
THE CONSTITUENT MUSEUM

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THE CONSTITUENT MUSEUM

CONSTELLATIONS OF
KNOWLEDGE, POLITICS
AND MEDIATION

A Generator of
Social Change

 CONTENTS

 INTRODUCTION

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| I.01 | THE CONSTITUENT MUSEUM Editors' Introduction | 10 |
| I.02 | THE RAINBOW WRASSE Francis McKee | 14 |

PART 1

BECOMING CONSTITUENT

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 1.01 | BECOMING CONSTITUENT <i>Introduction</i> John Byrne | 26 |
| 1.02 | THE REST IS MISSING <i>On Constituencies as a Matricial Notion for New Institutions of the Commons</i> Raúl Sánchez Cedillo | 30 |
| 1.03 | NEGOTIATING INSTITUTIONS Janna Graham | 44 |
| 1.04 | MIDDLESBROUGH'S NEW COMMUNITIES Elinor Morgan | 50 |
| 1.05 | NEW COMMUNITIES OF MIGRANTS Adela Železnik | 56 |
| 1.06 | UNTIMELY NOTES ON 'THE NEW ABDUCTION OF EUROPE' Francesco Salvini and Raúl Sánchez Cedillo | 60 |

PART 2

ARCHITECTURES OF USE

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.01 | ARCHITECTURES OF USE <i>Introduction</i> John Byrne | 76 |
| 2.02 | ARCHITECTURES OF ENCOUNTER, ATTENTION AND CARE <i>Towards Responsible Worlding Action</i> Alberto Altés Arlandis | 80 |
| 2.03 | NEGOTIATING JEOPARDY <i>Towards a Constituent Architecture of Use</i> John Byrne | 92 |
| 2.04 | TENSTA MUSEUM L'INTERNATIONALE Maria Lind | 114 |



| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.05 | THE USES OF ART LAB @ LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY John Byrne | 122 |
| 2.06 | HONEST SHOP Alistair Hudson | 126 |
| 2.07 | SEED JOURNEY Futurefarmers/Amy Franceschini | 130 |
| 2.08 | MUSEUM SOLIDARITY LOBBY Azra Akšamija | 138 |

PART 3
PEDAGOGIES OF ENCOUNTER

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 3.01 | PEDAGOGIES OF ENCOUNTER <i>Introduction</i> Aida Sánchez de Serdio | 154 |
| 3.02 | 'GIVE HER THE TOOLS, SHE WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THEM!' <i>Some Thoughts about Learning Together</i> Nora Sternfeld | 158 |
| 3.03 | A CONSTITUENT EDUCATION Yaiza Hernández Vélazquez | 166 |
| 3.04 | ANOTHER ROAD MAP SCHOOL FOR ARTS EDUCATION Alejandro Cevallos Narváez and Nora Landkammer | 170 |
| 3.05 | POSSIBILITIES FOR EMANCIPATION Bojana Piškur | 174 |
| 3.06 | 'REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE' Manuel Borja-Villel | 178 |
| 3.07 | 'REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE' AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING Jesús Carrillo | 182 |
| 3.08 | BETWEEN ACTS: INFLUENCE, NEGOTIATE, ENCOUNTER, INSTIGATE, NARRATE <i>Re-writing the Relations Between Art and Situated Knowledge Found in Times of Crisis</i> Subtramas (Virginia Villaplana, Montse Romani and Diego del Pozo) | 196 |
| 3.09 | TOWARDS A COORDINATION ETHIC Sara Buraya Boned, Paula Moliner and Manuela Pedrón Nicolau | 202 |
| 3.10 | CLOSE THE FOLDING SCREEN BEFORE LENIN ESCAPES <i>Somateca and the Closet</i> Bárbara G.F. Muriel, Sara Buraya Boned, Loreto Ares, Diana Vázquez somateca | 206 |
| 3.11 | A GREEK CHOIR TEARING THE CANVAS OF PUBLIC HEALTHCARE Carmen Esbrí | 212 |

PART 4

DISTRIBUTING OWNERSHIP

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 4.01 | DISTRIBUTING OWNERSHIP <i>Introduction</i> Elinor Morgan | 220 |
| 4.02 | DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS VERSUS CULTURE WARS Jesús Carrillo | 234 |
| 4.03 | PRESERVING PRECARIOUSNESS, QUEERING DEBT Isabell Lorey | 242 |
| 4.04 | NOTES ON FRIENDSHIP Céline Condorelli | 250 |
| 4.05 | SOLIDARITY Igor Španjol | 256 |
| 4.06 | ANTAGONISM Francesco Salvini | 260 |
| 4.07 | 'VSAK ČLOVEK JE KUSTOS!//JEDER MENSCH IST EIN KURATOR!' <i>Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 16 June-30 September 2007</i> Tjaša Pogačar Podgornik | 274 |
| 4.08 | LODGERS AT M HKA Nav Haq and Alan Quireyans | 278 |
| 4.09 | A MODEL FOR A CONSTITUENT MUSEUM <i>MOCA Toronto Canada</i> November Paynter | 282 |
| 4.10 | NEW LINTHORPE Elinor Morgan | 286 |

PART 5

ARCHIVING AND COLLECTING RELATIONSHIPS

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.01 | ARCHIVING AND COLLECTING RELATIONSHIPS <i>Introduction</i> Aida Sánchez de Serdio | 292 |
| 5.02 | REVISITING AND RECONSTITUTING NETWORKS FROM JAPAN TO BEIRUT TO CHILE Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti | 296 |
| 5.03 | ARCHIVES IN USE <i>A Laboratory of Political Imagination for the Present</i> RedCSur | 316 |
| 5.04 | REALITIES OF THE UNDERCOMMONS <i>About the Work of Making, Unmaking and Remaking Organizations</i> John Hill talks to Tiziana Terranova, Sean Dockray and Adelita Husni-Bey | 322 |
| 5.05 | VULNERABILITIES AND SHIFTING MEANINGS OF CITIZENSHIP Özge Ersoy | 330 |



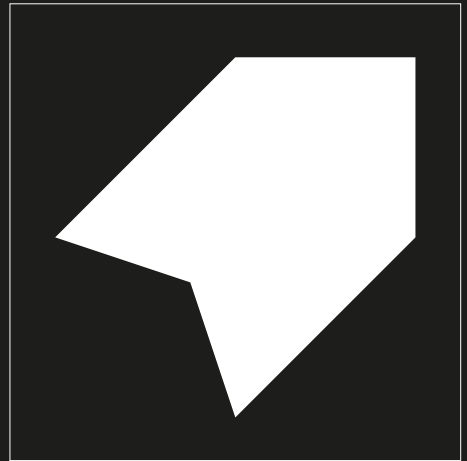
| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.06 | DATA ASYMMETRY Burak Arıkan | 336 |
| 5.07 | GRAPH COMMONS Burak Arıkan | 340 |
| 5.08 | OPEN SOURCE PROTOTYPES Oriol Fontdevila | 342 |
| 5.09 | THE SALT OFFICE OF USEFUL ART Onur Yıldız | 356 |

APPENDIX

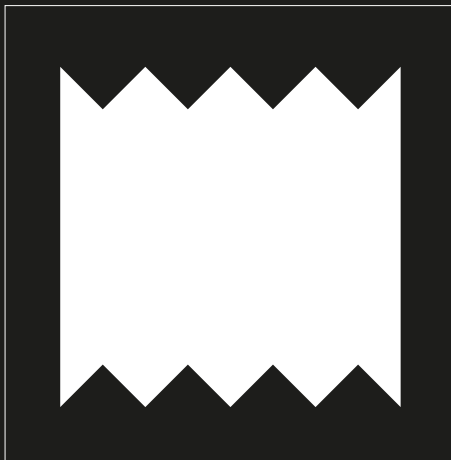
| | |
|---|-----|
| Contributors | 362 |
| Index of Names | 372 |
| Index of Works of Art, Exhibitions, Projects, Organizations | 376 |
| Acknowledgements | 380 |
| Colophon | 382 |



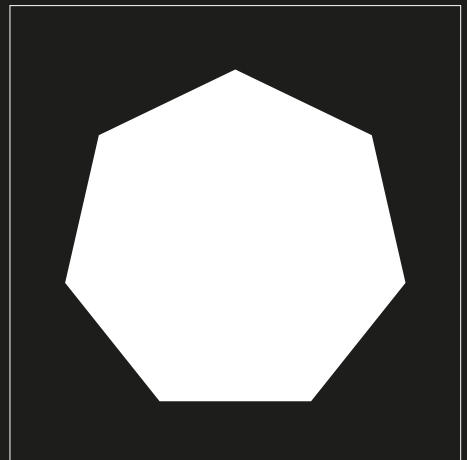
RECIPROCITY



ACTIVATION



STRUCTURES



NEGOTIATION

KEY ISSUES OF THE CONSTITUENT MUSEUM

In the upper right corner of each spread a set of icons is displayed, representing the key issues of this publication. Black icons refer to the issue or issues the current text is about. Below is a brief explanation of their meaning.

RECIPROCITY indicates a range of constituent activities based upon the act of exchange, whereby the act of exchange is not necessarily financial or undertaken as a means to ensure advantage or profit in favour of one or the other party. Instead, reciprocity refers to a set of relationships that are entered into through mutuality, as a form of co-labour and/or collaboration, whereby all parties benefit through acts of trust, friendship, kindness, and sharing.

ACTIVATION is, quite literally, an act or activity in which, or through which, a process of constituent practice can have real-world affects and produce change. Drawing on the political and social histories of activism, forms of constituent activation seek to transcend the symbolic representation or proposal of possible future change and, instead, indicate the initiation of a process (or processes) through which forms of re-imagination and of thinking otherwise can be shared as tools of creation and reshaping.

STRUCTURES are not seen as a set of delimitations, borders, territories, or closures. Instead, structures are understood as representing the complex social and historical arrangement of relationships between parts or elements of collaborating constituencies. As such, both physical and ideological structures are seen as forms of material process that can be re-negotiated, through the production of constituent and common assembly, as a means to decolonize the current limitations of our shared histories.

NEGOTIATION refers to a constituent right to form, shape, and continually re-define relationships of power, as well as structures of inequality, through processes of active commoning. As such, Negotiation is also taken to indicate the active process of reaching agreements that are, of themselves, both fluid, provisional, mutual, and constituent.

THE

THE CONSTITUENT MUSEUM

CONSTITUENT
MUSEUM

What would happen if museums put relationships at the centre of their operation? This question inspires this publication, which offers a diverse, rigorous, and experimental analysis of what is commonly known as education, mediation, or interpretation within museum institutions. It takes the visitor not as a passive receiver of predefined content, but as a member of a constituent body, who it facilitates, provokes and inspires. Moving beyond the practice of mediation as such, the publication situates these practices within the social-political (neoliberal) context and the physical and organizational structure. By placing the relation to one's constituent at the centre of the museum organization, and by considering a constituent relationship as being one of collaboration and co-production, the relative positions of both the museum and its constituencies begin to shift and change. Understanding this change holistically is what this publication aspires to.

As a composition of new commissions and case-studies, *The Constituent Museum* draws from the diverse experiences of the institutions that together form the museum confederation L'Internationale, and the partners with whom it has collaborated during the five-year programme 'The Uses of Art: The Legacy of 1848 and 1989'. Central to the development of 'The Uses of Art' project was the instigation of a 'Mediation Task Force' that began to explore and address some of the key issues surrounding the evolution of relationships between museums and their publics. Initial debates around these complex and shifting relationships were played out through an examination of the terms 'use' and 'usership'. As museums begin to see themselves as sites of collaborative knowledge production, and begin to replay their earlier, nineteenth-century roles as active sites for the co-production of new civic identities, it became apparent that the terms use and usership did not fully implicate the necessity for museums to re-think their own operating systems and managerial structures. Or, to put this another way, it began to seem apparent that museums could do little more than 're-brand' their existing relationships with audiences—as the oneway and non-reciprocal broadcast of established knowledge—unless museums were prepared to open themselves up to the reciprocal possibility of change. Parallel this was the realization that many who work within, or collaborate with, existing museum structures already share in the belief that institutions need to change if we are to begin to reimagine our futures for the better. Furthermore, it also became apparent that many also

believe that museums have a key role to play in this social reimagining of our futures: and that new forms of fluid, flexible, and collaborative institutionalization are necessary if this reimagining is to move beyond the level of symbolic and utopian rhetoric.

With this in mind, the Constituent Museum actively seeks to present and make visible the diverse and sometimes contradicting strategies that institutions deploy when working to implement this change, depending on the context in which they operate or the size and history of the institution. In order to do this, the publication is introduced by a piece of fictional writing and then organized into five Chapters, composed of essays, project studies and discussions, which focus on different elements of museum practice that could be affected by a rethinking of the relation between the museum and its constituency. In 'The Rainbow Wrasse', Francis McKee gives us a 'future fiction' of a Constituent Museum yet to be in the form of a written email dialogue between Uschii and Leila. As Uschii arrives at the former terminal of Glasgow airport in 2068, he is part of a familiar landscape of scarcity, recycling, repurposing, reimagining and hope. As such, McKee's 'The Rainbow Wrasse' helps us to look back upon some of the key questions that are arising for us all now and, in doing so, begins to ask key questions of constituent commitments to both possible pasts and probable futures. Following this, Chapter One 'Becoming Constituent' seeks to frame some of the overall debates that underpin our relationship to the term 'constituencies' as a site of active, and ongoing, political struggle. By simply accepting that constituencies themselves are always mutable, fluid, protean and self-generating, it becomes possible to re-frame this term as one of active engagement. If this is the case, then we can also begin to re-imagine the Constituent Museum as being a generator of social change, a site in which meanings and identities are themselves coproduced and continually re-negotiated through our collaborative uses of art. Chapter Two, 'Architectures of Use', attempts to build on the broader themes and issues of the Constituent Museum by looking at some of the developing relationships that are opening out between the physical specificity of the museum as institutional edifice, and its ideological roles and functions as producer of meanings, site of exchange, and progenitor of social re-imagination. Chapter Three, 'Pedagogies of Encounter' begins to imagine the Constituent Museum as a space for the emergence of both critical discourses



and practices, in which new forms of hybrid and constituent education allow for the coproduction of difference, encounter and dissent, whilst relationships between aesthetics, politics, and knowledge are problematized and redrawn. In the light of this, Chapter Four, 'Distributing Ownership and Empowerment', turns our attention to the thorny, real as well as hypothetical, issues surrounding constituent collaboration and coproduction. What does it really mean to empower constituencies, publics and audiences? Beyond the rhetorical and well-meaning, such an activity would require that museums renegotiate certain levels of control in collaboration with their constituencies or, at the very least, that they at least begin to problematize previously received wisdoms surrounding traditional and sedimented forms of operational logic. Finally, Chapter Five 'Collecting Relationships' begins to think about a future in which relationships, and constituency, are already a core part of a museum's operational and relational logics. At the heart of this institutional re-imagining is the use of the archive as an active and constituent tool in the production of power and knowledge regimes. As the institutional archive is traditionally invisible, or at least less visible than the other dimensions of the museum (which is, after all, an institution dedicated to developing certain regimes of visibility and display) what would happen if the archive became the central, and most accessible, form of institutional constituency and collaborative and/or open-source self-management. This final Chapter, and it is hoped the overall critical, theoretical, and practical narrative arc of the book as a whole, will lead us back to the future, to our opening fiction and, most importantly, to the stark reminder that our constituent futures will largely be shaped and formed by the dreams and actions we take today and tomorrow.

THE

THE RAINBOW WRASSE

Francis McKee

RAINBOW

WRASSE



21.8.2062 6.43am

Dear Leila

We arrived last night in a rainstorm. Winding our way through muddy trenches and cuttings for hours before we surfaced at the back of a vast building. The horses were taken away and stabled while we were led through dim corridors to our quarters. I fell asleep instantly without exploring my room and had that odd feeling of waking and not knowing where I was in the world. And yes, there is internet!! My machine tells me I've got a three-hour ration per week. I'll write offline and send you more in bursts...

X Uschii
(I miss you)

21.8.2062 8.38am

Leila—me again!

Ok—I'm writing quickly here. Just been walking around the building. It's breakfast time and everyone is gathered in an upstairs balcony —i think it may have been a 'food court' once (the building itself is the old Glasgow Airport terminal). There's a rota of course and everyone cooks at some point during the week and cleans—either the kitchens or the other areas of the building. I'm on the rota from tomorrow.

From the big windows you can look across a vast plain towards a distant horizon. They dug up the main runways and now they're full of crops—I can see people bending along the furrows as I'm writing this... I'm down for that too, I don't mind but the rain...! The sky is sludge and the rain just keeps falling—forty days and nights of rain. The landscape is brown—tilled earth everywhere, waiting for the greenness the crops will bring.

I remember being in an airport when I was a child. It was a forest of human legs and me holding on to my father's hand for dear life. He took me to the big windows and we watched the airplanes turn on the runways in slow motion as they lined up and then roared off into

the sky. Now it's hard to believe everyone used them, going somewhere just for a few days—impossible! It took me three weeks to get here and I'm staying for two months. I hope those vegetables they're picking are tasty...

X Uschii

26.8.2062 8.38am

Habibi...

So. Those first two messages were indulgent. This is a logbook for the week. I'll use the rest of my ratio for searches.

First: my disappointments. There are no dogs—I'd hoped some might have survived up here but everyone says not. There are bees though—hardy and productive—but does that mean there are plenty of flowers??

Now the good things:

I met my curator this morning—Agnes Lozac'h—an amazing person. She's subtle, quick and intelligent. Within a few minutes my head was spinning as she described the origins of the museum. After the great floods and the 2042 hurricanes the airport was decommissioned, though in truth it had barely been used for many years. At first it was repurposed as a sanatorium—the region was badly hit with disease as the water laid waste to everything. But gradually the beds emptied and, same as everywhere, the great transition began. Solar power, waste not, work brigades, the new medieval, refugees from the burnt out zones...

Amid all the replanting of the runways the airport apron was left empty and the terminal building evolved as a public forum, a meeting place for the inhabitants of the new shelters and caravans that were springing up in its hinterland. It was the only space big enough for large-scale convocations, or the weekly market or religious festivals.

The iconoclastic revolt in 2045 determined the fate of the building. The director at the time, Adam Kirk, was an apostate. He knew many of the great collections had been decimated over the previous decades from the disastrous subsidence of the British Museum



and the Tates, undermined by floods and revolt. As the same thing happened in Scotland he assembled a team of agents to rescue what they could, hoping that, one day, people would distinguish between commodities and art. Not so much survived it seems—one or two magical things but the waters went high here and much of the rest got buried in the collapses. Agnes said she'll keep the remainders a surprise for the moment because there is a presentation next week. In the meantime (and I guess for all my time here) I'll be working alongside her in the physic garden—that is one of her curatorial specialisms—'one of the founding elements of museums in the first place' she said.

X Uschii

28.8.2062 10.14am

Dearest Uschii

You know I'm reading your emails. I love the formality and tradition of the form. I'm glad, in a way, that we can't afford the immediacy of chat because I can hear you thinking in these letters.

I don't have much time to reply these days though. Work is non-stop as we feel we're near a breakthrough. We're working on a newly found mutation of the ideonella sakainesis—my god it's a real beast (for a microbe!). It's hungry for plastic, ravenous even. The problem is the plastics are slowing its cell division, killing it really, no stamina.

Your description of the museum reminded me of Charles de Gaulle. There, of course, the planes still land for presidents and generals. But in the vast abandoned areas a true monastery evolved: austere, spiritual, a total renunciation of the object and the spectacle. If your journey continues then you should make it a real pilgrimage and head there, however long it might take. Which reminds me... have you seen any rainbow wrasse? I've heard they rule supreme in the east Atlantic, tell me it's true!

Love, Leila x

01.9.2062 11.23pm

Leila

It was so good to hear from you—I wanted to reply immediately but I kept discipline and recorded life for you when I could. Your beastie (as they say here) sounds impressive and tragic. My gardening is beginning to rival your pursuits though: Agnes has introduced me to the research constituents, locals from the surrounding caravans. They visit in the morning and work closely with a fungal colony that extends far beyond the garden. There are roughly twenty researchers: they microdose and then link to the mycelium threads through a fine web of cuts on their forearms. I'd heard of this in Preston but only as a rumour. Here, it's a daily reality. It's all based on the Dorsett theory of junk genetics: activating latent codes, reanimating fossil DNA, merging with the colony. For the first few weeks Agnes led the researchers but now they guide her work, logging their discoveries and mapping the next steps—she calls it 'curatorial transference'.

The rain eased off finally on Wednesday morning and suddenly the terminal was illuminated with sharp, precise light. Bennet and Maha, Agnes' co-curators quickly announced just after breakfast that there would be a presentation in half an hour. We were directed towards one of the largest bays on the first floor though most people had already headed to their tasks. There was a small painting on the back wall, a picture of an old woman feeding a dog. A man looked on from a doorway and above the lintel there was a large pot holding a flower. Near the painting Bennet had written 'Gabriël Metsu. c. 1654–1657' on the wall. The light poured in as the curators retreated, leaving a few of us standing in some disarray unsure how to deal with this thing. I know you've told me about seeing great paintings before but still, I was totally unprepared for the shock. The quality alone was difficult to absorb—how did they make this? The richness of the colours—so many browns, seemed right for this landscape but gradually the blue of the old woman's apron, the luminous white of her bonnet began to glow among all those dun colours. The real shock though, and I think the others were experiencing this too, was the question of how to look. I didn't know how to pay attention to this either as an object or as an image. I couldn't bring myself to move away from it. There was a later moment of vertigo when I began to see how closely cropped the image was within its frame and suddenly I sensed how this



was simply a fragment of a larger reality. And a reality that is gone forever. The dog, of course, brought me close to tears. Extinction and all that.

I couldn't leave and I couldn't look continuously. I knew that I needed time. I sat down on the floor and tried to think. Slowly other elements of the thing became more apparent: there was some water damage in the top corner, the frame had taken a battering, the man at the doorway was probably the old woman's husband, there was a light source inside the house behind him that made no sense logically, there was a whetstone in the corner of the painting...

I was aware of Agnes sitting down beside me.

'What do you think then?' she asked.

'I think I'm angry and I don't understand how that can be...' I replied.

'What is making you angry?'

'I'm not sure. It's something to do with paying attention. This painting demands more attention than I can give it. I can't respond in a few minutes... instinctively I knew when I saw it that it's wrong to show it here like this.'

'What do you mean...?'

'Its demands are greater than we are giving it. Something like this demands a decade or several of them, a lifetime.'

Agnes looked hard at me, her lips pursed in a silent reprimand. Eventually she explained how the painting would have to be shared by everyone and could only be seen on certain days. 'Perhaps', she said, 'we will all have to learn to have that experience together.'

I like Agnes and I think she may be right but I also know that she is wrong. At this rate, I would not survive in Charles de Gaulle.

Yours forever, Uschii.

04.9.2062 4.57pm

Dear Leila

So much to tell you since my last. I know I sounded angry at the end and I was—the Metsu got to me in ways I never expected and raised all sorts of questions. Now that feels so far away. Something momentous happened last Saturday morning.

I woke to find the whole area covered in fog. The usual market, and all the noise that comes with it, was not to be heard. Everywhere was unusually empty. Heading down to the terminal apron I could hear voices arguing and reaching ground level I could finally see that a large group of people had arrived. They didn't look like refugees from the south. Rather, they looked like a small regiment or brigade: alert, poised, and capable. Agnes, Maha and a taller person stood to one side of the group, in deep conversation with a stocky couple, who seemed to be the group leaders. The tall figure was Weever, the sub-director, and it was the first time I'd seen them. They looked at me as if they knew me already.

Agnes came over and explained that the roamers were looking to settle in the terminal and demanded rooms. This would entail removing the artefacts and public spaces so Weever was now confronting their demands and explaining the wider need for the space. The roamers' leaders, Rainborough and Fatou, were claiming that such ideas were against the common need—in this new world a level distribution of the land was the most important thing. Empty sheltered spaces such as the terminal were too precious to be kept as a luxury. Weever appeared calm and unruffled by this development. Agnes though looked worried—perhaps torn between devotion to her artefacts and the demands for common space.

The meeting ended quickly and Weever announced there would be a public debate at the start of next week. In the meantime the roamers were to be hosted generously, allowing them to settle and prepare their arguments.

Now I know how subtly Weever was thinking. The terminal was to remain unoccupied while the local population found temporary space among their own huts and caravans to host the roamers. Sunday was spent in minor festival mode. Bonfires and barbeques punctuated the afternoon and as everyone here is vegan the bees didn't lose their honey. The roamers blended in quite easily and told stories of their travels. Some just made the journey from the south beyond Preston but others had come from as far away as Spain, Morocco, Southern France, and Mali. Somewhere through the evening they visibly relaxed (the terminal-brewed beer did help) and the talk veered more to crops, the weather, the gleaning of cities and what was left of the nearby ruins. They asked so many of



the same questions I had asked Agnes when I first got here: did the submarine fleet really exist; was it true the fleet lay at the bottom of the river and all the bombs too; had the city subsidence really left a vast crater; did the gleaners there really find a Viking hoard?

On Monday, the roamers sent petitioners to the curators apparently asking for the apron to be arranged in a particular configuration. Weever, Agnes, Maha and Bennet listened carefully and then went into a huddle, emerging quickly and agreeing to the demands. Afterwards I had my daily meeting with Agnes but she wouldn't tell me anything about their plans or what was going to happen on Wednesday. She looked calmer than before, determined maybe, but refusing to crack under my sly interrogation. She did, though, work out a personal project for me that would extend over the rest of my time here. She had noticed my interest in the mycelium researchers and remembered that I'd wanted to know more about what they experienced when they were linked to the fungus. For my project, she wants me to interview each of them and record their visions. Then, using a theory from an old British philosopher, she wants me to investigate whether the dreams could actually be caused by future events—assuming that the interaction with the mycelium could mean the researchers are tapping into a backwards time flow. I don't have to produce any outcomes from this but, if I feel inclined, Agnes has made a space available for me (the same bay that held the Metsu) and one of the researchers is also a sign painter and has said he is willing to collaborate with me if I want to go in that direction...

First thing on Tuesday I raided the strange library housed in the terminal—a beautiful space in what must have been the departures lounge. It's filled with light, lines of seats from its past life and a sea of odd mismatched shelves rescued from the fallen world outside. I tracked down the book Agnes mentioned—John Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*. It was published in 1927 and it's bonkers. I love it.

I just hope this amazing library and all the stored treasures survive the week. I still haven't seen more than one work...

All for now
xx Uschii xx

05.9.2062 8.22pm

Dear Uschii

I'm in transit and only have this link for a few minutes... I've heard there is a hurricane heading your way and there are signs of it here already. Take care, please—I'm thinking of you

All my love

Leila

08.9.2062 9.05am

Oh Leila ...so much to tell you!

Weever, the curators, some of the researchers and a few fieldworkers sat cross-legged in horizontal lines across the terminal apron. Everyone else lined the space in a square and waited for the arrival of the roamers.

They came with noise: a small battery of kettledrums firing a sharp tattoo across the dead runways, forcing a breach in the crowd. Then the debaters entered, in dark red robes, drawn across their shoulders like a shawl. Once on the apron, they dispersed, each one standing in front of a seated opponent. The drums stopped and there was a tense silence with just the crows still squabbling on the roof of the terminal.

Fatou lifted a square of blue linen in the air and let it drop. When it hit the ground the roamers started. Each whirled in front of their opponent and thrust themselves forward to stare into their eyes. Each produced a string of beads that they coiled around their left arm and then let loose towards their opponent, pulling it back and starting all over again. All the time they flung a tirade of arguments into the air with only fragments reaching the surrounding audience—'elite...!', 'fetishizing things....!' and 'for who?'. Quickly this rose to a torrent and began to synchronize across the lines of roamers as they repeated: 'what does this have to do with our everyday? why is there a hierarchy? what is art—why do we need it?'



Only Weever replied and spoke quietly. I couldn't hear much, just fragments: 'a place for self-criticism and a place to observe the world... contamination... things become alive when there is friction...' The wind carried their words away—your hurricane has almost arrived—and then I could hear again: 'where ideas can ferment in a cool, dark place... a forum... a life force... the friction between ideas and experience... we need communal space...'

It all ended quickly and inconclusively—more drumming and a procession of debaters leaving the arena. Agnes and Bennet were back quickly though to enlist my help to arrange a large screen in the main hall. They had a projector and one of the big, precious solar batteries already in place with Maha working on the cabling. While the crowds outside set to organizing a makeshift kitchen we created a mobile field cinema in the terminal.

As people drifted in, some still with plates of food or cups of tea, they found space on the floor or made their own cocoons. The film was relatively short—another of the terminal's rescued works called *Garden Conversation*. Agnes explained to the audience that it was made by a Moroccan artist called Bouchra Khalili. The Moroccans cheered, recognizing her name from the *Mille Nuits Rouges* in Paris during the 2020s. The film depicts a conversation between Che Guevara, Lynch and Abdelkrim El Khattabi—two old revolutionary heroes of the twentieth century. They conduct a secret meeting in Melilia in 1959 and discuss the nature of revolution, ghosts of the past and what the future could hold. It was a perfect choice. We still didn't know the outcome of our own squabbles but so many thoughts were running through our minds that we began talking to each other as soon as the film finished. Even on our way back to work (vegetables do not wait for art) we were still discussing it.

Towards the end of the afternoon Bennet came loping through the furrows and broadcast an update—we'll know the results of the debate tomorrow at noon. His face was impossible to read. And now the wifi is shaky. I'm pressing send and we will have to wait for the squalls....

Take care you, in love
Uschii

NEGOTIATING JEOPARDY

NEGOTIATING JEOPARDY

Towards a Constituent
Architecture of Use

John Byrne



Useful Art is a way of working with aesthetic experiences that focus on the implementation of art in society where art's function is no longer to be a space for 'signalling' problems, but the place from which to create the proposal and implementation of possible solutions. We should go back to the times when art was not something to look at in awe, but something to generate from. If it is political art, it deals with the consequences, if it deals with the consequences, I think it has to be useful art.¹

The gap that currently exists between art and life is a complex and intriguing one. On the one hand, the continuing erosion of our political and civil liberties under the neoliberal aegis of deregulator logic has cast doubt on the very possibility, or even desirability, of the Enlightenment subject as the base unit of democracy. Under these conditions it is understandable that some see art and the aesthetic as a final fall-back position from which to contest the moral certitude of a thoroughly instrumentalized and precarized swarm. The obvious flaw in this form of resistance is, of course, its dependence on a neo-Kantian architecture of disinterested aesthetic contemplation. When aligned with the last-ditch attempt to claim that art somehow represents one of the few remaining arenas in which to play out an effective politics of resistance, the rigorous commodification of cultural alterity as fashionable lifestyle choice is never far behind. On the other hand, any attempt to move beyond our inherited templates for the production, identification and evaluation of art as art seem to somehow run the risk of disappearing altogether. After all, how on earth are we supposed to distinguish between 1:1 Scale art practices and the hubbub of everyday life if the former is not somehow, and in some way, linked to the enshrinement of artistic value and worth as represented within the cultural institutionalization of the Enlightenment dream?

The 2013 exhibition of the 'Museum of Arte Útil' at the Van Abbemuseum in the Dutch city of Eindhoven was, in part, an attempt to address some of these urgencies (Figure 1). The exhibition itself was based around the protocols and archival organizations of the Association of Arte Útil (AAÚ), an on-going online/offline platform



2.03.01 - 'Museum of Arte Útil', façade in daytime, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2013. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven

¹ Tania Bruguera, 'Introduction on Useful Art', 23 April 2011, www.taniabruquera.com/cms/528-0-Introduction+on+Useful+Art.htm (accessed 10 April 2017).

initiated by the artist Tania Bruguera.² The AAÚ itself seeks to develop a theory and practice of activist art collaborations and initiatives that have a real-life and real-time social, political and economic affect. As Van Abbemuseum curator Nick Aikens has succinctly put it:

Útil in Spanish roughly translates as useful, but it goes further, implying the notion of a tool or device. The central premise of the *Arte Útil* project is to consider practices and initiatives in which artistic thinking is used as a tool to intervene in the world and bring tangible change. In this sense, it stands opposed to modernist notions of artistic autonomy.³

By undertaking the ‘Museum of Arte Útil’, the Van Abbemuseum knowingly set itself a currently impossible curatorial task—that of reconciling long term, collaborative and multi-purpose forms of activist practice with the existing taxonomic, objectifying and aestheticizing bureaucracies of Western museological architecture. In doing so, the Van Abbemuseum also sought to open up potentialities and possibilities for using the museum as an active vehicle for rethinking art as tactical rather than a symbolic form of resistance. In order to do this the Van Abbemuseum set in motion a range of protocols aimed at undermining the usual terms and conditions of museological display and audience experience. For example, visitors to the ‘Museum of Arte Útil’ were given the choice of either paying a standard entrance fee or gaining free entry by agreeing to be active ‘users’ of the show. Also, the Van Abbemuseum itself was proposed as a ‘social power plant’—a site of interchange and co-production, where history and art could be collaboratively reused as a means to imagine new forms of civic citizenship. Finally, at the show’s centre was a physical presentation of the Arte Útil online archive whilst, surrounding this, the rooms of the Van Abbemuseum were reorganized according to a series of thematics; mixing artworks, documentation and makeshift structures and carrying instructions for the visitor-user on ‘what to use and how to use it’.⁴ Perhaps the success of the exhibition was its ability to highlight its own physical and ideological limitations: When the spaces were

² The Association of Arte Útil, www.arte-util.org (accessed 12 July 2017).

³ Nick Aikens, ‘The Use of History and the History of Use: Museum of Arte Útil and Really Useful Knowledge’, www.internationaleonline.org/research/alter_institutionality/14_the_use_of_history_and_the_histories_of_use_museum_of_arte_util_and_really_useful_knowledge (accessed 13 July 2017).

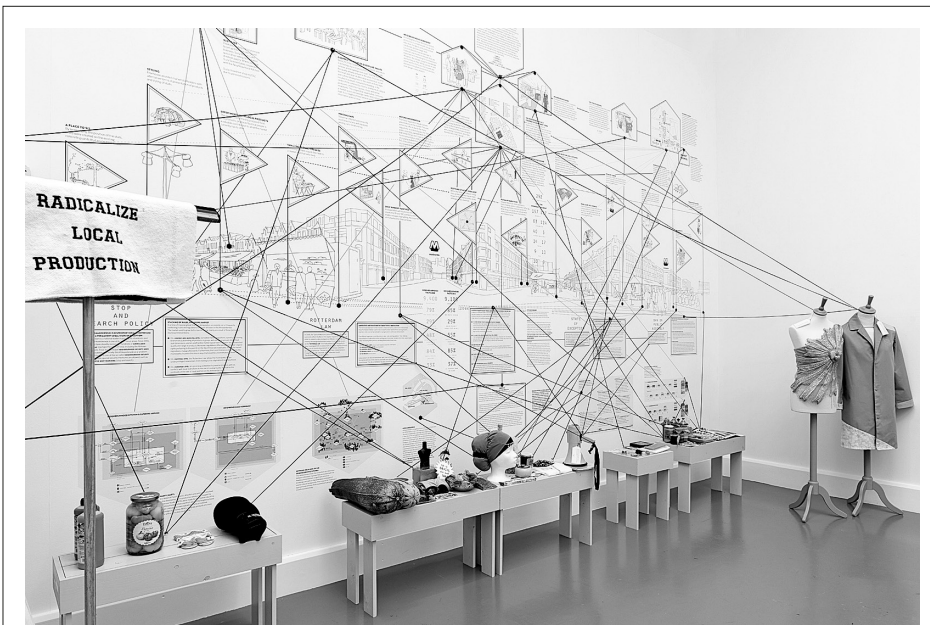
⁴ See <http://museumarteutil.net/about/> (accessed 10 April 2017).



2.03.02 – Apolonija Šušteršič, *Light Therapy*, 2013, installation as part of the 'Museum of Arte Útil' activated by the museum's volunteers choir. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven

activated—through discussions, meetings, presentations, workshops or performances—the potentialities of Arte Útil became accessible and usable (Figure 2); when they were not, the current templates we have for experiencing artworks in galleries and museum spaces—as objectifications of invested artistic labour, whose latent surplus value is waiting to be

extracted via the aesthetic experience of spectatorship—began to contradict the manifest intentions of both the AAÚ and the long-term projects whose legacies were on display (Figure 3).



2.03.03 – Jeanne van Heeswijk, installation in the 'Museum of Arte Útil', 2013. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven

I.

One of the key outcomes of the ‘Museum of Arte Útil’ was the realization that any attempt to imagine a museum of the future must begin as an act of negotiating jeopardy—as both a framing of, and an intervention within, the complex conundrum of art and life that may, inevitably, result in our current understanding of art changing forever. Consequently, if we are to begin the process of imagining a constituent museum of the future, then we must also allow ourselves to begin the process of thinking beyond the current museological paradigms of exhibition making, public display and audience consumption. Instead we must somehow begin to imagine the constituent museum of the future as a continual process of collaborative renegotiation, one that would also require and necessitate new ways of thinking through and beyond the existing physical and ideological architectures of museological use.

This, in turn, would mean a wholesale reappraisal of pre-existing relationships between art, artworks, audiences and institutions. As the privileges that have previously been accorded to the physical manifestations of the work of art begin to give way, so it becomes increasingly important to offer a truly constituent and networked conception of the work or labour of art as co-production and common ownership—one that is capable of escaping the gravity of instrumentalization through activating ground-up forms of opposition and use. Such demands would themselves entail nothing less than a radical overhaul of our currently perceived relationships between art and activism. As with Tania Bruguera’s call for a networked, fluid and self-reproducing Association of Arte Útil, such demands would also mark a shift away from our current uses of art as a tool for visually expressing transgressive intention or symbolizing possible forms of change—as either counter-propaganda interventions within the symbolic flows of semiocapital or propositional alternatives that function within the rhetorical schemas of museological and curatorial meaning-making—to the repositioning and repurposing of art as a set of useful tools for the practical, political and theoretical purposes of living otherwise. In short, a seismic shift away from our common conception of art as a tool in the realm of politically representative activism and towards new forms of non-representational activism, built through and with useful art, and evaluated in terms of their use value or purpose. And, if this is the case, then it could also be argued that the job or work of art is



no longer encapsulated within the historical over-identification of an artist's precarious role as the enlightened harbinger of a potential future. Instead, it now lies in negotiating the very possibility of radical and alternative action in a post-monopoly landscape—a landscape that is already dominated by the terms and conditions of precarious labour on every level.

As a means to think through this complex and emerging landscape, the activist thinker George Yúdice has recently argued for a theory of art that would be capable of looking beyond our currently institutionalized, and recognizable forms of politically transformative art (Extradisciplinarity, Transversality, Research Art and Institutional Critique, etc.) and, instead, towards other possibilities, or forms of collaboration, with diverse communities and, in particular 'those at a remove from hegemonic Western cosmology'.⁵

For Yúdice, this would necessitate re-thinking the outside/inside conundrum of art institutionality by accepting that art already functions within and across a range of disciplines that are not confined by the closed conception of existing gallery, magazine, museum, collection and art market circuits. In turn, such new forms of re-thinking would also necessitate the tacit acceptance that art already functions within and across a range of disciplines that are no longer confined by the current art world circuits of production, distribution, evaluation and worth. For Yúdice, such a radical approach is now required simply because, as he puts it, 'art is no longer only in museums and galleries but has migrated to other areas (media, fashion, social action, investment funds, urban revitalization, new technologies, security, recovery programs for at-risk youth, etc.)'.⁶ What Yúdice is interested in opening up here is a shift away from existing forms of institutional critique and, instead, a heuristic of the work or labour of art in which:

5 George Yúdice, 'Static Gallery's Architecture of Flows as Extradisciplinary Investigation', in Nick Aikens et al., eds., *What's the Use: Constellations of Art, History and Knowledge: A Critical Reader* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), p. 283. In his book publication *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Yúdice argued coherently for a new theory of Culture that was capable of seeing culture as the co-production of multiple (and often incompatible and sometimes hostile) social, political and economic positions and interests. This article both builds on Yúdice's earlier work on culture and, also, begins to deploy Yúdice's interest in the work of Néstor García Canclini which, Yúdice argues, has the capacity to help us rethink art's journey into and across new spheres of cultural production: See Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), and *Art Beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Storyline* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

6 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

... the frame is more ambiguous and there is no finger pointing; that is, the effectiveness of the project is not based on the smug disclosure of the dubious if not deplorable underpinnings of the art institution (museum, gallery, biennial, etc.) while nevertheless living off and gaining cultural capital in that institution.⁷

By developing new uses of art that can adopt, repurpose and reuse the flows of semiocapital against themselves—as forms of real world interruption and alternative proposition—Yúdice argues for a theory and practice of art that would be capable of transgressing the current poetics and possibilities of institutional critique. Instead, Yúdice points towards what he terms as a possible ‘politics of intermediation’ that:

... reproduces neither the hegemonic control by governments, large business enterprises or large NGOs, nor the Deleuzian option for a nomadism that eludes control, not to speak of the naiveté of Internet enthusiasts who believe that the distributed networks of the web have eliminated intermediaries simply because people get to upload their own contents, or that the conceptual harnessing of these networks ushers in the rather vague and wistful ‘communism to-come’ of Antonio Negri.⁸

In turn, what Yúdice is arguing for here is nothing less than a theory and practice of useful art, one that would be capable of providing strategies for simply ‘remaining relevant in the era of globalization’. Furthermore, such a practice and theory would demand, for Yúdice, the ‘capacity to mediate a range of concerns’ rather than simply positing the possibility of an autonomous alternative within the existing frameworks of art.

II.

But, in the light of this, what would a truly constituent museum or gallery look like? A museum or gallery that had, at the core of its operations, the commitment to see itself as being one constituency

⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

⁸ Ibid., p. 283.



amongst others? That contained, at the very core of its own operating systems, a willingness to grow, learn, reform and re-engage through a constituent process of co-production, co-authorship and constituent use? Would such a constituent art institution, if it were to exist, become fluid and porous enough to engage in the continual reproduction of a work or labour of art that was, in turn, capable of moving across, through and between the existing flows of semiocapital? In effect, would such institutions themselves become un-institutions, working towards the amelioration of the very institutional/alter-institutional bifurcations that plague us? And, if so, how would we begin to think through such a situation?

This also becomes interesting when we begin to realize that the dominant art world, as we know it, has still not experienced anything like the seismic rupture that peer-to-peer internet protocols, such as Napster,⁹ forced upon the music industry nearly twenty years ago. Museums and galleries, for the large part, are still based around the model that art is made by artists for use by a willing public (in whatever myriad of forms ensue from that simple equation). To move beyond this impasse would necessitate far more than a shift towards horizontal, as opposed to hierarchical and top down, organizational structures (however helpful these may seem to be). In short, such a transition would require that museums and galleries begin to open up our existing source codes and templates for understanding art to a constituent process of renegotiation—one that would require a fundamental revaluation of the collaborative and constitutive work or labour of art in terms of its use and use value.

Further to this, I would argue that such a conceptual leap would also necessitate the tacit acceptance that art, as we know it or knew it to be, no longer happens in ways that the existing physical and conceptual architectures of aesthetic contemplation would allow us to understand or even to see. And, if this is the case, then the challenge facing museums and galleries is not

⁹ Napster was a peer-to-peer (P2P) online platform that allowed any users, who downloaded simple software, to share MP3 files of music. The initial deal was simple, have access to a global online resource of MP3 files by allowing your own MP3 files of music to be accessed in return (Napster operated free online in this way from June 1999 to July 2001). This had a profound impact on the music industry and its sedimented and hierarchical commercial logics. My point here is that art institutions—however proud they may be in their rhetorical support for all things ground-up, user based, publically accessible and horizontally shared—remain, for the most part, both hierarchical and pyramidal in their organizational structures. What is more, I would also argue that this lingering hierarchical structural organization is also largely responsible for many of the outmoded ways that we currently access and use art. As such, Art institutions may need to adapt to a possible future in which their dreams of hierarchical dispersal and horizontal sharing platforms may become a reality.

simply one of documenting or pointing towards these new practices as they hybridize and mutate across non-institutional fields. Nor is it the task of simply ‘keeping up’ with such practices as they flow across, through and between the cracks and fissures of neoliberal semicapital. Instead, it must be one of complicity, of museums and galleries becoming social and political hubs of the commons, through which these new forms of constituent activism can be used, re-used and developed. This is especially crucial, I would argue, as the growing global divide between rich and poor is accompanied by new forms of information feudalism—as knowledge, and its production, becomes the consolidation of power amongst the privileged few.

III.

By flipping the usual art world anxiety—that non-institutional forms of activist practices might somehow herald the loss of art’s critical and political function within the global matrix of the infotainment sphere—we can begin to think of the challenge facing museums and galleries as one of constituent collaboration and participation, of actively engaging in the development of use-based tools for thinking through the work or labour of art as collaborative and constituent forms of coproduction. As a step towards this goal, the Van Abbemuseum will begin to undertake a new constituent form of programming in September 2017 that invites groups to work with the museum as a means to develop forms of constituent analysis and representation. The ambition of the Van Abbemuseum here is to experiment with methods that will allow the museum to become a useful site—one that actively supports communities in their need for reflection and visibility. Concomitantly, the aim of the Van Abbemuseum is to negotiate jeopardy, to depart from a common understanding of arts intrinsic value and, instead, to see how these values may be modified if they are brought into constituent relation with real social and political urgencies and demands.

To facilitate this, the Van Abbemuseum hopes to match up members of their curatorial team with a range of communities already in the Van Abbemuseum’s network—queer, refugee, expat, green-entrepreneurs and black Dutch—and to co-produce a range of research and exhibition programmes based upon the museum’s collection. The Van Abbemuseum will provide workshop spaces



with the Arte Útil Archive (Figure 4), a banner-making workshop for constructing banners (which will subsequently be displayed in the museum) and a pod-cast studio. According to Steven ten Thije:



2.03.04 – Arte Útil Archive, installation at the 'Museum of Arte Útil', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2013. Photo: Peter Cox, Eindhoven

What we hope to achieve with this new programme is that the museum will find methods by which it can move beyond programming 'for' a community and become a tool for communities to publish themselves. The motivation is not only to give a platform to different voices, but also to actively embrace the fact that we live in a time where multiple histories

related to different communities require reflection, recognition and negotiation simultaneously. We no longer need to account for the best, nor are we a site for an avant-garde. We need to be a space that can be occupied when the need arises, with an organizational structure that can allow multiple and even competing occupations at the same time, allowing conflict and difference to be negotiated with the help of publicly funded art.¹⁰

As Ten Thije also points out, this process of negotiating jeopardy is, in turn, based on the Rancièrian idea that politics is something that happens when the overlooked, underrepresented and unheard gather together to make their voices heard—and which, in turn, brings about a redistribution of the organizational structures that underpin the 'sensible' public sphere (Figure 5).

Instead of acting as a tool by which the logics of deregulatory neoliberalism can be propagated, I would argue that projects such as the Association of Arte Útil and the 'Museum of Arte Útil', as well as the new forms of constituent programming about to be undertaken by the Van Abbemuseum, offer a means by which the instrumentalization of culture can be resisted on its own terms and on its own levels. As art—as we know it or knew it—continues to go undercover, slipping through and between the cracks and fissures

¹⁰ From a conversation/email exchange with Steven ten Thije 12 July 2017.

of neoliberalism, identifying and disrupting the smooth flows of semiocapital, it will mutate, change and grow. Simultaneously, museums and galleries will need to continue the task and struggle of developing new ways of following, supporting, growing with and responding to these new, fluid and emerging forms of activist art. This task, or struggle, as we have already seen, will be one of negotiating jeopardy. If a constituent museum of the future is to achieve anything more than the simple, and duplicitous re-framing or rebranding of audiences as constituencies, then they need to become one constituency amongst many—open to negation, change, drift, dream and collaborative re-negotiation. Only in this way will the Western hegemonic cycle of the privileged objectification of knowledge in autonomous art, and its concomitant broadcast to the uninitiated and unentitled, be broken and transgressed. Finally, I would argue that if we do not act upon this imperative, then art, as we know it or knew it, will simply run the risk of disappearing from our view. We simply cannot continue to look for the critical and political emancipatory value of art, or even hope to recognize it, by using outmoded and out-dated mechanisms of identification, evaluation and worth.



2.03.05 - Laurie Jo Reynolds ('Museum of Arte Útil' resident artist), active installation, Reynolds organizing her archive in the gallery space on her long-term activist project against Tam's maximum security prison. Photo: Perry van Duijnhoven

**GIVE
HER THE
TOOLS,**

'GIVE HER THE TOOLS,
SHE WILL KNOW WHAT
TO DO WITH THEM!'

Some Thoughts about
Learning Together

Nora Sternfeld

**SHE WILL
KNOW
WHAT
TO
DO WITH
THEM!'**



'Give her the tools, she will know what to do with them!' The feminist London-based femme punk band Charismatic Megafauna make this plea to educational institutes, which have not been public for a long while in many places, but have instead become private establishments. All the same, the song addresses them: despite all their entirely capitalist contradictions, they may still be able to provide the tools to transform the house of the oppressor during its occupation and/or to do something completely different with it one day.

'Give her the tools, she will know what to do with them!' At first it sounds as if the recurring rhythmic refrain—to which Jenny Moore, one of Charismatic Megafauna's singers, gives various layers of meaning on stage—contradicts Audre Lorde, when she said 'the —master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. But Lorde didn't mean that we couldn't or shouldn't do anything with powerful knowledge. Instead, she pointed out that alliances with silenced and marginalized positions are necessary in order to overcome the existing violent power relations. Are there any tools other than those of the master, other than those of this neoliberal world that is becoming increasingly fascist, of which there is no outside? In other words: Are there already tools from a different world here and now? How are they built? And how can they be applied? So how can we learn something that doesn't yet exist? On the one hand it seems paradoxical, but on the other hand that's precisely the point of a radical approach to conveying information. Political learning always saw itself as a process in view of another possibility; political education always involved learning to understand the relations in order to change them; to learn to understand them in a way in which they could perhaps only be understood in a different world, while this world might become a bit more like it as a result. In turn, this can't be done alone and is only conceivable as a collective process of self-transformation.

Museums aren't, in principle, places of radical education; like all public, civic educational spaces they are places of maintaining existing relations, places of a history of discipline and violence. And at the same time, they are places with a history and a promise of emancipation. They bear the violent legacy of colonialism, just like that of the bourgeois revolution. As places of learning, in this sense they may have something to offer another possible world—even if that would, in principle, contradict what they mean. I approach the topic of relations and learning pre-emptively. And at the same time, I take a look back. This is because I would like to pursue the

prefiguration and processuality in the history of emancipatory education and revolutionary education, in order to ask how we can use the tools we receive, and which we adopt, together, so that we can learn something about another possible world from each other.

1. THE TOOLS AND THE BUILDING PLAN

This anthology poses the question: What would happen if museums were to put relations at the heart of their actions? It sounds promising. But it is certainly also part of a general post-representative shift in museum discourse from representation to presence, from originality to relationality¹, which is happening in parallel with immaterial economies and associated social networks. Is the relational museum therefore the master's house? In light of this question, let us consider the point in which Audre Lorde talks of tools in more detail:

... survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.²

It's not the case that those master's tools would serve no purpose to Audre Lorde; according to her, they simply can't be the only tools with which to build another world in which everyone will flourish. In

¹ Cf. Nora Sternfeld, 'Inside the Post-Representative Museum', in Carmen Mörsch, Angeli Sachs and Thomas Sieber, *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016): 'In advanced exhibition theories and curatorial practices, various turns came one after another over the past years, which expanded the exhibition space in terms of its functions. There was the turn to education, to discourse, to performativity, to dance and to activism. Often, these were also interwoven. What do all of these trends have in common?—Exhibitions are no longer understood as places to exhibit valuable objects and present objective values. Instead, the focus is much more on producing spaces of possibilities, on social and physical experiences, unexpected encounters and changing debates, in which the unpredictable seems more important than exact plans as to what is displayed where. In this way, exhibitions are becoming rooms of action. Based on this premise, it is inevitable that curating and communication intertwine. I refer to this phenomenon as post-representative curating.'

² Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), pp. 110–114, p. 112.



terms of relationships, she advises not only operating in a team, but also sometimes going against the current alone and, above all, doing things together with those who are outside the structures. So what does that mean today, when we have to assume that in a world of pervasive capitalization of relationships (and the increasing isolation that goes hand in hand with this), there isn't really an inside and an outside? And what does it mean when we have to assume that we probably already end up in the master's house everywhere and the master is not only living in the institutions and on the street but also in us and our relationships? If we still want to insist on the construction of another possible world, the workshop that we imagine would also have to be everywhere. We therefore need building plans that are able to transform both the inside and outside of institutions, both the existing relationships as well as future relationships, and namely with the tools that we have or that we are able to obtain.

2. DISMANTLE THE HOUSE: PROCESS AND MOMENT

And what does this mean in terms of conveying information? If, alongside Antonio Gramsci, we understand hegemony as something that is only based in part on force, but much more on agreement, it soon becomes clear that power needs to materialize in people's minds in learning processes. Except it can also be questioned there... In this sense, Gramsci writes: 'Every relationship of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship.'³

On the one hand, learning takes place in relationships and power structures, on the other hand it is also a preparation, as everything that we learn is full of the sediment of history, but is still learnt in the present and, above all, refers to a future in which what has been learnt comes into play. Possibly and often in a completely different way than expected. (Children learn the language that is full of relationships of subordination, but they also learn words that they will teach to their children, and who knows in which world they will be spoken.) As learning has this double potential of adaptation and revolution and because it also links together what was, is and could be, it is a practice full of binding and transformative potential. Hegemony therefore presents itself as a process that constantly needs to stabilize itself and is therefore always in danger of

³ Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 157.

becoming destabilized. In this context, destabilization also appears as a process.

Do we now need to give up on the idea that radical change presents a great moment for this? This would be a break with Walter Benjamin's famous depiction, which poignantly describes the momentary irreversibility of the revolution, in which the clocks stand still, after being shot at during the July Revolution of 1830 in France. In the 15th section of the theses on history he writes:

The consciousness of exploding the continuum of history is peculiar to the revolutionary classes in the moment of their action. The Great Revolution introduced a new calendar. The day on which the calendar started functioning as a historical time-lapse camera. And it is fundamentally the same day which, in the shape of holidays and memorials, always returns. The calendars do not therefore count time like clocks. They are monuments of a historical awareness, of which there has not seemed to be the slightest trace for a hundred years in Europe. However, in the July Revolution an incident took place which did justice to this consciousness. During the evening of the first skirmishes, it turned out that the clock-towers were shot at independently and simultaneously in several places in Paris.⁴

Perhaps both are true. It's certainly something different, to learn and teach *in view of* a new frontier and to learn and teach *in* a new frontier. It was, for example, actually a completely different type learning and teaching when my seminar, which dealt with critical practices of learning and exhibiting, took place as 'squatting teaching' in the occupied auditorium of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 20 October 2009 until the end of the semester.⁵ The moment of occupation changed everything: we discussed in the name of education and in the space of a different reality to the neoliberal economization of education. And nevertheless, none of the discussions that had come before lost any of their meaning. Who knows, perhaps they even had something to do with the fact that it had come to occupation.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' (1940), XV, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.

⁵ <http://no-racism.net/article/3149/>.



In order to understand the simultaneity of process and moment in 'revolutionary practice' I would like to recall Marx' famous third thesis on Feuerbach, which raises the question as to who educates the educators:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.⁶

If we want to think of radical mediation in regard to a radical change, it is probably both process and moment.

3. LEARNING IN ADVANCE

If we assume that learning can serve to challenge the existing hegemony, this happens in two ways: On the one hand, the existing truths and forms of knowledge often become fragile, debatable and disputable. On the other hand, other forms of knowledge may come to light. These relate to the knowledge of fighting, but also the knowledge of another possibility. In their book *The Undercommons* Stefano Harney and Fred Moten quote C.L.R. James with the wonderful words:

I am a black man number one, because I am against what they have done and are still doing to us; and number two, I have something to say about the new society to be built because I have a tremendous part in that which they have sought to discredit. C.L.R. James, *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*.⁷

⁶ Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845), in *Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969), p. 5.

⁷ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, New York and Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), p. 25.

There is therefore a knowledge of the ‘undercommons’ that we can learn from each other. For this knowledge, Harney and Moten believe that there is always, in institutions, in the street, at night, context for what they call ‘study’: a practice of coming together and learning together. Spending time together and with the topics, without established objectives and schedules—and above all without credit points.⁸ It is a type of learning in the interstices of institutions, in the interstices of economization. In this way, we learn another possible world from each other. And that can’t be done alone, but only as a collective process.

As such a process, the anticipation of the other world seeks to achieve hegemony in the ‘positional war’. But sometimes it is first and foremost about surviving—about surviving the winter of another possible future. And that takes us back to the master’s house again. How can spaces be created in order to think and structures in order to survive in this neoliberal, increasingly fascist world? And does the master’s house actually belong to the master? Or have we not already been occupying its interstices for a long time?

And who are we then, if we build like this? Bini Adamczak, a Berlin-based philosopher and queer communist theorist, researches ‘types of relations’. She asks what would happen if we could already imagine the other society that we want to fight for, and comes to this conclusion:

In order to succeed, an emancipatory revolution must already anticipate moments of utopia that it attempts to realise, at the same time this utopia must not be purged of all moments of revolution, for the sake of which the revolution becomes sought-after and contrived. The proposal about how this historical problem could be countered, is to conceive the revolution as less of a seizure of power and more of a process of social transformation, at the centre of which isn’t the destruction of the ruling society, but instead the construction of a society free of rulers.⁹

In her work, Adamczak focuses on relations. She recommends that ‘we’ no longer define ourselves through identities, but instead through relations and that these relations in turn are now being

⁸ ‘Stefano Harney on Study (Interview July 2011, Part 5)’, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wIoBdY72do.

⁹ Bini Adamczak, *Beziehungswise Revolution: 1917, 1968 und kommende* (Berlin: unpublished manuscript, 2016), p. 178.



reconstructed with regard to a different world, and namely as relations of freedom, equality and solidarity. It is possible in neoliberal capitalism, in which the public space is gentrified and capitalized, that everything becomes interstices. In a third space of the undercommons, in which such relations have been made impossible (because we always have to compete with each other, with every open call, at every workplace and on every Facebook wall we become numbers that are compared against each other), we reinvent the relations every day with the tools that we have. And so we build—freely, equally, and learning from each other in solidarity—these relations that shouldn't actually exist, and therefore a space between us, a para-institutional space, which is taking hold in the midst of institutions in view of another world.

REVISITING AND RECONSTITUTING NETWORKS

REVISITING AND
RECONSTITUTING
NETWORKS FROM JAPAN
TO BEIRUT TO CHILE

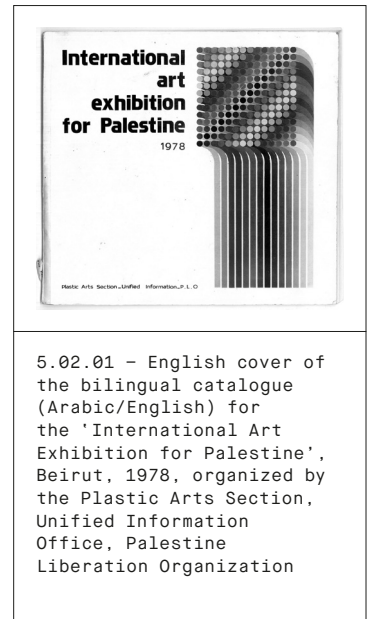
Kristine Khouri
and Rasha Salt

FROM
JAPAN TO
BEIRUT
TO CHILE



In 2009, we, Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti, decided to start a 'study group' to undertake research into the history of modernity in the Arab arts. We were witnessing the rising interest by the market (and collectors) in 'modern' Arab art, but due to the paucity of scholarship and information, auction houses and art dealers seemed to be writing the history of that modernity. The narratives were unconvincing, riddled with blanks, based on unchecked facts and indifferent to a complex view of society, politics, and the larger cultural context. We soon realized that the most basic questions, like 'when was modern art first exhibited to a public in Beirut?', or 'when did the Lebanese begin to collect art?', opened interesting pathways to reconfiguring the social, economic, political and cultural matrix in which modern art existed. That was the mission of our study group and we aspired to rally emerging art historians, cultural historians, visual anthropologists and cultural sociologists around it.

While waiting in the office of a gallerist in Beirut, we found, by coincidence, the catalogue for the 'International Art Exhibition for Palestine' in his library. The exhibition had taken place in Beirut in 1978 and its scale and scope were astounding: approximately two-hundred works, donated by almost two-hundred artists hailing from thirty countries. Leafing through the catalogue's pages, we found artists who were very well known internationally: Joan Miró (Spain), Roberto Matta (Chile), and Antoni Tàpies (Spain), in addition to very well-known Arab artists like Dia al-Azzawi (Iraq) and Mohamed Melehi (Morocco). There were also artists who were entirely unknown to us. As we began to probe in our small circles in Beirut, we realized that although only a handful people recalled the exhibition, it seems to have eluded most art historical accounts on the region. We were furthermore intrigued because we learned that the exhibition was the seed for a collection for a future museum for Palestine, and that the artworks were donated by the artists. The paper trail for the collection and the exhibition was destroyed during the 1982 Israeli siege of Beirut. In order to understand how such a remarkable endeavour could have taken place, we had to conduct our own inquest and unearth the networks that lay in the pages of the catalogue.



The ‘International Art Exhibition for Palestine’ was organized by the Plastic Arts Section of the PLO—Palestine Liberation Organization’s Unified Information Office at the basement of the Beirut Arab University from March 21 to April 5. We later found out that the exhibition had been extended by a few weeks. We began with interviewing artists, intellectuals, and cultural actors in Beirut who were connected to the PLO, who were active in the seventies and now lived in Beirut, Amman, or Damascus. Slowly pieces of the large puzzle emerged. We gathered press articles, documents and testimonies, but the more we learned, the more questions we had. The progress of our research changed dramatically when we met Claude Lazar, a French artist who lives in Paris, and who had been

close to Palestinian militants in Paris during the seventies. He was an important protagonist in imagining and organizing the exhibition as the foundational step for a ‘museum in exile’. Lazar had actively mobilized a significant number of artists to donate work. In May of 2011, when we visited his studio, he had pulled out three boxes from his personal archives, containing photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, and facsimiles and papers. He welcomed us enthusiastically and said: ‘I have been waiting for you for thirty years.’

From that first interaction, Lazar revealed and made accessible to us a network of artists and militants we did not even think we could ever meet. We realized that the Palestine exhibition and museum were directly inspired from the Musée International de la Résistance Salvador Allende (MIRSA), a brilliant initiative by Chilean artists living in exile in France, after the Pinochet coup d’état. They imagined

a ‘museum in exile’ made of artworks donated by artists from all over the world to incarnate their solidarity with Salvador Allende and what he represented as a political figure. Lazar knew some of the exiled Chilean artists living in Paris and had himself donated a painting dedicated to the Palestinian struggle to that resistance museum. It was clear that we had to understand the mechanics and dynamics of networks behind both these museum initiatives.



5.02.02/03 – Video still from an interview with Claude Lazar showing photos from his visit to Lebanon in 1978, featured in ‘Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine’. Courtesy: Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti



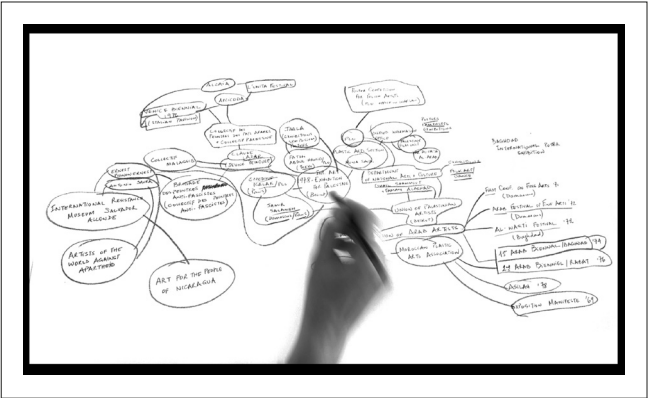
When we looked at the list of artists that gave work to the Palestinian initiative we noted that a remarkable number had also given work to the MIRSA a few years earlier.

As we revisited this history, an international solidarity network of collectives, artists, public actions and exhibitions emerged. One name led to another and we tracked down as many people as we could. Considering how few books and resources on these

(very recent) histories and questions there were, we tried to meet as many people as possible and recorded their testimony. Often the accounts we collected contradicted one another, or had large blanks. The act of remembering being so embedded in affect, we seemed to awaken old vicissitudes, wounds, loyalties, and affinities. We relied on how they wanted to recount this history, sometimes we used prompts (images and documents we compiled over the years of research). We also revisited sites where events had taken place, looking for traces of what could have remained from an exhibition, a meeting place, or an assassination.

Two other itinerant international solidarity collections (or 'museums in exile') surfaced in the mesh of networks we were unearthing, the 'Art Against/Contre Apartheid' collection, and the 'Museum in Solidarity with Nicaragua'. Both were initiated in Europe. These different instances of a 'museum in exile' present an alternate history of museographic practices from the seventies, mobilized around political causes: the struggle against the dictatorship in Chile, the struggle against Apartheid, the struggle for a free Palestine, and in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. The individuals involved in each one string together networks of cooperation, collaboration, exchange of resources, knowledge and access. They were artists committed to political struggles and militants who could not imagine conducting their struggles without artists.

The kind of forensic exhibition history inquest we have undertaken seldom took place in libraries or institutional archives. The



5.02.04 - Video still from an video document of Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri mapping artistic and exhibition networks, featured in 'Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine'. Courtesy: Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti

bulk of information we collected was from people's testimonials, to whom we are immensely indebted for their generosity, openness, and trust. They included artists who donated works to these museums, or even organized the collection of artworks and administered its international tour, but also militants, scholars, researchers, curators, and art critics. The pathways of the research were fraught with coincidences and felicitous accidents; we have been fortunate to have had dozens avail themselves to us, share their time, memories, and personal archives and receive us in their homes. Even though the mobilizations had lost their magnetic power, some of the chains in the networks were 're-activated', because some individuals had forged life-long friendships and were re-connected.

We often felt like detectives tracking clues, without a real sense of the whole plot or picture. The catalogue was like our treasure map, and every time we found something or hit a dead end, we went back to the names listed in it. Some threads that we followed assiduously, we had to give up pursuing after a while because they led nowhere. Dead ends. At the same time, a lot of our findings were totally unexpected fortuitous surprises.

PAST DISQUIET

When we were invited to present our research in an exhibition, we were compelled to take a step back and reflect critically on the significance of these histories we were unearthing. The first obvious conclusion was that we were threading a history of artistic, exhibition and museographic practices that were outside the canon. We chose to tell the stories of the networks as we mapped them because they were at the core of the research. We used wall texts, facsimiles of documents, images, catalogues and books, but we also presented 'video-documents', or montages of interviews we had filmed with images, text as well as archival footage that we found. The exhibition tries to reconstruct this world, in its rich complexity, and acknowledges the trappings of remembering, as well as the contradicting versions for an event or action. 'Past Disquiet' proposed a speculative version of history that we author subjectively.

The first iteration of 'Past Disquiet' was commissioned by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in 2015, and the second, in 2016, by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Both iterations were presented, respectively, in the context of



5.02.05/06 - 'Past Disquiet:
Narratives and Ghosts from the
International Art Exhibition for
Palestine, 1978', installation
view, Museu d'Art Contemporani
de Barcelona (MACBA), 2015.
Photo: La Fotogràfica

larger programmatic or curatorial questions. The MACBA had launched a set of programmes around the question of decolonizing the museum, with a keen focus on exhibition histories, while the HKW launched a programme around interrogating the art historical canon with 'Past Disquiet'.

The HKW enabled us to continue our research in Germany. With the collaboration of Emily Dische-Becker, we met the only non-Palestinian political figure to appear in the photographs documenting the

opening of the 'International Art Exhibition for Palestine' in Beirut, namely Achim Reichart (born 1929), who was the ambassador for the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Lebanon from February 1978 until August 1981. When we visited him in the winter of 2016, Reichart had long since retired and lived with his spouse at the outskirts of Berlin. They recalled attending the exhibition, but also receiving the five East German artists and curator who were invited by the PLO and the Union of Palestinian Artists to visit the Palestinian refugee camps and PLO offices. We were also able to meet a few of the German artists who travelled to Beirut and recorded their recollections, photographed the sketches they did while visiting camps and meeting artists in Lebanon.

In February 2017, we presented our research as a long two-day seminar at the Tensta konsthall in Stockholm to art history and cinema students, and a witness seminar explored the Swedish context of solidarity networks and artistic practices around the anti-Pinochet struggle and Palestinian struggle during the seventies. These witness seminars produce and record testimonies by key protagonists, which are later made accessible at Södertörn University. The election of Salvador Allende and the experience of a democratic socialism that he incarnated captivated the Swedish left in the sixties and seventies. After the coup in Chile, a committee was formed to collect art works to be donated to the Resistance Museum (MIRSA) and the collection was exhibited at the Moderna



5.02.07 - 'Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978', installation view, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 2015. Photo: La Fotogràfica

Museet in 1978. We invited two individuals who had been members of the Stockholm committee that had organized the show and a former ambassador to Chile. In addition, there were three members or artists from the Palestinian solidarity movement, two of whom are still active today. In the case of the Palestinian struggle, Sweden was a country where solidarity with the Palestinian people had a wide base, however there

were no Swedish artists who donated works to the 'International Art Exhibition'. We were obviously intrigued to understand why.

These witness seminars have a specific format, and the individuals were invited to reflect on their practice then and today, and on the effectiveness of strategies and actions, with people engaged with Palestine and Chile sitting across from one another. The stories of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinians and against Pinochet unfolded an untold history of Sweden. The audience was not only university students, but also a cross-generational wider public. Some intervened to contribute their own testimonies of engagement with solidarity movements, including younger people in their early twenties, who were Swedish or Chilean origin who had never heard these stories before.

In April of 2017, we travelled to Japan to conclude the research we had initiated there a few years earlier. We interviewed Vladimir Tamari, a Palestinian artist who had been in Japan since 1970. We also met with Misako Nagasawa, a pro-Palestinian activist who acts as a bridge between generations of scholars, artists, filmmakers and writers, in the network of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. With her help, we were able to meet Japanese activists, such as Toshio Satoh, who was the graphic designer with whom she collaborated to publish *Filastin Biladi*, a monthly publication produced by the PLO office between 1977 and 1982.



LEBANON, CHILE, PALESTINE

Today is my day off. I heard that international artists who support the revolution are here and have brought their paintings to us. I came to the exhibition that tells the world that while the Palestinian carries a gun, he also ‘thinks’, cares, and participates in cultural events.

Quote from a fighter visiting the exhibition in 1978.¹

There are a few cities that are important for us to present our research and share the stories with a wider audience in the places where we collected them, and suture small ruptures in histories that used to be connected. In 2018, we plan to present new versions of the exhibition in Beirut, Santiago de Chile, and Birzeit, Palestine. Sharing these stories will have a different resonance in each place, awaken different connections and circuits in the networks that exist or will be formed. Beirut will be the most challenging because the original exhibition happened in the middle of the civil war. Over 40 years later, the legacy of the war, that involved the Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians, is still present in the country and sectarianism still permeates society and imaginaries. The Palestinian struggle is not the only focus of the research; the exhibition also deals with interrogating art history, museographic practices and the engagement of artists in political causes from New York, to Paris, to Cape Town and Tokyo. We are motivated by the necessity to bring a yet unwritten history of those who are still alive, their aspirations and engagement.

The struggle for Palestine is yet unresolved, while in the case of South Africa and Chile respectively, the apartheid regime has ended and so has the military dictatorship. The questions of the transformation of solidarity throughout the years until today is significant and will be prompted by sharing the research. We hope



5.02.08 - 'Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978', installation view, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2016. Photo: Laura Fiorio/Haus der Kulturen Der Welt

¹ From the article 'Militant artists present their works for the Palestinian Museum' by Najat Harb in the Lebanese daily *Al-Safir*, published on 28 March 1978.



5.02.09 - 'Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978', installation view, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2016. Photo: Laura Fiorio/Haus der Kulturen Der Welt

that the exhibition in Beirut will bring together a Palestinian community as well as a wider local community, to acknowledge the work of those engaged in the Palestinian cause, a public interested in the history of art in Lebanon, museum-making and collection-building around causes and international militant practices from the seventies.

Throughout the years of research we have been interviewing Nasser Soumi, a Palestinian artist who had been involved in the 1978 exhibition. He took it upon himself to embark on a project to trace the artworks from the collection. He found artworks that stayed in Tehran after a selection of artworks from the collection were exhibited there in 1980, but were not returned because Beirut's airport was shut down at the time. He has tracked down other artworks in Lebanon, and is actively seeking a resolution to return the collection to its rightful owner. Showing 'Past Disquiet' in Beirut will also spark a conversation into these difficult and complex issues.

In April 2018, 'Past Disquiet' will open in Chile at the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende. The museum was re-opened in 1991, adding to the remains from the collection of the original Museo de la Solidaridad por Chile (1971-1973) and the itinerant museum collections from the seventies. We have been in contact with the museum's archivist and head of collections and made them aware of the intersections between the Resistance Museum (MIRSA) collections, the 'Art Against/Contre Apartheid' and 'International Art Exhibition for Palestine'. Their museum spear-headed the others. Over a few years, we started sharing materials, and as we researched the Chilean resistance museum we shared our findings with them, as they did with us.

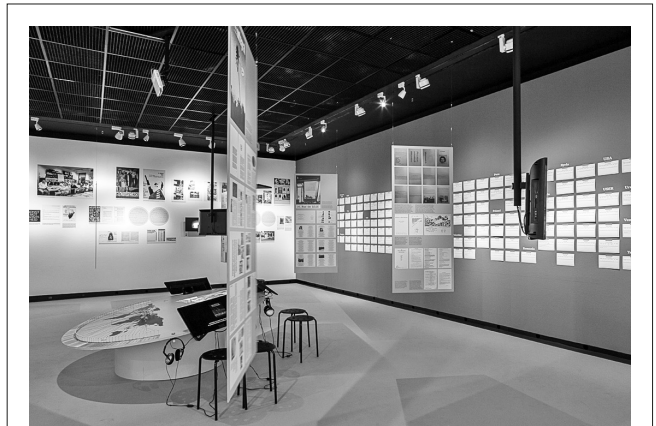
In Berlin, the opening of 'Past Disquiet' was followed by a conference, in which Claude Lazar spoke briefly. He reminded the participants of the mission at the core of our research, namely, artists giving work to be part of a larger project, a collection that incarnated international solidarity with a cause. In the case of Chile, most of the works were shipped to Chile from the committees



abroad and the works are at the museum. In Chile, we aim to show the public how both the Museo de la Solidaridad por Chile [Solidarity Museum for Chile], and subsequently the Resistance Museums (MIRSA), instigated the establishment of other museums in exile. The largest Palestinian diaspora outside of the Arab world resides in Chile, and surfacing these connections will hopefully draw together different communities living in the same city, whose origins are connected in more than one way.

In Palestine, we plan to exhibit 'Past Disquiet' at the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, which had its first official opening exhibition in August 2017. The museum, which operates with a 'base' in Birzeit, plans to activate collaborations with satellite institutions hosting shows and public programmes to reach to the diaspora around the world. On a practical level, 'Past Disquiet' is an exhibition that is not encumbered with the difficult logistics of shipping artworks past checkpoints. We hope to bring the yet unfinished story of a collection in waiting into an established institution. The borders that keep artists apart between the occupied territories, Jerusalem, Lebanon, and abroad will dissipate—if only momentarily. We hope the practices of the artists active in the seventies, as well as militants, will resurface in the public programming and be shared with the wider public. Considering that we are prohibited by Lebanese law from going to the West Bank, we plan to collaborate with curators who will adapt 'Past Disquiet' to the site and context.

By revisiting forgotten networks of artists and practices, the research and the exhibition revives them while weaving a new inter-generational constituency of activists and artists.



5.02.10 - 'Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978', installation view, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2016. Photo: Laura Fiorio/Haus der Kulturen Der Welt