Union members were able to successfully mix approaches, and messaging.

4 By November, these larger organizational structures had deteriorated and become irrelevant but we continued to strictly abide by OWS style process (to the best of our abilities) within the group.

5 The genesis of the invitation: I had previously worked with German curator Florian Malzacher. Joanna Warsza and Florian were visiting NYC during early days of Occupy. They came to an Occupy Museums action at the David Koch dinosaur wing of the Museum of Natural History highlighting the "menace" of philanthropy. An interview turned into an invitation.

6 Core OM members Tal Beery, Jolanta Gora-Witta, Max Libroin, Arthur Polendo, Carey Machet, Ben Laude, Nitasha Dhillon, Noah Fischer, Blithe Riley, Maria Byck, Maraya Lopez, and Jim Costanzo went to Berlin.

7 Nitasha Dhillon, member of Tidal, MTL and G.U.L.F and veteran of OWS was an architect of the horizontalization strategy.

8 When we opened Momenta's space to general use by the Occupy community and held a series of public discussions about the Bloomberg Family Foundation's conflict of interest, Bloomberg-connected board members of Momenta art resigned, striking a serious financial blow to Momenta. This seemed to highlight the precariousness and self-censorship involved in private funding, but our refusal to diminish the critique came with serious fallout for good people who were on our side.

9 "Truth is Concrete" was curated by Florian Malzacher and consciously meant to take an opposite approach from the Berlin Biennale. The institution presented movement politics in the frame of hyper connectivity and productivity: a 24/7 marathon camp for discussions and performances which favored constant communication and networking over open experiment. Finally, a small group of which I was part called "Action is Concrete" succeeded in pulling the general assembly out of the curated frame and onto the streets. To the curators, the action was an embarrassment of performed faux- politics. In my view, it was an opportunity to solidify a political artistic community and exchange tactics through practice.

10 Mostly conducted by NYC based artist Maureen Connor who brought her "embedded practice" to OM.

11 Housing was provided by Pawel Althamer and Artur Zmijewski who also supported some travel expenses. WHC members funded their daily work and materials for the project.
12 We had used the Acquisition tactic twice before: in 2012, we accused MoMA of "unilaterally acquiring" our banner when they confiscated it during an action, and this accusation loosened MoMA's lips, setting off a public back and forth in the press. In an action at the Museum of American Finance, we offered a cardboard model of a foreclosed home to their permanent collection. After an initial refusal, they accepted the model into their permanent collection, which we presented on Occupy Wall Street's International Day of Fighting Foreclosures. At CCA, This new permission made it impossible to prevent our horizontal process and we set up a series of meetings with the staff to begin rewriting the CCA constitution.
13 It was intended to fill a gap in the program resulting from the early closing of a previous show (whose high expenses had been used to argue for the cancellation of Winter Holiday Camp) The Show, British British Polish Polish was also a subject of political attack from the Catholic Right which resulted in a blasphemy trial. We ended up supporting CCA in this context in an action at the Ministry of Culture.
14 At the 2012 Occupied Freize Art Fair, our protest was penned into Police barricades. We decorated the pen to create what Tal Beery called a "freedom cage" which can be thought of as an installation analog to the art fair booth.
15 this was also clear when the highly produced and super-visual issue of the Occupy Wall Street Journal appeared in an exhibition on the wall of MoMA. No challenge to power norms existed in that case.
16 A German Refugee activist named Napuli wrote her story on the wall to add a viewpoint missing from the exhibition, the Refugee Movement in Germany was not included in the Global Activism Exhibition.
17 See 2010's "Skin Fruit" at the New Museum from museum board member Dakis Jannou collection and curated by Jeff Koons:
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/05/arts/design/05dakis.html?pagewanted=all
18 We later heard directly from Guggenheim director Richard Armstrong that following the action, owners of the paintings had called in, angry to see the colorful graphics taped inches from their loaned works. This has greatly helped pressure mount on the labor-abusing museum.
19 This is to speak nothing of the cultural capital which accompanies wealth and has a strong pull on most artist-activists who are often highly ambitious, and besides, often need cultural capital to open doors for successful organizing.
20 Transfield leaving Syndney Biennale following artist boycott, and the unionization of Frieze Art fair in New York.
21 I'm thinking of a moment when Lou Reed, Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson joined us in front of Lincoln Center for the Satyagraha protest.

On the Citizen Forum for Contemporary Arts

Joanna Figiel

Two-thousand-and-twelve saw a certain large-scale, spectacular sporting event take place in Poland, leading to a number of discussions concerning the use of Ministry of Culture funds. A large portion [of these funds] was allocated for big scale, one-off events such as the Euro 2012 football championship or the 2012 Polish Culture Congress, drawing attention to the generally poor, day-to-day financial situation of Polish artists and cultural workers. Following these debates, the various artists, curators, critics and writers forming the Citizen Forum for Contemporary Arts (Obywatelskie Forum Sztuki Współczesnej - OFSW[1]), staged a one-day art strike – a day without arts and culture. The aim of the strike was to influence the public discussion of cultural matters, including the symbolic and political, but also economical place of artists and cultural producers within the public sphere and social hierarchies. Around the same time, a proposed change to tax law meaning a reduction or elimination of a flat-rate allowance to reclaim up to fifty percent of costs from revenue on contracts was announced. Such a change would further harm the majority of artists and cultural producers who are often reliant on commission contracts and need to then recoup the costs of their production, materials, etc. This provided further impetus for the OFSW action.

'The day without art', the first to ever take place in Poland, followed a well established, if sporadically enacted and relatively little-known tradition of artists' refusal of work. The protest followed examples beginning in the 1960s with the Art Workers Coalition (AWC), who focussed mainly on institutional critique and that continued through Gustav Metzger's "years without art" (1977-1980), when the artist went on strike, producing no work whatsoever, thus drawing attention to his position as part of the art world and his relationships to galleries and institutions. In the early 1990s art strike strategies were taken up again, this time by Stewart Home and various adherents of the Neoist movement, whilst in recent years Redas Dirzys and Temporary Art Strike Committee have been calling for an art strike in Lithuania. Such actions attempted to disrupt the role and position of artists themselves,

or to address issues in the cultural economy and creative industries in more general terms. Most recently, in 2012, the London-based Precarious Workers Brigade, a group organizing for several years around the issue of precarity within cultural and creative work, called for a Cultural Workers Walkout[2], in solidarity with other casual and public sector workers taking part in a national strike the same day.

The Polish art strike was, by all accounts, quite a small and seemingly insignificant event, relatively speaking. A number of galleries and institutions[3] did however express solidarity, and some did indeed close their doors for the day, in addition to a handful of protesting OFSW members, some bystanders, and one banner. In terms of media coverage or turnout it certainly did not stand out amongst demonstrations and strike actions staged that year by workers in other sectors. However, the strike did kick-start a non-going debate about cultural and artistic production in Poland. It brought, once and for all, the often-invisible working conditions in the arts and culture into the public domain. Most importantly, it cemented the credentials of the autonomous, horizontally organised OFSW as an effective and credible model for (some, see below) artists and cultural producers to represent themselves and each other in a field that is unstable, mostly reliant on decreasing amounts of public funding, and characterised by increasing levels of competition and individualism.

Zbigniew Libera, "I'm an artist, but this doesn't mean I work for free" Photo by OFSW

Julita Wójcik, "I'm in a union - I don't work for free", Photo by OFSW

Crucially, this first public action of OFSW not only brought the economic conditions of artistic and cultural work into open discussion, but also into the streets of Warsaw, where contemporaneous protests, be it by nurses or taxi drivers, were taking place. Thus, not only were their often obscured working conditions and labour made visible, but also the ideological distance between the labour of artists and cultural producers, and that of workers in general, was dramatically reduced. Artists and cultural producers on contingent, casual and temporary contracts, without health insurance or pensions, increasingly without the ability to own a home or afford the mortgage and burdened with debt, are, in terms of employment law and economic survival, often leading the way for workers in other sectors. Therefore, when some twisted joke on the original mission of the art avant-garde casts artists are new models of employment in an increasingly deregulated, neoliberal job market, an erasure of the ideological gap between art and labour, and the dismantling of the myth of artistic genius could be an important political strategy.

Almost two years on from the art strike, OFSW is continuing to shape the struggle for changes to economic and social aspects of the Polish art scene. Its programme includes:

- Efforts to ensure artists receive payment from art institutions.
- Artists' remuneration to be included in the rules of the Ministry of Culture grant programs.
- Inclusion of artists' labour rights in Polish employment legislation.
- Pension and health insurance provision for artists.
- Publishing a 'Black Book for Artists in Poland', with an aim of defining the status of artists and cultural production in Poland.

The forum was also actively involved in the on-going conflict around the Centre for Contemporary Arts Zamek Ujazdowski[4] and the dispute concerning the directorial competition at Poznan's Arsenal Gallery.

More recently OFSW has joined forces with the trade union movement, or rather, one of the new unions, the recently formed Inicjatywa Pracownicza[5] (IP, Workers' Initiative), which began in 2001 as a continuation of various self-organised grassroots and anarcho-syndicalist groups active mainly in and around Poznan. In 2004 it became an officially recognised union. IP was formed as a reaction to the crisis of Poland's official union movement–its bureaucracy, passivity and links with the anti-social and anti-worker governments – but also as a union that recognises new forms of employment and contracts not recognised by traditional unions, also paying attention to specific issues concerning female and migrant labour. IP allows for the formation of autonomous collegial commissions that can then support workers on casual contracts, or those who are self-employed.

One such collegial commission affiliated to IP is the recently formed Komisja Środowiskowa 'PracownicySztuki'[6], founded in October 2013. The forming of the group was in part a reaction to the ongoing CSW Zamek conflict[7]. Here, despite two trade unions in operation, most staff concerned with the issues at stake (developments around the tenure of director Fabio Cavalucci, the non-payment of artists fees[8] or the *British British, Polish Polish* exhibition, various other budgetary concerns, the treatment of the Winter Camp exhibition/events season and so on) were unable to participate in the dispute due to their employment status, i.e. being on casual contracts. Other reasons for affiliation were to receive formal support from a nationally and legally recognised union in negotiations around the guaranteed minimum artist's fee payment and issues concerning social security and pension contributions. In addition, it allowed representation for freelancers, project-based workers and the self-employed who, for the lack of a physical and fixed workplace, are often unable to even recognise who their colleagues are, let alone to struggle alongside them or cooperate with arts and cultural employees on permanent contracts.

24.05.2012. - Art Strike rally in front of Warsaw's Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Photo by OFSW

Banner reads "Strike! - We call for the goverment to start negotiating with artists" Photo by OFSW

The commission, currently consisting of over 100 members – including artists, cultural producers, writers, curators and critics, academics and teachers, poets, musicians recently held its first annual conference. During the two-day event, attended by ca. 50 new members, four objectives were declared:

- The struggle for workers' rights and social protection (especially health insurance and pension) for artists.
- Striving to settle the issue of remuneration for artistic work.
- The struggle to incorporate the voice of artists in decision-making processes in the arts and cultural sector
- Solidarity and cooperation with other industries where there are on-going struggles for workers' rights, as well as social movements for freedom and democracy (e.g. the anti-eviction movement).

Working groups on issues such solidarity/interventions, legal/contracts, social insurance/pensions were formed and since the commission's inception a meeting addressing the work and payments for writers, including non-fiction writers and poets, has taken place.

To date, the biggest success of the commission/OFSW has been with regards to the issue of guaranteed minimum fees for artists. On 17th February 2014 four institutions—Art Museum, Łodz, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Zachęta National Art Gallery, Warsaw and Arsenał Gallery, Poznan—signed an official agreement

regarding such fees. The minimum payments were set at 800PLN for taking part in a group exhibiton, 1200PLN for taking part in a small group exhibition or so-called 'project room', and 3700PLN for a solo show (respectively c. 200, 300, 900Euro). A further five institutions have pledged to sign the agreement as well.

While this leaves artists in Poland far off the relative security of other countries' models, for instance the German system of social insurance for artists[9], or organisational models, such as the Scottish Artist Union[10], the commission is definitely a first step towards some more concrete solutions. The formation of such a group, in a sector so heavily reliant on competition and individualism as the art world, and where even a few years ago it would have seemed scarcely achievable, can be counted as a great success in itself.

Joanna Figiel, Obywatelskie Forum Sztuki Wspolczesnej/ Komisja Środowiskowa Pracownicy Sztuki Ogólnopolskiego Związku Zawodowego Inicjatywa Pracownicza. Joanna is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Culture Policy Management, City University London and works at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research focuses on labour issues, unpaid work, precarity and policy within the creative and cultural sectors. She is a member of the ephemera editorial collective.

Endnotes

1 http://forumsztukiwspolczesnej.blogspot.co.uk/
2 http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/post/7027907945/culturalworkers
3 Around 90 in total, including, beyond Warsaw, in Poznan, Krakow, Wroclaw, and Trojmiasto; as well as in smaller towns like Bytom, Slupsk, Torun.
4 http://csw.art.pl/index.php?lang=eng
5 http://ozzip.pl/inicjatywa-pracownicza/item/10-about-inicjatywa-pracownicza-workers-initiative
6 http://www.obieg.pl/obiegtv/31185
7 http://art-leaks.org/2013/10/26/centre-for-contemporary-art-ujazdowski-castle-workers-protest-letters-contd-warsaw-poland/
8 http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20140217/stokfiszewski-koniec-z-nieplaceniem-artystom
9 http://www.kuenstlersozialkasse.de/
10 http://www.sau.org.uk/

The Assembly for Culture in Ukraine: Shaking the Foundations of Ukraine's Ministry of Culture

A conversation between Larissa Babij and Corina Apostol

The Assembly for Culture in Ukraine is essentially an ongoing meeting of citizens who are concerned with how cultural processes in Ukraine are structured and intent on transforming these structures and pressing the Ministry of Culture to shift the vector of influence on culture from government ideology to the people who are the recipients and creators of cultural products and processes.

One of the defining characteristics of the Assembly (one which is often criticized) is that it does not have a consolidated voice. Based on the principle of horizontality, which defies hierarchy, the Assembly functions through self-organization. Initiatives come from individuals and the initiator is responsible for making his/her proposition happen. No one gives or fulfills orders. And no one is delegated the responsibility for speaking or answering or deciding for the group. The Assembly expresses its positions in letters addressed to particular government officials and in public statements published on the Internet. Audio and video recordings of almost all meetings are also available via the Internet within Ukraine.

In the following conversation the use the word "we" refers to past events (involving several or more participants of the Assembly) and positions that have been agreed upon and declared as common views of the ACU.

Corina Apostol (CA): I would like to start with very basic questions about how the Assembly came into being and how it's developed over the past month. We've recently heard of cases of art workers' protests in Bucharest or Belgrade, and even occupations of museums and public institutions; at the same time, these actions seemed to be effective only for a short period of time, as some kind of consciousness-raising moments.

Larissa Babij (LB): The Assembly for Culture in Ukraine came into being after three months of continuous protest and civic tension in Kyiv and all over Ukraine. The Assembly has been meeting regularly in the basement of the Ministry of Culture since February 23, 2014. Those who have been involved in the protests in some form or other have accepted the fact that you have to give up your daily routines and certain expectations in emergency situations. Work in the Assembly demands a lot of time, patience and flexibility, but there are enough people interested in reforming culture in Ukraine that it has persisted for two months already, albeit with varying momentum.

CA: How did you decide to occupy the Ministry of Culture? As I remember, the situation in Kyiv back in February was very dramatic and volatile, in terms of the political processes and protests on Maidan.

LB: The week between February 18-22 was the most violent on the Maidan: a hundred people were killed and many of my colleagues and I were volunteering in hospitals. As former President Yanukovych seemed ready to withdraw, on February 21, Ukrainian students took over the Ministry of Education. The following day I saw a Facebook post from an unfamiliar person calling people to gather and occupy the Ministry of Culture. Since I have often picketed the Ministry of Culture together with the Art Workers' Self-defense Initiative (ISTM), most recently in a series of demonstrations aimed at the Ministry itself in January, I decided to go and investigate this proposal to occupy the Ministry.
Initially a group of 40-50 people, including cultural workers, journalists and a student "self-defense" brigade from Maidan, gathered near the Ministry. Someone called the Minister of Culture and his deputies to come and open the building, as it was Saturday. Our main goal was to prevent people from the previous administration from removing documents from the building, especially those containing evidence of corruption.

CA: How did you manage to establish yourselves inside the building?

LB: After an hour or two of standing and calling through the windows of the Ministry, someone from inside opened the doors, and then they let us inside. There was an unused space in the basement that we were allowed to set up for our discussions. We then decided to call an official meeting the next day for everyone who works in or is concerned with the cultural sphere and how it has been organized thus far in Ukraine.
On February 23rd the Assembly as such was born. Over three hundred people came to the meeting, including some former and current bureaucrats. Many attendees wanted to complain about their experiences, but others began to formulate what has to be done to change the Ministry of Culture and restructure the cultural process in Ukraine.

CA: What was the reaction of the people still working in the Ministry? Did they join the discussions?

LB: Initially no, the occupation occurred over the weekend and almost nobody was working there. At that time there was no Minister of Culture, because all the former cabinet members had been dispersed and no one had been appointed yet. On the day after entering the Ministry a few of the occupiers sealed all the doors of its offices to prove that no documents had been removed, and we continued to block access to most Ministry employees until the new Minister was appointed.

CA: And how was the new Minister appointed?

LB: He was put in power by the new government, but he also had the support of the Maidan. He is an actor who spent a lot of time on the Maidan stage. On the most violent days in February, when there was a lot of shooting, he was there, trying to calm people and giving directions where medical help was needed. His appointment, like that of other current Ministers, was an attempt to build a bridge between the protests and the new government.

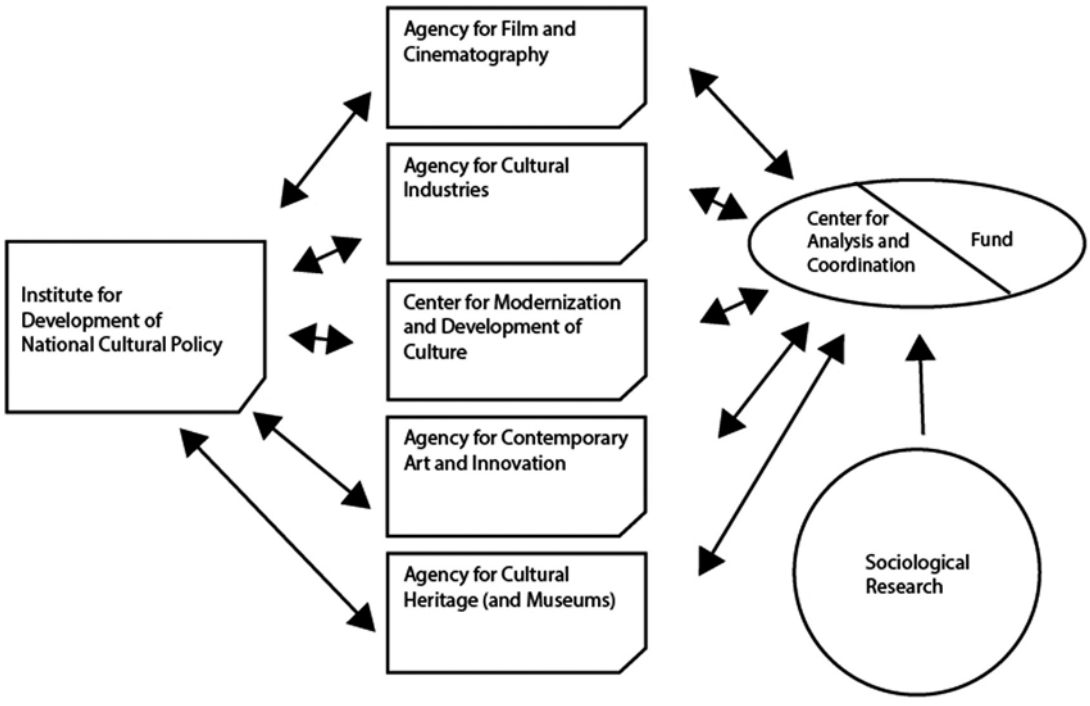
CA: The Assembly was also responsible for putting out a series of concrete demands to change the Ministry. How would they affect the way the Ministry is organized and functions?

LB: In the first week when we were physically blocking the building of the Ministry we set out some demands: one was to set up a financial audit of the institution, one was about lustration. When the minister was appointed, he met with the Assembly and signed a memorandum, which included (in addition to the above-mentioned demands) his promise to recognize the legitimacy of the Assembly, implement structural reforms and to develop together with the Assembly mechanisms by which the public can exercise control over the Ministry's decisions and policies. While the first demands are practically aimed at preventing further corruption, the other points demand that the Ministry begin to function as a public institution, listening to and serving the people. The main task was to start developing new organizational mechanisms in collaboration with the Minister, and in parallel develop mechanisms through which the Assembly and the general public could have access to and influence the decision-making processes of the Ministry.
After the new Minister was appointed, he dismissed most of the previous deputy ministers, and the Ministry went back to work. An independent organization has been hired to perform a financial audit, but it hasn't started yet. The Assembly has regularly demanded meetings with the new administration; these demands have been met with reluctance. We've met officially with the Minister five times so far, plus several meetings with his new deputies. The administration has tried to get the Assembly to go away, but the Assembly persists in meeting in the basement of the Ministry of Culture and pestering officials to produce evidence of beginning systemic reform.

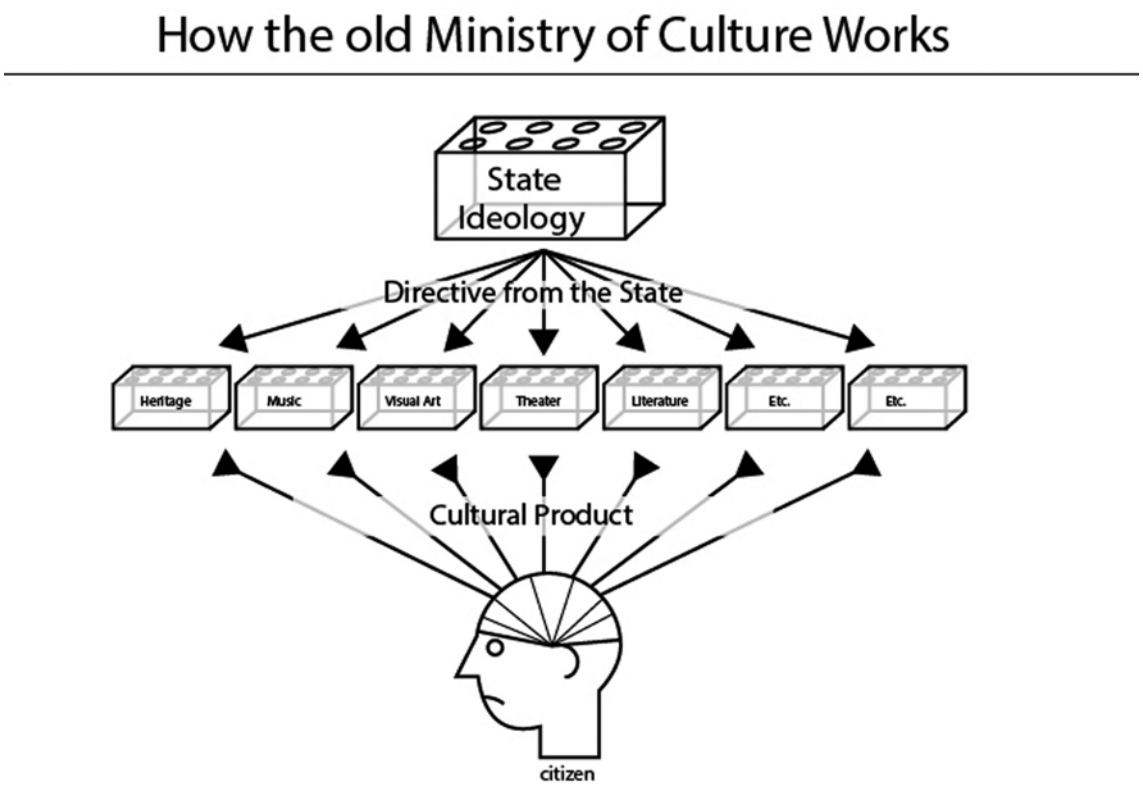
CA: The Assembly adopted a non-hierarchical model of organization, similar to that used in the Occupy movement. If I understand correctly, there is not one leadership, but everyone who is present at these meetings can influence the process.

LB: Yes, that was a fundamental decision. When the group was just forming, we realized that if we are trying to change the system, the more the Assembly mimics the existing system the less likely we are to make meaningful changes. The Assembly is a method for collectively discussing issues and making decisions; its membership is fluid. There have been tensions in the group over maintaining this non-hierarchical, horizontal organization, which demands a lot of time and patience from its participants. The second meeting with the Minister, which revealed how little interest the official structure actually has in the ideas and demands of the Assembly, deepened a schism between the Assembly's participants over priorities and fundamental principles. While there are staunch proponents of the Assembly as such, even though its radical, utopian methods may ultimately only yield small

How the Cultural Agencies Function



Agencies are autonomous. The Center for Analysis and Coordination (CAC) works with the agencies and independent sociological research to determine the public's cultural needs. The Institute for Development of National Cultural Policy makes recommendations directly to the Agencies - it does not allocate funds. State funding for culture is distributed through the CAC; individual agencies may receive additional funding through grants, charitable donations, etc.



results, others prefer efficiency and effectiveness, especially in influencing policy and decisions within the specialized departments of the Ministry, to the slow, laborious process of systemic change. However, the Assembly is still meeting and working through these differences to identify common goals and ways to work together.

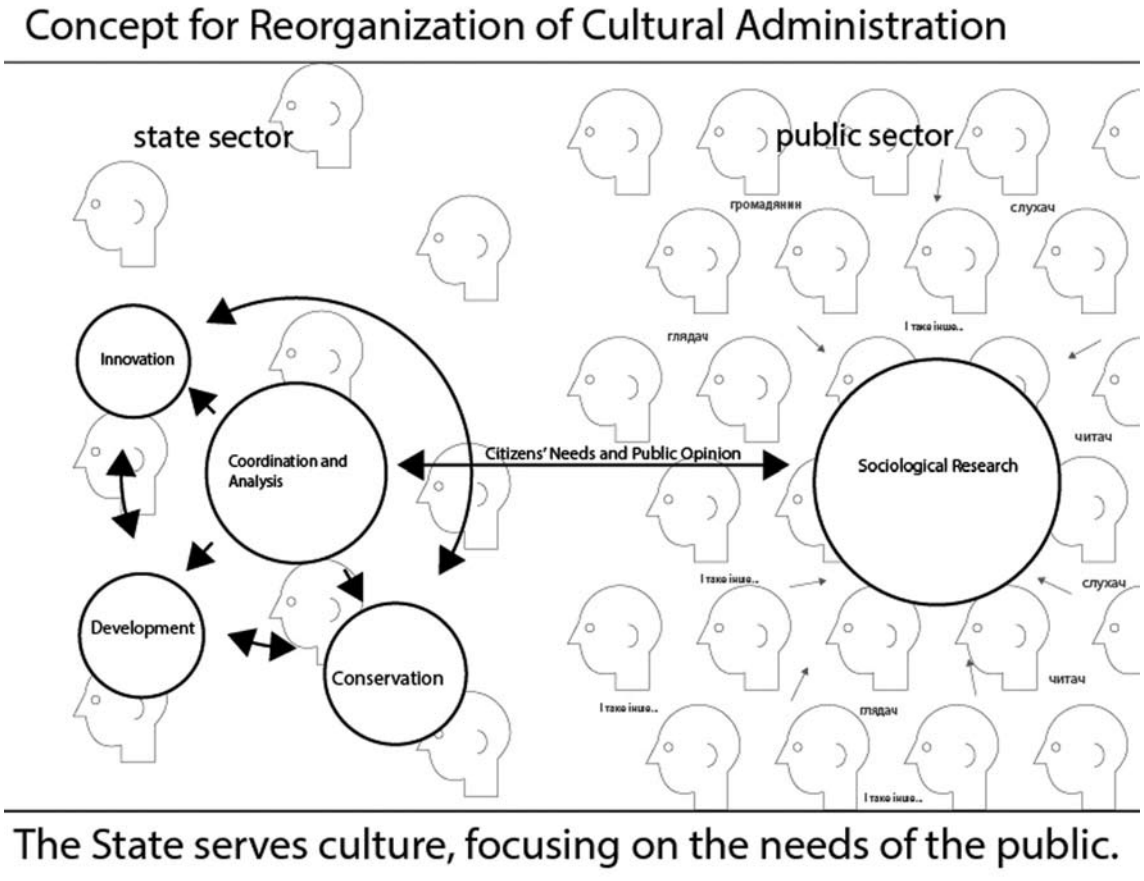
CA: Could you say a bit more about the composition of the Assembly and the participatory impetus behind different groups in its constituency?

LB: The Assembly is open to everyone: the amount of people that show up for any given meeting varies from just a few people to several hundred. I'd say there are around 30-40 people who are very active, and each meeting usually has around 20 attendees, including continuous newcomers. People participating in the Assembly, while they may be members of various groups and organizations, speak for themselves and do not represent the interests of any other group. Thus the Assembly does not supersede, replace or deny any other cultural organizations.
Because the first meetings had so many participants, a decision was taken to break up into working groups. While there were conflicting views on how the groups

should be organized, the principle that was chosen was by discipline: film, circus, music, design, contemporary art, festival organizers, coordination, etc. The problem is that this to some extent mimics the existing structure of the Ministry of Culture, favoring the old-fashioned division by genre, which does not reflect today's cultural production. However, there is also a group devoted to analysis, which is developing a proposal for reorganizing the Ministry.
The working groups researched and prepared reports on the needs of their respective spheres. The Assembly also had conversations with people who had worked in cultural administration in other countries like Belgium, Switzerland, Poland and Lithuania; those from the latter countries shared their experiences restructuring their cultural administration when transitioning to the EU.

CA: Tell me a bit about the drawings created within the Assembly that begin to describe what new structure you had in mind.

LB: The Assembly agreed that the Ministry was not serving the needs of culture, but instead serving whatever ideology the government wanted to promote and functioning as a mechanism for corruption. Since the system itself is dysfunctional, regardless of the individuals working in it, the challenge is finding a way to change the entire system, without immediately dissolving the existing structures.
The first drawing shows how the old Ministry was working, with ideology from the



top sifting down through all the departments. The main conceptual shift proposed by the Assembly is eliminating the top-down vector, so the people and their needs become the focus of cultural activity and administration. The system that would provide coordination and resources for cultural activities should be focused on the public – viewers, thinkers, doers. Practically speaking, this system could be organized as a series of autonomous agencies focused on different aspects of culture (conservation, development, innovation) and a center for coordination and analysis that would distribute the national budget according to the needs of the public and the needs of the agencies. It is imperative to separate state cultural policy from the budget; in this model, those who develop cultural policy make direct recommendations to each agency, but do not influence the distribution of funding.

CA: How do you negotiate the relation between the Kyiv-based Assembly and other cities across Ukraine?

LB: The Assembly for Culture in Ukraine is nationwide. From the beginning in other cities such as Zaporizhya, Kharkiv, Lviv, people formed their own assemblies. In an attempt to avoid centralization in the capital, the assemblies in Kyiv and other cities share a lot of their minutes and recordings of meetings online. Information is also passed along personally when people travel between cities.

CA: What are some of the most important things that you feel the Assembly has achieved so far?

LB: As in the model I described above, where cultural administration focuses on aspects of conservation, development and innovation, I have observed that the members of the Assembly include people who are conservators of an authoritarian system of thinking (waiting for a commands from above), people who believe that cultural management and other forms of "modernization" should be implemented in Ukraine's cultural sphere, and people who see the Assembly as a means to invent new ways of working together. At its core the Assembly – as a foundation for Ukraine's future culture system – really is about social relations. One of the important things is to keep the Assembly autonomous from the Ministry, which not only allows for a certain degree of unpredictability and mobility, but also clarifies the difference between exercising one's rights as a citizen and aspiring to power. It is also worth noting that the Assembly's work to reform the Ministry of Culture began immediately after the Yanukovych regime dissolved, affirming that cultural reform is fundamental to any kind of social, political or economic change.

Larissa Babij lives in Kyiv, where she works with Ukrainian contemporary artists as a curator, writer and co-conspirator of experimental projects. Together with Tanz Laboratorium she has been producing the annual PERFORMATIVITY Educational Art Project since 2011. In April 2014 she brought Gregory Sholette's and Olga Kopenkina's "Imaginary Archive" to Ukraine (including new works by local artists). Her writing has been published in ARTMargins Online, Guernica and other publications. She is a member of the Art Workers' Self-defense Initiative (ISTM).

Artists between aestheticization of the struggle and unionization

Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić

On June 22nd 2013, artists and cultural workers organized one of the biggest protests in Belgrade and other cities across Serbia.[1] About 800 people, most of them workers in public cultural institutions, and some from independent organizations, joined the demonstration in Belgrade's Republic Square. Although the vast majority of them live and work in harsh conditions, during this public protest they unfortunately avoided addressing directly their economic problems, such as unpaid social insurance contributions, precarious working conditions and inadequate distribution of public funds. Among other complaints, an objective cause for the protest were the cuts of the budget for culture, that shrunk it to 0,62% of the total state budget of Serbia, as well as the reallocation of main parts of these funds for religious and "patriotic" projects. In spite of this, the organizing committee stressed in its press release that the main aim of the protest was the struggle against the degradation of culture and the decay of the society's moral values that "every European nation needs to protect." Representatives of independent organizations expressed their discontent demanding the withdrawal of political party-interests from cultural institutions. In the course of the devastation of state institutions, a good part of the cultural production has been already handed over to the cultural industries, and is, directly or indirectly, managed by individuals belonging to party structures like in the case of project MIKSER – "a multidisciplinary platform which centres around the affirmation of cultural industry of the Balkans and organization of the biggest regional festival of the festival of creative arts."[2]

The contradictions and confusion of the protest described above provoked a set of questions concerning the organization of artists and cultural workers and their representation in organizational bodies. First of all, how is it possible to successfully organize artists and cultural workers today, in reference to their position within the production process?

Protest of artists and cultural workers in Belgrade, June 2013, Photo by Rena Rädle

How to strengthen the struggle over workers' rights and for a cultural production in the context of the public goods? How to position toward the activities of neoliberal managers, promoting the creative industries and intensively advocating gentrification, such as Belgrade's Savamala project related to various initiatives and organisations in Serbia?[3] Who is actually profiting from the work of interns and a growing army of volunteers in the context of cultural production?

In this article we will give a brief overview about some aspects of the present-day struggles in culture and the arts, and discuss existing forms of organization, with a focus on the situation in Serbia. We will pay special attention to different ways to struggle and strategies for organization that could be successful in local and international contexts.

Art Strikes, Anti-Authorship and Institutional Critique

Generally, there are two ways for artists of dealing with the material condition of the artist in society. Firstly, there is, let's say, the pragmatical one, when artists join organizations to regulate their legal and economic status. Secondly, there is the artistic-ideological dimension, when artists try to problematize their position through the artistic work itself. Working on both fronts is desirable and not mutually exclusive, even though the opposite happens quite often.
The problem with the second position can be followed easily through the history of the artists' social struggles. Here we can observe a paradoxical situation in that, what started as an emancipatory step and act of protest or critique, is later captured in the realm of commodification. Through aestheticization, the struggle of the artist easily becomes an artistic product or cultural commodity.
This tendency became obvious in the 1970s, exactly in the period when conceptual art developed out of a critique of the art market: The politics of a practice that engaged with the struggle for the material working and living conditions of the artists was presented by some conceptual artists as their own artistic practice.

The art strike quickly became a means to struggle; the famous 1969 strike was organized in support of the artist Takis who removed his works from the MoMA. The "Art Workers' Coalition"[4] was founded around his case. The group called artists to go on strike, published statements and tried to influence the museum's exhibition politics through direct criticism of the institution. Simultaneously with these practices the afore-mentioned problem of the commodification of the struggle emerged. In addition to strikes against the commercialization of the arts, another practice of the 1980s was the negation or creation of fictive authorship. This strategy went against the treatment of artistic acts as branded goods and was meant to prevent

Protest in Belgrade, June 2013, Photo by Rena Rädle

the accumulation of market value through the mere status of being a "criticizing and striking" author. The second famous art strike was organized by Gustav Metzger from 1977 to 1980, followed by another one from 1990 to 1993 called by Stewart Home. In 1979, Goran Đorđević joined the international debate on art strike and developed his own artistic agenda.

The question arises if these strikes really contributed to the improvement of the artists' position and to the decommercialization of artistic production, although they might have been successful in some of their specific aims. The problem becomes more complicated through the fact that, among others, the market value of art is defined by a complex system of mediators and through the speculative framework posed by banks, auction houses and leading galleries. That means that for example a strike of volunteers and workers of galleries, museums, cultural agencies and auction houses would momentarily have a stronger effect than a strike of the artists-producers themselves. If we understand the strike in a certain moment in time as a relevant means to struggle, we will have to think about how to include all the above mentioned groups into coordinated action with clear political demands.

In the beginning of the 1990s institutional critique emerged. Its well-known protagonists were Andrea Fraser and Hans Haacke. Both artists are an example for a next wave of aestheticization of the artists' struggles, that was first transformed within the conceptual arts and then filtered through the discourses of structuralist and critical theory. Today, we have inherited from institutional critique a whole culturological framework of criticality circulating through the social relations of the post-ideological discourse. Yet it does not offer much in the field of the real struggle of the artists and cultural workers for material conditions, especially across the European economic peripheries that are confronted with austerity measures, different parameters and conditions of production.

Artists' organisations and unionization

As the pressure on cultural workers across Europe became stronger due to budget cuts and their increasingly precarious position, a series of new platforms or organizations emerged alongside the traditional ones. Through them, artists and other producers of culture are trying to concretely strengthen their position towards agencies, institutions and various financiers of cultural production in the private and public sector. Apart from these new initiatives, in many countries classical artists' associations still exist, which protect and support art production and realization of the artists' social rights. They resemble guild-like organizations through which a producer of designated artistic products can achieve the status of a so-called "freelance artist." These organizations can be useful political actors when it comes to legal regulations concerning the taxation of art work or social security.

In Serbia, one of the major problems of the local artists' organization ULUS[5] is that the relations of cultural production have become very contradictory in the current systemic crisis of neoliberal capitalism, and that it did not find an answer to the collapse of the social position of the artists being confronted with unpaid and precarious work in culture. Additionally, the process of privatization of public spaces is heavily affecting ULUS, depriving the organization of spaces for production and presentation of its members' works, such as galleries and workshops. However, attempts to establish an artists' union do exist, with the mission to meet this challenge.
A different form of cultural organization in Serbia is the NKSS Association[6] "Nezavisna kulturna scena Srbije" (Independet Cultural Scene of Serbia), which does not focus on the association of artists-producers but links civil society organizations. This association tried to implement some projects of "successful" initiatives in the region, such as "Clubture" from Croatia. The strategy of this Serbian organization is to position itself as an intermediary between the ministry and individual organizations in terms of allocation of funds.
With the founding of NKSS, the formerly active platform "Druga scena" (The Other Scene) was in a way curtailed, since the majority of active members joined NKSS. While "Druga scena's" program quoted among its goals defending "public

goods of general societal importance, but not as means of gaining profit or realizing other individual private interests" and supporting "the improvement of the social position of the cultural workers"[7], the NKSS's program is limited to the establishment of a superstructure for applications for local or international, public or private donors, aiming at joined lobby work for certain cultural politics and managing donations from bigger funders for its members.

Especially the Balkan region is heavily affected by NGO industry, and culture is always interconneceted with non-profit funds. In that respect example organizations such as W.A.G.E.[8] that criticizes the lacking transparency of funds paid to artists by non-profit foundations in New York, could share their knowledge and experience with their Balkan colleagues. W.A.G.E. established a certificate that documents payment and social contributions, putting pressure on foundations and non-governmental organizations and thus preventing the cuts of artist fees. Also important are organizations such as the Carrotworkers' Collective and the PWB (Precarious Workers Brigades)[9] that came out of the protests against cuts in London. PWB for example question the massive voluntary work in cultural production, with the young producers in culture serving years and years in internships and mini-jobs that violate their social rights.

An important organizational framework are platforms and organizations that work internationally. An example of such a form of organization is the platform ArtLeaks[10] that operates through the realization of various events, publications, magazines, public statements and campaigns and puts pressure through social networks and regular open meetings in different countries. This way it supports local

Protest in Belgrade, June 2013, Photo by Deana Jovanović

struggles against violations of workers' rights of artists and cultural workers, making them visible and articulating them on a global level. It should be underlined that ArtLeaks drifts from a platform towards the evolution of a sustainable union. One of its longterm goals would be the formation of the first international union of artists and cultural workers that operates along the lines of the production of public goods and supports the artist-producer according to the principle that artistic means can be a legitimate means of struggle.
In these terms we don't need to discard the experience of the conceptual art of the 1970s, nor the art strikes and anti-authorship of the 1980s, or the organization experiences from the internet activisms and networks of the 1990s. Artists and cultural workers need to conflate these historical experiences into a means of political struggle for artists' workers' rights and the acknowledgement of their work. Joining a broader emancipatory project, without which it will be indeed hard to achieve these rights in the long run, artists will succeed to advance the society's resources and conditions and thereby their own position.

It must be emphasized that the above quoted strategies and ways of organizing might look even less progressive when compared to the practices of some artists during the 1930s in Yugoslavia. Some of the most interesting are the groups "Život" (Life) and "Zemlja" (Earth) who fought for social art and demanded full rights for artists as workers. In 1932, Mirko Kujačič, the founder of "Život" from Belgrade, wrote a manifesto in which he demanded the improvement of the material condition of the artists.[11] With his colleagues from the group he went into direct conflict with the so-called "l'art pour l'art-artists" (art for art's sake), who were then leading the art pavilion "Cvijeta Zuzorić" in Belgrade. Kujačič turned up in the gallery dressed in a blue workers' shirt, read out the manifesto and put a pair of workers' shoes on the wall. The simple demand of these artists was that the societal role of the artist needs to be understood in a broader socio-political sense, not only trough the narrow frame of the guild. When the Zagreb group "Zemlja" exhibited in Belgrade in 1935, the artists of the group "Život" made vivid propaganda and mobilized trade unions, the women's movement, students' and workers' youth groups for the opening.[12] They activated the whole society and in this way, art left the confines of bourgeois taste and actualized itself as living political action. In our view, what is actually lacking today, are similar contemporary practices that address society at large, and thus relate the artist to political and social movements that, by acting on the local and international level can transform society.

This article is based on a text written in Serbian for culturenet.hr and a talk by Vladan Jeremić held at the round table discussion "Levels of contradictions and means of articulation," organized by the Centar za dramsku umjetnost, on 12.12.2013. at Gallery Nova, Zagreb. Participants of the round table discussion were: Vladan Jeremić, Sabina Sabolović, Goran Sergej Pristaš i Marko Kostanić.

Vladan Jeremić and Rena Rädle are artists and cultural workers. They live and work in Belgrade, Serbia.
http://www.modukit.com/raedle-jeremic

Endnotes

1 http://art-leaks.org/2013/06/23/artists-and-cultural-workers-stage-massive-protests-in-serbia/
2 http://mikser.rs/en/
3 Mikser na vodi, Marko Miletić, http://www.bilten.org/?p=868
4 http://www.primaryinformation.org/projects/art-workers-coalition/
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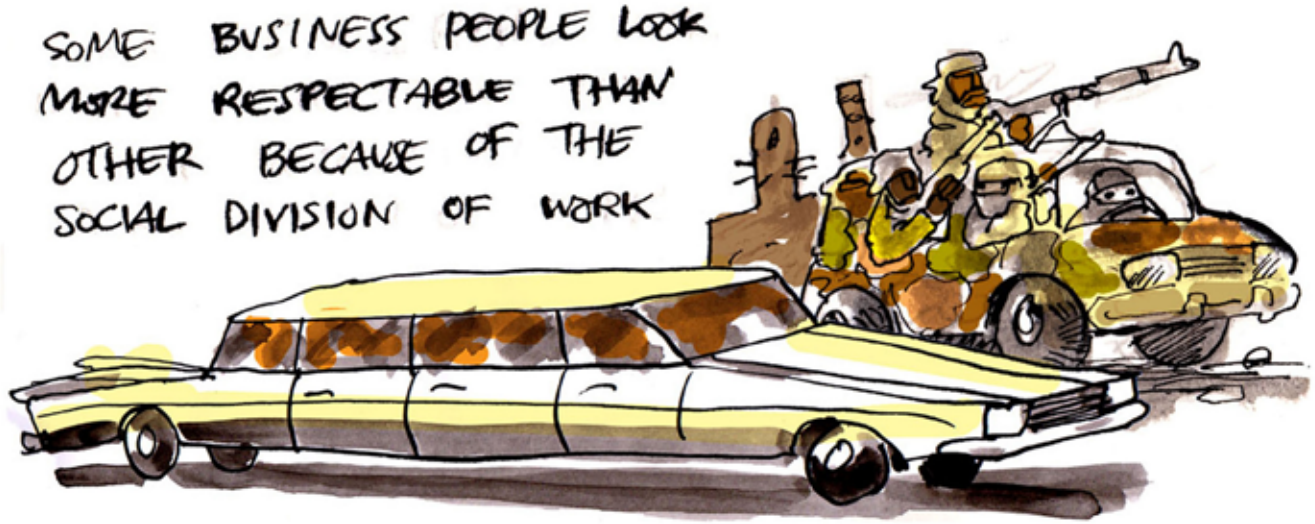
http://www.zidne.udruzenjekurs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/zidne-novine-br-2_web.pdf
12 Revolucionarno slikarstvo, Spektar, Zagreb, 1977, Josip Depolo, Zemlja 1929-1935, p. 21-22.

KA-POW!

CRITIQUE IN ACTION



Spear v.s. scissors: Art held captive by budget cuts

Andrey Shental

Neoliberalization, privatization, commercialization

Austerity measure policies currently in effect in many countries have given rise to a special rhetoric reminiscent of Franciscan preaching poverty and humility faced with the vicissitudes of earthly existence. It's not just a metaphor: the English word "austerity" itself contains obvious religious connotations. Like religion, these austerity policies are naturalized and internalized affectively: comparing the national economy with the household, or appealing to collective traumatic experiences, as many critics have observed, produces a fake sense of community, as opposed to an artificially produced shortage, lack, deficiency. The apologists of austerity measures offer us only one possible way out of this crisis - sacrifice.

In his 2012 book "The Year of Dreaming Dangerously", Slavoj Žižek wittily summarized the austerity politicians' arguments: we live in critical times of deficit and debt and will all have to share the burden and accept a lower standard of living—all, that is, with the exception of the (very) rich". This begs the question: why does the social sphere has to be sacrificed, when we can more wisely apply taxes? This is immediately objected to with the axiom: "The idea of taxing them more is an absolute taboo: if we do this, so we are told, the rich will lose any incentive to invest and thereby create new jobs, and we will all suffer the consequences."[1] Or, alternatively, to transfer the least important sectors of society in the hands of private capital. Cuts in state subsidies of culture and experiments in privatization have affected many European countries, especially the former welfare states, which still kindle the remains of social democracy. In the UK, the Parliament led by the Conservative

Ellie Harrison, Bring Back British Rail, 2009

Party has for the past 3 years been effecting budget cuts and actively dismantling what had not already been dismantled at the hands of Margaret Thatcher and her labor successors. Budget cuts, which have affected art and culture much more than others fields of knowledge production, have in the English language been shortened to an almost onomatopoeic name, reminiscent of the clanging of old metal shears: cuts. In the part few years these cuts have not held the front pages of newspapers and magazines, but they appears in the nightmares of social workers who are in constant fear of personnel reductions and dismissals. According to a statement he made last year, David Cameron, tried to completely de-ideologize austerity measures: this policy is not just a temporary measure, but should be implemented as a public policy, and perpetuated as inevitable and necessary. It is difficult to imagine what the future results of this will be, but after two years we can draw certain conclusions and make forecasts.[2]

At the present moment, we can say that left critics' and journalists' worst fears were not justified. Everything remains seemingly unchanged: the galleries are still working, museums are free of charge, art journals continue to be published, and people are no less interested in art then before: a recent statistic by Tate Modern will reassure those who think that contemporary art is of no use to anyone anymore: crowds of people go there (although for what is another question).

Ellie Harrison, Bring Back British Rail, 2009

Against this background, failures and even the inevitable "healthy" fight for survival in a "free" competition economy seem insignificant. Some small galleries and magazines experienced serious difficulties, but almost all were able to find alternative ways of funding, and only a few were closed or reorganized . But who still remembers "Storey Gellery," where no almost no one has visited? Who will regret the exhibition hall at the British Film Institute, when a luxurious library was opened in its place? In a country that suffers from a surplus and overproduction of art, such trifles simply are not worthy of attention. And what if tickets to the British Film Institute tickets are now nine pounds instead of six pounds ? It seems that it doesn't matter since people continue to go there.

At the same time, the "age of philanthropy" that former minister of culture Jeremy Hunt promised happened only nominally. The conservative minister promised that given greater tax breaks, the rich will take pity on art, and share their income and savings - and that the influx of capital from the private sector will transform the UK into a new Florence. Capital did begin to flow (4 %), but it did not exceed the level of annual inflation (5.2%) and turned out to be more insignificant given its sharp decline in the previous years - of course, Hunt did not include this in his reports.[3]

Ellie Harrison, Desk Chair Parade / Desk Chair Disco, 2009/2011

Major changes in the art system are not limited only to closed galleries and shutting down journals, but also occur on the barely noticeable microlevel and often go unnoticed. The reduction of the state budget and the policy of attracting primarily private capital, lead to inequality and polarization, as Žižek observed: "the poor are getting poorer, and the rich - richer."

Recognized, respected and promoted institutions acquire new spaces, overseas offices and stores. Only in 2012 the following commercial galleries have somehow manage to expand: Pace, Blain / Southern, Marlborough, Carlslaw St. Luke, David Zwirner, Space Station 65 , Eykyn Maclean, Michael Werner, Thaddaeus Ropac, Gagosian, White Cube, Vitrine, Carroll / Fletcher. This not only goes for private institutions, but also for charitable ones: Tate Modern increased its space through underground oil storage tanks and in parallel continues to build a new wing, the Jerwood Foundation opened a gallery of the same name, the David Roberts Foundation moved to a new multi-storey building, the organization Gasworks, consisting of studios, residences and exhibition hall, also plans to increase its space several times over.

Such disproportionate expansions lead to a peculiar aggravation of "class relations" within the art system, strengthening the position of artistic elites and - most surprisingly - to the formation of stellar systems and hierarchies within the leftist movement. As curator and theorist Simon Sheikh explained me in an interview, despite another rise in tuition costs, Goldsmith University , the main stronghold of critical theory in the U.K. or as it is called the "factory of criticality," began receiving more applications from students than usual.[4] This is not only due to the growing fashion for leftist ideas among young people, regardless of their background, but also indicates that Goldsmith professors acquired a special patent for leftist discourse, while other universities where "stars" of critical theory like Simon Sheikh himself do not teach, were forced to close their art departments.

In parallel with this polarization, the process of geographic centralization on the London axis also occurs - the budget of private donors interested in visibility or advertising their brand, is flowing, in contrast to the state budget: especially in the capital (an increase of 9%), while the provinces get several times less (a decrease to 32%). Another, more evident and not always conspicuous process is the commercialization of the art and related fields of research activity. To survive in a situation of intense competition, artists and galleries have no choice but to adapt to market demands. Moreover, bureaucrats suggest quite specific tactics to further the cultivation of mercantilism, such as cultural celebrities who should promote the art to the masses. And these suggestions became inevitable compromise for many, because in order to qualify for state grants, British institutions involved in charity work in the field of art, must have their own sources of income. At the same time, understanding the invasiveness of such an abrupt transformation, the state willing sponsors research and counseling centers that help pave the way to private financing "painlessly," while fundraising is gradually shifted onto the shoulders of the institutions.

Ellie Harrison, The History of Revolution: Fireworks Display, 2010

As for state support, it is still carried out through a system of organizations, established as a result of the separation of the British Council into regional councils. Among them, the Arts Council of England (ACE) is the most powerful organization, which to its credit, copes very well with its tasks, even after substantial reductions in its budget. The ACE directly allocates money to organizations or grants to individual artists and redistributes its budget within a whole network of small independent substructures, among them the Film and Video Umbrella iFLAMIN (supporting film and video), The Art Catalyst (supporting art-science), ArtQuest (information and legal support), Art Angel (support for costly and risky projects), LARC (Liverpool community organization), etc.

However, the ACE continues to deliberately cut budgets and introduce new conditions of contracts, reducing their duration, which makes the situation of many institutions highly unstable. In this situation, non-profit, small and young organizations, as well as the artists themselves , and especially those who have just graduated are forced to find alternative ways of financing or horizontal ways to unite, for mutual support, and sometimes direct offensive.

Drowning people hold their salvation into their own hands

According to the critic and curator Lars Bang Larsen in his book "Work, Work, Work," today we are experiencing changes in the time politics of labor, which results in time becoming a real currency - "The time that you will be spending or will have spent as the future time of deferred."[5] Developing his idea, one can add that time - is what the modern state least willingly provides, insisting instead on immediate effectiveness, efficiency and practical applicability of any type of production. Therefore, austerity measures are not only budget cuts but also the imposition of a certain alien and often harmful temporality.

In the situation of the neoliberalization of the art system, small organizations who need more time to get on their feet and achieve visible results, find it especially difficult to adapt to the new rules of the game. They cannot make income through a cafe or a bookstore, or the release of souvenirs like copyrighted prints, let alone attract celebrities. Most often, they begin to engage in the sale of work, like many so-called non-profit galleries do behind the scenes. Common Practice was founded to support the most vulnerable of them, bringing together several institutions in different formats in order to jointly research and find ways out of this critical situation. Their publication "Value, Measure, Sustainability" developed the idea of "deferred value": small organizations are as good as large ones, even though they do not provide tangible results in the short term, and therefore it is necessary to reconsider the conditions of funding and the metric approach in assessing their activities.

Namely, the study suggests ways to make better use of "immaterial assets," included in the total turnover that employees have to perform - such as conduct paid consul-

tations, give lectures, etc., that is, ways in which to invest their subjectivity for a net profit. And this can have negative consequences: overtime, educational programs for profit; furthermore, the very orientation of education towards making a profit does not bode well. But what is especially confusing in the aforementioned publication, is the consensus that the pursuit of growth - physically, spatial expansion, and the expansion of activities in general - is the a priori goal of small institutions. Development is not outwards but inwards, and focusing on professional activities is not expected nor stipulated in general, bearing witness to how deeply the ideas of entrepreneurship and marketing have penetrated the consciousness of the British art system .

On Ethics

It is generally accepted that ethics is one of the radical artistic methods invented in the early twentieth century, that was intended to democratize art. However, ironically, everything turned out quite the opposite. The state system to support art in the U.K. can be said to capitalize on this idea: since 1994 the ACE survives by selling National Lottery tickets. According to the statistics, the lottery is played primarily by representatives of the lowest strata of the population, those engaged

Ellie Harrison, Artists' Lottery Syndicate, 2010-2011

in manual labor and working on a temporary basis. They, unlike many artists, often originate from the middle class, and have nothing to lose, so they are ready to give their last money on a fluke. The ethical aspect of this type funding is (with rare exceptions) a taboo among the art community, and is perhaps criticized by Christian organizations: it is easy to deduce that the latter comes from the belief that gambling is sinful by definition. This is a key paradox of British art. The local artistic intelligentsia continues to live with hope that the art changes something in this world, while the same art lives on the money of the people who go to galleries for anything except to get warm. This would not be an exaggeration, given that utility bills in the UK are constantly getting more expensive.

Some artists see an evil mockery of themselves in the fact that art is funded by the lottery: a career in the art world is also a kind of lottery, where success is often determined by luck and good fortune, and it is no secret that many artists themselves are living below the poverty line. Playing with this situation, the founders of the Artists Lottery Syndicate invented an alternative model to support the artistic community, by receiving money from the same National Lottery, not from above but from below. Artists bought tickets together to increase their probability of winning, and they planned to divide the money among themselves. As the organizer of this initiative, Ellie Harrison, told me, members of the syndicate invested 8436 pounds, but were only able to win 1346 pounds. The Artists Lottery Syndicate positioned itself as an artistic conceptual project, and its true mission was not to acquire earnings per se, but to draw attention to the commercialization of the financing system through the symbolic return the money back to the lottery.

As these monetary losses were burdensome for the participants, the syndicate was transformed into the organization Artistsbond, a less risky way of investment through a single state lottery — the National Savings and Investments, that even began to bring some profit. By the end of 2012, the organization has won three awards of 25 pounds, and each of the artists got their share of 32 pence. Under the terms of the agreement, any artist living in the UK who has a bank account may participate Artistsbond, but his or her participation should be lifelong:
Ellie believes that in this way they oppose the demands of short-term effectiveness, imposed by the market and new cultural politics.

The artist and the crowd

Crowdfunding is a relatively new way of sponsorship based on the horizontal collecting of donations through the Internet. It was invented in the United States, where government support of culture is minimal; and after the introduction of austerity measures Crowdfunding became popular in Europe. Currently in the UK there are several organizations that collect funds to support art projects: WeDidThis, WeFund, Sponsume, Crowdfunder, as well as their US counterparts - such as KickStarter and Indiegogo. The Crowdfunding model is based on the principle

Ellie Harrison, Work-a-thon for the Self-Employed, 2011

of "all or nothing," accruing money for a limited time: if the project does not gain the required amount within the specified period, it is simply not sponsored. This is also called "participative" financing, as all the donors are rewarded either by direct participation in the project or a souvenir or some privilege. It can be effective among small groups of like-minded people, and at the state level, such as in France, where donations for the restoration of the dome of the Pantheon in Paris were rewarded by invitations to a private party.

Using Crowdfunding to fund art projects causes the similar fears as does the open distribution of taxpayers' money. Assuming that taxpayers will determine the UK's museums exhibition policy, then high Renaissance and modernist masters or even entertainment projects would be almost exclusively exhibited. Exhibitions containing anything "controversial," would not receive a budget. However, if the content of the exhibitions would be determined by experts in contemporary art, regardless of what visitors want to see themselves, then this model by definition cannot be called democratic - that gets us back to the old dialectic of intellectuals and people.

The structure of Crowdfunding holds inside it this intractable conflict. On the one hand, it helps some young artists to start a career: in the UK money was successfully collected for three final exhibitions, used to pay for the participation of several

contestants in the BP Portrait Award, implementing projects of young curators, publishing catalogs, etc. But if we take a quick glance we come to realize that these internet servers are primarily used for entertainment projects, equating art with graphic design and fashion. Still, the money that goes to support the arts, is hardly comparable with the millions of dollars that Internet users donate to burn discs by their favorite rock bands or for the development of new computer games.

The very ideology behind these sites raises many questions. For example, the British lead of Crowdfunding Ed Whiting defines it as "a microphilantropy" that raises a new generation of "major donors" - that is, the very rich, who will invest, but only under the condition of low taxation. Moreover, Crowdfunding usually does not involve the possibility of selfless donations and thus mediates the perception of art: as I wrote above, each donors is supposed to get some material or symbolic gain. Thus, aesthetic judgment, which, according to Kant, must be disinterested, is in fact inscribed in the logic of real subsumption and entrepreneurship. Despite this, Crowdfunding still has the potential to support protest, critical, and even revolutionary art, that is hardly represented in state institutions.

All of these initiatives (as well as many others) allow art to survive in the era of austerity measures, but they also tell us something about the need to change the existing system, in which art can serve either private capital or exist through money received from the lottery.

Ellie Harrison, General Election Drinking Game, 2010

Freelancers

The above problems may seem to some readers - such as myself coming from Eastern Europe, no more than the whining of spoiled British artists snickering on grants and high fees, and in general living in a country where there so much art that it is almost nauseating. And these readers would right to some extent. In many ways, the role of non-profit galleries in the UK is no more than lengthening curriculum vitaes, or to facilitating exchanges of compliments between insiders at exhibition openings. As for those galleries that are engaged in marginalized areas and local communities, they in many ways just diverting attention from the real social problems: no gallery in east London failed to prevent riots that happened there in August 2011. While interning in a gallery in Hackney - where in some parts pogroms occurred - I watched as students of African and Arab descent arrived there entirely lost: they did not want to see art projects and even less to discuss them with the gallery employees. At the same time they were photographed by interns in order to send documentation to the ACE, as the galleries are required to report on their alleged charitable activities.

Yet, the decline of galleries and a reduction in the production and distribution of art cannot be a solution in a context in which the downside is little more than a chimera or ideological construct, produced by capitalism. In a system where the public budget is downsized in order to increase the salaries of the rich or pay the national debt to banks, we can hardly count on the fact that that money for the arts would instead go to a "more necessary" social sphere. Therefore, upholding the art system in its entirely - even considering that in a few decades of neoliberalism its sociality was partially atrophied - is primarily an ethical and ideological position. This is not a quixotic attempt to get back to a post-war social democracy, but a necessity to resist the expansion of neoliberalism, which is destroying the remnants of a society in which art has become the last refuge for politics. Moreover, art as defined by Stendhal as a "promesse du bonheur," that is promising happiness in spite of lack and suffering, may be one of the few remaining antidotes to this artificial austerity.[6]

However, the impossibility of reducing cultural production is associated with a completely different issue, that reverses the problem on its head. In this country, contemporary art has reached a deadlock: it exists in such amounts, concentrations and forms that it is not needed by society nor by the state which sees how wonderful this art pays for itself in the galleries of the central, eastern and south London. But given the current situation, measures like the reform or partial dismantling its infrastructure will only exacerbate unemployment and create new serious social problems. During the period which is now remembered as the years of well-being and prosperity (especially during the time of prime minister Tony Blair), art spawned hundreds of arts organizations and trained thousands of professionals, whose existence is now totally dependent on competent funding. British humanities institutions produce thousands of artists, curators and critics from around the

Ellie Harrison, Anticapitalist Aerobics, 2013

world annually, forming a reserve army, which ultimately leads to structural unemployment and a post-wage economy based on exploitation. In this situation budgetary deficits, the artistic elite, obsessed with the idea of infinite growth and development, is unable to slow down its momentum, or otherwise reform adequately. As a result, it "lumpenizes" students and graduates, creating class inequalities in an age of already record-high levels of unemployment among young people. Any resistance against the new austerity reforms is criminalized, and the students themselves, who do not agree with these economic measures aimed against them as "class," are publicly denigrated as naive and uneducated.

Faced with these issues, the British contemporary art system is unable to resolve not only structural, but also ethical contradictions. It illegally exploits students and graduates, denies ethnic, gender and sexual equality, and it is perhaps more successful at this than any other immaterial industry. Young professionals full of ambition and expectations agree to unpaid internships, and in most cases they end up performing mindless and thankless job to supplement their semi-fictitious resume. Gallery interns are forced to seek any means of subsistence to help them get a job in their field in a hypothetical future. Moreover, because of this, a conflict emerges among young people: those who cannot work for free are doomed to remain forever freelancers or completely change their sphere activity. Such a system is also beginning to take shape in Russia - where wealthy arts organizations like the "Garage," which now also has unpaid Internships or the "Manezh," where volunteer work is actively promoted.

Produced under such conditions, art paradoxically creates a new kind of autonomy and self-reflection: artists, critics, art historians and curators, all faced with the problem of survival, focus their practice and research activities on the context of their own existence, survival and artistic and economic relations.
Currently in the UK there are many organizations dealing with the problems of exploitation: Critical Practice, Precarious Workers Brigade, Future Interns, Rag-pickers, and, of course, ArtLeaks. Through these and similar initiatives the problem of the precarity of art labour becomes an integral part of art itself and its discourse. But precisely this inward turn works like a spring, ready to shoot back at any moment. Art's self-reflection provides a new opportunity to get out of its own autonomy.

This unassimilated debris, marginal elements of the artistic infrastructure, allied with each other, give some hope for a change in the status quo. The very terms "intern" and "freelancer" as Hito Steyerl notes in her text[7] have their own tradition, being etymologically connected with the struggle for freedom and justice: freelancer refers to a free medieval spearman, while intern is associated with the word internment. However, in order not to fall into philosophical realism by giving these notions real political power, we should be primarily talking about them as a potentia. They could become modern fighters with the system, because they are not bound within its contracts, and are situated in the border zone between the "inside" and "outside." Art, which is sponsored by the poorest people, while the rich launder their money, art, from which productivity, efficiency and utility is demanded, cannot but trigger their rejection and protest. However, in practice, these fighters become active actors of contemporary protest movements, but they do not become revolutionary subjects.

On the one hand, the system of contemporary art, affected by its internal contradictions become a crucible of the politicization and radicalization of its members, which led to some extent to the student protests in 2010. On the other hand, when this same system is more and more constrained, we do not see the escalation of conflicts and protest movements. Perhaps it is because the artists belong to a narcissistic class, closed in itself and who is not ready for solidarity. By interacting an activist group which appealed to the international consolidation of artists, I was confronted with the fact that artists are not willing to recognize their social and financial situation. Given that class conflict is beginning to emerge on a certain age level, youth and poverty begin to be perceived as a shameful, yet inevitable transitional period. After several years of Internships and low-wage jobs, people seems happy to forget about their experiences as if they were a necessary step to a successful career.

No less problematic is "organization on the ground" and the establishment of trade unions, because workers are afraid to speak about their rights and to demand anything under the threat of losing their jobs. In this situation, oddly enough, a direct action in the gallery space - even though I am not in full support of this method - proves an effective measure, allowing for some clarity and a kind of "political education." Ideally, such an action should be accompanied by solidarity with the employees themselves and grow into a common struggle, instead of being limited to a moment of "intellectual terrorism" by intimidating gallerists and drawing attention to these issues.

However, a more problematic aspect of activism on the territory of art, is its openly economic character. As David Beach rightly observes, instead of demanding the abolition of wage labor as such, as in the tradition of the engaged left movement, interns are fighting for relative exploitation, that is, for the replacement of slavery by another form of slavery, and therefore, the continuation of capitalist labor relations.[8]

In the context of austerity measures, the notion of a possible "horizon" narrows more and more, being reduced to a simple opposition between decades: the 90s were better than the 10s and 70s were better than 90s. Moreover, the emergence of the phenomenon of unpaid work in the private and public sector is so demoralizing that even a meager salary begins to look like a possible way out. On the one hand, these measures apply to the majority of young professionals in the art system who feel the urge to fight them, and on the other hand, since such a position may be a dead end in terms of changes in the system as a whole, we should not talk about lowering fees and free education as the given right of any student, we should not talk about social democracy as a satisfactory and tolerant form of government, but about an alternative social model as fundamentally possible and necessary. When speaking of higher wages, the abolition of internships and improved working conditions, we at the same time need to identify with other workers in other fields and other countries. And as banal as it may sound, economic demands should lead us to the political ones, while at the same time not pushing away potential allies.

Based on a text published online in Russian on Colta.ru, March 2013. This text has been revised and expanded for the ArtLeaks Gazette 2. Translated by Corina L. Apostol

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Ellie Harrison was born in London and now lives and works in Glasgow, where she sees herself as a 'political refugee' escaped from the Tory strongholds of Southern England. She describes her practice as emerging from an ongoing attempt to strike-a-balance between the roles of 'artist', 'activist' and 'administrator'. As well as making playful, politically engaged works for gallery contexts, she is also the coordinator of the national Bring Back British Rail campaign, which strives to popularize the idea of renationalising of our public transport system, and is the agent for The Artists' Bond - a long-term speculative funding scheme for artists, now with 120 members across the UK.

Endnotes

1 Slavoj Žižek, The Year of Dreaming Dangerously, Verso Publishers pg. 23
2 See "David Cameron makes leaner state a permanent goal":
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/11/david-cameron-policy-shift-leaner-efficient-state
3 These figures are from 2012.
4 See my interview with Simon Sheikh in Russian:
http://theoryandpractice.ru/posts/6823-saymon-sheykh-sovremennoe-iskusstvo—eto-mesto-izg-naniya-politiki.
Unfortunately the interview was never published in English
5 'The Paradox of Art and Work: An Irritating Note' in Work, Work, Work: A Reader in Art and Labour, Stenberg Press, 2012, pg. 22
6 See Steven Shaviro, Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption:
http://www.e-flux.com/journal/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/
7 Hito Stereyl, Art as Occupation: Claim for an Autonomy of Life, e-flux journal #30, 12/2011
http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life-12/
8 See David Beech, Reproduction, Interns and Unpaid Labour:
http://dbfreee.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/reproduction-interns-and-unpaid-labour/

Circus Melodrama

Corina L. Apostol
with
drawings by Iulia Toma: ArtLeaks Bestiary Series

A sketch for a theatre fable for cultural workers based on the everyday life in a family of orphaned wild beasts, including some endangered species trying to live and work together in a circus.

Intro

Hello, good evening, welcome to our show. I am the director of this event and tonight we will take you on a very special journey deep into the every-day life of a circus, of wild birds, terrific beasts, and even shiny reptiles. How exciting it will be! Isn't it wonderful to escape for a few hours into a world of fantasy and magic which has no relation whatsoever with reality?
Sit comfortably and enjoy tonight's performance brought to you live by these wonderful and talented creatures! Applause! Applause! *(All the actors now come onto the stage holding hands)* And please do not forget to thank our sponsors whom we owe all these wonderful things! Yes, thank the benevolent sponsors and patrons! Isn't it so nice to be a sponsor? Applause! Long live free enterprise!

Enters the Monkey:

OK, can we go now? I am just going to start, I have a play to do here tonight! Director get off the stage, please and let us begin!

Ahem ahem here we go!

By now most of them hated working in the circus. Their lives depended on it and some long time ago, they even felt like it was their home. Oh how nice the feeling of being part of a circus community! The games they played, the laughs they had, the public raving about their acts, the occasional dramas, all this they cherished as their own unique world – and it had been their own laboratory of creation for generations. But everything changes.

It happened without their realizing it, while they were too intoxicated by sheer fun and excitement. The circus had become a cage to which they no longer had the keys. At first there were solitary voices complaining, but soon the whole chorus of wild birds, mammals and even the reptiles were rebelling. Finally, even the big stars were talking about escaping the circus. Even they realized that they were only playing the interests of the big sponsors who controlled them like puppets on strings.

Director intervenes: Excuse me but this part which you just said is incorrect and plus we agreed to not include it in the final play! Please cut it out for good, Monkey! We cannot have such direct attacks on an artistic institution or its sponsor even in the form of an artistic event which has nothing to do with reality!

Monkey: But I need to say these things, they are true and….I….. (director just stares down at the monkey)

Monkey continues:

But they could not even how they would change the mess they were in if they could. Some called the circus a new system of oppression. But that sounded too abstract to catch on. They all knew how oppression, manipulation and control really felt inside and outside of their bodies. Some brave ones decided to stop ignoring the problems and speak out and encourage others to raise their voices too. Some even began imagining rebellious actions to clean up the mud they felt they were living in.

Director interrupts: You play sounds too pessimistic and realist! People don't want to hear about these things! They want to be enchanted by nice, adventurous, lovely stories!

The Director turns at the audience: And that goes for you too! What will the people upstairs will say if they would see how boring your faces look right now?? Eyes bright, smiles on, chins up and we're on live! I am especially talking to you here (pointing at someone random in the audience), I want to see that big expressive face of yours - SMILE! ENJOY! IT'S ALL FOR YOU!

Monkey: Ok let me continue, please…

There was ferment like never before; a less innocent , less carefree but hopeful era had begun. Of course, there were still parties and fun to be had even during dark times. But in the end life never quite works out the way you expect it to…

Voice from the audience: Monkey you are in league with the bosses! Shame! Shame! Down with the monkey!

Monkey: I am not in league with anyone! I am for autonomous creative expression! I believe in the power of free creativity! After we won the last revolution, yes, now this is freedom and I am free!
So now we are really going to begin and I would like to start with a very personal story which brought me the inspiration for this play. And it goes like this, it is actually a letter i received from an old friend….

The Letter

Dear **Monkey**,
You've only been gone a couple of days but I get the feeling you are starting to freak out about how much you miss me, so here's a run-down of my recent adventures. The manager made me lick an icicle that was half my size at the beginning of my show (it's the new trend in circus acts) and I got nearly stabbed by it but the audience loved it: "do it again!, do it again!". Then I had to stand like forever in a meter pile of bat shit which I had to clean up after people left. Apparently it's all in my "contract" – funny thing when you're not educated enough and just "x" your name to a piece of paper. I guess I was just tired of looking in boroughs for scraps of dried fruit; I just wanted some decent food and a warm place to live. I am still a monkey from the jungle and this "salary system" they got here seems unnatural to me. I feel trapped in it but I ain't smart enough to see myself out.
Anyway, after my acts, I made plans to ride the rollercoaster when the show was over just for my own fun you know… but then I made the major mistake decision to feed myself lots of sugar and coffee to stay awake. Things took a turn for the way worse when, due to lack of sleep and sugar-caffeine rush I picked a fight with two burly men hanging around the circus; and after narrowly escaping I learned that the rollercoaster was closed for the winter…
And then I gave myself a pep talk in the bathroom and made a fun acrobatic show the next day with some kids cheering me on and now I'm almost back to normal. By the way, I also joined a new group together with the Lizard. They're called the "Repressed Mammals Banter Group" or something…and if you thought that talking in-between shows about how unbearable things are in the circus was getting too dangerous…well… you ain't seen anything yet!!!
It was so great when you were here to make me laugh and gave me hugs. .. Thanks for that!
Love,
Parrot

Monkey: Unfortunately, dear friends, the Parrot left soon after he wrote this to me, he decided to emigrate to a new life in the amazonian jungle.
Director: I think your play is moving in a better direction, still there is too much mention about all sorts of illegal and criminal activities which have no connection to us and it really ruins the moment. This is after all a melodrama about LOVE….

Monkey to himself: Bitch!

Director: What did you say? Nevermind, I have to have dinner now with a sponsor, please do follow my instructions! I am watching youuu!!

Monkey's assistant/voiceover -
[*Parrot would oftentimes think of his good friend from afar, from his new life in the Amazonian Jungle. How good it was to be free again! The monkey was still too attached to the circus to finally let it go, the Parrot thought. He could always remember how it was to be a wild creature living carelessly nurtured by the jungle. But in a few years he discovered that even his dear Jungle was being destroyed by forces he could not understand then, the same as those eating away at the circus. The Parrot was destined to travel from one place to the next, always looking for something he thought he could return to but never did.*]

The Working Group for Repressed Mammals, Birds and Reptiles

The Zebra: Quiet! Quiet please! We have come here from different realms of the animal kingdom, different species, different languages and customs. And in spite of our differences, we are here to discuss some problems which plague our lives at the circus and even our everyday lives. We are all for the circus, but who is the circus for?
We stand for collective mobilization and autonomy of circus life! It's time to think where we are, what we want…and tonight, **The Flamingo**, our talented and beautiful poet has written a song to inspire us! Please, we are listening, dear Flamingo….

Flamingo: Thank you. I dedicate this poem to us, the new oppressed species! (cheers from the audience). Ahem, I begin:
"We are all broken by the quality of life"

Bear: Oh, he starts so depressing. I need a drink already…

Everyone: SHHHHH!!!!

Flamingo: "We are all damned by the cruel wheel of oppression"

Bear: Oh, for the love of…
Everyone: Keep it down, we want to hear!!!

Flamingo [reads dramatically]:
"We dreamed ourselves free eagles whose wings could not be chained
But we ended up never more than carrion crows
They pushed us from our nests, stole our eggs, changed our stories
The mockingbirds sings it, it's all that he knows
"Ah what can I do?" say a powerless few
With just a lump in your throat and an emptiness in your stomach
Pity, I thought a bird's life was full of dignity
But now I can't even see whose profiting from me
My world is of puppets grasping at their threads to survive…"

Everyone except the bear: "AHHH…." Handkerchiefs, teary eyes, running noses all around.

The Zebra: You cut so deep to the core of our suffering, Flamingo. Oh, such lives we do lead nowadays….Freedom , freedom, we want freedom!
Everyone except the bear: Set us free, set us free! We want to create as free animals!

Bear: What? What is this senseless weeping? Who is this freedom really for? I see no merit in his teary verse. Yes, we are the wretched many, but we still have our dignity, mammals! Sorry, I mean birds as well…and reptilians of course! We still have…we still have justice on our side! And the oppressed will rise! They will rise…. I thought we were here to self-organize!!!

Everyone: Yes, the oppressed will rise! They will rise! We will rise!! Rise up, rise up!

The fox: Who are we here? We can only feel the symptoms of how we've come to live and work like a disease; we cannot feel your sense of pride. You speak of dignity when most of us need two or three humiliating acts to make ends meet; we run from one to another while juggling a series of temporary gigs throughout the year. We are owed, we are robbed, we are overworked. We feel unsafe, abused and dispensable. Imagine! Most of us will probably never be able to live our old age in comfort.

Everyone: How do we make a change? Can you show us, Bear? Do you know what to do? Can you lead us?

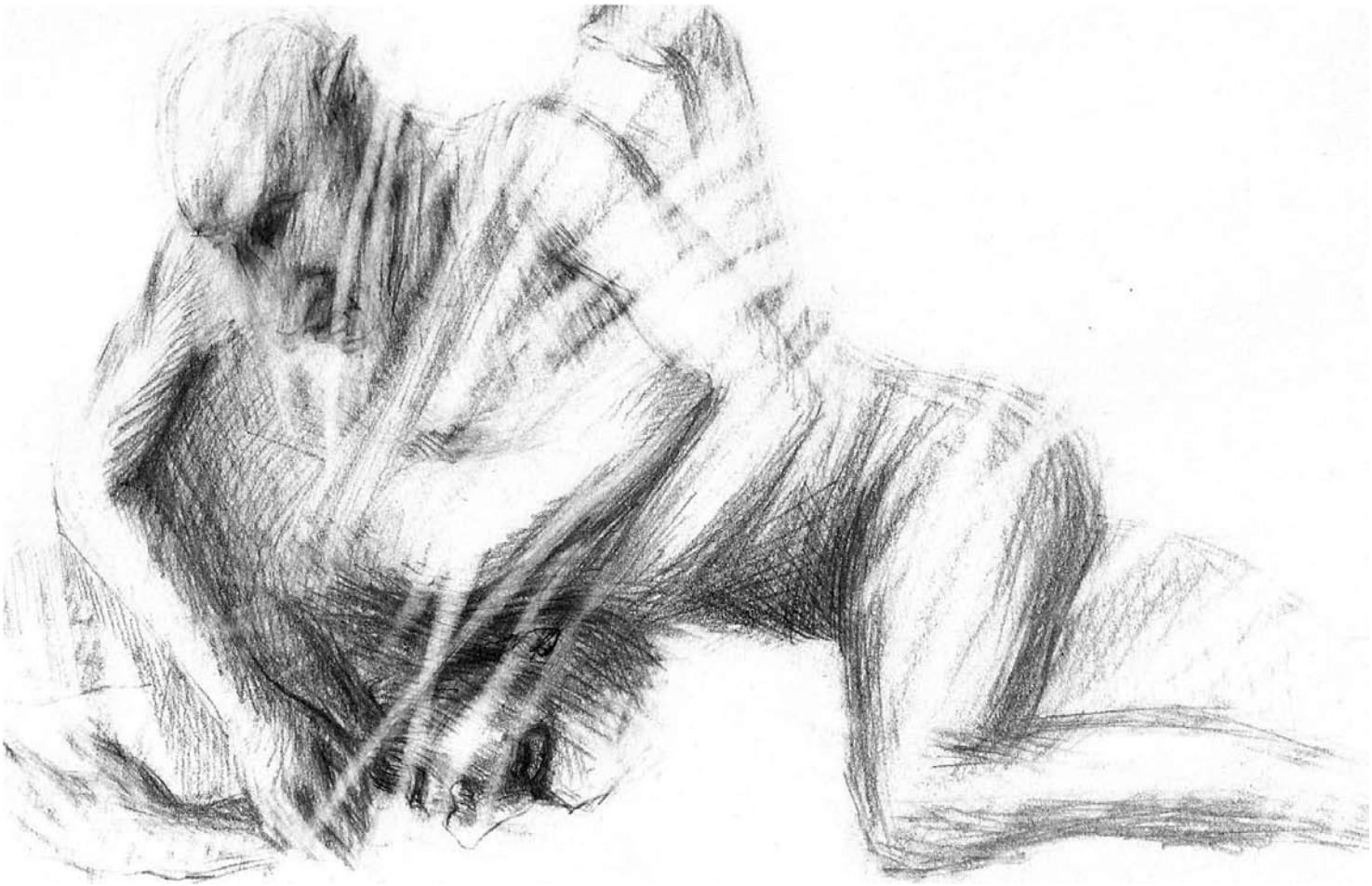
Bear: I am not sure that I…. I feel you are weakened by this oppressive circus which runs our lives. Your minds are clouded by the symptoms of the system that enslaves! Eh….There's somewhere else I have to be tonight….

Fox: Then let us weep! Let us at least express our traumas! Let us confess our own miseries and those which we inflicted upon others too! …I don't mean ME of course….but I've heard rumors that some here do collaborate with our sponsors on dubious event….Well, anyway there is at least some comfort in confession.

Bear: No. It is not the way. I am sure of it. Listen to me I come from a distinguished Marxist tradition!

But nobody listens anymore. Night has fallen and everyone wants to go home and rest after a tense discussion.

Flamingo: So anyway, Bear, here's a booklet of my poems I wrote recently : "Let it all out!". So you know, cut me some slack, I was a bit drunk (what can I do in my condition), definitely nervous, I was sad for missing my friend the Stork's wedding because I couldn't afford the trip, certainly pissed at life….However, I can proudly say I managed to finish the series probably because of my dear wife who nurtured



me with cooked fish. She is really great to me, even though I can't help behaving like the peacock sometimes…you know the ladies really adore poets…what's a guy to do when…Anyway, I thought your little speech was pretty good tonight…

Bear: Yeah, thanks, I'll check it out…I need to be somewhere tonight. …But. You know what? No matter what you guys say, I still feel like my own free agent, I can get into as much trouble as I want, no rules, nobody tells me "you can't do that!" Freedom of the will, you know! My circus acts are still my own creation! That's worth holding on to!

Flamingo: I guess I am happy for you if you feel that way…anyway…I wish I had your conviction….Take care. My best to Mrs. Bear!

The Bear thought to himself then: I always knew I was not born a slave. But I am not their leader.

[They part ways.]

Director comes back on the set: I am baaack! How are you my darlings? I hope the play is going well.

Monkey: You talk like you are so above this. Sitting at high-class tables, making classy conversation by candlelight. Do you ever think that these sponsors are the betrayers of the revolution? Should we not denounce them?

Director: Whatever do you mean! Know you place, Monkey! I put food on your plate while you monkey around behaving "creatively"! Everyone knows that the revolution has been won, and no we are living in a free society, including all you creative critters jumping and thumping on the stage! How little you know of how to manage you own selves! You need a Director! and you need Sponsors!

Monkey: But in whose interests do you work, Director? What is your real play here?Who are the real sponsors? Is all this support so innocent, so free of obligation, so generous and charitable?…Anyway it's getting late, we must go on with the play.

Director: Listen here, if you use any more of these scenes which we agreed to cut and which harm our friends and sponsors……I WILL STOP YOUR PLAY! Would you like to be in a real revolution?

Silence.

Monkey: No.

Director: Then go on with the entertaining story!

Monkey's assistant spits directly on the stage looking at the two: And now it's time for the next scene:

Love Changes Everything

Fox: Good evening, Tiger, my dear friend! I come from the revolutionary "Working Group for Repressed Mammals, Birds and Reptiles." There were some intense discussions tonight, you should have come! We even cried, except the Bear who was his stoic self of course. Flamingo wrote such a stirring verse. You know although he is not of my species nor of the "prescribed" gender for me, I've always fancied him. His feathers are so tantalizingly pink! Mmmm…Delicious!….. But why are you so quiet and morose?

Tiger [begins singing]:

You know my story?

I never met a chase
that I could not catch
never fallen in love
and not been bored by it….

I never asked a lover for their help
You learn better when
you're always picking lovers
who can't help themselves.

And I don't want to try so hard anymore
I don't want a fucking lover
who makes me feel like a failure…damn!

Fox: I see, amorous problems again. But look around, we are again on the verge of revolutionary times! Lovers come and go like leaves change on trees! The red blood baths have been replaced by red hearts on Valentine's day! Oh… or is it the other way around?… Valentine's hearts and blood baths still to come. Everywhere I look there are enemies and hypocrites, hypocrites who pretend to have our best interest at heart… red hearts on Valentine's Day and blood bath still to come…oh now my head is really on fire!

Tiger: You are as blind as you are smart, dear Fox. Love changes everything. I'm heartbroken and I'm dealing with it as I can…you see, dear Fox you have your hell, I have mine. I don't even care about the circus or the revolution anymore.

Fox: Oh, I did not mean to belittle your sadness! I mean I was once in a stupid kind of love, a way too in love-love, a you -can't-possibly-be-this-cool-in-real-life…right? –love. And I knew better, my internal realist said : "well, he's so out of my league!" And at some point I had to give up on him and returned to the circus routine to make me feel better again….That and I ignored all my phone-calls and ate ice cream like any depressed soul.

Tiger: You know, I woke up this morning, my coffee tasted like shit. I want to shave my whole fur off, all the food tastes rotten. And I feel like everything is working as it should in the world, but everything's just wrong with me…
Fox: You speak wise words, friend. And I think your own struggles are not so far from what us rebellious beasts have been discussing about and organizing. Yes, yes, love does change everything. You've relieved some deep seated apathy I've been carrying around. Hallelujah!

Tiger: What do you mean?

Fox: Love is a whole different animal, you are right. But I just realize that we've been arguing only about money and resources as a way to organize ourselves and hit a dead end politically - like tonight's play (*right? looks at the audience*) .
We never tried beginning from the position of love as a force for our struggle. Love opens us to move beyond ourselves. Love can bring us to the adventure of creating the change we've all been waiting for. To see a different world that we don't yet know through attachments that give us the real possibility to flourish.

Tiger: After all, you are not half as dumb as you look, my dear.

Fox: Let's tell the others together! There is no real revolution without free love!

Director: Yes, yes very good! After all this is all about LOVE!

To be continued….

Corina Apostol received her B.A. with honors from Duke University, majoring in Art History and History. Currently Corina is pursuing a doctorate in Art History at Rutgers University - New Brunswick, with a dissertation entitled: "Dissident Education: Socially Engaged Art from the Former East in Global Context." Corina also works as a curatorial research fellow at the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum. She is the co-founder of Art Leaks and co-editor of the ArtLeaks Gazette. Corina contributes to The Long April. Texts About Art, IDEA Arts+Society and Critic Atac.

Iulia Toma is a mixed-media artist who works with the means of aesthetic expression through textile, as well as with photography, painting, installation and text in each work. Recently she has been focusing on social issues that she expresses in her own individual way: feminism, women's rights, interpersonal relations of closed communities, the materiality of urban living, social justice. She teaches in the Department of Art & Design, Textile section at the National University of Arts Bucharest, practicing pedagogy in harmony with her personal activity as well as with the innovation required for didactic activity within the artistic discipline.

Once upon a Time in the ANIMAL ASSEMBLY


IT SEEMED LIKE DANCING WAS LIBERATING THEM OF THEIR INTERNAL POLICE...
JU JU
OOOH YEAHHHH
WE HAVE TO FIGHT THE HIERARCHIES, IN and OUT ART SPACES!
INVOLVE ART SPACE WORKERS and PUBLIC AS PRODUCERS
MORE INTERACTION BETWEEN ART AND EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION!
CREATE A CRITICAL DISTANCE TO ANY IMAGE
MOST ART NOWADAYS IS A COLLECTION OF SYMPTOMS
ALL ITS GLAMOUR, VOID & COLD SHOW US THE degree of SAFETY desired by the RULING CLASSES

THE WHITE CUBE IS NOT THE PROBLEM

THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE ANTIRADICALITY OF THE RITUAL

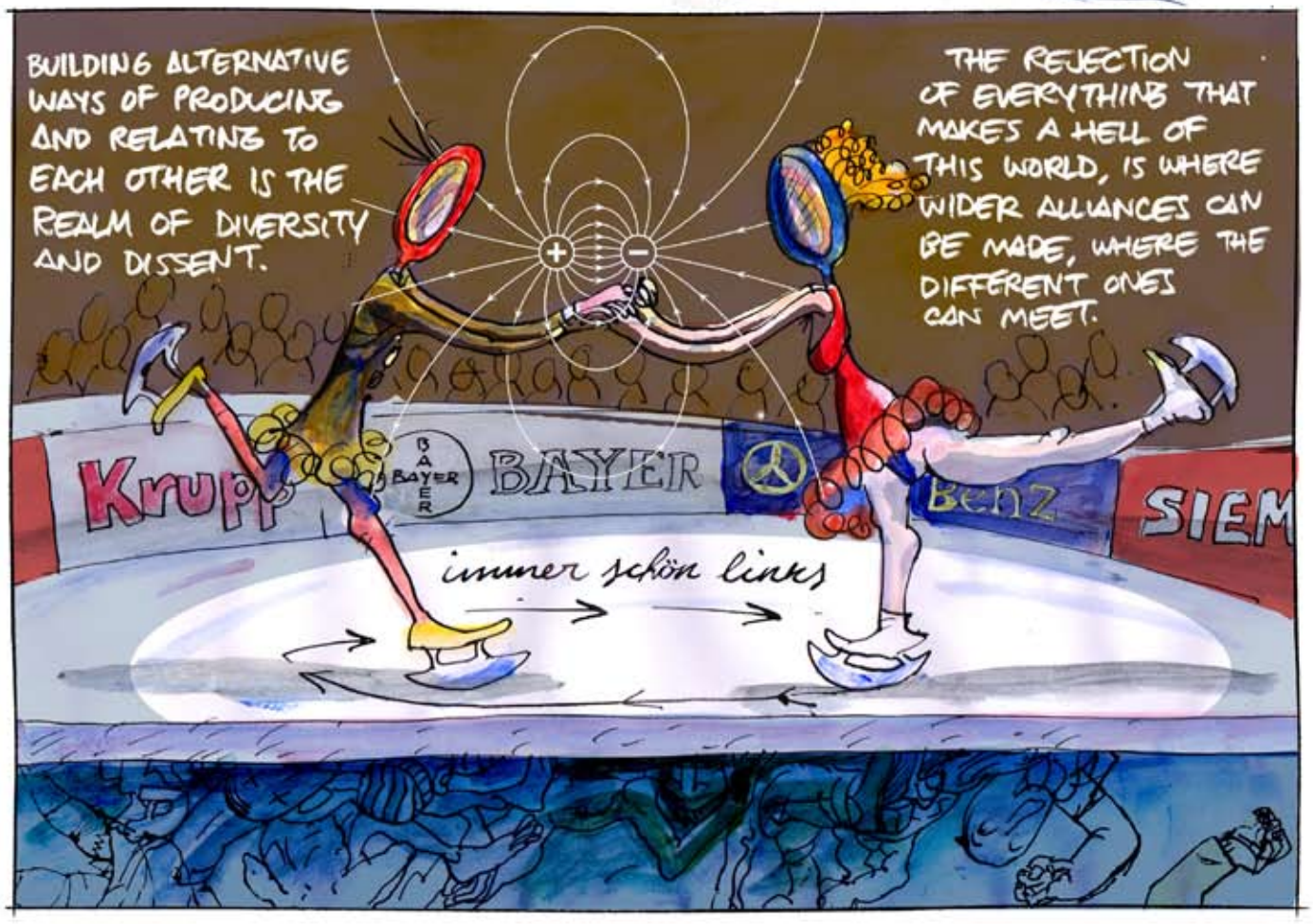
ARTISTS HAVE TO FIGHT CORPORATE MEDIA. MASS MEDIA ARE THE VOICE OF CORPORATE POWER: THE VOICE TO BE OBBEYED...


WE ARE STILL LOOKING FOR THE INSTITUTION OF A NEW REVOLUTIONARY
WE


IT WAS THE PROLETARIAT FOR LONG, BUT IT WONIT WORK AGAIN

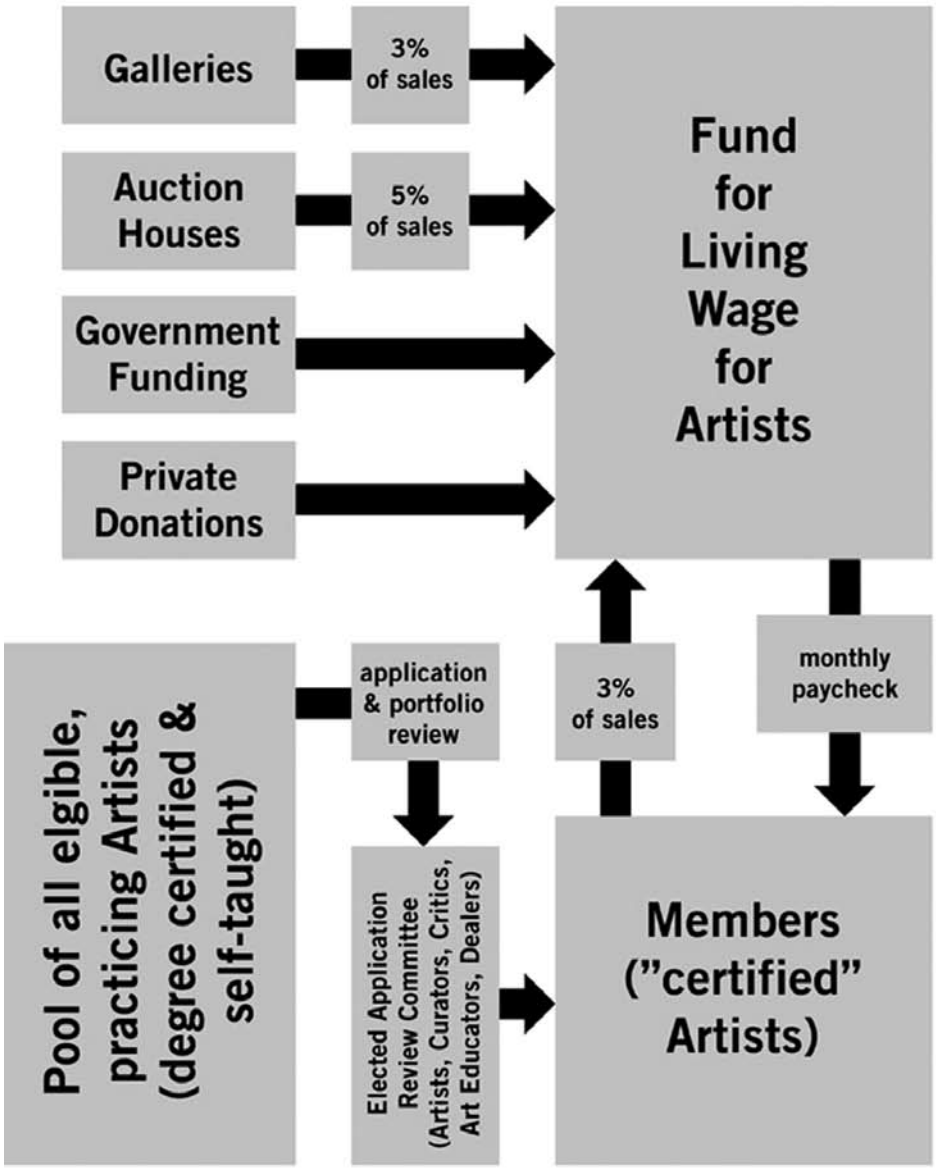

WE: THOSE WHO CAN SEE OURSELVES AS A SINGLE AND DIVERSE SPECIES


MUST STOP THE CORPORATE MACHINE
BOING! BOING! BOING!


BUILDING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PRODUCING AND RELATING TO EACH OTHER IS THE REALM OF DIVERSITY AND DISSENT.
THE REJECTION OF EVERYTHING THAT MAKES A HELL OF THIS WORLD, IS WHERE WIDER ALLIANCES CAN BE MADE, WHERE THE DIFFERENT ONES CAN MEET.
Krupp
BAYER
BAYER
Benz
SIEM
immer schön links

Artist Union Fund for a Living Wage

Daniel Blochwitz

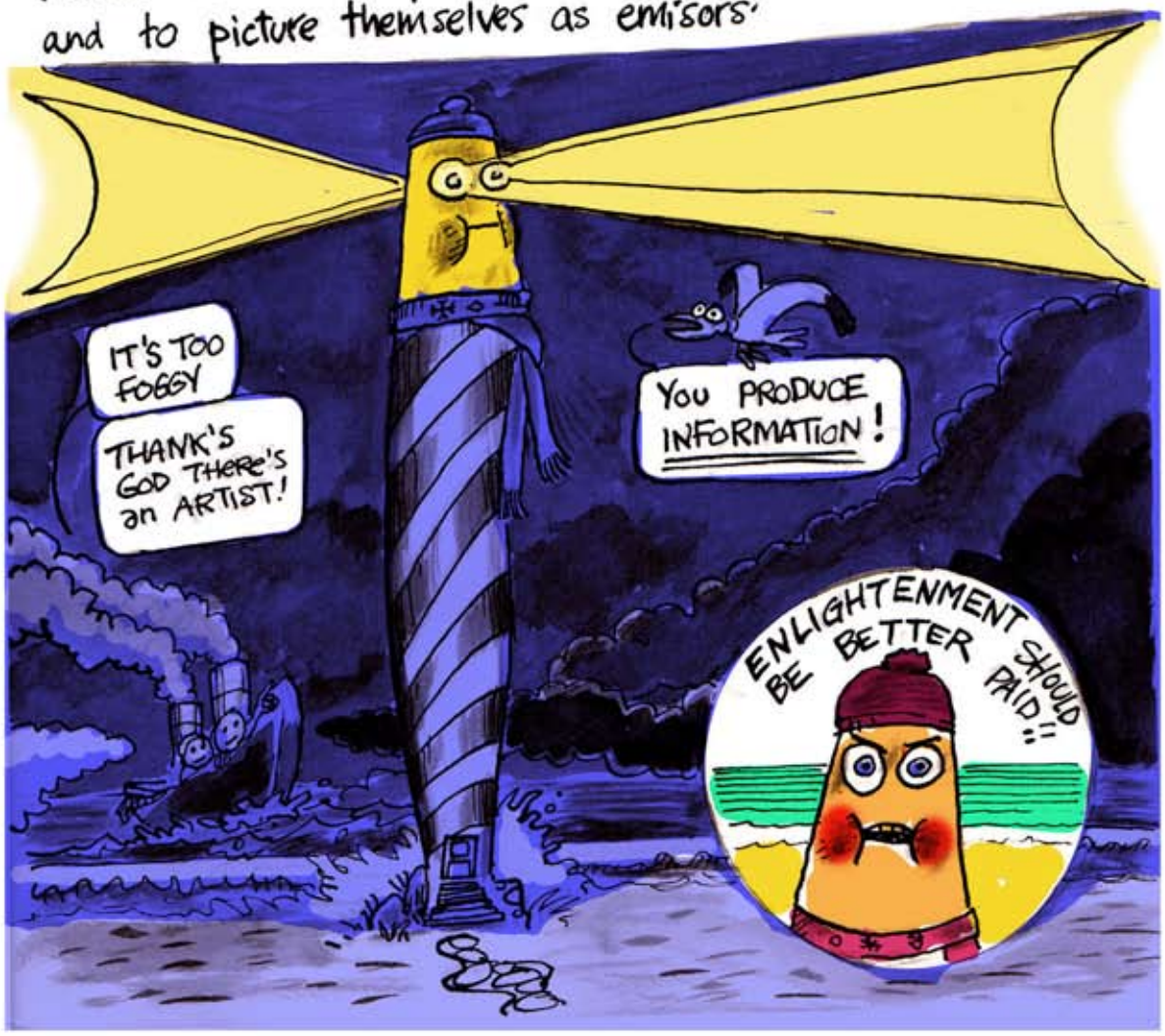


My diagram proposes a sort of artist union fund for a living wage within the current political/socio-economic system - thus an evolutionary rather than revolutionary proposal - that tries to re-distribute fractions of financial gains from art sales made by galleries, auction houses and commercially successful artists. These resources would go into a fund that would disperse the money equally amongst all eligible visual artists, selected by rotating and elected jurors of peers and art world workers in monthly paycycles comparable to a basic income. This system would be based on solidarity, in which those who profit most from the current art market come to the aid of those artists whose work or practice can't sustain their basic needs, because it tends to be too political/radical/critical/conceptual/theoretical or otherwise resistant to mainstream tastes or interests. It could provide a starting point for a future when an art practice can be totally independent of the market and media and subsequently starts to concern itself truly with the issues that are most pressing and/or form-findings that are most innovative. It would benefit the common good and public knowledge. Art would get a chance to reach its most pluralist/democratic/emancipated incarnation and thus also connects most strongly with the "real world"….

Daniel Blochwitz was born in 1973 in East Germany and came to the US in 1995, where he studied visual art, receiving a BFA (Eastern Kentucky University, 1999) and MFA (University of Florida, 2003) degree in photography, the latter with a minor in German Literature and Film, before attending the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York (2003-04). He has shown his work in solo and group exhibitions in the United States and internationally.

EDUCATIONAL RIFT

ARtists are used to produce images, sounds, objects, texts, etc and to picture themselves as emisors.




AND JUST ANOTHER VERY IMPORTANT QUESTION:
WHAT ABOUT OUR FUTURE? NOT YOURS OR MINE
BUT OUR FUTURE AS THE HUMAN SPECIES?!
EH?!
WE NEED MORE!

Autonomous Research within and/or Beneath the Ruins; Or, We are Finally Getting our Feet Wet

Heath Schultz

The beginning portion of this text was originally written as a glossary entry on "autonomous institutions and education" for an unrealized project. Included here is a slightly adapted version.
Also included is a revised and expanded piece I wrote exploring an experimental collective research project I was involved with in graduate school along with several peers. The editors and I found that these previously distinct texts add a certain depth to one another and thus publish them here as one.
For purposes of clarity, I've framed the different histories and traditions of "autonomous institutions and education" in four ways. In no particular order I will refer to them as: Activist initiated education; Infrastructural experiments; Free Schools, and finally Free Universities.

Activist initiated education is typically derived directly from political struggles and often have a clear political purpose. Examples here might include: the Highlander Folk School, founded in Tennessee (US) in 1932 to help educate and organize labor and union activists; the highly influential praxis of Paulo Freire and his work with Brazilian illiterate poor;[1] and Sojourner Truth Organization's (US) now infamous How to Think: Dialectical Materialism course, developed in the 1970s as a week-long intensive on Marxist theory.[2] Importantly STO's 'classes' were not run by academics, but STO members who were directly involved in organizing workers toward revolutionary ends. More recently we can look at projects like the IWW's Work People's College, which seeks to build the skills of union organizers and help educate fellow workers on the historic and contemporary class struggle.[3]

Infrastructural experiments are platforms to help facilitate self and co-education projects. They often use networked forms to connect individuals with shared interests of inquiry and usually function through the establishment of a website or other common site of exchange, enabling those interested to find each other.

Perhaps most visible here is the arrival of listservs, wikis, discussion boards, and other online sites of exchange. While the quality and political leanings of these efforts vary greatly, perhaps two of the more productive examples and concerted efforts are the discussion-based listservs Nettime and Edu-Factory in their initial form. While both projects have now become closer to an announcement list, originally they were structured as rigorous critical exchanges between intellectuals across the globe. Nettime, inaugurated in 1995, was primarily focused on the emerging technologies around the web and its corresponding sociopolitical conditions; importantly this also led to a high degree of self-reflexivity on the form of the archived listserv itself. Following a similar form, Edu-Factory initiated their study in 2007 focused on "university transformations, knowledge production and forms of conflict, in which nearly 500 activists, students and researchers the world over have taken part."[4] While these two examples make deliberate use of the global reach of the network and remain self-reflexive about their form, the listserv has become a ubiquitous site of critical exchange and self-education for all kinds of activists and intellectuals.

A quite different use of similar technology can be found with the Public School, started in Los Angeles (US) as a web platform in which one could suggest a course.[5] Courses proposed would provide a description, where the individual was located, and any other relevant information. Those interested in participating in a given course could make that known by simply clicking a button, and when enough people have expressed interest, the participants exchange info and self-organize how they want to proceed. This particular web platform has now been exported and adapted to various cities across the world.

Notably these projects bear a striking resemblance to the ideas of Ivan Illich's concept of 'learning webs,' articulated in his book *Deschooling Society* (1971) in which he calls for a peer-matching communication network very much like the Public School provides, in order to connect those with similar interests outside of state-sponsored educational environments.

Free Schools are most closely associated with anarchist pedagogy and can be traced back to the Modern Schools of the early 20th century. The first *Escuela Moderna* was started in Spain by Francisco Ferrer in 1901 as a counter-educational program influenced by anarchist philosophy. Not long after Ferrer's inaugural efforts in 1909 the infamous Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, with many others, started a Modern School in New York City.[6] Importantly, the Modern School movement primarily emphasized working with children as an alternative to state-sponsored

schooling. This tradition has continued and transformed into what is now often termed 'unschooling' and 'deschooling' movements.[7]
Today Free Schools typically take the form of volunteer initiated workshops and classes, often around ideas related to anti-capitalism but certainly not exclusively so. Projects like the Experimental College of the Twin Cities (EXCO) (US) for example takes the form of the Free School but does not necessarily remain adhered to its anarchist roots in the courses it offers.[8] EXCO mixes the use of a connecting platform and a free community educational space in which community members offer free classes.

Free Schools have also proven influential to various artist-initiated and experimental projects like the Free/Slow University of Warsaw, Universidad Nómada in Spain or the now defunct Copenhagen Free University.[9] While each of these projects has a distinct character, they all share a commitment to experimental research as well as non-traditional ways of expanding public engagement with knowledge production and their respective communities.

One can see that we've quickly overlapped into what I'm calling the **Free University**. I use the term Free University because of its rhetorical associations with a high level of intellectual rigor found in upper-level academia and because these projects tend to be distinct from the anarchist histories of Free Schools as well as public self-education projects like EXCO. For better or worse, participants that are highly educated through the academic system often initiate many of the projects in this paradigm.

At their foundation and what sets free universities apart from the previous categories I've suggested, is their commitment to advance a theoretical and/or analytical engagement with contemporary struggles, geopolitical configurations, or other leftist and anti-capitalist concerns. 16 Beaver and Edu-Factory are perhaps the most visible examples. With many free university projects the form or self-organization is important due to the realization that the ways we produce knowledge also generates ways of knowing and being.

From the outside, free universities might look indistinguishable from any self-organized seminar, reading group, or study club. They often take the form of intensive multi-day workshops on a given topic with many participants, or longer-term investigations with a smaller number of participants. Many of these projects have taken particular inspiration from Colectivo Situaciones' theorization of 'militant research' or the Autonomist inspired 'co-research.'[10] In particular, there has been significant theorizing around this collective process of knowledge production with an emphasis on the theoretical and political questions that surround *autonomy*.[11]

Brian Holmes comments on autonomy and the influential research project Continental Drift:

…There is no possibility of generating a critical counter-power—or counter-public, or counter-public sphere—when there is no more search for relative autonomy, or when the collective self (autos) no longer even asks the question of how to make its own law (nomos). So the importance of this kind of project is to use it as a moment of experimentation, not just in the quest for the perfect theory of the perfect procedure, but cosmologically, to rearrange the stars above your head. Such events don't often happen, the only solution is to do-it-yourself.[12]

Related to the question of autonomy, this experimental trajectory often looks to notions of the 'common,' as a concept that may provide a line of flight from the privatizing nature of capitalism. Edu-Factory Collective writes:

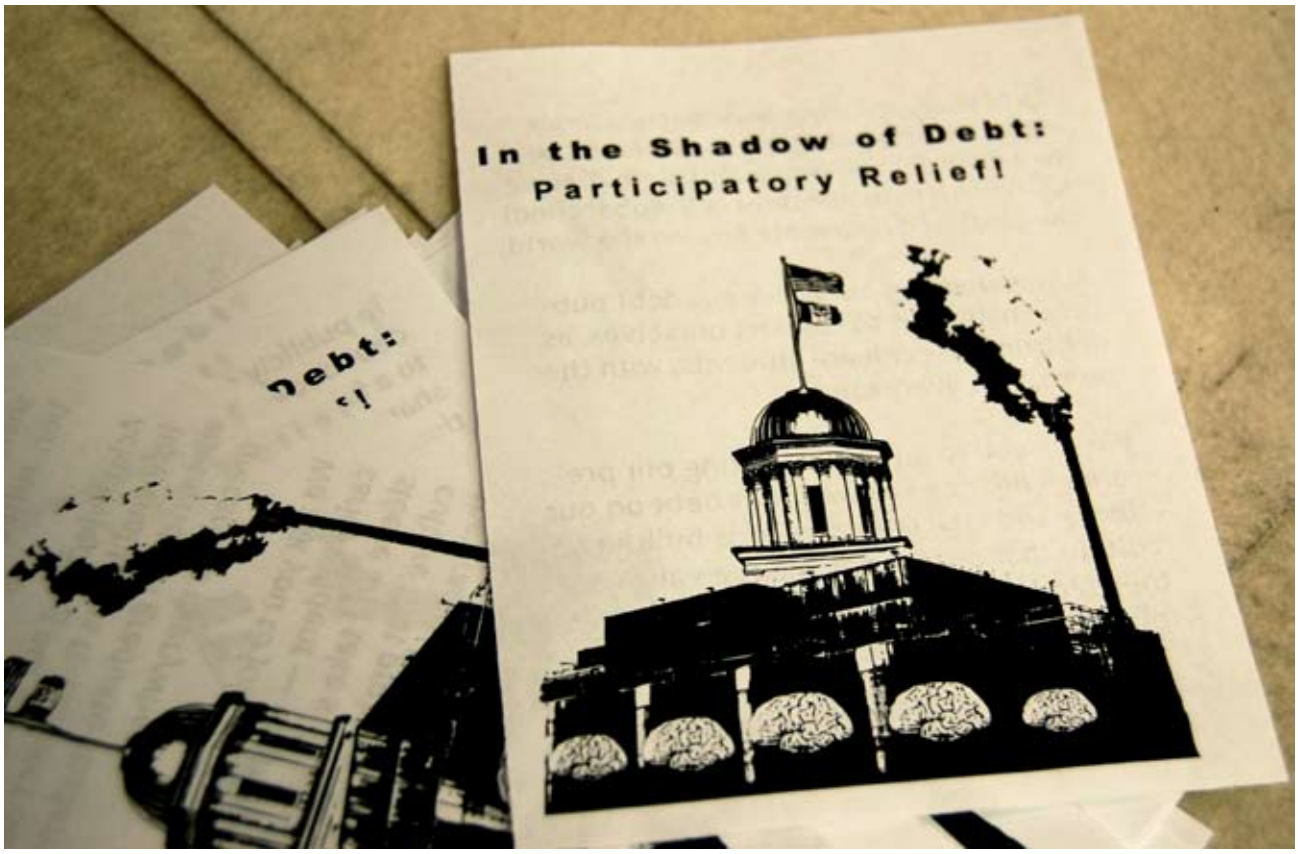
…The common is, from a class point of view, the escape route from the crisis of the public/private dialectic [...] When we speak of the common, far from existing in nature, is therefore produced: it is always at stake in constituent processes, capable of destroying relations of exploitation and liberating the power of living labor.[13]

Here the problems and possibilities of autonomy and common converge, and the *forms*—ways of being and collaborating—of collective research become important. In short, we cannot overcome capitalism if we do not also find new ways of producing knowledge collectively that reject logics of strictly individualized study, competition, and the privatization of knowledge, i.e. the logics of capitalism in both form and content.

****

The following is a text written in August 2011 as an introduction to a now defunct project called Self-Organized Seminar (SOS).[14] *Along with several of my peers, we began this endeavor in order to establish a collective way of working and studying in the fraught space of our shared MFA program. The text below was written at the beginning of our efforts and lacks several lessons we learned by working together for the remaining two years of our graduate program, but I believe it remains a useful resource to frame an experiment that attempts to thwart the professionalizing and individualizing tendencies so present in creative graduate programs. The glossary above helps situate our project; most significantly, we took several cues from free university experiments.*

Collective members of Self-Organized Seminar were: Brendan Baylor, Kristen Degree, Kelly Gallagher, Josh Hoeks, Christopher Pickett, Heidi Ratanavanich, Corinne Teed, and myself. I would like to thank them here—this text would be impossible without their wonderful minds and hearts.

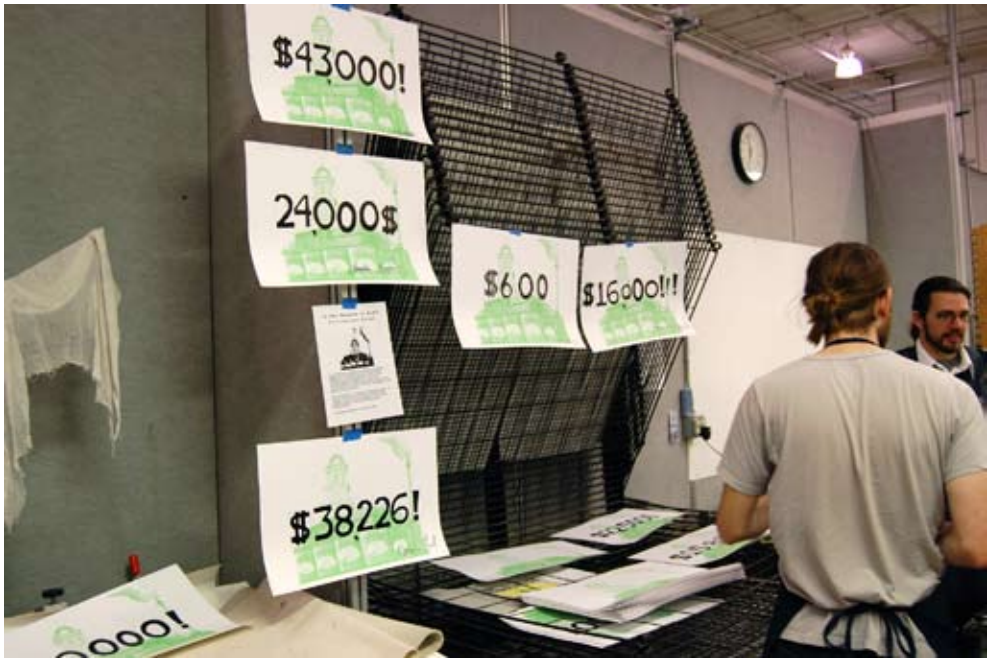


Following images: Self-Organized Seminar (SOS), In the Shadow of Debt: Participatory Relief!, workshop at the University of Iowa, 2012

Over the course of our first year or two while working toward studio arts MFAs at a large research university, a few friends and I began an on-going informal conversation about our frustrations with our respective programs, the neoliberal university, our classes, and various other problems.

We felt that our art programs were failing us, unable to provide a theoretical and political footwork for what we wanted to do in our practices. Our programs were beholden to the confines of art disciplines and we were pushed into PhD seminars, looking for a deeper and more textured understanding of our varying political interests. In turn, we found ourselves frustrated by those seminars. While initially interesting, they usually struck us as only concerned with the discipline specific paradigms and quickly meandered into irrelevant and apolitical academic indulgence, excusing itself (and thus students) from any real political possibilities of worldly relevance or responsibility.

In the hallways between classes or at night during studio sessions, over beers and coffee, we found ourselves arriving at something of a critique of the surely common problems listed above. But we also found that we didn't know how to move forward, how to make critical work in such a structurally problematic environment.



We realized we spent all of our time trying to explain ourselves to our peers—"What is wrong with getting an MFA? If you hate it so much, why are you here? What is wrong with Critique sessions? What is wrong with the University?"—Legitimate questions that we still can only sort of answer.

We came up with not so much an answer to our problems or a deeply sophisticated critique, but rather an idea for an experiment among friends with common interests in twisting away from the normative and cowed paradigms of university Art production. And so we arrive at our not-so-creatively named project—"self-organized

seminar."[15] Shorthand we've taken to calling the experiment SOS; perhaps tellingly, if inadvertently, suggesting a double meaning—*Help! Save our souls!* But no longer do we look to anyone but ourselves.

In large part the project looks like a reading group, an autonomous research project, or maybe militant research. Basically, the plan is this: we take classes that are not especially time-intensive—no seminars, but instead primarily workshops where we can focus on "our" work (a privilege of art programs). This extra time and energy is re-directed into this self-organized research project, reading self-selected texts and meeting once a week to discuss and figure out our next steps. It is a long way of saying that we divert our energies away from our schoolwork and toward a collective project, toward developing our political interests through experimentation and communal support.

We want to deepen our friendships, our ability to collaborate and to comprehend. We want to learn how to resist and build a new way of working in an environment that feels overbearing, normalizing, and paralyzing: to borrow from one inspiration for the project—to begin to occupy and/or evacuate.[16] We desire a double-movement of pushing back while twisting away.
We decided we would start with two brief and wonderful texts: Brian Holmes' "Continental Drift: Activist Research, From Geopolitics to Geopoetics" and Marto Malo de Molina's "Common Notions Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action-Research, Militant Research."[17]

From Molina we learn the beginnings of radical critiques of institutionalized practices, that the purported neutrality of an institution "is a trap: one is always compromised." Molina offers us much insight from theorist, political militant, and radical psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, especially his vehement condemnation of the normative practices of psychoanalysis. But we also learn roots of activist research projects—from feminist consciousness-raising to Brazilian pedagogical theorist and activist Paulo Freire's poverty centered and empowering 'action-research,' designed primarily to educate illiterate peasants. Molina also provides notes on the (at times) heady practice of militant research.[18] Militant research is important in its materialist inspiration, she notes, where content and power flows through the body, simultaneously inscribing it. We learn that the gestures we make, the art we produce, inside and through the institution are swallowed and digested into its belly—always growing, always making itself stronger. Militant Research always begins with the concrete, with our own experiences as subjects. Politics and resistance can't be separated from the micro-gestures we make, the ways in which we inhabit and use our bodies as well as the spaces in which they exist. Thus we find ourselves discussing some kind of exit route, or Guattari's 'lines of flight.' *SOS!* We'll try and slip out the back door on company time, returning only when we have to.

The co-production of critical knowledge generates rebellious bodies. Thinking about rebellious practices provides/gives value and potency to those same practices. Collective thinking engenders common practice. Therefore, the process of knowledge production is inseparable from the process of subject production or subjectification and vice versa.[19]

Until finally our new rebellious bodies can stand on their own with affinities, deterritorialized from its original body and becoming something new with others, something capable of resistance, communalism, and struggle.
But first we must remake ourselves and re-chart our territories. Another inspiration for SOS, Brian Holmes, who has with many collaborators been in the forefront of experimental and very committed research projects,[20] states this clearly in our preschool reading:
[...] disciplines have to be overcome, dissolved into experimentation. Autonomous inquiry demands a rupture from the dominant cartographies. Both compass and coordinates must be reinvented if you really want to transform the dynamics of a changing world-system. Only by disorienting the self and uprooting epistemic certainties can anyone hope to inject a positive difference into the unconscious dynamics of the geopolitical order."[21]
And so we have something of an exit plan, something of a compass, pointing us toward each other.

I'm writing now three years later after the slow and probably natural death of the SOS in early 2014 due to our eventual graduating and busy-ness. It is difficult to describe such a collective process in retrospect. It was very much about our move-

ments together, struggling to learn and grow in ways that oppose, in practice, the competitive logic of the art world and academic environments, and in a broader context, capitalism. We were right to look to Marto Malo de Molina and Colectivo Situaciones as signposts with their emphasis on both an embodied and intellectual collective struggle in efforts to constitute a common space. I wouldn't know how to gauge the success of our project; I can only say that it was immensely helpful for me, and I think for my collaborators, to think carefully about collectively politicizing our praxis against the professionalizing logic of our MFA programs. In isolation, our efforts may seem insignificant, selfish even, divorced from on-the-ground struggles (indeed, we constantly circled around this question), but when viewed alongside dozens of other autonomous and experimental anti-capitalist research efforts like 16 Beaver (NYC) and Slow-Motion Action/Research Collective (Chicago), perhaps one can begin to see an extremely significant pattern of reimagining how intellectual and creative activity can function outside, against, or even within our oppressive institutions.

SOS and similar projects are resistant to easy packaging. It was messy, as all experiments are. The lessons we learned, or perhaps the questions we learned to ask better, are too complicated to unpack in this brief essay. Here what I want to avoid is summarizing SOS as an art collective that did periodic projects and events, even though we were art students involved in a collective process that sometimes involved projects and events. It sounds silly to make the distinction, but it is an important one that marks the possibility of locating a new collective way of working (to occupy and/or evacuate) in a relentlessly capitalist environment.

While I am hesitant to sum up SOS as simply creating a handful of projects, there were a few moments when we came out of our collective shell in an attempt to reach out to our peers. Notably we facilitated two events: the first a seminar on institutional critique,[22] and the second a collaborative print workshop we called *In the Shadow of Debt: Participatory Relief!* With both events we attempted to bridge the gap between our anti-capitalist experiments and the more mainstream liberal tendencies of many of our peers. Because the institutional critique seminar is relatively self-explanatory, I'd like to briefly describe our printmaking workshop.

In the Shadow of Debt took place at a printmaking conference held at University of Iowa (US), where we were all students. We wanted to problematize the uncritical embrace of the prestigious degree (UI is a highly-ranked Printmaking program) as well as the conference's largely apolitical programming. We found the conference to be paradigmatic of many of the problems we were exploring as a group, namely the celebration of hermetic academic/artistic culture that systematically denies its complacency in the neoliberal university that serves capitalism so well. The conference itself was not especially egregious, and yet its banality struck us as a good spot for a gentle intervention. We wanted to insist that conference attendees recognize the unsustainable and problematic ways in which labor is exploited in the university while students accrue debt that will prove near impossible to pay off in any sustainable way. Even more we wanted to suggest debt as a global *condition*, and draw connections between debt, precarity, and political movements across around the world. In a rather simple and arguably timid gesture, we asked conference attendees—our friends, peers, and strangers—to print their cumulative debt on a screen-printed image of a our university as a brain-factory. The result was dozens of printed posters with dollar amounts ranging from $0 to $160,000 or so (had we currently been at a private school that number would've surely been even higher). We also took photographs of each participant, each holding up their poster, their burden. Formally the photographs recalled both a mug shot—convicts holding their name and number for the State to keep track of them—as well as a student who joyfully holds up his award for the camera. "This is my college degree, it cost $160,000," a caption could say. We all sort of laughed together at the high dollar amounts with a certain exasperation and thinly veiled sadness. We knew one another's exorbitant debt was shared but still distributed unevenly. We cheered with happiness (and probably jealousy) at the few who had printed "$1,000" or even one participant's "$0.00!" I sheepishly printed my own: "$600." I was embarrassed to admit to my peers that I have been luckier than they have. Others coyly printed "TOO MUCH!!!" or simply "∞," not willing to go along with our requests entirely.

We did all this while a haphazardly curated soundtrack played off our iPods. The only criteria for inclusion: songs about money. I remember Wu-Tang Clan's C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules Everything Around Me), Dire Straits' "Money For Nothing," Notorious B.I.G.'s "Mo' Money Mo' Problems," Patty Smith's "Free Money." And on and on. The paradoxes and ambivalences of money present in our cultural

relics audibly lingered over us, blurring together, drowning out, lightening the mood.

In the flier we made inviting people to participate, we stated: "To publicly state our personal debt declares our vulnerability to a financial and political system that we share with millions. […] Acknowledging our academic debt enables us to connect ourselves, as debt-ridden graduate students, with the precarious everywhere […]. We ask that you join us in making our precarity evident—to wear our debt on our sleeve and *gesture* toward a larger movement."

I think it is a mistake to characterize SOS as an art collective. To do so would be to remain stagnant in precisely the way artists too often are: content with this 'gesture.' Part of what was meaningful, for me at least, in working with SOS was that it was decidedly *not* a gesture, but a real attempt at remaking how we could work together while recognizing all of the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in our lives as subjects and students in a capitalist world. It was a small attempt maybe, but one that continues to look for connections in the constellation of others like us around the world. Just like our debt, our struggles and experiments are yours, too.

Heath Schultz is an artist and writer living in Austin, TX. Mostly a researcher who sometimes finds ways to make his thinking public, he is interested in understanding the relationship between radical politics and cultural production, and struggles to balance a practice between activism, production, and theorizing.

Endnotes

1 Freire's major theoretical contribution is of course Pedagogy of the Oppressed, [1968] New York: Continuum, 2000.; See also Education for Critical Consciousness, New York: Continuum, 2005, in which much of his pedagogical methodology is discussed.
2 Description and course materials available here: http://www.sojournertruth.net/htt.html. Accessed May 2014.
3 http://workpeoplescollege.org. Accessed May 2014.
4 Edu-Factory Collective, "Introduction: All Power to Self-Education!" in Toward a Global Autonomous University: Cognitive Labor, The Production of Knowledge, and Exodus from the Education Factory, eds. Edu-Factory Collective. New York: Autonomedia, 2009. p 0.
5 http://thepublicschool.org.
6 For this history of anarchist education see Paul Avrich's The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States, Oakland: AK Press, 2005.
7 For more on this see Everywhere All the Time: A New Deschooling Reader, ed. Matt Hern, Oakland: AK Press, 2008.
8 http://www.excotc.org/. Accessed May 2014.

9 Free / Slow University of Warsaw: http://www.wuw-warsaw.pl/wuw.php?lang=eng; Universidad Nómada: http://www.universidadnomada.net; Copenhagen Free University: http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk. Accessed May 2014.
10 See Colectivo Situaciones "On the Researcher-Militant" available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en. On co-research see Marta Malo de Molina "Common Notions, part 1: Workers-inquiry, Co-research, Consciousness-raising" available at: http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en. Accessed May 2014.
11 For a working definition of autonomy, see 16 Beaver's glossary developed in 2008: http://www.16beavergroup.org/drift/glossary2008.htm. Accessed May 2014.
12 Brian Holmes, "Articulating the Cracks in World Power," available online at: www.16beavergroup.org/drift/readings/16b_bh_articulatingcracks.pdf.
13 Edu-Factory Collective, "Introduction: All Power to Self-Education!," p 11.
14 An archive of our work can be viewed at selforganizedseminar.wordpress.com.
15 An archive of our projects as well as an extensive digital library is available at selforganizedseminar.wordpress.com.
16 http://occupyeverything.org/. Accessed May 2014.
17 Brian Holmes, "Continental Drift: Activist Research, From Geopolitics to Geopoetics," available at: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/5-Xholmes.pdf. Marto Malo de Molina's "Common Notions Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action-Research, Militant Research," available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en. Accessed May 2014.
18 "Militant Research," while summarized by Molina, is typically attributed to the Argentinian group Colectivo Situaciones. Theoretical footwork for militant research can be found in their text "On the Researcher-Militant," available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en. Accessed May 2014.
19 Molina, "Common Notions Part 2."
20 See especially "Continental Drift," (16beavergroup.org/drift/) an on-going project in collaboration with 16 Beaver and several others. For more of Holmes' writing see his blog brianholmes.wordpress.com. Accessed May 2014.
21 Holmes, "Continental Drift."
22 Readings from the seminar can be found here: http://selforganizedseminar.wordpress.com/institutional-critique.

SPACED, ART OUT OF PLACE

The experiences of the Free University of Liverpool and the CyberMohalla project as examples of alternative education

Andrea Pagnes (VestAndPage)

Don't think they prefer the drudgery of the desk and the slavery to their circulation and to the business manager to the joy of writing. They have tried to write, and they have failed. And right there is the cursed paradox of it.[1] *(Jack London, 1909)*

Preamble

In the decades of the 1980s and the 1990s, alienation was described as a cognitive space overcharged with nervous and conditioning incentives to act, frequently deriving from external forces to select and exclude individuals who fail to meet often badly regulated specific requirements. The dramatic economical crisis of the recent years has contributed to making individual and household debt a post post-modern form of slavery, due to the toxic effects of unscrupulous financial policies.

Within this context, higher education has also become an issue linked almost exclusively to the economic status of the student and his/her family, or his/her possibility of contracting a considerable loan at a certain interest to be able to complete his/her studies. This has created a form of non-meritocratic selection and unjust exclusion, evidencing another discrepancy in the idea of globalization, whose great promise now lies in ruins. The relentless pressure of production aimed at satisfying the constrictive logic of the capitalistic markets and their financial oligarchies, weakening the individual's will and his/her decision-making capacity to act differently, paints the picture of a dystopian future. As a result, the conditions for the growth of new communities are stranded. To begin to reverse this situation, new philosophical categories are needed, and with them, new ways of praxis.[4]

The deception of the artist statement

In today's global contemporary art scene, a large part of research results/public presentations seem too much encircled in the manifestation of artist statements, oftentimes seditious, redundant, pretentious, and discussed only to embellish a certain type of work. Does an artwork need a statement to be understood, or explained as such to the fruiter?

From my point of view, I see a 'quid' (almost a habit, a tendency) forced and compulsory in all this, probably deriving from an a priori intentional attempt of hoped/presumed self-affirmation at any cost, also due to the fact that more and more colleges and universities insist on requiring artist statements as a means to be able to compete in the art world, to gain visibility and be recognized. Sometimes an artist can obtain the desired effects of having the artwork accepted, but only when his/her statement luckily matches with the criteria and procedures of the cultural structure to which the statement is addressed.

This common routine of encasing one's own art in well-compiled artist statements clashes with the needs for changes in contemporary society and it hinders innovative transformation of cultural production. There is not much difference between the words 'submitted' and 'submissive': to submit implies a form of implicit obedience to the existing system (and an overall acceptance of it), which, given the current situation, seems really hard to avoid for a multitude of artists, often even for the ones that through their art try to criticize openly that same system.

Almost anyone who has to submit an artwork or a project is subjected to fulfill artist statement procedures of a certain kind. By doing so, the risks are multiple: an excess of self-serving and presumption of the artist towards him/herself and his/her artwork; the progressive impoverishment of the artwork to the level of a mere 'artist statement outcome' albeit frequently not matching the reality of the artwork itself; the withering of the artist's creative process because of forced frustration, feeling obliged to attempt and satisfy those requirements and then, in most cases, being rejected; the loss of the experiential benefits that a creative path pursued with constant dedication and by adhering to it completely with no compromise can bring

Paradoxically, by over-producing artist statements and often assuming them as a best way to emerge from a condition of anonymity, artists also undergo a form of external surveillance, nourishing that "watch-over you" system that rules, and that artists simultaneously criticize and strive to change. It is like labeling oneself as a Beckettian flesh for the grind, a mouse for the pied piper, presenting artworks, which seem to be just surrogate evidences of well-adjusted written words.

Since the last decade I have observed in art schools in general the increasing trend is to brainwash students by telling them that an artist statement is prior to any-

thing. It is like saying that what counts the most is the etiquette, not the artwork, not the thorough study of history of art, nor the history of thought. In some MA classes where I've given lectures and seminars (that one must pay $ 25.000 per year or more to attend), I sadly witnessed the low level of students' knowledge about art. This lack of knowledge was to the detriment of the quality of their work and ability to develop interesting questions on art issues. On the other hand, they all shared the same ability to formulate elaborate artist statements of their artworks, which in general lacked the very poetics and concepts flaunted in those statements.

The fault is not with the students at all; rather I think it is due to the lack of concern and carelessness of the institutional educational structures. It is much easier and expeditious to teach how to compile a statement than to deepen the comprehension of art making. Art today is often taught in univocal ways. However, I argue that a capillary approach to it should be facilitated, according to the talent that each student has and shows, and that should be nourished with care, commitment and patience, offering a wide spectrum of different creative processes. More than anything, students should first and foremost be taught 'how to learn' to make art, through effortlessly open dialogues, and in a climax of liberated situations, which educational/formative 'enclaves' (also often elitist) don't seem to provide.

Theoretical studies are fundamental of course, for they can also indicate choices and possibilities on the many ways of how to practice art. Yet today the excess of theory, rather than its convergence in artistic praxis, has led to an over-production of empty abstractions, as this is what the system demands.

On lieu of such approaches, the duty of an art school should be to increase understanding on what it means to express someone's most profound urges through art. In short: it's elusive and misleading to believe that by producing artist statements, an artist will actually be fairly rewarded by having given the chance to "whoso pulleth out this sword from this stone and anvil"[5]. Yet, there is also a more delicate question to take into account that involves the sphere of personal ethics: to prefix artist statements to research and practice makes precarious one's own intellectual honesty.

Some examples of alternative forms of education

In terms of free educational/formative experiments, the three years adventure of the Free University of Liverpool, which was born as a protest and founded in November 2010 "during the hiatus of the students and the public sector worker marches against the ConDem government's plans to privatize public sectors of higher education,"[6] deserves attention, for the courage of openly contrasting that institutional trend and its consolidated structure. With a program of radical, creative self-education and viral interventions to dis-establish, disseminate, propagate, radiate and grow cultural praxis in terms of active cooperation, the FUL was open to anyone who wished to engage in a critical exploration.

FUL closed in October 2013, but its effects still resonate, having become an example of a lively community of creative resistance, where people learned to work together, work with others, deal with difference, determining freely when art and activism can work together and when they don't. It is an example of a pro-active gathering reunion, living, learning, participating, and giving birth to new modes of knowledge.[7]

Of course there are many other interesting experiences of alternative formative educational art praxis. Some of them can be found in the cultural programs of foundations and artist-in-residencies around the globe, which promote and support artist-run-initiatives, free formative courses and internships for students: Sarai CSDS (New Delhi), Taipei Artist Village, Alumnos47 Foundation with its Moving Library (Mexico City), C32 Performing Arts Space (Venice), to cite just a few.

These structures are born not just to host, but to collaborate actively with artists and other cultural institutions to create opportunities for art students to develop research, raise and increase awareness on art issues, share ideas, implement audience interests, thereby producing art projects and opening such practices to national and international partners on the basis of fruitful cultural/cooperative exchange.

It is worthwhile to describe the literary case of the Delhi based collective of young researcher-practitioners and writers CyberMohalla Ensemble, that has emerged in working-class and quasi-legal settlements of the city. They gathered together within the project called Cybermohalla ("mohalla" means "neighborhood" in Hindi), a network of dispersed labs for experimentation and exploration among young people in different neighborhoods of the city.

The CyberMohalla project was founded in May, 2001 by a collaborative initiative of The Sarai Programme at CSDS[8] and Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education[9], a Delhi based NGO for the creation of nodes of popular digital culture in Delhi, through the settlement of generative cultural spaces and creative hubs. It addresses the intersection between information technology and creativity in the lives of young people who live in a highly unequal society. It is a community of young practitioners with difficult access to proper education, some of them living in the poorest districts of the city. "Sarai CSDS organized for them spaces and provide the structure where these young people can now share each other thoughts, ideas and creative energies in media labs located in the working class areas of Delhi. The young people who come to these media labs are between the ages of 15 to 23. At the lab, they work with media forms (photography, animation, sound recordings, online discussion lists and text) to create cross media works, texts, collages, posters and wall magazines. Their writings and images can be seen as a rich database of narrative, comment, observation, imaginative play and reflection on the contested circumstances of life in the sprawling urban metropolis of Delhi. The labs are self-regulated spaces. That is, the daily routine of the lab is decided upon by them, they

are in charge of the maintenance of the lab and the responsibility to imagine and realise the future of the lab is theirs."[10]

These examples represent cultural structures addressed to people who are interested in learning and exploring knowledge in an unconventional way in order to collaborate with a wider community and generate critical research insights and knowledge in the public domain.

Here, the shifting of the emotions, the actualization of the critical thinking, the relationship with the other, the effectiveness of group dynamics, the contact and conflict are the cornerstones of the learning and creative process. When a community sharing, albeit temporary, takes shape, it becomes possible to investigate one's expressive necessities through the eyes of the other, triggering a willingness for change and transformation on a cooperative basis.

Designed to structure a meta-dialogue between self and the other, between the world of one's vision and the vision of the world of the other, CyberMohalla has become also a place that functions on the symbolic and material level at the same time: a contextualized place, where one can freely explore the endless possibilities that art making, creative writings and the use of technological media involve, as well as other ways of living, as time based discovery.

Specifically, Cybermohalla is a project, which aims also to propose alternative criteria of cultural production in terms of social and civil intervention through forward-thinking, to disarm crystallized socio-cultural patterns and norms and try to plan for the future.

To encounter and work creatively with other people implies also the convergence of different expressive behavioral manifestations (besides difference in languages) that lead to an integration of several instances: bodily, cognitive, emotional, intuitive, creative, and in terms of time (past, present, future), relation (I-Thou, I-world), and body (listening and interaction).

For instance, to explore different modes of relationship, or to analyze the meaning inherent to the variety of daily rituals that each one has,, respecting the imagination, the world of emotions and the variegated ways of expression of the other, means also to transform a place of cultural production into a protected space of free access and gathering open reunions, where it becomes possible to share experiences and ideas dialectically, without feeling too much subdued by external pressure and conventional censorship.

A space conceived to be as an experiential 'lieux de rencontre' to research the potential of creative human resources and discuss limitations less critically and more purposefully, is also a place of mutual understanding in which the differences are enhanced and respectfully highlighted, and hence where the possibilities of listening, realize and creatively making are made possible and implement.

The usefulness of establishing new and reinforce already existing professional art laboratorial activities serves also to reduce the boundaries between theory and practice, privileging open communication and confrontation between facilitators and participants to explore the limits of creativity and its extendibility.

The investigation is always a crucial moment of any creative process and should be principally conduced throughout an active participation and continuously tested. Hence, ways of expression, interactions with the others, within reality, with auxiliary tools, and/or technological and digital media, should not be left to the a mere theoretical realm.

For instance, what should normally happen during the preparation of an intensive art workshop is at first an explanation of activities and overall delivery, in order to introduce and offer the participants the various ways of how they can transform their own ideas and concepts into practice, which in turn can be changed and developed both on an individual and collective scale, acknowledging the cutting-edge existing between 'what I want to do, and what someone wants to do with what I want to do'.

In our workshop activity experiences (which combine different performing arts and social/experimental theatre praxis, and that we organize annually in synergy and cooperation with cultural institutions worldwide), we freely analyze the many human existential conflicts (at the core of our research), as well as the often hidden relationships between people and their discomforts/diseases (social-psychic-spiritual). We always ask our participants to keep in mind that more than a technical one, it is an aesthetic control of the surrounding space/environment through their own body language and signs (holy but empty space at the same time) that can lead them to produce an original creative, meaningful imagery, and set him/her into a positive open confrontation with him/herself and the others.

Here, it is not a matter of interpreting something a priori assumed, but to operate practically in accordance with one's own human nature, to realize its full potential, as stated by Socrates, "a self-aware person must act completely within its capabilities to their pinnacle, to become aware of every fact (and its context) relevant to his existence, if [s/]he wishes to attain self-knowledge".[11] This means to indicate new possible meanings, render tangibly a concept, or even stir up and provoke emotions (inside us, inside the others) to externalize what is hidden inside someone's own heart, and ultimately valorizing life experience.

A major problem is that many art schools founded on the ashes of post-structuralism and postmodernism are both heavily theoretical and followed a fragmented, almost anti-authoritarian course, ending up being absorbed in narcissistic and near nihilistic manifestations.

Thus, even though contemporary art issues are increasingly multifaceted and address many different areas simultaneously, in terms of art practice I often see that still persists a critical habit "of 'yes or no', 'right or wrong' statement, as if – in general - we still feel more comfortable with dichotomies: to opposites".[12] Therefore, rather then observing the actual choices made by agents in practice, contemporary art continues instead to be examined from a top-down point of view, almost forgetting that in art anything is a matter of giving and delivering through the specificity of a 'poiesis', an instrument of creative freedom to explore and discover unknown territories, which expand and change continuously.

On the other hand, in laboratorial activities as the ones described above, the facilitators stimulate each participant to adopt and form their own methodology (both individual and collective), as anything new that will be discovered along the laboratorial creative process is to express and realize new ideas. The use of irregular forms and the making of mistakes are necessary for artists in order not operate slavishly according to pre-determined rules and norms, to exercise a free choice (consciously and responsibly), to get completely involved (directly and personally), to get off the ground, to put themselves over the barrel, to bring into focus and undermine their own beliefs and prejudices, to arrange, to tune, to compare, to confront, to offer, to sharpen, to bare, to uncover physically and emotionally, to arrange, to put away, to tweak, to put at risk, to hazard, to lay it on the line, to hit for, to strike down, to ground, to dump, to put on, to banish their own credos, to try out, to tax to the limit, to meet, to collect, to edge and hive, to drop down their own arms, to hammer away at something, to get started, to break into, to sleuth and get forth, to enjoy whatever state of being, and to also rely on weakness.

What in art schools is hardly taught is the nature of the psychic actions within their process of art making: what an artist expresses through his/her artwork is not just a well-rendered representation/outcome of a concept/idea. It is also what emerges from the full concordance of his/her own inner imagination with the context around him/her, a sign of a profound experience, and of his/her inner life.

Conclusion

The example of the CyberMohalla project is noteworthy because it has been clearly conceived to offer a dynamic space of learning and subsequent cultural production, where is actually the process and the practice of the creative writings (in the case of the Ensemble) that contribute to develop a fruitful critical thinking and a propositive dialogue between all the participants. Here the direct encounters on a daily basis are fundamental, the confrontation of ideas is crucial, and the collection of personal life-stories are essential to stimulate and implement participatory collective commitment, and which in turn become sources of inspiration

As there are many different languages spoken around the world, so in art there are many different poetics. To bring at least just a few together into a laboratorial situation, crossing and combining them, means to provide an open space where a temporary community can freely live and work.

These kinds of operations offer the possibility of breaking out of the idea of the cocooned global village, and to explore inquires deepening reflection, flexibility, sincerity, both individually and collectively. In art, on a social level, we shouldn't forget that everyone is a legitimate subject.

Given the short time allocated between conception, subsequent corruption and production of artworks, a laboratorial situation today should strongly consider and hold the focus on the value of spontaneous creativity, as this is what is sought most intimately, and also what might attract a new possible audience that more and more calls for genuineness and authenticity.

In the case of the CyberMohalla Ensemble, each of the members had several stories to tell, equally valid, interesting and moving. These young writers have been welcomed to gather, live and confront their differences of analysis, and were then motivated to meet again to give birth to a mutual creative process of productive exchange of information and expressions about their personal and private lives, which then were re-experienced collectively. The CyberMohalla Ensemble, interlacing different individualities together, has been able to transform all those stories into a compact literary art form, which is the artistic manifestation of the young storytellers themselves, delivered with to an increasing public of readers.

Over the years, the collective has produced a very wide range of materials, practices, works, texts, and installations. Their work has been circulated and shown internationally in online journals, on radio broadcasts, in publications, as well a being featured in contemporary and new media art exhibitions. Their most significant publication include "Bahurupiya Shehr" (Rajkamal, Delhi 2007), "Trickster City" (Penguin India, 2010), a best seller collection of vibrant short real stories of 20 young writers of the Ensemble, "No Apologies for the Interruption" (Sarai, Delhi, 2011), an image-text exploration of post-piracy media encounters.[13]

Their last main project "Cybermohalla Hub", in collaboration with Frankfurt-based architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Muller, is an installation that represents a consolidation of the conversations, designs and efforts from over the last few years to carve out a language and a practice for imagining and animating structures of cultural spaces in contemporary cities. Sternberg Press (Berlin) has published their book "Cybermohalla Hub" in 2012.[14]

To establish a space as an open source of free cultural production as constant work in progress and extending personal knowledge and reciprocity are key factors.

When the investigation focuses on a common ground, the usefulness of a shared territory of multiple experimentations is continuously tested. Constant feedback is necessary to increase mutual trust and collective achievements. Shared remembrances, ideas, actions, interventions and expressions, when they flow together become fermented material at the same time being civil, social, and poetical, resulting from an aesthetic course, which carries within clearness and significance of a broader creative process.

The success of a formative/educational laboratorial activity, such as the case of the CyberMohalla project, is founded on pinpointing solutions in terms of praxis and applied research, by fostering technical knowledge (pedagogy) and functioning as a cultural engine within the local community to stimulate cooperation and integration. The effects of promoting intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and social exchange concretely enlivens the relationship also between culturally distant individuals, which process-led practices of art conceived in such a way may reunite.

Aiming at exchange and social interference, those kind of laboratorial practices become means to activate a potential cultural energy, displaying anomalous and exceptional experiences, where art and life coincide. Putting into relation and giving visibility to the many differences, and making them visible to benefit the growth of a community, allows for the communication between its members to be founded on empathy and reciprocity.

In general, academic discussions tend to dismiss independent cultural activities by saying that they often belong to an amateur sphere that doesn't demand rigor and discipline, detectable in cultural products of poor quality, sometimes also presumptuously accompanied by the excuse of a political, social or didactic message. There is some truth to this of course, but also something vicious is detectable, probably because the established cultural institutions, which hold the power of professing an idea of education, refuse to accept the validity of these cases, instead of opening and evaluating new possible fruitful and productive models of learning, as the ones promoted by the mentioned realities above.

The CyberMohalla Ensemble functions because it consists of a well-coordinated, non-hierarchical group. Knowledge is shared and learned reciprocally, because of their continuous encounters on the basis of given tasks that must be fulfilled almost always together. Their approach to creative writings and art speaks of social engagement, individual and community dynamics in relation to their urban settling, personal identity and its contamination and transformation by living in specific environments, tracking stories, experiences, ideas, expectations, local issues, past and present situations, living and working conditions directly on site.

Dialogues among the members represent always a crucial moment in the various phases of the their working processes, specifically functioning to understand in

depth the collected materials about people's stories and what they see as alternatives to their present condition. This stimulates a mutual, cooperative exchange on a re-cognitive level, where the evidences and witnesses of each social and individual experience in this very context could be then transformed into art. [15]

Here the idea is that all should become a collective shaped outcome, a "real people" project, which finally transforms into pure poetic/artistic matter (the final product). This 'modus operandi' is hardly detectable in academies and universities. If human and social practical aspects are not seen as crucial in art schools, art schools might become even useless, as the Free University of Liverpool already indicated.

Indeed, the activism that animated the constitution of the FUL has increased awareness on the vulnerability of the consolidated educational system. It showed alternative places where giving context to the complexity of social relations, and the ways people are willing to risk crossing visible and invisible lines drawn by norms no longer acceptable, are possible.

I have taken into account Cybermohalla project and FUL as examples of alternative education because for them the priority is to engage their members, participants and students in the adventure of knowledge, cultural intervention and activism, instead of instructing them on how to use words to write well compiled artist statements, as a necessary way to try to promote and consolidate their art, a habit which I personally see somehow elusive, even seditious in most cases.

On the contrary, engaging in the adventure of knowledge is a constant process where is possible to realise hopes, desires and dreams that will push it forward.[16] Participating, contributing, facilitating, learning and teaching are fluid and interchangeable, as well as the continuous feedback given and received from one each other. Therefore, it is fundamental not 'to state' anything presumable, but rather to settle "a community in the making, and the making of a new forum for leaving and learning, as giving birth to knowledge is ultimately humanising."[17]
Finally not 'statement', but cultural 'praxis' is the watchword[18], that is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, practiced, embodied, to realised and determine something else, vital, open, different, and unconventional.

Andrea Pagnes is an artist, independent curator, lecturer and writer based in Italy and South West Germany. He holds degrees in Modern Literature and Philosophy. He founded cultural magazines, and obtained a Social Theatre operator diploma, working as actor and playwright, focusing primarily on personal conflicts and social responsibilities. Since 2006 he has been collaborating with German artist Verena Stenke as VestAndPage, creating art in live performance and filmmaking. VestAndPage are also the idea makers and curators of the independent biennial live art exhibition project Venice International Performance Art Week. http://www.vest-and-page.de

Endnotes

1 London, Jack. 1909. *Martin Eden*. New York: Macmillan Publisher, p.219. *"The chief qualification of ninety-nine per cent of all editors is failure. They have failed as writers. Don't think they prefer the drudgery of the desk and the slavery to their circulation and to the business manager to the joy of writing. They have tried to write, and they have failed. And right there is the cursed paradox of it. Those watchdogs, the failures in literature, guard every portal to success in literature. The editors, sub-editors, associate editors, most of them, and the manuscript-readers for the magazines and book-publishers, most of them, nearly all of them, are men who wanted to write and who have failed. And yet they, of all creatures under the sun the most unfit, are the very creatures who decide what shall and what shall not find its way into print - they, who have proved themselves not original, who have demonstrated that they lack the divine fire, sit in judgment upon originality and genius."*

2 Hegel, Friedrich. 1807. *Phänomenologie des Geistes.* Bamberg and Würzburg: J.A. Goebhardt.

3 Berardi, Franco Bifo. 2009. *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy.* Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, p.23.

4 Ibidem. From the book introduction of Jason Smith, pp.9-21.

5 Malory, Sir Thomas. 1470. *La Morte d'Arthur*, Book 1, Chapter V.

6 The Free University of Liverpool. 2012. *Foundations.* Liverpool: FUL Press. From FUL Archive: "THIS IS A PROTEST! Higher Education is a right for all not a privilege for the few. It is on this basis the Free University of Liverpool is committed to FREE education for any student who wants to study with us. At the Free University of Liverpool we believe that critical thought and action are at the heart of changing the world we live in. With this in mind we support, teach about and practice cultural activism. We believe in the strength of intervention, in the necessity of interruption and the efficacy of interference in the powers that seek to privatize and instrumentalise education. The current cuts the ConDems announced are promising to ruin civil society in the UK. This is the last straw! We will not sit here and take it any more. We will rise up and educate each other and ourselves to FIGHT BACK! We are interested in those who wish the world were otherwise and are willing to take steps to make it otherwise. Students wishing to learn with us will take a Foundation Degree: a six month introduction course to changing the world or Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Praxis: a three-year course, taught on the ground in Liverpool by a dedicated team of cultural activists, educationalists and cultural workers with experience and formal qualifications. The Foundation Course starts in October 2011 and the BA in Cultural Praxis starts in October 2012. Lectures, seminars and workshops will form the core activities of the university with equal weight given to the power of words and the power of action. Praxis is our watchword. These courses are validated by the blessing of leading thinkers, writers, artists and educationalists, all of who have contributed to the course by way of interviews and lectures. They believe, like we do, that higher education is a right for all not a privilege for the few. The Free University of Liverpool is run cooperatively by the Committee."

7 See: http://thefreeuniversityofliverpool.wordpress.com/

8 Sarai is a programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, one of India's leading research institutes, and one with a commitment to critical and dissenting thought and a focus on critically expanding the horizons of the discourse on development, particularly with reference to South Asia. Sarai is a coalition of researchers and practitioners with a commitment towards developing a model of research-practice that is public and creative, in which multiple voices express and render themselves in a variety of forms. See: http://www.sarai.net/

9 Ankur has been working on developing educational resources and pedagogic tools for children and young adults for the last 25 years. It has evolved educational spaces in many neighborhoods all over Delhi. See: http://ankureducation.net/index.html

10 "Each practitioner spends five days a week at the lab, and many are at the lab for close to eight hours every day. The day begins with listening to what their peers have written the day before, and brought to the lab to share. The challenge here is not only to be able to write a text, but to be able to read it out in front of fifteen people, and to be able to listen with them, and among them. While Mondays are reserved exclusively for listening to each other's texts (reflections, descriptions, conversations, logs of a street, anecdotes from daily encounters, etc.), afternoons and evenings on the other days are devoted to creating projects from these texts, their narration and the discussions that follow every narration. These projects could be animations, HTML, typed texts and formatted texts, sound scape, photo stories, written word, audio and visual juxtapositions or narratives, storyboards, etc. Every day is a day for practice and creation realized through engaging associational free ways of thinking with each other's experiences. Our thoughts and energies are spent to understand the tentacular complexity of Delhi urban settlements: in fact, tapping into the media environment is not limited to the locality alone, but also extends to the media practices of the city. Repetition and duration are central to building the density of each node, and therefore, of the network; and every practitioner coming to the lab knows there will be new encounters and engagements every day."
Retrieved April 4, 2011, from: http://www.sarai.net/community/saraincomm.htm.

11 Sahakian, William S., and Sahakian, Mabel Lewis. 1993. *Ideas of the Great Philosophers.* pp.32-33. New York: Barnes & Nobles Books. For a thorough investigation, see also: Baird, Forrest E., and Kaufmann Walter. 2008. *From Plato to Derrida*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice.

12 Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity, An Essay On Exteriority.* Try.Exterity, An E1969. Jersey: Pearson Prentice.horough investigation, see also: Baird, Forrest E., and Kaufmann Walter. 2008. media environment is not limited to the locality alone, but als; Ref. by: Darwall, Stephen. L. 2003. *Theories of Ethics*. In: Frey, R.G. and Wellman, C.H. (Eds.). *A Companion to Applied Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 1717rd

13 Shveta Sarda editor and translator at Sarai CSDS (as the young Cybermohalla Ensemble writers all write in Hindi, the language they know better) outlines that in this book the focus of the research is "on practices of auto-didactism and their radical alterations within the post piracy digital environment, along with the difficulties posed to writing and thinking the layered conflicts produced by the accelerated growth and violent renewals of urban landscapes and imaginations."
Retrieved March 12, 2012, from: http://p2pfoundation.net/Shveta_Sarda

14 In 2006, one of these neighborhoods was demolished, and its residents were relocated to the barren landscape of Ghevra. Their practice of eight years, their dialogues with people around them, and the shrinkage of their spaces of intellectual/creative life propelled them to propose the Cybermohalla Hub in Ghevra in collaboration with architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Dr Michel Müller (Frankfurt). The design takes the multiplicity of voices in Cybermohalla practices as its starting point, translating them into dynamic architectural elements. Constructed on a 6x3 m plot (the size of houses in Ghevra), Cybermohalla Hub will be a space that creates a body of work around the making of the neighborhood. Linking the cultural practice and the architectural project, the proposed book represents a crucial part of the process. The book not only documents the architecture of the project, which functions as an attempt to "build knowledge," but also publishes insights that have emerged from the project as a whole.
Retrieved May 14, 2014, from: http://www.grahamfoundation.org/grantees/3673-cybermohalla-hub

15 Cybermohalla on themselves (2007): "The city wears many masks. With each mask it dawns on a different guise, each guise creating countless images: like restless shadows that travel together without ever becoming known to one another. In living in it, the city seems close; but it seems far when one begins to narrate what it is to live in a city. This distance provokes practice; through our practices we seek ways to cover this distance. We seek our ways of expression from those around us, from those near us. To us, our different practices are not a means of falling into someone's life; that we have entered someone's life is not the important thing – no entry pass or card records or marks it. What matters is, what are the terms with which we let someone step into our life. Our practice is our engagement with the time, questions and tussles that have been narrated to us, and which form the scaffolding in which we start collecting the scraps of desire to express. Practice! Need, habit, entertainment and hobby are not what we desire. In needing, we are alone. In habit we are chased by boredom. It is not entertainment, because that makes us dependent on the new. It is not a hobby, because hobby seeks futile gatherings. To us, to be in practice is to follow our insane desire over huge distances. This desire gives us a force to tussle with ourselves. And the tussle makes us vulnerable not only to our own thoughts but also leaves on us a special imprint of the images of many others."Retrieved April 10, 2011, from: http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/delhi/sarai/index.html
16 The Free University of Liverpool. 2012. Foundations. Liverpool: FUL Press, p.12.
17 Ibidem p.9
18 Ibid. p.13


SPONSORS LIKE TO HEAR IN LEFTIST TERMS THAT CAPITALISM IS UNAVOIDABLE!!!
ART CAN'T CHANGE REALITY!!!
(AND NOW PAY)

Project Anywhere: art, peer review and alternative approaches to validation at the outermost limits of location-specificity.

Sean Lowry and Nancy de Freitas

This text discusses the conception and development of a new global exhibition model dedicated to the validation and dissemination of art and research outside conventional exhibition environments. With much contemporary artistic activity manifestly ill-suited to the spatial and temporal limitations of traditional exhibition environments, and the figure of the curator as "cultural gate-keeper" still dominating more democratic models of selection and validation *Project Anywhere* was conceived as a potential solution for this double bind. *Project Anywhere* aims to meet the challenge of defining and implementing a new approach to the critique, peer review and documentation of artistic practices that fall outside of the forms and structures accommodated by conventional exhibition and publishing modes. Acting as a node to connect artistic activities in disparate locations, the *Project Anywhere* website[1] is not an "online gallery". By contrast, the site becomes a contextualizing framework for an expanded project space encompasses the entire globe where the role of curator is replaced with an adaptation of the type of peer review model more typically associated with a refereed academic journal.

Historical context

Artistic practices which unfold outside of conventional exhibition circuits have become increasingly common in recent decades. Much of this often dematerialised[2] and post-object practice is concerned with critiquing traditional exhibition systems and the commodification of art objects. Historically, these practices have evolved

to challenge the idea that art only functions through its reification into an object such as a painting or sculpture. As a consequence, discrete paintings and sculptures, films screened in theatres, and conventionally staged theatrical performances are no longer necessarily a primary focus for many cultural practitioners. By contrast, many artists have attempted to transcend the discrete exhibited and distributable object by producing ephemeral works, using their bodies, or framing networks of social and political activity as sites for artistic expression. Importantly, this shift has also transformed relationships between spectator and artist. The spectator is no longer passive and detached but rather an intrinsic element within a *whole aesthetic experience* in which relationships between conditions of production and networks of reception are implicated. This reorientation of art's perceived purpose has had a profound (and still unfolding) impact. The roots of these developments can be traced back to the 1960s, when Situationist International (SI)[3] and Fluxus[4] began to challenge conceptions of the way in which viewers are involved in the process or "situation" of artistic production. Extending ideas that originated in early twentieth century avant-garde movements such as Dada, this "second horizon"[5] of post war "neo-avant-garde"[6] tendencies was more explicitly concerned with the creation of art experiences that offered active viewer participation. The outcomes of these interventions were not objects but rather *experiences*, resulting in a blurring of boundaries between art and life.

With aesthetic experience transformed from passive to active, both art and the conditions of its production and dissemination became increasingly politically focused, opening the way for even more radical challenges to the idea of place and spatial location. This tendency is perhaps most explicitly demonstrated in the institutional critique performed by artists such as Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers and Andrea Fraser. For Miwon Kwon, one the best reasons for expanding the idea of site specificity was an "epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context; the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience; and the self-conscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy."[7] Accordingly, much advanced art practice now seeks to actively transcend the physical limitations of traditional exhibition contexts, and often includes work in remote geographical locations, technically specialized contexts, and even in imagined spaces. *Project Anywhere,* the subject of this text, is specifically dedicated to the validation and dissemination of art at the outermost limits of location-specificity. During the late 1990s, participatory practice was famously reframed by Nicolas Bourriaud, who argued that audience involvement made work political, since the space of interaction created fleeting communities whose inter-subjective relations and concrete communications could be politically affective. The political, he suggested, could emerge within and through the aesthetic experience without the art or the artist engaging directly with politics. However, Bourriaud's influential ideas were also criticized. Claire Bishop, in particular, critiqued the lack of critical antagonism, loss of aesthetic criteria, and assumption of democracy she saw as evidenced

throughout much the work and ideas championed by Bourriaud. For Bishop, the aesthetic antagonisms presented in the work of artists such as Santiago Sierra and Artur Žmijewski potentially contain more critical potential. Bourriaud's ideas have also been critiqued by Owen Hatherley[8] for their alleged ignorance of the persistent political ramifications of advancing neoliberalism, declining socialism, and an expanding mass media, and Adam Geczy for being a form of Situationism.[9] At any rate, in the academic/research environment in which many artists are now working, this contested terrain and its inherent defiance of traditional location-specificity presents a new series of challenges. Here, it could again be argued that a political dynamic is inherent, since this kind of work sets up a distinctive ambiguity, particularly in terms of academic expectations for peer review and critique. Responses are often remarkably similar to the skepticism that earlier artists faced when they abandoned medium specificity.

Expanded exhibition circuits

Within an expanded approach to the idea of an exhibition, it is clearly no longer realistic to expect all art and research to fit within the physical and material constraints of established public art institutions or other public viewing spaces such as theatres, libraries, community centers, universities and art academies. Although some artists' work is specifically positioned to critique the institutional spaces in which they are expected to present their work and ideas, others are simply unable to appropriately present their work within such spaces. Consequently, and in divergent ways, many artists eschew conventional spaces in favour of dynamic exhibition environments, ever expanding in their physical and temporal parameters. An "exhibition" might now constitute anything from a "Silent Dinner Party"[10] to the performative ascent of a mountain[11] or a modular eco structure in the Kalahari Desert.[12] Significantly, such practices invariably disrupt established critical processes of review insofar as they make direct access to the artwork difficult. Established models of validation typically require direct, physical access and a comprehension underpinned by full sensual experience of the physical work. Consequently, the challenge for artists who create work in defiance of location-specificity is that their work often sits outside of the quality assurance processes that typically define value within the academy. Critical peer validation of research output is fundamental for artist academics, but if the direct experience of an artwork is potentially inaccessible, what kind of assessment can be made? In the 1960s, when Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg famously argued for medium specificity, they were arguing from a modernist position that emphasised disciplinary integrity and the purity of the medium. The situation is very different today. Rosalind Krauss has recently described a "post-medium condition" that re-presents the idea of purity of the medium.[13]

Roisin Beirne, Clare Breen, Andreas Kindler Von Knobloch,David Lunney,John Ryan, Tom Watt, Winter Resort, 2012, Photo by Andreas Kindler Von Knobloch

Countering the presumption that a specific morphological instantiation or physical performance necessarily constitutes the primary condition for critique is the argument that the aesthetic object is finally something immaterial. In other words, it is something unfolding within a network of relations that includes both sensory and non-sensory information. By extension, this idea of a work as something inhabiting a network of material and immaterial forms (i.e. historical and social contexts, multiple forms of documentation, critiques and interpretations etc), suggests that being critiqued, discussed and experienced in a mediated form is still an aesthetic object insofar as it can still be distinguished from other forms of human cultural and intellectual expression and activity by virtue of its dependence upon the structural idiosyncrasies of the *art condition*. Moreover, with physical spaces and materials now inextricably intertwined with expanded structural conceptions of what constitutes an artwork, it no longer makes sense to pinpoint a single fixed and immovable location or moment for a creative work. Given that we cannot even behold a work as art without the surrounding historical, subjective and cultural contextualizing information bound up in this determination, an aesthetic object can therefore potentially be anything that directs aesthetic contemplation and interpretation toward this *idea* of network. For David Davies, the physical work is simply a vehicle or medium

through which the artistic performance is generated.[14] Thus, the morphological instantiation or physical performance makes no exclusive claim to the art condition in itself, but represents the networked aesthetic experience.

Once we regard the supporting apparatuses of art history and the political, social and economic contexts that underpin the production and reception of art as aesthetic elements, it becomes possible to argue that the art condition, is something that is *always* dematerialized. This art condition, a structure that hosts aesthetic comprehension as distinct from other languages of human comprehension, is therefore something built in the mind of the interpreter via both direct experience and documentation, and moreover, that it is clearly problematic to separate these elements. Most of us, for example, did not directly experience the seminal performance works of the 1960s and 1970s that continue to inform our understanding of contemporary art. Although our understanding of the ideas carried within these works is dependent upon mediated documentation, these seminal works are nonetheless interpreted *aesthetically*; that is, they are interpreted in a manner that is fundamentally distinct to other forms of knowledge.

Much contemporary artistic activity is specifically framed to implicate structural relationships within the spaces (physical and cultural) in which it is situated. Working within the systems and symbolic languages of a host context, such work invariably produces meaning and experience that is contingent upon that host context. A creative work is a dynamic collection of signs, concepts, myths, traces, objects, sensations and contradictions. These are all intertwined with its surrounding contextualising apparatus of documentation and interpretation. Thus, comprehension of a creative work typically demands a combination of aesthetic experience *and* contextualising information. A central question at play within this paper is whether this relationship can be adequately extended across time and space via substantial documentation, facilitating "authentic" access to both aesthetic experience and critical comprehension. This, as we will discuss a little later in this text, is *Project Anywhere*'s *raison d'être*.

Institutional validation

Despite the radical transformations that have occurred over the last century of artistic practice, institutional agendas continue to have a disproportionate and conformist influence upon artist academics, many of whom are dependent upon university and residency programs for financial support in order to actually produce work. Some of these conditions and requirements have contributed to an environment in which particular, assumed limits are set on artistic processes and outcomes. Consider for example, the typical requirement for artistic research to include: documentation and analysis as research evidence; quality assurance through academic peer review; public program collateral for institutional use (museum or public gallery); media and social network friendly publications as well as public funding justifications.

Given the reality that much artistic activity is now concerned with the production of work that transcends physical location or evolves over extended periods of time, there is a commensurate likelihood that audiences will only experience works through mediated networks of documentation and interpretations. In the extreme, some artistic interventions are impossible to distinguish as art without a specifically designed, corresponding online presence. Broadly, audiences are now less likely to expect artworks and their corresponding documentation to exist in singular destinations, but rather, to be situated and understood within unfolding processes of formation. Adequate documentation for the task of communicating new knowledge clearly needs to be able to incorporate the kinds of open-endedness and contradiction that this kind of art itself experientially manifests. Without addressing this challenge, any understanding produced between the complexities of creative works and parallel, contextualizing elements will never hold.

Addressing the challenge of expanded exhibition circuits: the conception and development of Project Anywhere

Project Anywhere was conceived and developed as a possible solution to the challenges outlined above. Prior to the development of this system, and based initially upon the founding concept of Sean Lowry in 2011, *Project Anywhere*'s Steering Committee (2012)[15] was formed with a view to developing appropriate policy for the task of validating artistic research at the outermost limits of location-specificity.

Department of Biological Flow, Channel Surf, 2014-15, research-creation event,
Photo courtesy of Department of Biological Flow

After much consultation and debate, a two-stage peer review process was developed. It was decided that a blind peer review of project proposals would be used to determine which projects would be hosted, whereas an open peer review of project outcomes would better suit the task of deciding which projects would be finally archived as "Validated Research Outcomes". As part of this undertaking, a comprehensive set of evaluation criteria was developed. Here, it was also emphasised that *Project Anywhere* should retain verification materials to demonstrate that all evaluation criteria are met (these materials are archived and backed up for external auditing). Once this two-stage peer-review policy was formulated, an Editorial Committee[16] was then formed in order to review any proposals that had successfully navigated the peer-review process. Once these proposals had been returned to the candidate with peer comments for revision and then resubmitted for Committee for review, the Committee makes their final recommendation as which projects will be hosted. Meanwhile, an Advisory Committee[17] was also formed to oversee the overall strategic direction of *Project Anywhere*.

Following the first round of evaluation and Committee review, a selection of four projects was made for hosting during 2013. With four projects and a live web presence, the site and its conceptual framework was finally open to the scrutiny of the *Project Anywhere* committees. The digital conditions of each art project's web presence (text descriptions, image quality and links) became the focus of the committees' attentions and evaluative discussions are continuing as to the potential value of: 1) higher quality visual and textual information on hosted works;

Mark Shorter, Song for Glover, 2012

2) more comprehensive artist statements; 3) supportive texts by invited writers and/or comments from external critics; and 4) advice for artists on quality documentation (writing style, web format, image choice and quality).
Given the dual schema of *Project Anywhere*, research practice and exhibition practice have become two interconnected frameworks under examination. *Project Anywhere* is a critical response to both of these problematic issues—art AS research (artistic research) and the notion of the exhibit or exhibition as the primary product of artistic practice. Many interesting and ongoing practical and theoretical challenges have arisen within the process of designing and managing the launch of this initiative, which in turn is providing a valuable testing ground for future approaches to research and experimental exhibition formats.

Looking ahead

Three lines of enquiry in particular will be drivers of research and development associated with the *Project Anywhere*. The first relates to the concept of distributed project documentation. This is the relationship between official and informal material and the opening out of archival and documentary environments and structures accessible as part of the aesthetic experience of contemporary work. There are implications for the maintenance of any digital archive that is expected to be true to the form and complexity of the work being produced. The second line of enquiry will focus on the quality of documentation produced by and for artists working in the new genre. *Project Anywhere* is poised to play a significant role in the development of new approaches to visual/textual documentation of contemporary practice. The third line of inquiry, and perhaps the most far-reaching, is a reconsideration of the function and impact of critique within this new environment.

In recent years, tertiary art education and the artwork associated with higher education programs (and graduates) have become products dominated by research paradigms and objectives with quantifiable, verifiable end results. The institutional requirement for documentation and evidence of research, and scientific models of peer validation, has undoubtedly introduced a political dimension and a homogenizing influence upon artistic activity. Distinctive parallels have emerged with marketing attitudes and productivity agendas as we witness the loss of unfettered, open-minded, value seeking creative action. Socially oriented, critical processes and work towards self-enlightenment or pure experimental, speculative thinking may be in decline. In 2012, an interesting examination of this phenomenon took place at the 1st Tbilisi Triennial, *Offside Effect,*[18] which was focused on the conceptual development of educational platforms that challenge the current prescriptive influence of the Bologna process in Europe. Artists and lecturers, collaborating with groups of students from several selected experimental academies, attempted to open a window on their creative orientations and strategies for making work. Much of the visitor experience of these works entailed: encounters of a discursive, critical or archival nature; interpretations of artistic freedom; collective, experimental, bohemian and squatter action, and the idea of an exhibition functioning as a school in turn

framed as a work of art.[19] In this context, the art is framed and understood within the immaterial context of social relations, expanding beyond the tangible object, fixed in time and place. *Project Anywhere* is also alive to idea that art can be understood as something immaterial within a network of social and political connections.

Much like the fictional world that we call art, cultural projections such as institutions only exist to the extent that people agree that they do. Art remains a fertile ground on which to stage a dynamic play between a literal register of information and spaces for the imagination to flourish. In asserting that the "art" itself is not directly presented on the *Project Anywhere* website, the idea that the art is to be somehow apprehended as existing elsewhere in space and time is implicated. To this end, the indexical information made available via the website functions to direct attention to a work existing somewhere else in space and time. The potential remoteness or transience of some hosted projects will invariably mean that it is difficult, and in some cases impossible, for all subjects in the intended audience to directly apprehend the work. This invariably raises the question of whether mediated apprehension of some works is somehow a "second-best" experience. Given the "post retinal" nature of much contemporary practice, these kinds of philosophical questions have arisen across a range of institutional contexts. In many cases, these theoretical uncertainties in themselves are developed into an artistic or curatorial premise. To cite one example, the artistic director of Documenta XIII (2012) Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev directly addressed the necessity of the relationship between aesthetic and sense perception: "What does it mean to know things that are not physically perceivable to us through our senses? What is the meaning of the exercise of orienting in thought toward these locations?"[20] Accordingly, some Documenta XIII "sites" included in the Kassel catalogue were actually located elsewhere on the globe.

Other social experiences reinforce this notion that it is possible to build an aesthetic experience in the mind of an interpreter who does not directly sense a creative work. We sense many things vicariously, without direct experience. For example, many humans who have not experienced life in the wilderness may still hold strong political opinions about the value of an unvisited wilderness and have a personal attachment to the idea of it. In this sense, simply *knowing that it is there* offers an experience profoundly different to that of a theoretical proposition.[21] There are of course many other lived examples of things that we can sense without resorting to direct experience. We do not, for example, necessarily need to directly witness events ranging from sexual *impropriety* to genocide in order to be reasonably convinced of their existence. Extra sensory information in the form of substantial documentation can provide forms of validation that are as convincing as direct sense experience. Continuing with this train of thought, one of the reasons that Tehching Hsieh's work arguably remains compelling is the way in which systematic documentation has enabled interpreters who did not directly witness his five *One Year Performances* in New York between 1978 and 1986 to build his works in the mind. Hsieh's *Time Clock Piece*, for example, is validated by 366 time cards,

366 filmstrips, signed witness statements, a record of missed punches, and a 16mm time-lapse film. Consequently, Hsieh's performances provide a profoundly *different kind of comprehension* of concepts central to the mechanics of capitalism, surveillance, production, control, discipline and submission than might be possible within a more traditional theoretical or philosophical argument.

In conclusion

The conditions under which *Project Anywhere* was conceived are underpinned by a series of now long standing debates concerning the paradoxical conditions of artistic production, display and consumption. From the historical avant-gardes through conceptualism and institutional critique, to new modes of exhibition, display and performance across the global contemporary art spectrum, artists have consistently demonstrated a self-reflexive awareness of what Sabine Folie recently described as "the paradoxical insight that total comprehension is impossible."[22] By extension, addressing this problem of incomprehensibility has also become a defining characteristic in the framing of artistic research. The ongoing challenge that faces *Project Anywhere* is the question of how the veracity of artistic documentation might accommodate these paradoxes in a way that is sympathetic to the contradictions characterizing much contemporary artistic practice, whilst also somehow being accountable to the institutional expectations of university-based research culture
In accepting that it no longer necessarily makes sense within an expanded conception of art (and by extension artistic research) to pinpoint a single fixed and immovable location or artefact as the primary text for a creative work, *Project Anywhere* encourages artists to push against the edges of artistic practice and the specificities of exhibition location whilst at the same time striving to maintain research accountability via the relatively democratizing processes of blind peer validation.[23] In doing so, *Project Anywhere* aims to connect the sensory experience of apprehending art with the communication of knowledge about and through art. As an exhibition platform, *Project Anywhere* promotes new and experimental art at the outermost limits of location-specificity. As a publishing platform, *Project Anywhere* facilitates processes of critique and validation for artistic practice. The extent to which the initiative serves the artistic and arts research communities of the future will invariably depend on careful management of these distinct yet intertwined objectives. Although the relatively democratizing process of blind peer review is arguably a more ethically robust alternative to the figure of the curator as a cultural gatekeeper, it is also clear that an alternative approach to committee selection may eventually need to be found to circumvent any perception of indirect influence in Editorial Committee member selection by the Executive Director. This, and many of the other challenges presented in this paper, will be addressed as time and funding permits (the Executive Director currently performs all administrative functions and covers most costs beyond small institutional contributions from partnered universities toward advertising).

It is clear that the challenge of institutionally validating research in which artistic practice is the significant medium is made even more difficult when the research activity is "out in the world" as opposed to within a traditional exhibition space such as a museum or gallery. This paper has examined the challenge of bringing new knowledge from discursive, speculative and experimental fields of artistic activity at the outermost limits of location-specificity into contexts that also meet expectations of clarity and relevance typically demanded of research. It has also discussed the challenge of documenting geographically remote or ephemeral contemporary artistic research in a format that can potentially facilitate meaningful dialogue under relatively stable conditions. The *Project Anywhere* team is currently working toward hosting a conference at the School of Art, Media, and Technology at Parsons The New School for Design, a division of The New School, New York, NY on Thursday November 13 and Friday November 14, 2014 that will feature presentations from international artist/researchers that have successfully navigated peer evaluation at the proposal stage within *Project Anywhere's* 2013 and 2014 program, together with a series of invited speakers also interested in the challenge of exhibiting, performing and conducting research outside traditional exhibition environments. It is envisaged that this conference will provide another opportunity to test the challenges discussed in this paper.

Sean Lowry is a Sydney-based artist, an academic at The University of Newcastle, Australia, and. Executive Director of projectanywhere.net. Lowry's conceptually driven artistic practice employs strategies of concealed quotation designed to evoke ghostly feelings of familiarity. From August to December 2014, Lowry will be Visiting Scholar/Artist at the School of Art, Media, and Technology at Parsons The New School for Design in New York.

Nancy de Freitas is an artist and academic based at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. She has lectured widely on art and design research practice and material thinking methodology and is currently Editor-in-Chief of the international journal 'Studies in Material Thinking'.

Endnotes

1 "*Project Anywhere*: a global peer reviewed space for art at the outermost limits of location-specificity," accessed May 10 2014, http://projectanywhere.net/
2 See Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* (February 1968): 31–6. 10.
3 The power of mass media was the target of Guy Debord and the Situationist International. In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Debord characterises the reified "spectacular" image as symptomatic of capitalistic alienation and, moreover, that the spectacle actually conceals this estrangement. (Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), § 10). For a comprehensive introduction to SI, see Tom McDonough, ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

4 In the late 1960s, George Maciunas's insistence upon "concretism" (materiality) in fluxworks and his criticism of "illusionism" (representation) aimed to problematise the spectacular reification of reality. For Maciunas, the irreproducibility of material contextual conditions marks out all representation as inexorably illusory. For an introduction to Fluxus, see Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (Chichester, West Sussex and New York: Academy Editions, 1998).
5 See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
6 See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), xi.
7 Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October,* 80 (1997): 91.
8 See Owen Hatherley, "Post-Postmodernism?", *New Left Review* 59 (Sep/Oct 2009): 160.
9 See Adam Geczy, "Sanitised Situationism," *Broadsheet: Contemporary Art + Culture* 37:2 (2006): 127-127.
10 See Honi Ryan, "Silent Dinner Party" (from *Project Anywhere*'s pilot program, 2012), accessed May 10 2014 http://projectanywhere.net/archived/silent-dinner-party.
11 See Mark Shorter, "Schleimgurgeln: Song For Glover", (from *Project Anywhere*'s pilot program, 2012), accessed May 10 2014, http://projectanywhere.net/archived/schleimgurgeln-song-for-glover.
12 See Hans Kalliwoda, "WiaS (The World in a Shell)" (from *Project Anywhere*'s 2013 program), accessed May 10 2014, http://projectanywhere.net/project/wias.
13 Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 56.
14 David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2004), 59.
15 *Project Anywhere* Steering Committee (2012): Professor Brad Buckley, Associate Dean (Research), Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, Australia; Professor Su Baker, Director, Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of the VCA & Music, University of Melbourne, Australia; Professor Richard Vella, Head of School, Drama, Fine Art & Music, University of Newcastle, Australia; Dr. Sean Lowry, School of Drama, Fine Arts & Music, The University of Newcastle, Australia; Associate Professor Nancy de Freitas, School of Art and Design, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand; Mr. Ilmar Taimre, Executive Consultant, Independent Researcher/Virtual Musician, Brisbane, Australia. Dr. Jocelyn McKinnon, School of Drama, Fine Arts & Music, The University of Newcastle, Australia; Dr. Andre Brodyk, School of Drama, Fine Arts & Music, The University of Newcastle, Australia; Dr. Angela Philp, Deputy Head of School—Research, Drama, Fine Arts & Music, The University of Newcastle, Australia; Dr. Tony Schwensen, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A.
16 *Project Anywhere* Editorial Committee (2014): Dr. Sean Lowry School of Creative Arts, The University of Newcastle; Professor Brad Buckley, Professor of Contemporary Art and Culture, Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney; Professor Bruce Barber, Director MFA, School of Graduate Studies, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Associate Professor, Simone Douglas, Director, MFA Fine Arts, Parsons The New School for Design, New York; Dr. Adam Geczy, Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney; Professor Steve Dutton, Professor in Contemporary Art Practice, The School of Art and Design, College of Arts, The University of Lincoln; Dr. Les Joynes, Visiting Associate Professor of Art, Renmin University of China, Beijing.
17 *Project Anywhere* Advisory Committee (2014): Professor Su Baker, Director, Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of the VCA & Music, University of Melbourne; Mr. Ilmar Taimre, Executive Consultant, Independent Researcher/Virtual Musician; Dr. Jocelyn McKinnon, School of Creative Arts, The University of Newcastle; Associate Professor Nancy de Freitas, School of Art and Design, Auck-

land University of Technology, New Zealand; Dr. Sean Lowry, School of Creative Arts, The University of Newcastle, Australia; Professor Brad Buckley, Professor of Contemporary Art and Culture, Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, Australia.

18 1st Tbilisi Triennial, *Offside Effect,* curated by Henk Slager and Wato Tsereteli, Center of Contemporary Art, 10 Dodo Abashidze Street, 0102 Tbilisi, Georgia, October19 –November 20, 2012. Contact: tbilisitriennial2012@gmail.com.

19 The Triennial exhibition included documentation from *Unitednationsplaza,* by Anton Vidokle and Martha Rosler, an "exhibition as school" project intended to start as a biennial (*Manifesta 6*, 2006), but eventually realised as an independent temporary school in Berlin (October, 2006). The work had a later reincarnation under the name *Night School* at the New Museum in New York, 2008-9.

20 Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Introduction", *The Guidebook*, dOCUMENTA (13), Catalogue 3/3 (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 7.

21 Consider, for example, the description of the six hundred thousand hectares of wilderness that constitute Southwest National Park (part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area) provided on the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife website: "The park, the largest in Tasmania, epitomises the grandeur and spirit of wilderness in its truest sense. Much of the park is remote and far removed from the hustle and bustle of the modern world. For many, just the fact that such a place still exists brings solace." Southwest National Park: Introduction, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife, accessed November 14, 2012, .http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=3801.

22 Sabine Folie, "unExhibit-Display and the Paradoxes of Showing by Concealing", *unExhibit*, exhibition catalogue, trans. Gerrit Jackson (Wien: Generali Foundation, 2011), 169. Folie concludes this catalogue essay with a claim toward art that restitutes "imaginative space by a concealment that paradoxically 'shows' while leaving behind a vestige that cannot be differentiated, that is neither entirely transparent and comprehensible nor utterly opaque and comprehensible.", 173.

23 *Project Anywhere* "Peer Evaluation Policy," accessed May 10, 2014, http://projectanywhere.net/peer-review.

ARTLEAKS OPEN CALL

For establishing local/regional ArtLeaks

We call on artists, activists, researchers, curators, dancers, interns, art workers, to create local or regional ArtLeaks organizations to discuss issues related to working conditions, censorship, exploitation in their respective artistic and cultural fields.

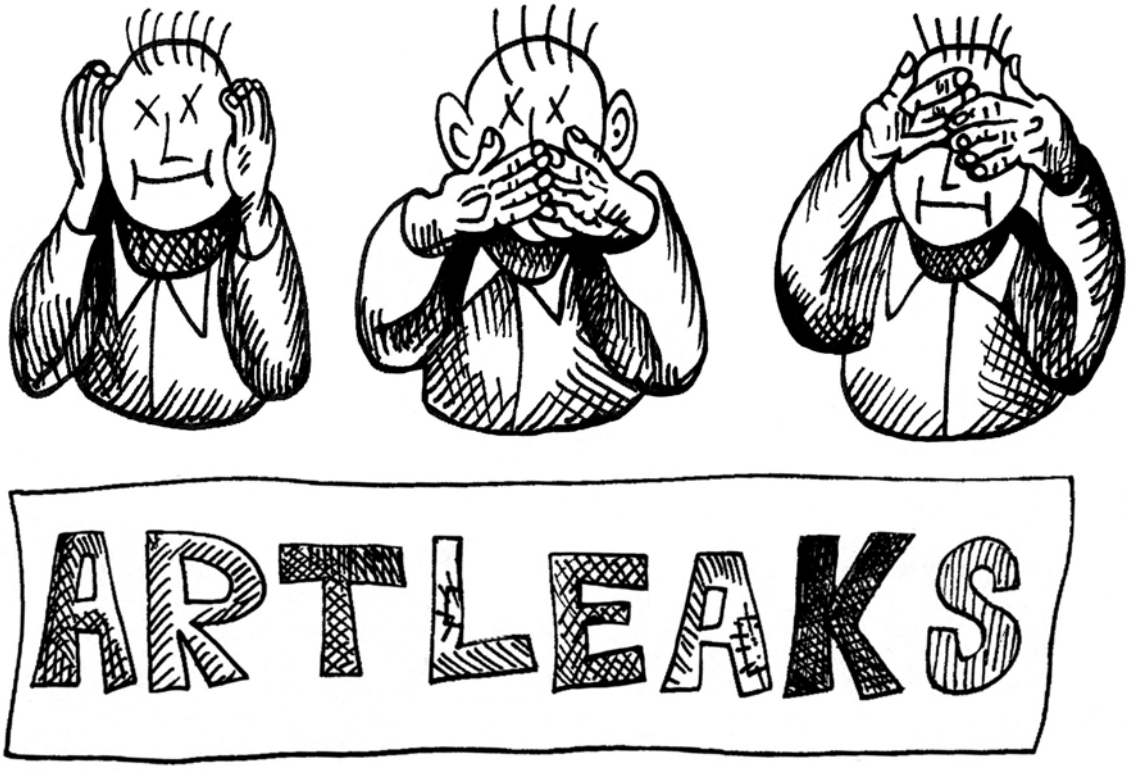
The problems and concerns put forth by our platform ArtLeaks are truly global and require an international solidarity network between cultural producers to tackle them.

In this sense, we strongly encourage like minded individuals, groups and collectives to create and manage their own ArtLeaks, to publish reports in their original languages on the situation inside institutions in any form. Both anonymous and signed reports are welcome, as long as they are submitted together with collective evidence and documentation.

We will offer logistical support and visibility to those who are ready to take responsibility for these local initiatives. The main ArtLeaks page and the ArtLeaks mailing list will continue to function as a public forum and archive of information related to international artistic struggles and models for a more emancipatory cultural field.

Those who are interested should send us a preliminary email inquiry describing their proposals in a couple of paragraphs at artsleaks@gmail.com

It is time to break the silence!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