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MICROPOLITICS  
Notebook  
2011

This publication brings together texts by the lecturers hosted in the series *Micropolitics* in 2011 which focused on exploring niches, those *in-between* spaces between galleries, museums and so-called off-spaces, as spaces of production, communication, research, discussion and distribution of contemporary art. By bringing together their essays, works and notes, it does not strive for the comprehensive overview, but rather functions as a document or notes on what has been discussed in the framework of the series in 2011, and so it circles around the topic, tackling it from different viewpoints and through different formats.

The opening work by Clare Butcher explores the idea of the borderline as a site of unlikely connectedness, approaching the ambiguous terms of “fence” and “wall” in the particular context of South Africa. Katharina Schlieben reflects on some approaches of the project series *Work to do! Self-organisation in Precarious Working Conditions* that “examined the dynamics, emancipatory movements, and self-empowerment potentials as well as the paradoxes and problems of self-organisation concepts in times of huge transformations of working conditions in our society”. In her essay, Beata Hock analyses art works and network activities from the 1970s that have so far remained blurred in recent art history narratives, as they were mostly focused on the rehabilitation of the male-dominated counter-culture of the period. Her findings are insofar more valuable because the assessment of women artists’ activities in the Central and South Eastern European region from a feminist perspective has been characterized by a “discourse of lack”, each country typically exposing one lonely early feminist “heroine” at best. In the context of complicity between the world of artistic research and the neoliberal economic and political regimes, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez calls for the renewal of research by encouraging and maintaining the construction of methods through situated actions. The Bureau for Melodramatic Research usually relies on methodology of infiltrating into cultural institutions at home and abroad “in order to de-mystify the function of gendered emotional capital in the matrix of social, political and economic relations that govern these organizational bodies”. In the debate with art historian Corina L. Apostol they address the conditions of inequality that direct the reception, interpretation and production of art and culture by women on Romanian art scene today.

This publication also brings Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović’s drawings, as continuation of their long-term project *Art&market* that examines the relations of art and power positions. This simple gesture of opening the *Notebook* as an in-between space for exhibition changes the status of the publication and calls for altered perception. (V. V.)



## After Good Fences: Some Notes since Zagreb

CLARE BUTCHER

Between leaving Zagreb and returning to Cape Town, I stopped in Eindhoven, in the south of the Netherlands, where I helped facilitate the first symposium of the Autonomy Project. This project began two years ago, led by a number of partners and coordinated by Steven ten Thije, John Byrne and myself. It has been an organic, under-the-radar sort of exercise — establishing a trans-border community of young graduates (from art academies, and universities) as well as more “seasoned” thinkers and practitioners who are concerned with the place of art in society — to put it very broadly.<sup>1</sup> Where are contemporary art’s politics located? How can artistic practice and mediation happen sustainably but also independently of market/national-bureaucratic agendas? What does that independence even mean? If it gets equated with individualism and precarity, is independence even what we want? These questions have led the project along a winding path to this most recent, more high-profile manifestation — a symposium which included guest presenters such as Jacques Rancière.

The feverish tone of the symposium debates and the history of the Autonomy Project, I think, justify a connection with the conversations I had while in Zagreb. I found that despite the many lines separating a Croatian working context, from a South African one, and for that matter, from that of Eindhoven and the Dutch situation, there was a surprising closeness between our ideas. The questions being asked and challenges faced in each setting are probably quite particular — addressing idiosyncratic administration processes, relative funding scales (though funding for the arts is universally, never “enough”). The similarity however, is the sense of urgency now compelling us.

This urgency seems to occupy all that I could see and hear around me in Zagreb. “Occupy” in both the sense of time and space. The drive that, despite logistical nightmares, resulted in a strategic flexibility in actions by cultural organisers, as well as a general lack of complacency — the feeling that there is always something more to work on, the job is never finished. Even before arriving, the spatial elements of this ongoing occupation were made evident in the framing of [BLOK]’s Micropolitics programme investigating ‘(im)possible territories’ of artistic production, as well as the occurrence of the 11th

<sup>1</sup> For more details and information on the project, as well as to access its publications please see: <http://www.theautonomyproject.org>

edition of their UrbanFestival — taking up private and public urban places.

It was a conversation between artist, Hito Steyerl and Italian philosopher, Franco “Bifo” Berardi at the Autonomy Symposium that finally made apparent to me the borderline, or a “join”, lying between these “micropolitics” of artistic practices in specific places and the recent resurgence of protest occupations in cities around the world. As a quick aside before continuing with that conversation however, it is worth stating that, though his work is often over-cited in cultural-political discussions, a central tenet within my curatorial practice has been Homi Bhabha’s conception of “borderline” creative engagements. He states: “The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress...”

Bhabha closes that same chapter with the following benediction: “When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival. To live in the unhomey world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity: ‘I am looking for the join...I want to join...I want to join.’”<sup>2</sup>

I want to join, I want to join. Those words echoed in Hito Steyerl’s presentation which related this joining, and the “homing” capacity of artistic practice within that “unhomey world” described by Bhabha, to the notion of occupation. Steyerl spoke about art as an *occupation* (or vocation) and as an *occupier* (in terms of time and space). Instead of occupying more of life with art — through aestheticisation and micro-management — more of art, she said, needed to be taken up by the messy issues of life — issues in the world. Berardi furthered this sentiment by lamenting the tragedy of compartmentalisation and individualism. He called for those of us listening, to resist becoming people of abstraction but rather to become lovers —

<sup>2</sup> Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 3, 26-27

face-to-face, indebted and connected — joined. To become occupied with each other...

#### SOME MORE ON “GOOD FENCES”

My presentation in Zagreb clung to this idea of the borderline as a site of unlikely connectedness. Not only as an *idea* but as a physical thing, like a wall or a checkpoint, as well as what the borderline necessitates: repeated, enacted negotiation on a number of practical, historical and also moral levels between two positions.

I would say that South Africans understand these ambiguous functions of the “fence” or “wall” (whether physical or conceptual) very well. The atrocious separations made between people and spaces under apartheid in the country have existed since the 1950s officially (and before that under colonial rule less officially). Movement and the visibility of people, ideas and goods were regulated under a system of passbooks (identity cards that had to be carried by those classified as “non-whites” at all times), an actual re-zoning of cities and countryside, as well as an intricate legislative system designed to micromanage who could be with whom, when and for what purpose. Of course there were spaces where this was resisted (like the socio-sonic space of jazz in fact, or in certain intellectual settings and art schools). But basically — as such a recent phenomenon, with South Africa coming to democratic “freedom” in 1994 — we, as a society, are still very much faced with the issue of realigning those ‘customary boundaries’, to quote Bhabha once more. How do you reconnect a milieu built around apartness: apart-heid? How could art, which we’ve spoken about in terms of ‘sundering and splitting’, seek to occupy itself and address these twisted official logics that are so systemic?

Besides reporting The Struggle (the term for much of the work made during the 1970s and 1980s is “Struggle Art”) and the spatial occupiers (structures) left in place even after the transition to democracy, a number of critically reflexive artistic projects sought to realign the new forms of collective selfhood emerging in post-apartheid South Africa. In the words of artist, curator and scholar, Colin Richards, “to speak of and form a collective ‘we’ turns on a mix of unconscious universalising assumptions and contradictory, clumsy convergence

of self-reflexivity and strategy... this situation bedevils any working sense of critical political-cultural solidarity, perhaps more so — paradoxically — than during apartheid proper, where the binding of anti-racism and resistance to the State allowed less fragmentation, dissipation, and cynicism.”<sup>3</sup>

Colin Richards wrote the above in the context of his exhibition *Graft* (at the National Gallery in Cape Town) which formed part of the second and final Johannesburg Biennial in 1997. The exhibition sought to critically engage with the institutional walls around it, literally “grafting” into the space those strategies working in, as well as against, the binding narratives of the ‘we’. One of the works included in the exhibition was Siemon Allen’s *La Jetée* (1997). Weaving reams of surveillance VHS tapes together, Allen formed a series of dense screen panels that filled an entire room of the art museum. This room happened to be placed closest to the gallery entrance where many of the newly acquired works from the era of resistance were being proudly displayed. Allen had been prohibited from moving or disrupting any of these works on the wall so, in response, he built up this reflective structure — reflective and reflexive. The artist’s shiny, dark tape screens mirrored those works which were already hanging in the gallery, while his structure also obstructed the visitor’s movement and vision of the entire space. Besides a reference to Chris Marker’s 1960s film, the title of the piece — a student reminded me — has a useful ambiguity about it. *Jetée*: a pier or bulwark, or perhaps, if you take away the last ‘e’ (to make *jeté*) it means to throw, fling, to plunge. What a wonderful encapsulation of this conflictual/consensual; reparative/fragmentary capacity of the work of art referred to by Richards and Bhabha!

#### THE “WE”

In the years since these glorious moments of institutional critique, the conception of South Africa as a multicultural “Rainbow Nation” has been in need of “bulwarking”. The FIFA soccer world cup was one instance of a supposedly necessary universalising mechanism

3 Colin Richards, “Curating Contradiction: ‘Graft’ in the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale”, in: Hans Belting & Andrea Budenseig (eds), *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009, pp. 329-330

for, once again, throwing over the internal borders emerging within the country, driven by unequal distribution of resources. Borders between classes rather than races per se; urban and rural; local and migrant; the skilled and the unemployed.

Various strategies were employed by cultural organisations to promote South African art’s role in all of that solidarity-building. All manner of public artworks took shape on the sides of buildings and on bus stops, just as a host of informal businesses were cleared out of the streets by squads of city police — “cleaning up” the common property around the new soccer stadiums. This kind of motion-making way for “culture” to occupy the city with visions of a pre-given “we”, is nothing new.

In the post-monarchic society of a younger England, the political philosopher John Locke queried the actual nature of the “commonwealth” — that shared space, both physically, conceptually and economically that holds a community together. For him the notion rested not only on a freedom of conscience for each subject, but importantly the right to property for each citizen. In his 2nd Treatise, Chapter V, he writes: “Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a “property” in his own “person”. This nobody has any right to but himself. The “labour” of his body and the “work” of his hands, we may say, are properly his.”

This thinking was biopolitical — saying that each person had the right to “his” own bodily actions and by extension, the result of those actions as “he” sought to work in the nature around “him”. So long as each member of society was capable of doing the same, i.e. that this extension of property was done within reasonable limits, then, individuals as Locke advocated, are free to pursue their own ‘life, health, liberty, and possessions’. Having said this however, the philosopher quickly observed that this pursuit must be of “useful”, simple things and not those of speculated (therefore over-extended) value. When this goes unchecked...

“When great mistakes are made in the governance of a commonwealth, only rebellion holds any promise of the restoration of fundamental rights.”

In fact, the commonwealth, that maintaining of a sense of neighbourliness, requires that the possibility of revolution be a permanent feature of properly formed civil society.<sup>4</sup>

Though separated by centuries of experience, the above descriptions designate the alarmingly repetitious role of psychological/philosophical and physical dimensions in ways of belonging to a “we”. As sites of constant contradiction and embattled negotiation, and despite the ‘great mistakes’ in its governance (read: instrumentalisation) it is the common space of fiction, of artistic experiment, which allows this rebellion, and promises a view of that restoration.

#### ON NEIGHBOURLINESS

What emerges from the aforementioned melange of examples is a need for strategies with which to negotiate separation, fragmentation and solidarity. Taking this as a starting point and inspired by the poem of Robert Frost, a modern American poet writing at the start of the last century, my current work plays with the impoverishing legacy of cultural boycotts on South Africa in the past, and the current geographic, economic and sometimes self-imposed isolationism of the Cape Town artistic scene. I say “plays with” not in a flippant sense, but rather, my curatorial work attempts to “put into play” that which brings into contact the citizens, subjects, and neighbours on various sides of the many walls constructed around us.

Robert Frost’s poem, *Mending Wall*, is an ambiguous rendering of two characters repairing the boundary between their two fields. The speaker of the poem is not convinced as to the necessity of the wall in the first place — despite his neighbour’s repeating of the line ‘Good fences make good neighbours’. Rather, the speaker insists on probing the question of what it is that they are ‘walling in’ and what they are ‘walling out’. The answer to this question, when read in a broader context, can only be ‘energised by encounters with strangeness’.<sup>5</sup> What

4 I am not a political philosopher so I must also excuse my parsing of Locke’s writing here. Many of these thoughts were aided by online readings (which I am very grateful for, as they have simplified his work for someone like myself), and my sister, Sian Butcher, whose work in human geography explores many of these concepts in greater depth.

5 Ibid., p. 330

if, I asked my audience in Zagreb, the wall in fact, represents that site of encounter — the borderline, to return to our original metaphor?

Bertold Brecht is an example of someone who was a proponent of wall-like structures: positing them throughout his *songspiels* and other versions of epic theatre not as limitations on the actors but rather as staging devices. Using walls for projection, scaffolding, support, and also separation, this form of theatre offered an architecture of engagement between all components — actors, audience, objects, words, texts, score and movement. Each element was independent in a sense, but constantly brought into encounter with — made aware of — the other.

Having begun as a theatre-maker, before moving in the direction of art history, my interest has always tended towards the staged nature of curatorial action. My first interest was in Brecht’s early plays. In one work, he and his set designer, Caspar Neher, used a boxing ring as the original set in Brecht’s first *songspiel* — *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (which later became *The Little Mahagonny*). They surrounded the ring (and the actors on it) with screens on which various captions were projected — as some kind of subtitle for the action. This strategy intrigued me — mimicking a very curatorial exercise in the way that Brecht mediated the particular creative gestures happening on stage to both his audience and to the actors themselves. These screens, ropes, walls, all acted alongside the humans on stage — bringing an audience into critical awareness of what it was that they saw, allowing them to identify themselves (or not) within what they watched.

Brecht wanted each element of the *mise-en-scène* (which, for him, arguably included the human actors) to stand on its own. But in his conversations with Walter Benjamin, Brecht spoke about the possible juxtaposition of dissimilar elements and how this often resulted in surprising “friendliness”. The “astonishment”, in his words, caused by the placing together of supposedly separate things of life, went beyond a static empathy between components and audience. It could open up a space for real action — action that would eventually wear away at the “hard structures” of power so present in the time of Brecht’s early career in the Weimar Republic. This word — empathy — reminds me of the curatorial strat-

egy of placing two works near one another in a gallery. They call it *Einführung*<sup>6</sup> — and in the 1980s, this became a means for curators such as Rudi Fuchs and of course, Harald Szeemann, to offer counter-narratives of national art collections by placing art from dissimilar periods in ‘mutual dialogue’ with one another.<sup>7</sup>

PAUSE

So we have borderlines, separations, occupations, reparations, walls and juxtapositions. In the coming year, I hope to gather these terms, as well as the strategies suggested above, and “play them out” in the context of a pilot neighbourhood project based in (but not exclusive to) Cape Town. Inviting practitioners from outside as well as inside South Africa, this project aims to support long-term research proposals carried out in a neighbourly fashion — open to conflict, consent and connection — reliant on a new kind of governance when it comes to the private properties of knowledge and experience. The focus of the proposals should be multi-faceted but bulwarked by the walls that house them. Whatever the “outcome” (throughout this process I hope to problematise that term), the research initiatives should repair a number of interdisciplinary and collaborative walls, engendering a kind of active empathy between borderline processes and the city, as well as fields of practice elsewhere. When friendliness and political/practical urgency occupy this space side-by-side, what else could emerge but the kind of astonishment that wears away at “hard structures” and fills the spaces in which we thought we were alone?

6 Apparently this term was originally coined by one Theodore Lipp and translated as “empathy” by E.B. Titchener in 1909. The term was commonly defined against its close relative: sympathy. The latter was conceived as “feeling with” and the former, “feeling into” — as related to the possibility of identification with the world of others. Ref. Wilfred M. McClay (ed.), *Figures in the Carpet: Finding the Human Person in the American Past*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. The term is then applied to the curatorial strategies of these two curators by Debora J. Meijers in her essay, “The Museum and the ‘Ahistorical’ Exhibition”, in: *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, (eds), New York: Routledge, 1996

7 Ref. Fuchs’s arrangement of the Van Abbemuseum collection in 1983

CLARE BUTCHER

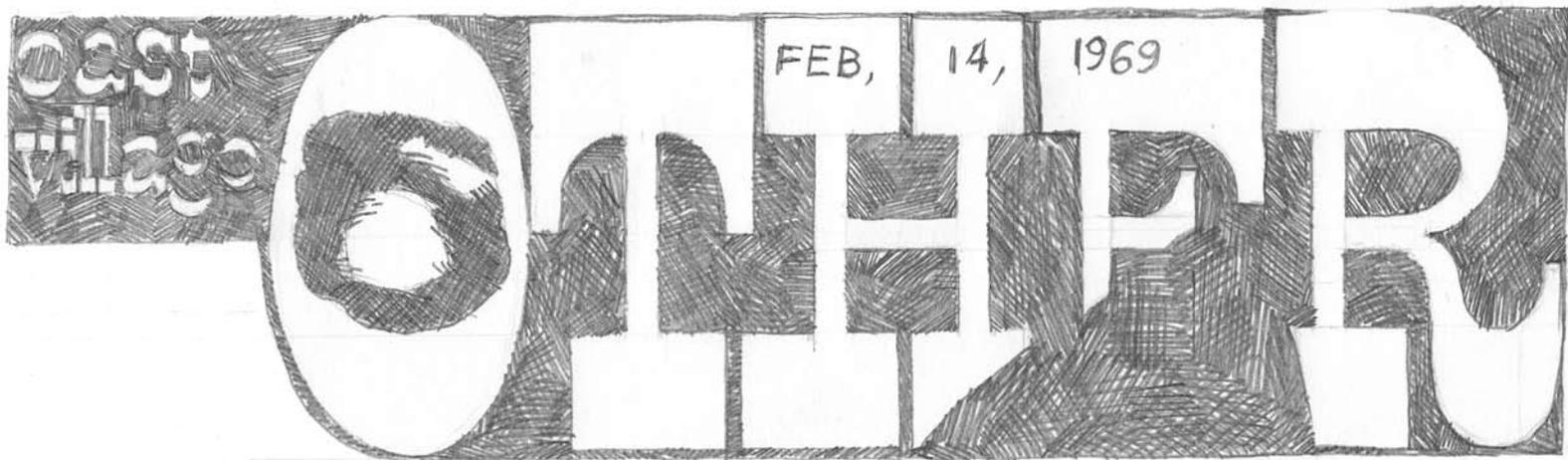
is a curator and researcher with the Centre for Curating the Archive at the University of Cape Town, currently looking into modern South African exhibition history. She completed the de Appel Curatorial Programme in 2009 and has curated several exhibitions internationally. She writes for a number of art journals, does some lecturing, editing and cooks.



"JA SAM ZA PRIMJENU NOVOG ZAKONA O SAMOSTALNIM UMJETNICIMA"  
1979. RZU (RAONA ZAJEDNICA UMJETNIKA) ZAGREB), PRVI BROJ NOVIHA



"ARTIST WORKERS WON'T KISS ASS" 1969



THE SHAME OF THE ART WORLD

1969, AMERICAN UNDERGROUND NEWSPAPER FROM NEW YORK - THE EAST VILLAGE OTHER,  
NUMBER THAT HAD AWC ARTICLES PUBLISHED



OCTOBER 10, 1966 "OUR STRUGGLE CANNOT BE HUNG ON WALL" BLACK MASK

# The “Thing” as “Gathering”: Praxeological Approaches and Detours in the Project Series “Work to do! Self- Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions”

KATHARINA SCHLIEBEN

Bruno Latour’s *actor-network-theory* and *Dingpolitik*<sup>1</sup> provide two different approaches to probing the ‘science of living together’ and to tackle the phantom of public space and representation. Because both theories address constellations of actors and societal realities, they are helpful when examining collective forms of collaborative work, in terms of societally involved constellations of actors. *Dingpolitik*, a German neologism Latour introduces to replace *Realpolitik*, or politics based on practicality, provides the starting point to refocus political thought on the Thing (*Ding*) or issue at stake: “In a strange way, political science is mute just at the moment when the objects of concern should be brought in and made to speak up loudly.”<sup>2</sup> As Heidegger had already alluded to in *What is a Thing?* (1935/36)<sup>3</sup>, the original etymology of the word ‘thing’ means *gathering* or *assembly*. Thus, just as *Thing* and discussion are interrelated notions, discourse and conflict merge in the notion of *Thing* (translated gathering). But what about the element of representation in relation to the *Thing* or the issue? Latour links two different meanings of the word *representation* that are seen as separate in theory, although they are tied to each other in practice. The first one refers to the ways in which people gather around a specific issue, and the second represents the object of concern that has gathered the participants around it. While the first one delineates the place or format of the gathering, the second one carries a topic or contentious issue into this site.<sup>4</sup> Thus, both meanings must be considered as inextricably tied to each other. These myriad gathering sites, or spaces of representation, have their own representation machinery, which Latour calls on his reader to scrutinize: “How do they [gathering formats] manage to bring in the relevant parties? How do they manage to bring in the relevant issues? What change does it make in the way people make up their mind to be attached to things?”<sup>5</sup> He is interested

1 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public”, in: *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005

2 Bruno Latour, “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public”, in: B. Latour and P. Weibel, eds. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 16

3 Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* (trans. W.B. Barton, Jr., Vera Deutsch), Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1968; *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 41, Frankfurt a. M. 1984

4 Latour, p. 16

5 Latour, p. 34

in the methods and topics of debate, the nature of arenas of negotiation and speech processes.

Latour's central inquiries about the nature of gatherings and its communication are also of relevance for collaborative practices in the cultural and curatorial field. The curatorial practice permanently articulates *Things* or formats of *gathering* and needs to be aware of its modes of representation and speech acts.

The following considerations<sup>6</sup> reflect on some approaches of the project series *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions*<sup>7</sup>, curated by Sönke Gau and myself and took place at the Shedhalle in Zurich between 2007 - 2009. Further, some thoughts in relation to the paradoxes of the funding situation that my colleague Sönke Gau and myself formulated once as "caught between two stools"<sup>8</sup> will follow.

#### GATHERING FORMATS

The project series *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions* examined the dynamics, emancipatory movements, and self-empowerment potentials as well as the paradoxes and problems of self-organisation concepts in times of huge transformations of working conditions in our society. In this series communication between contexts and different logics of knowledge became a challenge in terms of what self-organisation could mean beyond the art context and what *learning-from-others* and self-education means in its consequences. Communicative processes in relation to self-organisation are of fundamental importance for both the internal organisation amongst the involved subjects as well as presenting their respective concerns externally and generating publics and/or

6 The article is based on thoughts of the following texts: Katharina Schlieben: "The Crux of Polyphonic Language - or the Thing as Gathering. In: *Collective Curating, MJ - Manifesta Journal*, Journal of Contemporary Curatorship, 8 (2009/2010); Katharina Schlieben: "The Dilemma Between Artistic/Curatorial Research Practices and Their Visual Translation. Or: The Hunter deciphers the track, Sherlock Holmes takes the magnifying glasses and Freud reads Morelli. (Carlo Ginzburg)", in: *Szenography Expanding* (Prague: Reader Prague Quadrinale, 2011); Sönke Gau, Katharina Schlieben (eds), *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Kunst Nürnberg, 2009).

7 Gau/Schlieben, *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions*

8 Gau/Schlieben: "Caught Between Two Stools - or on the necessity of considering new approaches to funding culture", in: *Ibid.*

sub-publics. The project series *Work to do!* took these considerations as one of its starting points to reflect on and to link to communicative necessities, possibilities of collective knowledge production, interactive communication, and mediation in self-organised contexts.

If knowledge production and mediation/communication practice is not thought as categorically separate, then, along with the questions: how is knowledge produced and who communicates with whom and why, who speaks for whom, the issue of their relationship to one another emerges. Our interest was to find out how these two areas could overlap and to focus on the *in-between* as a productive possibility. The perspective and logic of *Work to do!* was to bring together actors (in a practice and theory context) and interested parties from the respective knowledge fields in a dialogue which attempts to grasp expert, interested and practice knowledge as levels with equal status and understands the roles (and their ascriptions) in connection with collective knowledge production as exchangeable. One prerequisite for this is to accord to the moment of communication between the dialogue partners an autonomous knowledge-producing potential as a form of cooperative learning: in terms of a question that does not conceive an answer beforehand, or the formulation of an answer that does not anticipate a question.

As an essential component of the project series, the idea was, on the one hand, to carry out the research *in public*, i.e. by enabling the involvement of interested parties, and on the other, to organise the resultant meetings in a way that facilitates moments of collective knowledge production and communication in the sense of cooperative learning and understanding as described above. For three project parts we proposed three different *dialogue formats*: Meetings with Initiatives, Dialogical Talk Series, and Skype Meetings.

To become acquainted with self-organised initiatives in Zürich and to find out more about them, a series of meetings were held with such groups during spring 2007. We wanted to get to know the people and places behind these initiatives and learn about their motivations, working conditions, structural organisation, economic basis, and visions. The spectrum ranged from initiatives, which can already look back on a certain tradition, to others in the process

of being formed and trying out new forms of organisation and articulation. Common to all visited initiatives is that they are committed to emancipative concerns and work in self-organised structures: mozaik (<http://www.mozaik.ch>) and nosotras (<http://www.nosotras.ch>) are concerned with the cultural and social problems of migrants and they facilitate cultural exchange; antidot (<http://www.antidot.ch>) was engaged in founding a new newspaper as a platform for the resistant left, the Frauen Dienstleistungs-, Gewerbe und Kulturzentrum Zürich AG (<http://www.frauenzentrum.com>) is a small company seeking to provide women from business, culture, and politics with an infrastructure suitable for their activities; and Kraftwerk1 (<http://www.kraftwerk1.ch>) is a residential cooperative that enables communal, self-determined forms of living and work. Both project participants as well as Shedhalle visitors were invited to the 'Meetings with Initiatives'. These interactive visits were understood as a kind of *public research* featuring direct exchange and talks; the primary goal was to identify and discuss those questions which in turn went on to decisively influence the conception and line of questioning of the overall project series. These discussions with protagonists from the initiatives and project participants were documented and subsequently integrated into the exhibition. *Leaving behind* the institution of the Shedhalle — and thus our own context — and going to the locations where the initiatives work, provided all participants with the opportunity to get to know these structures. Moreover, the direct contact with the organisational structures, expressed spatially, and how the hosting initiatives arranged the respective evening influenced the discussions in so far as ideas of what *on the spot* entails were questioned and corrected without the need for extensive explanations about one's own context. For us, it was important that Shedhalle visitors were not excluded from this research, and so we sought to consciously conceive a framework in which questions could be developed jointly or carried forward. At the same time, proposals and criticism from the initiatives concerning the project series or individual project conceptions became components of the further development.

#### PRAXEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE

In his book *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kulturosoziologie* 2008 (engl. translation by the author: *Blurred Boundaries. Perspectives*

of Cultural Sociology)<sup>9</sup>, Andreas Reckwitz discusses the polarised theoretical approaches *culture as text* and *culture as practice* in cultural studies; the question of how culture is constructed and where it is located. An ongoing issue is whether culture is situated primarily on the level of discourses or on the level of social practices. Reckwitz says that the praxeological perspective replies to textual models and de-intellectualises the idea of culture, which moves the symbolic systems of culture away from mental categories and discourses towards the resources of the 'tool kit', or reservoir of skills or strategies of practical knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

One could say that exhibition and art projects reply to both notions of culture. They can sometimes be read as a text, but they can also be understood as a practice, which implies a plurality of activities, exchanges, and dialogues with actors of all kinds of contexts and practices from different fields. The different actors and contexts bring in and transport a praxeological experience and knowledge that institute and shape the dynamic of an exhibition project and the programming of an institution. The constellation and production processes have their own speeds and needs, and sometimes demand for detours or reformulations. Thus, the rhythm and the logic of representation are orientated towards practice experiences and knowledge and not towards presentational obligations only. A praxeological approach allows different patterns of reception and production as it demands a choreography that focuses on time aspects as much as on spatial considerations.

Seven artistic projects of the series developed over time in the sense of "the mental comma instead of the full-stop"<sup>11</sup>. Two projects will be described in more detail. A praxeological approach in terms of research and solution finding, which had to be found accordingly to the idea of entering the public sphere and to the dynamics and needs of the project, defined the rhythm of the following project.

9 Andreas Reckwitz: *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kulturosoziologie*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008

10 Ibid. p. 45

11 A curatorial metaphor expressed by Johanna Lassenius and title of the Editorial of the Newspaper Shedhalle, No 1, 2004

The artists Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser and the curators collected and sorted valueless materials for the *Building Material Centre* at the Shedhalle before they were then used for constructing a satellite in the city centre of Zürich. Visualising the materials as well as the stories and places associated with them, which provided insight into the concrete situation in the city, was central. The collected discarded and unwanted materials throughout the entire Zürich urban area were first sorted and stacked and put on show in the 18 shelves of the *Building Materials Centre*. During autumn/winter 2007, in the form of a pavilion (a Shedhalle satellite), the *Werdplatzpalais*, located on Zürich's Werdplatz, was built out of the collected material for the next step. The form and location of the satellite referred to its surrounds by accompanying the existing footways and providing sitting areas. The satellite, used for film screenings and talks, reformed the square on all sides, forming a temporary centre point open to all members of the public and to self-organised initiatives, which have no office or meeting point. The satellite was made up of four shelf modules, coming from the *Building Material Centre*, out of which a central interior space was formed. Shifting the shelf modules created a protrusion that in turn formed two constructions jutting out into the exterior space, which may be used for varying purposes, for instance as a projection screen, storage, passageway, hammock mountings, etc. During spring/summer 2008, the material re-entered the public realm for the third time. The community centre Loogarten in Altstetten asked the artists to build another house *with and for* children. Working together with kids and youths from the Loogarten community centre, the artists built the offshoot *Filiale Micafil* as a meeting place in the Micafil residential settlement in the Zürich suburb of Altstetten.

The collection of materials to be recycled at the *Building Material Centre* in the Shedhalle — which for months acted as a storehouse, production, and exhibition site in one — and later erected in the form of the *Werdplatzpalais*, a temporary meeting and discussion place and later as the *Filiale Micafil*, revealed a cycle of re-deployable materials that the citizens of Zürich had thrown away and thus defined as valueless. The project addressed three different publics and defined three spatial figures of *gathering*. The first step — and its practice knowledge — was necessary to get to the second, and then the second to get to the third.

Central for the other project, I would like to describe, was as well not to illustrate self-organisation, but to find out how self-organisation could come about. This meant that the project could and had to be modified and negotiated during the realisation by and with the involved parties and thus followed a logic of practice knowledge.

*1 CHF = 1 VOICE* is a political art intervention (summer 2007- summer 2009), initiated by Andreja Kulunčić. The project could be understood as a *thing* or as a moment of *gathering* in which elements publicly correlate, complement each other, and offer new scope for action. A central question during the realisation process was, what do these arenas need and how to make the object of concern to speak up loudly? One starting point was to involve a plurality and polyphony of heterogeneous parties, which look for emancipation, antagonism, and self-criticism within migrant political activities.

Briefly in advance: the idea of the action itself was to give invisible, 'illegalised' people a public voice. The action wanted to make available a tool for 'illegalised' persons/Sans-Papiers in Switzerland (activists estimate that about 300,000 undocumented immigrants are living in a precarious situation in Switzerland, the 'official' number is 80,000) through which they can attain visibility on the political and public level. The concept as well as the action was developed *with and for* Sans-Papiers. The idea of the campaign was that Sans-Papiers were invited to anonymously donate one Swiss Franc through the account of SPAZ (Centre for Sans-Papiers in Zürich) for the renovation of the Swiss Parliament, which was under renovation until 2009. The Parliament is usually considered as the public voice of every country, and in addressing it, the idea was to address the requests of Sans Papiers to Swiss society. Through the act of donation to society, the Sans-Papiers sent a message that they want to take part in carrying out obligations, but also in having privileges in the society in which they are living and working. The handover of the raised money to the parliament, Switzerland's representative and *most democratic building* and thus for Swiss society, is to be understood as gestures of approaching others, of seeking contact and entering a dialogue. The financial aid should guarantee a long-term symbolic visible presence in/on the federal parliament, reminding the parliamentarians (through a plate saying 'Donated by Sans Papiers for the renovation of the Parliament') every single day of the need to take political action and challenging them to finally recognise how Sans-

Papiers contribute to society. The action aims at giving Sans-Papiers a voice and making the invisible visible. Since summer 2007, the project campaign has been translated into many languages by various migrant initiatives and has been circulated in the Swiss press, free magazines, and Zürich public domain, for example through an eBoard clip at the main railway station, the project website, notices, advertising spots in cinemas, and newspaper articles. Furthermore, a video was produced for and about the project that illuminated the campaign from a variety of perspectives. Voices from Sans-Papiers, political initiatives, politicians, the artist and the curatorial team on perceptions and perspectives of the project were gathered together in a series of interviews. For more than a year the Shedhalle office acted as a kind of networking, communication, and distribution headquarters.

In terms of *gathering* and polyphonous voices, the project wanted to initiate different dialogues between different parties, which are not necessarily separated: the 'illegalised' people, the art context, the activists and the parliamentarians. The parties are not at all homogenous. Negotiations, confrontations, and new constellations in-between the parties came together while the action was running. The challenge was to shift one's own position into a dialogue. In-between voices and tones suddenly became more visible and became public.

#### QUESTIONING PRODUCTION CONDITIONS...

In terms of both their content as well as selected methodologies and performance, the projects from the series *Work to do!* were experiments in identifying and fostering alternative dynamics and economies of social exchange, and wished for a sustainable impact on public sphere and especially on their partly unexpressed conflictual marginal spaces. The concept of what constitutes an artwork developed here into a notion of practice that incorporates pre- and post-production as well as reflective mediating tools and in turn entailed their archiving and distribution.

The more general question might be how to negotiate and to bring into the arena of curating the invisible, the marginalised, the immaterial, or the ephemeral. This is probably again connected to the political issue of representation that was questioned in the beginning:

Who and what is represented and how does it come into the fore? How to define the means of representation, how to create and form the methodologies of visual translations for ephemeral practices and long-term processes? A reflection on institutional framework conditions, namely of conditions under which research-based, participatory, socially-relevant and context-related art production takes place today in connection to funding criteria is of particular importance in relation to the question of representation.

Sönke Gau and myself described the funding situation and production conditions of such kind of projects like *1 CHF = 1 VOICE* or *Building Material Centre* as "caught between two stools"<sup>12</sup>. Whilst the art market booms and selected few artists manage to make money through their involvement in the market, it seems as if such kind of practices and the institutions making the effort to support them remain 'caught between two stools', and indeed that the space between these stools is becoming increasingly restrictive. While applying for financial support for artistic projects in the *Work to do!* project series, it soon emerged that many foundations are fully unprepared for this kind of art production or have little knowledge about the funding necessities. Narrow definitions of what constitutes a work, inflexible funding categories and fixed cycles, categorically presupposed for artistic production, inform and rigidify the selection criteria for funding projects and thus indirectly also the possibility of their realisation and public visibility. Therefore it is necessary to think about production conditions, including approaches towards funding culture which are neither work nor category oriented and do not exclude immaterial, temporary, intervention project formats.

If it comes to the question of representation of art, then one has to question who are the responsible parties for the represented issues as Latour pointed out. It is not possible to think about art practices without discussing their production conditions and the various parties involved in that process. Such a focus demands from art institutions and those institutions contributing to art and culture funding an analysis of artistic working and production conditions and their methodologies, while also simultaneously self-reflectively experi-

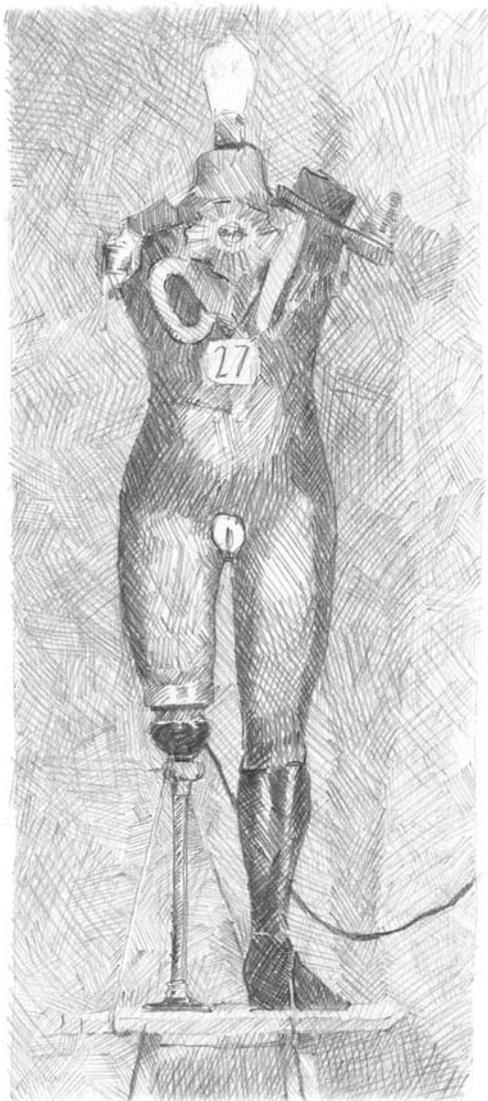
<sup>12</sup> Gau/Schlieben: "Caught Between Two Stools — or on the necessity of considering new approaches to funding culture", in: *Work to do! Self-Organisation in Precarious Working Conditions*, pp. 218-236

menting with strategies and instruments, so as to pose productive questions in order to find possibilities of implementing and financing such practices. So, how to bring alliances that are interested in shifting fixed borders and conventional structures into the arena and how to bring in perspectives from marginalised points of view and practice knowledge into the “Thing”: namely the arena of curating. An evaluation in regard to production conditions and funding criteria need to take into account the praxeological knowledge of art, which needs to speak up loudly.

KATHARINA SCHLIEBEN

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2004-2009 she formed, together with Sönke Gau, the curatorial directing team of the Shedhalle in Zürich. 2002-2004 she worked as a curator at Kunstverein München and as a guest curator at Künstlerhaus in Vienna. She held teaching positions at various art academies and art schools in Switzerland. Since 2010 she works as a curator and lecturer at the Art Academy in Dresden.



THE MIDDLE-CLASS PHILISTINE HEARTFIELD GÖVE WILD  
BERLIN 1920.



GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ  
III BULEVAR 106/15  
11070  
N. BEOGRAD  
YUGOSLAVIA

DETAIL OF A LETTER BY CARL ANDRÉ, SENT TO  
GORAN ĐORĐEVIĆ AS A RESPONSE TO  
HIS INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN  
"INTERNATIONAL SPIKE OF ARTISTS" MAR 1979.

"TAKIS VASSILAKIS CARRYING HIS PIECE, JAN, 04, 1969"



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

--	--	--	--

STANDARD NATIONAL IDENTITY NUMBER



IS GIVEN A LICENSE TO MAKE A LIVING

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

NOT VALID UNTIL SIGNED

AGENCY: THE PENTAGON

THIS LICENSE CAN BE REVOKED AT ANY TIME AT OUR DISCRETION

FORM GS1-17/18-81

2001, GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP (JON HENDRICKS AND JEAN JOCHE), FROM THE SERIES OF NINE LICENSES

## Where Have Some Women Gone? Making Women Artists' Networks Visible

BEATA HOCK

When, around the early 2000s, I first came to work with the subject of contemporary Hungarian women artists, I encountered a more or less solidified professional consensus: a discourse of lack, centering around the simple argument that in Hungary there has been no grassroots feminist movement that would compare to the 2nd wave of Western feminism in the 1960-70s, and therefore that there has been no meaningful art practice that could be interpreted from a feminist perspective — until, in the mid-1990s a younger generation of artists could find inspiration in Western feminist discourses which finally became available after the Iron Curtain was lifted. In the midst of this vast lack there stood Hungary's only self-identified feminist artist: Orsolya (a.k.a. Orshi) Drozdik.

Orsolya Drozdik (b. 1946) graduated from the Budapest Fine Arts Academy in 1977; left the country a year later, and settled down in New York. Since 1989, Drozdik has partly been based in Budapest again. According to her statements, when in the 1970s she started to create works that operated with a woman's perspective, she did so without an awareness of an ongoing feminist discourse on the same topics elsewhere. These pieces problematized the limited choice of role models that were available for her as a female artist, or confronted traditional male-biased art practices (such as the drawing of the live female nude as a core exercise in art education). Upon her return to Hungary, alongside creative activities, Drozdik wrote in the Hungarian art press about feminist theory<sup>1</sup>, edited a rather advanced reader in the subject<sup>2</sup>, and repeatedly took care to explicate her artistic position in interviews and articles<sup>3</sup>. In 2001 she had a retrospective solo exhibition in the Ludwig Museum Budapest, and in 2006 she published a monograph (not a catalogue) on her own artistic practice<sup>4</sup>. These occasions gave her the opportunity to be-

1 Orsolya Drozdik, "Kulturális amnézia avagy a történelmi seb. A feminizmusról" [Cultural amnesia, or the historical wound. On feminism], *Balkon* 1995/1: 4-7

2 Orsolya Drozdik (ed.), *Sétáló agyak: kortárs feminista diskurzus* [Brains in highheels: contemporary feminist discourse], Budapest: Kijárat, 1998

3 See e.g., "Fátyol alatt. Tarczali Andrea interjúja" [Covered by a veil. Interview by A. T.], *Balkon* 1999/7-8: 4-10., and "Én voltam a modell és a modell rajzolója". Forián Szabó Noámi interjúja. ["I was both the model and the one drawing the model." Interview by N. F. Sz.]. *Élet és Irodalom* 2002, March 1.

4 Orsolya Drozdik: *Individuális mitológia. Konceptuálístól a posztmodernig* [Individual mythology: From conceptual to postmodern], Budapest: Gondolat, 2006

come actively involved in constructing and reifying her persona as the first and only Hungarian visual artist who exhibited interest in subject-matters inspired by feminist theory, even in the absence of any accessible knowledge of this intellectual trend.

Despite this well-formulated narrative framework, the discourse of lack, for me it seemed plausible to posit that the “socialist way of women’s emancipation” that ran parallel to the 2nd wave of modern feminism and the Feminist Art Movement just might have impacted in some way women’s creative aspirations. This emancipation certainly had many flaws, but it also had an intense political rhetoric attached to it, actual pieces of legislation and very real social policies which brought enormous changes to women’s lives inasmuch as they created the legal framework for women’s education and employment as well as introduced an updated — and rather progressive — family law.

I also do not rule out the probability that recent art history focusing on this period has been more interested in retrieving records about the activities of the counter-culture and the semi-official art world, and that this narrow focus may have contributed to blurring other phenomena of “secondary importance” as it were.

Luckily, at the Budapest art archives Artpool I came across a small pile of unidentified and unprocessed documents. These were notes: handwritten and typewritten sheets, and something that looked like the transcript of a conversation. One of the pages was signed by the art historian Zsuzsa Simon and had a heading that read, “Four questions I asked myself after Dóra Maurer’s feminist meeting”.

Dóra Maurer’s work is not exactly the kind that is often associated with feminist thinking and artistic expression. I’m also not going to challenge or contradict existing perceptions of Maurer’s *oeuvre*, but the truth is that for a short period in the late-1970s, she did inquire into the feminist critic of art history and contemporary art practice. This story came to light when I went to interview her and asked for help to identify the documents found in Artpool. The handwritten sheets turned out to be hers: transcripts and notes for an interview that she took with the members of the Vienna-based union of women artists IntAkt (International Action Community of Women Artists).

The interview was done in 1979 for a radio broadcast “F”: *Women in the arts* — in the framework of a radio program Maurer regularly ran on a national radio channel at the time (the tape is also preserved). The broadcast was a discussion, initiated and moderated by Maurer, with the participation of a handful of artists and art historians. Apparently, Maurer who was partly based in Vienna since 1967, mediated relevant information between the Austrian capital and the Hungarian scene just as a number of other artists did who had the chance to go abroad and who were then disseminating and sharing information on and personal experiences of international art events and tendencies.

Maurer today says that her interest in feminist thought was part of a general intellectual openness and was not more personally motivated than “the interest of a bug collector in any unfamiliar creature” — that’s a metaphor she herself used. But at the end of the day, she did not feel that feminist concerns could really speak to her. The accounts of both Maurer and Zsuzsa Simon agree on that the discourse on women’s equality was indeed liberating, and that their perception was that they as women had never encountered open resistance or institutional discrimination as long as their professional output proved to be good. Nevertheless, as we’ve just found out, Maurer made substantial efforts to disseminate, both publicly and more privately, issues of feminist criticism.

The manuscripts of both Maurer and Simon as well as the speakers’ contribution in the radio broadcast show a clear understanding of feminist thought on the identity of women as social subjects and creative workers and the inequalities they face on both levels. An enormous benefit of these records is that they are very articulate and remarkably free from the standardized formulations of today’s feminist scholarship that often blur rather than elucidate a particular problem feminist authors engage with. These were indeed the efforts of open-minded individuals to make sense of a newly discovered knowledge field.

Maurer’s research also documented another charming detail, the appreciation by the Austrian feminists and fellow-artists of a gender regime in Hungary that legally guaranteed women’s rights to professional self-development.

Another clue I found in the Artpool Archives was bits of documents of referring to a work, or rather a project by Judit Kele — a participant in Maurer's radio discussion and one of the few women Maurer referred to as those exhibiting a more profound and lasting interest in feminist problematizations than herself.

Judit Kele graduated in 1976 in Textile Design at the Budapest Academy of Applied Arts. She left Hungary in 1980 and is today based in Paris. Her leave was intimately linked with a piece for which I suggest to invent and introduce the genre "social-body art". The piece is entitled *I Am a Work of Art*. In 1979, still in Budapest, Kele presented a photo performance with the same title. She substituted her own naked body for the medium of the artwork: the thread that runs through the loom. Next year she expressly placed herself in the role of an artwork at a durational performance in the Museum of Fine Arts. Playing upon the ways women had been traditionally represented throughout art history, Kele composed herself into a perfect sight, a beautiful spectacle, and spent three days sitting/living at the empty place of an El Greco painting on loan, behind a cordon, in the company of a security guard and the rest of the artworks. The artist poignantly juxtaposed the mastery of an artwork on the one hand, and masterfully staged female beauty on the other, and through this gesture she inquired into the durability of the two kinds of value.

Next, Kele was invited to the Paris Biennial in 1980, where she planned to be auctioned off as an artwork. She figured that through selling herself as a work of art, she would learn what she was worth, and armed with that knowledge, she would be better able to take control of her life. The bidders of the auction were selected from among respondents to a matrimonial ad she had published in the French daily paper *Libération*. As the ad stated, she hoped to gain, through the marriage, more freedom of movement than what her home country allowed her at the time. The item put up for auction was a given period of ownership of the artwork for each Swiss Franc the bidder was willing to pay. This is how Judit Kele became the property of a Frenchman for a period equivalent to the amount offered. The new owner then wanted to keep his artwork by his side, which at the time was only possible if he married his far from free-wheeling Eastern European "artwork".

When we were searching through Judit Kele's personal archive in her Paris apartment, we found some other documents that seemed to have been largely forgotten even to herself. One of these was the mimeographed program of the International Feminist Conference *Drug-ca žena*, organised in Belgrade in 1978 which listed Kele as a participant. Ex-Yugoslav gender scholars today take great pride in having organised an event of such a scale as early as in 1978. The conference program features a truly impressive list of international participants, including such hugely important feminist figures as Susan Sontag and Lucy Lippard representing the US, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva invited from France, or from England Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell. Now, we know from Chiara Bonfiglioli's meticulous research carried out at the University of Utrecht<sup>5</sup>, that all these prominent feminists have been sent invitation letters to but practically no-one of these prominent guests attended although there was a high number of international participants. (Unfortunately, Bonfiglioli's research or other local sources do not clarify why the prominent guests remained absent.)

As I said, Kele's memories are a bit blurred concerning this event, but as much as she can recall she went there with fellow-artists Ilona Lovas (also a participant in Maurer's radio broadcast) and Orshi Drozdik. In any case, she presented me a "visit card" that she, Drozdik and Lovas allegedly had made for this event. The "visit card" has their contact addresses and shows photos of them (plus future filmmaker Ildiko Enyedi) engaged in every day activities: chatting at a café, walking down the stairs, emptying the dustbin, etc.

Judit also came across a few photos of a performance that she planned to do with Katalin Ladik, in which the two women were going to be fighting in and with mud. The other participant, Ladik, lived in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, but regularly came to perform to Hungary from the 1970s on, and in 1992 she moved to Budapest. Discovering Kele's joint performance with Ladik is interesting because even if I try hard to avoid making normative comparisons with the master narrative of Western feminism, I can't help pointing to a glaring difference between the Feminist Art Movement and develop-

5 Chiara Bonfiglioli, Remembering the conference "Drugarica žena. Žensko pitanje - novi pristup?" [Comrade Woman. The Women's Question: A New Approach?] thirty years after, MA thesis, University of Utrecht, 2008

ments within the Hungarian art world: while performative genres were preferred form of expression with international women artists, hardly any women in the Budapest counter-culture were seen in performances unless as non-agentic participants, virtually props, in male-authored pieces. According to Ladik's personal narrative, her first appearance on the Hungarian unofficial scene in 1970 lastingly marred her reputation. The performance was a quasi-shamanistic fertility ritual in which the performer (Ladik herself) recited her sound poetry pieces, accompanied them in rudimentary musical instruments, and was dressed in a fur gown that revealed one of her breasts. While this piece perfectly fitted the profile of alternative art and theater festivals such as Belgrade's Bitef, and was welcome in other Yugoslav cities, the event caused outrage in Budapest. It earned Ladik the epithet "the undressing poetess". At this time, as Ladik commented in our interview, one of the distinctive artistic features of the acclaimed Hungarian film director, Miklós Jancsó, was using stark naked female extras in his films without little apparent function. By contrast, a woman using her own body (in a clearly motivated way) was hardly tolerable.

In closing I wish to disclose the particularly gendered background story of a relatively well-known 1968 happening with the participation of prominent counter-cultural artists Tamás Szentjóby and Miklós Erdély. The title of the happening was *UFO*, and it was on the occasion of this event that Ladik was first invited to meet members of the semi-official Budapest art scene. *UFO* is a drily beautiful piece that was orchestrated to arrange a meeting for Ladik and Tamás Szentjóby who had already been in professional contact, exchanging letters, for a while then but have never met. According to the script of the event, Ladik arrived to town, spent the night in a hotel, where the next morning she was going to get instructions from the receptionist concerning the whereabouts of the meeting. The message told her to follow a man with a dog, waiting for her across the street. The two silently drove to the Danube bank where they found Erdély and others engaged in various senseless activities, and a human figure wrapped in aluminium foil lying on the ground. Ladik was to unwrap the body — and thus meet Szentjóby finally.

Now, when recalling this happening, Ladik mentioned a peculiar difficulty that she as a female artist has repeatedly faced and that some

of my other respondents also reported on. Interpersonal relations in the private sphere often called for the subordination of women's professional aspirations to male artist-partners, or such creative aspirations elicited male partners' professional jealousy. This proved to be a situation difficult to manage even for exceptionally self-reliant Dóra Maurer, and led to actual divorces in Ladik's life. Ladik herself set this issue as a major motive structuring our interview. As the artist related, she was ready to enter a traditional marriage and family relations, taking on the extra effort to produce creative work, but she very much resented when her partners were jealous of the little time she could devote to art making, and was not ready to take infringements of her creative freedom: The *UFO* incident when she went to Budapest despite her husband's disapproval, became a ground for divorce.

The research that I presented here did not conclude that despite the "discourse of lack" there *was* a thriving feminist art movement in Hungary in the 1970s — but proving something like that wasn't its goal at all. Rather, I consciously tried to move away from a unilinear view of recent art history and normative comparisons with a master narrative of feminist art practice.

But I do hope that these findings will contribute to the creation of a less monolithic and more nuanced picture of the cultural history of the 1970s and help to replace the framing provided by the "discourse of lack". The research unearthed evidence that there was not only one single token figure on the scene at the time developing a genuine feminist perspective. My inquiry also disclosed channels through which knowledge about then current intellectual trends circulated, and it therefore may loosen up popular imaginations about hermetically isolated cultural landscapes behind the Iron Curtain.

This historical snapshot also shows that Hungarian women artists' at best tangential endorsement of feminist perspectives was only partly the result of an unawareness of current feminist tendencies. Other part of the reason was that young women artists internalized social discourses about gender equality and took the attainment of women's emancipation for granted. This said, I do not mean to deny the inner contradictions and even a degree of cognitive dissonance coming through their narratives — this is also an intriguing subject

from the perspective of a fast re-traditionalizing gender regime in the transition period.

And yet another reason for “aborted” feminist experimentations seems to have been the unreceptivity of the strongly male-dominated, if not sexist counter-culture. In this respect the vanguard artistic circle of the period has to be regarded as to some degree regressive and exclusory insofar as it withheld new possibilities that in comparison, the simultaneous social developments did offer for women.

And last but not least, the research brought back to life a superb art project. Since 1985, Judit Kele has stopped working as a visual artist and took to filmmaking. Her scarce recorded works and performances, including *I Am a Work of Art* were practically forgotten and thus unknown to even local art historians until the my research brought them back to light. Kele’s piece was reconstructed and first shown in the framework of the exhibition *Agents and Provocateurs* that I co-curated with Franciska Zólyom in 2009. Earlier this year, the Ludwig Museum Budapest bought the work, and it is now part of the museum’s collection.

#### BEATA HOCK

is a research fellow at the Leipzig Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe. She holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Gender Studies and also works as independent curator. Her areas of interest include feminist cultural theory, state- and post-socialism, and the interrelation between social formations and cultural production.



"BATES LOWRY IN MOMA OFFICE ANNOUNCING RESIGNATION, MAY 03, 1969"



AT THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL DADA FAIR, 1920, BERLIN



7. APRILA 1935 U 11 SATI UJUTRO KRISTO HEGEDUŠIĆ, KOJI JE SKANDALUZNU ZABRANU NAMJEŔAVAO JOŠ VIŠE DRAMATIZIRATI, POSTAVIO JE NA VRATA UMJETNIČKOG PAVILJONA OGROMAN LOKOT KOJI JE TREBAO SIMBOLIZIRATI ODNOS REAKCIONARNOG REŽIMA PREMA KULTURI.



AFTER THE POLITICAL CONFLICT  
AT MARCH 15, 1920 IN DRESDEN,  
A STRAY BULLET PIERCED A  
HOLE IN A PAINTING TITLED  
"BATHSHEBA AT THE WELL" BY PIERRE  
PAUL RUBENS IN A NEARBY  
ZWINGER GALLERY.

OSKAR KOKOSCHKA WROTE A TEXT  
INVITING THOSE INVOLVED IN  
THE POLITICAL CONFLICT TO  
PRESERVE CULTURAL HERITAGE,  
THUS PROVOKING A REACTION  
THAT WOULD GROW INTO THE  
FAMOUS "KUNSTLUMP DEBATE".

# How to Make Artistic Research Methods Public? Notes on Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers

NATAŠA PETREŠIN-BACHELEZ

I would like to discuss the importance of a method in the context of artistic research, and more specifically, how discussing the method of a given research is of a public concern. Many projects hosted at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers seem to deal with their own way of working or the ways others work, and one of the goals is to make these research methods public.

The knowledge economy in the realm of “cognitive capitalism” promotes efficiency, innovation and the transmission of research, which has led to a tendency for standardization and institutionalization of methodologies to be applied to the art world. The current critique of this process condemns the conspicuous complicity between the world of artistic research and the neoliberal economic and political regimes which transform this research into an academic, quantifiable and applicable discipline. It seems as if the only suitable framework for research is a tool which can adapt to it. One of the main conditions for allowing the renewal of research, artistic practices and cultural models is to encourage and maintain the construction of methods through situated actions.

The following notes offer the structure of the talk which I gave in November in Zagreb, and which has been taken from the archive of the Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers at: <http://www.archives.leslaboratoires.org/>

## I. CONTEXT

Les Laboratoires' history:

- \* 1990s - 2000s: the important role of the former mayor Jacques Ralite and the role of the choreographer François Veret as the first “generator” of Les Laboratoires

Particularities:

- \* collective artistic direction (with at least one artist) from 2001 onwards
- \* board of administrators is an autonomous body, separated from the financial structures that support the institution
- \* LOCALITY: Aubervilliers, its multicultural, communist and industrial past; its future in gentrification and new university campus on horizon; an active, engaged and diverse life of associations; Stéphane Hessel is honorary citizen of Aubervilliers; Lettrist and Situationist past →

## PAST

Two projects have most precisely described the way Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers function, the way the artists are involved and devoted to the research that is happening in that particular context and the way Les Laboratoires consolidated its institutional objectives in the recent past.

### Thomas Hirschhorn: Musée précaire

Thomas Hirschhorn was invited by the Laboratoires as early as 2001 to realize a project in the town of Aubervilliers; in the meantime, he installed his studio in the town itself, a decision that conditioned the specific contents of his project, considered to be a “NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT”. The project, determined in 2002, planned the construction of a “precarious museum” at the foot of a block of buildings in the Landy area of Aubervilliers. The goal of the *Musée Précaire Albinet* was to exhibit some of the major works of 20th century art history, with the support of the Pompidou Centre and the Fond National d'Art Contemporain, involving actively people from the neighborhood in the different phases of the project.

The concept of the *patrimoine* — an aggregate of physical and nonphysical “goods” *inherited by and belonging to a person or a group, but most significantly allied with the state* — is put very precisely into question by the *Musée Précaire*: the inhabitants of Landy (a neighbourhood in Aubervilliers) are invited not to merely repossess art, to see it in their own neighborhood, to gain, however temporarily, a legacy usually denied them. Rather, they are invited to *run and man the institution in which this art can be seen*. They built the *Musée Précaire*; they were trained in advance at the Centre Pompidou in art's security, handling and media exposure; they took over the *buvette* in order to make a little money from concessions. They constructed and dismantled the museum, manned and guarded it, and shared, however hesitantly, responsibility for its “success”, as was completely clear from their attitudes towards outside visitors. Thus one can imagine their *looking* at the works of art on display to be infused with an activated sense of collective participation. The labor they give to the Musée, paid and unpaid, and whatever they gain from it — even in simply sitting around its open-air *buvette* — enlarges the definition of their audiencehood, defines it as a solidly “participatory” kind of art-spectatorship, different from the placid attendance of a *patrimoine* that is the usual mode of institutional spectatorship.”<sup>1</sup>

## Théâtre permanent

In 2009, Gwénaél Morin and a fixed team of five actors (Fanny de Chaillé, Grégoire Monsaingeon, Stéphanie Beghain, Barbara Jung, Julian Eggerickx) brought a permanent theater to the Laboratoires for an entire year. The idea was to develop an artistic tool for theatrical affirmation and intensification. The experiment was based on a sense

<sup>1</sup> Rachel Haidu, “Les Utopies précaires de Thomas Hirschhorn”, in: *Le Journal des Laboratoires*, #3, December 2004

of urgency and energy that make it political not only from a creative, collective point of view — but also from the point of view of inventing new relations with a place, an environment, and an audience.

The Permanent Theater hinges on 3 LINES OF WORK:

### A play a night

Performances take place on the first 24 evenings of every month (except Sunday and Monday). The company will stage a new play at the Laboratoires every two months starting with a revival of Lorenzaccio d'après Lorenzaccio by Musset, followed by five other adaptations of eponymous plays, all very well-known and in the public domain. The end of every month will alternate between periods of vacation and periods of intensive rehearsal.

### Rehearse every day

Every afternoon the company will rehearse a play, which, after two months, will replace the play then in production.

### Continuous education

Every morning, during a workshop open to the public, an actor from the ensemble will teach a part from the evening performances to an amateur.

## 2. LES LABORATOIRES AS A TOOL FOR ARTISTIC RESEARCH

- deviate from the recent tendency in academia to quantify artistic research according to Bologna convention: Hito Steyerl, *Aesthetics of Resistance*<sup>2</sup> where she tackles the transformation of artistic research into an academic discipline: “there are discussions about curriculum, degrees, method, practical application, pedagogy. On the other hand, there is also substantial criticism of this approach. It addresses the institutionalization of artistic research as being complicit with new modes of production within cognitive capitalism: commodified education, creative and affective industries, administrative aesthetics, and so on. Both perspectives agree on one point: artistic research is at present being constituted as a more or less normative, academic discipline.”

Steyerl gives an example of the construction history of what is today Linz Art Academy, which features prominently a new artistic research department, and its link to the Nazi Germany and the forced labour that came from the nearby concentration camp Mauthausen.

She ends on a highly critical note: “what are the extensive sets of conflicts underlying this new academic discipline? Who is currently building its walls, using which materials, produced by whom? Who are the builders of the discipline and where are their traces?”

A classic research methodology should be described in several steps: one starts with an initial postulate, conducts tests, analyzes the results, and hence proceeds by adjusting between what one sought out to do and what one does. The artistic research projects which we follow at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers do not always seem to rigorously follow these steps. It is always difficult to determine what initiates a research project, for example if the object of a work de-

<sup>2</sup> Hito Steyerl: “Aesthetics of Resistance? Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict”, in: *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, January 2010. Retrieved December 10, 2011, from <http://www.eicpc.net/transversal/0311/steyerl/en>

termines the method of work or if this object is chosen according to methodological principles, if a postulate leads to one or several research processes, if the artist has any idea of what the result may be upon beginning to work, or if s/he doesn't, etc. A situated practice involves mobilizing ideas, actions and (human and non-human) relations, and putting forth a group of practices, exercises, reflexes, and ways of focusing, which modify the context of said situated practice, as well as its actors/tresses, as much as they are modified by it. In this sense, the object of any artistic research is also the research itself: how does one determine its stakes, describe its territory, maintain its progression, guarantee its course, or address it publicly? How do we share knowledge with public?

SITUATED ARTISTIC RESEARCH (REFERENCE TO DONNA HARAWAY AND "SITUATED KNOWLEDGES") situates itself in a given time duration and directly or indirectly involves different types of collaborations and interactions with a given context. How does one work with this one or that one? How does one work at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers rather than somewhere else? How does one work in Aubervilliers? How can art be inhabited, charged with the socio- and geopolitical urgencies of a context? On the other hand, when the art researcher is included in the object of his/her research, any possibility of objectivity in tackling the process as an encounter between reactive poles is forsaken. Approaching theoretical questions in a practical way comes down to "visiting" the notions, to inhabit them in order to know them and to know our personal relationship with these notions.

HOW RESEARCH IS COLLECTIVE AND PUBLIC => PUBLIC AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH + ENABLING SPECTATORSHIP AS A PRACTICE:  
\* DISCURSIVITY  
\* METHODS AND MODES OF ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC RE-INVENTED WITH EACH PARTICULAR PROJECT (DISCURSIVE EVENTS, PUBLISHING ONLINE AND JOURNAL, WORKSHOPS)

Our claim is that the only suitable framework for research is a tool which can adapt to it. One of the main conditions for allowing the renewal of research, artistic practices and cultural models is to encourage and maintain the construction of methods through situated actions.

### 3. CASES

Through three current cases of the research projects I wish to show how knowledge is unfolding. The aims of the research presented here are dealing either with the art itself (Bojana Kunst), larger social and political questions (La Semeuse) or research on spectatorship (Jennifer Lacey).

#### BOJANA KUNST: TO BE CONTINUED

— important anecdote with several visitors of the discursive meetings with Bojana and Danae Theodoridou, who postponed their meetings in order to stay with them for 4 hours, instead of an hour that was previously arranged.

How this peculiar temporality is framing the contemporary artistic processes of making, collaborating and creating: PROJECT turns out to be the ultimate horizon of making in the present day. There is something very perplexing at work in the projective temporality of the PROJECT: regardless of the myriad possibilities it opens up, it nevertheless projects its own completion as the ultimate horizon of work. The problem therefore lies in the fact that, regardless of the openings and transformations inside the projective temporality, the future is still projected as chronological continuity with the past, and the meaning rises from progressive continuation.

Even if the constant creation of projects gives the feeling of flexibility and creative dynamism, actually it is not enabling change, but sameness, or better, exhausting sameness. It is important to mention the specific RETROSPECTIVE FUTURE of the project, which always enables a lot of possibilities even though everything has to be planned in advance to reach the already-projected future. A project works as a horizon of expectation, with a lot of possibilities but no actual change. The time of the project is not the time of the event, which would open the window of the unexpected, with the time being out of joint. It can be described more as an administrative time, where some possibilities are being realized and some not in the progressive

3 See: "Editorial", *Journal des Laboratoires*, Sept-Dec 2011, retrieved December 10, 2011, from [http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/jdl\\_sept-dec2011\\_web.pdf](http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/jdl_sept-dec2011_web.pdf)

line between the invention and its completion. What is particularly interesting here is to observe how the administrative time of the project literally results in an increase of administrative work and demands multiple managerial skills from the artist and other workers (skills of evaluation, self-evaluation, presentation and application, presentation, etc.).

No wonder artists have become a model of creative job insecurity in the last few decades: s/he is so deeply involved in the projective time. This is also deeply changing the social and public role of the artist: the public dimension of his work is projected, not imagined any more. That means that the public dimension of his/her work is most of the time conceived as the finalization of its ends, and the public becomes an outcome of the fact that art is an important part of the economy. Artistic practice should be understood as public because it is a practice of work, an antagonistic practice of doing and making.

One way to deal with and critically address the problematic projective understanding of the artistic work is through the disclosure of the durable and enduring nature of work, and therefore to address this peculiar relation between work and time. This can be seen in numerous attempts by artists to explore duration in the last few decades as a powerful strategy to overturn the ruling formation of temporality. Another way to address the overwhelming projective temporality could be to intervene directly in the rhythm of production and actually continuously and excessively produce plenty so that every “(non)significant” moment in the project is overproducing myriads of traces, evidences, suggestions, discourses, etc.; somehow the project itself may be overrun with the sheer power of activity.<sup>4</sup>

#### La Semeuse<sup>5</sup>

The project *La Semeuse* is a Seed Bank and a Plant Bank, both nourished by the biodiversity in Aubervilliers. The aim of the project is to initiate an exchange of seeds and plants between the residents and gardeners of Aubervilliers. *La Semeuse* takes root during a very special time when the people of Aubervilliers want to rebuild communities around gardens.

The Seed Bank and the Plant Bank are located in front of Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. Opening in spring 2012, the Plant Bank in-

4 Bojana Kunst: “The Project Horizon. On the Temporality of Making”, in: *Journal des Laboratoires*, Sept-Dec 2011, retrieved December 10, 2011, from <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/article/project-horizon/suivre-capturer-le-temps-dans-la-performance-contemporaine>

5 Slovenian artist and architect Marjetica Potrč and architects Séverine Roussel and Philippe Zourgane (RozO Architects, based in Aubervilliers) are the originators of the project. Guilain Roussel, landscape designer, is the coordinator of conferences and workshops organized around *La Semeuse*.

stallation will entail containers of soil and form a connective landscape. Initially, the seeds and plants will be provided by gardeners in Aubervilliers, both individuals and associations. Our future hope is that *La Semeuse* will be a place for residents to exchange plants, seeds and community.

The project raises awareness about the importance of urban gardening and establishes a network between strong local gardening initiatives in Aubervilliers, and beyond. *La Semeuse* will join the seed-adoption campaign by the national association Kokopelli. The project also provides a platform for reflecting on the history of Aubervilliers — once known as the ‘vegetable basket’ of Paris — as well as on the city’s diversity today.

*La Semeuse* is a monument to the city of Aubervilliers, a living laboratory for coexistence between more than 100 different nationalities and cultures.

Jennifer Lacey, Barbara Manzetti, Audrey Gaisan:  
I Heart Lygia Clark

At several sessions from May to November 2010, the choreographers and dancers Jennifer Lacey, Barbara Manzetti and Audrey Gaisan took over the dressing rooms of the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and doled out “aesthetical care” on a one-on-one basis and by appointment. Using the work of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988) as a springboard, they explored the potential of therapy as an artistic practice. Each care recipient was interviewed by the artists beforehand and debriefed afterwards, MAKING THEM AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CHOREOGRAPHIC, BODILY, DISCURSIVE AND MENTAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PIECE, ITSELF ENDOWED BY THE DANCER-BEAUTICIANS WITH MULTIPLE IMPLICATIONS, SENSATIONS AND MICRO-EVENTS. Certain sessions took place at the salon Passion Beauté in Aubervilliers, which generously agreed to accommodate the project.

“My dear Lygia,

I'm in Malmö and I'm thinking about you. The air is filled with iodine and the seagulls here have a higher tonality than in France. It's true that you and I don't have much in common (except maybe the “American-in-Paris” effect), but my feelings for you are very real. Let me explain: I come from a country where the sense of History is too much linked to nationalism for my taste. I'm also, like you, a Lady-Artist and I find it hard to situate myself in the history of my métier, especially because of the seasickness that is induced by this kind of nationalism that is not mine. So, my Lygia, disoriented as I am, I hereby declare my intention to momentarily link all my activities under your flag, you as a country, you as a history. Don't worry. I hope my colleagues and I won't operate in a fashion of tribute, which I would find lacking respect. We rather colonize a new territory with your head engraved on the coins. I thank you for your work Lygia, and already ask for your forgiveness, as the work we do, I, Barbara and Audrey,

HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THERAPY BUT RATHER WITH ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, AS CAETANO VELOSO SAID OF HIS EXPERIENCES WITH YOU. Maybe he misunderstood? Maybe we also do. Don't worry, we'll leave the earth you cultivated in peace. What I say is probably rather obscure but I think you like it, don't you? In any case, the work doesn't take place on the page, and on that point we agree. So the month of May in Aubervilliers will be yours and ours, too. And of those who will join us. But here and now, in Sweden, I think of you and my feelings call for a relief that comes when one puts words on things. And I say those of course for my own benefit, hoping they will also touch you.

I love you Lygia Clark.  
Jennifer Lacey<sup>6</sup>

Jennifer: "The objective: to bring the show towards its most radical point — only one addressee. We address ourselves directly to our client/spectator; his or her presence is more real than an imaginary "public". We function in the domain of the affects without deviating towards a manipulation. This show exists when the public/addressee reaches a level of a particular concentration that enables to feel a part of it without any obligation to react or interact. It is the active passivity that we put forward in this work. To be a spectator in general is to be passive. "Aesthetical care" provokes an enriched state of this reception and transforms it. The client is passive but integrated into the event: she becomes strangely active in her passivity. The objective is not intimacy as such, but an investigation of the power of the performative."

#### 4. AND HOW DOES THE TEAM WORK?

ARE YOU THE TEAM? (A live editorial with Virginie Bobin, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Tanguy Nédélec, Pauline Hurel, Anne Millet, Barbara Coffy, Claire Harsany and Alice Chauchat, as seated. And Grégory Castéra on the other side of the mirror (or the Atlantic Ocean). Interview in front of the kitchen "by Barbara Manzetti")<sup>7</sup>

The choreographer and artist Barbara Manzetti develops in Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers her "performances in the form of a book", publishes regularly her writings in *Journal des Laboratoires* and organises live events. Events give the artist an opportunity to read her texts or have them read by others, as well as to write, orally and in real time, a performative complement to the corpus currently being composed.

We all have a position that goes "blob". Elastic and organic. That speaks for our projects. We sought out its different shapes. Some of us took part in the work early on. And then we stepped back. We passed it on. We returned. Our official position is cut here, spilling over there. There must be an inherited commitment. Not only inheritance in the positions. There was a change so radical that we had

<sup>6</sup> Letter by Jennifer Lacey, retrieved December 10, 2011, from <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/article/my-dear-lygia/i-heart-lygia-clark>

<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/jdl\\_janv-avril\\_2012.pdf](http://www.leslaboratoires.org/sites/leslaboratoires.org/files/jdl_janv-avril_2012.pdf)

to take responsibility for it. We rose to the challenge together. The team was present and united by this challenge. The challenge of being brought forth by those who didn't initiate the structure. Today the project has its own ethic. This new directing body perhaps allows for a more collective decision-making. In the beginning there was some reserve. After a year we still felt that there was this outside perception of change. But that it was accepted. The identity of Les Laboratoires had evolved along with our work. It's no longer a fear of the unknown. There is an acceptance of the fact that it has changed. Not for the better or for the worse. It's just different. We have moved from a clear project to promote into a multitude of extremely complex objects. Then something is created progressively. The practice of being a spectator. A cross-disciplinary practice. It is something that is created.

Part of our energy is drawn from believing or not believing in the projects. In that sense of truly shared responsibility where everyone works in solidarity alongside their co-workers. So that we progress together. There have been moments when we have felt a sort of collective resistance to some projects. Either our commitment to it was harder to justify, or the whole team was worn down. Because it takes us longer to reach our limits here. I myself am trying to imagine work differently. And to create the optimal conditions for the project to be carried out both according to its philosophy and according to the ethic of Les Laboratoires. And perhaps that is one of the limits that we could set for artists. An ethic for the use of public funds. That too is one of the fuzzy edges that we have to define together. When we ask ourselves just how far we can work with a project. The work of 10 committed people to bring all of this about, all of this which is not very visible. Because what we really want to show is the artists' work. And what had to be negotiated is not visible. It is something we thought about at the very beginning. We thought "Can research really be collective? Can we open up the walls to reveal the processes that go along with it?" There is a place where research is done with support. We learn a lot because we can discuss things. What is hard is to give a general meaning. Give priority to projects and their construction. Which is often delicate work. We are not a production company. We have to quickly get down to what is essential, the way you apprehend a project. And that brings freshness. It brings new energy to everybody every time you do it. Getting a better hold and

finding a more stable base. Without getting lost in the details. The demand for flexibility is related to the art form. It is our job. The ability to listen. Adaptability.

Faith in the ability of Les Laboratoires to provide happiness varies. It's a barometer that depends on individuals' capacity to experience happiness. Curating. It means being with and creating frameworks for operating which are not necessarily those that society uses. I also like the word situate. We situate an imaginary world in relation to the reality in which we find ourselves. An ethic. It also means telling ourselves that we are not the ones doing the projects. So we're not going to impose our way of working. We have an influence because we come with questions, curiosity, things we have thought of. The questions are related to each of us individually and to the idea that we have of what Les Laboratoires is. This black, gaping hole that could take any shape. We never discuss it but we presuppose it when we talk. Our work ethic. The strength of the team is in constructing a shared answer to this problem that one person has brought up. The presuppositions are there without being discussed because we believe in them individually. Up until the point where there is a risk of a breakdown. And we feel these questions collectively. That is what Les Laboratoires is. What is felt by everyone. Some projects don't set our capacities and desires in motion. That can happen with projects that don't have any public impact. Sometimes we even feel as if we have been rejected by a project. In a way. The moment of satisfaction is the introduction to the public. It's in the skills that you develop. In a human meeting. Discussion is an important part of the work, in order to be clear and not lose the thread of what is happening. The direction. It's keeping track of everyone's work and direction. Together. We use shared documents and several meetings a week. Open space. That solidarity. That satisfying dialogue. It would be a failure if we were to notice the effect of our work on the shape of a project. That would mean that as a structure we had imposed too much, I think. I believe that the way in which we work means that projects take on other directions. It is a rare thing to have such a capacity to work to accompany a project. It is pragmatic. But it means that a project has a critical component to it. Support from the structure. For production and public relations. Which are not easy to do. And us, we are a tool to do that, something that is already set up. So there are projects that grow. Because they can. Something in the artist's practice cor-

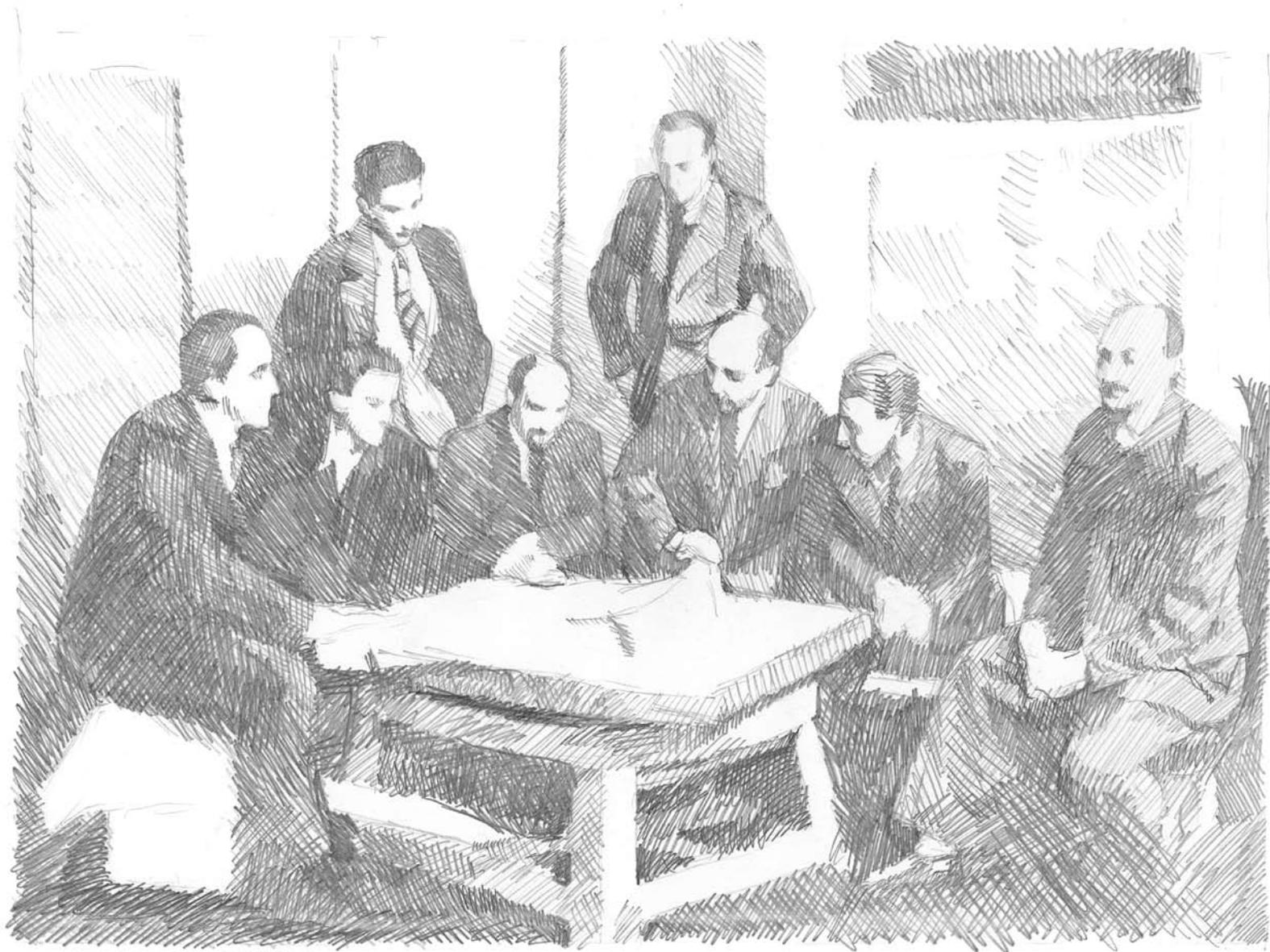
responds to how we see Les Laboratoires. This morning I re-read our statement of intent. There is a clear interest in collective initiatives. Critical, discursive approaches. A lot of foreign artists. Presentations in English. It was difficult to present it as an art form. We were interested in the idea of the research process with regular meetings. So what you come to see has another type of strength and fragility. We are all very sensitive to the fact that Les Laboratoires is a place for experiments. We all feel that it is a unique place that we want to support through these projects. Devoting ourselves both to the artists and to the structure. Les Laboratoires does not come after or next to the project, it is a part of it. Questions from you. And you. And you. They make us take a new direction. The words that come up again and again that are so obvious. Words that assert themselves as part of this new architecture. It is like a skate park where somebody doing a trick might fall on his/her neighbor. But s/he doesn't. S/he makes the turn at just the right time and you ask yourself how it is possible. But it is possible.

NATAŠA PETREŠIN-BACHELEZ

is an art critic and independent curator. In 2010 she was appointed co-director of the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. She contributes to many international art magazines and is a member of the editorial board of several. She is editor-in-chief of the *Manifesta Journal* (2011-2013).



FEATURING BEN MOREA (SCENE IN A MOVIE "I SHOT ANDY WARHOL" (1996), AT A TIME AROUND "GARBAGE STRIKE" FROM 1968 IN CONVERSATION WITH V. SOLANAS



1935. GRUPA ZEMLJA



NOVEMBER 29, 1936 ARTISTS' UNION LEADING A PICKET LINE IN NEW YORK CITY



## What Positions Can Women Occupy in Contemporary Art and Culture in Romania?

CORINA L. APOSTOL AND THE BUREAU  
OF MELODRAMATIC RESEARCH

What began as an interview between an art critic and an artist-duo, evolved into a debate over the condition of women cultural workers active on the Romanian art scene today. Corina L. Apostol, art historian, and The Bureau of Melodramatic Research (thereafter BMR), decided to do away with the normative format of a Q&A, in order to deconstruct the circumstances that brought their collaboration into being along the lines of feminist critique. The BMR is known for cooperating with or infiltrating cultural institutions at home and abroad in order to de-mystify the function of gendered emotional capital in the matrix of social, political and economic relations that govern these organizational bodies. Working together, we would like to address general conditions of inequality that direct the reception, interpretation and production of art and culture by women (in our local context and abroad) to make them visible and discernible — and to plant these concerns squarely at the center of cultural debates.

CLA: Let us begin with formal introductions, to illuminate for the reader the conditions that made you decide to work together, after being formally trained as individual artists at the Academy in Bucharest. I am also curious to know how you see your platform's mission in the cultural field in Romania and outside its borders.

BMR: The figure of the individual artist, praised both by the art education system and by the art market, has been under constant question and critique in our practice at the Bureau of Melodramatic Research. The ideology of individualism, central to Western modernity and to capitalism, finds its overstated expression in the social role it conveys to the artist: a self-centered, coherent, unique subject, whose singularity is bolstered by an exceptional autobiography. These features are also linked to the emergence of central perspective and Eurocentrism in the Renaissance, not coincidentally right in the wake of colonial expansion and the reinstatement of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

An important aspect of the artist figure promoted beginning with the 15th century was the prevalence of a male subject. In this respect, the communities of witches in the late Middle Ages, described by Silvia Federici in her excellent study *Caliban and the Witch*<sup>2</sup>, are role models of the Bureau. She analyses the transition to capitalism from

<sup>1</sup> See Hito Steyerl's analysis on the history of the concept of horizon, closely connected to the development of linear perspective as a visual paradigm of European modernity, in: *Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*, retrieved October 18, 2011, from <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/222>

a feminist viewpoint, centering her research on the great witch-hunt of the 16th and 17th centuries. The witches were considered dangerous because they were healers — they had a great knowledge of plants and herbs, so they could use contraceptive methods and thus could make decisions about their own bodies and were part of the heretic movements — they obeyed neither the hierarchy nor dogmas of the official church nor the socio-political system imposed by it.

She argues that this violent taming of disobedient women was one of the key processes to enable the emergence of capitalism, which could not have been possible without their domestic and reproductive work. Before, however, these women were living and working in communities, they were skilful in their knowledge about natural abortifacients and they had a monopoly over birth services (including surgery). In conclusion, they were able to control their own reproduction and it's particularly this aspect that had to be repressed by all means. Federici thus draws an important genealogy for presenting alternative social structures based on communalism and at the same time empowering women.

Later, with the emergence of European industrial capitalism in the 19th century, individualism was reinforced as a hegemonic economic doctrine. Parallel Romantic myths have produced the ultimate figure of male individualism endowed with genius, creativity, originality, imagination. These traits which once belonged to the artist were gradually taken over by capitalism: first in the realm of consumption during the fordist era along with the advertising boom, and later in the postfordist mode of production, based on management creativity, including its ability to dissimulate the exploitation of labour force in the third world. These myths prevail since they very well serve the present neoliberal discourse, centered on the assumption that capitalism has reached a postindustrial stage. Artistic and economic individualism are inextricably intertwined in the race for capitalist redemption. Creativity and originality are fetishized as landmarks of freedom; nevertheless individual freedom is often used as a mere pretext for market freedom and capital expansion. The so-called creative class becomes a reliable human resource to be

2 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004

placed where profit is needed (through the process of gentrification, very familiar to artists), while other classes, the working-class and lumpen are being displaced and, best case scenario, relocated to the peripheries. On the other hand, creativity is praised for its assumed potential to reform strategies of resistance. The question is to what extent this language, imbibed in the corporate world, can still be reclaimed.

Speaking of language, we would also like to comment on the word “mission” in your question. Its etymological roots lie in religious (the Jesuit avant-garde of the European colonial imperialism) and military (the avant-garde of the American military operations) discourse, which both claim an ethical subtext. In the wake of the neo-conservative backlash which we are currently witnessing across Europe and North America, this moralizing sermon of the right needs to be challenged. Melodrama as a genre has the polarized, personified battle between good and evil at its core, a battle on which contemporary political discourse is structured, be it the war on terror or the local anticommunist crusade. It is something we have been concerned with for quite a while: hierarchies and power relationships that are formed in the course of various missions. There is an inherent dilemma in the whole idea of the Bureau, because it tries to reconcile research activity with the study of emotions. We are sometimes wary of BMR becoming a Sentimental Police. That is why we have to constantly negotiate our position and avoid the clinical study of emotions, their quarantine in a sanitized laboratory. Instead, we are terribly attached to a melodramatic methodology: *melo-critique*.

CLA: I would like to continue with the following observation, which becomes more visible for someone like myself, writing from outside of the center of debates in the local art community. That is, to whom the situation appears thus: most artists in Romania are men, while women have been assigned the role of critics and curators. What informs this attitude — is it the academic training, the power structure in art institutions which are still governed by mostly male boards? Or do you see it as personal conviction on the part of theoreticians and curators? I struggle with these questions as a theoretician acting in a field that is fraught with the historical denial of gender discrimination, more prevalent in the East but still persisting in the West as well (and I am sure North and South).

BMR: It is a multi-faceted issue and one which may cause some stir. Nevertheless we are glad you brought this subject up. We are noticing more and more discomfort caused by gender imbalance in various critical groups in Romania, accompanied by unsupported efforts to set the balance. They result in a slight improvement but never bring about serene gender equilibrium. Let us begin by considering the specific context we are in right now, that of *CriticAtac*, before we go on to analyze the local art scene. The Bureau calculated statistics for the two years of activity of the magazine, a kind of gender audit. We found that while in the first year the percentage of women contributing to the platform was around 10%, this year it grew to 23%. This means an average of 18%. Quite a remarkable difference. So the three of us are proudly lending a helping hand in this respect.

More generally, there seems to be a paradigm of critical clusters in Romania coordinated by mostly male boards (for example, *IDEA Arts+Society* with a five to one score and *CriticAtac* with a slightly worse situation of 6 to 1).

In the case of contemporary artists however, statistical data might at first suggest a more balanced situation. We had a look at several websites, which aim to offer an overview, such as [artscene.ro](http://artscene.ro) or [rootowatch.ro](http://rootowatch.ro): there are 40%, respectively 36% women artists mentioned. However, if you think about the first names that come up in your mind when thinking about Romanian contemporary art, judging by the hierarchy of the international institutions where these artists have exhibited, the balance becomes quite different from the statistical results. So maybe not only the local art institutions are fraught with gender inequalities, but also the international ones. Is it what you had in mind with the question, also thinking about your presentation at The Congress of Spectral Institutions (in June 2011) about artist branding?

CLA: My intervention at the Congress tried to deal with a form of canonization of Eastern Art in the West and the establishment of a consistent “laundry list” of artists that always appear in the shows in Western Europe and the USA. Moreover, certain works are always emphasized, those that relate to the traumas of communism instead of shedding some light on contemporary concerns of artists — which have dramatically changed in the past 20 years. From my

own research I can concur that 75% of these artists are male — and it should be emphasized that this is a choice on the part of the curators and the managers of these spaces, and does not rightly reflect the works produced by women artists from the region.

BMR: We totally agree. We would also like to point out another aspect: if contemporary art is placed in a grey zone, and leaves some room for debate on the topic with gender shades worthy of the Painting School of Cluj (also male dominated), with more traditional art institutions we enter a black hole. In the National University of Arts' painting department the teaching staff is exclusively male (13 out of 13 teachers mentioned on the website). In the same department of the Artists' Union, there is only one woman out of 15 members of the board. That is 0%, and 6% respectively. In the photography& video department of the school the situation slightly changes (2 women out of 9) which drastically raises the percent to 22%. We also had a look at the commercial galleries: the two most internationally visible ones represent 2 Romanian women artists out of 11.

Critics and curators in turn, as you said, are mostly women, both in the Artists' Union and on the above — mentioned websites. The percents add up to 80%, 66%, 50%, 80% — the first case of female majority.

If we think of the etymological background of the word curator we also find the Lat. “cure” meaning “care”. Care work has been traditionally assigned to women so from this perspective one can also imagine the woman-curator mothering the male-artists. On the other hand there are many examples in the Romanian art world defying expected clichés: spaces run by women, women artists who are politically and socially engaged, dealing with gender issues in their work, etc. Maybe visibility of instances of discrimination is one of the requisite strategies of resistance: that is to make the conditions of production (including gender restrictions) public, and part of the production itself.

CLA: We began this debate bringing up feminist theory, which emerged from the 1960s and 1970s solidarity movements among women workers in the West, and is now considered a global phenomenon. But I am skeptical of the extent to which the various waves of

feminist critique can be straightforwardly applied to our context. Do you consider yourselves feminists? I am particularly interested in what you see as downfalls and opportunities associated with such a claim in Romania — which has been only recently exposed to this concept and lacks the conditions for a strong solidarity front among women to bring it to fruition — if you agree with my statement.

BMR: WE are definitely taking a feminist viewpoint. However, as regards the downfalls, even if you do not use the word feminist but simply deal with gender issues in Romania, you might be cast as a “freak” and looked down upon with suspicion and distrust. Further, we noticed that the local imaginary associated with feminism is haunted by a frightening bestiary of unshaven legs and underarm hair, bras on fire and voodoo rituals against men. In this dark scenario, feminism becomes the benevolent church of hideous femininity.

The question of the relevance of Western feminist theory in the local context should be preceded by an investigation of its visibility. The amount of international female theoreticians, whose work is being translated, referred to, quoted, even in critical groups, is minute. Rock star philosophers like Žižek, Chomsky, Negri and Grosz make Silvia Federici, Donna Haraway or J. K. Gibson-Graham seem underground. All the more their perspectives seem to be a rare and precious knowledge.

On the other hand it is equally important to talk about things everybody can relate to, that is, to rely on examples drawn from the local situation. In this respect, we find the discussions of the Feminist Reading Group at *Biblioteca Alternativă*<sup>3</sup> really meaningful, as they deal with urgent issues for the Romanian context. This group's women-only policy has been under constant debate due to its exclusiveness, but on the other hand it is necessary to create a space of solidarity and peer-to-peer dialogue for women. In the public space women are still speaking in a considerably lower voice compared to their male counterparts, so in a way such a space offers a training ground for public expression.

CLA: We have just “celebrated” the fall of the dictatorship in Romania, over 20 years ago. Usually in our local context the lines become all too

3 For more details and information please see The Alternative Library: <http://www.biblioteca-alternativa.noblogs.org>

blurred between the philosophy of communism and the regime that betrayed its ideals. One of the unexplored ventures of communism in this country is that it paradoxically promoted women as equal to men, women actively engaged in building socialism, engaged in the economic and political orders. Of course sexist restrictions still prevailed in this so-called equality: such as women still being expected to produce babies and take care of the household — but in theory they were conceptualized as the equal half of the male proletariat. How do you see the shift between this construction of “woman” and the “liberated” woman living in free market economy today? What has changed and what inequalities still prevail? I would like to begin thinking about how to recapture the transformative potential of the claims from both eras in theory and practice. I think it's a very difficult exercise to imagine this, but the process toward achieving it may prove important in focusing our collective efforts.

BMR: Indeed, in keeping with the gains of the October Revolution in 1917, the postwar Eastern European governments provided women with the right to vote, widespread access to education and a working place, while at the same time confining them to the traditional roles of mothers, the main care-takers in the family. In theory it meant equality, in practice a double amount of work, and this was not only the case for Romania but for the whole ex-Soviet space.

We are currently working on an archive of women's visual representations before and after 1989, and started with the main magazines which were aiming at a female audience — *Femeia* (The Woman) as well as the ones dealing with health and hygiene education - *Sănătatea* (The Health). We began the same type of research in Poland and Moldova, and in all cases we were completely outraged by the contrast in representation between the two periods. After spending a lot of time looking at pre-1989 images, in which women were often represented in professions traditionally assigned to men (the chemist, the welder, the astronaut and so on), the topless pictures of the 90s (which all seemed to re-stage Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in the fashion of the time, with high heels and “big” sprayed hair) seem to be a sort of a soft porn with secretaries, played on the premises of foreign-capital companies.

So there was a sort of visual fairness in soviet communism. Visibility was not restricted to the young, slim and beautiful, at least in what

regards some categories of women. However, this was not the case with Roma women, or the disabled, fully excluded from sight. The nationalist doctrine of Ceausescu's regime was well supported by image propaganda, with eugenics-inspired hymns of population health and scientific racism, reminiscent of the past interwar period.

Another element of connection between the interwar eugenics movement and the period between 1945 and 1989 is the denial of women's reproductive rights with the 770 Decree, aiming at population growth. This less discussed genealogy is traced by Maria Bucur in her work *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*<sup>4</sup>. Her research points out that the decree passed in 1966 comes in close connection to the similar one from 1936, issued by King Carol II. She carefully follows the thread of people involved in both laws, revealing a hitherto neglected historical continuity and implicitly contributing to a critical perception of the interwar period.

However, it seems difficult to counter the consistent efforts of the Romanian neoconservative intellectuals to gild the 30s, as well as their fierce perseverance to dissimulate the racism specific to this period. The official anticommunist discourse builds its legitimation upon a dramatic opposition as well as a positive re-affirmation of the interwar period, that's why it is full of technocratic fiction and backed through the goofy LARPing<sup>5</sup> of the intellectual "elites".

As regards the reproductive propaganda, it persists in the present public discourse, if merely implied, influenced by local Orthodox neoconservatism. Marches for the rights of the unborn have been recently organized by the Pro-Vita, the Romanian version of Pro-Life. In some of the schools in Bucharest, sexual education is being taught by Pro-Vita agents and priests, also a consequence of their lobby and easy access in the Ministry of Education. Silvia Federici rightfully identifies the body as the main battleground for feminist struggles. She insists on the centrality of the reproductive work as the work producing the work force, ignored by Marx and Foucault alike (although the latter mentions birth rate as an important biopolitical

4 Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001

5 LARP stands for *Live Action Role Playing*

instrument). So the moral principle of fetal sanctity claimed by the right as well as the capitalist ideology of the constant production of bodies ready-to-be-exploited-for-profit lead to the same pressures on the women's body.

CLA: And what of the theorization of gender in the East of Europe governed by Western institutions, which possess the institutional framework and capital to support exhibitions and publications? There have been many such endeavors recently, dealing with the production of gender Eastwards in a still Cold-War rhetorical dichotomy. Most striking was *Gender Check: Masculinity and Femininity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2010), hosted by the MUMOK in Vienna and back by the influential Erste Foundation. Do you think such an exhibition could take place in Romania or another post-socialist region? Why haven't institutions supporting contemporary arts in this context initiated such manifestations — are they even relevant to our context or do they serve to perpetuate the Othering of the East under the guise of gender critique?

BMR: It's a coincidence worthy of melodrama that you mention this particular exhibition. We were in residency at KulturKontakt at that time, and we attended the conference and opening. So we got a little bit of backstage information and also were exposed to the context in which the exhibition took place. It was organized in the anniversary year 2009, when Vienna was cheerleading the 20 fruitful years of neo-colonial expansion over territories of the former Habsburg Empire — referred to in the title of the exhibition as "Eastern Europe". So a "1989" exhibition was on at Kunsthalle Wien, while in its close vicinity MUMOK was proudly checking the gender of Eastern artists with the kind support of the Erste Foundation (the one that owns Erste Bank).

We were amazed by how many artists were on the checklist (more than 200); the exhibition rooms were suffocated with works aligned onto the walls, in endless rows, arranged according to nationality. Nevertheless, the rather huge differences between the social and political situations of the participating countries were hardly explained, the *checking* was following the principles of the *check-in*. Although she was part of the exhibition and accompanying conference, Marina Gržinić wrote a very critical article about the whole

project<sup>6</sup>. Already at the conference she gave a well-trimmed lecture on borders and the internalization of borders (a propos check-in) instead of the innocent melo-autobiographical tale that was expected of her. Actually it has become a habit that melodramatic stories of overcoming adversity provide the background and legitimacy of artistic practice, as shown by such presentations or artist interviews in which questions about childhood hardship just cannot be helped.

After the opening, Gržinić and her class organized a public debate inside the exhibition, taking very critical positions towards the exhibition. We sat in circles in different parts of the show and commented upon the financial supporters behind it, the happy marriage of Erste funds and MUMOK visibility, neo-colonization, the absence of some key groups such as Laibach, the printed leaflet-invitation comprising a best-of selection of the participating artists, chosen according to the glitter of their CVs etc. We imagined such a gathering in MNAC, questioning one of their exhibitions on their own premises!

It is clear that such a retrospective, such an apparently comprising checking cannot take place in the respective countries. There are neither the financial means, nor the power position to allow this bird eye's view on the whole region, nor the prestige of MUMOK to raise the symbolic capital of post-1989 Austrian investments.

CLA: I agree — although such exhibitions (with all the problems that you mention) are desperately needed in our context to legitimize more engaged conversations about women artists' working conditions and offer models from previous generations, they by and large remain the privilege of cultural capitals in West-Central Europe. Instead of a conclusion, I'd like to think about the future, the work that still needs to be done locally to counter some of the bad practices and habits that we emphasized in this exchange. I'd like to suggest that the collective platform we co-founded this fall, ArtLeaks<sup>7</sup> can be a productive space in what concerns women artists' struggles — making them more visible and empowering some of the demands we identified through our collaboration. At least I hope that it will

6 Marina Gržinić, Analysis of the exhibition "*Gender Check — Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*", retrieved October 18, 2011, from <http://www.eipcp.net/policies/grzinic/en>

7 For more details and information please see: <http://art-leaks.org/>

develop also in the direction of gender discrimination and inequalities that we unfortunately still encounter. If we understand these as paradigmatic of historical conditions that can be overturned through collective action then that would be taking a big step for our community already.

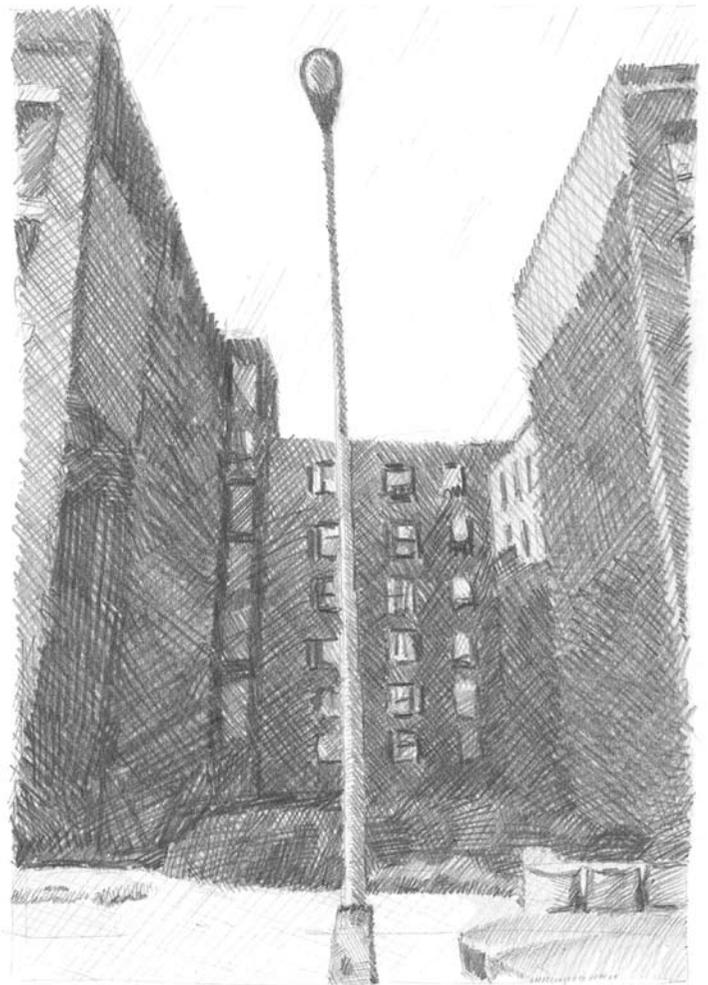
(A collective intervention in *CriticAtac Magazine*, October 18, 2011)

#### THE BUREAU OF MELODRAMATIC RESEARCH

is a dependent institution without permanent premises engaged in analyzing different elements of the melodrama genre and their influence on political, social and cultural spheres. It relies on strategic cooperation with fellow institutions, whose reserves of emotional capital it tracks and investigates.



'ARTISTS ATTACK MOMA, JAN 24, 1969'



335 Edgecombe Ave, Block 2053, Lot 94, 30x100, vacant/  
"Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social  
System, as of 1 May 1971" / Hans Hacke, R. Guggenheim Museum 71

# Die Rote Fahne

JUNE 9, 1920, GERTRUDE ALEXANDER, WHO WAS THE EDITOR OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER'S CULTURAL SECTION, WROTE AN ARTICLE TITLED "HERRN JOHN HEAFIELD UND GEORGE GROSZ" AS A RESPONSE TO THE "KUNSTLUMP DEBATE", REPRESENTING IN A WAY A DISTINCT POSITION OF THE PARTY TO THE CASE ITSELF, AS WELL AS TO THE ROLE OF ART IN REVOLUTIONARY SOCIETY.  
DIE ROTE FAHNE (ENG. THE RED FLAG)



MAY 1, 1971 / "AWC" PROTESTING CANCELLATION OF HANS HAECKE SHOW  
AT THE SOLOMON ROBERT GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM IN NEW YORK

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IMPRESSUM

IVA KOVAČ AND ELVIS KRSTULOVIĆ

started to work together in 2006. Since 2009 they intensively work as a team, due to distribution of work and credits still in search of a joint name. They work at the crossroad of theory, art and design, and are involved with the activities of the artists' self-organisation SIZ, as well as the platform k.r.u.z.o.k.

