

From New Institutionalism to New Constitutions: Annotating Institutent Practices

Over the course of Fall 2017-Spring 2018, [Temporary Art Review](#)¹ organized an extended feature adapting Gerald Raunig's notion of '[institutent practices](#)²' (understood as artistic and curatorial practices that "invent new forms of instituting") as a starting point to address the legacy of institutional critique and ongoing organizational experiments across the United States and Europe.³ Raunig's writings on instituent practices form a kind of canon on emergent institutional thinking in Europe, and can be read in relation to the phenomenon of *New Institutionalism* as the social turn of experimental institutional practices on that continent. Yet, each of these terms, and the theories that underlie them, are mostly unknown in the United States where the ideas proposed are nonetheless embodied and extended in practice.

Over its active publishing period between March 2011 and 2019, *Temporary Art Review* itself increasingly inhabited this in-between position as its editors split between St. Louis and Berlin. The publication's first five years are gathered in [To Make a Public: Temporary Art Review 2011-2016](#)⁴, a book that documents both the publication's activities and a parallel rise in experimental, autonomous artistic practices predominantly in the United States. Following the book's release in the winter of 2016/2017, this feature on 'institutent practices' formed a new mode of inquiry around the ways in which institutional thinking incubating in Europe and embodied practices in the United States could be brought into productive tension. These inquiries arose within a backdrop of deep institutional ruptures following a wave of museum protests that are still ongoing, as well as a post-election, post-Brexit moment of rising nationalism and crisis globally. These crises were both sub- and con-text, both the foundation and co-vocalization that animate the essays, interviews, and reviews collected here. There is an

¹ <http://temporaryartreview.com/>

² <http://temporaryartreview.com/tag/instituent-practices/>

³ This feature on 'institutent practices' was inspired in part by Vessel's International Curatorial Workshop on the same topic in Bari, Italy, August 2017. Many participants of the workshop (including Temporary Art Review editor Sarrita Hunn) were also contributors to the feature.

⁴ <http://temporaryartreview.com/announcing-to-make-a-public-book-launch-events/>

implicit *After* that looms throughout. *After Capitalism*. *After (Public) Institutions*. After our elusive present and After the Future. How do we proceed? Into what (institutional) futures and carrying forward which forms?

This reader, then, may be read equally as a critique and assessment of this present, as well as an exit - a "fleeing" in Raunig's terms. It includes the period of publication from *To Make a Public* - which resurfaces in Anthony Romero and Abigail Satinsky's piece "Making Art Politically: How We Gather" as well as in the book's postscript, "Art After Capitalism" - to essays drawn from our final months of active publishing. The first section, "**Annotating Institutent Practices**," includes a selection of articles from the 'institutent practices' feature; part two summarizes Temporary Art Review's positions concerning "**Art After Capitalism**" during this transitional phase; and part three, "**New Constitutions**," provides examples of critical practices in a range of forms from experimental exhibitions, conferences and residencies, to speculative museums and boycotts that draft new ways of gathering which exceed the singular institution towards more collectively articulated "co-" or "constitutions".

"**Annotating Institutent Practices**," begins with Lucy Lopez's essay "On Care and Parrhesia" (commissioned for [Common Field](http://commonfield.org/)⁵'s [Field Perspectives 2017](https://www.commonfield.org/projects/424/field-perspectives-2017)⁶) and, therefore, with the question: **Can a practice of instituting also be a practice of care?** Lopez writes:

"In his development of this theory, Raunig draws on Foucault's writing on *parrhesia* as a form of uncompromising truth-telling: to practice *parrhesia* is to speak frankly from a position of exposed vulnerability, to speak truth to power and in doing so to practice a kind of radical care of the self. [...] Applied to the institution, we can see how in order to practice *parrhesia* it must both speak truth to power (in terms of content and on behalf of its publics) and, at the same time - speak truth of, and to, itself."

From this starting framework, James McAnally spoke with Casco's Director Binna Choi in the Netherlands on the organization's year-long shift from "Casco Office of Art, Theory, and Design" to "**Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons**" to ask what an art institution for the commons consists of and how Casco, among an

⁵ <http://commonfield.org/>

⁶ <https://www.commonfield.org/projects/424/field-perspectives-2017>

expanding network of commoners, could contribute to collective actions in order to radically change our way of working and living. New York-based artist and educator Tal Beery's expansive essay considers "**Art After (Public) Institutions**" as a "fleeting moment of utopian possibility" particularly in the American neoliberal landscape. Sarrita Hunn discussed the recent transition at **Palais des Beaux Arts Wien** in Austria with Seth Weiner and Bernhard Garnicnig, and in a three-part essay, "**Making alternative futures: Instituting in a 'weird' world**" Tom Clark considers what power does to 'reality' by artists and organisations as they seek not to just represent the real, but actively to (re)make it. Part one included in full here follows a shift from representation to participation through the 'scripted realities' (such as reality TV) towards a proposed 'community-based reality.' Lastly, James McAnally spoke with **Eastside Projects** Director Gavin Wade on the Birmingham-based artist-run multiverse's compelling vision of an intuitive arts institution, the urgencies of independent arts organizing post-Brexit, and how art offers space for reflection, speculation, and action upon our complex present.

Section two summarizes *Temporary Art Review*'s propositional "**Art After Capitalism**" and begins with "**There is no longer non-political art.**" published by the editors of *Temporary Art Review* on the morning of US President Donald Trump's Inauguration in Washington DC, January 20, 2017. In his commission for [Field Perspectives 2016](https://www.commonfield.org/projects/74/field-perspectives-2016)⁷, curator Joshua Simon articulates a vision of dual power inspired by the soviet that imagines a "centralized confrontational strategy together with a decentralized practice of social organizing in communities." Sarrita Hunn documents the emergence of a field of art distinct from academic and commercial interests she terms "**Artists for Artists' Sake**" - a "realm in which priorities and values are determined by the artists themselves." Positioning artists as the initiators of new kinds of institutionality, Hunn argues that to propose "radical forms of participation to forefront self-organized, inclusive and equitable structures...means creating new social imaginaries."

"**We're Here to Make Friends**" by Tori Abernathy grounds friendship as the basis of political action, and both large and small scale organizing. Building off of legacies of prefigurative practice, Abernathy argues that the goal of organizing is bringing the future into the present and the primary way that we do this is in the

⁷ <https://www.commonfield.org/projects/74/field-perspectives-2016>

forming and nurturing of our relationships with one another in the ways we enact them on a day-to-day basis. In "**The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization**" James McNally articulates a manifesto for an art organization we can live in and with, proposing a new future for the nonprofit art space in America. The manifesto, originally written as a guiding document for *Temporary Art Review's* publisher **The Luminary**, frames the "organization as an organism that must not just last, but live" and must be prepared to take positions and protest alongside and on behalf of its publics. "**Postscript: Art After Capitalism**" by Sarrita Hunn and James McNally is the postscript for *To Make a Public*. The text was intended as an exit from the first five years of the publication, proposing a tentative thesis for post-capitalist institutional practice that defined the period reflected in this reader.

Opening the final set of selections, "**New Constitutions**" by James McNally surveys the **Museum of Capitalism** while proposing a new ethics of the institution after capitalism, described in the essay as "a new constitution of sustainable, but unstable institutions. Spaces that deny individuation of attention and concentration of resources towards considerations of the collective." In "**I Can't Work Like This: On the Art of Boycotting**," Tori Abernathy takes on the eponymous book and its release event timed just days after Hannah Black's immediately incendiary open letter regarding Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till in the 2017 Whitney Biennial. Abernathy expands outward from the book and its backdrop into a broader account of artistic protest, boycotts and direct action towards a "diversity of tactics." Responding to the Ghost Ship fire (in Oakland, CA) and attempted political interventions in North Carolina, **Elsewhere** co-founder George Scheer considers how alternative spaces thrive in emerging cultural economies and how we can work together more critically and collectively.

From Slovakia, Rado Ištók wrote on **Collection Collective**, a multifaceted project initiated by tranzit consisting of an exhibition, closed working group and a public seminar which together act as an invitation for establishing an art collection owned and run by artists and cultural producers themselves rather than by the existing public or private institutions. In Tom Clark's review of "**Ways of Learning at Grand Union**," curated by contributor Lucy Lopez, he explores pedagogical approaches that foreground "anecdotal, informal, and communal ways of knowing rooted within feminism, inter-generational alliances, indigenous knowledge and forms of

solidarity and allegiance that intersect with queer culture." These ways of being together is both critiqued and expanded upon in Kayla Anderson's interrogation of **artist residencies that pose as experimental-community-think-tanks** and considers how artists may collectively shape a new ethics towards our respective communities. Finally, in a return to *To Make a Public*, the reader closes with **"Making Art Politically: How We Gather"** by Anthony Romero and Abigail Satinsky that offers a survey of conferences, convenings and gatherings around the United States from 2014 to 2016, posing out loud "a different kind of investment on the part of hosting and organizing bodies" that is both programmatic and structural, concluding with Angela Davis's assertion to "turn towards what we have ignored and excluded to build what is to come."

The process of rigorous reflection, retrospection, and speculation that the arc of this reader represents ultimately led to the closure of *Temporary Art Review* as a project and a planned opening into a new borderland - a "journal of art and strategy" - that intends to embody and extend these urgencies through a new publication platform we will be launching in early 2020. This pivot absorbs and refracts institution practices' most foundational appeal: to draft new terms of institution-building that are both a refusal and a reassertion to "[\[betray\] the rules of the game through the act of flight.](#)"⁸

Sarrita Hunn and James McAnally, co-founders and editors
Temporary Art Review 2011-2019

⁸ <https://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en.html>

Annotating Instituent Practices

On Care and Parrhesia

by Lucy Lopez

Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute

by James McAnally

Instituent Practices: Art After (Public) Institutions

by Tal Beery

Palais des Beaux Arts Wien: Legacy and Latency

by Sarrita Hunn, Bernhard Garnicnig and Seth Weiner

Making alternative futures: Instituting in a 'weird' world

by Tom Clark

This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things: A Conversation with Gavin Wade of Eastside Projects

by James McAnally

Art After Capitalism

There is no longer non-political art.

The Dual Power of Arts Organizations

by Joshua Simon

Artists for Artists' Sake: Notes on Independent Art

by Sarrita Hunn

We're Here to Make Friends

by Tori Abernathy

The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization

by James McAnally

Postscript: Art After Capitalism

by Sarrita Hunn and James McAnally

New Constitutions

New Constitutions: Institutions After Capitalism

by James McAnally

I Can't Work Like This: On the Art of Boycotting

by Tori Abernathy

Up to code but caught on the fringe: holding alternative space in emerging cultural economies

by George Scheer

Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation

by Rado Ištok

Ways of Learning at Grand Union

by Tom Clark

Learning to Live Together: Artist Residency as Think Tank

By Kayla Anderson

Making Art Politically: How We Gather

by Anthony Romero and Abigail Satinsky



Documentation of Policy Show Meeting #1: Unspoken Policies of the Art Organisation, Eastside Projects, 2017. Image credit: Stuart Whipps (Courtesy of Eastside Projects)

On Care and Parrhesia

LUCY LOPEZ on October 12, 2017

Can a practice of instituting also be a practice of care? In his paper “Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming”, Gerald Raunig discusses the potential of ‘instituent practices’ as a process of ongoing instituting, rather than a process of gradually “*becoming institution* in the sense of constituted power.”¹ He describes the process as one of exodus – not in terms of withdrawal from the institution, but rather through “betraying the rules of the game.”² This entails a departure from the two previous iterations of Institutional Critique by drawing something from each: working from a position of ongoing self-questioning (not imagining an artificial distance from the institution), but also not fixating on complicity within it.³ In his development of this

theory, Raunig draws on Foucault's writing on *parrhesia* (developed in "The Courage of Truth" lectures at the College de France from 1983-84) as a form of uncompromising truth-telling: to practice *parrhesia* is to speak frankly from a position of exposed vulnerability, to speak truth to power⁴ and in doing so to practice a kind of radical care of the self.

In 2016, Simon Sheikh expanded on this use of *parrhesia* to consider the connection of care and power in terms of the institution.⁵ In other words, to consider institutions speaking truth of, and to, themselves – by looking at the relationship between their artistic programs, the information they make public, and their modes of governing and instituting. How could the institution practice care of the self – towards (or on behalf of) its workers and its publics? As Raunig describes, the truth-teller is involved in a self-critique that "queries the relationship between their statements (*logos*) and their way of living (*bios*)".⁶ If we see the outward facing program of the institution as its statements, or *logos*, and its internal functions as its way of living, or *bios*, then a reconciling of the two is needed in order to practice *parrhesia* as a radical position of (self) care.

Writing for the October 2017 issue of e-flux journal, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez makes a case *For Slow Institutions*, with a call to curators to "imagine new ecologies of care as a continuous practice of support...to radically open up our institutional borders and show how these work—or don't—in order to render our organizations palpable, audible, sentient, soft, porous, and above all, decolonial and anti-patriarchal".⁷ This sentient and porous, *slow* institution – one which might adapt according to changing needs⁸ and resist crystallization⁹ – might go some way towards a practice of *parrhesia*.

As Nina Möntmann has put it, the art organization – often the smaller, non-profit, the artist-run – has the potential to function as a wild child:¹⁰ to challenge and disrupt the forms of institution building and institutional governance that form the major infrastructure of our societies and culture. There is no lack of art which challenges existing conditions and makes propositions for new ways of living and working together – yet all too often these practices are strictly supported and celebrated in the realm of programming, while our institutions neglect to learn from the radical practices that they propose.

What can we learn from the practices of artists such as Alex Martinis Roe (whose project "To Become Two" continues her research into feminist alliances and methodologies for navigating the contemporary condition), Dorine van Meel and

Nelmarie du Preez (who, in their project “The Southern Summer School,” worked together with collaborators from the Netherlands, South Africa and the United Kingdom, towards creating non-normative spaces and alliances of solidarity across national borders) and Sidsel Meineche Hansen (whose discursive projects “Towards a Physiological Novel” and “This is Not a Symptom,” explore nervousness as a response to the institution and the biochemical production of subjectivity through what they term the “biopolitical regime that shapes the consumer’s nervous system”¹¹)? With the histories and problematics of institutional critique in mind, how might we resist the subsumption of these practices into the institution, and instead critically address, acknowledge, and act upon their capacity to have a measurable impact on the way that we work? In the 2017 Contemporary Art Society conference in London, Andrea Phillips proposed *management* as a site of contemporary political struggle, and not in the ways we might expect (such as exploitation of workers or micromanagement under contemporary capitalism), but rather a site of struggle in how we *manage* institutions – with management as key to their transformation in real terms.¹²

This struggle over management is also simultaneously a struggle over the *bios* of the institution, viewed most directly through the experience of the art worker, and the anxiety and exhaustion which this often entails. As highlighted by FcU (Feminist Curators United) at a recent event in Nottingham Contemporary’s *New Institutionalities* series, the tendency to fetishize hard work, to present as a public face the ‘coping curator’ is widely recognisable. During this event, curator Helena Reckitt presented the results of a workshop around working practices, with responses from numerous contributors stating their relationship with work: one which was underpaid, overcommitted, and often took precedence over family and personal commitments.¹³ To put it simply, we know that we are overworked, and that it seems almost unavoidable in the strained financial context of working in the arts under neoliberalism. What does it matter, in the wider context? Apart from the obvious (that institutions – publicly funded or not – should not be exploiting their staff), it matters because the first stand we can make is how we work together (and treat those who work alongside us) and because this is a real enactment of the care that we might profess in grander and more distanced ways.

It is up to us as art workers to address the reality of the institutions in which we work – to make demands on behalf of ourselves and our publics. Artistic research and practice is at the core of curatorial work. Can we follow the lead of artists imagining new ways of living, of truth-telling, of establishing collectivities? If we are to think about how we can really make a shift within the wider context, we need to likewise reimagine this

institutionally: what are our governance structures? Could they be rethought as a critique, rather than a reflection of, the neoliberal context under late stage capitalism?

As Andrea Phillips writes in her recent paper 'Reclaiming participation: arts centres and the reinvention of social condensation';

"just as arts centres have morphed into sites of the performance of neoliberalism, so they could transform again into locations where we test and perform practices of equality on a daily basis: not just through the making of exhibitions and events but through equal staffing and pay structures, through fair pricing, through the maintenance of equality within our collegiate relationships and through the recognition of the intelligences of our audiences".¹⁴

In order for the institution of art to practice *parrhesia*, it needs to be as Petrešin-Bachelez writes, sentient; to care and to speak. In his essay "Art After Trump," Simon Sheikh asked the questions: "How do we act institutionally? In terms of how we govern within artistic institutions such as galleries, museums, biennials, art fairs and art schools – can we re-orient these spaces away from the vanishing center, and towards a resurgent left?"¹⁵ This reorientation could be a form of reconciling the *logos* and *bios* of the institution.

This framework was the starting point for *Policy Show*, the current program at Eastside Projects (Birmingham, UK), which I have co-curated with Gavin Wade. *Policy Show* brings together a group of artists and art workers (Teresa Cisneros, Christian Nyampeta, Ciara Phillips and Rehana Zaman) to think along with Eastside Projects about its existing policies, and to develop together a policy of care for the organisation. Our first step was to publish the existing policies of the organisation, ranging from measurable policies ('We will work with a minimum of 50% women artists and curators') to the more everyday ('last one out, turn off the tea urn'), and those policies which function more as artworks, though are no less considered as guidelines to live and work by ('evolve according to changing needs' and 'as long as it lasts'). Working together with Cisneros, Nyampeta, Phillips and Zaman, and facilitated by artist Rosalie Schweiker, alongside the input of Eastside Projects' staff, volunteers, board members and publics, our first event resulted in a number of action points towards developing our policy of care. Moving forward from this first meeting, we will develop a care consortium – working with other small art organisations to share and develop policy together (around maternity leave and sick pay, for example), whilst also acting as a potential lobbying group. The further development and implementation remains to be seen over the course

of the project, and the years to follow: part of our work will be to develop a framework for accountability within this.

We must not only begin to imagine how these policies are situated within the singular institution, but how they might begin to connect to a resurgent left. Sheikh locates these potentials within “galleries, museums, biennials, art fairs and art schools,” but we could extend this to networked contexts such as Common Field, that connect and form alliances between the resistant strategies of artists and art organisations, in order to reimagine not only the institution but the “rules of the game” itself. Raunig states that what is needed is “*parrhesia* as a double strategy: as an attempt of involvement and engagement in a process of hazardous refutation, and as self-questioning.”¹⁶ Applied to the institution, we can see how in order to practice *parrhesia* it must both speak truth to power (in terms of content and on behalf of its publics) and, at the same time – speak truth of, and to, itself.

This essay was commissioned by Temporary Art Review for *Field Perspectives 2017*, a co-publishing initiative organized and supported by Common Field as a part of their Los Angeles 2017 Convening. *Field Perspectives 2017* is a collaboration between Common Field and arts publications ARTS.BLACK, Art Practical, The Chart, Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles, contemporary, DIRT, Pelican Bomb, Temporary Art Review, and X-TRA. Partners each commissioned a piece of writing that aims to catalyze discussion, dialog, and debate before, during and after the Convening. Read the other contributions here.

1. My emphasis.
2. Raunig, G. (2006) ‘Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming’, trans. Derieg, A. Available at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en>
3. Ibid.
4. Foucault, M. (1983-84), collected lectures from the College de France, in *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II)*, Ed. Gros, F. (2011) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Sheikh, S. (2016), ‘Careful and Careless Power’, paper presented during a public editorial meeting at BAK, Utrecht, 2016, titled *Instituting for the Contemporary*, commissioned by Clark, T. Hlavajova, M. and Lopez, L.
6. Ibid.

7. Petrešin-Bachelez, N. (2017) 'For Slow Institutions', in e-flux issue 85, October 2017. Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/>
8. 'Evolve according to changing needs' is Eastside Projects policy number #5, 2009, as included in the publication Eastside Projects User's Manual #7.2, 2017, eds. Langdon, J., Lopez, L., and Wade, G.
9. Raunig, G. (2006)
10. Möntmann, N. (2008), 'Playing the Wild Child: Art Institutions in a Situation of Changed Public Interest' in Open, 14: Art as a Public Issue.
11. Meineche Hansen, S. (2014) 'Emotional Reasoning', in conversation with Gritz, A. in Mousse Magazine issue 44.
12. Phillips, A. (2017), 'Museum as Social Condenser', paper given at the Contemporary Art Society conference *The Museum as Battlefield: Alternative Models of Museum Practice*.
13. Child, D., Reckitt, H., and Richards, J. 'Labours of Love: A Conversation on Art, Gender and Social Reproduction' in *Third Text*, 2017, available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09528822.2017.1365492>
14. Phillips, A. (2017) 'Reclaiming participation: arts centres and the reinvention of social condensation', in *The Journal of Architecture*, vol.22:3.
15. Sheikh, S. (2016) 'Art After Trump', in e-flux conversations, November 2016. Available at: <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/simon-sheikh-art-after-trump/5325>
16. Raunig, G. (2006)



Image from the workshop "Towards a new visualization for Casco" with the Casco team, organized by David Bennewith & Bram van den Berg, 2017. The collage is by Staci Bu Shea and includes the photo of Faceless of History Visits Casco [2016/2017] by Cooperativa Cráter Invertido in collaboration with Vladimir Mainline.

Working for the Commons: A Conversation with Binna Choi of Casco Art Institute

JAMES MCANALLY on November 30, 2017

Earlier this year, Utrecht-based space Casco announced a reorientation of their program around a new modus operandi, beginning a year-long shift of both the language and name of the organization itself from "Casco Office of Art, Theory, and Design" to "Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons." This distinct evolution activated the idea institution in both language and practice as inextricable from its

mission, inscribing an altered ethic towards the commons into both its daily practices and long-term horizons. Action is more than implied – it is imperative, as the organization stated in their announcement of the shift: “With this change we aim to act on our political-aesthetical intentions and face their urgencies with **working for the commons** as the guiding imperative for all Casco operations.”

Working for the Commons operates as a kind of manifesto nested into a name, the commons becoming a value system that precedes and exceeds capitalist relations among individuals, institutions and their publics. Speaking with Casco’s Director since 2008, Binna Choi, we consider what an art institution *for the commons* consists of, new habits of working together within and beyond institutions, and how Casco, among an expanding network of commoners, could contribute to collective actions in order to radically change our way of working and living.

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**James McNally:** *First of all, what prompted the shift from your long-term research on the commons to a reconsideration of the organization itself as “working for the commons?” What does changing your name indicate that wasn’t possible simply as a program, or long-form series as you’ve engaged in the past?*

**Binna Choi/Casco:** Our team had a desire of sharpening focus – and clarity – in our programming that would enable us and our public to have more time for “deep understanding” as we called it: deeper relations to beings and things “we” create and encounter – and reproductive labor, instead of keeping our habit of working – an ongoing production and event cycle – experienced in our psychosomatic experience of “being busy,” while thinking of what the institution of the commons could be. This process of reflection has been progressing with *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*, a collaboration between our (shifting) team and artist Annette Krauss during our program *Composing the Commons* (2013-2015). At the point of concluding this program, which entailed inquiring and imaginative projects by artists and/or group of transdisciplinary practitioners of mapping the definitions, issues and strategies around the commons, and growing networks, we also came to recognize the commons as a vast field of research and practice where a number of urgent issues of our time around racism, fascism, fundamentalism, capitalism and above all ecological crisis converge. The commons could function as a common denominator with which we see these respective struggles in relation to each other and their common cause. So, in fact, we may only continue to work on the commons. In other words, we pursue “deeper understanding” of the

commons, including our investigation and practice of Casco as a commons, a site for commoning or an institution of the commons.



Casco Team & Annette Krauss, Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation), Unlearning Exercises, installation view at the exhibition We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning, 2016, at Casco. Photograph Coco Duivenvoorde.

**JM:** *What does this shift signify in concrete terms? How does the organization change under this framework?*

**BC:** You mean, how does an art institution of and/or as the commons operate? Let me start with this. Commoning is often misunderstood as an organizational form with no hierarchy or simply as co-owned resources. Yet I think it's more complex than that. Working collectively, for example, cannot simply be associated with complete horizontality – or flatness of structure – and non-hierarchy. Also this does not mean the withdrawal from the public such as public funding, publicness, public presence and so on. I would say rather that commoning should be at the core of the public. For example,



“gemeente” – city council in Dutch – derives from “meente,” which translates as the commons.

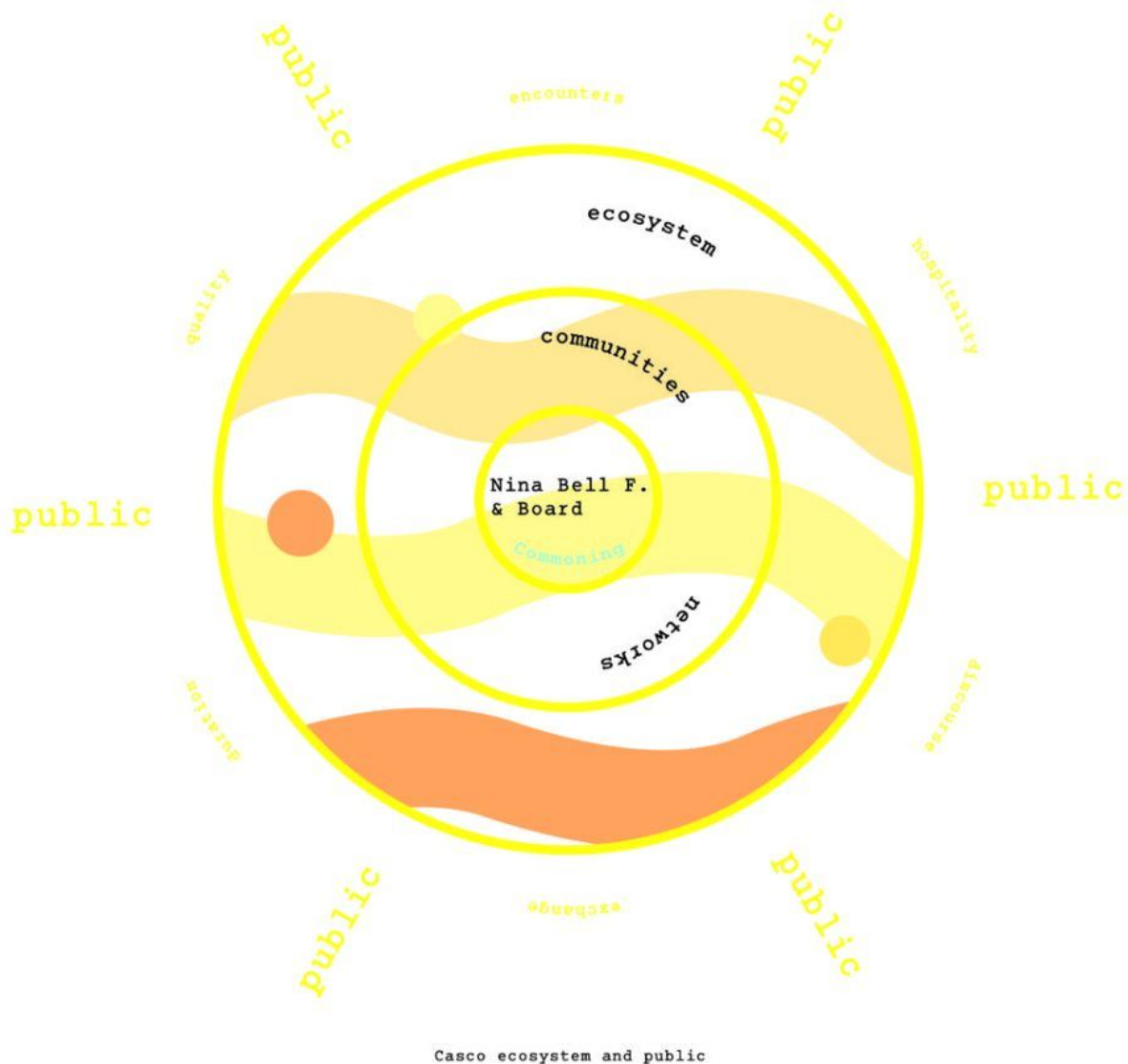


Diagram for new “working for the commons” modus operandi, developed by Binna Choi and Ika Putranto. Courtesy of Casco.

In this regard, we are going to keep our “institutional” structure, including fundraising from public foundations, and would like to care even more for our “publics.” Practically, we will further “institute” our organization – after all we put an emphasis on this aspect through the name “Casco Art Institute.” We are going to write and publish a “protocol” for use and maintenance of Casco. We are further “specializing” positions in the organization, including the creation of new positions like “head of diverse economy” and

rearticulating some of our existing positions into “deputy director” and “correspondent & editor.” With specialization, however, I mean that each person has a stronger focus and hence equal weight in the organization. With protocol, I mean that we are prepared for us to share our knowledge and responsibility amongst ourselves – which is unfortunately not common either – as well as other commoners outside of the institutional-organizational circles. Furthering instituting is hence only to serve further commoning. The strengthened organizational power is in turn to support the mentioned commoners outside the organization- consisting of volunteers, artists and other practitioners who come to research, experiment and make projects and activities or simply share our infrastructure and facilities for gatherings. We do not envision that Casco will turn 180 degrees from an institution to collective. In fact their exclusive distinction is not relevant for the commons in my view.

Next to this, we will facilitate each of our “institutional” team and the commoners to care about a focused project and cultivate conditions for “deep understanding” instead of one or two curators/director pursuing the concepts of all the projects and them being “materialized” by others. Each project will have more autonomy and its own body once it’s launched. Plurality and multiplicity are something that we envision, rather than one mega project, while all fall under the practice of commoning and contributing to the commons, in the way, for instance, each own’s learning process will strengthen the eco-system as well as institutional infrastructure as the commons. Commoning here comes with a finer form of instituting in service of decentralization or rather plu-centralization.



Forms of presentation & sharing at Casco

Diagram for new “working for the commons” modus operandi, developed by Binna Choi and Ika Putranto. Courtesy of Casco.

Then, we anticipate that an annual assembly would be a crucial moment for all the commoners to come together and share about their projects in process and practice. We don't idealize the assembly to be where decisions are made in consensus. Rather, it will be a field of gathering, sharing, and collective experimentation, while institutional decisions are made understood and adoptable. Who knows in a long run – this could be an important moment for decision making too! We would just like to take a gradual step in this direction.

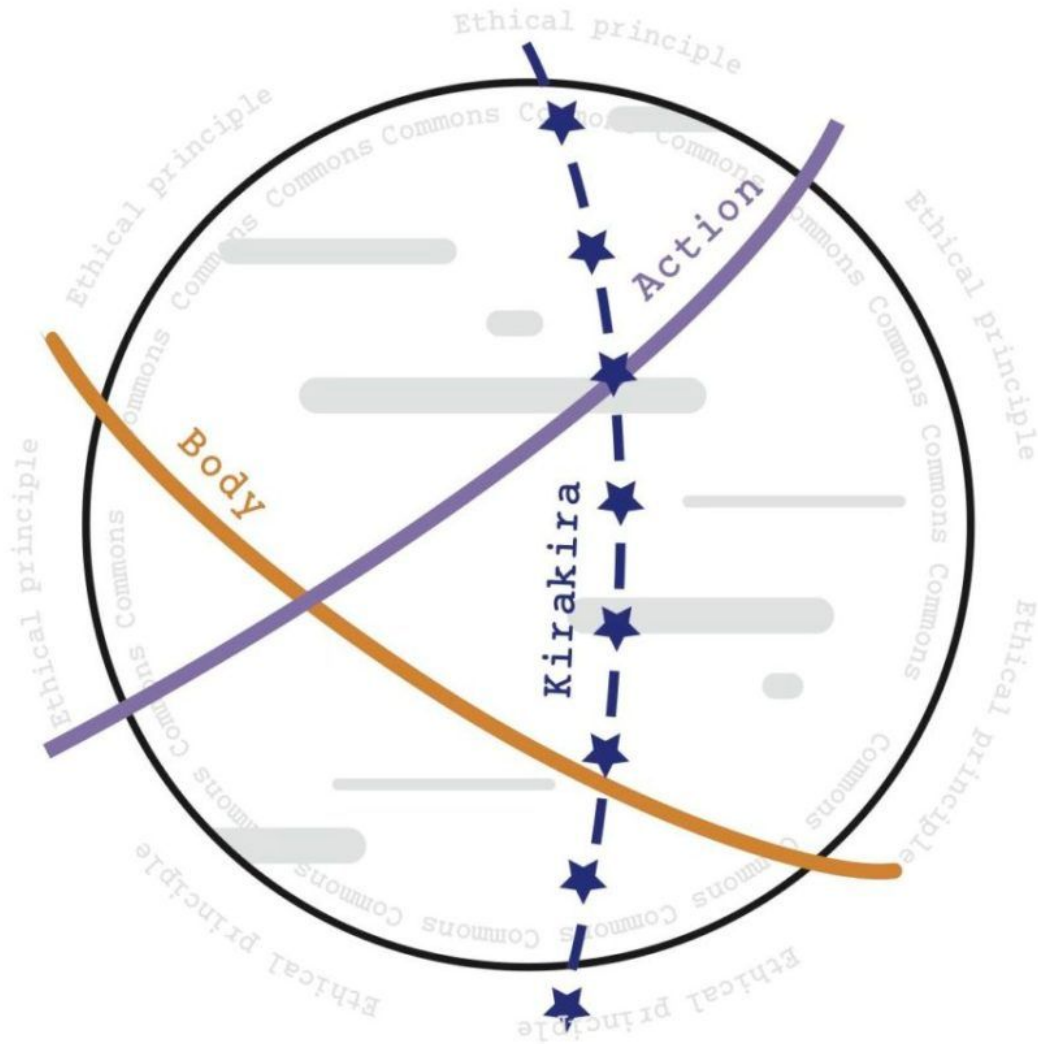


Exhibition phase of “Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons” at Casco, 2017. The installation view includes the works *Número* [2015] by Faivovich & Goldberg, *What if... (Panel Conversations)* [2017] by Maja Bekan and Gunndís Ýr Finnbogadóttir, and *Can tame anything, tables, tables, doors, blinds, bodies* [2016] by Ruth Buchanan. Photograph Niels Moolenaar.

Two exhibitions we will organize in our main building would be conceived as a form of assembly too, instead of a curator's oeuvre. In fact, many exhibitions are already a kind of assembly but approached as if they are singled authored or an artist-curator binary. One exhibition in particular would be an open field of things brought by the commoners – so serving the purpose of the annual assembly taking place.

Next to this, we will encourage exhibitions or other forms of presentation outside of our institutional premise – in other non art specific contexts where a project's subject

matters. This would multiply meeting points for the commoner and new potential commoners, while enlarging contact zones with the public.



How to construct the commons at Casco

Diagram for new “working for the commons” modus operandi, developed by Binna Choi and Ika Putranto. Courtesy of Casco.

Lastly, we also set a tri-fold parameter for planning, composed of “Action, Body, Kirakira”:

In terms of action, for every project, we consider the action goals it aims at realizing over the course of a given period of time. Art may be non-active, autonomous, object

based, sensual and contemplative: on that level itself art is potentially transformative and fills an important niche in society. Next to this, however, we are interested in bringing art to be more proximate to social change and to position an art that projects futures. Again, this binary distinction is not so interesting or relevant – why not rather overlap them, with myth-creating as active as raising a flag on the street. In any case, what this action requires is to try to be specific in your goals and “strategize” as much as you can. This in turn would allow more time to care on what we call “body.”

So, speaking of body, when taking action and developing projects, we take care to maintain the relations of a body of “people” and consider every position and perspective that works on the project. Commoning Casco is not possible without those who eventually form Casco’s ecosystem – notably “commoners,” nor is it possible without the organizational, institutional body. Traditionally speaking, this is the area of concern about labor, which we want to subject finance to as well.

Finally about kirakira. While we work by planning and manage by caring, we also leave a space for encounter, discovery, and improvisation. Where the unexpected — or “the magic” — happens. The process of working together is often prone to these kinds of unforeseen moments, providing new insights and modes, showing unimagined options and possibilities. Let us welcome and host these kinds of “kirakira” (“twinkle, twinkle” in Japanese, “approximately” in Indonesian) moments/spaces.

**JM:** *The inherited idea of the institution is individuation – you have to decide to work differently. It’s interesting that you mention further “instituting” in order to actually facilitate further commoning. What “rules” or guidelines have you set out to practice the commoning of the institution, or to maintain an intentional ethic within your activities?*

**BC:** Capitalist instituting is based on individualization and never-ending competition that propels an extractivist approach to our bodies and relations. Distinguished from it, instituting in general is about dealing with rules – not LAW! – through which a collective works together (by writing, practicing and rewriting), in which we consciously build and unbuild a routine or a habit, as Agamben showcased through his interpretation of Franciscan community (*The Highest Poverty*), or what Mary Douglas speaks about in her text *How Institutions Think*.



Casco Team & Annette Krauss, *Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation)*, *Cleaning Together*, 2014, weekly exercise, performance, and photo documentation. Photograph by Annette Krauss.

In this regard, we have one particular habit or rule of weekly collective cleaning of our office as a basis for this institution according to the commons, which we started in 2014 as we were engaging with the above mentioned *Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation)*. This is to keep us embodying the value of reproductive labor also in solidarity with domestic workers who fight for the recognition and respect for their works all around the world. We will continue this and hopefully expand on it, for instance as we did not manage to build up a cleaning practice of our “digital space.”

Besides, a new effort is to write an ethical principle. The following points are few principles that we have for now but in the coming months, we are going to further work on these to amend and continue to add to them. These initial principles are what we wrote together while Staci Bu Shea (curator at Casco) was in charge of articulation.

– **Decentralization & shared-governance:** Our new mode of governance at Casco implicates our team, former team members, as well as our respective communities and constituencies that continue to develop and solidify. In this process, we give space for a

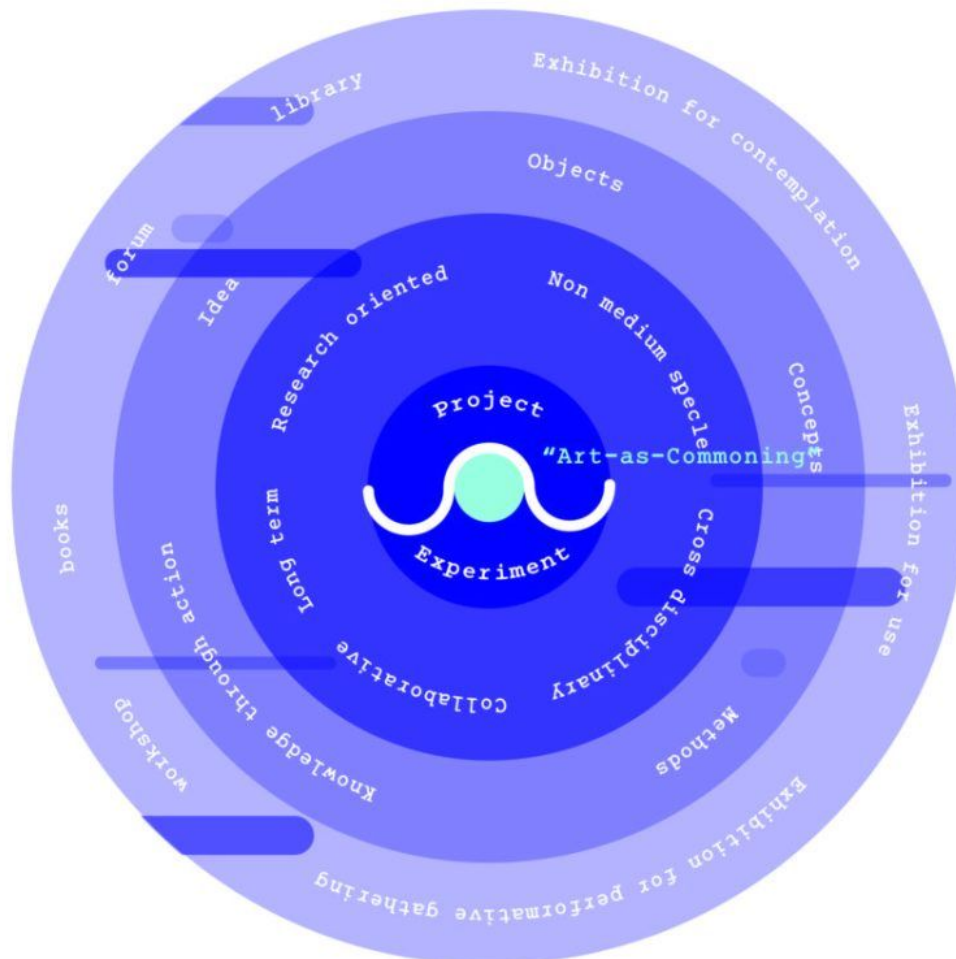
collective decision-making that empowers those involved to be self-organized and accountable with the recognition of hierarchies and skills. Yet collective decision-making is not necessarily consensus-making but composes a space for mutual understanding and respect.

– **Tango or slow dance between desire and capacity:** All too often those working in the arts and the cultural sector experience a burn out from working on an intensive project or multiple projects at once. While it is evidence of enthusiasm and commitment, exhaustion is rarely generative for long-term engagement. While “working for the commons,” we are devoted to methodologies that assist in our self-management of desire and capacity. Even if it is never finite and always evolving, this means that one’s desire and capacity must be named and sized accordingly. It is an exercise in self-care and self-limitation as well as mutual care, collective well-being, and responsibility. We look out for each other in the ecosystem during this process. In this light, we celebrate not only one’s strengths but also vulnerability and the ability to acknowledge one’s own limits. We encourage taking small, concrete steps for achievement, instead of having big, abstract ambitions.

– **Transparency and opacity:** We take both transparency and opacity as very different conditions or states, but as equally generative. A large portion of Casco’s vision involves an open and transparent approach: in collaboration, problem-solving, exhibition presentation, budget sharing, and other internal matters. Historically and still today, many institutions do not practice transparency as it would inevitably reveal malpractice or systemic injustice, hence we find transparency a crucial part of commoning. However, as much as we value transparency, privacy remains important to us. Opacity can also be used as a tool for thinking through problematic issues, self-determination, or simply the sticky, uncomfortable, and vulnerable parts of what it means to be human. We value an ethics of thinking through how the two function.

– **Intersectionality:** To exist is to be amongst a web of power relations. We take intersectional analysis as an important part of working for the commons. Coined by Black scholar and activist from America Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and inspired by the work of women of color before her, intersectionality concerns the interconnected nature of identities such as race, gender, class, ability, orientation, legal status, age, etc. This is crucial to our work, both as a team and with the public, because if we place the experiences and interests of marginalized people at the forefront of change and social movements, we can more actively address the barriers faced. This involves how we form our team, work as a team, how we think about artistic practices and projects, and

how we can think further about our differences-in-common. “If it’s not intersectional, it’s not feminist!”



Art for Casco working for the commons

Diagram for new “working for the commons” modus operandi, developed by Binna Choi and Ika Putranto. Courtesy of Casco.

**JM:** *In our previous conversations, you have spoken about working both within and outside of the art world as a strategy. Does the art world allow for commoning in ways other fields may not? Alternately, what do you feel are its limitations that prompt working outside of art?*



**BC:** What does art do for practicing the commons? How do we imagine the commons, what are the images of the commons? These are the questions we put forward while working as one of the partners for the biennial conference by International Association of the Study of the Commons held last July in Utrecht called “Practicing the Commons: Self-governance, cooperation, institutional change.”

Our provisional answers, which are also gathered through the “banga” – study meeting – of Arts Collaboratory which we are part of – next to the conference, are that art, its sensibility and its imagination, offers an openness, opens pre-existing “boxes” of thinking and doing, so it can be contributing very well to the environment of desiring changes: art per-form, art touch. During this conference period, for example, next to the exhibition at Casco that provides different perspectives and ways of looking at organizational matters (taking Casco as an example) and possible images and visual narratives of the commons, we organized a 3 day long childcare program with artists Aimee Zito Lema and Merel Zwarts, nicknaming it as a mini-conference “Commons for Children.” Apparently a childcare program for academic, intellectual conferences is very “new” let alone that the forms of play these days are also very individualized and driven by commodities.



Presentation by the participants in the “Commons for Children” program organised by Casco as part of the biennial conference of International Association of the Study of the Commons: “Practicing the Commons: Self-governance, cooperation, institutional change” at the Utrecht University, 2017.

There's also a tendency of art becoming for its own sake. Art history, theory, criticism all are relevant but when they become gate-keepers of the disciplines or authors, they no longer function towards commons. This is one reason why it's furthermore important to situate art in non-artistic contexts. This implies that we also be open to forms of art, beyond aesthetically refined objects, towards imagination and things. By becoming "Casco Art Institute", we may broaden a space for experimentation – all "in the name of art" yet "working for the commons."

In fact, you come to see the most value of arts when they are in and by another context of art. The specialized "field" of art is however equally valuable for studying relevant forms of art and experimenting on them. It just should not be closed and self-contained!

By the way, when we organized an exhibition as a phase for making the transition from Casco- Office for Art, Design and Theory to Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, it was an interesting experience how this announcement immediately drew attention and new connections with those who have been working around that notion, in and out of the field of contemporary art. This points to the broader field of practice working towards the commons, which we are joining and hopefully advancing.



Exhibition phase of "Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons" at Casco, 2017. The installation view includes the works *Composition of the Universe* [2011] by Marjolijn Dijkman and *Número* [2015] by Faivovich & Goldberg. The situation took place during the launching event of the book *Space of Commoning*.

**JM:** *You framed this shift within an exhibition framed as “the institute as artwork” and “exhibiting the institution.” What was the impulse to present Casco and its shifting structure within the context of an exhibition?*

**BC:** It is similar to the logic of considering both action and body at the same time. To put institution only as a background support structure for art, we may only perpetuate our habit of operating in a representational realm. To put it positively, when we stage the institution as art, it could be an effective tool to bring that matter to “artistic” concern. It’s an additional, follow up work to the living and acting legacy of institutional critique, and further new institutionalism, and their limitations, in the West.

However, I would like to remark that we should **not** reduce ourselves to the purity and seamlessness between our practice and the intention, between present and future. Although it’s part of practice to recognize the contradictions and differences between them and try to diminish them, it would be only discouraging and fragmentizing solidarity work if black and white judgement is made based on the contradiction. Often those who make such judgement do so from the position that is not practicing and cynical. Furthermore focusing on intention, or focusing the linear perspective of temporality is not so helpful for the time we live in. It’s all too “humanistic” of those believe in the “modern.”



Exhibition phase of “Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons” at Casco, 2017. The installation view includes the works Disposition Table (Conversation Five) [2017] by Riet Wijnen. The printed materials on the Disposition Table are the artists’ selection of the working documents by Casco. Photograph Niels Moolenaar.

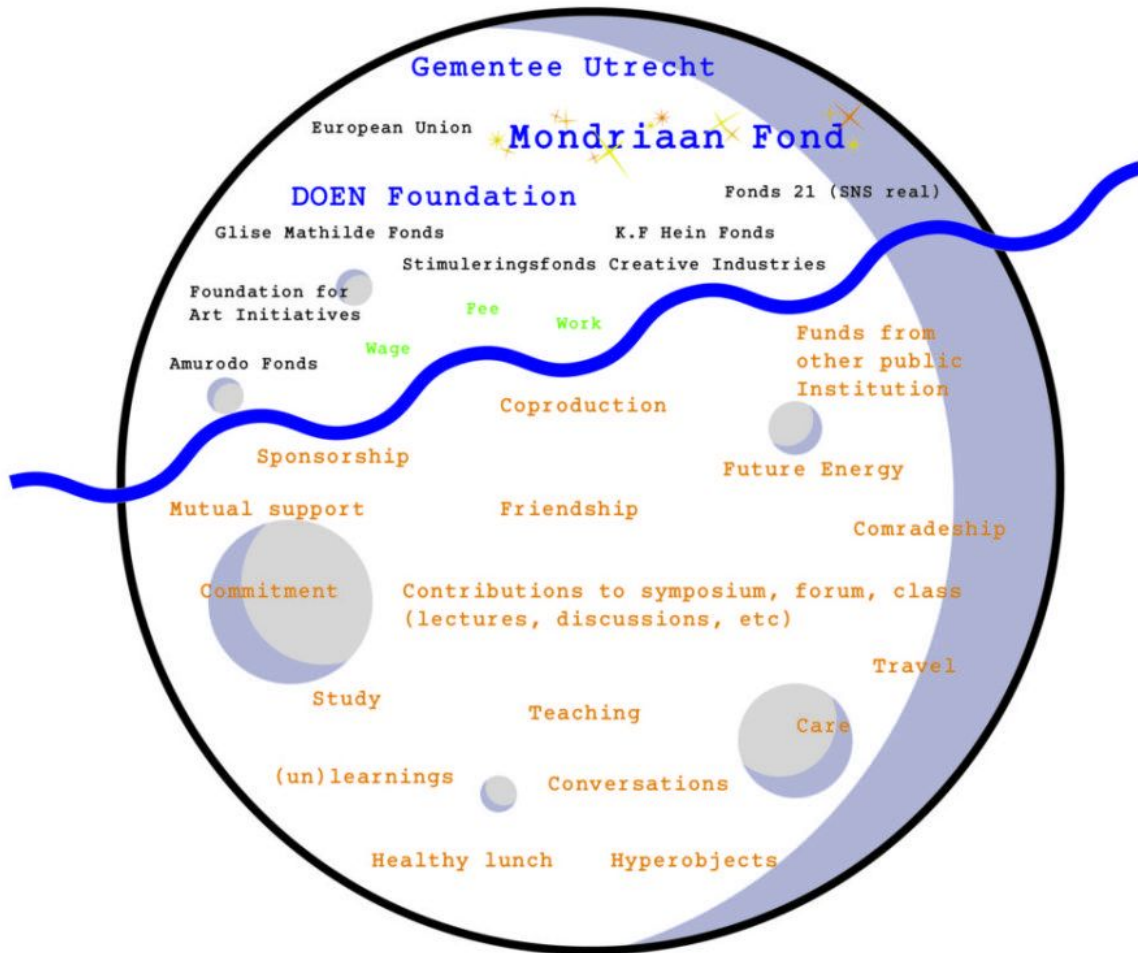
Partly the exhibition was also meant to enable us to take time in the process of working on institutional change without being totally silent or not “showing,” which is considered to be the prime task of institution like us – in the Netherlands, Casco and other peer organizations are categorized into “presentation institution.” And to make this presentation an open occasion to share our thoughts and get feedback. Yet, exhibition making is costly, not only in terms of finance but labor and time. So it was not an easy balancing act, of course.

**JM:** *Inherently, working towards the commons assumes an outside to the institution. This is distinct from a movement such as New Institutionalism interested in experimenting with forms of institutionality and the public, and adds an additional prompt towards collaborative learning, sharing within networks, or attempting to provoke further commoning among multiple institutions, and many different publics. Casco seems especially interested in reproducing itself in a sense, through networks, publications, symposia and so on. How would you propose other organizations begin working for the commons? How does it expand outside of Casco? What is the horizon or endpoint of the process for you?*

**BC:** Within the art world, there is so much competition among organizations – most directly due to limited funding resources and art’s dependency on outside funding . I think that cultivating a non-competitive culture and way of working together is an important step of “commoning”, whether you put it as an explicit goal or not of organizations. But how...?

Back to the *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*, I think the state of busyness is something that our peer organizations, many of which appeared in late 90s and mid 2000s, are confronted with. Instead of networking for “united busy states”, we then would move towards interfering with the state of busyness for deeper understanding, reproductive labor, or something else – deeper thinking, acting, and imagination as Isabelle Stengers suggests. This would require us to ask what make us busy in concrete terms. Where we spent more time and less and why? If experimentation, critical thinking and risk taking are another common denominator for our works, I think this should be possible. As part of the 2016 Gwangju Biennale, Maria Lind and I organized an initial gathering of just over 100 small to mid scale art organizations under the name of “To All the Contributing Factors.” We hope this could be a seedbed for further collective thinking and acting. More actively, but in a smaller scale, there has been a collective attempt at this through the Arts Collaboratory network – a network of 25 art organizations, including Casco, yet mostly situated in so-called “global south,” by

collectively engaging with self-analysis and developing a proposal that requires a change in the system of a funding that directly influences our habit.



Casco's diverse economy

Diagram for new "working for the commons" modus operandi, developed by Binna Choi and Ika Putranto. Courtesy of Casco.

To speak of funding, I think it's crucial to address and engage with our work from a perspective of economy. Here I don't mean how to better fundraise, as our governments are decreasing the art and cultural budget. The intense emergence of spaces like ours in the 90s speaks itself; we are very much part of the capitalist economy. Our way of working and producing also makes use of all the infrastructures and products produced

on capitalist enterprise, whether we are non-profit or not. We may see ourselves as the antidotes, that's fine, but then we could be far more radical to show very difference. And HELP public funders to recognize and value it by articulating these differences and the urgency of making difference.

Where's the urgency? Isabelle Stengers talks about a "cold panic" in which while we all more or less know or hear about the planetary crisis and the speed of extinction of our commons, we don't know quite what to do or we get a double message – we need to change our way of living, but at the same time we need to be competitive and competent. No panic, but I think we need to take action to change not only the forms of art that we need to engage with but in our forms of organizing, living, being. By the way, we do not need to compete in articulating this urgency, right?

This would let me speak of the horizon of the process you asked... J. K.

Gibson-Graham – who theorized diverse economy or community economy based diverse forms of interaction and exchanges underneath the visible capitalist economy – talk about a temporary yardstick. Instead of change all at once, we see the change in duration. Unfortunately, I don't feel we the earth have much time left. So by 2020, I want the new system of working – part of which I sketched out above – to get established to vividly see organizational/institutional team, our commoners, and network as the eco-system. Based on this eco-systemic structure, I hope Casco as part of that could contribute to collective actions in order to radically change our way of working and living, ahead of a possibly (even more) catastrophic situation on earth: or at least set a very clear attitude and practice to avoid the "barbarism." At the same time, this lets us think thoroughly through what forms of art we would like to support and produce. This definitely indicates more performance – immaterially oriented, objects whose material process is in tune with the biological world, imageries that unfolds the entanglement of the earth, and so on; this would be an endless, laborious, thoughtful process of working, to speak the least.

Perhaps at this point, I have to say that the commons is a language that we at Casco and some others use for its merit. But we could meet and form collectivities without such notion too. Some say Gaia, others say social justice...

# Instituent Practices: Art After (Public) Institutions

TAL BEERY on January 2, 2018

*“Solving complex social problems requires more than an intention to do good. It requires a portfolio of functional skills and an understanding of the business and economic context in which those social problems arise. It requires an entrepreneurial mindset, applied with the same vigor and ingenuity as we see in the most successful business startups. That’s why we see an increasing number of our students, at Purdue, and in business programs nationwide, looking to apply their talents to solve social problems in the US and around the world. And heck, if you can do that and make millions in the process, why not?”*

–David Hummels, Dean

Purdue Krannert School of Management

Americans have been steadily losing faith in their public institutions for decades. After a brief (and albeit minor) bump during the early Obama years, trust in government is once again at an all time low. A 2010 survey by GlobeScan revealed that just about half of Americans believe in the free-market system, remarkable because it represents a 30% drop from only 8 years earlier. As global income inequality has risen, faith in free market capitalism has declined throughout the world. In Europe, it is only held by small minorities. The business sector has also seen a decline in trust across the board. The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer begins with the assertion that most people in the world “now lack full belief that the overall system is working for them.”

Not unrelatedly, the last 15 years have seen enormous growth among social enterprises, which are blending for-profit and nonprofit business models to address social, cultural, and environmental issues typically associated with the nonprofit sector. Sixty percent of U.S. social enterprises were created since 2006.<sup>1</sup> The number of social entrepreneurship courses at top universities more than doubled during the 2000s and enrollment in Harvard’s prestigious Social Enterprise Initiative also doubled since 2006.<sup>2</sup>

This growth trend is international: three quarters of all universities in the Middle East are teaching social entrepreneurship; a 2015 survey found that 18.1% of Senegal's population is pursuing social entrepreneurial activities; and one of four new enterprises established in the European Union are social enterprises.<sup>3</sup>

Passionate and caring people are pursuing sustainable business solutions to fill the void created by the failure of traditional institutions – so goes the popular narrative – but in reality decades of an active neoliberal 'leave it to the markets' agenda has driven public disinvestment and privatized social services, undermining the capacity of government and other public institutions to perform their basic functions. It has also facilitated an enormous transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top. Aided by the spoils of their conquest, the winners of this current state of affairs bet on the next billion-dollar social enterprise 'unicorns' at countless pitchfests, or pluck them out of selective accelerators. In other words, the growth of this sector represents a major economic transition, a usurpation by the private sector sold to the public by free-market advocates like the late Amway founder and arts patron Rich DeVos in his 1993 bestseller *Compassionate Capitalism*. It is an old story: a crisis is engineered by profiteers who then present themselves as the only ones capable of solving it.

The rise of social enterprise also has much to do with related transformations in the nonprofit/nongovernmental sector. The US nonprofit sector has been growing rapidly and today there are more than 1.41 million nonprofit organizations registered with the IRS. Community-based nonprofits have been reporting increased demand for services year after year, while the rise of "big-better philanthropists" (including individuals, private foundations, and corporations) have contributed to a new class of \$50 million-plus mega-charities.<sup>4</sup> All in all, the top 5% of nonprofits account for more than 85% of public charity expenditures, an outrageous divide considering that there is to date absolutely no clear indication that larger organizations produce a larger impact. In fact, the opposite may be true, as larger organizations tend to have trouble maintaining community engagement, which is key to lasting social change.<sup>5</sup> Growth in crowdfunding for struggling community-based nonprofits is completely overshadowed by giant philanthropic gifts from the winners of neoliberalism to giant mega-charities. More than 65% of nonprofits compete for less than 2% of sector-wide funding, much of which still comes from private foundations and major donors who are profiting under current economic conditions.

What is important to gather from all this is that neoliberalism has greatly intensified the authority of the wealthiest classes of individuals and corporations over institutions providing for the public good. This is a sorry state of affairs for the many still questioning



whether the free-market system is in their best interests. As the world's attention becomes fixed on the consequences of overproduction and ecocide, as well as structural racism and sexism, people are looking for answers, courses of action that could put an end to extractive capitalism and usher in paradigms based on fundamentally different ethics. This is a moment where the current state of affairs may seem utterly unsustainable but a new direction is as yet unclear, an anxious time that has sparked fascist populisms throughout the world. One recalls Gramsci's troubling claim that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born."<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, there are many great thinkers out there working on solutions. Guided by the mantra that "systemic problems require systemic solutions," The Next System Project, co-chaired by the political economists Gus Speth and Gar Alperovitz, has become a clearing house of sorts for a certain vein of next system proposals. Alperovitz's *Principles of a Pluralist Commonwealth* is especially noteworthy for its breadth. Other proposals abound among the techno-futurists promoting transitions to a universal basic income, the grassroots organizers plotting a Just Transition, and the MIT professors profesizing the rise of "eco-system economies." Alongside proposals by activists and theorists, the market for speculative fiction in the United States seems to be in its heyday. People appear hungry for stories of ways things can be otherwise.

**Agro-institution**

An institution significantly tied to agriculture, especially the production of crops for food, fiber, livestock, and land reclamation.

**Alt-institution**

A newly emerging alternative institution, or any newly-conceptualized way of visualizing an institution or creating it.

**Apo-institution**

An isolated institution significantly detached, separate, or free from other similar institutions or any other insti-

**Dis-institution**

An institution that exists as its own negation.

**Epi-institution**

An ancillary institution whose singular function is to provide necessary top-level support to the primary activities of a particular institution, organization, industry, or system.

**Ex-institution**

A former institution that has acquired a new status recently enough that it still retains an obvious residue of its prior condition.

*Tal Beery. 'The Glossary of Institutional Prefixes' (detail), 2017.*

This sentiment is reflected in the arts, especially within an area of activity becoming known as instituent practice. It is both rooted in and reacting to the practice of institutional critique, which intermittently has been a popular form of cultural production, and at times a sort of discipline in its own right, since its first wave in the 1970s. At that time, artists and critics turned their attention from the meaning produced by the art object to the meaning imposed upon objects, bodies, spaces, and culture writ large by institutions that mediate individual and collective engagement. In other words, both formal and informal institutions became understood as framing devices that can change the way an artwork, a history, a body, or a collective is valued and understood. Artists using almost every artistic medium scrutinized ideological state apparatuses like schools and museums, but also governments and more complex arrangements like the art market.

In the 1990s, during what has become known as the second wave of institutional critique, the practice seemed to have hit a dead end. The mechanisms of neoliberalism had by then become too strong to be intimidated by mere speech; criticism by artists, especially within arts institutions, became accepted with open arms and even invited, as proof that the arts had remained a space of open democratic discourse when in fact, structurally, they were increasingly beholden to a smaller and wealthier class of art collectors and patrons like Rich DeVos. Institutional critique had become a value for the institutions being critiqued. In return, artists critiquing institutions were rewarded: those who offered the best and most artful or most thoughtful critique received invitations, artist fees, speaking engagements and all the social and cultural capital they could want by the very institutions they were aiming to undermine. It was up to Andrea Fraser, perhaps the most decorated artist of the second wave, to declare it over with a 2005 essay published in *Artforum*, of all places. There, Fraser famously claims that artists are “trapped in our field.”

Fraser may have put words to it, but the feeling of being trapped was already common in the arts at the time and manifested in two distinct ways. First, driven by income inequality and the related boom in the high end of the art market, graduate programs in studio art (especially in the US) began diverting student attention away from developing their creative practices and towards courses in professional practices that could prepare them for a hostile and competitive market.<sup>7</sup> Students were at once freaked out by the prospect of paying back their onerous student loans in a market that regularly disregards the notion of the artist fee or the adjunct professor salary, and at the same time they fully embraced their position in this market. Second, in the 1990s and early 2000s, a group of curators and directors of museums and arts organizations, especially

in Europe, sought to internalize institutional critique in the very functioning of their institutions. Could new museums create new publics? They experimented in institutional forms and functions, open exhibition formats, different understandings of audience, as well as methods of working with artists and communities under the banner of New Institutionalism. Although these practices continue to inspire some arts institutions today, the experiments themselves “didn’t survive the ‘corporate turn’ in the institutional landscape,” according to curator and author Nina Möntmann. “Most of the institutions seem to have been put in their place like insubordinate teenagers.”<sup>8</sup>

Trapped. Museums were trapped. Artists were trapped. Nonprofits were trapped. Social entrepreneurs were trapped. This feeling was one of the major sparks for the Occupy Movement, which, despite its obviously antagonistic stance, was also a radically optimistic rejection of entrapment. The encampments at once represented resistance to the system, retreat from the system, and the prefiguration of a new system. Artists involved in Occupy rejected the limitations of the art system and created collectives to engage in direct political action. Many of these groups, like *Occupy Museums* and *MTL*, remain active. Despite the fact that they have at times operated within traditional arts institutions and have sometimes found themselves too close to the contradictions inherent to Fraser’s phase of institutional critique, they have managed to maintain a degree of autonomy and a reputation for unpredictability that has allowed them to operate somewhat outside conventional spheres of influence. These days, the greatest moments of these groups comes when that old flame of Occupy, that vision of a possible future embedded in the encampment and assembly, is temporarily rekindled.

Instituent practices seem to have arisen from the desire to constitute frameworks that prolong this fleeting moment of utopian possibility. The theorist Gerald Raunig, who coined the term, beautifully defines it as “the actualization of the future in a present becoming.”<sup>9</sup> It is, in a sense, the practice of implementing the speculations of next systems dreamers.

There are two types of work that go into an instituent practice. First, there is the creation and recreation of an explicit plan, comprised of the legal, financial, and procedural rules that are typically set out by one person or a small group of founders. The second kind of work involved is the management of interpersonal or infrastructural dynamics internal to the framework, or the relationship between the framework and external social dynamics, which evolve over time. The major difference between these two modes is their timescale. Although they play off of each other and co-evolve, one is more immediate and explicit, and the other is prolonged and implicit.<sup>10</sup> The result is an organization, a

framework, an infrastructure, a container, or even a choreographic score for instituting an emerging social vision.

Despite the revolutionary intentions of this work, the craft itself is already well known to many people. The legal, financial, procedural, and management tools artists and curators use in these practices go above and beyond the cursory offerings of professional practices courses. They are the same as those they teach at business schools and refine at social enterprise accelerators. The “products” of this practice can be categorized alongside the many hundreds of *hybrid organizations* merging a utopian vision with the thoroughly anti-utopian tinkering that accompanies the mucky reality of everyday life under capitalism. They can only be sustainable if they find sources of revenue, either by raising money from government, private foundations, or individual donors, charging rents, or selling goods and services. Those that are entirely voluntary or somehow operate without money must rely on the capacity of their members to earn a livelihood in other ways. This artwork, in other words, needs to function within the market; it needs a business plan.

Nevertheless, many of the examples of instituent practices to date are situated within the arts sector. On the one hand, this makes sense. European cultural institutions, particularly because of their relationship with government funding, can legitimately claim to have a close connection to the machinations of the state. They can therefore hope that experiments in the arts might influence a broader culture of governance or its infrastructures. On the other hand, staying in the arts sector is like staying close to home. It ensures that these practices, without having to stretch much, remain legible as artworks to art audiences. It enables them to engage somewhat unselfconsciously in the arts economy and compete for the familiar stock of grants, donors, and attention. The danger here is that instituent practices may remain siloed in the arts, never to grow out of an arena specifically designated for cultural experiments.

Schools are another area of active engagement for instituent practice. This could be because of the close connection between pedagogy and art today; pedagogical practices have become a sort of subset of social practice, which is now a thoroughly accepted artistic discipline. Moving beyond art, however, it could also be linked with the long histories, practices, and theories of *anarchist pedagogies*, which remind us that, in a sense, there are no other places more potent or more obvious than schools for experiencing the relationship between institutional structures and social visions. Schools are specifically tasked with creating the social. Likewise, arts institutions make space for cultures to emerge. Although everything in the world produces and reinforces it, both

schools and arts institutions have a special relationship to the collective imaginary. They are also spaces where, in the best cases, failure is an acceptable and even desirable outcome. That kind of tolerance proves very useful when considering the paradoxes inherent to this style of work. So in spite of the dangers, it is entirely reasonable that artists working in instituent practices would choose to engage there.

Furthermore, at least at this very early stage, it is crucial that these works are legible within the arts and are not simply lumped in with other social enterprises. The types of forms that instituent practices will produce need to be evaluated differently from any conventional standards of efficacy or impact. Instead, critics should be asking new sorts of questions. How is an institution sensed? How do we see something operating simultaneously within multiple temporalities, with no beginning and no end? How can we understand a thing when the distinction between object and subject is completely muddled? And for that matter, how can we even begin to discuss a thing whose name is always changing? These are questions business writers tend not to consider, but are the bread and butter of the arts. Just as the arts doesn't yet have the language for addressing the craft of institution building, business does not yet have the tools to comprehend the value of instituent practices. The great hope is that this tension will inspire new observational modes, theories, and standards with which we can judge organizational forms across all sectors of society, economy, and politics.

This great hope is also completely naive. In the US, operating in the arts usually means functioning in the nonprofit sector, which is increasingly beholden to a global ruling class whose power grows at an accelerating rate. If operating outside of the nonprofit sector, any organization with a social vision antagonistic to neoliberal capitalism must still hope to sustain itself by selling products or services to people who likely make their living doing things that directly undermine that vision. What a paradox! How can we expect any kind of ethical consistencies in such a complex and contradicted system?

The trouble, of course, is that neoliberalism has become a total ideology. It is barely possible to see it, let alone see beyond it. The multitude of next system proposals, political theories, and speculative fictions today only underscores the desire for, and therefore the absence of a true counter-politics. But no amount of speculation is going to produce it. What surely separates instituent practices from conventional social enterprises is their pre-political self-consciousness. This requires a kind of self-criticism borrowed from institutional critique and New Institutionalism (or even a "presencing" as

described by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer), as well as the willingness to put theoretical conjectures into practice despite imperfect conditions.

This is important work. Institutions are powerful. They carry the weight of collective effort and simultaneously guide its direction. And despite the obstacles, feeling our way through inescapable contradictions is exactly what we have always needed from art.

*The author gratefully acknowledges BAK Summer School: Art in a Time of Interregnum, which helped to inform his research.*

*Image courtesy of the author/artist.*

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Palais des Beaux Arts - Löwengasse 47, Vienna

# Palais des Beaux Arts Wien: Legacy and Latency

MULTIPLE AUTHORS on March 21, 2018

*The Palais des Beaux Arts Wien is a historic surface dedicated to the projection of past, present and future alike. Hosting a collection of commissioned artworks and texts on a wireless router, the Palais surrounds an Art Nouveau building built in 1908 of the same name with a cloud of data. As a site, it folds time into today. As a host, it questions how what has changed also seems to repeat itself in everyday life; political cycles, socio-economic divisions, media and the art that both inspires and is absorbed by these untethered, wireless and invisible technologies. Creating a conceptually unmarked space between the history of the building in Vienna and its environment, data becomes the interface for the reproduction and representation of art and institutionality in the post-digital age. At the Palais des Beaux Arts, the vernissage is on the trottoir, exhibitions are more-or-less always open, and can be copied, carried around in your pocket and even deleted.*



*The name Palais des Beaux Arts is a multiple. Popularized in the 19th century as an architectural container for primarily Western European aristocratic wealth and its colonial exploits, this dangling signifier continues to be emptied and filled with varying degrees of intensity across the globe – Madrid, Belgium, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Lille. In 2014, Bernhard Garnicnig came across the Palais des Beaux Arts on Löwengasse in Vienna’s third district on his way to the supermarket. At first struck by its ornate presence and the two sculptural globes on its roof that bear an uncanny resemblance to browser icons and dot.com logos, Bernhard began to dig into the building’s history with the help of Herr Schleiffer (an antiquarian from across the street) and Eva-Maria Mandl (a cultural historian that grew up in the surrounding neighborhood). Motivated by a desire to explore new forms of collaboration and rewrite the dynamics of institution-artist relationships, Bernhard then began reinstituting the Palais des Beaux Arts by experimenting with how the building’s facade and historic graphic identity might comprise the surface of an institution, using a website to express and further format the project as a kind of site-non-site. While its institutionality is validated by search engine optimization, a community of artists, and an ongoing program of events, Palais des Beaux Arts Wien in fact has no keys or official access to the Palais des Beaux Arts on Löwengasse. The Palais des Beaux Arts didn’t always exist as a paradox though, and because of the overwhelming historic conditions it has inherited by adopting this particular building and this particular name, it’s important that the project continues to address institutional forms of matter, memory and void.*

*To start, a rough timeline: 1898; Atelier Bachwitz is founded in Vienna by Arnold Bachwitz and begins publishing and distributing lifestyle magazines and fashion catalogs internationally. 1908; Palais des Beaux Arts is built on Löwengasse 47 as the central headquarters for Atelier Bachwitz where it also hosts fine art exhibitions. 1930; Arnold Bachwitz dies of natural causes. 1938; Because of the family’s Jewish heritage, Atelier Bachwitz falls under the rule of the Nuremberg Race Laws and undergoes Aryanization. As a result of this seizure, their publishing rights to several internationally*

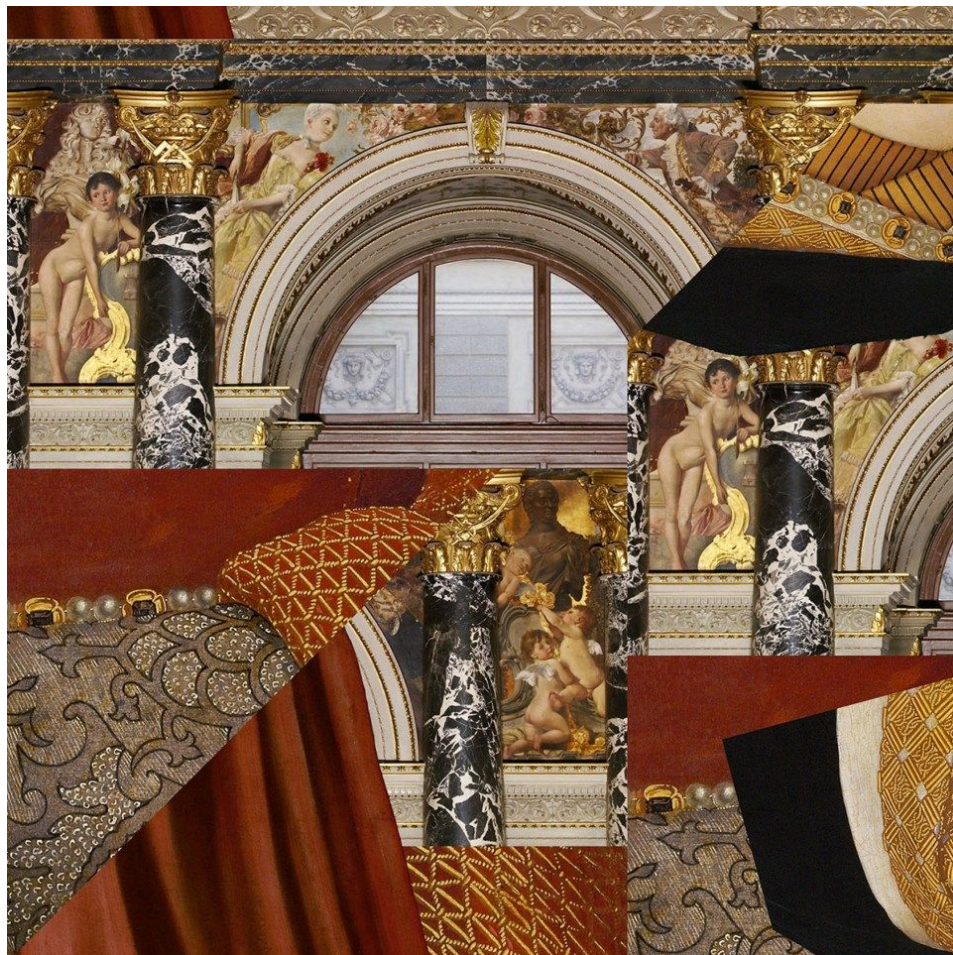
*distributed fashion magazines are revoked. At this time it has around 320 employees. 1942; Rosine Bachwitz, primary caretaker of the Atelier and wife of Arnold Bachwitz, is murdered in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. 1945; Rosine and Arnold's daughter Alice Strel dies under unknown circumstances during a death transport from Prague. 1946; Atelier Bachwitz becomes the property of the Republic of Austria, the company existing almost exclusively on paper and only publishing minimally. 1958; Atelier Bachwitz is officially dissolved. 1991; The Palais des Beaux Arts building is renovated and put under historic protection. 1998; The Generali Insurance Company purchases the building as one of their real estate holdings. 2003; 20,000 outstanding shares of the company's stock are returned to descendants of the Bachwitz family and their relations. 2014; Palais des Beaux Arts is reinstated as an immaterial institution by Bernhard Garnicnig.*

*In 2017, Bernhard invited Seth Weiner to work on a project for the Palais based on a series of watercolors he had been doing in his basement that related to catalogs produced by Atelier Bachwitz. Throughout the process of researching and working on the commission, they began to discuss how different meanings and intentions behind the term 'occupation' collide in the Palais des Beaux Arts. On the one hand, occupation is part of the logic of fascism that ultimately led to the genocide that the Bachwitz family were victims of under National Socialism. Inversely, it's part of a post-'68 logic and used as a conceptual, situationist strategy that assumes an alternative set of values in relationship to ownership; here, appropriation becomes emancipatory, and occupation, a form of political resistance. In both cases, 'occupation' implies a set values that is meant to upend an accepted order, but used to very different ends and through very different means, and with very different intentions.*

*Already by 2017, Bernhard had begun to feel he had reached the limits of where he could take the Palais project and had become somewhat exhausted by building and maintaining the collection and acquiring the necessary funds. Based on what he had*

*been thinking about conserving the collection and solidifying its relationship to the site, the ongoing discussions about occupation, and the need for the institutional past to be addressed more directly in light of the current Austrian right-wing government's ties to a history of anti-semitism, Bernhard invited Seth to continue his involvement with the project as Artistic Director.*

*The following is an edited conversation between Sarrita Hunn (Temporary Art Review, editor), Seth Weiner and Bernhard Garnicnig around some of the issues surrounding the transition process.*



Joe Hamilton. "Appraisal " (excerpt) Collection of Palais des Beaux Arts Wien.

**Sarrita Hunn:** When I first heard about Palais des Beaux Arts Wien and how it was going through this particular transition, one of the things it reminded me of was an article James [McAnally] published here on Temporary, “The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization,” a kind of “Manifesto for an art organization we can live in and with” – specifically point number eight:

VIII. **To age well, to sustain or end well.** An organization is also a kind of organism and it must not simply last, but live. As it ages, it must either retain an essential vitality through evolution of concept or form or it must end appropriately, supporting others still in its fall.

There comes a point when, for a lot of projects and institutions, it is no longer sustainable for the founder or the director to continue and it must be decided whether the institution needs to end or make a significant transformation or transition. So, I wanted to start by asking Bernhard: What were your thoughts behind the decision whether to end, transform or transition the project?

**Bernhard Garnicig:** For me, the Palais des Beaux Arts Wien was a way of researching what an institutional model and practice for web-based art could be. Before the Palais, I’d worked through several temporary organizational structures for art production; artist-run spaces, the construction of artist identities and convening ideas and spirits in collective exhibitions and experiences. What is really special about the Palais building is that it has been there before me. So, there wasn’t really ever a choice of not continuing – the Palais is an ongoing thing.

One of the qualities of modern institutions as we know them is that they seem to be instituted with the idea that they will always exist – compared to artist-run spaces, which are more temporary expressions of what a group of artists deem necessary to develop their audience, practice and community. Other theories around institutionality propose

the Institution as a social imaginary, expressions of desires and intentions which have always existed because we as a people want them to exist – like the institutions of Law, Libraries or Marriage. Once I understood that perspective of the institutional, there wasn't a choice not to continue. The only choice was to figure out how the legacy that the Palais process has created would be stabilized and in which other version it could continue after the four years I had worked on it.

**SH:** The ninth point of this manifesto is to “To create a continuity of history.” It seems like both you and Seth are focusing the transition around that to some extent – both within the project itself and also the project's relationship to the site. What is the role of the ‘continuity of history’ in relationship to this project? And how are you approaching it similarly, or differently, or trying to coordinate that?

**Seth Weiner:** One of the things is that there are multiple strands of history and intentions at play. On the one hand, you have the building and the name Palais des Beaux Arts, which is also sort of detached from itself. The name is physically attached to the building as signage, but what is the name? There's the history of the family that initiated it, the history of the neighborhood surrounding it, the political history which created several gaps that become a part of that continuity, then there's Bernhard's work and representation of it. It's a really complex question. Because of these multiple strands of history taking place, for me the name on the building becomes a site where they all overlap; or at least meet in a somewhat fragile way. Bernhard picked up a certain history and to some degree is continuing it, but he's also creating a new history that's nested within it.

One of the difficulties for me coming in as the new Artistic Director is the question of how to create continuity with an awareness of its impossibility and its destructiveness. What are some of the ways multiple strands of history and intentions can be represented and carried on, however much they seem to be at odds with one another?

I've been trying to define what the institution's mission was before I was asked to be a part of it, along with some of the ways I interpret not only Bernhard's intentions, but also what Atelier Bachwitz had done after having adopted and reconstructed the Palais des Beaux Arts name, then what was done in their name (while they were being forcefully occupied), and then how it came to be that the building was just hanging around. An important point for me is to try to recuperate and represent these layers while simultaneously looking forward, without becoming moralizing.

**BG:** This is really exciting when going back to the idea of *passing on* an institution as a way of introducing instability into the way it's run. Passing something on is a way of destabilizing a process and introducing new questions to it. What I'm really excited about, through seeing how you [Seth] have started to pick up the project, is how the institution reveals itself as having these multiple layers of histories – and continuing multiple histories is how you are manifesting that into projects that continue to build the institutional character. Instead of seeing the institution as something that has been given to someone, it has been passed on to you to care for and realise your own intentions. It only prescribes the continuation of a transformation in the same way that I've picked up the history of the building, but also in how during my time we disregarded some of the historical aspects that were already there when I started. In a certain way, the institution was also passed on to me as it is being passed on to you. It's always happening and I think it's interesting in how that manifests in this project specifically.

**SW:** Yeah, and also for me it was about thinking into the future of it as well. You [Bernhard] first encountered it, or kind of picked up the institution, from the neighbourhood where it had been sitting in a somewhat neglected state. The idea of legacy within this project could also maybe be thought of as latency, and I would like to see it become a model for an institution that continually questions its own structure. Maybe it's picked up for some years, transformed, and then gently placed back on the shelf for someone else to adopt. The Palais survived without someone directing it for

quite a while. Yet, how does it go back to being in-between states after having been fostered for some time? I would hope that although the name's relationship to its site and past remains somewhat unstable, it continues to accumulate, absorb and even reject the trajectories and pressures placed upon it.



[Die Moderne Welt # 7](#), 1938, Published by Atelier Bachwitz, (L) Excerpt from Page 8, Original Caption: Ein Blick in die Zukunft. (A look into the future.) (R) Excerpt from Page 40, Original Caption: Das Geheimnis der Schlanken Wienerin ist Waldheims Entfettungs-Tee. (The secret of the slender Viennese is Waldheim's slimming tea.)<sup>1</sup>

**SH:** To build on this direction, the full text of the ninth point in the manifesto says:

**IX. To create a continuity of history.** We aren't operating to sustain ourselves in a perpetual present: we inherit complex histories, we are a home for a time, and we propose alternate futures. We do not always need to live into the futures we propose: this is the after-life of the institution, embedded in its present.

I'm really interested in this way you're talking about the relationship between the past, the present, and the future, but I also feel like there's a sort of implicit future in how the Palais is organized. Maybe that future is defined by how you're dealing with the past in a sense, but I'm interested to know if either one of you (Seth in particular) feels like there is this kind of implied future (or 'social imaginary' as Bernard has mentioned before). I'm trying to think of how your relationship to the site – as an institution – is very different than other institutions' relationships to the site. What is particular about your iteration of the Palais des Beaux Arts in its relationship to these past, present, and potentially futures?

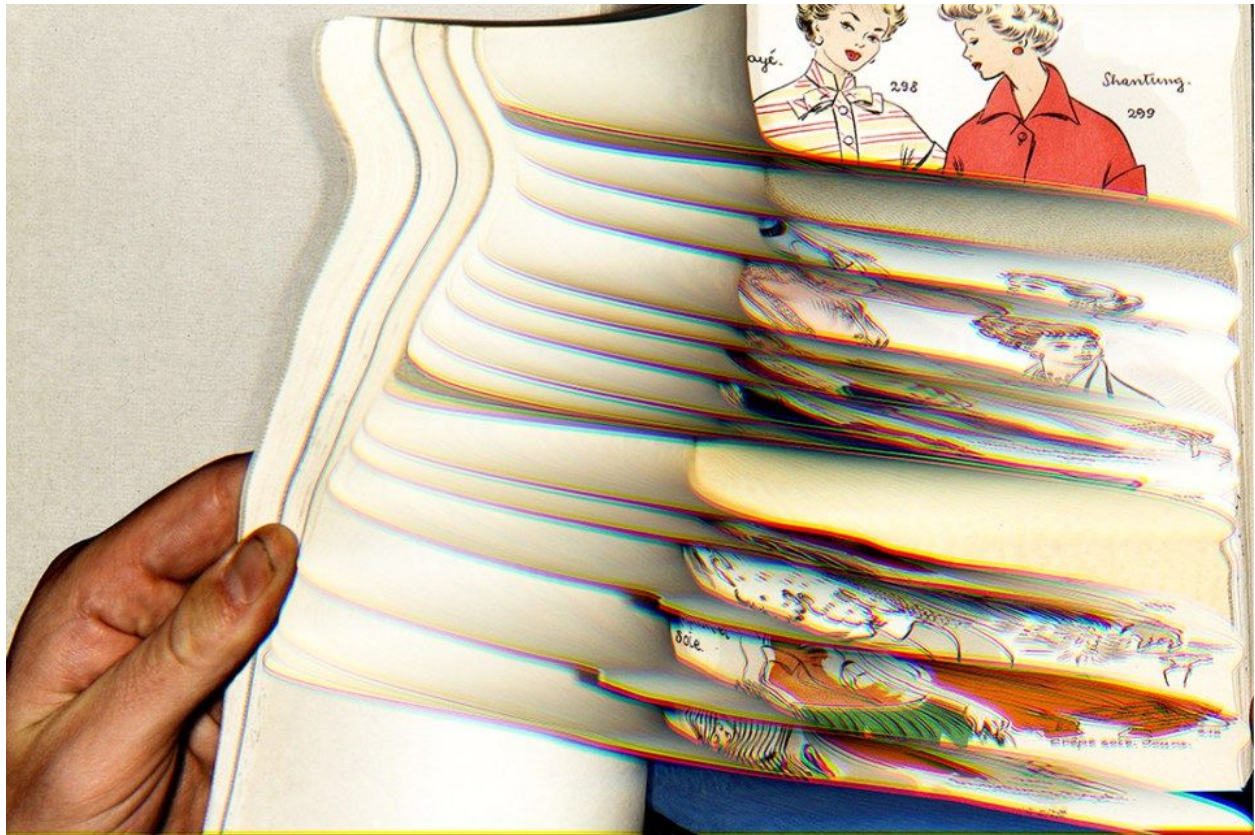
**SW:** Are you asking: Do I have some sort of ultimate goal or is there a specific social imaginary envisioned at the end of it? I would say nothing monolithic other than that the building will continue as it is and the idea would be to start to re-attach some of its histories to the site more directly.

**SH:** To reframe the question in a different way: Why do that? What's the point? I understand what the project is trying to do, but I'm trying to get more to the why. Why put these histories in relationship to this site? There's an implied reasoning for that and I wanted to know if maybe you could articulate that a little bit further.

**BG:** It's not something that I came up with but Deleuze's take on instincts and intuition is that we try to find satisfaction for our tendencies as humans in the institution. Reflecting on the research that I've done in the past few months, I came to the point where I'm highly doubting that Palais des Beaux Arts Wien has anything to do with an institution in the sense of a cultural or social institution. I don't think it has been an institution in itself before – I think it is a manifestation of a kind of built thing that exists in an environment that leads us to ask questions and say things about institutionality and about other institutions and about the nature of institutions. I think what Seth is doing now is to try and find satisfaction for his tendencies in an institutional form. Those



tendencies are manifold and come from very different personal sources and directions. It's not about building an institution, because maybe institutions can't be built? Perhaps they all exist already and they are just a synthesis of our desires and our tendencies?



"Chic Parisien" scan. Published by Atelier Bachwitz.

**SW:** One of the ways I think about this project is that it provides a structure for some of my own tendencies as well as raises questions about Vienna's current relationship to the past. The building, and name attached to it, house a confluence of political and artistic impulses by embodying a conflict between the history of a place and the drive for producing a present amidst, and in spite of, that contest. It's hard for me to interpret the project in a conventional sense as an institution, but it does become a site where the components of multiple institutions collide. There's this urban-mysticism aspect in the idea of it being latent, a violence in its history that is invisible in its loss, and there's the situation where works are being commissioned for a digital collection that is under

seemingly constant construction. How do you deal with these components when you don't have a physical space? What is the form for this immateriality? How do you access it, share it, and experience it in a collective way – if at all? As more works are formalized into a collection that mimics some of the more traditional forms of artistic institutions, but doesn't use the same tools, values, or points of access; how does the project of the Palais become something that's accessible in ways that it previously wasn't? Whose history is represented in its projection? Whose history is omitted and maybe even destroyed in the process? For me, this is one of the tendencies; to look more closely at the context, construction, history and performance of a site.

But why use this building? Why do these sorts of things using the name? I think in some ways it's because the narrative of this building and its family has survived a series of gaps and interruptions that I feel connected to because of being Jewish. Also, in its beginning phase, Arnold Bachwitz used the name Palais des Beaux Arts in an act of appropriation. The building was never intended to house the spoils of the aristocracy, instead it was thought of as a sort of factory where the Beaux Arts would be produced. If you look at what this collection is doing now, it's not that there's a whole department of experts who have studied art history and decide what gets bought, sold, traded and shown. It's essentially one person: Bernhard. He's worked through his tendencies by commissioning a group of different positions that were surrounding him, ones he'd been influenced by and excited about, then somehow tried to find a way for that work to continue beyond the opening, beyond the traditional exhibition format and climate-controlled storage room, and onto a hard drive (where most of our ideas live anyhow). In terms of the institutionalization of art in this way that things are collected, preserved and curated, I think the strategy of adopting a name that just barely survived a hostile takeover, then using data as the material, makes sense in a kind of perverse way. The collection and history is somehow living, and can now self-replicate and spread beyond conventional understandings of material.



Rosemary Lee. "Artifacts" (excerpt) Collection of Palais des Beaux Arts Wien.

**BG:** It's really interesting that you bring up the collection because it solely consists of commissioned artwork that have been specifically made for that place by artists engaged (through their work) with the site. To date, we have a collection of eleven browser-based artworks stored in an offline environment and five texts online. One of my intentions was to take web-based art out of the infinite scroll and content engagement optimisation that had taken over a primarily community driven the web by then. By producing these artworks, we're also producing displays and re-produce their framings, attempting to create a vantage point that we all share – because there is no 'inside' of this institution. We are all outside; nobody has a key! Making these works was an impassioned attempt to to figure out what that place is and what it means.

In a sense, the work you [Seth] are doing now is finding the ways the institutional enters a place, a site, a work or a history. In this case, it seem to be about the way we institutionalize History and how that plays out in our consciences and consciousnesses. We *intend* to be that what allows us to do that which we would like to live among. I think that's where I see the relation between the institutional and the institution and the question, *Why the hell do that?* The collection (or the commissions) is essentially a situation created to allow a place like this to be made.

**SW:** For me, it hasn't been a question of why. That was clear right away when I encountered the project and what was exciting about it. How, though, is still unresolved and I think this is where new questions of 'why' will continue to infect its representation in an almost Talmudic spiral of questions. The production of place is going to come from different positions on what constitutes a place, and in searching for different ways of approaching that production. Not only to inhabit the multilayered site of the Palais but rearrange and construct it to some degree. And then I would say collecting these positions, or making that work somehow legibly, is where it gets difficult and really interesting as to how this becomes tied to the physical brick-and-mortar structure of the building, which is maybe one of the more persevering institutions of the whole project. So, how does this process become tied to a material? In a way it's like renaming, using different artistic positions to highlight and challenge aspects of the very material it references. For me, the ideal situation would be for the project to continue accumulating different positions about what constitutes place by working with the palimpsest of its institutional surface; and somehow in the process keep the Palais des Beaux Arts signifier dangling...

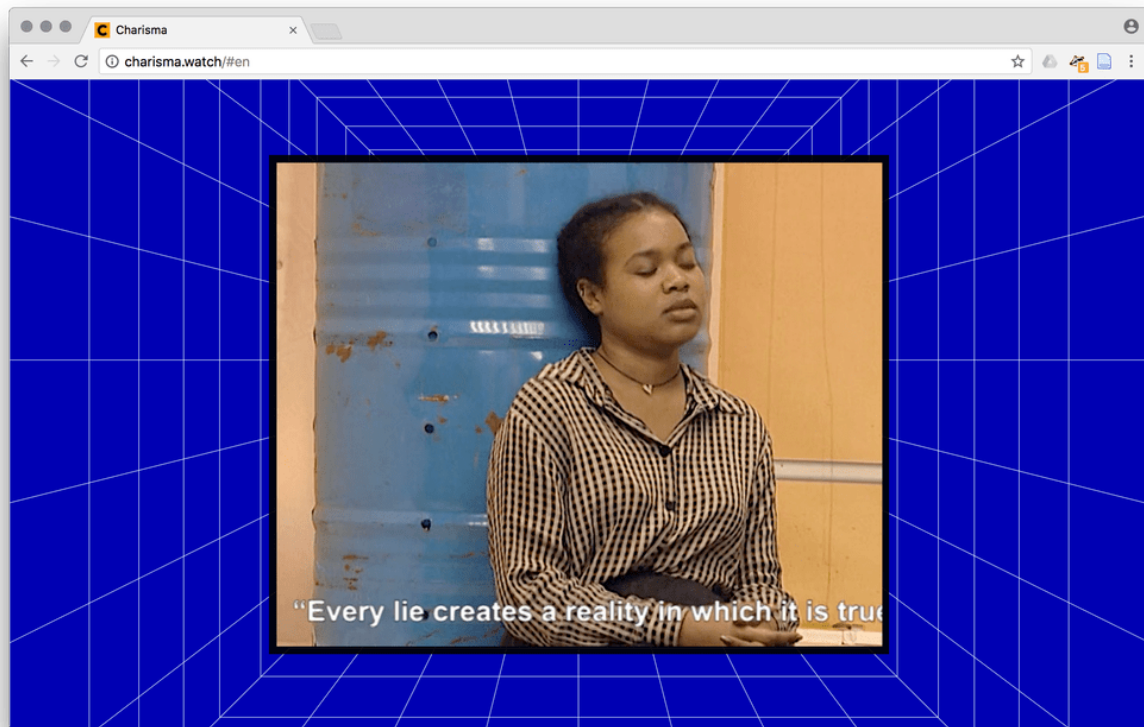
*For more on Palais des Beaux Arts Wien see the recent Issue 7.1 / 2018 of [continent.](#), edited by Bernhard Garnicnig and Maximilian Thoman.*

**Seth Weiner** (USA, 1982) became the Artistic Director of the Palais des Beaux Arts Wien in 2018. Containing performance and proposal simultaneously, Weiner's work employs a wide range of media in which he explores the gaps between architectural

fiction and social convention to create both actual and imagined spatial environments. Often process-based and collaborative, he has worked with Untitled Collective (co-founded in 2010), Gruppe Uno Wien, and (since 2012) has served alongside of Gerhard Schultz as the Co-Artistic Director of Berlin-based Care Of Editions, a conceptual business model in the form of a record label.

**Bernhard Garnicnig** found the Palais des Beaux Arts Wien in 2014 and acted as its Very Artistic Director and Janitor until 2018. In 2014, he co-founded Supergood, a nomadic movement in the ambiguous space between product and performance. In 2012 he co-founded the Bregenz Biennale, a bi-annual festival for ephemeral and impermanent forms of art in the lakeside small town he was born. In 2011, he co-founded *continent.*, a para-academic journal for thought in its many forms. These days he works conceptual narration within emancipatory institutional, corporate and media surfaces, through structures for aesthetic collaboration, as earnest attempts at making paradoxical things work to experience what happens. Also, he is a researcher with *Institutions as a Way of Life*, a research project on institution as creative practice hosted at the CML IXDM FHNW HGK Basel.

1. In 1938, the administrative board of Atelier Bachwitz fell under the rule of the Nuremberg Race Laws and underwent Aryanization. As a result of this seizure, the board – comprised mostly of the Bachwitz family – was replaced, their publishing rights to several fashion magazines revoked. Issue # 7 of *Die Moderne Welt* (The Modern World) has several pages celebrating the Nazi party's arrival in Vienna on March 13th of 1938. Based on the lack of historical records available about Atelier Bachwitz, it's unclear if the editorial process of this issue was based on a more general Austrian mandate or a result of the publishing company's direct occupation. The representation of idealized female figures however runs throughout the entire output of the company and is primarily framed by a male gaze.



Wojciech Kosma and Sarah M Harrison. *Charisma*, 2017. (online installation)

## Making alternative futures: Instituting in a ‘weird’ world, part one

TOM CLARK on May 13, 2018

“Have you heard that reality has collapsed?”  
— Erika Balsom, *The Reality-Based Community*

In a now infamous exchange with Chuck Todd on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, when asked why the then-press secretary Sean Spicer had attacked the media over their coverage of crowd numbers at the 2017 US Presidential Inauguration and falsely claimed “the largest crowd in Inauguration history,” White House aid Kellyanne Conway was

unflinching. “Don’t be so overly dramatic about it, Chuck. You’re saying it’s a falsehood [...] Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts to that.”

Participation in the narratives of history (or of the present) is crucial to their purchase on reality. Defining the terms for representing reality, how these are told/shared and, therefore, made (and who gets to authorize them), has been at the heart of the western artistic and humanist canon for millennia. Today, however, a broad spectrum of challenges now confront that basis for these terms, making the relationship between representation and reality evermore fine-grained and relational. Whether it’s the reappraisal of the phony histories of nationalism and nativism; the expanding horizon of what new visualisation technologies make it possible to ‘perceive’ and how these new ways of seeing are impacting post-humanist philosophy, computing and big data; the fracturing of previously dominant linear versions of world history; the uneven effects of globalization; or user-driven participatory citizenship (to name just a few), the effects of these slippages (positive for some, negative to others) on often violently guarded stable categories of ‘the real’ are genuinely ambivalent — and certainly ‘real.’

When all existing critical perspectives show institutions and constituencies to be fragmented and contingent enough to allow these kinds of slippages as to what is ‘real,’ art with its long-running, but precarious engagement with the narrative that is ‘reality’ is a good starting place for contemplating the construction of flexible realities. Indeed, this context is the new unstable ground from which to consider what agency, and so what power, instituent practices that critique the cultural construction of ‘the real’ are likely to be confronted with when threaded through the institutions of art.<sup>1</sup> Considering what power does to ‘reality’ (and the negotiation between representing or intervening in that reality), this three-part text aims to consider instituent practices by artists and organisations as they seek not to just represent the real, but actively to (re)make it. Specifically, I want to draw out the potential of what writer Marina Vishmidt has called *infrastructural critique*. Here I will tailor this proposition through the form of *scripted* or

*scripting reality* to explore critical practices that have enabled various artists and art organisations to both remodel the realities of the present through participation, and to work on the future by intervening in what that reality is.<sup>2</sup> In the first part, I will follow a shift from representation to participation, in the second how we might look to art practice for ways in which the particularly digital modes of participation can be reformed, and in the third, I'll look to the practice of social intervention.

### **Scripted Reality Part One: Community-based realities**

When reality seems to shift so quickly, and often with such little concern for so-called objective truths, is there any point left in searching for more stable ground by critiquing the institutions that once defined it? Where does one even begin when the Emperor doesn't care that they're naked? From another perspective, we might even say that seemingly objective representations of reality have simply been made obsolete by now openly interested and contingent worlds. Interested as they are, they offer (or demand) participation in narratives that redefine the present enough to bring in to being impossible-seeming futures – like reality TV stars as world leaders. In this reality, it would seem that TV's most recently contagious formats, reality TV and scripted reality, are not just products of this world. They make it. To explore what this has to do with instituting, it's perhaps best to begin with that relationship between narrative and reality.

### **Reality-Based Communities**

The revolution of the Internet was supposed to be that information would become ever more accessible. Newly-empowered, digital-citizens would directly access the facts once hoarded by governments, corporations and institutions and make better, more



life-affirming decisions we could all benefit from. But in even *attempting* to keep up with the news today, two challenges to that idea quickly emerge. First, the (online) bubbles that filter which information is most available are fortified by ever-more sophisticated personalization and granular grouping of interests by marketers and online influencers; and second, those governments, corporations and institutions who were once the protectors of knowledge, are, on the surface at least, losing their interest in being — or capacity to be — connected to stable and identifiable ‘facts.’ In particular, it has been the now-fully-detached and instrumentalized concept of reality itself, especially its connection to recorded and mutually agreed facts, that has become both the subject of the news and focus of dissensus.<sup>3</sup>

In her text, “The Reality-Based Community” London-based writer Erika Balsom sums this up with the troublingly rhetorical question: “Haven’t you heard that reality has collapsed?” Citing “post-truth politics, the death of facts, fake news, deep-state conspiracies [and] paranoia on the rise,” Balsom describes a panic around what has come to constitute and define what we call reality. The anxiety around these exacerbate and reproduce the very loss of reality they decry, at the same time lifting “the heavy burdens of gravity, belief and action, [and] effecting a great leveling whereby all statements float by, cloaked in doubt.”

This uncertainty has been long in the making. In his 2004 article “Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush,” written for the *New York Times*, veteran political journalist Ron Suskind details the faith-based decision-making of the former US president George W. Bush which he argues was driven by gut instinct buried deep within a messianic belief that he was doing the will of God. He describes a creeping normalcy in which, instead of relying on data, research or expertise, Bush would berate anyone who questioned his “God-given” authority. Fearful of reproach, those around the president quickly fell in line. So much so that at its height Suskind recounts how a deputy chief of staff derided him for his own attachment to the facts. Mocking Suskind,

and those like him who believed that solutions come from a “judicious study of discernable [read earthly] reality,” the White House staffer infamously chided: Suskind was “in what [the Bush administration] call the reality-based community.” But, as the staffer went on, “that’s not how the world really works anymore ... we’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.” And while those in the reality-based community are busy trying to make sense and make visible that reality, “... we’ll act again, creating other new realities... We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” Today’s events seem would bear this coming-reality out.

With decreasing institutional and intellectual clout in the face of such messianic-capitalist Imperialism (as well as its own, now spurious, claims to progressivism thoroughly undermined by right wing and alt-right elements surfacing in its own midsts), it’s also not hard to see that art has not only not escaped the power vested in shaping reality, it has also played its part – something Balsom aims to make especially clear.<sup>4</sup> Among other possible culprits for its role in the slipping real, Balsom targets the exploration of documentary cinema in art. Rejecting an “observational mode,” for Balsom, much recent documentary filmmaking (from Trinh T Minh-ha to Werner Herzog) has favoured a “perverse suspicion” towards the constructed nature of ‘the real’ in documentary. After postmodernism’s emphasis on the nature of cultural simulation and mediation, the interference in documentary processes in digital post-production has only compounded a critical narrative of scepticism that has become all too familiar for Balsom: “I, too, attended all those graduate school seminars in which we learned to deconstruct Enlightenment principles and mistrust empiricism, but given the state of things, it’s starting to look like they might need salvaging.”

Expressing the fear that we might be heading down a path in which no truth is ever stable and in which its impossible to believe in anything except power (as well as simply fatigue with such deconstructive games), Balsom offers a counterclaim. A new political

objectivity – set in the vein of films by Harun Faroki and Eric Baudelaire – it calls for a reconnection with the so-called “reality based-community... an imagined community founded in a practice of care for this most fragile of concepts.” And while art’s fascination since postmodernism with challenging the grounds on which truth claims are made could be partly to blame for such credulous acceptance of falsity and paranoid conspiracy, for Balsom art also offers a route out through its participation in the language of recording and observations, a key she believes to effective political action in a critical history reaching back to the Sceptics. In this scheme, art needs to reconnect with its function as a producer of knowledge. Not as a return to disinterested notions of objectivity centred by a liberal and western humanism, but for Balsom, a knowledge that is situated by what has actually happened regardless of how this might confound the identity or ideological positions motivating it: a return to the “power of cinema as window, however dirty and distorting its panes may be.”

When discussing the imagined community in this context, it’s difficult to ignore the role fake-news and alt-facts have played in the reaffirmation of ethno-nationalism and fascist state narratives and actions. In 1985, Benedict Anderson wrote *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, in which he argued that, among other dynamics (including the break up of dynastic powers, the vernacularization of mono-linguistic religions, and the beginnings of European colonisation), the nation came into being as a self-aware community of people through literary forms, such as the novel and the newspaper, and what would come to be understood as the nation grew economically and literally. The novel not only acted as widely dispersed (and purchased) cultural commodity crucial to the expansion of print capitalism, but as Anderson argues, as a narrative structure based on asynchronous events (distinct from previous, linear epics following their hero verbatim), it also allowed for multiple-co-existent subjective timeframes to be imagined in parallel. As a means of

narrating the spatial and temporal coexistence of many lives, the novel laid the foundations of the national imagined community.

Similarly, where religion or those you might meet physically once shaped the edges of one's cognitive map, the events within the editorial purview of national dailies would come to shape and unify the nation as a shared sphere of relevance rooted in their often national geographic. Together, Anderson argues, these formats engendered the sense that all those separate events happening in a newly formed geographical regions – the nation – were connected in time and space, even if their protagonists and readers would never see each other in their lifetimes. Crucially, Anderson continues, these forms contributed to a sense of national-self that not only included those considered its members, but excluded those not part of the national narrative, as well.

While I don't have the space to fully explore this here, if another important characteristic of Benedict's proposal was the effect of media on shared time, the question today is what (if any) forms of narrative and politics could shape existing and new imagined communities. This is particularly pertinent when communities formed around the non-consensus-based realities, or alt-facts, are central to the resurgence of increasingly fragmented as well as nationalistic agendas. As much as scripted reality requires a participation in its present, it also acts on the future. In this sense it is a form that chimes with both Balsom's call for a community whose task it is to rebuild the future of truth *and* is suggestive of the kind of narrative mechanism, as described by Anderson, by which imagined communities are able to make themselves. Thus, beyond offering an aspirational model that blurs the boundary-spaces between viewer, participant and character, the question remains; Does scripted reality truly constitute the basis of a new imagined community? Or is it the method of its manipulation?

## Scripted realities

To begin an answer: in simply focusing on the *what*, rather than the *how* reality is constructed, is perhaps where such a new reality-based community might be missing the point, especially when ‘the real’ has become so polarized around the truths one chooses to accept. Here then is a counterclaim to Balsom’s reality-based community to help explore this further: a community-based reality.

One immediate question is: which community is the basis for this reality? The answer should, of course, be both none and all. It must also take into account how communities understand themselves through time and space in narrative forms. The point of this inversion is that a community-based reality refuses to begin from a known, a reality that is not taken as given or foundational. It can only be generated dialogically. To be sure, this suggests a certain ambivalence: in what a communal understanding of reality shapes, and the futures that are possible in it. Which brings us to scripted reality.

Scripted reality, a television format that demands a particularly participatory community to form around it, could be said to be the cultural companion to fake news, alt facts and future-oriented forms of contemporary governance. In the opening sequence of *The Only Way is Essex*, one of the UK’s most popular examples of the genre, the show’s narrator reminds us, “Their tan lines may be hidden but these people are all real, although some of what you see has been snap, crack and popped for your pleasure.”<sup>5</sup> Developed during the mid-noughties, scripted reality, like reality TV before it, appears to follow the lives of “real” people in their usually-romantic daily trials and tribulations. But with its disclaimers and circuitous, exaggerated action, always miraculously caught on camera, it is clear that what appears ranges between lightly and heavily scripted, produced and staged action. As British broadcaster Grace Dent described it, the genre centres on showing “real people in modified situations, saying unscripted lines but in a structured way.”<sup>6</sup> From talent shows to character-driven dramas, other examples of the

format range from ITV's *X-factor*, *Britain's Got Talent* to *Keeping up with the Kardashians* on E!; and MTV's *The Osbournes*, *The Hills*, *The Real World*, *Jersey/Geordie Shore*, to *Made in Chelsea* on Channel 4.

While the TV format relies on an openly spurious realism (scripting only what *looks* like documentary or reality TV from behind the scenes and often taking place in real-life streets, clubs, or restaurants), what I'm keen to draw attention to here is how they set up conditions in which "real" action takes place. Adjusting these throughout the filming or a series (often with audience interaction such as votes), they generate and reach a produced outcome or scenario that, without a whiff of cynicism, overlays or intervenes in the social realities the programmes claim to document. Considering the known constructedness of documentary, Balsom explains that the scripted scenarios on screen, though only *appearing* like real effects of real causes, at the point of their consumption are *as good as real*. Further, by increasing viewer investment in its construction (such as in the voting on *Big Brother* or *Love Island*), or with "characters" having "real-world" social media accounts (such as Kim Kardashian), scripted reality sutures the gap between public experience and staged performance. In this way, its narrative is as much participatory or performative, as it is documentary. Constructed through a web of reality-shaping platforms (fabricated scenes and real life situations), it makes that narrative a part of how the cultural and social world is itself formed. We come to understand ourselves if not through, then *among*, these narratives — as part of communities that, tangled in the creation and suspension of those realities, might imagine themselves as much a part of the script as those acting it out. At this stage, such a framing of a community-based reality might not suggest much more than a lens through which we could consider the already fraught connection between culture and national identities, and certainly this is not one which would be meant to rebuff Balsom's rightful critique of the alt-facts regime as a new locus for state power.

Yet to draw on Anderson's study of the mechanisms by which imagined communities were formed, and reflecting on the increasingly participatory platforms and narratives of today's scripted realities, the next section explores a different critical approach to simply searching for the better facts.

ALSO SEE:

<http://temporaryartreview.com/making-alternative-futures-instituting-in-a-weird-world-part-two>

<http://temporaryartreview.com/making-alternative-futures-instituting-in-a-weird-world-part-three/>

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1. That is, drawing on Gerald Raunig (and Stefan Nowotny) a critical attitude of institution forming, away from present conditions but not without them: "Flight and exodus are nothing negative, a reaction to something else, but are instead linked and intertwined with constituent power, re-organizing, re-inventing and instituting." Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming," *Transversal Texts* (January 2006), available at: [http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en/base\\_edit](http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en/base_edit)
2. Marina Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural," In Hlavajova, M., Holert, T., (eds) *Marion von Osten: Once We Were Artists (A BAK Critical Reader in Artists' Practice)* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017). Infrastructural critique develops the site-specificity of institutional critique. It makes visible the many interlocking and intersecting conditions, protocols, structures and materials that make the institutions possible. Grounded by this visibility, it also works on these infrastructures, intervening, redistributing or rebuilding the various flows, mobilities, or dispositions that enable them to repeat or reproduce themselves.
3. See for instance, The Guardian's "The Cambridge Analytica Files," *The Guardian*, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files>

4. See the protests around the London gallery LD50, which for a time attempted to provide intellectual weight and space to the so-called alt-right movement:  
<https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/>; and an attempt by right-wing activists to stage an exhibition in support of the incoming president,  
<https://hyperallergic.com/328846/this-is-not-parody-fuck-trump>
5. Opening sequence, *The Only Way is Essex*, ITVBe (23 October 2016). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khvQyGSszfM>
6. Grace Dent, "Grace Dent's TV OD," *The Guardian* (23 October 2010). Available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/oct/23/tv-od-the-only-way-is-ess>  
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# This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things: A Conversation with Gavin Wade of Eastside Projects

JAMES MCANALLY on May 30, 2018

Ahead of its ten year anniversary and impending reopening, Eastside Projects Director Gavin Wade speaks with *The Luminary* caretaker (and Temporary editor) James McAnally on the Birmingham-based artist run multiverse's compelling vision of an intuitive arts institution, the urgencies of independent arts organizing post-Brexit, and how art offers space for reflection, speculation, and action upon our complex present.

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**James McAnally:** As someone who alternately (or simultaneously) identifies as an artist, curator, writer, and founder of an independent art space – positions I likewise occupy – why do you feel that the assembly and sustaining of an institution is the best

form for your work? Why not an independent curator, or a free-floating artist, or a biennial director? What about this form compels you?

**Gavin Wade:** It is simultaneity for me. I am always an artist-curator and occupying this position includes the usage of stories, words, space, organisation of energy and resources, the connections of people and a critical insistence upon context, and the push and pull of responding to and altering existing conditions. The institution is simply a form that brings together a pattern of ideas and actions to test things out, achieve things, and implies for me a working with other people, sharing approaches – shared consciousness in a way. In many ways curating an exhibition involves the same level of instituting as forming a business, a charity, a gallery, or a collaboration. There are more or less levels of bureaucracy in different examples but I am still able to feel that I can operate as a free floating artist, which is the term I like the most out of your list!



This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things 2008, Eastside Projects (Installation view with works by L-R Herbert Bayer, Marc

Bijl, Peter Fend (floor painting), ISAN, Bill Drummond, Matthew Harrison, Lawrence Weiner, Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, Kelly Large, Mark Titchner.) Curated by Gavin Wade, photo by Stuart Whipps.

Eastside Projects is an ongoing attempt to generate a free floating artists institution. From the outset I attempted to counter the elements of instituting that I, and we, encountered and disagree with, and to include those that we wish to learn from and include in our gallery. The title of the first Eastside Projects exhibition was *This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things*. And this still holds true to this day. We have a new way of describing ourselves as an artist run multiverse. If that is what an institution is, then I want more of it! Our multiverse is an attempt to influence and act upon the reality of Birmingham and, by knock on effect, the world. And I reserve the right to also be free floating, and act on impulse and intuition. If you build this into your policy and live by it, then it is true. So I think you can be truthful through this form of being an artist-curator and directing an institution. That is what compels me, that I can pretend, be truthful, and experiment, and I don't have to do it on my own.

**JM:** I appreciate this fundamental refusal to be singular – a tendency many institutions suffer from in the interest of branding or public image. I find that the most interesting institutions are those that insist on their multiplicity and indeterminacy; those that insist on being free-floating, or simply *free* (whether we call this independent, alternative, or some other term), but also those that use that freedom to act in the interest of others. Eastside Projects' description as a multiverse reminds me of a project here in the United States, Mildred's Lane, which describes themselves as a "contemporary art complexity." At The Luminary, we've started talking about our work as *constitutions* (con- meaning "with" or "together") or co-institutions rather than institutions as we are attempting to move away from this singular space to something more expansive.

So, now Eastside Projects is "Many Things" and not just conceptually. With the *Policy Show*, you worked with the City of Birmingham in some context. You are working on a new space with Birmingham City University (STEAMhouse). Could you talk about that

shift? Are you intending to open or operate other spaces over time or continue to push past the space of the gallery?



Policy Show, Meeting #2: Unspoken policies of housing, 19 October 2018, Birmingham City Council Chamber, Christian Nyampeta, Ciara Phillips, Rehana Zaman, Teresa Cisneros. Curated by Lucy Lopez & Gavin Wade. Photo by Stuart Whipps.

**GW:** We didn't work with the City of Birmingham, but more in relation to them, and occupied their central council chamber for the third *Policy Show* meeting, and invited the Cabinet member for housing in relation to our investigation of how we should develop new housing policies. Over the past few years we have fed directly into writing elements of the public art strategy and cultural strategy for Birmingham 2015-2019 and hope to contribute to the next versions of these. In a way these should be expected. We are some of the members of various publics of Birmingham who focus on making art and so we should be at the table when the city wants to work out what the conditions for making art should be here. On that basis my collaborator, associate Director and

co-founder of Eastside Projects, Ruth Claxton, proposed Birmingham Production Space which developed into STEAMhouse through synergies with Birmingham City Council and Birmingham City University. She wanted to produce a space based on her needs as an artist and then other needs of other artists and makers. And you look to align yourselves with others in the city who want to invest time and energy into improving the city. STEAMhouse is less a space dealing with display, and the gallery at 86 Heath Mill Lane more on display, but both are part of this process of testing how art should come into being in this city and offer support to others who want to move here, work here, live here, and change what here is.

I think we are moving towards an idea of other spaces and strategies and relationships, opening out from the last ten years of experimental exhibiting, to push our ideas into other usages. If we want to make production spaces for art, then not only the gallery, or the workshop, or the public square should be the site for this production, but also the home. We have been imagining making Artists Houses over the past few years, something I have found myself drawn back to time and time again over my past twenty years of being an artist-curator. We have one Artists House in development with artists Heather & Ivan Morison in Banbury about 40 miles south of Birmingham. This is part of a public art project called Park Life that we are curating, and the house will be for artists to live and work in, and we are aiming to have a 25 year lease on the house. So the house is a public artwork, it is a site for an artist to live as part of a new and old community, and to work and support activity within that area. And we are also making plans for a plot in Birmingham to develop the first Birmingham artists house with a number of artists.

We are also refitting the gallery space at Heath Mill Lane at the moment after a set of major building issues were revealed. So approaching our tenth anniversary of operating

we find ourselves adjusting, proposing and adapting in a range of different ways, and authorship and ambitions are changing and spreading out in new ways.

**JM:** Your work is distinctly rooted in Birmingham – its histories, opportunities, industries, and policies. I'm interested in how directly you engage your city and its specific positions. What has “acting on the reality of Birmingham” meant over your history? What does it mean in terms of policy and politics away from the gallery?

**GW:** What it means is that there are a different set of options in this city because we are part of its life. We have joined with other organisations here to survive, support, attract attention, centre the artist, and make civic space. These five aims are still part of our future vision but we have already acted in many ways to bring attention to these, to influence how people tell the story of what Birmingham is and can be. Our sixth User's Manual, *The Artist and The Engineer*, is a retelling of the story of Birmingham's coat of arms and proposes a new motto for our city. James Langdon, another founding director and a graphic designer, led this publication working with Peter Nencini and myself to craft a manual as a children's book. A simple shift in perspective allows a retake on our city.



Kathrin Bohm, EUStside 2016, Eastside Projects Facade, billboard poster on: Céline Condorelli & Gavin Wade, Scaffold as declaration of altered conditions 2008, Temporary External and Internal Façades, scaffold tubes, scaffold fixings, scaffold boards, Billboard hoardings constructed of timber, paint, electrical fittings for outdoor lighting. 5m x 12m x 0.3m and 5m x 12m x 10m. Photo by Stuart Whipps.

Working with other organisations like Impact Hub Birmingham also feeds into real change in possibilities within housing in the city, with the new policy for self build partly based on work towards the artists house. We look for change everywhere I suppose, with ourselves, our partners and the environment around us. Much of it is very hard to influence and we try to lead way beyond our authority. But it is in the trying and listening that we hope to make a difference. Small examples are when you might create a pocket of power and then you take it away. Our external billboard evidenced this as we were able to operate the only billboard in the city not controlled by advertising companies for 8 years until it becomes a way to express our emotions, in this case, anger. The day after the EU referendum here in the UK we smashed down our billboard. We bit off our nose to spite our face, but we were so angry. I still am angry about it. We are still part of the EU and I believe will continue to be so. I reject the government's weak decision based on some hidden agenda. But I must admit, what I am interested in, what I think makes the most difference is what we can do with exhibition. To lead and adapt what is around us through our processes of making art. It is the most important element to us, hence a text like my TedX talk – *City of a Thousand Artworks (How to revive a city)* – published in my *Upcycle This Book* last year. In that text I show how simple it is for us to choose to make Birmingham an art city and that it sets up a whole other set of values and possibilities for how our city can survive and attract attention etc. It is important that we consider how to make art as policy, art as housing, art as a city. And then we go and do it. Or more precisely, we do it through the working-it-out!



Gavin Wade, *Into the Void*, 24 June 2016, (exterior hoarding smashed and removed on day after EU Referendum 24 June 2016) alteration to: Céline Condorelli & Gavin Wade Scaffold as declaration of altered conditions 2008, Temporary External and Internal Façades, scaffold tubes, scaffold fixings, scaffold boards, Billboard hoardings constructed of timber, paint, electrical fittings for outdoor lighting. 5m x 12m x 0.3m and 5m x 12m x 10m. Photo by Stuart Whipps.

**JM:** What I find so compelling about this vision is that you see the institution as a citizen in a sense, and certainly your positions as founders and artists shaping its course as a part of the public that you are addressing. At The Luminary and in my work with US English and other projects, we reference the concept of a “Prefigurative Institution,” which likewise assumes that the ways an artist space is constructed and the ways it operates in the world point to some other way of being in the world, of acting on it, as you say. Your work seems to operate similarly: the work is often on a 1:1 scale, but it symbolically reaches the whole city of Birmingham (and by extension, other cities, an altered world). One project I was especially drawn to is “Draft Ideas for an Artist House” by Ivan Morrison, which lays out the vision concisely: “We propose to begin by building a house that will act as a metaphor for what we want to achieve and a gathering point around which ideas and strategies can be voiced.”

Throughout your history, you’ve ‘upcycled’ and adapted works staged elsewhere such as modular walls from Vienna’s Secession, and so on. Eastside Projects clearly has a distinct voice and vision, but I’m curious to know who you view as contemporaries, as well as references. Who is informing your work in this moment of transition (even if negatively such as neoliberal, spectacle-driven institutions, etc)?

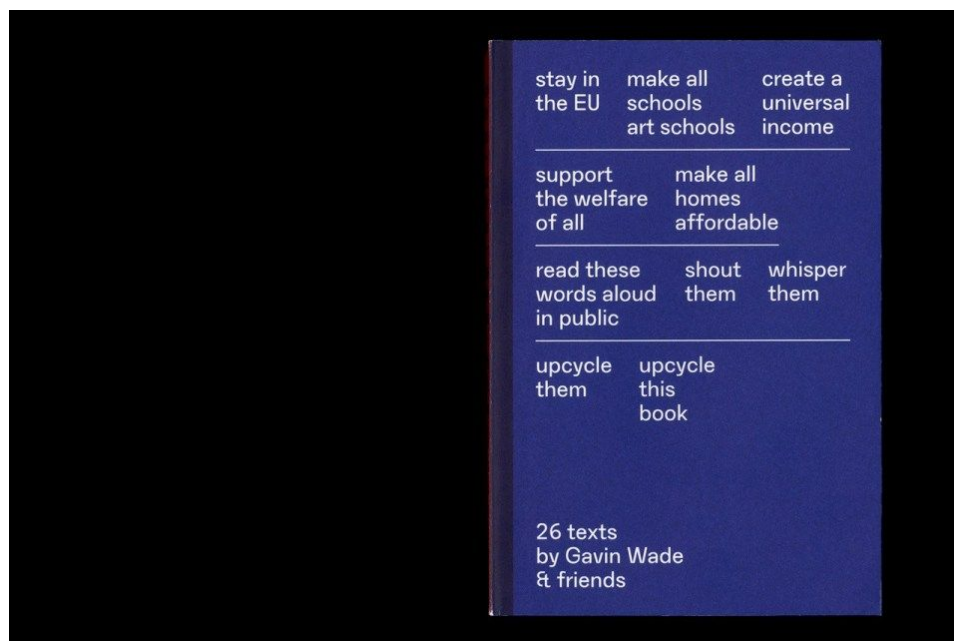


Production Show 2017, curated by Ruth Claxton & Gavin Wade, installation view with works by: Sonia Boyce, Heather & Ivan Morrison, Jasleen Kaur, Ben Harding, Richard Woods, Des Hughes, Emily Atkinson. Works on: Gavin Wade, Production Plinths (After Adolf Krischanitz & Samara Scott) 2017, 15 plinths (various heights/sizes/colours) 50mm square powder coated aluminium poles, powder coated steel/aluminium plinth tops, stainless steel threads into existing mobile wall system sockets in gallery floor, made by Avonstar Trading Co Ltd, Digbeth. Photo by Stuart Whipps.



**GW:** 1:1 is definitely something we're interested in, and I'm interested in the draft, or proposition, acting at 1:1. We have carefully chosen references over the years, from the first references we outlined in the first User's Manual – El Lissitzky's 'Abstract Cabinet' 1926/1930, Peter Nadin, Christopher d'Arcangelo, and Nick Lawson's 'The Work in this Space is a response to the existing conditions and/or the works previously shown within the space' 1978-1979, Bart de Baere, Honore d'O, Fabrice Hybert, Louise Borgeois, Suchan Kinoshita, Jason Rhoades and Luc Tuymans' exhibition 'This is the Show and the Show is Many Things' 1994 at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent. After that point our contemporaries are the artists and other people we have invited to Eastside Projects and worked with, from Peter Fend, Heather & Ivan Morison, Shezad Dawood, Lawrence Weiner, Laureana Toledo, Mithu Sen and so many others through to the artists we are working with right now like Jasleen Kaur, Sonia Boyce, Rehana Zaman, Teresa Cisneros, Ciara Phillips, Christian Nyampeta and Hardeep Pandhal. But it is not only the artists who we are working with, nor the founding artists who influence what happens within our multiverse, it is as much the other individuals who have and are working on licking our organisation into shape. This includes key people along the way such as Elizabeth Rowe, who was the first ESP Programmer and my main assistant when we first started and I was the only employee. Liz worked through till 2012 and now she is part of an art producer duo called General Public. We have commissioned a new long form video work from them, called The Endless Village, that we will present in the gallery in June this year. Elinor Morgan was ESP and Public programmer with us from 2012-2015 and now is Senior Curator at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. It really is the people we work with, from some of our first volunteers who are now designers for us in the case of the amazing An Endless Supply, or artists we work with, ongoing supporters and people who care about us and we care for them. The current team now are all part of pushing Eastside Projects into our next phase of activity, involved in the processes and thinking about how best to exist.

Within Birmingham there have been moments of close partnership with other cultural organisations and I think we take pride in supporting each other as well as hopefully keeping each other on our toes. Looking out for opportunities that can be shared and when we need to work together to achieve things. And we also have key contemporaries over the years with other groups of active artists and curators from Grizedale Arts to Wysing Arts and The Showroom. Internationally we have imagined projects with Vitamin Creative Space in China, Tensta Konsthall in Sweden and Stroom den Haag in The Netherlands, and recently we enjoyed spending time with Aarhus Kunsthall in Denmark. We're currently working with Mixrice in Seoul for an exhibition of their work also in June, and they are a fascinating artist collective, so we like to work directly with our contemporaries, involved them in what we do as much as is possible. We like to send out messages into the world and to get a response! Sometimes we invite people to us, other times people invite us to come and make a difference. Both are amazing situations. Eastside Projects can move anywhere in one sense and connect and collaborate with others. We are not so fixed.



*Cover of "Upcycle this Book" by Gavin Wade. Designed by James Langdon and published by Book Works.*

All of our propositions and exhibitions, and functional configurations are responses and criticisms of other parts of the world around us – artworlds, planning decisions, funding body decisions, governmental mistakes, social changes, policy voids, and unexploited opportunities. Ongoing issues of representation and power structures within the artworld are a particular concern at the moment, and that our actions can say something to others about how you should and shouldn't, can and can't do things. Policy Show is very much about that, a criticism of ourselves in order to reflect on a broader sphere.

**JM:** Your last statement returns me to the context in which we started. Temporary Art Review has been doing a feature on 'instituent practices,' which is a term coined by Gerald Raunig meant to suggest the development of a new phase of institutional critique born from not just a natural conceptual evolution, but of a "political and theoretical necessity." Our conclusion (and his, in many ways) is that the formation of new institutions that are self-critical, that short-circuit established power structures and point to alternate forms of organizing, gathering, is one of the primary necessities of our time. It is hard to unfurl this any more poignantly than you have already, but how do you feel that your work – at Eastside and elsewhere – infiltrates and 'acts on' this broader sphere? What may be the wider implications of this work?

**GW:** The wider implications are still that the entire system of how we organise our lives can change. Governments and national organisation systems do change and fall, and reset. It happens. Even relatively stable status quo situations like the EU and USA are going to have to change. It's inevitable that a rebalancing of resources, trade and economic relativism is due, and if not imminent, necessary. You asked before about who might be informing our work from a negative position, and it is very much governmental, right wing, nationalist political positions that we attempt to survive and counter. The loss of governmental support for homes replaced by the profit impulse to develop real estate, the withdrawal of the free and open education system within the UK, and the attack on the freedom inspiring arts within that system, the erosion of the

welfare state and movement away from an idea of universal income that supports inequality. They're just the large scale blunt tools of keeping a population in its place. We're against that. We're a small cog but we try and make sure that our findings, propositions, questions, policies and actions, connect with others, offer small openings to rethink, react and plan.

It sounds overblown, or grandiose perhaps, but it is just part of looking and moving and thinking. The more you do those things you more you learn and have to take into account wider contexts. Practically and reflectively, this brings me back to our first exhibition 'This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things,' which we are planning to do a second version of in September as we reach our ten year mark. The statement still rings true and will allow us to show elements of these many useful and useless things that we do, and how they are vital still, and point towards the next ten years of problem solving and provoking. The remaking of the gallery space and the interrogation of our policies and methods is all part of this. To act on our broader sphere is still to attempt to make art. That is the core of what we do, and what we believe in. That even in the face of impossible odds and gross inequality we will make art as judgement and speculation. The aim really is that a housing, welfare or economic system could be led by an art process. We just have to imagine it, recognise it, act on it together. Different visions will merge into something unexpected and new. It will happen.

# **Art After Capitalism**

**There is no longer non-political art.**

**The Dual Power of Arts Organizations**

by Joshua Simon

**Artists for Artists' Sake: Notes on Independent Art**

by Sarrita Hunn

**We're Here to Make Friends**

by Tori Abernathy

**The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization**

by James McAnally

**Postscript: Art After Capitalism**

by Sarrita Hunn and James McAnally

# There is no longer non-political art.

January 20, 2017

There is no longer non-political art.

We cannot afford a commercial system that exploits our labor.

We cannot subsidize an academic system that exploits our knowledge.

The critic is complicit in the world as it exists.

The Contemporary has come to an end. We cannot be obsessed with the present. The present has failed us and we have failed it. We must look to the future. We must gather our resources and bend all energies toward envisioning and realizing that future.

We must embrace respect, trust and affectionate play. Love.

We must unlock doors and invite people in and share our space, time and knowledge. There is not scarcity but abundance. There is not isolation but unarticulated connection.

We cannot wait for someone else to do this. No one else will do this but ourselves.

“To find a solution to this impasse through art itself is impossible. It is a crisis which concerns all culture, beginning at its economic base and ending in the highest spheres of ideology. Art can neither escape the crisis nor partition itself off. Art cannot save itself. It will rot away inevitably – as Grecian art rotted beneath the ruins of a culture founded on slavery – unless present-day society is able to rebuild itself. This task is essentially revolutionary in character. For these reasons the function of art in our epoch is determined by its relation to the revolution.

[...]

In very much the same way, to repeat, a progressive movement occurs in art. When an artistic tendency has exhausted its creative resources, creative “splinters” separate from it, which are able to look at the world with new eyes. The more daring the pioneers show in their ideas and actions, the more bitterly they oppose themselves to established authority which rests on a conservative “mass base,” the more conventional souls, skeptics, and snobs are inclined to see in the pioneers, impotent eccentrics or “anemic splinters.” But in the last analysis it is the conventional souls, skeptics and snobs who are wrong – and life passes them by.

[...]

Art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself. Poets, painters, sculptors and musicians will themselves find their own approach and methods, if the struggle for freedom of oppressed classes and peoples scatters the clouds of skepticism and of pessimism which cover the horizon of mankind.”

Leon Trotsky  
*Partisan Review*, 1938  
[LINK]

*Note: This article was published by the editors of Temporary Art Review on the morning of US President Donald Trump’s Inauguration in Washington DC, January 20, 2017.*



# The Dual Power of Arts Organizations

JOSHUA SIMON on October 14, 2016

USSR = Soviets + Electricity  
-V.I. Lenin

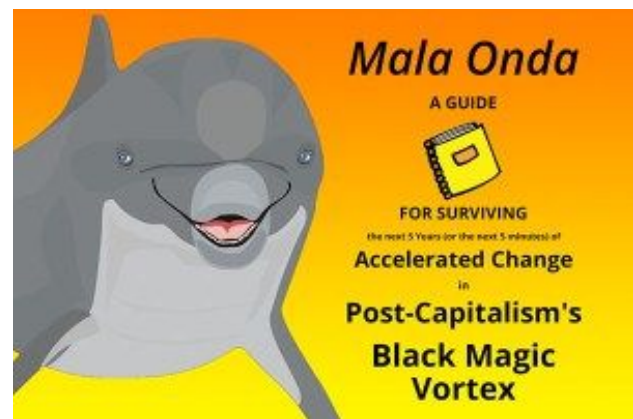
As organizers and administrators in the art field, we develop projects to support our long term program. At the same time, we create our long term program in order to enable the projects. That is why we have to initiate and respond. Taking this way of working into consideration, we can try and scale it up to create a sustainable infrastructure to support our activities.

Practices such as erecting drywall for a show and then tearing it down, working on parallel projects, managing low-intensity collegial networks for deadline based tasks, applying for funding in order to get your unpaid work completed, and valorizing goods while impoverishing ourselves teaches us that creative practices—namely what artists do today—have become models and source of inspiration for contemporary forms of precariat ready to deliver outsourced labour. We are all driven individuals full of ideas. Somehow being creative doesn't



seem to like such a good idea any more. It seems that our creative capacities pose a problem, and gentrification is one example of that. Yet, claiming that “art is gentrification”—something I actually heard in a conversation at the latest Berlin Biennial—appears too cynical and anti-political to be deemed a worthy assessment of contemporary art’s contradictory capacities. If anything, art can also be considered an agent of gentrification where everything is only real-estate. And this might actually be a good way to describe our world. That is why cities that have no public housing or rent control experience the effects of contemporary art also as urban gentrification.<sup>1</sup>

From licensing of intellectual property to privatization policies, to student loans and mortgages, and the real existing internet, the forms of capitalist accumulation shift from production and growth to life-taxes and rents. Technological and legal devices monopolize access by territorializing even immaterial things to the extent that they behave like fenced land. The realities of our digitized



present confront us again and again with different practices of accumulation by dispossession. As Frederic Jameson put it: “Postmodern politics is essentially a matter of land grabs on a local as well as a global scale. Whether you think of the question of Palestine, the settlements and the camps; or of the politics of raw materials and extractions; whether you think of ecology and the rain-forests for example; or the problems of federalism, citizenship and immigration; or whether it’s a question of gentrification in the great cities as well as favelas and townships, and of course the movement of the landless – today everything is about land.”<sup>2</sup>

Berlin’s Mitte since the 1990 is of course the example of how artistic practices were used as fertilizer to re-cultivate a no man’s land. This is the scenario we know, but it is interesting to think about the previous political order in regards to the arts. If we take seriously the claims by the writers like Eva Cockcroft and Max Kozloff on the CIA’s involvement in distributing American post-war modernism in the service of Cold War politics,<sup>3</sup> it might help us understand our

situation today. To put it as bluntly as possible, we are basically not needed anymore. Welfare states—a direct product of capitalism’s inability to defeat the USSR before and during the second world war—enjoyed significant funding for culture. Now that there’s no USSR, there’s no need for capitalism to offer subsidies and social services. On the contrary, now everything is a commodity. In recent years, places like the Netherlands and the UK experienced huge budgetary cuts for culture. What once was praised for self expression, freedom of speech and civil liberties during the Cold War is useless today. Culture and art do not have the function they had back then. We are no longer living proof of the West’s superiority.

What this means for us is that we are experiencing our practice in a manic-depressive manner: on the one hand the world is following in our footsteps as far as flexibility, valorization and gentrification go, yet on the other, the state does not need us, and almost no one is willing to fund art outside the art market. We are extremely exploitable and irrelevant at the same time.



In “The Sadness of Post-Workerism,” David Graeber writes, “While they are not always self-consciously revolutionary, artistic circles have had a persistent tendency to overlap with revolutionary circles; presumably, precisely because these have been spaces where people can experiment with radically different, less alienated forms of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Graeber says that historically, artists and revolutionaries experiment with notions of value for very different reasons. While revolutionaries aim to overthrow the existing regime for new sets of value, artists experiment with value within the existing regime. Companions for brief yet intense moments—this constant negotiation between two different experiments with value has been the fuel of many avant-gardes. But, couldn’t we claim the same in relation to “urban renewal” and artistic practices? I mean that we negotiate value differently. While ours is a make-do attitude, theirs is focused on price. While we are expressing our need for infrastructure, after we have been given over to the market, they are speculating thanks to the lack of social infrastructure. We have seen the rise and fall of the

artist as consumer with the appropriation art of the 1980s. Then we saw the shift towards the artist as producer with video productions and installation art in the 1990s. Since the 2000s, we see the artist as researcher in the zero growth economy.<sup>5</sup>

So, how do we set out to organize our arts institutions? Here we go into the question of organization. Recently, the Leninist idea of dual power was revisited in Jameson's provocative reader "An American Utopia."<sup>6</sup> In the book, Jameson proposes the military as the only viable infrastructure for the Left to work with. For him, the military operates as a huge infrastructure that is not solely profit driven—it takes care of its soldiers with education, health, transportation, and other support structures that cannot be found outside it. Dialectically, the military also politicizes the public as the draft implicates everyone. Jameson remarks that it was President Nixon who ended the draft in order to put an end to popular, and in particular student resistance to the war in Vietnam. What Jameson stresses in this proposal more than anything is the lack of infrastructure for Left politics today. Relying on the military of all things reveals how haphazard Leftist political organizing has become. This relates directly to our arts institutions and the ways they suffer from diminishing public infrastructure. The notion of dual power, which Jameson takes from Lenin, refers directly to questions of structure and spontaneity, self-organization and long term support systems. These seem to be questions we should ask ourselves not only in politics today, but also in relation to our arts organizations and how we manage them and coordinate between them. The need for organizational infrastructure seems to be relevant in our case as well. In Lenin's short essay published in "Pravda" in the transitional days of the spring of 1917, prior to the victory of the revolution, he describes a form of feedback sovereignty in which the then provisional government (pre-Bolshevik) and the network of already existing soviets (workers and soldiers councils) cooperate.<sup>7</sup> Jameson compares this to the Black Panthers whose organization included daily services (food kitchens, garbage collections, health care, water inspection, etc.). For him, Occupy did not constitute dual power. While the encampments operated like self-organized entities, online social media did not function as an organizing infrastructure between the different units and against the one percent. Therefore, parallel to a strategy for taking power, we have a network of councils that already functions as if it contains that power. Dual power includes a centralized confrontational strategy together with a decentralized practice of social organizing in communities. These operate side by side as parts

of the same project. Dual power therefore generates a shadow state that takes care of the people and makes them realize they can do away with the current state. Alongside a direct political assault on the current regime, this network of dual power makes it wither away. The operative application of dual power, after taking the state, is best described in Lenin's formula for the USSR as a combination of the soviets and electricity used here as an epigraph (USSR = Soviets + Electricity). In this respect, his idea of what the USSR would be was a vision of a network of free self-organized entities, affiliated by an infrastructure that feeds and connects them. Note that the name USSR does not demarcate any territory—it is simply a union of soviets.

Therefore, dual power could be a useful reference for us when we come to discuss the ways we can organize ourselves. Maybe not for art initiatives to gain political domination (yet), but at least to achieve some form of sustainable infrastructural networks. In the age of franchised museums, one can already observe that while the biggest art museums open branches, independent art spaces and initiatives find ways to develop projects together. Changing funding conditions demand that we share costs, which is one reason this is happening. Secondly, from each other we can learn how to work with other like-minded local actors to counter artwashing and displacement. When several independent institutions collaborate on an application for funding (something I find myself doing more and more), the process can stay very administrative with the initial guidelines of the funding entity strictly followed (cultural exchange, and promoting this or that set of values, media, or any other thing). However, it can also work to our benefit on a larger scale, first by initiating a project together and then with each partner applying for available funding and assistance in his/her territory. Now funding is coming into the network we have initiated. Therefore, instead of only chasing deadlines and potential benefactors, we can potentially find assistance amongst ourselves.

I have heard the term "The Field and the Market" in arts management circles. This refers to the way the art market feeds non-commercial, artist-run initiatives. We find ways to produce projects that once completed and exhibited with us and find their way into commercial galleries and art fairs. Now this relates to a whole set of other concerns that involve questions of living wages and artists literally working in the greater economy to support themselves. But, I am mentioning

this issue because we need to think of ways to keep the investment we have been able to put into a project so that when it goes commercial, our non-profit is not a facilitator for a commercial gallery's gain. Imagine that we keep the money in the network we've set up—that we share mailing lists and start our own web-blast service with announcements. If we only advertise in the network, it will grow. It can be used as a tool for us to refer to each other for assistance (a residency program looking for one thing, and an artist-run space looking to engage in exactly that thing). The fact that I can think of these things means that they probably already exist. We can already see possible reference to orientate ourselves in this. Like the dual power of the network of soviets, these lines of distribution are the infrastructure we need.

*These ads+videos by Anxious to Make and essay by Joshua Simon have been commissioned by Temporary Art Review for Field Perspectives, a co-publishing initiative with The Miami Rail, Temporary Art Review and Common Field for the 2016 Common Field Convening.*

1. See for example the story of "BHAAAD – Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement," in Los Angeles:  
<http://observer.com/2016/07/one-la-hood-is-violently-fighting-gentrification-demanding-art-galleries-leave/>
2. Frederic Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," in: *New Left Review* 92, March-April 2015, pp. 130-131
3. See: Max Kozloff, "American Painting During The Cold War," *Artforum* Vol. 11, No. 9, May 1973 and: Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, Vol. 15, No. 10, June 1974

4. David Graeber, "The Sadness of Post-Workerism, or 'Art And Immaterial Labour' Conference: A Sort of Review (Tate Britain, Saturday 19 January, 2008)", *The Commoner*, 01.04.2008: [www.commoner.org.uk/?p=33](http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=33)
5. See for example: Ekaterina Degot and David Riff, *Monday Begins on Saturday: Bergen Assembly 2013*, Sternberg Press, 2013, pp. 12-25. In a previous collaborative curatorial project, together with Cosmin Costinas, Ekaterina Degot and David Riff have coined the term "Shockworkers of the Mobile Image" to relate protocols of artistic production in post-constructivist USSR with those under which we operate today. See: *The First Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg, Russia, NCCA, 2010*.
6. Frederic Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, including contributions by: Kim Stanley Robinson, Jodi Dean, Saroj Giri, Agon Hamza, Kojin Karatani, Frank Ruda, Alberto Toscano, Kathi Weeks, and Slavoj Zizek, Verso Books, 2016
7. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "The Dual Power," in: *Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 24, pp. 38-41, first published in: Pravda, No. 28, April 9, 1917. See also: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm>*

# HOW TO...MAKE AN (ALTERNATIVE) INSTITUTION.

[a counter-power strategy]

## ① UNDERSTAND: What is an institution?

Institutions may be:

FORMAL: U.S. Congress, Roman Catholic Church  
INFORMAL: marriage, family, money

While institutions may seem static, they are in fact social constructs produced by collective human actions (toward a specific purpose).

We understand these institutions (or organizations) through implicit images, or metaphors. "The use of metaphor implies a way of thinking or a way of seeing that prevails how we understand our world generally."<sup>1</sup>

But METAPHORS always create distortions.

1. Morgan, Gareth. *Images of Organization*, Sage Publications, Inc., 1997

## ② COOPERATION: Make your own institution. (or support your local alternatives)

Our failing institutions are based on: market capitalist economy, authoritarian republics, patriarchy, eurocentricity

Alternative institutions by necessity are based on: decentralized cooperative economics, participatory democracy, gender equality, ecology<sup>2</sup>

Through building alternative institutions, individuals are empowered, committed to change, and skilled in running society.<sup>3</sup>

COUNTER-POWER INSTITUTIONS:  
worker cooperatives, intentional communities, temporary autonomous zones

2. "An Introduction to Dual Power Strategy" by Brian A. Dominick  
3. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_power)

## ③ NONCOOPERATION: Radical non-participation. Resist and destroy the failing system.

Express your SOLIDARITY and help alternatives become the prevalent institutions by:

BOYCOTT: Boycott most or all corporate products. Reduce to eliminate your consumption of gasoline. Close accounts and reinvest in local credit unions.

STRIKE: Take your vacation time, sick leave. Organize to strike. Spend time with friends and family!

SELF-RELIANCE: Learn about wild foods. Start a garden. Increase your awareness of local market resources and strategies.<sup>4</sup>

### Organizations as...

|                                                |                                                   |                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>MACHINES:</b> factories, fast-food</p>   | <p><b>BRAINS:</b> bureaucracies, info systems</p> | <p><b>ORGANISMS:</b> technology, research</p>               |
| <p><b>PSYCHIC PRISONS:</b> rules, behavior</p> | <p><b>GAMES:</b> politics, marketing</p>          | <p>?</p> <p>(fill in your organizational metaphor here)</p> |

INSTITUTE FOR AUTONOMOUS PRACTICES for #mkthngshppn - [www.instituteforautonomouspractices.org](http://www.instituteforautonomouspractices.org)



4. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Global-Strike-Real-Solidarity/1168103184211903>

REMEMBER: THEY HAVE AS MUCH POWER AS WE BELIEVE IN THEIR MONEY. -Global Strike

## Artists for Artists' Sake: Notes on Independent Art for The Independent/Garibaldi (published in Italian) by Sarrita Hunn

In order to define the 'independent' field of art, one must first recognize that there is no *one* artworld. That is of course true in infinite forms at the micro level, but one can also see this in a more general way at the macro level. I propose that for the last half century we have been operating across two distinct spheres, the commercial and academic art worlds, and are experiencing the distinct emergence of a third sphere – one that emerging organizations like [The Independent](#) (IT), [Common Field](#) (US), [Common Practice Network](#) (UK/US), and (to some extent) [Arts Network Asia](#), and [tranzit](#), attempt to bracket.

The market world of art production has of course existed for centuries in different forms, but the rise of an academic arena for art practice as a relatively new 'field' has a particular history over the last century. One could possibly trace this from the Bauhaus to Black Mountain College, through the rise of critical art writing by artists in the 70s and 80s, and finally to the overwhelming predominance of the MFA in the US and Art Practice PhD in Europe (alongside an expanding roster of MAs in anything from Curatorial Practice to Performance, bracketing an entire field of production within academia) in the last decades. Anyone who has worked in academia knows that success in that field is defined along slightly different terms than those of the market and vice versa. They are interrelated, of course, but it is easy today to forget the relatively newfound freedom allowed to artist-faculty to explore outside of commercial concerns through their support as academics. Think, for example, of the Los Angeles legacy of artist-professors such as Judy Chicago and John Baldessari, not to mention Joseph Beuys' highly influential activities during and after his dismissal at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf that included founding the Free International University and the Green Party in Germany.

However, as academia has financialized (especially in the United States), these once somewhat separate fields are also losing their distinction. It is clear now the ways in which the academic realm has been co-opted by the market, and artists working in general have been required to embrace an increasing level of professionalization. To put it another way, it used to be said on the US East Coast you've 'made it' as an artist when you quit your teaching job and on the West Coast you've 'made it' when you got one. In a world of an increasing number of self-identified artists who are neither 'making it' or getting (full-time) teaching jobs, these distinctions seem less relevant.

Conversely, as Institutional Critique has become academicized (particularly with so-called New Institutionalism in Europe, a theory that focuses on the sociological aspects of institutions, alongside the growing number of artistic practice and research-based PhDs), conversations around the social and political implications of independent art have increasingly lost their connection to an actual practice. There is a high level of discourse, but (in combination with public and private art funding that gives preference to socially-engaged initiatives) also surprisingly limited forms. To put it another way, I have noticed one of the first things artists in (notably northern) Europe will tell you is whether they make work for grants or galleries, but in a world where the largest number of self-organized projects look a lot like white cube storefront commercial spaces (and art institutions are increasingly community-engaged), this distinction seems less relevant.



But a third way has emerged. It is notable that this third field first defined itself in the negation of the other two – the ‘alternative’ gallery and the ‘alternative’ school. However, this definition by negation has yet to be enough to carve out an entire ‘field’ on its own. This is not entirely new (we are arguably in a third wave of this practice, with the first in the early 1970’s and the second in the 1990’s), but a growing number of practitioners are aiming to formalize these efforts on their own terms. On a structural level, I would describe the field as ‘artists for artists’ sake’ – defined as consisting of those organizations (and artists, curators, administrators, etc.) working in the full range of independent, self-organized practices (from apartment galleries to artist-led and -centric nonprofits) who define their priorities and values in terms of artistic support and concerns (which by definition changes over time) and generally take the form of hybrid spaces and/or residencies, non-commercial galleries, and platforms for learning and sharing information. To be clear, I am not trying to reference an essentialist claim to ‘art for art’s sake,’ but the subversive potential of being subject (historically speaking) to neither church nor state.

I would characterize the independent field as being typically artist and/or curator-founded, and existing aside and/or in a fluid interrelationship with the market and academic fields, but also distinctly separate. For example, one may work as a faculty in a local art department or school, show in a commercial gallery and still run a project space out of their living room or studio. But the third field – the ‘independent’ field – is really concerning the latter, the realm in which priorities and values are determined by the artists/curators themselves, not the market or academia that may or may support them otherwise.

One may argue that institutionalizing this third ‘field’ may be the first step toward its cooptation, but that argument lies in the assumption that the market (particularly within neoliberal capitalism today) is an inevitability. This is the assumption that this third field must reject. Being hybrid in nature, artists are uniquely positioned to think both inside and outside the existing spheres. As Lise Soskolne stated for W.A.G.E. at a Common Field Convening (aka Hand-in-Glove) in 2015:

The exceptional status of the artist as someone working both inside and outside of capitalism, drawing from and working against, is something that we must both acknowledge and put to work. In other words, as artists we must acknowledge that our labor is not exceptional in its support and exploitation by a multi-billion dollar industry, while simultaneously putting our own exceptionality to work by engaging our own labor in political terms and as a political act – not as an artistic gesture.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, members and allies of this independent field must leverage what power we are given *within* the commercial and academic (and also increasingly civic) spheres as “cultural workers” to position ourselves *outside*, and in resistance to, these hegemonic power structures. As artist-centric institutions, this means using radical forms of participation to forefront self-organized, inclusive and equitable structures – this means creating new social imaginaries.

If our failing institutions are based on market-driven capitalist economy, authoritarian republics and eurocentricity – then our ‘alternative’ institutions by necessity must be based on decentralized cooperative economics, participatory democracy, equality, transnationalism and ecology. Through building this third field, artists become empowered, committed to change, and skilled in developing a society with these values. This is not (only) an artistic gesture but a matter of “engaging our own labor in political terms.” As Lise continued:

...it is only once we organized effectively around non-payment in our own field, that we can align ourselves with other workers struggles. Before we can align ourselves with other workers struggles, we must be prepared to occupy our own exceptionality, however uncomfortable, and as politically as possible.

For those of us looking to develop and define this third field let’s start by asking ourselves and each other: ‘What do I need?’ and ‘What can I give?’ With these priorities, we can avoid the financialization (and academicization) of the third field and define it on our own terms. We might not get everything we want, but we just might get what we need.

*This essay was adapted for The Independent/Garibaldi “Learning” issue edited by Radical Intention (published in 2018) from the author’s [Social Response to Hand-in-Glove 2015](#), “[Artists for Artists’ Sake](#),” first published on [Temporary Art Review](#) October 19, 2015.*

# We're Here to Make Friends

TORI ABERNATHY on January 24, 2017

'DOES THE END  
JUSTIFY THE MEANS?' this is  
process, there is no end, there are only  
means, each one  
had better justify itself.  
To whom?  
– Diane di Prima, "Revolutionary Letter #26"

Keep smiling, keep shining  
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure  
That's what friends are for  
For good times and bad times  
I'll be on your side forever more  
That's what friends are for  
– Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager, "That's What Friends Are For"

I came home on the evening of December 19th, 2016, to a flurry of messages from Friends on Facebook prompting me to check-in as safe. There had been an alleged terrorist attack at one of the Christmas Markets popular here in Berlin (which left 12 dead and 56 injured). On the same day, two other major attacks made headlines. One involved an off-duty riot police officer, Mevlüt Mert Altıntaş, gunning down Andrei Karlov, the Russian ambassador to Turkey. The attack occurred at the opening of a photography exhibit, *Russia Through Turks' Eyes*, at the Cagdas Sanat Merkezi Modern Arts Center in the Çankaya district of Ankara.



*Burhan Ozbilici / Associated Press*

I was shown the now-iconic photo of a man standing in a pose like the Statue of Liberty, a gun fashioned where a torch should be. I knew immediately that this went down in a contemporary art space due to the coldness and clarity of the light behind the scene. It seemed like this liminal environment gave my colleagues a particularly high degree of comedic license because within a few hours there were jokes about how hot or stylish or fuckable the shooter was, how fat the ambassador was, or how poorly hung the artwork was. Despite days of searching, despite the fact that the perpetrator actively destroyed the work in the exhibition, I'm still unable to find any Western news source able to tell me who any of the artists in the exhibition were. It is pretty irrelevant, it would seem.

What ISIS's attack in Berlin and the actions of the Russian and Syrian governments in Aleppo show is that there are plenty of people who do possess clear images of the future, images of the future that are perhaps not so far from the dreary isolation we experience in the present – or would have us return to a distant past. Authoritarian enclaves, however disparate in their histories, methods, and scope, still have the propensity to embolden one another within and outside of the borders of a territory.

There is a gap between the theories that we make use of to understand political arts practices and the practical agendas of those who might want to maintain or ramp up the fear that already constricts our movements. But from Royal Oak, Michigan, to Aleppo, how can we mind this gap? Since the election, there have been a lot of articles circulating on social media that provide some insights on how to combat fascism now that it is here. But fascism is not suddenly appearing. It is not coming to us from elsewhere. It is making itself seen and it is growing. If the idea of labeling this growing political trend as fascist makes some readers squirm in their seats or otherwise scoff at the ubiquity of the term, we must at least admit that there is a populist authoritarian movement brewing in the West, with foundations in the petty bourgeois.<sup>1</sup> This growth requires us to reconsider our militancy in the face of it or lack thereof. We're going to have to pay close attention to the relationships that we can count on; we're going to have to come to an understanding of who our friends are, who is on our side, and how we can continue to grow and strengthen anti-authoritarian movements.

'Prefigurative politics' or simply 'prefiguration' has been a modus operandi among many self-organized autonomous or anarchist groups in the West of recent memory. The career of the term 'prefigurative politics' since the 1970s lies largely within the radical organizing communities that see prefiguration as a way of living something in order to bring it into being. That 'something' is often a way of relating to another person or persons that moves away from the alienated conditions of daily life under capitalism. To 'prefigure' first implies that there is a 'figure' of a social order to embody in one's daily actions before it takes place. The anthropologist David Graeber, writing at the height of the anti-corporate-globalization movement writes of prefigurative politics that "It's one thing to say, 'Another world is possible'. It's another to experience it, however momentarily."<sup>2</sup> Social movements are messy, and resistance is not always easy or 'safe'. That being said, there is nothing more life-giving than enacting the spontaneous or loosely-planned will of an indeterminate 'we'. It is in the immanence of this indeterminacy that new pathways to a better world open up – like when you have taken the Brooklyn Bridge with others and someone stumbles upon a way to get to the other side and you take it together, or when a newfound friend is in need of or offers you water. For me the most powerful memories I have from participating in social movements lie in the way someone's face lights up and their energy changes the moment they choose to act with their own bodies to fight with others, with no coercion or directions from above, and realize they can. There is a need to create distinct images of a future we'd actually want to live in. There is, of course, an urgency around the need to stand for justice and fight in defiance of the structures you oppose. There is also something new that opens up when you see self-organization in practice, the creation of

a model of existence that can stand on its own, almost as if indifferent to the oppressions that exist elsewhere. We need more of this.

Rather than operating solely on the foundations of would-be efficient strategies that come to us from elsewhere, or relying on a vanguard to seize power and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses, a prefigurative approach traditionally seeks to create a new society in-the-shell-of-the-old by developing counter-hegemonic modes of interaction that embody the transformation before it exists. Or as Carl Boggs puts it, the impulse is to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement... those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.”<sup>3</sup>

To ‘prefigure’ is to collapse the distinction between the means and ends of a practice. One might distinguish a mode of organizing that operates on the basis of prefiguration from, say, those led by groups like Socialist Alternative who offer salvation to those who join the ‘party’ or back the politicians they have chosen to collaborate with a sovereign power. Otherwise, it could be said that many of the non-profit organizations birthed in the wake of the Ferguson Uprising do little to ‘prefigure’ the sense of justice they seek when salaried employees become the executors of the monetary donations elicited from the social unrest of the dispossessed.<sup>4</sup> We can look to social movements to better understand the nature of ‘prefiguration’, but what does it look like to operate on the basis of a prefigurative political art practice? What might it look like if this tendency informed artistic interventions at large?

It has been increasingly popular among those on the so-called ‘left’ to decry the widespread lack of faith in the future, or at least the inability to manifest coherent images of it, that plagues the contemporary subject. Theorists like Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Mark Fisher, and Franco Berardi have written volumes explicitly hoping to make us more concerned about the incoherence, or lack, of any hopeful future-oriented political project. Certainly, my work has been informed by my fear of this as well. Sometimes I feel like I might drown in the waves of criticism and critique that seem to wash over the various initiatives folks undertake to organize themselves, or speak out against injustice, or simply articulate sound alternatives. And what are we aiming at? Revolutions concern not death, but life and improving it. Many of my colleagues in the arts are by and large doomsday sayers, well-written Marxists with hands that are too soft, “left accelerationists”, or liberals crippled by the fear of the fascism that they didn’t realize was always already there who are quick to react, primarily with criticism or a kind of stale allyship.<sup>5</sup> And isn’t it so easy to tear apart the ideological basis for an event, as

opposed to suggesting a concrete step to be taken, or putting your bodies on the gears. In short, critique is easier than being a good friend. Put another way, it is easier to analyze and deconstruct the pitfalls we have taken thus far on our journey together than to prefigure a new social order.

After Occupy Wall Street (OWS), political artists on the ground are increasingly less anxious over whether or not the work they are doing is to be counted as 'art'. And in many ways, the question of whether you are an artist, activist, or concerned citizen continues to be less meaningful in our movements, when we are left with the question 'what can be done right now?' This question echoes with all the more tremulous sincerity as the 'neo-fascism' of the West becomes more visible, or as the 'alt right' assumes more power, and with the understanding that organized resistance has not yet produced an effective counter-attack.

Yates McKee points out in the introduction to *Strike Art* that his text is fundamentally "a strategic address to those working in the art field more specifically to consider how the various kinds of resources at our disposal might be channeled into movement work as it unfurls with ongoing moments of political rupture."<sup>6</sup> For a long time now, artists have been staging encounters through which political action can flow. Activists have been harnessing the tools and skills that derive from an artistic sensibility, or from their 'artist friends'. This difference is also less important as we move away from the distinctly Modern question of the division between Art and Life. Perhaps if we go a step further, we can collapse the distinction entirely and simply 'act' in the face of the authoritarian subjects that prefer we didn't.

On the other hand, there is a growing complacency around what gets counted as *political* activity, and likewise what we mean when we speak of political art. In her keynote address for Open Engagement in 2012, Tania Bruguera outlines the stakes of 'Useful Art' or 'Arte Util': "I place usefulness in art at the center of what social art should be. Usefulness is the responsibility of social art. It is its form of communication and its context. Usefulness is what makes art social." She goes further by suggesting that a work of art is only political if the artist is taking a personal risk. Her demand for social art to be 'useful' is reminiscent of Gramsci's general understanding of what gets counted as 'political activity' that we see throughout *The Prison Notebooks*. In making the distinction between the role of the professional and 'organic' intellectual classes as part of the antifascist movement in Turin, it becomes clear that for Gramsci, whether a certain tendency is political or not depends on its direct, material engagement with existing power relations and structures.<sup>7</sup> To be political is not merely to have an opinion,

or even to express that opinion loudly or colorfully – as did the professional intellectuals – but to effectively take the risk, with your own body, in combating fascism – as did the ‘organic intellectuals’. For Gramsci, the development of an organic ideology is a key component of an anti-fascist uprising insofar as the organic intellectual evaluates and analyzes the situation before him and responds with haste, and with consent to the counter-hegemonic ideas and ambitions of the working class (for they are his friends), acts upon it.

For Bruguera, her long-term projects involve a careful planning process in order to ensure that the work is firmly rooted in the context – the various institutions, publics, places – through which they manifest such that the risk falls on that of the artist as much as possible, rather than putting social actors in the line of fire. Bruguera reiterates what is meant by a political art practice in her keynote address at the International Council of Museums Conference in 2013 by saying “if you guys want to deal with political art, you have to take risks and take a stand. That is what politics means.” When we speak of political art, we speak of the work which – in its confrontation with the political – requires the artist to take a risk. Art about politics is not political art. But perhaps what is needed from the arts in our time is for the role of the artist to dissolve entirely into the space of the social with newfound urgency. In an effort to facilitate change right now, under the threat of structural violence, political arts practitioners can stand to learn from a prefigurative sensibility that prioritizes the process of lifting each other up as life unfolds in common.



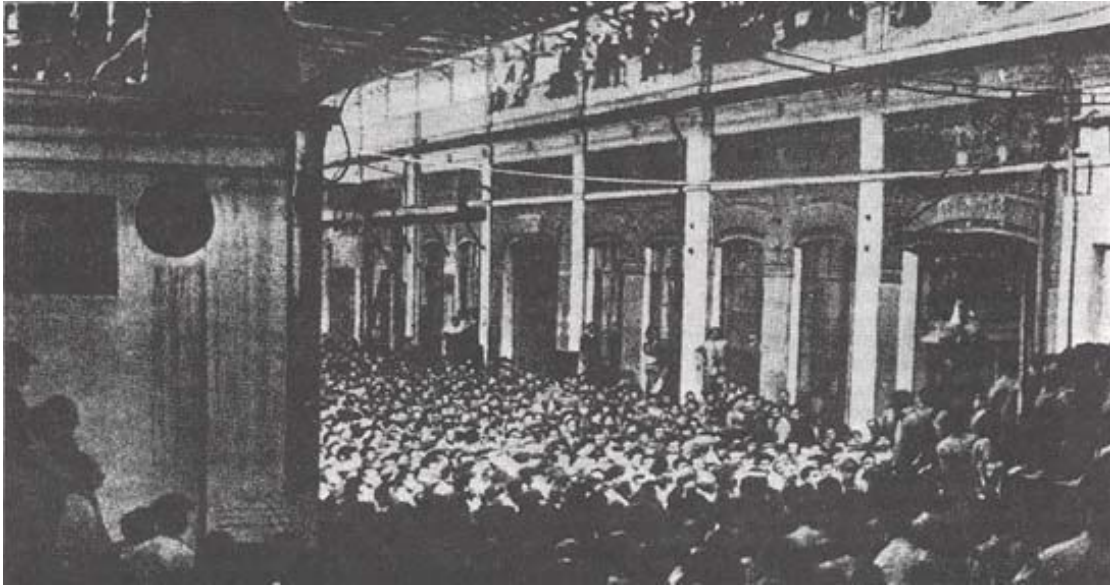
*Bruguera, Tania. Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana version), 2009. Decontextualization of an action, Behavior Art : Stage, Podium, Microphones, 1 Loudspeaker inside and one outside of the building, 2 persons on a military outfit, White dove, 1 minute free of censorship per speaker, 200 disposable cameras with flash. Image Courtesy of Studio Bruguera, Collection Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2014.*



In the spaces and the work where the spirit of prefiguration is a key component, I have found a refreshing interest in the opinion of those who have gathered to take action together, as opposed to the opinion of supposed experts or those who are traditionally considered to have more authority to speak. Or at least, this is intended to be the case. In the absence of a rubric that predetermines the standard methods for social engagement (based on hierarchy or type – age, gender, class, profession, role, etc.), the friend emerges as a crucial figure. The concept of the ‘friend’ becomes more meaningful because the other discursive frameworks for indicating trust or say-so fade away. It would be dangerous to assume that a ‘friend’, however, is someone who simply seems to share your political values, your artistic sensibilities, reads the same magazines, or wears the same shoes. It is also harmful to assume that the ‘friend’ is something you can determine based on your proximity to another’s social or geographical locations; this love-of-the same is a corrupt form.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the ‘friend’ is a relationship based on a camaraderie that reveals itself through time and through activity in common (particularly in a struggle, maybe). We say to our friends, “I’ve got your back,” and we mean it. In fact, the most basic way we understand who our friends are is that they are the ones who stand up for us in times of need. They defend us in the face of our enemies, and we are always there to fight for our friends. To be a friend is to make oneself vulnerable; to be a friend implies that you are willing to take a side; it is to open oneself up to the possibility of being an enemy. In the opening, a social safety net is formed from the sticky residue of the relationship(s), and the vulnerability is mediated through it. Friendship understood in this way necessitates not only personal, but collective, accountability as it evolves over time. This isn’t a game. We’re here to make friends.

Friendship is a form of life. It is an incessant, shape-shifting ‘we’, one against the line that separates and divides the interior from the exterior. Friendship as the perpetual state of becoming the ‘with’ that we always already are.<sup>9</sup> Friendship is dangerous to Empire. We can see this in the infiltration tactics of COINTELPRO<sup>10</sup>, where a primary mode of sabotage focuses on fostering distrust within a group by inserting enemies into the spaces where friends are purported to be. Years after the widespread use of these infiltration tactics, we still see movements torn apart by this fear.<sup>11</sup> Often this fear is inflected with unresolved misogyny, racism, classism, and other forms of systemic oppression that choke everyone from the outside in. Fear means order, atomization, and crippling anxiety. Love means disorder, health, and insurrection. Fear is born of control. Love is born of vulnerability. In a similar way, friendship is also dangerous to the arts institutions that would have us make work in the form of socially engaged projects

with 'communities' primarily conceived of instruments that can signify social cohesion and acceptance.



*Workers assembly in an occupied Fiat Plant, Turin, 1920.*

One of the things that Gramsci helps us understand is that insofar as there is intellectual activity going on everywhere (for everyone has an idea of the future), the only meaningful distinction we make when we speak of someone as having the identity of 'an intellectual' (in other words, a 'traditional intellectual') is that their thought takes place within a general sphere of social relations, just as a worker is not a proletarian because they labor (for we all labor), but because their labor is positioned in a market such that it becomes a commodity.<sup>12</sup> Capital is essentially dead, only staying barely alive by extracting more life from workers. Most successful 'political art' is dead, too, subsisting off extracting vitality from social movements and putting it into the most sacred of dead spaces – the Museum. In this way, there is a kind of violence at the core of contemporary political art practices that are underwritten with the force of singular authorship, that depend on the 'cultural hegemony' of the traditional intellectual. It is a myth that mirrors that of state apparatuses of control, a kind of subdued repression. It is a violence because its existence is dependent on the subtle denial of licensure over the construction of images of the future that matter to the confines of those counted as legitimate participants in the field. In this way, to be a political artist is often counter to the position of the friend because it relies on denying 'the community' full access to the life-giving ability to compose an image of a future together, understand its implications, its strategies, and *spontaneously* act accordingly on their own terms. In this way, the

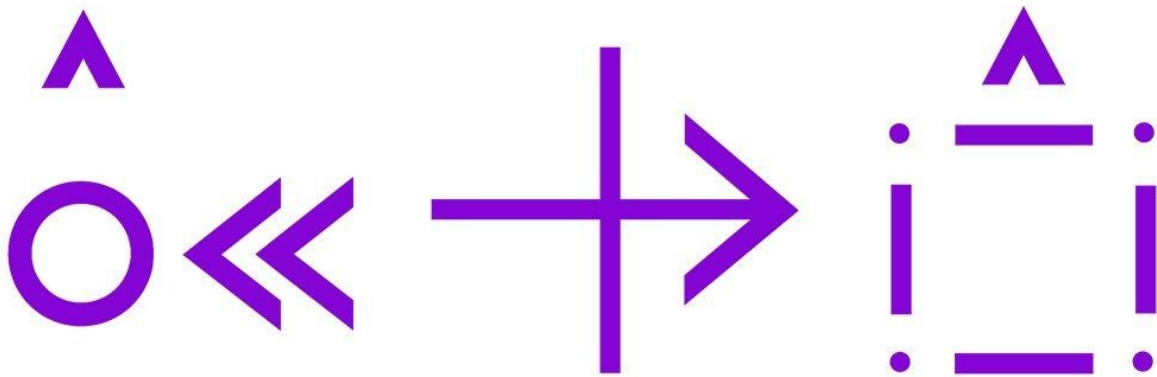
personal risk that the artist might take can be rendered meaningless if the artist is not willing to be accountable in a sustainable way to the community.

In another way, this idea of the 'political artist' – the tension between those with cultural hegemony and those without – is inherently false and imposed upon us from elsewhere. Bruguera's insistence that the artist take her time in order to mitigate the risks for other social actors is based on a bourgeois conception of the role of artist in society that we need not accept. This mirrors the intentional manufacturing of racial tensions in the industrial factory imposed by the owners in an effort to suppress resistance. These and other divisions permeate the collective psyche to the degree that we continue to impose them upon ourselves, possibly with even more vengeance. There is a way that we do more harm than good by distancing ourselves from the communities we work with out of fear of intervening where we don't belong. Many cultural workers, especially after having attended art school, are just as much in positions of material poverty or just as much indebted as the next guy. It is hard to discuss it when there is so much professional (or academic) posturing that is the function of the idea that your images-of-the-future matter if and only if you are paid to make them, or worse, the idea that you need to have an answer when someone in the Arts asks you 'so what are you working on right now?'. We don't want to talk about this poverty because we are ashamed of it. We don't want to ask because we might embarrass someone. In America, this is what keeps us from asking the family next door if they have enough food to eat but it is also what keeps us from asking the other artists we might work alongside if they received the same stipend or truly asking our would-be friends 'what can be done now?'

We live in strange times, increasingly precarious times, scary times that are poised to only get scarier unless we seriously intervene. Friendship has been and always will be the basis of political action. The point of prefiguration is bringing the future into the present and the primary way that we do this is in the forming and nurturing of our relationships with one another in the ways we enact them on a day-to-day basis. Doing this work well might mean a total restructuring of what is meant by political art (or political activity in general). It might mean that we abandon our comfortable stations altogether in favor of building stronger alliances within and among our friends so that, for one thing, we can better understand who the common enemy might be. To be a friend is the ultimate risk and it is the risk the artist needs to be willing to take.

1. Trotsky, Leon. "Fascism – What is it?" *The Militant*, January 16, 1932.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1944/1944-fas.htm>
2. Graeber, David. "The New Anarchists," *The New Left Review: Issue 13*, 2002.
3. Boggs, Carl. 1977. Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control. *Radical America* 11 (November), 100
4. This is not imply that those organizations are not generally doing good work.
5. For example, what even is this shit?  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/14/fashion/safety-pin-ally-activism.html>
6. McKee, Yates, "Introduction" *Strike Art* (Verso, 2016), 25.
7. Gramsci's explicit defense of the autonomous and rhizomatic force of the factory-council movement against fascist Italy, comes in the second volume of *The Prison Notebooks*: "The Turin movement was accused simultaneously of being "spontaneist" and "voluntarist" or Bergsonian. This contradictory accusation, if one analyses it, only testifies to the fact that the leadership given to the movement was both creative and correct. This leadership was not "abstract"; it neither consisted in mechanically repeating scientific or theoretical formulae, nor did it confuse politics, real action, with theoretical disquisition. It applied itself to real men, formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world, etc., which were the result of "spontaneous" combinations of a given situation of material production with the "fortuitous" agglomeration within it of disparate social elements. This element of "spontaneity" was not neglected and even less despised. It was educated, directed, purged of extraneous contaminations; the aim was to bring it into line with modern theory (Marxism)—but in a living and historically effective manner. The leaders themselves spoke of the "spontaneity" of the movement, and rightly so. This assertion was a stimulus, a tonic, an element of unification in depth; above all it denied that the movement was arbitrary, a cooked-up venture, and stressed its historical necessity. It gave the masses a "theoretical" consciousness of being creators of historical and institutional values, of being founders of a State. This unity between 'spontaneity' and 'conscious leadership' or 'discipline' is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, in so far as this is mass politics and not merely an adventure by groups claiming to represent the masses."
8. See: Hardt & Negri. "Of Love Possessed", *Commonwealth*, 2009. Also, Berlant, Lauren. *Desire/Love*, 2012.
9. See: Esposito, Robert. "Ecstasy", *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. Stanford University Press, 2010.

10. Churchill, Ward, and Jim Vander Wall. *The COINTELPRO papers: documents from the FBI's secret wars against domestic dissent*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990.
11. It is still relevant for us to understand how to protect one another.  
<https://crimethinc.com/2009/06/25/towards-a-collective-security-culture/>
12. "The traditional and vulgarized type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist" (Q123)



## The Work of the Institution in an Age of Professionalization

JAMES MCANALLY on February 23, 2016

The institution is in an age of professionalization, now as always. Imported and internalized narratives of corporate structures inform every level of our organizations, as our nonprofits are *non* in name only. This *non*, the definition of which can be stated as “not of the kind of class described,” is itself negated in our forms – our boards, our outcomes, our communities, our committees, our various attempts at sustainability. However, as Ben Davis staked out in the first of his 9.5 Theses: “Class is an issue of fundamental importance for art.”

We are exactly of the kind of class described: profit.

The institutions of art have become antagonistic to the space of art itself. Insert an MFA, perhaps Cooper Union or USC. Insert the museum, perhaps MoMA or better, the Broad. Insert the grant cycle, the fair season, the public education system. Insert our own moments of imagination, in the studio alone listening to ourselves talk, watching ourselves make, wondering if it is worth it. Insert Instagram, where our insecurities stream out, swipe down, and we wonder if we’ve taken an improper path, that \_\_\_ has

appropriately patterned his steps, that someone is selling, that something is being sold, that at least some people are traveling to Venice, to Miami, to LA, to Mexico City, to Middle America, and that perhaps this is the work itself.

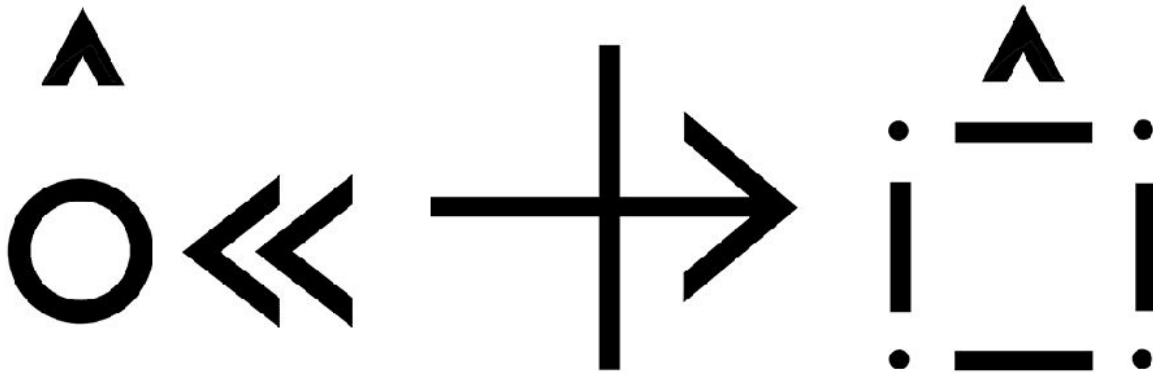
It is a moment of boom><bust, startups and gilt groups, biennial-as-spectacle over biennial-as-organism, biennial-as-flower, biennial-as-root system. It is a time of the accumulation of debt, the privileging of privilege. It is a moment of protest, of outrage. It is a moment where there are more artists than ever and fewer who know what to do next. It is a moment of protest, of outrage, and that perhaps this is the rage we use to propose new ways of articulating our way out.

What is the work of the institution in an age of professionalization? Andrea Fraser locates the roots of the nonprofit within a general distrust of the public sphere, stating in *L'1% c'est moi* that the private nonprofit model “has its nineteenth-century origins in the same anti-tax and anti-government ideology that led to the current situation: the principle that private initiatives are better suited to fulfill social needs than the public sector and that wealth is mostly productively administered by the wealthy.”

As arts organizers attempt to stake out positions for non-non profits, anti-profits (as in this publication), unprofitable for-profits, and hybrids between each of these, what is the future of the nonprofit, this negated space we've put so much stock in to sustain the arts?

Perhaps our institutions, for once, can help lead us, as they are where the bodies of artists meet, where the work of artists often make it to the public, where the public rightfully expects us to show up and show something of value.

We must articulate the forms of an art organization we can live in and with. To re-envision the reasons to continue, to perhaps propose a future for the nonprofit art space in America.



## **Manifesto for an art organization we can live in and with**

I. **To critique by building.** We must build conscious alternatives to the world as we experience it: sustainable structures that support artists, support ourselves, and model a world we want to see embodied more broadly. *An idea is not enough.* The structure of our critique must also be a place to live.

II. **To embody and enact structures that are sustainable, just, conceptual and diverse in idea, manifestation and act.** Many things exist, exhaustingly, so we must propose new forms, as well as adopt and extend old forms that work. There must be an aesthetic and ethical, ideological and material justification to continue. The forms of organization must advance alongside artistic practice, manifesting in as many iterations as art itself as a collaborator and co-conspirator rather than a passive container of inherited ideas.



**III. To support artists and organizers in their arc as individuals and practitioners and create a place for many people.** Not all will be 'in-common' but will create common ground for those involved to flourish. Our organizations must be survivable for founders and organizers, seeing the institution as a collective of individuals with diverse needs and concerns. In an age of precarity, anxiety and over-labor, we must care well in the ways we can.

**IV. To hold money as a tool to be used and a horizon to be overcome.** The methods of accessing money should be ethical and the uses of money should be to grow the whole structure, to support the needs of artists and of the public, and to care for the individuals within it. As a nonprofit, this articulates a fundamental aspect of the form: for money to be a tool for public good, to *take care* of those individuals and ideas our society does not. To echo the attempts of for-profits through accumulation, competition, and over-professionalization is to empty the form of its force. It is to fail every level of what we mean when we say the public, who have enough businesses as-is, but too few forms of care.

**V. To view art as a start, not the end.** Forms of care, shapes of living and platforms of meaning are the end. Art emerges in this arc. Art has no other life than this: to course through communities as a charged object altering our attempts at communicating meaning, one to another, one to many, many to a multitude, a multitude to one.

**VI. To understand our place in complex politics, ecologies and communities within and beyond art.** The precarity within art does not exempt us from engagement and existence within un-abstracted communities, as neighbors, as citizens, as advocates. We are no longer naive about our role in processes of gentrification, capitalization, and spectacle. Artists may often be both perpetrator and victim, yet we must actively oppose these new social roles.

**VII. To consider the intersectional implications of our actions in the Anthropocene, in America, in an evolving present.** Injustice has no place within an institution. The new institution, as with the new artist, protests.

**VIII. To age well, to sustain or end well.** An organization is also a kind of organism and it must not simply last, but live. As it ages, it must either retain an essential vitality through evolution of concept or form or it must end appropriately, supporting others still in its fall.

**IX. To create a continuity of history.** We aren't operating to sustain ourselves in a perpetual present: we inherit complex histories, we are a home for a time, and we propose alternate futures. We do not always need to live into the futures we propose: this is the after-life of the institution, embedded in its present.

*This text was initially written as an internal working document for The Luminary, a nonprofit arts organization in St. Louis, MO. It was an attempt to propose the value and future arc of the organization for those directly involved in its evolution.*

*The accompanying graphic was created by US English based on the ideographic language of Blissymbolics.*

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To Make A Public:  
Temporary Art Review  
2011–2016

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Edited by Sarrita Hunn and James McAnally

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As we exit this archive and emerge again as a public, we return to the beginning and ask: What idea are we bearing within our form?

Our individual voices have become cacophonous, a wild choir. We must be viewed collectively, as a group with motionable members and permeable borders. Returning to Siegfried Kracauer, we propose that an idea's "corporality is produced by the group," taking shape out of its initial abstract articulation to become a body—to "penetrate the extant world...to become reality [itself]."<sup>1</sup> As Marx proposed, reality is merely "the result of what we do together," a document of our shared labor expanding steadily into new spheres.<sup>2</sup>

In this moment, we are considering rebirth—horizontal, non-hierarchical, decentered, dispersed. We are considering art *after* capitalism – how we walk out of our present and into this afterlife with our bodies, as an idea become a body.

We are expanding on Jan Verwoert's conclusion in *Self-Organised*; he states "when we speak, we speak into the void of what society is not but could be. When we organize, we don't just expand networks, we work towards possible societies."<sup>3</sup> We are exploring the speculative here, but are working both from and toward the idea—sketching out models, excavating and erecting walls, moving out and in—considering what is not, but could be.

<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "The Group as Bearer of Ideas," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 144.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Nicolas Bourriaud, *Make Sure That You Are Seen (Supercritique)*, (London: Fact, the foundation for art & creative technology, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> Jan Verwoert, "All the Wrong Examples," *Self-Organised*, ed. Stine Hebert and Anne Szefer Karlsen (London: Open Editions, 2013) 134.

Though our interests and formational influences are far-reaching, we distill our work, with few exceptions,<sup>4</sup> specifically within the context of contemporary art. This isn't solely a matter of genre purity, but speaks to an expansive categorical shift in art itself that pushes past art history into lived history, and away from critical reflection towards speculations into futures in and beyond art.

While much ink has been spilled attempting to define the endless crises in art, what if there is not a crisis in art at all, but in fact a crisis in all other fields—a crisis in society itself? Consider all the 'experimental' research, design, and fabrication developments in architecture, biology, economics, theory, and other humanities fields that quickly get forced out of their respective silos and into art once they become *too* experimental, too speculative. What if the continual expansion of art is the narrowing definition of all other realms of inquiry, bent by market forces and reframed as art when they no longer fulfill or reinforce the logic of funders and intellectual gatekeepers? If art is, in fact, a final field that has some foot outside of capitalism—some space for (truly) free, critical thinking and autonomy—then we must not only defend and expand that space, but develop, improve, and bring our methodologies back to the public at large.

In a moment of globalized anxiety and institutional collapse, art isn't able to weather the coming storm alone. It is, as always, a document of the time and canary in the mine, so what does it mean for art to be a

<sup>4</sup> Particularly around the Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, we published a number of essays and articles that didn't return to the art world, but lived solely in proximity to protest.

transitional, transnational refuge for ideas fleeing from other fields? Further, how does it accomplish this in view of the extraordinary (or, perhaps, ordinary) inequities within the art world itself? The propositions artists in the present are making as they propose new institutions, new ways of working, and new ways of working together have more dramatic implications than ever before. *We don't just create work within society, we work towards possible societies.*

As a publication founded and edited by artists, we are paradigmatic of and participating in a historical shift toward artists creating institutions and other structures that reimagine and sustain particular kinds of (art)worlds, particular communities, and particular ways of working that model a world-building impulse perhaps embedded in artistic practice itself. Artists within this expanded present are intentionally cultivating and modeling practices that connect the work artists make with the structures they create. The structures artists are creating today are inseparable from the art (and sometimes are the art) and include not only the production and presentation of art, but also its assessment, distribution, and archiving, abandoning boundaries between the art world and an idea of society itself. The contained public of the art world re-enters other publics as an Öffentlichkeit.<sup>5</sup>

As Sven Lüttiken has argued, "The public sphere has been described as a fiction that creates its own reality. When people start addressing each other as its representatives, as [the] first modern art critics did, the idea

<sup>5</sup> Öffentlichkeit is translated most often as "public sphere," arising from Jürgen Habermas's seminal account *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

of this sphere becomes an invitation to start behaving as if it actually exists.”<sup>6</sup> This impulse cannot be seen as separate from other ruptures within late-stage capitalism, and we propose that the structures artists are creating are not just local and individualized but are pointing towards new systems altogether: an art after capitalism.

Art after capitalism is a fiction within capitalism, presently in the process of creating this new reality. If capitalism has no outside, itself a doctrinal fiction, then we cannot wait for others to write this public into existence. We are late-stage critics addressing each other as its representatives. This, too, is an invitation.

Clearly artists are working as if the world is different than it is. We organize alternative schools, spaces of free exchange, communities of critique; we practice and propose direct democracy and non-hierarchical forms of organization and care; we form working groups and co-ops and time banks and collectives; we open our homes, our studios, our bars, our backyards; we look closely, we curate, we care, we make and we make things happen. Through this period of sustained experimentation, we are anticipating the ways in which the world could or will be different.

Our provisional definition of an art after capitalism, then, is *artists creating autonomous models for collective self-organizing that critique current structures through building new ones*. In other words, the practice of autonomy requires critique, yet critique also assumes a process of creation, of building,

<sup>6</sup> Sven Lüttiken, “Secrecy and Publicity: Reactivating the Avant-Garde,” *New Left Review* 17 (Sept.–Oct. 2002), <https://newleftreview.org/11/17/sven-lutticken-secrecy-and-publicity>.

and if the critique speaks to a more foundational rupture, then that building becomes a form of world-building.<sup>7</sup>

The increasing number of these activities (documented throughout this publication and beyond) is clearly in reaction to the neoliberal, individualistic, market-driven cultural environment that has been dominant for at least the last thirty years. It could perhaps be said that the main drive behind this movement is to envision a counter-power cultural ecology that can exist self-sustainably—a model that supports and encourages collective self-organizing, not at the expense of criticality, or even individual practices, but entirely in support of them both, together, in solidarity—in *autonome*.

Ultimately, whether this constitutes an ‘art practice’ in some categorical sense of the word is fairly besides the point. However, the question points to a fundamental reshaping of the ways that art is made, circulated, supported, seen, written about, and sustained, carving out an equitable platform from which to advance. Art is not alone in this endeavor, nor could it be, but is putting these methodologies into practice with a distinct *techne*.<sup>8</sup>

The realm of the imaginary that artists are proposing occupies a simultaneously symbolic and concrete world-making process that responds to the present by articulating new futures. If the explicit critique within Occupy was that ‘capitalism isn’t working,’ and subsequent movements reiterated the

<sup>7</sup> See “Manifesto for an art organization that we can live in and with,” whose first tenet is “To Critique through Building.”

<sup>8</sup> *Techne* used here as a philosophical term describing principals whose intent is making or doing as opposed to disinterested understanding.

intersectional inequities at play, then this emergent moment is one in which artists (and others) explore speculative futures no longer contingent on capitalist assumptions—in other words, ways of working past capitalism.

This “after” is not yet present, but is first a question of our social imaginaries. We are interested in the ways in which “a new perspective is implicated in our knowledge of the present and visions of the future.”<sup>9</sup> Extending this to how we view and experience this speculative practice, Amelia Barikin and Nikos Papastergiadis state “art in general, and perspective in particular, continue to demonstrate that the mystery of creativity is not in mimesis, the capacity to copy the world, but rather the desire to make possible another vision of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Post-capitalist practices move speculatively from a method of seeing, to making, to sustaining, even as they contend with alternate views on multiple fronts.

Art after capitalism builds institutions around art’s emergence and circulation that enable its critiques to persist. We cannot remain naïve about how our works and words circulate among the multiple possible art worlds emerging and dissolving at any moment. We must create not just new narratives, but new structures to sustain us. We must create self-sufficient models that exist outside of the dominant structures of the art world. Institution building is inherent to this way of

<sup>9</sup> Amelia Barikin and Nikos Papastergiadis, “Ambient Perspective and the Citizen’s Moving Eyes,” *Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht: Valiz/BAK, 2015) 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

working past capitalism, because our work cannot remain radical without autonomous, interconnected structures to support it. We must critique through building. In order to enter this future, we must not just make, but become this public we propose.

In this moment, we are considering rebirth—horizontal, non-hierarchical, decentered, dispersed. We return to the beginning and ask: What idea are we bearing within our form? We are considering art after capitalism *becoming reality itself*.

## **New Constitutions**

### **New Constitutions: Institutions After Capitalism**

by James McAnally

### **I Can't Work Like This: On the Art of Boycotting**

by Tori Abernathy

### **Up to code but caught on the fringe: holding alternative space in emerging cultural economies**

by George Scheer

### **Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation**

by Rado Ištok

### **Ways of Learning at Grand Union**

by Tom Clark

### **Learning to Live Together: Artist Residency as Think Tank**

By Kayla Anderson

### **Making Art Politically: How We Gather**

by Anthony Romero and Abigail Satinsky





# New Constitutions: Institutions After Capitalism

JAMES MCANALLY on June 28, 2017

## [Institutions of Capitalism](#)

Opening this month in Oakland, the *Museum of Capitalism* is a conceptual conceit arranged in the form of a prefigurative institution. Its central position is that of a museum *looking back* at the era of capitalism applying a “museological gaze” to document this disappearing age and the forms of resistance found within it.<sup>1</sup> Even though the project is framed as a means to preserve a record of capitalism as it recedes, it is a museum that does not retell a particular past so much as foretell possible narratives forward. In the process, the museum is constructing an “archeology of the future,” a term Frederic Jameson adopts for the utopic impulse to imagine radical alternatives to the present.<sup>2</sup> Conjoined to this is Jameson’s assertion that “utopia as a form is not the representation of radical alternatives; it is rather simply the imperative to imagine them.”<sup>3</sup> The *Museum of Capitalism*, centrally, is an applied imperative to imagine the end of capitalism through the lens of an institution.

The museum itself is arranged as a durational exercise several years in the making with other as yet unannounced iterations to come. Situating itself between a singular, complex exhibition

and a permanent institution allows the museum to slip among forms as it suggests possible institutional modes after capitalism. The first public initiatives of the museum evoked particular markers of institutions under capitalism, such as a widely circulated architectural competition – appropriate given that the dominant identity of many museums is the spectacle of their buildings themselves – followed by an artifact donation drive<sup>4</sup> and a summit of the three museums of capitalism presently active.<sup>5</sup>



*The Museum of Capitalism. Photo by Brea McAnally.*

Organized around an open system of exhibitions, research, publications, the collection and preservation of art and artifacts related to capitalism, and other events and public initiatives, the museum resists strict definition, leaving it unclear whether its projected duration is the length of an exhibition or whether it is proposed as a more or less permanent institution. Does the Museum of Capitalism make its statement simply by enunciation, strengthened by the creation of a temporal institution with an iterable form, or could it survive into its speculative future as a

primary site of the “eroding” evidence of capitalism for some post-date onlooker? The answer, of course, is both yes *and* no and a refusal to require an answer is itself central to its aura.

Like any good utopia, the Museum rests between an impossible present and a practicable future. In fact, it is a future that only arrives through practice. To slightly amend Robert C. Elliott’s assertions about art in science fiction, a utopia can be judged by the quality and position of the institutions it foretells. Institutions, in their specificity and particular positions towards art, publics, or ethics, gather the collectivities of possible worlds into shapes that may sustain them.<sup>6</sup> The Museum of Capitalism does not need to succeed in representing alternatives, though it may do that as well; it must simply offer a renewed imperative to imagine post-capitalist practices. This “practicable alternative” is the urgent work of the institution – to create spaces in which one may reimagine an altered future, to create constellations of relations among artists, objects, and publics that resist commodity form, and to create forums of dissent, collaboration, and communing that too often feel equally necessary and non-existent.

Rather than place this burden on a single representative museum (a proposition that, as I’ll return to, is itself a contradiction for a post-capitalist institution), I am interested in opening the discussion to what an institution after capitalism consists of more broadly: What is its ethic? How is it formed? How specifically does it differ from those emergent within the era – our era – of capitalism? To arrive towards the future, we must first define the present with some brief sketches.

### **Institutions within Capitalism**

To understand the idea of the institution after capitalism, it is imperative to acknowledge the failure of the institution within capitalism, as well as the ruptures and contours at work within capitalism itself. The idea of the institution within capitalism is something of a paradox. It is a form meant to strategically fail when stressed so that it can be unendingly replaced and reiterated as capitalism evolves. A history of capitalism has to account for its capacity to devour its kids and any twinned institution acting in accord with capitalism tends to disaggregate if not outright disappear in subsequent phases of its development. As J.K Gibson-Graham makes

clear, capitalism “constitutes us” – patterning our institutional practices in its own image, dictating terms of development, and presenting us with the mirage that it encompasses all alternatives.<sup>7</sup> The institution within capitalism is always secondary to the demands of capitalism itself, predetermining its endpoint unless resistant structures are considered and constituted from the outset.



*After Ferdinand Waldemüller: The Harvest (1847). Lithograph on paper, 7 ½ x 9 inches (1887). Palouse Regional Studies Collection.*

The emergence of capitalism as we understand it is intertwined with the Protestant Reformation, a kind of predestination oriented towards ending history, as all religions tend to do. The precursor to Marx’s infamous “specter haunting Europe,” this spirit started working out its salvation in the open, splintering history with what came to be known as the Protestant Work Ethic, the Spirit of Capitalism.<sup>8</sup> This new economic actor, the Protestant, needed confirmation of

his path and found it in simultaneous austerity and accumulation – two approaches that have persisted in subsequent phases. This ethic was initially embodied through a complex set of values: a sense of calling towards one's work that encouraged over-labor alongside an attendant belief that material gains were physical manifestations of one's faith, all undercut with a disdain for waste as decadent, charity as enabling of laziness, and most outward expressions of wealth as idolatrous. Capitalism quickly remade the Reformation over, secularizing its spirit and reconstructing it into an amoral ethic of expansion, excess, and austerity.

Looking back over the past several centuries of accelerated re-articulations of capitalism, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello hypothesize a series of 'spirits' successively from the reformer to the industrialist to the bureaucrat and, finally, to the artist and infinitely flexible auteur.<sup>9</sup> We find in this final form a culmination of style. Destabilized, disrupted-disruptive, precarious laborers who nonetheless produce endless wealth (for the abstraction of the "market" rather than themselves) and who, like the Protestants, create based on a sense of calling and a tendency towards over-labor. Now, though, the market is the only afterlife to be achieved and the ethic is entirely unclear. Capitalism has constituted us and we no longer imagine an end outside of its institutions. The *spirit* of capitalism turned out to be an appropriate image: an immaterial, infinite entity negotiating its salvation through imprecise instruments.

The trickle down of capitalism into our era's art institutions is easy enough to find in the precise point in which expansion meets austerity: Where the new \$422 million Whitney Museum of American Art towers over the Meatpacking District as artists mount protests for even meagre stipends to support their work. Where the Met expands into the Whitney's old Breuer building only to find itself "broke" and director and/or direction-less, a public museum needing to pass on its debts to attendees. Where the MOCA LA has record crowds yet barely escapes bankruptcy.<sup>10</sup> Where the museum building boom continues unabated while the NEA enters shutdown procedures. This is capitalism's new institutional ethic: exploit any advantage, move up, move in, pass on costs, privatize, expand your space and lay off staff. Project austerity, demand it, while concentrating resources under cover, all under the auspices of increased competition from other institutions and imported ideas of efficiency.



*The Whitney Museum of American Art's new building and the end of the (High) Line pictured as they would like to be seen. Image courtesy of the Whitney.*

Placing two superficially opposing modes of organization in parallel, we can see the groundwater that feeds our widescreen art world remains the same no matter the scale. Take first the proliferation of the private museum as one of the fastest-growing sectors of institutional expansion. Based on obscene individual wealth and a celebration of individual taste as consumptive spectacle, we've begun to reach a kind of zenith of this form through the Broad in Los Angeles, which looms above its neighboring museums and whose line continuously wraps around the building, often hours in length to even enter the building. The Broad manifests a museology of capitalism instituting its founders name and taste as form. An old trick, yes, but one that seems to really work, no? Individual wealth, which once typically made it back to the older model capitalist construction of the "public" museum in the form of donations and honorary acquisitions has instead increasingly collected into singular pools. That massive crowds line up eagerly either way is simply a symptom. These spaces aren't wrong about their world; they are perhaps its apotheosis, the end of a line.

The distant kin of the private museum, radically altered in appearance though still caught under comparable logic, is the precarious independent or alternative space petitioning for its place within the same art world. These spaces live in the margins as a minor league that deny their minor status in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, instead serving as testing grounds for capitalist subsumption.<sup>11</sup> This is explicitly the defense commonly offered as an expression of their value: they take the risks on new artists and ideas that lead to later sales in commercial spaces and acquisitions for museum collections. This early-stage investment, the argument goes, is why these spaces deserve support rather than any value immediately immanent within their work itself, much less for the very fact that they offer a space of possible opposition or collectivity outside of capitalist logic. To follow this argument to its end is to say that its function is fully dependent on capitalist metrics of success, just slightly deferred and with significant risk – to find oneself, finally, in the Whitney or at least a spirit appearing on a High Line billboard visible from its cantilevered balconies.

The value given or taken may be variable in kind or even degree, but its success is still individual, unable to de-emphasize its individual acclaim in favor of a far-reaching collectivity. This, at its core, is what makes an institution essentially capitalist no matter the scale or experimental veneer it embodies otherwise. Quoting @fucktheory, the failure of institutions under capitalism can be summed up succinctly through their desire to establish “value through individuation.” Continuing from FT's Twitter thread, we could say that the capitalist institution carries a “pathological inability to de-emphasize the individual in the interest of collective benefit.”<sup>12</sup> At present, we can clearly diagnose that the apparatus aimed towards social good (“the institution”), which is purportedly organized in some way outside of the logic of profit (“the non-profit” or “alternative space”), continues to operate within the logic of competition and individuation, claiming some corner of the market and aggressively marketing its competitive advantage. This is the institution acting in parallel to Boltanski and Chiapello's precarious, flexible laborer. Given a landscape of perpetual precarity, the institution goes rogue as a free agent attempting to undercut the competition by offering a more efficient product, poaching funders and competing for attention in an oversaturated market.

This is not to say that this is the only form the non-profit or independent institution takes today, simply to clarify our terms in order to strike distinctions between an essentially capitalist and an anti- or post-capitalist practice. We are in an era of hybrids – contingent spaces operating contradictorily on multiple levels at once. To be contingent is not the same as being compromised and we must refuse the assertion that any capitalist activity leads us back to the infinite mirrors of capitalism. A space may exist as capitalist in one sphere, and trespass those borders in another. Autonomy is a mirage under a capitalist system and interdependence among multiple modes is a necessary part of institutional (and individual) existence. However, any institution that opposes capitalism’s logic by advocating and installing commoning, collectivity and mutual support within its active structures and granular practices precedes the era of post-capitalism that is our horizon here, prefiguring it and offering some path out. This is a practice that, again, does not necessarily represent radical alternatives in all spheres of activity, but offers an imperative and, importantly, a means of imagining them. The foothold requires other rungs to become a ladder but even one step gets us off the ground.

### **Institutions After Capitalism**

We find it easy to sequester art institutions and artistic practice as a whole as subject to the whims of the political, whatever its manifestation, without acknowledging its potential radical ruptures. It is clear that categorical shifts in the political domain have direct implications on artistic institutions in particular, as seen most immediately in the Trump administration’s dismantling of the NEA or Putin’s direct suppression of artistic dissent through state coercion, among a multitude of other examples currently being enacted. Artistic practice is likewise no substitute political practice but the important point here is that it also should not be dismissed as a potential opening into a prefigurative practice of institution building.



*Tania Bruguera banner, The Time Has Come For Us To Take Our Institutions, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Image by the author.*



In the shaping of an institution, we are inscribing a kind of world we wish to inhabit. Without larger shifts, this world is always contingent, yet it is also concrete. It is a space and system in which post-capitalism makes itself immanent; it flashes into the present within an exhibition or collaboration, in the ways decisions are made and how dissent is engaged, the forms in which ideas are dispersed or how a public is gathered in space. All this gathers into how a museum or alternative space is formed from the ground up, a concept made manifest into an institution.

Given our definitions, post-capitalist institutions cannot be considered as singular entities, but require, in Gerald Raunig's terms, an "institutent" or "constituent" practice that forms around their work eroding borders between institutions as distillations of individual efforts. Following Raunig, "if instituent practice can be understood as a process...then it is the event of instituting in which it is pre-decided how cooperation, collectivity and participation develop."<sup>13</sup>

In other words, processes such as cooperation, collectivity, and participation, along with an unending list of daily practices towards commoning are an alternate set of ethics that must be part of the organizing impulse of the institution from the outset and emerge as the result of premeditated decisions. Foundationally, we must first acknowledge that our modes of instituting dictate the end position of the institution. If capitalist practices are the default under the regime of the present, then concrete dispositions must be considered, constructed, constituted and *practiced* towards other ends.

A position towards the present is a protest ethic – to be post-capitalist, one must practice anti-capitalism, imagining new institutions in which new habits are formed.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the Protestants weren't so far off in their insistence of not being reformed, but "always reforming."<sup>15</sup> Reformation as an active practice wasn't itself the source of capitalism – that was other interrelated impulses – but this pre-capitalist position may point to one way out. Writing in related territories, Antonio Negri surmises that "only life in a constant state of renewal can form a constitution." As a prefix, *con* indicates an institution is acting "together" or "with" another in order to enact new forms in common. Like Raunig, the *con* of Negri's constitution announces a collectivity from the outset. This is the new constitution that is our horizon here.

What would this ethic consist of? How do we *work* differently within institutions? How do institutions work differently? How do we not embody austerity, but joy? How do we not replicate (self-) exploitation but create spaces of care? How do we reject expansion and accumulation in favor of commonwealth and generosity? How do we not defer utopia as an uncertain salvation, but inscribe it into our present, even in part, even if contingent, even if short-lived?

Can we propose a new constitution of sustainable, but unstable institutions? Spaces that deny individuation of attention and concentration of resources towards considerations of the collective. Situations that shed the borders of the institution and act in multiple at any moment. Can this ethic be instituted or, as we insist – *constituted* – within a succession of spaces, networks, and other constellations among artists? Our utopia insists upon it. This is the work of the institution today: to put into practice a new ethic of an emergent and unnamed after to capitalism and to hold it in common with one another.

*This is the first in a series of texts by the author entitled New Constitutions considering ways in which institutional practices prefigure other forms of organization towards the commons. This was written on the occasion of the opening of the Museum of Capitalism and was accompanied by a discussion with the museum's founders, Fictilis, as well as Anti Lab, Art for a Democratic Society, and Related Tactics.*

1. From the Museum of Capitalism's "about" statement on their website: <http://www.museumofcapitalism.org/about/> (accessed June 2017)
2. Frederic Jameson, "Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions" (Verso Books, 2005)
3. Ibid, p 416

4. Editor's note: The Artifact Donation Drive was organized as part of this publication's anthology and exhibition, *Document V*, at The Luminary in March, 2016.
5. The summit, held on March 11, 2017 in Berlin, included other museums of capitalism such as Museum des Kapitalismus in Berlin and Musée du C/Kapitalisme in Brussels
6. Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia* (University of Chicago Press, 1970)
7. J.K. Gibson Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
8. Max Weber's formative text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1905 set up, in his words, a "conceptual definition" of capitalism peculiar link to Protestantism.
9. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Verso Books, 2007)
10. This statement is little more than shorthand for an astounding series of expansions, deficits, layoffs and austerity measures at museums throughout the US. As *New York Magazine* reported in "What Broke The Met", "The Met shed around 90 staff members (in 2016), but MoMA also offered buyouts in the midst of an expansion — and just after receiving a \$100 million gift. The Brooklyn Museum cut staff in response to rising costs. Out West, the LACMA had its own overleveraged expansion, and L.A.'s MoCA was still emerging from the brink of bankruptcy." (*New York Magazine*, April 2017)
11. As Stephen Shukaitis states in relation to his imprint, *Minor Compositions*, "The notion of the minor figures broadly in Deleuze and Guattari's work, underpinning an approach to politics not based on attempting to seize and control apparatuses of power, but working beneath and below them."
12. All quotes come from @fucktheory's Twitter thread from 1/15/17. The account is suspended as of 6/26/17.
13. Gerald Raunig, "Instituting and Distributing: On the Relationship Between Politics and Police Following Rancière as a Development of the Problem of Distribution with Deleuze"
14. A complete consideration of the protest work ethic and alternate imaginaries of the institution will follow in this series of texts.
15. Some form of the phrase "Ecclesia semper reformanda est" dates back at least to Jodocus van Lodenstein in 1674, though it allegedly dates to St. Augustine centuries before.



## I Can't Work Like This: On the Art of Boycotting

TORI ABERNATHY on June 13, 2017

*"The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools."*

– *Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War*

*I Can't Work Like This* is a reader on boycotts in contemporary art published by Sternberg Press in early 2017. The publication results from a workshop led by the editor, Joanna Warsza, at the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts in 2015 where many of the twenty participants now serve as co-editors. As the curator of public programs for Manifesta 10, Warsza notes that she found herself in a difficult place; she "empathized with the claims of the boycotters, yet [she] didn't think that quitting was an option. [She] felt that the show must go on, but it should not go on undisturbed."<sup>1</sup> The workshop was later organized in an effort to grapple with the ongoing debacle over whether 'to continue', and if so, when and how. The course and

the corresponding text address the popularity of the boycott within recent biennials by looking closely at four case studies: 13th Istanbul Biennial in 2013, Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg in 2014, 19th Biennale of Sydney in 2014, and 31st Bienal de Sao Paulo in 2014.

The release event for *I Can't Work Like This* held at Proqm in Berlin took place on the evening of the 28th of March, only eleven days after the artist Parker Bright stood in protest wearing a t-shirt, sharpie emblazoned with 'BLACK DEATH SPECTACLE' in front of a painting by a white woman of Emmett Till's mutilated corpse, and only a week after Hannah Black published an open letter to the curators and staff of the Whitney Biennale calling for the paintings' removal and destruction. On August 28th, 1955, Emmett Till was lynched at the age of fourteen after being accused of flirting with a white woman. In an interview with Andrew Goldstein of Artnet regarding the perplexing decision to create such a work in our time, the artist admitted "I always had issues with making this painting, everything about it. And it is still uncertain for me." When asked if the public reaction to the painting would influence the future of her artistic practice she responded "I'm sure it has to."

I still have so many questions; like for one, how even can you? But also, seeing as the painting was for some reason not removed from the exhibition as a direct result of the public outcry, what can we learn from the successes and failures within the history of boycotts inside and outside the sphere of contemporary art that might make our campaigns more successful? Or, at least, what can we learn that will embolden us in the future?

With these questions in mind, I eagerly headed over to the release event in Mitte. Despite the fact that the controversy was very much on the lips of the internationalist crowd between puffs of cigarettes before the official discussion began, the goings-on failed to be covered in any meaningful way aside from a cursory mention of how 'topical' the discussion was that week. This was troubling, but unfortunately not unexpected. That is, it is not surprising for the space of critical discourse within the arts community in Berlin to fall short of having any relevance to real actions going on in the world, apparently not even when those actions actually impact art world elites.

The event featured brief presentations by Warsza as well as three of the publication's contributors. Ahmet Ögüt, artist and 'sociocultural initiator' opened by discussing the successes of the boycott at the Biennale of Sydney in 2014 and emphasized the collective nature of this boycott, citing the solidarity with simultaneous local struggles as a contributor to the boycott's success. Tirdad Zolghadr noted that artists are inherently already complicit in the structures of power the boycott seeks to address, and that it would behoove them to learn to 'stop disidentifying with power'. Julieta Aranda, contributing editor of e-flux, reminded us that as calls for boycotts continue to mount and their sexiness soars, there must still be those of us willing to set roots through practices grounded in building the kind of world we wish to see.

As a post-studio approach to artmaking becomes normalized, artists and cultural workers increasingly experience an implicit pressure to derive a sense of authorship from the actions they perform in daily life. The declaration of an *auteur* is integral for the artist to position themselves in the art market. How does this requirement impact the effectiveness of the boycott in contemporary art? Can we use the term 'boycott' to describe the process of artists refusing to present their work in the context of the biennale, if the arts are produced under conditions of 'sponsorship' that is related to, but distinct from that of 'ownership'?

The first to speak, Ögüt offered a basic timeline and overview of the protests leading up to the 19th Biennale of Sydney, where nine artists planned to withdraw their participation in response to calls from local activists to boycott the biennale due to its relationship with Transfield Services Ltd. On February 4th, 2014, Australian art educator, Matthew Kiem kickstarted the proceedings when he published an open letter to colleagues outlining the chain between the company and the injustices taking place on the Manus Island and Nauru detention centers, ultimately claiming that "profits from mandatory detention fund the Biennale." Ögüt was clear to point out that the group of artists involved did not refer to their actions as a boycott, but as a conditional withdrawal. "We never used the term boycott, we were also targeted by the boycott call because we were part of the institution." When certain conditions were met, namely that Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, director of Transfield Holdings, stepped down as chair of the board and the Biennale cut all ties with Transfield, seven artists resumed their participation, including Ögüt.

As he closed, Öğüt emphasized the distinction between sponsorship and ownership as it pertains to the culture industry and cultural workers' capacity to make waves through collective engagement. "The Sydney Biennale is not owned by the sponsorship, the biennale is not dependent on the sponsors entirely. Ownership here is a cultural heritage thing so it is owned by all Australians but also the international community that contributed to the biennale... If you have contributed to something in the past that puts you in the position, I believe, to say a word about the future of that institution. It is basically a collectively created cultural heritage and we have to take care of it for the long term." His statement, as well as the small victory of the Sydney Biennale boycott, reflects the way in which artists who choose to act, or not, are always embedded in a cultural apparatus that extends beyond the specific form or content of the works they produce for public display. Cultural production today is embedded in not only a network of institutional support and patronage, but a supply chain that links viewership to the manufacturing and service sectors, whether these relationships are made visible or not.

For many today, 'boycott' alludes to the consumer boycotts popularized by the anti-globalization movement of the early 21st century. When we look at the boycott in more historical contexts, we can see that what notably characterizes the tactic at large is the application of social pressure towards concrete demands. The term 'boycott' is actually an eponym for the campaign of ostracization inflicted on the land agent and Englishman, Charles Boycott in late 19th century Ireland.

Deep in the Lough Mask of County Mayo, the newly-formed Land League insisted that Boycott temporarily reduce rents by 25 percent when poor harvests made famine likely for his tenant farmers. In a speech to locals, Charles Stewart Parnell of the League encouraged the refusal of any communication with those who did not meet their demands. Thus when Boycott failed to comply and attempted to evict eleven of his tenants, local housewives swiftly caught word and began throwing mud and manure at the carriers until they left with their notices in hand. Soon after, locals stormed the estate, urging Boycott's workers to leave their positions. Likewise, workers in nearby shops, the blacksmith, the laundress, the postman, and others refused service to Captain Boycott and his family.<sup>2</sup>

Boycotts have never intended to function along the same material economic basis as the strike. One of the primary ways to distinguish the boycott from the strike is the boycott's emphasis on embarrassment and the use of social pressure. Often, a boycott is a tactic employed when there is no possibility to strike in the traditional sense, or when a strike would otherwise be ineffective. The boycott makes use of collective power in a kind of performative social campaign, often with media attention playing a crucial role, to call attention to the scorned subject. In the case of Charles Boycott, a strike would have been nullified by the immense access to wealth and capital Boycott elsewhere had access to when compared to that of his farmer tenants.

The boycott against Boycott actually garnered international attention when he wrote to the *The London Times* detailing his plight and requesting aid. Funds were raised to send fifty volunteer harvesters – and more than 1,000 Royal Policemen to protect them – to bring in what was left of the crops on Boycott's estate. Over £10,000 was spent to harvest a yield worth about £500 and Boycott returned to Suffolk shortly thereafter. Boycotting quickly became a staple in the toolbox of the tenants movement in Ireland, and later, for political mobilizations at large. Fast forward two centuries later, and it is clear that in the case of the Sydney Biennale, international press attention played a major role in the director's decision to step down. In both these cases, it is clear that successful boycotts do not happen in a vacuum; they happen when social actors from a number of fields apply pressure in tandem.

Julieta Aranda, contributing editor of *e-flux* journal, likened the stance of the artistic boycott to that of *Bartelby* when he utters the enigmatic line 'I would prefer not to'.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on the #J20 Art Strike, of which she was a participant, she noted that she would prefer "that we keep our spaces open, actually addressing what is going on and proposing alternatives." She expressed concern that art's affair with activism challenges the autonomy of the arts. She is simultaneously worried that artists who withdraw their participation are not doing the grunt work of building social movements and that some artists, accustomed to self-promotion as they are, make their careers out of their participation in the boycott.

Remember the popular adage from the leftist Twitterverse, "There is no such thing as ethical consumption under capitalism"? Well, the same is true for where we get our money, as the labor



theory of value would help us understand. If we actually take this to its logical endpoint, the only ethical thing we can do is abolish work entirely (and reduce our consumption as much as possible), but this is not something we can do alone. This is why I find the critique of political actions within the arts on the grounds that artists 'benefit' to be off base. Or as Tirdad Zolghadr put forward during the Q&A in response to the idea that boycotting is a sexy career move: "I encourage you to give it a shot and I think you'd be surprised. You can show me an artist who has made a career off of boycotts and I'll show you 200 who have made a career out of schmoozing and kissing up, or more actually. Who in this room can honestly say that they are not pursuing a career? I think that if you are pursuing a career out of something that is as (...) as boycotting, I don't have a problem with it." We can call folks out for their dirty money – or social capital, as it were – but to start digging around in the arts with these questions, we risk opening up Pandora's box to all the filthy capital floating around.

There are plenty of artists out there, enough of them to be making a career out of pretty much any kind of act, or its documentation. Does it leave a bad taste in the mouth of those who are not seeking to up the ledger of their social capital for their involvement in the boycott or the strike? Sure, and I don't blame them. But I don't think it makes very much sense to judge the efficacy of a political tactic on the basis that there are artists cramming their part in that activity into their portfolio. This is a separate problem. Tirdad continued, "the issue is how to familiarize yourself with power and to stop disidentifying with it in a way that assumes that the art world is the same as it was in 1968. If that is something you manage to pull off by means of boycotts, then more power to you." This is not to say that we shouldn't open the jar full of evils, but we have to be prepared that when we do so, we might end up finding that the only way to clean up the arts is for all of us to abandon it *as a profession* altogether. And wasn't it Ranciere who reminded us that the category of the artist, as we understand it today, is only a necessary one – and therefore it exists as a distinct role – under the conditions of alienation felt by those working for a living.<sup>4</sup> To render the profession unnecessary would be to spread the aesthetic regime across the salt of the earth, would be to change the world. If we were trace our complicity in the structures of power, rather than blowing smoke when offer to speak truth to it (if we do at all), we would at least be left with the sliver of hope that keeps us moving forward.



remember, kids...

In an interview with the reader's editors, Aranda claims that making ethical demands on the arts results in a narrowing of the field and that the imposition of moral imperatives erases the autonomy of the arts. She says that to demand that artists act ethically "amounts to saying that all art should only be about good things and good deeds, about fixing the world, about saving the whales, etcetera. But if we make all our work about these issues, what happens then to transgression, ... form, ... structure, ... technical development, what happens to all the other things that have normally preoccupied artists?"<sup>5</sup> Aranda's point is a logical one, but I'm not so sure who or what the autonomy of the arts is intended to serve in this case. Maybe I'm biased,

but I would rather have an art world that is concerned with its ethical implications than one that is preoccupied with structure and form.

Frederick Jameson, in an attempt to articulate the role of aesthetics in late capitalism insists on an aesthetics of cognitive mapping<sup>6</sup>, a way of actually locating our position within the complex social order we are stuck in, making sense of the neverending data streams and variables of a millenarian era, in order to navigate towards post-capitalism. This is necessary in a time when the impacts of production are illegible in the center, felt in the peripheries, but the source remains abstract. It is precisely contemporary art's preoccupation with the technical sublime – a term borrowed from political writer Nick Snircek – that prevents contemporary art from offering anything to us as political subjects, prevents it from doing anything but serving elite interests. We need to imagine a better world and put it into action, and to do so we need a way of pinpointing our disposition.

Art has an important role in fostering this utopian imagination, in developing this affect, in helping us imagine something other than being stuck in, as Mark Fisher puts it, this capitalist realism, but it can't accomplish this if it insists on prioritizing the subjective encounter of the viewer with the work. When I think of Zolghadr's observation that contemporary artists insist on disidentifying with power, I am reminded that semantic indeterminacy is one of the defining features of contemporary art practices. We cannot do anything to move towards a post-capitalist world if we demand an autonomy that is not actually indicative of the way in which artists are not only in bed with power, but embedded within a network of existing social and economic relations with other workers and other fields. In short, maybe autonomy that Aranda is worried about losing might already be lost (if it ever existed), and is not worth fighting for anyway.

When responding to the question "Does art need ethics?," Aranda summarized her position the following way: "I always explain it with this sentence: I would not trust a plumber to perform heart surgery. A plumber does plumbing and a heart surgeon does heart surgery. Art is not going to fix the world; artists are going to make art, not solve the migrant crisis. They might make you look at the problems of the world, but fixing them is something else."<sup>7</sup> Humorous and disarming at first blush, there are a number of ways that this analogy breaks down. For one,

heart surgery is an operation that absolutely requires years of training to perform, but nonetheless I would contend that most individuals are actually capable of obtaining this level of expertise if they do so desire. In the United States, where only one percent of plumbers, pipelayers, pipefitters and steamfitters are women, I know some folks in the Midwest actively working to help women and gender non-binary folks receive the education needed for these positions. Although this union job does have its own training requirements, for those without bachelor degrees in the US, plumbing is one of the few middle class professions still available. The point is that there is nothing integral to a profession that should bar anyone else from participation if they will to do so, but mobilization doesn't work that way anyway, or at least it shouldn't. No one benefits from limiting participation in social movements to supposed experts.

In much of the movement work I've participated in, concerned with prefiguring horizontal modes of action, we value the alternation of roles, if there are roles at all. While the commonly held belief that specialization improves the efficiency of production can be challenged in this practice, the more crucial point is that encouraging a diversification of tasks and responsibilities leaves everyone better equipped to participate in mobilizations as needed and based on their own desire to opt-in. Theoretically, this practice is intended to remove the coercive elements typically associated with 'work' and therefore much of our activity today. The intention is to prefigure an alternative to the alienation that the worker commonly experiences from themselves, from other workers, and from their work under capitalism. This alienation depends not only on specialization itself, but principally on the category of the artist holding the reins of culture.

Artists<sup>8</sup> are understood as those who are able to make a career of professing and practicing an imaginative art. We would not need this special category if the nature of work, in general, was such that all workers professed themselves imaginatively through their work. There should be no hierarchical impulse with respect to who is able to produce images of the world they seek to inherit. It would be better to abolish the autonomy of the arts altogether than to insist on their encasement within an imaginary vacuum.

Of course, implicit hierarchies are an inherent aspect of our social relations whether we intend for them to surface or not, but it is in the space of negotiating how to accomplish a shared goal

together in a meaningful way that the so-called 'work' of changing-the-world is done. We're learning something new. Perhaps we can agree that signing an online petition itself might make you feel good, but it grants you a kind of dangerous complacency in a similar way that buying your third wave coffee does. None of these are compelling substitutes for direct action. But perhaps we can also all agree that we need a diversity of tactics. We can agree that there is no individual mode of resistance that can alone radically alter the existing order, but there is also no individual, no particular role that can take the task on independently and no singular profession responsible for doing so either.

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2. Clark, Samuel, and James Donnelly, Jr. *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914*. Madison: Univ Of Wisconsin Press, 1986.
3. Melville, Herman. *Bartleby, The Scrivener : a Story of Wall-Street*, 1853.
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5. Ibid, 67.
6. Jameson, Fredric. "Cognitive Mapping" in Nelson, C. & Grossberg, L., ed. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. University of Illinois Press, 1987.
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8. "Artist" *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (13 May 2017)



## Up to code but caught on the fringe: holding alternative space in emerging cultural economies

GEORGE SCHEER on January 13, 2017

I want to reflect for a moment on the tragic fire in Oakland, which among its victims were musicians and visual artists, trans and queer. [See: [The Ghost of Art Spaces by Liat Berdugo](#)] We have a task today to explore the conditions and resources for creative experimentation in our home state of North Carolina, and also nationally with intricacies of our locales. Among its many lessons, the tragedy of Oakland points to unrelenting drive of artists to create, to make space for their work and their audiences, despite the conditions, despite the resources, and despite their own safety. We are also confronted with how the value we place in artists, or don't, directly relates to the resources we place in our community infrastructures, housing, businesses, and development.

I see this in what my grandmother left behind, a remainder of 60-years of commerce and consumption, an exhausted small, independent business in a divested and deteriorating historic downtown. After her passing, her store remained filled to the brink with an inventory and treasure trove of things. This three story fire trap, contained an incredible and seemingly infinite archive of 20th C. cultural surplus — an incredible artist resource.



*Store left by Sylvia Gray upon her passing, 1998. Photo credit Sidney Gray*

When we took over the store in 2003, we decided nothing would be for sale or leave the building. We wanted to keep the collection intact, to immerse ourselves inside it, and explore an alternative way of making and imagining in context and among things. We saw a future for this place as a connector for artists around the globe and within our own community. Over the past 15 years Elsewhere persisted and grew. It grew in a place where arts funding was conservative and scarce, in a place where artist residencies aren't common, where you're asked if you make paintings, where experimentation isn't a practice or a goal, and where fine arts or crafts determine what art is — made by skillful hands, and available for sale. Most of our community

isn't concerned with contemporary art and its turn toward social engagement, community investment, and activism. But at the same time, the city, its leaders, foundations, and organizations are all invested in art, adept at gathering resources, and effective in the production of not-for-profit and social justice work. For our part, we were savvy as we articulated our values in art, cultural vitality and placemaking. We tried to be incredibly welcoming at the front door. We were privileged by our whiteness.

For over 10 years we hid in plain sight, obscured the illegality of what we were doing, and played among the complexities of 'a store where nothing's for sale that became a living museum.' In the gray area of a grandfathered old store we were protected by alliances and by getting grants. We celebrated progress, not sustainability. We ended each season with a different end game and strategy for the next year. We built systems and partnerships, internships and a staff, workshops for the residents, a kitchen, a library. We folded fabric and arranged toys, made manuals and g-docs. Putting everything in order was both the Art and the only way we'd survive. Amidst this uncertainty we built a home for artists around the globe, a connective hub, a resource for people with ideas. If people asked where the artists' lived we'd say, we are a 24 hour studio, a term also used by the residents of GhostShip.



*Artist talks by South Elm Artist during the pre-proposal site visits by 15 artists commissioned for projects in the South Elm neighborhood, funded by ArtPlace America, 2015. (pictured, Camp Little Hope).*



In 2011, the Warhol Foundation, which cares for spaces like ours, asked two questions, 'Do you want to go on? and What do you need to be sustainable?' Answer: Yes. Fix our leaky roof, production resources for artists, and seed funding to restore the building. We gathered a team of board members and local volunteers serving as consultants to build a campaign. We wrote and received support from local and national foundations. We ran a kickstarter that brought in over 300 individuals. We were championed by a handful of local donors who believed Elsewhere was important for Greensboro and a future for collaborative art. In total we raised \$850,000 to restore the building, install life safety, residential coding, heat and air for year round operations. After 14 seasons of precarious operation, proof of concept, and cat and mouse games, we are, as of August, secure in our home.

It is pretty incredible that there are people in Greensboro willing to turn out for their alternative art space, as they did for the historic Carolina Theater and the Woolworths that became the International Civil Rights Center and Museum. Some developers and civic leaders are doing the same for dilapidated buildings throughout downtown — an independent bookstore, a maker space, new ventures by local restaurateurs. Typical of an emerging cultural economy of our scale, the gradual evolution and varied support of new and old ventures are championed for the momentum they bring. But momentum leaves people and things behind, evacuates spaces, folds services, and creates blind spots among the “game changers” and “catalysts.” In Greensboro we are building a Performing Arts Center and raised an unprecedented \$70 Million of public and private funds in under 6 months, alongside a new \$12 million public park, and \$36 million Greenway under construction.

While these accomplishments are tremendous, they are the effect of years of cultural advocacy from organizations that persisted in a less than rich arts ecology. 40+ years of active divestment in downtown makes capital investment expedient, and the rapid flush of infrastructure threatens to cannibalize existing organizations inside and out. The mantra, 'all boats rise,' obscures disparities and jeopardizes the organic qualities and sustainability of long standing community organizations. Increasing property values, renovation costs, and entrepreneurial models inevitably displace people and businesses while increasing tax bases rarely return resources to the cultural sector (let alone the people displaced). Instead, reliance is built on private

philanthropy to accomplish public good, resilience is expected from artist seeking exposure, and private investors are encouraged to leverage public dollars to build new markets and public services that align with a pro forma. Foundations become policy makers, fund holders become committee leaders, and private philanthropy is tied up for multiple years in capital. Dollars for organizational operation and capacity building become increasingly competitive and scarce. Some criticality and planning could address these issues, but no one wants another plan on the shelf! We could use a little pattern language in our cultural economy.

Consider that Elsewhere's three year effort to raise just under a million dollars is dwarfed by \$200 million invested into our block by private and foundation developers in the last two years. The International Civil Rights Center and Museum, set in the former Woolworths, took 17 years to open after its building was saved from demolition. Over the last 15 years, 4 or 5 underground music venues appeared and disappeared, closed down by city enforcement. Recently, Bennett College, one of two women's HBCU in the nation, closed its visual art department. Coffee shops are the only spaces local artists can perform or show work with limited barriers for access. 17 'grassroots' organizations receiving project support from Greensboro's arts council pull from a tiny pot of just \$125,000. Community artist projects like The Artist Bloc, Casa Azul, Greensboro Mural Project, Poetry Basketball, and Cackalac Thunder, remain underfunded because they don't fit a neat downtown narrative, aren't savvy non-profits, and present challenging work in their own vernacular. I suspect similar ecologies could be mapped for other cities at their scales.



*In affirmation that #blacklivesmatter, BLM: Gate City, Queer People of Color Collective (QPOCC), and Elsewhere occupied the new Lebauer Park with a Read-In. 40 police on bikes arranged against the Read-In, with full surveillance, in light of the recent Charlotte Uprising.*

Despite their relegation to an order of scarcity, alternative spaces thrive in emerging cultural economies. Their experimentation breaks down rigid thinking in the cultural sector by assembling new audiences, partnerships, and by mobilizing ideas into the public sphere. Elissa Blount Moorhead, Executive Director of Station North Arts and Entertainment District in Baltimore said in response to Oakland and the closing of Baltimore's Bell Foundry, "You can't call yourself an arts district or a city that cares about the arts if you only have spaces that people are trying to cobble together. There have to be spaces where people can live in community." As mid-size cities regenerate themselves around the renewal of their downtowns we should consider the opportunity for new social formations. Art's oft discussed fascination with accelerated capitalism luridly pictures artists clinging to the fringes of major metropolises. But places outside artworld bubbles where broad cultural shifts are absolutely necessary to protect lives, and are in fact most vulnerable to a critical art-activist incursions, are often invisible to the liberal art "centers." In a state like North Carolina, where congressional districts were redrawn to remove civil liberties, the municipalities are actually responsive enough to their constituencies and liberal enough in their values, to distribute cultural capital and invest in communities as part of culture—with the right pressure.

We've all experienced council leaders, economic development agencies, developers, planning departments, and corporate board members struggling with clunky ideas like Placemaking. Place is something felt, not a strategy. Yet we keep espousing these ideas to inch forward a sliver of understanding about our culture's potential. We turn critically important values of art and community into poor economic arguments. For example, American's for the Arts tells us that in Guilford County every dollar spent on the arts leverages \$14 dollars in the surrounding economy. But doesn't that mean for every dollar admission we accept at our door, \$14 is spent buying pizza across the street. Why don't we stop selling their pie and start expanding the pie for our communities and artists? Cultural capital in the arts is just decoration if it doesn't hold investors and civic leaders responsible to existing communities, doesn't embrace community design, and leaves artists outside the planning process. We need to stop advocating for more funds and start advocating for communities and artists.



*Miami-based artist Pioneer Winter performs 'A Love to Last 13 Hours' reflecting on the fragility of queer relationships.*

Following the talks, panels, and viewing of the Nasher Southern Accent exhibition, we will build an asset map of our state. Together we will ask: what are artists doing in our towns? Under what conditions are they operating? Why are their values sometimes so different from our arts institutions, patrons, and civic leaders? We will list the resources in place — formal structures like grants, studio and living spaces, program models, schools, peer networks, and leadership trainings. But let's also try to imagine what resources should be in place to sustain those more informal creative spaces, spaces where communities are serving themselves, where they work to remain less visible to ensure their own self empowerment.

Considering the history of our state in the Culture War and the current political coup in North Carolina's state legislature, I challenge us all to ask: in this new Culture War, whose side are we actually on — that of our own institutions or the artists and communities they serve? Are we prepared to use our exhibitions, hiring policies, board structures, and capital investments to divest in traditional leadership and decolonize the white power structures that systematically

segregate our culture? Are we prepared to lead our organizations and constituents toward a more honest and holistic conception of community building? When we support artistic experimentation are we prepared to enact the vision of freedom being described to us by our Trans and POC neighbors? Do we know what their vision looks like, what it feels like? Are we ready to build our organizations with a different image of love and growth?

Today, and perhaps over the next 100 days and next four years, I hope we will all be quick to express what we don't know and to lean into any discomfort. Let's try not to defend and promote our great work. Instead, let's think critically, work differently, act collectively, and make more equitably.

*This essay is an edited statement delivered at the opening of Elsewhere's Southern Constellation Convergence, a discussion and mapping of experimental artist resources in North Carolina. Held at the Nasher Museum, December 17th, Durham, NC in correspondence with their Southern Accent exhibition.*



## Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation

RADO IŠTOK on December 6, 2017

*Collection Collective*, curated by Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu and Raluca Voinea at tranzit.sk in Bratislava, Slovakia, is a multifaceted project consisting of an exhibition, closed working group and a public seminar which together act as an invitation for establishing an art collection owned and run by artists and cultural producers themselves rather than by the existing public or private institutions. Provoked by the discontent over the current state of collections and collecting practices — from privileging large scale temporary exhibitions attracting high numbers of paying visitors over meaningful collection presentations, and the ambitions of the former colonial centres to remain in power over the image of the world through geographically expanding their collections, to the private collections functioning as relatively safe assets for speculative capital buried in the storages of international zones of harbours and airports exempted from taxation—the *Collection Collective* proposes an alternative model in which the artists and cultural workers themselves could safeguard, determine and benefit from a collectively owned and managed art collection. The exhibition is thus a serious proposal for establishing a collection of artworks functioning as a cooperative in which the artists and other cultural and administrative workers are co-owners and caretakers of a shared collection rather than

employees. What such collection would look like, how it would be organised legally and practically, and what emancipatory potential beyond the existing collection models such collection could have, were some of the questions discussed in October in Bratislava.



*Installation view of Collection Collective, Anetta Mona Chişa and Lucia Tkáčová, Lia Perjovschi*

The exhibition in the three rooms of tranzit.sk brought together art works which in various ways addressed the poetics and politics of collecting, categorisation, (self-)organisation and labour. As a literal and metaphorical cornerstone of the exhibition, visible from the street through the glass walls of the central room's corner, could be seen the *Private Collection* (2005-2010) by Anetta Mona Chişa and Lucia Tkáčová. Consisting of objects appropriated by the artist duo from various galleries, the work plays with the readymade aesthetics of everyday objects withdrawn from their use while at the same time foregrounds subjectivity and chance as constitutive factors of collections, as opposed to the representation of the official narrative claimed by public collections. Similarly, in her work *My Private Collection* (1990-ongoing) artist Lia Perjovschi proposes an alternative art history based on associations and deviations from the sanctioned

canon, while Vlad Basalici's sculptural object *Trampling Down Death by Death* (2012) is also based on the subjective reworking of art history. Dan Mihaltianu's *Plaques tournantes* (2010), referencing both turntables and the turning points in history, is a conceptual collection of music records from both sides of the Iron Curtain standing not only for music and the associated fashion but also for the changing cultural, political and social values. Questioning of the official history and its political bias is also characteristic of Martin Piaček's works *Sun of the Nation* (2015) and *Great grandfather's War* (2013), while Ilona Németh foregrounds in her *Eight Men* (2009-2012) a tragic family history conveyed as oral history of the past twenty-five years by three generations of women.



Installation view of *Collection Collective*, Vlad Basalici, Martin Piaček

The interest in margins as rich with the potential for change has also motivated the *Basket of Deplorables* (2017) by Martina Růžičková and Max Lysáček,, referencing marginalised groups



of the society such as the retired as a model group for the desired future under the conditions of the universal basic income. Labour, as an unavoidable part of the self-organised initiatives such as *Collection Collective*, was addressed both in its industrial and post-industrial condition. While Péter Szabó's film *Good Morning* (2009-2010) documented the artist's actions in Bucharest, Ploiesti and Sinaia in which confetti cannons welcomed the factory workers arriving to work in the morning, Jana Kapelová's video *Nylon Relations* (2017) is a collection of accounts by the artist's colleagues—women artists, curators and art historians working under precarious conditions in Slovakia. In line with the rigorous institutional critique throughout is also Martha Rosler's video *Museums Will Eat Your Lunch* (2013) exposing the relations between the museums in the U.S.A., the interests of their private supporters, as well as their role in the gentrification of former working class neighbourhoods. *The Francis Effect* (2014-ongoing) by Tania Bruguera, whom with Rosler expanded the circle of artists from Central Eastern Europe, focuses on collecting signatures of the exhibition visitors in order to petition the Pope to grant citizenship of Vatican City to the undocumented migrants and refugees. Lastly, *The And of Art IN and FOR new* (2016-2017), titled after the eight most frequently used words in e-flux announcement titles, is an intervention by the Fokus Grupa in form of a stripe of text running throughout the whole gallery. Based on the keywords of the exhibition's curatorial text queried in the entire corpus of *e-flux's* disparate activities and further manipulated by rules set by the artists, the intervention, according to the artists, proposes a comparison of the *Collection Collective* and *e-flux* in their model of an artist-run collection and database of art writing, i.e. their material and immaterial production respectively.



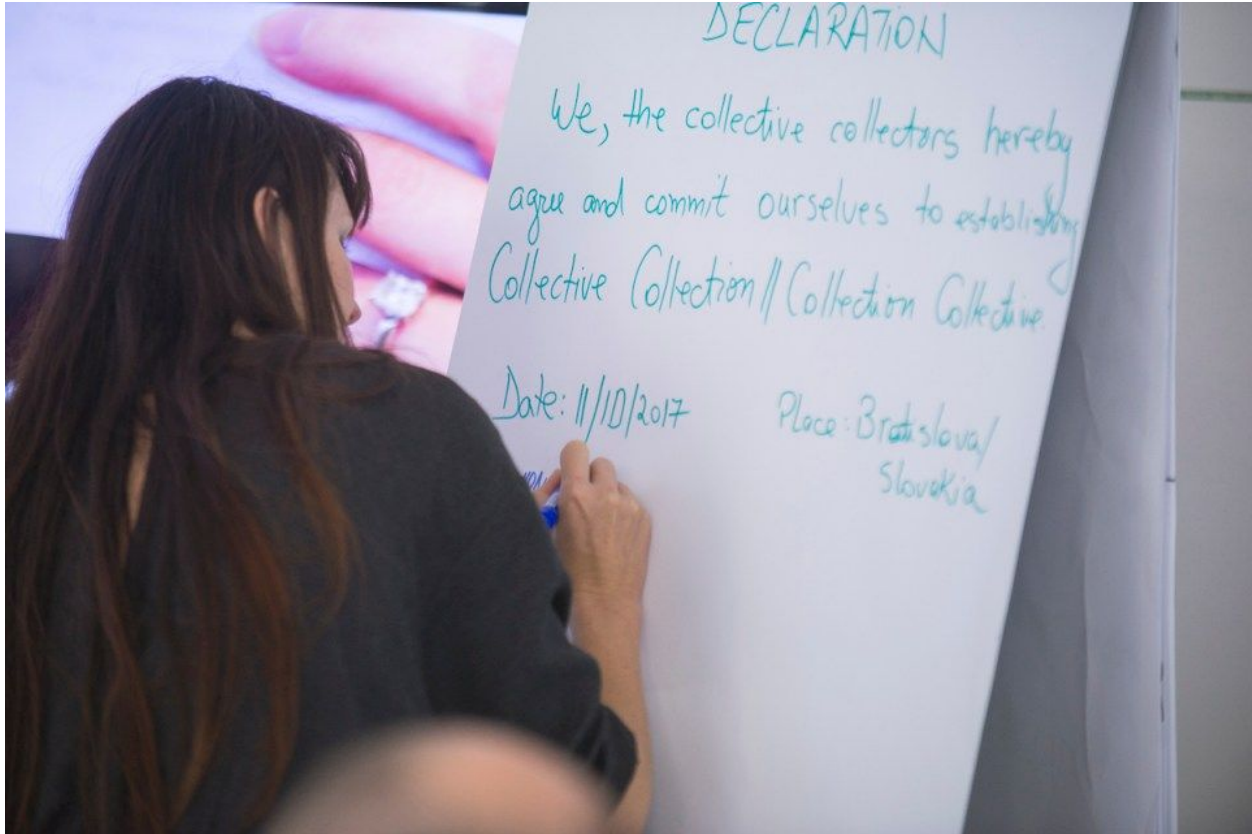
Fokus Grupa, *The And of Art IN and FOR new* (2016-2017)

Yet the exhibition's main aim was not only to reflect on various

models of collecting, archiving and history making, but more importantly to bring together artists and cultural workers in order to establish a new art collection co-owned and co-managed by the new collective. Although all works will after the exhibition be returned to the artists, the artists were invited to the exhibition with the intention of initiating a discussion of their future participation in this 'collective collection.' The actual discussion took place in the morning after the exhibition opening as a closed workshop in which the group shared their hopes and expectations as well as doubts and practical considerations. From the beginning, it seemed necessary to make clear that the act of contribution of one's work into the collection was not a charitable act of donation but rather an investment, one's share of the contribution when entering a cooperative. As such, the given work would thus become a collective property of the cooperative and all its members, which made some of the artists concerned about losing control over their work. Yet this issue was easily resolved when the artists realised that whenever their works enter public or private collections, they equally lose the control over the work, including the option of re-selling the work on the secondary market. Hence many questions arose in terms of what happens when an artist decides to leave the cooperative, whether they can withdraw their work. After a further discussion it seemed best to remunerate the artists in other ways. In other words, the works which enter the collection would remain in the collection, since necessarily some of them will over time increase in the market value more than others, and the possibility of withdrawal of the work from the collection by an artist in order to sell the work to another collector or institution would serve the tempting possibility for speculation.



In order to give the proposal for a collective collection a more concrete shape, the organisers invited accountant Andi Gavril with experience both in the art world as well as in a cooperative of beekeepers in Romania, lawyer Alena Kunicová with experience from the Czech association of artists and cultural workers *Skutek*, and architect Peter Lényi of the studio 2021 Architects. The invited experts grounded some of the premeditated as well as spontaneous ideas of the curators and artists in the legal and structural reality. Various suggestions on the organisation models could thus immediately be tested against the legal regulations and the spatial and economic restrictions of the potential storage facilities for the collection. Hence, although the organisers have from the very beginning been clear that they didn't aim for a collection that would grow endlessly, the final number of participants became also a decisive factor for the form of organisation and thus the legal restrictions made the group to face certain decisions right from the start. Similarly, the transnational ambition of the collection was quickly met with the legal requirement for the cooperative to be registered in a particular country, although this doesn't necessarily require the artworks to be concentrated in the given country. Housing of the collection also provoked a number of questions. While some preferred an open art depot which would allow researchers access to the works as well as to the collection as a whole, the investment into an architectural solution didn't seem to be feasible in the initial stages of the project, resulting in the decision to initially keep the works with the artists in their studios or storage facilities although they would become a collective property of the cooperative. The collection could thus be assembled in various configurations at invitation of institutions that would temporarily host it. The spatial solution however reflected the legal regulations in terms of settling in one country which in turn opens a variety of questions about the advantages and disadvantages of various locations. While the land in the rural areas Romania would, for example, be relatively affordable, this could possibly disproportionately increase the transportation costs of the works when loaned for exhibitions. All in all, the group agreed that the most suitable form of organisation would be a cooperative and that the works would physically stay with the artists until other solutions could be found in the later stages of the collective collection.



Another area of negotiation was related to administrative labour around the collection and the mechanisms of collective decision making. As the labour should not be free, the organisers proposed a fund which would cover salaries for administrative positions as well as provide the members with a yearly stock revenue. The resources of the fund would come from the fees for exhibition loans as well as from various grants. Another proposal from the organisers suggested a model in which every time a work from the collection is loaned or a member of the collection collective is invited to present the collection at a symposium or other public programming of another institution, the fee would be split in half between the respective person and the cooperative. And although revolving of the responsibilities, e.g. application writing, was also considered, eventually the group has agreed on more stable positions based on the members' existing skills rather than on perpetual re-skilling of the members in various fields of expertise. However, a small administrative board would be established for taking practical decisions, members of which would change every year, most probably on a lottery principle. More important decisions would be taken in unanimity rather than through voting, in part to avoid a party logic. Also, the founding members could nominate new members, which would have to be

agreed on unanimously in order to avoid potential incompatibilities or conflicts. Although many issues remain a subject of further discussions, including the selection of the works which would enter the collection, in order to keep the momentum of the initial meeting, the founding members signed at the end of the workshop a declaration of establishing the collective collection, manifesting a collective will for the initiative.

The closed workshop was followed by a series of public presentations at the Kunsthalle Bratislava focusing on a variety of related issues. Valeria Graziano focused on the perils of self-organisation from the perspective of autonomist Marxism as well as contemporary feminism, while Dave Beech presented some of his ideas on art's economic exceptionalism developed in his recent book *Art and Value* (2015). Curators Alenka Gregorič and Mira Keratová presented some of their curatorial projects relevant to the topic of collections, while the author of this article explored the potential of the *Collection Collective* for establishing a global art collection outside of the former colonial centres which could bring works of artists from Central Eastern Europe in relation to other contexts.

The motivations of the *Collection Collective* are both idealistic and pragmatic. The initiators of the project see the cooperative model of a collection not only as an alternative to the discontents of the current modes of public and private collecting practices, but also a pragmatic, collective means of renegotiating our positions within the existing system. The collection could thus be understood as a tool, not least for negotiating the conditions of labour as well as influence in the field of contemporary art ever more dominated by the interests of the private collectors or directors of large public institutions acting as advisors to the former, as the case of Beatrix Ruf using her position the Stedelijk Museum to advance her advising services to collectors has recently shown. At the same time, the *Collection Collective* (or the *Collective Collection*) is also an opportunity to move beyond the existing collecting models and, in the words of the initiators, “to rethink the relationship between self-interest and collective goal, between individual addiction and group strategy, between private taste and collective socio-political tactic and between insular neurosis and therapeutic friendship.” Equally importantly, it is also a chance to build on the personal relations among artists and various other agents of the art world beyond the model of collections of national art or the emerging global

canon monopolised by the neoliberal and neo-colonial mega-institutions located in the centres of the former colonial empires. The discussions in Bratislava were thus just the first step in a long process which will hopefully continue next year in Bucharest. The hope is that once clearly formulated, the model could become a template for similar initiatives around the world expanding the binary of the public and private with the option of a cooperative in which the collection equally serves the public and the artists and art workers.

*Collection Collective: Template for a Future Model of Representation*  
*On view October 10 – November 18, 2017 at tranzit.sk, Bratislava, Slovakia*

*Participating artists: Vlad Basalici, Tania Bruguera, Fokus Grupa, Jana Kapelová, Dan Mihaltianu, Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová, Ilona Németh, Lia Perjovschi, Martin Piaček, Martha Rosler, Martina Růžičková & Max Lysáček, Péter Szabó*

*Further contributions: Andi Gavril, Alena Kunicová, Peter Lényi, Dan Perjovschi, Alexandra Pirici*  
*Curated by: Judit Angel, Vlad Morariu, Raluca Voinea.*  
*All images courtesy of tranzit.sk*



## Ways of Learning at Grand Union

TOM CLARK on November 14, 2018

*Ways of Learning* is three-month exhibition and events programme at Grand Union gallery in Birmingham, England, focusing on non-formalised means of sharing knowledge.

Co-programmed by Grand Union and curator-in-residence Lucy Lopez, and featuring Uriel Orlow, Mujeres Públicas, Alex Martinis Roe, Intervention Architecture, it includes ongoing or single works by Sean Burns, Cooking Sections, Kirsty Clarke, Juliet Jacques, Huw Lemmey, Cathy Wade, among others. Given the expectations for accountability and instrumentalization by the sort of 'marketized' education that the exhibition openly situates itself against, especially important here are the anecdotal, informal and communal ways of knowing rooted within feminism, inter-generational alliances, indigenous knowledge, and forms of solidarity and allegiance that intersect with queer culture. It is not incidental then that at the same time as growing question as to the now habitual role and kind of education that art galleries and

museums can provide (usually that they can teach non-artists about how the world *really* is), that the pedagogical model foregrounded here is ways of *learning*.



*Ways of Learning*, curated with Lucy Lopez, featuring work by Alex Martinis Roe, Uriel Orlow and Mujeres Públicas, 2018. Courtesy: Grand Union; photo: Patrick Dandy

This reflexive, or rather, less pre-formed, approach to the sharing and building of knowledge and skills begins with the exhibition's striking support structures. The modular and interlocking plywood structure, designed by Birmingham-based *Intervention Architecture*, is for most of the exhibition arranged into two curved walls that support the video projections and continue into two semi-circles of seating to form a pair of temporary classrooms. An overall effect of visual and aural softening is created by sheets of pink upholstery foam fitted into the gaps created by the structures' repeating box construction. These shelter-like spaces are also rearranged for larger talks or groups. The modular, re-constructible approach continues in the rest of the space with self-assembly tables used for a slowly-accumulating radical education library or lunches, as well as a working kitchen, given equal presence in the space and used by *Cooking Sections* and



Kirsty Clarke, or by anyone in the space wanting to make refreshments, as offered by gallery staff. This careful consideration of the needs of use over display, sets up the exhibition for various explorations of what the sites and activities of learning might entail, while clearly re-articulating the politics of 'domesticized' spaces such as the kitchen (and of course actual teaching) at the heart of these questions.



*Ways of Learning*, curated with Lucy Lopez, featuring work by Alex Martinis Roe, Uriel Orlow and Mujeres Públicas, 2018. Courtesy: Grand Union; photo: Patrick Dandy

Of the three installed works, the two chapters of Alex Martinis Roe's film project *To Become Two* (2014–2017) shown here — *Our Future Network* (2016) and *For the joy of being together, they didn't have to agree* (2016) — most clearly follow this approach of direct re-imagining. One part of a long-running experimentation and research project into the work of various feminist collectives, *Our Future Network* sees various participants of a feminist collective brought together by Roe discuss and enact a series of propositions that aim to challenge existing social structures. Even though these model scenarios, such as the shaping of personal ethical boundaries around what could be refused at work, are shown relatively briefly one after the

other, the film's length of over an hour implies that a more lived duration is key to any depth that might be necessary to enact them.

When Roe's films were first shown in Amsterdam in 2016 at an event hosted by the Dutch Art Institute and the film's co-commissioners, *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution*, the relatively hermetic nature of the collective and its constituency was raised to counter the seemingly exemplary form its propositions took. In *Ways of Learning*, Uriel Orlow, showing two chapters from his *Theatrum Botanicum* project, *Muthi* (2016–2017) and *The Crown Against Mafavuke* (2016) provides a constructive counterpoint to the constraints of Roe's communal experiment. Both films focus on how colonial power has been exerted through limits and enclosures of medicinal knowledge. *Muthi*, named after the term for traditional practice of medicine in South Africa contrasts scenes from the shops and foraging of small-scale healers with industrial farms and factories producing much the same products at vastly increased scales. In a revealing scene, workers in the latter are tasked with repeatedly and obsessively cleaning bottles of product before its sale.

*Muthi* sets the scene for *The Crown Against Mafavuke*, a dramatized restaging of the 1940 trial of Mafavuke Ngcobo, a South African herbalist accused of replicating and selling European medicines. White pharmaceutical 'experts' and lawyers question black witnesses and co-workers as they seek to show Mafavuke has broached the boundaries what was considered the limits of traditional medicine — and to which it is implied is all he is entitled to. In a cutaway the actor playing Mafavuke speaks to camera: the white man tells him where the beginning and end of his practice and its development should be while bringing and cultivating his own plants and medicines for sale in South Africa, the real problem he says, "is that he is too successful." As if to underscore the double standards at work, the same white actor plays both colonialist prosecution and liberal defence lawyers, the character changing jackets doing little to alter who is ultimately deciding where those limits lie. Likewise, whereas white characters parse the categories of patents and knowledges, black characters, also played by the same actor, are asked to articulate the infraction of these categories against the whites' idea of a stable and unchanging local practice.



*Ways of Learning, curated with Lucy Lopez, featuring work by Alex Martinis Roe, Uriel Orlow and Mujeres Públicas, 2018. Courtesy: Grand Union; photo: Patrick Dandy*

Making a similar point as to the ambivalence of the located and partial formation of social norms — if with the forcefulness necessitated by the omnipresent violence faced by its members — *Mujeres Públicas*'s series of public-educational posters bluntly re-iterate the basic dynamics of sexualized assault alongside the dominance of these behaviours as expressed by many of the West's most revered male figures. The posters are used by the group both as protest and as the basis for workshops about issues facing women-identifying people in Buenos Aires; and they will also be used in Birmingham for *Ways of Learning*, to similar effect, but with this relocation in mind. The laziness and misogyny expressed by keystones of the Western philosophical tradition including Charles Darwin, St. Thomas Aquinas, or Pythagoras, is translated here as a powerful reminder of the entrenchment of both the speakers' sentiments and the history of its acceptance. For instance, in the view of Albert Einstein (which is only worth repeating here to reinforce the posters' point): "women are where they belong. Millions of years of evolution cannot be wrong, and nature has the ability to correct its own mistakes." If the simplicity of this expositional gesture contrast with the more 'complex' discursive explorations in the other works, these works serve to both further ground

that discourse in lived experience, but crucially, to show as well as this how that ground is differentiated depending on where you stand.

It would not be enough to say that *Ways of Learning* uses art to fill in the ever-widening gaps left by state-led education, however. In May 2018, a symposium, “From Critical Studies to Public Programming: Public Knowledge at the Post-Democratic Impasse,” was held at Goldsmiths, University of London to map the shared legacy between critical studies programmes developed alongside studio art practice in Higher Education and public programmes in galleries. Enlivening this debate — and adding to the mix the affinities, alliances, methods, durations and hospitality and of that which either exceeds or has been excluded from the gallery or higher educational spaces — *Ways of Learning* could perhaps be viewed not as an exhibition, but through its events as a curriculum.

Certainly this could be felt in one of the events that I attended, “Navigating Spaces Switching Locations.” Presented by Teresa Cisneros and b.Dewitt gallery, and moderated by writer, Ama Josephine Budge, the discussion considered the double edge of ‘passing’ in the art world as a person of colour, while also seeking to extrude through this structures and practices of self-identification. Beginning from the experience of the participants as they navigated the expectations that their identity-positions be legible within the art world, the conversation quickly moved towards framing this as a practice of care, emphasising that this cannot be reduced to an issue of representation. In so doing the discussion, which quickly spilled out to audience-members, brought into sharp focus not only the existing imaginaries and knowledges created, distributed and made accessible by the exhibition and education models of the art world, but also presented the organisation itself (and others like it) with a moment in which it could or should learn.

Backgrounded by Budge’s interest in science fiction — reflecting the both speculative and actual — the event both made clear the need to build infrastructures of access, while also shaping and creating the contours and connections which would substantiate that support itself. As one participant described, there is a shift towards making these spaces, not just accepting a ‘seat at the table.’ For Budge, this reflected a sort of ‘abundance thinking,’ that is, resisting the narrative of scarcity — often presented by those who also present themselves as the gatekeepers to the need scarcity creates — and that the group already had many more

tangible and social resources already available to it. For the panel, this also had the important effect of de-centring the gallery. Indeed one of the standout propositions was made by producer Amahra Spence, who discussed her attempts to start an affordable artist hotel, making it possible for often marginalised young producers to both travel and feel safe doing so.



*Ways of Learning, curated with Lucy Lopez, featuring work by Alex Martinis Roe, Uriel Orlow and Mujeres Públicas, 2018. Courtesy: Grand Union; photo: Patrick Dandy*

From this perspective then, the customizable, modular architecture and resources offered by the exhibition seemed to offer more than an update to the cannon of what counts as or should be counted as the concern of critical education. One could draw a line to other exhibitions by the co-curator Lucy Lopez, which have articulated their concept through built or structured means, including *Instituting for the Contemporary*, at BAK, 2016, or her work with the display-structure driven Eastside Projects. More interestingly however, is how practices of staging, which in those organisation's practices might be best thought of as experiments in exhibition-making, here the

question of pedagogy around the accessibility and distribution of resources and the constituency this creates is positioned as a form of education in itself.

Questioning the presentational and pedagogical roles of the gallery in this way, *Ways of Learning* re-stages the movement between the personal study of art works or texts and the formative possibilities of group learning. And if this is held in place by the careful consideration of the architectural space as one requiring the robustness of a multi-subject 'classroom,' the exhibition's willingness to be guided by what specifically is to be learned from its participants, keeps at bay the historically troubled and contested role of the institution as *the* educator. Personal study is a useful tool, but perhaps a better one now is how the institution is exploited to, in the words of Teresa Cisneros, *platform* those groups who have been ignored by the dominant cultural imaginaries — most often people of colour, queer communities and women — to engage with the building an educational collectivity as a way of learning itself.

Like this, the exhibition has served as a starting point for a number of continuing discussions including the Queer Conditions reading group; a long-term collaboration with Cooking Sections to research the food ecologies and related politics of the local area in Digbeth; and Huw Lemmey, Juliet Jacques and Cathy Wade will all contributing new writing which won't materialise until the end of the project. Similarly, these discussions have created and reinforced both new and existing relationships with local members of crisis, interfaith youth groups, such as Digbeth Community Garden, SHOUT Festival for Queer Arts and Culture, and the LGBTQ+ community; relationships which will likely be key to Grand Union's future plans for expansion at the nearby Junction Works.

To return to the central message of Orlow's film: culture neither pre-exists nor stays still; nor should it be made to. While it is a resource, if the gallery space is to be truly pedagogically radical, then it cannot rely on the pre-existence of the correct cultural references that it can then share with others. *Ways of Learning* suggests that it must participate as one organizational constellation among others. That this is difficult and fraught with power imbalances, dis-trust, and paternalistic agendas is obvious: and nothing spontaneously appears in the gallery. If this programme comes at a time when the ever-present difficulty for community-specific art spaces

to exist as resources become more leveraged, and less of a priority for the UK government, *Ways of Learning*, points at the increasing consideration given to the creation of platforms and structures that support and sustain cultural imaginaries — not only critiquing those which deserve it, but actively re-distributing the relationship between collectivity and the institutions that create them— and with it how to change them.

*(Editor's note: The author worked with Lopez during 2016 and 2017 at BAK, Utrecht, NL.)*



## Learning to Live Together: Artist Residency as Think Tank

KAYLA ANDERSON on April 12, 2018

In the summer for 2014, I found myself in the midst of an existential crisis (aka privileged mind-fuck). I was fresh out of school and on my first artist residency in rural Wisconsin, surrounded by 60 interesting and sociable people in an aesthetically pleasing post-work environment where all of my meals were prepared for me by a crew of volunteer staff (artists) and each day included at least three thought-provoking conversations. I couldn't understand how any of this was possible. (Yes, I was sharing a room with two other soon-to-not-be-strangers. Yes, my bed was filled with sand despite constant sheet-shaking. And yes, this whole experience, while on the "cheap side," cost 3x my rent in Chicago.) But all things considered, I had ended up in a magical place where creative thought was the primary activity demanded of me. Just how exactly did I get here?

Of course, I was wracked with guilt.

Why should I get to be here (using my vacation days from my full-time day job) while my mother trudged through overwork and underpay just hoping to have an evening to clean or knit in front



of the television? A specific brand of American-working-class-capitalism-induced-self-torture had its hold on me. Shouldn't I always be working / tired / miserable? Who was I to think I deserved (the closest thing I had ever taken to) a *vacation*?

An artist residency isn't exactly a vacation, but for many of us flailing towards professionalism in this hyper-productivity-endorsing-(art)world, it may be the closest we'll ever get. So what compels us to spend our vacation days cut off from cellular service, sharing rooms, meals, and vulnerabilities with strangers?



*ACRE (Artists' Cooperative Residency and Exhibitions) in Steuben, WI. Image courtesy of ACRE.*

It's important to first acknowledge the easy answer. As much as we may not like to admit, attending artist residencies is seen as an investment towards our careers; a status marker that many artists will pursue regardless of whether they actually work well outside of their regular community or studio environment. From a financial standpoint, attending artist residencies is a risky business: often requiring the artist to quit their job, temporarily vacate or sublease their dwelling, and cut themselves off from all familiar aspects of life. Residency hopping, though

professionally glamorous, requires one basically become unemployed, homeless, and subject to the emotional and psychological effects of prolonged precarity.

For the most part, we don't bat an eye at this. We have yet to experience an uprising against artist residencies without stipends, academic-art positions that require constant instability or relocation, or exhibition venues that are far from WAGE-certified. No matter how much you personally object, odds are one of your friends will still shell out \$4,000 for that career-boosting residency or €100 for that might-as-well-be-fake exhibition in a foreign country they'll never visit.

This is all due to the fact that once we enter the contemporary hyper-professionalized (art)world we are constantly bombarded with subliminal messages that in order to consider our careers more as *artists*, we have to consider our lives less as *humans*.

I too have stayed awake for days on end to finish work for an exhibition, or fed myself total shit in order to buy materials to create new work. Once, after a fellow artist explained how she decided to decorate a bathroom at a gallery as her artwork because she could never imagine spending that same money to decorate her own bathroom, an art critic rightly asked, "What the hell is wrong with all of you?" Meanwhile, the dean at an internationally renowned, extremely expensive, art school told the incoming class of MFA students "Don't worry about getting enough sleep, you should really prioritize attending openings and making connections!" This is all to say that artists (in the US at least) have been taught to develop a type of asceticism turned against all non-art related indulgence.

Now, this is not to say that residencies (as the *vacations* we allow ourselves to take in the name of career advancement) are completely sadistic. They can also be productive and/or utterly enjoyable. There are many models of artist residency, including some in which the resident is literally employed to make art in isolation, or matched with a range of professional connections and opportunities. However, the type of residency I'm interested in engaging here is the kind where you could easily *not make anything*. While the artist colony of the early 1900s and the

secluded utopia of the 1960s certainly feed into this phenomena, there seem to be a plethora of artist residencies arising lately that pose as experimental-community-think-tanks.

Since the aforementioned farm in rural Wisconsin, I've found myself in a former thrift store in North Carolina, and most recently a community garden/pseudo-cult in Paris, all the while grappling with the question of why we as artists and cultural producers put ourselves in these situations, and what trends this might represent within the (art)world and our broader cultural landscape.



*The Ark, organized by Grace Ndiritu at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris. Image courtesy of Rafaela Lopez.*

In the Summer of 2017 I was asked to participate as the writer-in-residence for a project called The Ark organized by the artist Grace Ndiritu at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris. The Ark was a proposal for living in a cross-disciplinary art-working environment, inviting people from

different backgrounds to work and live together for eight days, exchanging ideas and experiences in relation to making collaborative and shared artworks and art-thinking.

The Ark turned out to be more of a social experiment than a residency. Though not briefed on all the rules beforehand, participants were asked to turn in their cell phones, laptops, cameras, keys, wallets, and passports upon arrival. We were further instructed not to leave the premises, nor to communicate with anyone from the staff or general public for the first six days of the project, lest we contaminate our soon-to-be-molded minds.



*The Ark, organized by Grace Ndiritu at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris. Image courtesy of Rafaela Lopez..*

Each day we awoke to a gong and went about our business under a purposefully ironic banner that read A HAPPY WORKPLACE IS A PRODUCTIVE ONE. Our beds were set on a repurposed stage and our actions were recorded as quirky social media posts. What ensued in

addition to programmed talks by residents, activities, meditation, and the best food I've ever eaten, were many guided conversations about the project itself and its place within a social history of intentional communities. And perhaps because of the meta-turn in conversation, much of my thoughts revolved around the question: who has time to think?

Our organizer enjoyed reminding us that we all surrendered certain freedoms in order to participate in the project, and for what? For myself at least (and I assume for most of the participants) that *something* was a highly valued head-space.

Since entering this imaginary (art)world eight years ago through a magic portal opened by rubbing together student loan debt and a one-way plane ticket, I'm constantly taken with this rare and valuable resource called *critical thinking*. It's something that was remarkably absent during my upbringing. I remember my father telling me as a child that adults don't have time to read; capitalism protects itself by keeping the working-class too busy and tired for reflection. There are certainly tons of things about daily life and society we might object to, but we rarely have the time and mental energy to imagine alternatives, much less manifest them. Who can blame someone for working to afford their rent rather than protesting to make rent more affordable?

While artists might not be part of the middle-class financially, we are *oh-so-middle-class* in our abundance of thought, self-reflection, and self-ordained purpose. And to me, attending artist residencies has always been an analog for pretending to be rich.

But psychological class-hopping aside, what is afforded to us by these opportunities to think? Or rather, what is the importance of social structures for critical thinking in our current cultural landscape or political climate? And finally, what is it about us artists and the desire for these constructed spaces of seclusion and forced community? What lack in life causes us to enter into these temporary, partial utopias?

Though these utopian art experiments may have a 60s vibe to them, the stakes for us in the present are certainly different. The lack we face might be quite easy to diagnose as a late-stage

illness resulting from prolonged exposure to capitalism, individualism, and social media (let's be real, the latter two are definitely manifestations of the former).

We live in a time where social imagination has been foreclosed on; alternatives are seen as entirely fanciful if they are entertained at all; and even political action is plagued by feelings of preconceived failure. In the introduction to their book *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*, Antony Dunne and Fiona Raby state:

*We believe that by speculating more, at all levels of society, and exploring alternative scenarios, reality will become more malleable and, although the future cannot be predicted, we can help set in place today factors that will increase the probability of more desirable futures happening.*

They explore how after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of omnipresent market-led capitalism, social imagination and corresponding reality shrank, limiting our view of the *possible* to that of the *probable*. This has been enacted in part by focusing on the individual as the site of change or world-management. Social, political, environmental, and ethical responsibility has been redirected from a governing state or collective towards the individual. We are asked to personally manage our access to capital and resources as well as our exposure to toxins and oppressions. In her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Alexis Shotwell discusses how purity politics and healthism, a view that holds individuals accountable for managing their own bodily intake of toxins or vulnerabilities to oppression, “perpetuates the difficulty of perceiving how bodies are embedded in and fixes of the flows of capitalist production.” We see this at work when Republican Congressman Mo Brooks openly suggested that poorer Americans don't deserve affordable healthcare because they are personally responsible for their *bad lives* and resulting illness. The fact that people of color, women, and those living below the poverty line are systematically subjected to hazardous environmental conditions and workloads is instantly brushed aside. Beyond health, this focus on individual responsibility carries over into education (re: student debt) and politics (re: wokeness). As Shotwell states, the plight for individual purity “is a de-collectivizing, de-mobilizing, paradoxical politics of despair.” This is compounded in the present by social media as a supposed outlet for

expression and political solidarity. Caught in a feedback loop of sharing but never reckoning, we perform affective labor to the point of exhaustion. In *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, Roy Scranton cautions that:

*The more we pass on or react to social vibrations, the more we strengthen our habits of channeling and the less we practice autonomous reflection or independent critical thought...we become stronger resonators and weaker thinkers.*

When people started sharing increasingly negative or complex content on Facebook, the company responded by offering five additional emoticons with which to express reactions. I can only see this move as an attempt to circumvent conversation about what it means to “like” an article about police brutality or a school shooting. While I believe that information should be shared, I worry that the type of passing on that social media allows elides fully reckoning with the content or it’s causes. How often do we stop to think critically about the articles we read and the events they recount before scrolling on to the next tragedy? All of this enforced resonance leaves us little time to think critically, radically, and speculatively about the world we have and the world we want for the future.

These are some obstacles we *do* tackle (or at least momentarily escape from) in the artist-residency-as-think-tank. I can’t help but think that these limitations are also what make these residency scenarios increasingly important and appealing to us as artists. The opportunity to interact with others in-person with intensity and immediacy seems wholly rare outside of protest or religion. These residencies demand a much extended time bracket of attention and engagement. We are made to not only hear, but to consider and dialogue with others. Furthermore, these residencies may provide opportunities to re-collectivize. They allow us to momentarily enact different forms of economy and exchange. They require us to be responsible towards a community and (hopefully) give us the strength to work through the overwhelming feelings of immobilizing despair.



*The Ark, organized by Grace Ndiritu at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Paris. Image courtesy of Rafaela Lopez.*

The results of The Ark were, perhaps necessarily, complicated. Willing connectivity sometimes rubbed up against power plays or personality-based tension. Vulnerability is scary precisely because it opens one up to any range of possibilities: negative or positive. Some of my final notes from the project read:



*But our little world — one built for learning, and perhaps against loneliness — is starting to fall apart. Tides of anger, confusion, and frustration seem to retreat and then resurface, never fully ebbing. We are still in the world after all. Our world that is filled with both brilliant and troubling things. Utopia is always fractured, crumbling. The most one can do is to steal a few pieces and pocket them; carry them out into the onslaught. Purity is dangerous. Contamination is always already unavoidable.*

While it might now seem melodramatic, it was also an accurate temperature of the room. Wandering around Paris afterwards, we felt a bit like recently released abductees (or *MTV Real World* participants), grappling with subtle forms of the cognitive dissonance we had so often discussed during the project in relation to cult mentality. We found ourselves telling the story over and over again. How would we confront both the good and the bad of our experiment, our society, our world? Was I really crying uncontrollably like Jane Poynter upon her release from Biosphere 2? It was clear that in some way, our lives had changed. But what exactly were we bringing back with us into our respective routines and communities?

Despite our pervasive confusion, almost none of us regretted our time-out-of-time. Over the coming weeks we would begin to piece together new understandings of our humanity and how it sometimes snagged against the people-plowing-career-making-(art)world. Through ongoing conversations, we would begin to deconstruct and re-assemble our strange moralism.

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It turns out my Ark cohort and I weren't the only ones constructing momentary utopias that summer. Once I arrived back home and logged into social media, I saw a friend's status update: "Now that I'm back in Chicago, I keep having really intense dreams about being at [RESIDENCY]. I want to live somewhere in nature that also has jobs, art, and radical community...so I guess a commune? Anyone know any good communes? Or maybe other jobs at art residencies? I just want to live at art camp forever, please advise." A commenter had

already responded: “Aaah life without the overburdening soul crushing effects of capitalism!!! If u find an escape pod art camp commune plz give me an invite!”

Several other friends had just returned from Summer Forum, “an ongoing experiment in discourse and connection” this time in Kaneohe, Hawaii, where the theme of the session had been “persevering in one’s existence” and radical kinship. Organized by Sara Knox Hunter, Summer Forum selected residents from an open call and aimed for total collaboration around a shared syllabus that combined new materialisms with critical race theory, social justice activism, and local cosmology.



Koki Tanaka, *Provisional Studies: Workshop #7 How to Live Together and Sharing the Unknown* [Provisorische Studien: Workshop #7 Wie zusammen Leben und das Unbekannte teilen], 2017. Image courtesy of Skulptur Projekte/Henning Rooge.

Koki Tanaka’s *Provisional Studies: Workshop #7 How to Live Together and Sharing the Unknown* was on view at Skulptur Projekte Münster, wherein the artist orchestrated a live-in

workshop with eight participants from the city. Local non-artist participants volunteered for the workshop, and their activities were heavily documented by Tanaka as what he considered to be a non-collaborative work of art. Participants were led through activities ranging from conversations about personal history and identity to role-playing games simulating government policy meetings.

These three simultaneous experiments—The Ark, Summer Forum, and *Provisional Studies*—each had different structures and dynamics. However, all three projects emerged in response to crisis: Fukushima, Brexit, Trump, ongoing racialized violence, and escalating climate change. Each asked of its participants: how do we live — despite trauma, disaster, intentional media distraction, and political paralysis? And furthermore, how do we live *together* — with those both inside and outside of our like-minded communities, with our human and non-human kin?

These are the questions we should be asking ourselves regardless, but a lot of times life (work, survival, subsistence) gets in the way. Perhaps these residencies provide moments to really sit with this cognitive dissonance (*I can't go on / I'll go on*) that we experience on a daily basis in gnawing blips between reading the news and going about our business as usual; between the height of the protest and settling back into prescribed movements.

Like philosopher/artist Joanna Zylińska, I too believe that we are experiencing a crisis in critical thinking (which does not exclude feeling) that often results in either fast, superficial action or total impasse. Can we take time to consider our complicity in order to move beyond the reproduction of cultural norms? How do we take these moments back with us as artist-people in the world? At what point do our actions in one selective cultural sphere filter into the mainstream?

These situations, though temporary, ask us to spend a little more time in the present. This *presence* is necessary for recognizing the ground from which we can imagine from; our complicity in the very systems we hope to change. In *We Are Here, But Is It Now?* (*The*

*Submarine Horizons of Contemporaneity*), Raqs Media Collective presents a speculative conversation between a drowned Rhinoceros and a Deep Sea Diver:

**Rhinoceros:** The alternatives between utopia and dystopia are by now well rehearsed. That song can be sung in any portside karaoke bar. But it is more difficult to hum the uncannily familiar tune of the present moment. We think we know it, but it slips us by even as it haunts us. It is that elusive earworm.

**Diver:** So what song would you rather be singing?

**Rhinoceros:** I've been thinking we need a whole new set of ballads.

**Diver:** Where in the middle of the storm of today do you think they will find the reason to imagine how things will be when the tsunami quietens?

Taking time to consider the present is an important step towards imagining and constructing a better future. By considering our present and all the factors that make it what it is, we make reality more malleable. Many people don't have the opportunity to step away from the storm, or to hunker down and think during times of crisis. It's no secret that the *tsunami* Raqs invokes rages at entirely different intensities over different continents and against different communities. We could easily use this logic to further immobilize ourselves. However, guilt does little to solve this problem. To continue speaking of storms, as Audre Lorde said "Guilt is only another way of avoiding informed action, of buying time out of the pressing need to make clear choices, out of the approaching storm that can feed the earth as well as bend the trees." So guilt aside, how can we think in order to make change rather than simply buy time? Must doing and thinking, speculation and action, be separate? In the introduction to the reader *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* Walidah Imarisha states:

*"Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science*

*fiction. Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world.”*

I believe that to some extent, many artists and designers also dedicate their lives to envisioning other worlds. When we chide ourselves into thinking that our work exists in a vacuum, that the (art)world is separate from *the world*, we fail to take our own social dreaming seriously. Imarisha asks “are we brave enough to imagine beyond the boundaries of ‘the real’ and then do the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams?” In this paradigm, envisioning *is* creating if we do it critically, generously, and radically. So, what exactly did we *do* upon exiting our momentary utopias this past summer?

For different reasons, both The Ark and Summer Forum decided to cancel their planned publications. While for The Ark this had to do with representation, for Summer Forum I believe it came down to a question of embodying values rather than simply declaring them. For me personally, attending an artist-residency-as-think-tank didn’t cause an outpouring of art making, writing, or creative production in the expected sense. But I did find that I was making changes in my life, and many of my peers from The Ark and Summer Forum were doing the same. These changes we were making weren’t *art* things, they were *human* things: leaving jobs, ending relationships, asserting ourselves within whatever spheres of interaction we had access too.

But beyond these seemingly very personal, individual actions, what I hope we are doing is collectively shaping a new ethics towards our respective communities: a new list of demands for our (art)world and subsequently our world(s). The space for critical thinking is both a side effect and product of art making that we really ought to take more advantage of. However, doing so means stepping out of our cultural mania for competitive busyness. Rather than buying time through the default of busy behavior, together I hope we will *take time* furiously. I hope we harbor it until it multiplies into a million sparkling presents, that we might start to take more of a stake in our collective future.

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“...and when I say ‘political’, I don’t mean that one should make political art, but that one has to make art politically”

— Thomas Hirschhorn  
*Letter to Thierry de Duve, 1994*

Why and how do people gather? Specifically, people that share some common interest—in art, in art-as-doing-something-which-is-not-just-art, in art as a collective, community-oriented practice, which often involves critical components of difference, privilege, access, inclusion, and equity, and who like to gather themselves formally to speak on behalf of a practice? The conference is one such type of gathering. Aptly suited for professionals and those in their orbit, conferences on socially engaged art make use of temporary and nomadic structures by moving from city to city, highlighting grassroots (local) and professional (national) production, while providing practitioners with a platform to rethink, question, and provoke collaboratively as participants of a given field.

Conferences on socially engaged art often find practitioners wrestling with how to narrativize practices that are currently undergoing institutionalization. Often uncomfortable and clumsy, these internal debates take place on and off stage as presenters and audiences alike respond both to the discourse being presented and the superstructures (institutional hosts, funding sources, community partners, etc.) that support it. In the past few years alone, conferences and convenings such as *Open Engagement*, *The Creative Time Summit*, and *Hand-in-Glove* have experienced their share of pushback and have responded by changing forms, locations, and subject matter.

by Anthony  
 Romero and  
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Shifting geographies and institutional contexts add an extra layer to these proceedings—how does city identity mark the practice? What relationships do these institutions have to their communities as they attempt to fully represent the breadth of local activity? Whom should be the arbiter of a community’s history and practices?

When conferences and their organizers, who may have the best intentions in mind—to support and make room for artists and communities who are working towards a more just world—work through questions around representation, the allocation of resources, institutional demands, privilege, accessibility, and dismantling white supremacy, yet still somehow see this work as being separate from or outside of the superstructures, such as museums and institutional spaces, which allow it to exist, there is a problem. These superstructures, which act as resources, are complicated and certainly not to be shunned outright. However, if a value proposition is not presented that challenges and questions the hosting site and emerging narratives, or if there isn’t open recognition that anti-authoritarianism and anti-institutional ideologies are at the root of many practices and therefore always are resistant to the behavioral space of professional discourse (and by proxy conference-making), the organizers ignore the ways in which that space is constructed, replicating the very thing that they mean to dismantle.

Oppressive regimes are mimicked in the conference format precisely because the conference, as a form, necessarily relies on representation as a linchpin of dialogue. Representation most often takes the form of one to two hour-long panels couched in identitarian terms. Due

to time constraints, audience investment, and the pressure placed on panelists by competing panels to narrativize their work and experience in a compelling and coherent way, however, the very identities that the conference intends to care for cannot express themselves or their projects in their full, lived complexity. Add to this the high expectations which naturally arise when one calls to order a convening on “Power,” “Justice,” and “Sustainability,” or any number of other social conditions which directly impact the quality of life for some many, and we can see why it’s so difficult to locate a sense of shared politics and shared action. What do institutional perspectives, grassroots activists, and contemporary artists hold in common, if anything? And what is the place of art in all of this? Is the conference form the problem or is it that conferences on socially engaged art cannot decide if they are privileging art or social justice?

What we see is a middling effect that settles uncomfortably between these two spheres, and while they can co-exist in the right setting, what isn’t reconciled is that contemporary art’s reliance on authorship, art historical foundations, and a history of practice that draws strategies from conceptualism and historical avant-gardes is not the same legacy as histories of community-based activism and engagement that are also reacting to erasure, trauma, and disinvestment. Bringing these worlds of contemporary and community arts together in conversation is essential and interesting but can’t be wished into being by holding concurrent panels at the museum. Both hold their own powers and privileges and we would do better to challenge what’s at stake: resources, discourses, future possibilities, and the like.

One other dynamic at play is the relationship between national and regional knowledge. People travel from across the country to attend national conferences where the local context is included in a common format: tours and local parties sandwiching the keynotes and panels, which are perhaps used as an example in a passing comment from time to time on stage. What if local knowledge and local struggle was the driving force? A possible model may include practitioners from all over the country coming to consult and work together on a local issue—one that can be extrapolated to one's own community. Another could include mutually agreed upon goals that expand beyond just exposure and take into account the ways in which geographic identities mark a practice, and how trending discourses don't always recognize local histories. One example would be the recent *IDEAS City* conference in Detroit, an initiative of the New Museum in New York, for which a coalition of artists and activists came together to draft "community benefits recommendations" to help ensure the event had a positive engagement with the City of Detroit and its residents.<sup>2</sup> These are the ways that local pushback can be productive and should be welcomed. If we imagine that national organizing bodies do not necessarily know more than local artists and organizers, then the centralization of discourse and resources can be open to discussion. These questions should begin the organizing process, not be asked after the fact.

These issues are not subject to any one conference alone. As one

of the founders and organizers of *Hand-in-Glove*, a conference centered on arts organizing, Abby and many others involved have also struggled with form, audience, and shared values. The 2015 *Hand-in-Glove* conference in Minneapolis, organized by local artists Works Progress and sited at The Soap Factory, an arts organization that serves the local arts community, and including an advisory board of invested artists and thinkers from the area, made evident many questions around what organizing means in the context of social justice versus arts communities, as well as how nonprofit arts organizations and professional administrators can be both allies or barriers to progress. But, as Anthony pointed out in his article "To Participate or to Self-Organize: Reflections on the Experience of Race at Hand-in-Glove 2015,"<sup>3</sup> even with those intentions, artists and communities of color were spoken of as non-present third parties, despite being present, resulting in the erasure of those in the room who live in complex identities, and reenacting how their experiences are codified by others daily. Because even if a conference is organized within an alternative space by a local group of arts organizers in deep conversation with many across different communities, it can still read externally as the same as what happens at the museum or other institutions, because the forms of representation reflect structural principles that are at play outside the conference room. How can we escape? What are the assumptions regarding who is professional or not? Where are professionalism and

community practices incommensurable? Is that an interesting place to work in?

At *Open Engagement 2016*, Angela Anderson Guerrero, one of the self-identified people of color asked to respond to the white-identified artists who shared their coming to racial consciousness stories in a panel named "White Privilege in Social Practice: White and POC Artists Share," asked, "Why do you have to be so white?" Guerrero further elaborated by saying, "How do you all understand your positionality, what is a world without your whiteness?" As might be expected, despite assembling so many from the field who are deeply concerned with the subject of whiteness, very few answers emerged, but it does lead us to question: Why do conferences feel white?

Michelada Think Tank, a group of socially conscious artists interested in facilitating conversation and community around issues facing people of color that originated with a critique of *Open Engagement 2014* presenter demographics, pointed out that *Open Engagement 2016* featured 51% white presenters (a decrease from 72% in 2014) in a city that is only 34.5% white. One way to possibly address this is to have a policy that the demographics of presenters reflect those of the hosting city. *Hand-in-Glove* also received its own criticisms about its whiteness, despite the concerted efforts of its Minneapolis organizers toward broader representation in its speakers and in the planning process. Again, to go back to the internal process versus the public-facing result, we are talking about well-meaning efforts to change

presenter demographics that still run up against the issues of language and site. If a hosting organization is read within its own community as a white space, if the language it uses to make the discourse is read as white and exclusionary, then even the people of color speaking or organizing becoming subject to this call of overwhelming whiteness. What does it mean to create a space for discourse that is not white?

We are searching, ourselves, to figure out how to not just call out whiteness as if it is self-evident, because to do so both erases organizers and audiences actually in the room who do not identify as such, and also easily equates whiteness and institutionalization, thus just reaffirming its centrality. If the arts can offer us anything, it is a creative re-imagining of the structural conditions of white supremacy that permeate our ways of organizing, the sites in which we gather, and the language we use. But we must also demand that it do so, as a field. Because art can bring us together but it certainly does not automatically mean we share values, politics, or identities.

One recent example of upsetting these dynamics would be a panel discussion at *In/Out Symposium* in 2015, organized by Moore's Graduate Social and Studio Practices department in collaboration with the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, in which Immigrant Movement International Corona presented on their recent activities *sans* Tania Bruguera, in their native language of Spanish, thus enacting principles of language justice but also showing how this project has extended beyond the Queens Museum's initial

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support. The audience was presented with translation devices, effectively creating a space where those in the audience who didn't have Spanish as a first language could for a moment feel what the presenters had been experiencing throughout the proceedings, and this brief intervention of language justice hinted at what it might mean to displace the authority of dominant ways of understanding and demands for legibility and immediate understanding. Instead, as an audience we experience where we are inside and outside of the presenters' processes, where whatever limitations of cultural understandings are in the room are laid bare as part of the process of understanding the work. So the question becomes: How might we gather better?

In writing this we stumbled upon a phrase, "We tend to ourselves," which may be of use to us here as we consider how we might gather in the future. Behind this phrase is a feeling that how we care for our persons is necessarily a collective pursuit and requires us to conceptualize our individual personhood outside of colonial ideas of property and ownership—ideas which are reflected again in things like "Master" classes and other hierarchical conference structures—in favor of recognizing the inherent collectivity required to be in the world. In this way, we might deemphasize the individual and, by extension, exceptionalism and individualism, in hopes of replacing them with collectivity and mutuality. This is not to imply homogeneity but rather a revaluing of ourselves and the social lives that we produce. To build a practice around removing, rethinking, and revaluing notions of the self and its relationship to others necessarily requires that we rethink how we

gather and for what purpose. Is there room for us together without purpose? To evacuate professionalism and careerism from our gatherings? To learn from the spaces in which our artistic and cultural practices emerge—the dance floors, the neighborhoods, the barbecues, the dinner parties, the late night conversations, and on, and on? These are, after all, the situations and environments in which so many of us feel ourselves to be a part of a network of mutuality for the first time, and in recognizing ourselves in that space, feel other persons as our own and vice versa. It is from these situations that we feel those sensations (belonging, responsibility, etc.) that guide us through our work. If we can find a framework that addresses our commonalities and celebrates our differences, it could mean addressing why community engagement coordinators at museums, social practice educators at universities, activist printmakers, performance art historians, struggling artists, famous artists, students trying to figure out what's going on are all in a room together.

What would it look like for a gathering, which proposes to bring us together under the auspices of art, to become more experimental or even strident in its goals, to give up the pretense of openness, as if we have a shared meaning behind it? Do openness and experimentation extend to infrastructure, to site, to organizing principles? Often we separate the allocation of resources (space, money, time, etc.) from representation. We see them as two sides of the same coin, unable to face each other when the other is present, but this does a disservice to both and fails to recognize their interconnectedness. It is through one that we find the other. For if the

conference is about representation and the institutional relationship is about resources (time, space, money, etc.), then by that logic, their overall interrelatedness is felt but not said. What if this relationship is rethought so that both operate in tandem? Greater representation of excluded communities in institutions, for example, can open the doors to resources that can shift the structures in power, and it is through the reallocation of resources towards excluded communities that greater involvement and representation might occur. Perhaps what is required is a different kind of investment on the part of hosting and organizing bodies, an investment that requires that both representation and resources be considered programmatically and structurally.

To be clear, as organizers, we understand that the logistical realities may determine at least part of the decision-making, that this is a process and is ongoing, and we hope we can offer this reflection as part of that process. Let us gather around the social justice principles and activities that we cite as inspiration for the work, and in doing so, incorporate them on a structural level. Let us gather in uncertain and generative ways. Let us build a practice of gathering around the decolonization of the self. Let us imagine beyond panels and keynotes. Let us be open to community and geographic criticisms as necessarily uncomfortable and ultimately generative. Let us turn towards what we have ignored and excluded to build what is to come.

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3 Anthony Romero, “To Participate or to Self-Organize: Reflections on the Experience of Race at Hand-in-Glove 2015,” *Temporary Art Review*, Sept. 24, 2015, <http://temporaryartreview.com/to-participate-or-to-self-organize-reflections-on-the-experience-of-race-at-hand-in-glove-2015/>.



support. The audience was presented with translation devices, effectively creating a space where those in the audience who didn't have Spanish as a first language could for a moment feel what the presenters had been experiencing throughout the proceedings, and this brief intervention of language justice hinted at what it might mean to displace the authority of dominant ways of understanding and demands for legibility and immediate understanding. Instead, as an audience we experience where we are inside and outside of the presenters' processes, where whatever limitations of cultural understandings are in the room are laid bare as part of the process of understanding the work. So the question becomes: How might we gather better?

In writing this we stumbled upon a phrase, "We tend to ourselves," which may be of use to us here as we consider how we might gather in the future. Behind this phrase is a feeling that how we care for our persons is necessarily a collective pursuit and requires us to conceptualize our individual personhood outside of colonial ideas of property and ownership—ideas which are reflected again in things like "Master" classes and other hierarchical conference structures—in favor of recognizing the inherent collectivity required to be in the world. In this way, we might deemphasize the individual and, by extension, exceptionalism and individualism, in hopes of replacing them with collectivity and mutuality. This is not to imply homogeneity but rather a revaluing of ourselves and the social lives that we produce. To build a practice around removing, rethinking, and revaluing notions of the self and its relationship to others necessarily requires that we rethink how we

gather and for what purpose. Is there room for us together without purpose? To evacuate professionalism and careerism from our gatherings? To learn from the spaces in which our artistic and cultural practices emerge—the dance floors, the neighborhoods, the barbecues, the dinner parties, the late night conversations, and on, and on? These are, after all, the situations and environments in which so many of us feel ourselves to be a part of a network of mutuality for the first time, and in recognizing ourselves in that space, feel other persons as our own and vice versa. It is from these situations that we feel those sensations (belonging, responsibility, etc.) that guide us through our work. If we can find a framework that addresses our commonalities and celebrates our differences, it could mean addressing why community engagement coordinators at museums, social practice educators at universities, activist printmakers, performance art historians, struggling artists, famous artists, students trying to figure out what's going on are all in a room together.

What would it look like for a gathering, which proposes to bring us together under the auspices of art, to become more experimental or even strident in its goals, to give up the pretense of openness, as if we have a shared meaning behind it? Do openness and experimentation extend to infrastructure, to site, to organizing principles? Often we separate the allocation of resources (space, money, time, etc.) from representation. We see them as two sides of the same coin, unable to face each other when the other is present, but this does a disservice to both and fails to recognize their interconnectedness. It is through one that we find the other. For if the

conference is about representation and the institutional relationship is about resources (time, space, money, etc.), then by that logic, their overall interrelatedness is felt but not said. What if this relationship is rethought so that both operate in tandem? Greater representation of excluded communities in institutions, for example, can open the doors to resources that can shift the structures in power, and it is through the reallocation of resources towards excluded communities that greater involvement and representation might occur. Perhaps what is required is a different kind of investment on the part of hosting and organizing bodies, an investment that requires that both representation and resources be considered programmatically and structurally.

To be clear, as organizers, we understand that the logistical realities may determine at least part of the decision-making, that this is a process and is ongoing, and we hope we can offer this reflection as part of that process. Let us gather around the social justice principles and activities that we cite as inspiration for the work, and in doing so, incorporate them on a structural level. Let us gather in uncertain and generative ways. Let us build a practice of gathering around the decolonization of the self. Let us imagine beyond panels and keynotes. Let us be open to community and geographic criticisms as necessarily uncomfortable and ultimately generative. Let us turn towards what we have ignored and excluded to build what is to come.