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This is the first time *Urbânia* magazine has been published in a language other than Portuguese, my mother tongue. Throughout the editorial process, it was interesting to perceive that some words and expressions that are at the basis of this project do not have an exact English translation. A translation may exist, but it loses meanings and ambiguities that are present in the original terms.

I learnt, in practice, that trying to find equivalent terms is one of the most frustrating parts of the translation process, because languages are not symmetrical. In the same way the contexts in which languages exist are not symmetrical.

The meaning of every word and expression is constructed from the specificities of its original context. If there is no precise word in a language to name a practice, it may be because that practice does not exist in that context, or because it does not exist in the same way.

Rather than considering this a problem that needed solving, I chose to assume the failure of translation. And decided to use this editorial text to contextualise some terms, while introducing some of the magazine's contents.

DJA GUATA PORÃ

The Guarani phrase *Dja Guata Porã* identifies the act of “walking together” and, at the same time, “walking well.” As Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente tell us, the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã: Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* may be understood as an act of walking whose trajectory “is not defined from the beginning, but is rather constructed in a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledges (and peoples), which therefore implies conflict, but not confrontation. A conflict that will always exist, because the indigenous and non-indigenous are different bodies that talk together, moving according to their respective demands. A construction that will always be made without a predefinition, because the living object in movement needs to appear in varied versions.”

MUTIRÃO

The word *mutirão* has its origins in the Tupi word *motyrõ*, which means “working together around a common goal” and, at the same time, “mutual aid.”

In a *mutirão*, people cooperate and help each other, fulfilling different functions around a shared goal, such as building a home. Some people prepare and carry the concrete, some lay bricks,

and others carry water for those who are thirsty, among other lighter and heavier actions, each of them essential for the construction of the home. Work is alternated with group lunches – cooking, serving and cleaning are also part of the *mutirão*, and should not just be the responsibility of women – and, once the home is ready, the *mutirão* is celebrated with a party.

The Tupi term resulted in many other versions of the word, most of them no longer used – *motirão*, *muquirão*, *mutirom*, *mutirum*, *mutirão*, *muxirã*, *muxirão*, *muxirom*, *pixurum*, *ponxirão*, *punxirão*, *putirão*, *putirom*, *putirum*, *puxirum*. At the Quilombo Ribeirão Grande Terra Seca, where Nilce de Pontes Pereira writes, besides *mutirão* they use *puxirão*, *picheca* and *reunida*.

CANTEIRO

The Latin origin of the word *canteiro*, which may be translated as “construction site,” points back to the time of the guilds, the Gothic cathedrals and the predominance of stonework. *Canthus* referred to the labourer who worked with *cantaria*, who polished and sculpted stone. Such a worker was an artisan, and he didn’t need a design to guide his work. Drafting happened within the *canteiro* itself, in the form of schemes. There was no technical drawing, made far from the construction site, which started to happen in the Renaissance. The English “building site,” or “place to make buildings,” eliminates that link to the labourer. That detail is important, because the architect who designs in his office draws curved lines that are difficult to construct, while the *canteiro* architect worries, among other things, about techniques that make work easier and safer, in continuous dialogue with the labourers.

The ConstructLab collective, invited to create the furniture for the experiment of a cultural centre installed in the middle of Vila Itororó’s open construction site in São Paulo, define their practice as follows: “Unlike the conventional architectural process, in which the architect designs and the builder builds, in ConstructLab the project’s conception and construction are brought together. The designer builds and continues to design on site. The construction site is no longer the place of uncertainty where the design contends with reality, but the context in which the project can be enriched by the unexpected opportunities that occur on site”.

As I narrate in the long text I bring to the magazine, actions and debates that took place at the *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto*

transformed some aspects of the design that was at the basis of the restoration project of the area.

Some readers may wonder why I chose to emphasise this context in the publication, considering that it originates from osloBIENNALEN. As a result of the impossibility of doing a residency in Oslo as originally planned, I felt that the most honest approach, besides including collaborators who live in Norway, would be to address my contribution to the Biennial – the notion of “public as mutual” – from my own context and from the places where I had participated in residencies, Utrecht and Warsaw. The former is present in the essay on the unlearning process undertaken by the Casco Art Institute - Working for the Commons Team; and the latter in the essay on the *Common Space, Individual Space* exercise, practised for decades by Grzegorz Kowalski with art students. The initial plan was to publish only the newly commissioned text by Benjamin Seroussi on *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto*, but I decided to include the text I wrote in 2017 out of respect for the Vila’s former residents, as every talk about the Vila is also an opportunity to legitimate the former residents’ narrative, against the official narrative written by those in power, and with the intention to add another time layer to the discussion. Somewhere in his text, Benjamin talks about the “agreements” made by those who shared the space of the *canteiro*/the experiment of a cultural centre. At the time I wrote my essay, as the readers may notice, there were no “agreements” yet, but “rules.” Practice, with all its contradictions, has more beauty than theory.

CINEMA SEM FIO [CINEMA WITHOUT STRING]

The children’s game *Telefone sem fio* literally means a telephone without wire, from a time when phones still had wires. (Although, in fact, *fio* is not wire but string, and a literal translation of *fio* would give us another children’s game, a string telephone.) This game, which in English is called Grapevine, is conceived for relatively large groups, and may be played by both children and adults. The group sits in a circle or a line. A person begins the game, whispering a sentence in the ear of the person sitting next to her. This person must then whisper the same sentence (or what she heard, or adding her personal touch) to the next person, and so forth, until the last person says out loud what she heard. The message rarely arrives in its original form, and the final sentence often carries a series of

misunderstandings or inventions that emerge along the way. Inspired by this game, the film club *Cinema sem fio*, conceived by Fabio Zuker as one of the actions of the *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* project, had its programme decided in each session, with the direct engagement of those present, taking surprising and unexpected turns that, at the same time, constructed a collective string (or wire) filled with meaning. A programme without a string (or wire) predetermined by a curator, but still wired, *com fio*. Another meaning that escapes an objective or efficient translation: *confio*, in Portuguese, means “I trust.” *Fiar* means both “to sew” and “to have faith.” *Co-fiar*: to sew together, shared trust.

FORMAÇÃO DE PÚBLICO [FORMATION OF PUBLIC]

When I received the invitation to take on the role of Coordination of the Education Department at *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto*, my first proposal was to avoid the words “coordinator” and “education department,” using instead “Person Responsible for the Formation of Public.” “Responsible,” as the person who responds to that task, and “formation” as constructing the publics and constructing the notion of public itself, rather than teaching. Families had been evicted from that area in the name of a specific understanding of “public.” In my understanding of “public,” it would be necessary to emphasize the presence of these same people in any decisions about that context.

AUTOFORMAÇÃO DE PÚBLICO [SELF-FORMATION OF PUBLIC]

Forming publics should not be mistaken for *reaching* publics. The expression “target audience” presupposes the existence of a given public, or given publics, and the realisation of activities directed at those publics. What if we inverted that relation, practising an actual act of listening, so that the publics propose what they desire? So that the publics define themselves as such, even by deciding not to participate in the process?

During the research process for my work at osloBIENNALEN, Martin Berner Mathiesen introduced me to the network of non-European immigrant artists Verdensrommet. I became interested in working with them, especially because they were creating online strategies for *mutual aid* during the pandemic. I told them about the editorial project “public as mutual,” and asked: how may this

magazine be useful to you? How may the magazine’s structure (and that of the Biennial) contribute to your practice?

VERDENSROMMET

Rodrigo Ghattas, co-founder of the network, explains that the word Verdensrommet means either “‘the world’s room’ or ‘the universe,’ ‘outer space.’ We’ve chosen that name because it represents a plurality of voices and livelihoods that can coexist together. But it also represents being a foreigner, or alien, which might be representative of the experience of being an immigrant in a new society. It also refers to a ‘floating experience,’ like astronauts in space, which for many of us might be the case in our attempt to land in Norway”.

TIME

osloBIENNALEN became known for being a biennial conceived entirely for the public space. The building that housed the Biennial offices did not have exhibition spaces or artworks on display – except for Mette Edvardsen’s living books library and the toilets reformed by Lisa Tan – and hosted 60 artists’ studios. As can be seen in the booklet titled “Public as public policy,” included as an appendix to this publication, the creation of artists’ studios at the headquarters at Myntgata 2 was underway, and one of the relevant actions of the Biennial in the local context was to facilitate this process. By engaging with processes rather than results (akin to what would happen in a studio), and with performative rather than installation-based practices, this biennial was characterised by time, rather than space. Artists were invited to engage in long-term dialogues – three, five years... The notion of “biennial,” which refers to something that happens every two years, was imploded. There would be enough time to listen, experiment, err, think together, do differently, begin again... The Biennial’s structure and strategies could be rethought, on the basis of inspiration and problems that would emerge on the way. But there was no shared understanding of the meaning of such extended time. After a first year of production there was a deficit in the accounts, which made the project and the curators’ position fragile. Instead of lasting until 2024, as planned, the Biennial is finishing now, in June 2021.

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

After watching Ane Hjort Guttu’s film *Frihet forutsetter*

at *noen er fri* (*Freedom Requires Free People*, 2011), I approached her and asked if she would be up for talking with Jens Flakstad Vold, the protagonist, who during the filming was eight years old and is now 18, in order to develop something together for the magazine. I was interested in the fact that the film was a joint construction, despite the asymmetry between herself as an adult and him as a child. Ane took Jens's criticisms of the school seriously, and only began to register the daily occurrences at the school after he interpellated her, saying something like "you should go there and see how bad it is."

Pedagogical documentation, as practised by the Ateliê Carambola school, who wrote one of the essays of the magazine, does not refer here to the registration of a pedagogical process. Or not only, not exactly. It is, in the first place, a documentation that is pedagogical in itself.

Curiously, Jens approached Ane the same week I invited her, saying he wanted to watch again the film they had made together 10 years earlier, and that he would like to make another film with her. I know now that they met and actually finished shooting the new film. For the magazine, she chose another route, which perhaps is not that far from the original invitation: Ane engaged her former teacher Dag Erik Elgin and her student Stacey de Voe as interlocutors, for a process of intergenerational composition of a work and a text.

INACABAMENTO

My biggest frustration with the limits of translation was, without a doubt, not being able to find a word that does justice to the Portuguese *inacabamento*. According to William James Packer, who was responsible for copy editing the magazine, "unfinishment" does not exist. "It could be 'unfinishedness,' but I find the word slightly clumsy/ugly," he said.

But *inacabamento* happens not to be pretty, and it is good that it is not. Things that are too pretty, too perfect, too efficient, do not allow other people to enter.

As happens in Paulo Fochi's educational itineraries, also part of the magazine, "what is common to all the itineraries is that they end with an affirmation of inconclusiveness, which is proper to human beings and to the nature of knowledge, and stresses the circularity and continuity involved in the learning experience."

Dedicated to Eva González-Sancho Boderó

The term mutuality was introduced into psychoanalysis by Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi. He is credited with originating the radical spirit of the psychoanalytical method as a transformative experience at the core of a relationship marked by the independence of the participants.

I wish to add some of his experience to this text because while it is valuable and interesting in itself, it also helps us to imagine a society-building practice made for and by the people who are part of it. This is a practice that animates the current issue of *Urbânia* magazine, and so revisiting the mutual analysis developed by Ferenczi and his patients would appear to offer the right approach to such a practice.

Ferenczi is very well known among psychoanalysts because of the preferential importance he placed on clinical practice and its problems. He was concerned with patients' treatment, and with analysing psychoanalysts themselves at a time when this had not become an obvious precedent and – linking one problem with the other – arrived at fresh and foundational conclusions about the psychism grounded in the effects of the relationship between analyst and patient. Although well informed by theoretical understanding, Ferenczi was always willing to put clinical practice first, taking the tension between theory and practice to its utmost limits and expanding his own theory in the process. He affirmed that the psychoanalyst's training must place psychoanalytical method at the core of its process. To become a psychoanalyst amounts to engagement with the unconscious, reaching far beyond the conscious apprehension of one or another theory.

He introduced this thinking into practice, realising that one of the reasons for the patients' resistance to progress in analysis was the analyst's own unconscious. His interest focused on not only the patient's feelings and reactions regarding the analyst, but the analyst's non-analysed aspects, his or her own complexes, as well as the analyst's feelings and other reactions to the patient. In addition to the analyst's analysis, he felt that under some circumstances it would be both possible and necessary for the analyst to speak of him or herself with the analysand, so that his or her more delicate and repressed issues did not hinder the patient's elaborations. In order to set the analysand's analysis in motion towards his or her autonomy, even with regard to the analyst, the analyst should speak when his or her own issues are inhibiting the analysand's analysis. This opens up an option of utterance rather than silence, so that no void becomes

a desert of meaning, so that the analysand does not doubt his or her own perceptions or psychic capacity, so that the analysand will know that a particular difficulty with content has not necessarily originated with him/herself. And that the figure of authority may play a part in a situation of deadlock. Ferenczi believed in distributing responsibility and at the same time taking a position within the situation, dissipating paranoias and the imposition of silences emerging from the other... As Ferenczi pointed out, this is something very different from the usual relationships between children and adults, pupils and teachers, offspring and parents and so on... This means backing intelligence, desire and autonomy.

This practice, based on building a relationship that makes provision and space for affects and authentic words, and so truly transforms a person's psychic dynamic, he called *mutual analysis*. A practice, he writes, created by the patients:

"The word mutual here speaks above all of the implication of all subjects in the process. Analysis belongs to the analysand, but the analyst is there. It involves both, even if they take different places and positions. It transforms both, even when the analyst is unwilling to undergo transformation. The dyad is there, mutually implied. Even if the analyst does not agree, even so, this phenomenon is there to be consciously included or not in the analytical process and in later theoretical construction."

Mutuality has always been present in the history of psychoanalysis in some way. This was true from the very beginning of the beginning. In 1882-83, in the course of the clinical history of Josef Breuer and Bertha Pappenheim, also known as Anna O., the doctor himself was transformed by the patient's co-authorship of the treatment. This history also had effects on the young Freud, who, when he learnt of this experience, became decisively interested in the phenomena of hysteria and speech therapy. The patient's possession of the word, demanded by Bertha and yielded by Breuer, subverted the verticality of the relationship whereby the doctor knew, or enjoyed the authority of knowing what went on in the patient's body and soul. Only through intelligent and sensitive collaboration was it possible to carry on; and this is what constitutes the method. This moment configured the history of psychoanalysis within the relationship between analysts and analysands, and also between analysts.

It is worth reading this excerpt by Breuer on the clinical case of Anna O., the name Breuer gave to his patient in his

publication *Studies on Hysteria*, a book co-authored with Freud in 1895:

"While she was in the country, when I was unable to pay her daily visits, the situation developed as follows. I used to visit her in the evening, when I knew I should find her in her hypnosis, and I then relieved her of the whole stock of imaginative products which she had accumulated since my last visit. It was essential that this should be effected completely if good results were to follow. When this was done, she became perfectly calm, and next day she would be agreeable, easy to manage, industrious and even cheerful; but on the second day she would be increasingly moody, contrary and unpleasant, and this would become still more marked on the third day. When she was like this it was not always easy to get her to talk, even in her hypnosis. She aptly described this procedure, speaking seriously, as a 'talking cure', while she referred to it jokingly as 'chimney-sweeping.' She knew that after she had given utterance to her hallucinations, she would lose all her obstinacy and what she described as her 'energy'; and when, after some comparatively long interval, she was in a bad temper, she would refuse to talk, and I was obliged to overcome her unwillingness by urging and pleading and using devices such as repeating a formula with which she was in the habit of introducing her stories. But she would never begin to talk until she had satisfied herself of my identity by carefully feeling my hands."

Mutuality does not mean the fusion of two to become one. Ferenczi articulates another horizon in which each subject follows his or her own path, free from the other's idealisations. However, autonomy does not mean the abandonment of the other. The other remains incontrovertible in our formation as subjects, there is no hypothesis of our *being* without another. This starts with the radical dependence needed in order to exist, to be born, to protect oneself, to feed and to take possession of the life-entering tools of language and the affects.

I remembered Castoriadis, philosopher, militant, psychoanalyst and his advocacy of autonomy as an instituting practice that creates social relations. He speaks of this tension between subjects in the following manner:

"From the moment in which the word, even if not pronounced, opens the first breach, the world and the others infiltrate from all sides, awareness is inundated by the torrent of significations that come, so to speak, not from outside but from the inside."

Autonomy for him is not the elimination of the Other's discourse, but another relationship between the discourse of the Other and the discourse of the subject itself. So that a subject may exist, it is necessary to know the other. Hence the need to recognise and preserve the other. And this other, since it is also a subject, also recognises the other. It is at this crossroads where mutuality can exist. It lies at an essentially unconscious place, where the subject dwells, who, as Castoriadis reminds us, is not the same thing as the Self of consciousness. A non-geographic place of the multitudes of content passed on from subject to subject, from generation to generation. This place, where we may fantasise about just being in our room of intimacies, is the street. The tension between the intimate and the common, between the particular and the shared, between the public and the private, can be considered along these lines.

So, the Self of autonomy is not an absolute Itself, aseptic, free from the contamination brought in by the other. Instead, it is an instance that "constantly reorganises contents, and makes use of the self-same contents," comprising things that existed previously and that remain in transformation in and through the subject.

This ongoing construction of a relationship between the subject and the other makes me think that autonomy is not an end in itself, but a means. A never-reached horizon that needs a few tools to set itself in motion. I think that emancipatory practice is a lot more interesting as a horizon than as arrival at this ideal place of autonomy. Emancipation, as movement, is a horizon, and also, most importantly, a now.

Emancipation is emancipation from an unfavourable life situation into another less unfavourable one. Emancipation from a condition felt to be unpleasant into a fresh more interesting condition to live in. Emancipation from a condition of subalternity, of exploitation, of suffering.

Christophe Dejours may be of help here. He is a psychoanalyst dedicated to thinking the dynamics and the effects of labour relations in contemporary capitalism. As well as thinking and acting from the perspective of suffering at work, Dejours is interested in the emancipation process, both as a political position and as a clinical and theoretical interest. Inverting the classic question "why do people who are directly affected by capitalism not revolt against it?" Dejours is interested in knowing why people in disadvantage continue to revolt against this state of affairs.

It is in childhood, the very first infancy, that Dejours finds a possible answer. A baby progressively realises that great power over adults is within its reach, no matter how fragile, however difficult it may be for the young child to fulfil the satisfaction of its needs through its own motor control or because of its embryonic notion of itself and of the others. The adults in charge, who desired the child, who are charmed by it, have transformed their lives, their habits, the organisation of their time and their energies, in order to attend to the baby's needs. It is not an exaggeration to state that we do not know who is in command of the situation. The adults guess what the baby needs or demands, articulating tactics of persuasion, so to speak. Probably something between these two positions, in this redistribution of the adults' libido to the child who, in its turn, fills the adults' lives with libido, who in their turn find afresh, in an unconscious arrangement, their own childhood, their own relationships with their parents, their own traumas, desired reparations, infinite fantasies.

There is something within us, a lived experience, whereby we imagine that it is possible to transform reality in favour of our interests, needs, desires, even when we are at a disadvantage in some way. From hunger, cold, the precariousness of conditions, or by the widening of the possibilities for loving, by the possibility of existing as one is. And this experience, which does not spurn the other, but instead is lived in the very tense and contradictory relationship with this other, is found in childhood. It is in the space co-inhabited by subjects in different situations that such transformations take place, in another complexity that is not the elimination of the other or a pacified conciliation between unequal parties.

The analytical situation is the creation of one such common space, a place that is neither just of the analysand nor just of the analyst. A meeting place, a third thing, which an anthropologist such as Roy Wagner would call culture, but other psychoanalysts would properly call the unconscious, but which can be just a psychic space of passage, for building something. It seems to me that in this built situation something happens that evades the more immediate aims of a therapy.

This method, and this understanding of the method, can be extrapolated to other contexts and interesting things emerge from this.

This is so because conflict is not erased. Differences are not forgotten in a simulation of good coexistence. It is not about a

consensus, which in general erases differences rather than making them acute. Through psychoanalysis we learn that what is erased does not cease to exist, on the contrary, it carries on acting wherever possible. It is about experimenting, in the sense of experiencing, political practice by means of the implication of all the interested subjects and verifying the consequences of this subversion of the poles of power.

This is how we set out to work at the *Clínica Pública de Psicanálise* (Public Clinic of Psychoanalysis), an experience carried out between mid-2016 and 2020, at *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* (Vila Itororó Open Construction Site) in the São Paulo neighbourhood of Bixiga. The clinic was part of the wider history of the place. Vila Itororó was a very special place where many families lived, families who could not otherwise afford to live in the city centre. A space very different from what we are used to seeing today in the overbuilt and impersonal city. There was open space where one could play; the houses had been built next to one another, endowing the neighbourhood with an intimate quality. Open community parties took place. There was a very particular way of life there, which was interrupted by a dispute over land usage. The public powers, in

a perversion of their function, had decided that the residents should leave the site because the area should be placed at the disposal of the public at large rather than a few families. The future use of the space and the built area would however take the form of a commercial cultural centre, planned, executed and managed vertically from the top down. Screaming contradictions. The families organised, embracing the support of those willing to back them and, as the families were removed in various ways from the place where they had lived their lives, they did receive some compensation, rehoused nearby so that they could still access services found in the city centre but unavailable on the outskirts.

Municipal elections brought in a new administration with policies more favourable to the population. As a result, a provisional cultural centre was set up in the course of Vila's refurbishment. This cultural centre, called *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* (Vila Itororó Open Construction Site), proposed not to have a



programme defined by a team, but to act mainly as a space defined by uses decided and implemented by the public. This subtlety makes all the difference.

I think that the struggle of the original Vila residents created a field of critical action. Their existence and their dedication to struggle, to speaking out, and to living might be understood through a psychoanalytical interpretation of dispute. The residents of Vila were the analysts-psychoanalysts of the city. Our original idea, at the Public Clinic, was to offer a space where they could elaborate together the effects of this process. After all, psychoanalysts also need analysis. Here is a good example of a chaining of a public policy practice that takes mutuality into consideration.

This collective elaboration process did not take place, but the clinic started to operate in mid-2016 crossed by the context in which it was sited. The idea of *public* was formulated as a living experience, self-built by the population, rather than the property of the State. As in the core of the psychoanalytical method, the very people who used the clinic, among them the analysts, were the ones who shaped the clinic. This was analysis under construction, to quote the title of an important text by Freud.

So, with each event, each session, each working day, the clinic set out to respond to whatever presented itself. Some people who came to the Saturday morning sessions were unable to obtain individual appointments; they started gathering at the entrance of Vila Itororó to chat and this generated the idea of creating a therapeutic group. The analyst-patient couple were the ones inventing the situation where the sessions would take place and contents were already produced by this search. After the sessions some of these situations were documented and provided images of open clinic rooms, an image that increasingly became a key aspect of the project, giving it meaning, and making the analysts, patients and other interested people to constitute the clinic in this way, to think about the reverberations of this in the psychoanalytic process.

At the Public Clinic we did not offer a service that would build afresh the asymmetry in the doctor-patient relationship, flowing from he who knows to she who does not, in a dynamic that affirms a background of inequality. We were there to build together. This is the meaning of *public* that interests us.



Mutuality does not eliminate difference. It is not about symmetry. It is possible that conflicts are unsurmountable, for instance, in disputes over the organisation of labour and the distribution of wealth in society. It is possible that even within an analytical dyad, the aim is its own dissolution. In the formulation of policies within the State, for instance, across its public and private domains, it seems that no true compromise is possible between antagonistic fields of interest. So, mutuality can be thought of in various ways: as implication, as allotting responsibilities, and as a meeting whose tensions will produce answers specific to the problem, instead of idealisations that remain external to the context. Perhaps it is within this unconscious space, singular and plural, private and shared, that what we mean by *public* may take place.



Dja Guata Porã

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A way of working together. About *Dja Guata Porã - Indigenous Rio de Janeiro*

Can a museum trust?

Dja Guata Porã - Indigenous Rio de Janeiro; multi-time lines of the multiverse serpents

When the doing together meets the *dja guata porã*

A path of care and care as a path

Puri returns

Map of the absurd: remembrances of the ground as place

Dreaming is an art

A few perspectives about art in the Guarani vision

Exhibition credits

Clarissa Diniz Dauá Silva, Denilson Baniwa, Janaina Melo, Miguel Verá-Mirm, Niara do Sol, Pablo Lafuente, Rodrigo Ferreira and Sandra Benites

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Developed collaboratively, *Dja Guata Porã - Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* was an exhibition carried out at MAR - Museu de Arte do Rio (an art museum located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) between May 2017 and March 2018.

Produced by some of its participants (indigenous and non-indigenous persons and collectives), the exhibition was grounded in their own perspectives and memories. The following texts reflect on several aspects of the project. In particular, they recall and analyse the exhibition's methods of mobilisation and creation, which drove a complex and plural building process for those who were directly involved in the conception of *Dja Guata Porã* and for the museum, its staff and its publics.

Clarissa Diniz (org.)

A WAY OF WORKING TOGETHER. ABOUT *DJA GUATA*
PORÃ – INDIGENOUS RIO DE JANEIRO

Sandra Benites and Pablo Lafuente

Everything begins with a series of meetings, organised by MAR, starting in 2016. Meetings with the name that would eventually become the title of the exhibition, *Dja Guata Porã*, which in Guarani refers to a 'walking together' as well as 'walking well.' The trajectory of this walking is not defined from the beginning, but is rather constructed in a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledges (and peoples), which therefore implies conflict, but not confrontation. A conflict that will always exist, because the indigenous and non-indigenous are different bodies that talk together, moving according to their respective demands. A construction that will always be made without a predefinition, because the living object in movement needs to appear in varied versions.

Before the meetings there was perhaps another beginning: an irritation, a disagreement with the common ways of the visual arts and their institutions, which had been applied to the organisation of projects on indigenous culture in recent times in Brazil. The interest in indigenous cultures and their cosmologies, the concern for the violences imposed on the indigenous peoples of Brazil, are more common than ever before among non-indigenous Brazilians. The indigenous struggles are now part of some generalist political agendas. Elements from indigenous culture are incorporated into practices of life by parts of the population who until recently had no contact with those questions, struggles and practices. But this is not a matter of topic, of theme.

The very ways of doing are important: if the presentation of indigenous practices and elements happens without the negotiation with indigenous people, the violence of the colonial process is simply reproduced. Perhaps the act of appropriation has an element of appreciation, but it is much more than that. Tutorship implies concern, but such a response is not the only way (or the best one) to demonstrate care. The processes of decision, the rhythms, the formats, the ways in which exchanges happen, the goals pursued, the languages used ... all these shape different paths and ways of walking.

A different kind of walking implies always showing conflicts and misunderstandings, and from them accepting the need to establish a dialogue with all the participants, in order to hear what

each group or community wants to show and why. A more democratic walking, which brings the ways of walking of groups closer to their lived realities. That is why *Dja Guata Porã* couldn't happen without the meetings, without convoking groups and individuals ... They embarked on a trajectory, dedicating their bodies to a process that nobody could preview or control.

Because everything begins with stories and histories being told. And then, the histories having begun, problems might emerge. The problem, already defined, predetermined, is not the beginning – that would be the way of the *juruá*, a way that, as it begins with a defined problem, doesn't allow for new demands to appear on the way. In this scenario, the only possible thing to do is to attempt to resolve the given problem. In contrast, in indigenous cosmologies what is aimed at is not the solution of problems, but their prevention, and the creation of tools that appear alongside histories. For example, in relation to *Ywy Rupa*, or Planet Earth: in the indigenous world views it is possible to find all the knowledge necessary to look after the environment in which we walk and live, in order for it not to become a problem. And if the problem were to eventually emerge, the tools to face it will already be available.

Dja Guata Porã, then, is not the solution to any problem. It might be thought of as a walking that provides us with tools for what might happen in the future, or even in the present. A possible answer to the question, 'How to work?' would be 'working together'. Certainly it is not the only question – another, fundamental and urgent one, would be indigenous autonomy. Still, working together could be a strategy to secure resources, swap tools and articulate. Working through conflicts to show the diverse faces from different angles, without focusing on a particular version, a specific side, as museums often do. Working together in search of indigenous protagonism – in cultural projects which are also political projects.

CAN A MUSEUM TRUST?

Clarissa Diniz

In 2016, we were at the MAR – Museu de Arte do Rio. We were many and spoke different languages. We all lived in Rio de Janeiro, but we did not know one another. We were aware, however, of each other's existence.

Despite being celebrated worldwide as “wonderful,” the city of Rio de Janeiro routinely and ostensibly lives the condition of being “fractured.”¹ In Rio we have been driven apart by processes, historically inscribed in coloniality and in capitalism, that have perpetuated the chasms in both physical and symbolic terrains.

Aware of these chasms, and therefore, politically and subjectively longing for approximation, it seemed to us that the museum could, in some way, offer a potential space for relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals who shared the experience of living in the state of Rio de Janeiro. We believed, furthermore, that this should be one of the museum's responsibilities – its mission statement includes a set of guidelines for attending to its territory.

So, three years after opening MAR to the public, it was felt that the need to reaffirm and reassess the presence, history and up-to-dateness of the museum, as well as its relations and commitments could not be postponed any longer.

But, how?

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Incorporating the name given to non-indigenous people by the Guarani – *juruá* –, we knew that we were in native territory: an adjective which the Puri people taught us – we learnt so much during those years – not to use *juruá* as an adjective to identify people, but the land itself. Besides being *juruá*, we knew we were somehow foreigners both in Pindorama, Brazil, and in Little Africa – the markedly afro-diasporic district of Rio de Janeiro where MAR had opened in 2013.

Perceiving ourselves as *unknowers*, we embarked on a knowledge-building process that, rather than replicating the extractive logic of knowledge production, was necessarily anchored in reciprocity and in a collectivity of knowing.

1 *Cidade partida (Fractured City)*, 1994, is a book published by journalist Zuenir Ventura, in which Rio de Janeiro's social, racial and urbanistic inequalities are unveiled.

This was how MAR, together with the curators/researchers initially invited to collaborate on the project, started out on a long path of conversations, exchanges, reflections, discussions and forums around the problem that was as immediate as it was historic: “what is to be done?” At the same time, the institution admitted that it did not know how to realise the exhibition it wished to host.

Denominated *Dja Guata Porã* (an expression that in the Guarani language means a walk carried out collectively), this cycle of open conversations between MAR and the homes and indigenous villages of the state of Rio de Janeiro continued over months. In the course of this process, as well as formulating alternative strategies that challenged the museum's canonical ethnographic practices, we also got to know one another. Reaching beyond awareness of each other's existence, we came to recognise one another. And then, as confidence grew, we came to believe that we could work together.

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Born out of a condition of interrogation, *Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* remained imprecise up to the last moment of its conception. It was necessary to support a space-time for creation that, given its intercultural, subjective and multiple nature, demanded a radical state of undefinition until a position could be effectively affirmed, a sketch outlined, and a project came together. To do this, we had to place our trust in time, creativity and each other's commitment.

As such, MAR, as an institution, also had to commit to this process. Rather than accept the usual behaviour of the institution, *Dja Guata Porã*'s process called upon MAR as a subject: Can a museum listen? Can a museum be affected? Can a museum trust? Can a museum wait? Can a museum learn? Can a museum dream?

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The Museu de Arte do Rio dreamed of an exhibition dedicated to indigenous Rio de Janeiro, which would be as alive as we are, as creative beings. As Sandra Benites – one of the show's curators – and her Guarani relatives taught us, before things happen we need to evoke the movements of life in a dream. So, we can say that *Dja Guata Porã* was dreamt by many, in many diverse languages.

In these dreams that were also conversations, ideas, meetings, debates, emails, WhatsApp audio messages, songs, drawings, jokes, confessions... we imagined an exhibition that did not archive its living subjects, that did not reduce them to images, to information,

to objects, to just names. Instead, we imagined that by means of time spirals and of the living existence of the grandchildren of those who had already been charmed, we could evoke the presence of the dead, rather than treating them as archive material. Seeking to avoid the risk of re-enacting or updating ethnographic exoticist biases – from human zoos to field diaries – we formulated a living exhibition that could, at last, make the museum itself one of the subjects of the histories narrated there and of the perspectives articulated on its walls and itineraries.

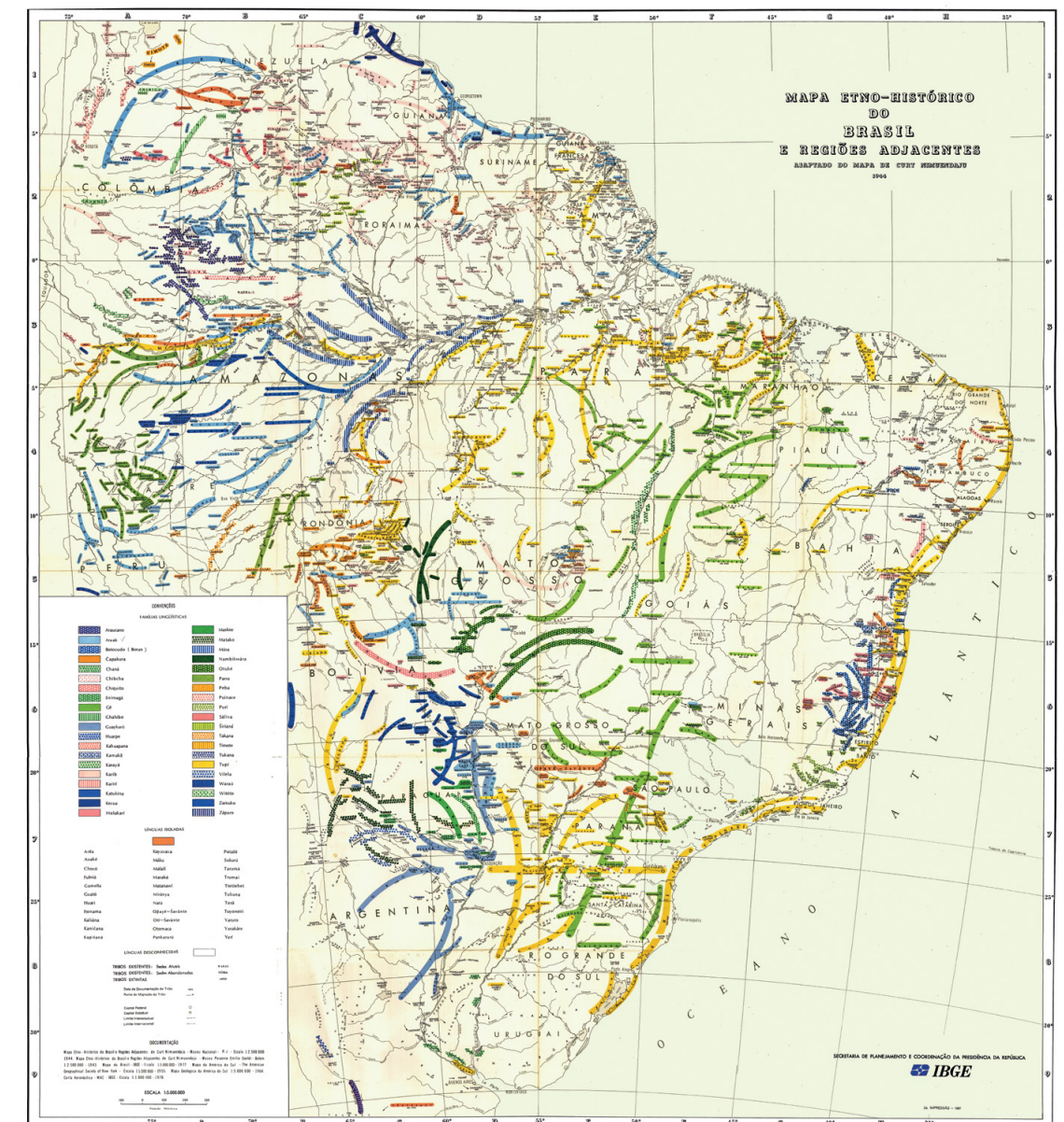
We also dreamt of not being limited to art, nor being restricted by it. Even to us – *juruá* – art is often insufficient to tackle certain social, ethnic-racial or historical complexities. Given the lack of “Art-with-a-capital-A” among the indigenous peoples with whom we were working in *Dja Guata Porã*, it seemed a mistake to insist on an aesthetising or conventionally artistic approach. So we dreamt of setting up, in the art museum, an exhibition that was not exactly artistic. And that is what we did. Instead of artworks, we had *presences*; in the place of artists, *participants*.

The usual aesthetic protagonism of art was overtaken by the concerns and urgencies around the histories, the memories, and the narratives present. Instead of leaderships and icons, there was collectivity. Instead of sacred objects, everyday life. In place of the drama of a darkened room with spotlights (granting sparkle and imposing a fictionalised exceptionality on objects historically and scenically enclosed in showcases), the light entering through open windows bathed a diversity of presences placed at a hand's reach.

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After months of collective debates and reflections, *Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* was finally organised around four big groups conceived through practices of self-representation (by the Puri, Pataxó, Guarani and indigenous peoples living in an urban context); six thematic stations exploring intercultural aspects (language, education, trade, art, women and nature); and a historical narrative of the colonial process made up of texts, documents, images, videos, etc., linked by the body of a Big Snake designed for MAR's walls by Denilson Baniwa.

The method adopted to generate ‘presences’ in the exhibition was that of commissioning, a common approach whereby museums financially and logistically host the creation of new works of art. However, unlike what usually happens in such institutions,



commissioning was geared not only towards art, but towards any form of self-representation that the participants of *Dja Guata Porã* deemed relevant, organised around themed materials: models, photographs, interviews, videos, objects, wristbands, traps, small beasts, looms, and others.

Opting for contemporary modes of self-representation instead of curated accumulations of ethnographic pieces colonially selected by museums or private collectors, *Dja Guata Porã* presented not only a historical perspective but a mainly present-day imaginary of the indigenous experience in Rio de Janeiro, stressing its constant violences – such as the forced eviction of Aldeia Maracanã or the racist episodes against indigenous people on the streets of Paraty. Together, these multiple presences underlined *Dja Guata Porã*'s ethical-political commitment not to restage the primitivism that has historically mediated the relationship between the 'art field' and the 'indigenous arts.' This confronted the violences that are not only posited outside the white walls of the museum, but equally haunt its own practices.

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Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro was not a specialised exhibition. Dedicated to historical perspectives but taking place inside an art museum, it was not a show conceived from the point of view of anthropological expertise but its opposite – it was grounded in an explicit and politicised perspective of *unknowing*. It was not, therefore, a public meeting of canonical or scientifically legitimised knowledge. It was a collective process – methodologically oriented – of exchange and of the elaboration of knowledges grounded in listening, in dialogue and in reciprocal trust.

Working daily at the Museu de Arte do Rio during the period that *Dja Guata Porã* was on show, I witnessed the discomfort of certain audiences. It is possible that, used to anthropology's competent discourses and institutions, some people may have found an exhibition such as *Dja Guata Porã – indigenous Rio de Janeiro* strange in a museum like MAR. They may have questioned the trustworthiness of the information and perspectives brought together under the aegis not of a discipline or an epistemology, but of a walk, of a meeting, of a collectivity.

The Museu de Arte do Rio also questioned the limits of its own knowledge and ambitions. But, for me, among all the self-critiquing questioning that accompanied us on this journey, one question in particular continues to reverberate: beyond all concerns about their own trustworthiness, can a *juruá* museum trust?



**RJ TERRA
INDÍGENA**

DJA GUATA PORÃ - INDIGENOUS RIO DE JANEIRO;
MULTI-TIME LINES OF THE MULTIVERSE SERPENTS

Denilson Baniwa

The Dancing Serpent

*As it fell from the heavens
Contemplative sensual eagerness
Memory's spark
Flowed into combustion*

*Like dawn screams in colours
History in its bosom made the firmament*

*Pupils that translate
Into lightning, thunder and lightning,
The dance of immemorial writing*

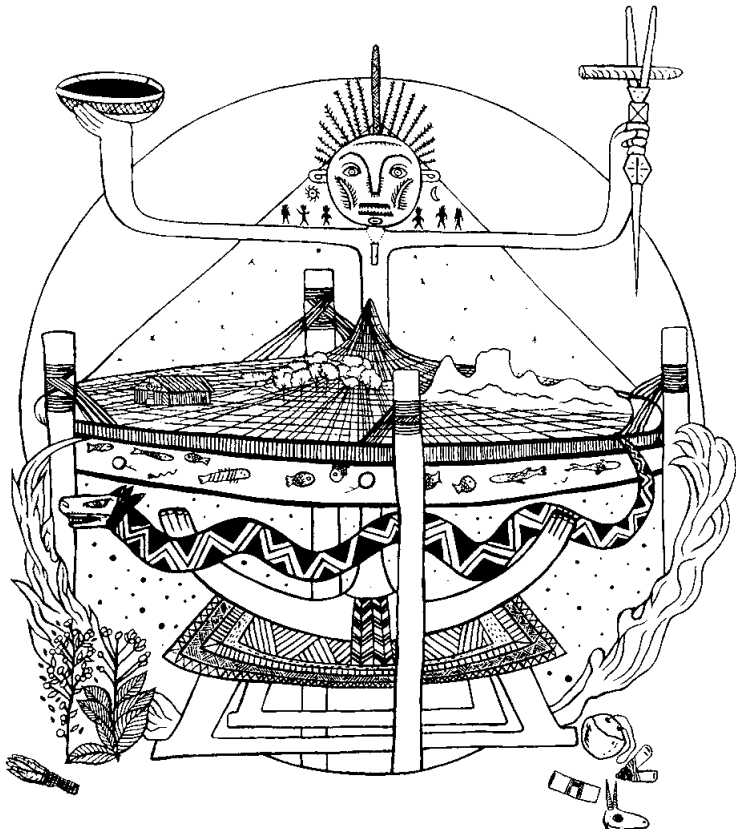
*In the foam that rims the beach
Together with the blood of the fallen
Ringed by steel and lead*

*The dance of the universe-serpent
Collects from drowned lungs
Lines that mix
Orange, red and crimson shades*

It's time of resistance

As I speak of *Dja Guata Porã*, I place myself at once in the trap of talking about myself and in a process of celebrating the alliances formed on a path mapped by four, eight, twelve, twenty... many hands. Paths that we shaped together with callused hands and voiced with calloused lips. Before grammar passes judgement on me, *Dja Guata Porã* is about *the* path, not about the exhibition at the museum.

One of the stories I have often heard since I was born is that under each large city there lies a serpent, who from time to time 'awakens' to shake up the whole of the urban formation's way of life. While it appeared to sleep, the serpent was watching the pointless building under which modernity set out to bury entities that existed





before the universe. Indeed, it seems to me that every so often bodies bearing ancestral markings arrive and destabilise the environment. Either violently or diplomatically. These are often interpreted and expressed as if “it was high time” by those who, unaware of multi-time, do not understand the temporality of invisible things. Immersed in dozens of urban times, I too had forgotten.

Dja Guata Porã has ignited the spark of a discredited self amidst a gathering of relatives, in the affective alliance of lives. The invitation to join the team who would work on *Dja Guata Porã* caused the serpent-heart to move inside my spirit, as if it was a city undergoing an earthquake suddenly alerted to the fact that concrete and steel are no longer holding nature down. As Mariane Vieira wrote: “the indigenous river that flowed into MAR,”² a fluvial clash of waters that would shift the edges and centres in a new history starting afresh.

Initially invited to work with and assist the architecture team on exhibition design, I soon found myself in the middle of a sea of discussions. Not only about what the exhibition could or could not be, but, reaching beyond practicalities, about future exhibitions featuring indigenous bodies and the approximation of western art and indigenous art that would become necessary from that point on. Part of what interested me very much at the time was thinking about how the ascension of indigenous art would take place in this situation, beyond the issue of what is and what isn’t handicraft or artefact.

With the curating team I had found a possible listening process and a conversation about how indigenous art has been asleep during the whole evolution of Art History, and that maybe it was the time for this Cosmic-Art-Serpent to stir itself and say: “I’m alive, don’t ignore me!” This is what we did in *Dja Guata Porã*.

It is fair to say that those days were decisive for the emergence of artists and discourses that had been categorised as contemporary indigenous art, and for artists who are today in the limelight,

or indeed, for Sandra Benites herself, who premiered as an art curator. I must draw attention to several novelties including the fact that she was the first indigenous curator, that this was the first co-participative exhibition carried out in a major Brazilian art institution, the first exhibition to recognise self-declaration, the first exhibition to recognise urban settlements, among a whole set of other first-ers.

I have to say that, if on the one hand the Museological Institution remains a representation of colonial power over indigenous peoples, on the other hand curating does not stand still. It was precisely through this daring curatorial initiative that the Serpent-Universe chose to appear, beyond the will of the team or my own volition. It found just the right moment to upset safe colonial ground and cause a geological fracture in the systemic Pangaea of western art. The earthquake took place through the presence of Ajurí. among other insolent and devious indigenous peoples and curators born on the margins.

It could not have been otherwise. When bitterness, disappointment and revolt come together, solidarity will prevail. Not that this is easy. It was a building process that included calming the mood swings of dissidence and argument, as well as negotiation with the institutional bureaucratic system. It is a joy to see that *Dja Guata Porã* has today been reflected in indigenous artists winning awards and in the apparition of new constellations in the Artsy sky.

We must be mindful of the twists and turns of *Dja Guata Porã* – translated as *walk well – walk together* – if we are to seek new horizons in art and in history.

WHEN DOING IT TOGETHER MEETS DJA GUATA PORÃ

Janaina Melo

This account is based on a question that was suggested to me as a trigger for further reflection: “what did the curatorial process of the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* learn from the training processes developed at the School of the Gaze (Escola do Olhar)?”.

So, as an account of a lived experience, the text is made up of memories coloured by the affectivity of the author. Rather than recount events chronologically, it mainly recalls the ways in which the relationships between people who lived together and collaborated in the exhibition evolved, which had much to do with the processes developed at the School of the Gaze, an extension of MAR responsible for developing the exhibition’s educational policy.

It is important to say that, even before entering into dialogue with teachers, neighbours, students, museum visitors, and others, the School of the Gaze’s undertaking was one of *placing oneself in relation*. This meant starting out from positions that could encompass intentionalities and subjectivities that were often coloured by contradictions, opposing narratives and layers of history.

What we (the team who had been developing the School’s programme since 2012) wanted to elaborate was a space for educational creativity that would be a central presence among the heated experiences, gestures and narratives that the groups who entered into relationships with MAR and its School of the Gaze would shape and experience. This is why two or three years before *Dja Guata Porã*, we began to think about the relationship between school and museum with the exhibition *There are schools that are cages and there are schools that give you wings*,³ which explored ideas such as ‘learning,’ ‘exchange of knowledges,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘places,’ ‘dialogues x monologues,’ ‘authority x sharing.’

In its turn, *Dja Guata Porã* highlighted issues that, beyond the rich plurality of partnerships between the participants, provided an opportunity for all of us: an epistemological change of direction related to the question of how the museum can be more than a place

where objects informed by expertise are placed on view. Unlike the tradition of ‘specialised discourses’ (for example, that of ethnography itself), the exhibition process was made open to authors, agents of narratives *other* than those that the museum as institution deals with routinely. The curating process quickly realised the redundancy of borrowing objects that would illustrate this or that argument – a canonical logic of representation – and was replaced by a process of self-representation, which was not univocal and was instead based on open-ended reciprocity.

Returning to a key moment for the School of the Gaze, I remember us (educators and audiences) establishing an ambiance that favoured building the idea of *commons*. We were interested in the relationship of the museum with individuals and their involvement, with the social body of the city of Rio de Janeiro; we sought to identify interests, concerns and urgencies that could, albeit in a contingent and contradictory manner, be thought of as *common* to the diversity of the subjects involved in the museum.

In awareness of what the museum could learn from its audiences rather than “teaching them about art,” we focused our efforts on making a School that would be in a permanent state of fallibility and uncertainty, that would avoid naming or attributing deterministic meanings to practices as an ongoing process of creation. We allowed ourselves to remain in a place/state of *not knowing* that was sufficiently open to circumvent susceptibility to the anticipative concerns of the methodological organisation (that is, static) of learning. This method was non-procedural, as it did not prioritise the schematisation, naming, or ‘application’ of what we had before us. Instead of imposing crystallised categories, it preferred to foment *collaborative space-times*, so that the processes set in motion in the School could attend to what individuals and collectives could do and learn together. In other words, our method was one of practising *what is not known* or what *we did not yet know*.

This exercise kept us in a state of constant friction, reinvention and doubt; alert to the breaches that can contribute to creation (each and every form of creativity); defying the canonical and exclusive hierarchies of knowledge, utterance and ways of living together; critiquing the very institutionalism of the museum while acting within it. In this sense, the School of the Gaze was established less as a school (one of formal teaching) and more as a space-time of horizontal collaborative functions and practices.

To create in such an ambiance requires dedicated listening and continuous articulation. To act from a position of *not knowing* demands wholehearted willingness and effort from everyone; all must become sensitised to the idea that what is unforeseen offers an opportunity. This approach has formed the basis of the programmes and mediation processes formulated by the School's educators at MAR. The experience was one in which diverse learning communities each articulated some input: audiences, the museum's educators and employees, or residents of the port area of Rio de Janeiro, where MAR is sited. From the beginning of the School of the Gaze, these inflection points led us to (re)imagine the museum as a network of processual relationships open to creativity. The operations resulting from this perspective shaped the School's conceptual principles. These were revised continually in order to adapt them to the dynamics of participation and joint transcreation – assembling and pulling apart in light of the specificities arising from each new opportunity.

I remember that one of the initial curatorial actions and intents that led to *Dja Guata Porã* took place in the School of the Gaze, room 2.2. on the second floor. In a room full of brightly coloured chairs, over 30 indigenous and non-indigenous individuals met, invited to talk about what the exhibition could be. It was in the course of such discussions that Sandra Benites, one of the show's curators, first introduced the expression *dja guata porã*: which became the title for the cycle of meetings that brought the exhibition to fruition.

Sandra told us that "*Dja Guata* means to walk together and walk well; this would be a group of people or a collective who walk well together. So, *dja guata* would be a collective walk regardless of whether the participants were indigenous or not. A dialogue, a conversation (...), many people taking part in a big talk. To call the conversations a *walk* pointed to the idea of bodies in movement – without a fixed route and in constant motion. This encompassed the community perspective that we had always sought.

Until then, we had not yet used the expression *collective walk*, even though we always started with the question "what can we do together?", thinking of it in a specific way and from a singular perspective. In this way, *we transformed a specific question into a principle* whose layers reveal (and constitute) the materiality and subjectivity of multiple contexts. The question "what can we do together?" had been elaborated by Senhor Brazil (a retired stevedore and frequenter of the port area, where he had lived for more than 40 years). He regularly

participated in the School's programme, and visited the exhibitions, often accompanied by his children, grandchildren and friends.

In 2013, Senhor Brasil asked us this question during a School of the Gaze seminar, and thereafter became our guide in the initiatives and understanding of "doing it together" with diverse collectives (school communities, local communities, the participants in workshops and training courses, museum visitors and audiences, participants in education programmes, among others). "What can we do together?" intersects with the expression *dja guata porã* to open the *not knowing* space-time present in the School of the Gaze, and the reciprocity and collectivity embraced by the curatorial processes that flowed into the exhibition.

Sandra Benites reminds us that there is no dialogue without conflict. To establish a dialogue grounded on what is not known without concealing the dimensions of clashes and disputes allows us to affect and be affected. As we do this, we imagine the museum as a school acting *in relation*, constituting its practices and possibilities for action from the unfinishedness of processes and the un-foreseeability of opportunities. These converge in a desire to implement processes that are ever-attentive to what is yet to come.

A PATH OF CARE AND CARE AS A PATH

Niara do Sol

My name is Niara do Sol, an indigenous woman living in an urban context who, in the course of my 72 years, have trodden a path of intense caring, whether for other human beings or for nature.

Before telling my story and offering the narratives I use today in my work, I want to speak about the education I had at home. From a very young age, I was aware of the path I was to tread in the world: spreading knowledge and care by means of herbs and spiritual treatments with native symbols.

My family can be traced back to the Fulni-ô and Kariri Xocó ethnic groups. I learned with my parents and relatives how the things of the world are connected and what my place in the midst of it all is. From a very early age I started caring for those in need and becoming the woman I am today. I remember very well when I started this work; I was around nine years old.

Another important point is how I see the world. With my upbringing, I understood very early that our body is linked to nature and that these two parts feed into one another. To take care of one without the other only brings about imbalance, and this became something I believe in and that I try to impart in my projects, activities and with the *Índios em Movimento* (Indigenous Peoples in Movement) NGO. But, to better relate my journey, I would like to share a story.

A few years ago I moved to Rio de Janeiro to work, giving my massages with herbs and teaching Reiki and native symbols in the Humaitá neighbourhood. In the meantime, I also set up the *Índios em Movimento* NGO as a way of showing indigenous culture and knowledge related to the earth. Through this NGO, I have been holding education events, cultivation activities and teaching about indigenous cultures in schools and cultural spaces since 1997. Up to that moment, I had already worked in many places around Brazil and abroad, but I felt there was still something missing.

With time, I realised I lacked a plot of land to grow plants. So, much to my surprise, one day, one of my students took me to work in a restaurant in the neighbourhood of Humaitá. There, I planted a vegetable patch and, at the same time, gave massages to the people who went there to eat. The massages were given before lunch and so we took care of the body, of eating habits and of nature.

My work at Humaitá lasted for one year and a half, and it was a great experience for me. With the end of the project, I was saddened by the fact that I no longer had a patch to cultivate or to encourage people to do the same. After that, I managed to grow herbs on a friend's plot and, later, I had a fresh opportunity to set up and care for my own garden.

With the indigenous movement, I set up and cultivated a medicinal herb patch at Aldeia Maracanã, next to the famous football stadium. I was part of the creation of the Aldeia Maracanã indigenous peoples' struggle movement and it was there that I planted my garden, which soon flourished with a wide variety of plants, thanks to the collaboration of other indigenous individuals such as Pacari – who, whenever he saw me at the patch, would go fetch a hoe. After the eviction of Aldeia Maracanã in 2013, I once again travelled far, to the municipality of Miguel Pereira. I also had patches there, both at the house where I lived and in other places, such as the schools where I helped to set up little patches of herbs – peppermint, basil and others.

So, I was always happy because I had somewhere to grow plants and a lot of people around who I could teach the medicinal or alimentary uses of the herbs being grown.

After our eviction from Aldeia Maracanã, flats in the Zé Ketí Housing Estate were promised to some of us indigenous people, in Block 15, which is now known as the Vertical Village. I came to live here, and still do today. As soon as I arrived, I started to set up a patch, but I was forbidden to do so. As time passed, I was introduced to a man known as *Caboclo*, who in turn introduced me to the residents of the neighbourhood right by the Estate, Morro de São Carlos. Through the Rio de Janeiro City Hall, I was introduced to the work of the *Hortas Cariocas* project, which to this day keeps a community patch located in the Morro.

But, unlike the joy I had experienced before, I did not feel that this patch was the way I wanted it, because the difficulties were numerous as I tried to do what I wanted – from planting to the cultivation classes and workshops. I wanted to do everything in that space. I wanted to set up a big school of cultivation and natural knowledge, but I realised that it would not be possible there.

A big surprise came in 2016. In that year, I became closer and closer to the MAR, which at the time was organising an exhibition about indigenous aspects of Rio de Janeiro. This exhibition involved many of the indigenous people from Block 15 (where we

live), including my friend and partner in activities Dauá Puri, as well as other indigenous individuals from diverse ethnic groups in Rio and Brazil as a whole.

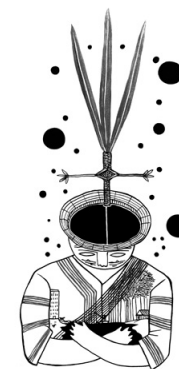
I participated in many of the initial meetings. In conversations, I established a wonderful rapport with Clarissa Diniz from the museum, as well as Pablo Lafuente. As the meetings to organise the themes, spaces, and what would be on display evolved, a big idea came up: one part of the exhibition would be a vegetable patch in the museum. This invitation made me very happy!

I started to work on this patch that was to be part of *Dja Guata Porã*, and there I also carried out many activities and cultivation workshops with children at the weekends. So I remained at the Museum for a year, regardless of the Mayor's hostility and other setbacks. I managed to keep over 190 herb patches in Praça Mauá, right in front of MAR.

When the exhibition closed and with it the patch, I looked for a place to take it to. Many people suggested I take it to Estácio, my own estate, behind the block where I live. At the same time, I took some of it to the Family Surgery that is located in a square nearby, between the Zé Kéti and Ismael Silva estates.

Today we have three offspring originating from this mother-patch: one in Maricá, one in Praça Marechal Hermes (which is kept by my student Rafael Scovino) and the most recent in the *Olympic Medal-winner Ricardo Lucarelli Souza Family Surgery*, which is located beside the block where I live. The patch here in Estácio is very big: at the last count (by another student), we can boast more than 39 varieties of plants – fruit trees, *urucum* or *bixa orellana*, *moringa* and genipap among many others. And the number must have increased a lot over the last year.

Besides keeping the patch, we also did work with the children and other residents regarding nature and heritage understood as ways of improving (using what grows in the patch) health and eating habits. In this time of pandemic, we have been forced to briefly halt the cultivation teaching activities (workshops and similar events) but we have kept the patch going as a space of welcome and care for all. Even at a distance, myself and collaborators from the *Índios em Movimento* NGO have continued to receive children and care for their needs: we talk with them about the pandemic and the right protective measures, including recipes for herb preparations that can strengthen the community's immunity during this delicate



period. Today, we have a group of almost 37 children taking part in the Community Patch's activities. They are very keen, and proudly say they are part of the vegetable patch. And of "my auntie Niara do Sol's patch."

Work at the *Dja Guata Porã*'s patch never ends, but is very rewarding. I remember that, before the pandemic, I loved to see the children talking about the patch with adults and explaining what each plant was good for, talking about things auntie had taught them, how to harvest vegetables and how to prepare them... And so we keep on doing the job, carrying on the good work we did at MAR. As I recall this collaboration with the museum, I remember many lectures I gave. One day, we had 800 visitors to the patch and this was very gratifying.

Right now, we are extending the patch at the Family Surgery, with herbs that will help the doctors treat patients. At a time such as today's, one needs to connect all the forms of knowledge we have: those learnt by the doctors and those learnt from our ancestors and from nature. The Surgery patch has been a space where these knowledges overlap and help each other.

As I know the importance of caring for the other at the same time as caring for nature, I have also offered emotional support to the Surgery's team, caring for the doctors by means of weekly massages. It is beautiful to witness the exchanges we are seeding... Little by little, we have more doctors visiting the patch to see how it is made, kept, used.

So, we have a variety of seedlings growing at the Surgery: *chia* or *salvia hispanica*, *ora-pro-nóbis*, pomegranate, orange, peppermint, *moringa*, *gervão roxo* or blue snakeweed, *noni* or great morinda. We wish to grow even more! We want a patch that is a good natural pharmacy for everyone attending the Family Surgery; we want this public space of medical care to be able take even better care of the neighbourhood residents' health. For even the doctors take an interest in the plants, and so it is easier to develop stronger and more effective work during the pandemic and carry on treading the path of care.

PURI RETURNS

Dauá Silva

In 2000, a people thought to be extinct in the 1900s began to reappear in the Serras do Brigadeiro, in the State of Minas Gerais. Originating in the Southeast, with a corridor territory between the sierras of the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo and São Paulo, the Puri people, by means of agroecology, reaffirm their indigenous identity and carry ancestral knowledge in their culture and management techniques.

As a member of the Rio de Janeiro indigenous movement since 2005, I have taken part in several cultural actions through the group Índios em movimento (Indigenous on the Move), among them efforts to support the Sambaqui de Camboinhas and Aldeia Maracanã occupations. In the process, I heard the signs of *Nhaueira* and started to search for relatives in Minas Gerais, collecting Puri histories and songs.

As the peoples of the sierra say: seeds do not die. The Puri people, erased, forgotten and invisible to the dominant logic of Eurocentric colonialism, to the *Bandeirante* and ecclesiastical drives, have come through alive. Like dormant seeds, we sprouted afresh from the earth that we helped cultivate.

By spreading songs in the Puri language across the fields and cities, we have sparked the interest of various other Puri in their original identity, which we have further encouraged through meetings of the Federal University of Viçosa's Troca de Saberes (Knowledge Exchanges) group, which has triggered the Movimento de Ressurgência Puri (Puri Resurgence Movement). In Rio de Janeiro and its vicinity, multi-ethnic indigenous individuals came together to participate in the meetings held at Parque Lage, in schools and in universities, to disseminate Puri wisdom. In this way, we consolidated our presence and existence.

By studying the Puri language and producing the first bi-lingual Puri-Portuguese book, *Alkeh Poteh*, written by myself, we proved that we are not extinct: a literary effort, the fruit of study and dedication to translating true manifestations of the ancestral desire of giving voice to the People.

Participating in the actions organised by the forum A Voz dos Povos (Voice of the Peoples), the State of Rio de Janeiro Human Rights Secretariat, as part of a struggle to change public

policies, we, the indigenous peoples, succeeded in electing the Conselho Estadual dos Direitos Indígenas – CEDIND (Indigenous Peoples' Rights State Council). This has been a landmark on our journey. We have carried on organising lectures in the universities of the Southeast region, to give visibility to the territory's original ethnic population.

In this context, we were visited by the MAR curating team in 2016. They were in the process of organising the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã*. As soon as they arrived at the Puri *nguará* Vertical Village (the building where several indigenous families live, in the Estácio neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro), the museum's team entered a native environment. I was able to show them our creations, studies, histories, and how our identity is linked to the earth. Many were unaware of the very existence of these people. An invitation for us to participate in the exhibition was sent.

I participated in two Puri organisation committees and was also part of the group representing the participation of the Associação Indígena Aldeia Maracanã – AIAM (Maracanã Village Indigenous Association). I liked the project's organisational dynamics, where for the first time in Brazilian history my Puri people were able to have a voice and show protagonism as a south-eastern people in the production of the exhibition's representational space.

Our proposal set out to highlight the Puri language and our people's histories, with their memories and artefacts recreated for the show, as well as prints and texts made as records by eighteenth-century travellers brought into the country by the Brazilian imperial government. We produced videos and a CD with music in the Puri language, which were on show during the whole exhibition. We also edited interviews on the Puri Resurgence Movement, and created a storytelling carpet, where we recounted Puri history from the invasion to the present day.

Besides the section dedicated to the Puri, we were part of the sound corridor featuring the utterances and voices of various ethnic groups, which provided an acclimatisation area for visitors arriving at the exhibition. In the course of the show, I told stories from the book *Alkeh Poteh* inside the gallery.

From an identity rendered invisible, excluded and massacred, the Puri once again speak and tell their own histories, recreating their culture and language, reaffirming the fact that indigenous peoples have managed to survive and live on even through the

stormiest times, times of fires, of soil exhausted by mining activity and export-led agribusiness.

The *Dja Guata Porã* exhibition is a landmark in the history of indigenous peoples, where we were able to bring together a collection of the old, the modern and the contemporary in the languages used by indigenous artists, who were able to tell stories ranging from the ancient Big Snake from the Amazonian myth, slithering along the gallery walls and saluting all indigenous peoples, journeying across centuries and centuries of indigenous culture in the Southern Cone.

We salute the project and its execution as a major event for the indigenous peoples. We long for fresh initiatives where we are able to talk about the indigenous peoples' living culture, and to reclaim the important role played by these cultures in the formation and defence of the national state, and bring their traditions of technology, art and expertise to add to the foreign cultures that have dominated the country. To write our true history with our own hands and voices.

Ho puky ah lekah tschore!



"HEY, THIS GUY HERE IS NOT AN
INDIAN. INDIANS ARE NOT FAT."

MAP OF THE ABSURD:

REMEMBRANCES OF THE GROUND AS PLACE

rodrigo ferreira

getting home in 2021 has become synonymous with taking the body through a series of care operations such as cleansing and disinfecting everything we bring in from the street. sometimes, as a result of so often repeating and automating these actions, i forget what i have already done and then i must make an effort to refocus my attention. on one of such homecomings, i could not recall where i had placed the keys i had used just minutes before. i took to bustling and searching, and it took me a few fat minutes before i came across the keys on the floor, beside the sitting room door. for some reason i had naturally placed them down there – perhaps the floor had summoned their presence and my body obeyed. tired from the search, the following sentence issued from my lips: “damn, i have to remember that the floor is also a place”.

"WHY ARE THOSE INDIANS WEARING CLOTHES?"

from here on i will talk about this, about the relationship with the ground i tread.

i worked for a number of years at MAR, directly within the exhibitions, sensitive to the spaces and artworks during my initial stint as a museum guide; later as an educator for a second, longer period, adding to my initial capacities and creative practices.

"YOU CAN'T
USE LIPSTICK
TO PAINT
YOUR FACE. IT
HAS TO BE
THE URUCUM
SEED PASTE."
i usually joke with educator friends that “educators can’t see a floor without wanting to sit on it.” we learn this occupation of the floor at school, in the backyard, in the street, playing, and it was something i learned to retain in my practice as an educator.

when we are children, we naturally feel closer to it, and engaging with the ground and thinking of it as a space to be occupied can open up countless paths to many bodies within the museum – particularly when we consider that a strong imaginary still persists, whereby absolutely everything inside such places is untouchable, including the walls – and yet we touch the floor all the time.

i remember sitting in a circle on the school floor; i also remember the times when i touched it as i fell down, the time when there was more earth than cement in my granny’s backyard, the city’s slippery ground on rainy days, the street markets that have occupied the city terrain for so long (today, the floor of the *shopping mall*) and also that i tripped in the first museum i ever visited in my life... the



floor says things about us, about the place we occupy, that we want and struggle to keep roots in; the ground is a space of sharing.

in order to see the ground in other ways, i now jump to 2017; i recall that during a thirty-day period i used a printed plan of the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* in a proposal to the education team who worked directly in MAR's exhibition pavilion.

the proposal came about after a few months living with the exhibition, affected by the reactions voiced by some visitors to the space – hate speeches, ethnocidal hegemonic narratives, which affirmed primitivistic stereotypes against the indigenous peoples. i proposed collecting these utterances that filled our daily routine, for we were sure these words would be repeated. when we, the educators, heard them uttered to the four winds, which happened often, or to one of us directly, a plan of the space was posted for us to go up and draw a red blob (with a specific shape if one wanted, or just a blob), marking the spot in the exhibition where the utterance had taken place. the actual sentences spoken were written down on the back of the sheet.

and so the *Map of the Absurd* was born, a name proposed by educator Guilherme Dias for the activity-device that would be assembled by the hands and mouths of many people. the first version of the Map was carried out together with educator Diego Xavier, involving precisely the occupation of the floor – we wanted to transpose the Map onto the space with the blobs placed around the rooms' floor.

besides the blobs, we implemented another approach to the same activity by means of cards. the card was a random invitation to analyse as one read it out, at least one of the sentences collected, becoming a gesture summoning us to the recognition of the racist and ethnocidal bases of the narratives historically built and strengthened in society.

on a second occasion, in the context of the Sixth MAR Mediator Training Course, together with Georges Marques, the Map became a big board. here the approach and debate took place among the people taking part in the training process, immersed in the terrain of education and summoned to devise confrontation strategies with audiences, in response to the sentences on the cards. each participating duo received a blob and a card in order to walk around the board-like Map, trying to imagine the place where each sentence

rodrigo ferreira
"BUT THIS INDIAN IS TOO MODERN. HE IS EVEN PLAYING THE VIOLIN."

had been uttered, connecting it to the conceptual and historical bases underpinning the exhibition – producing, by means of a debate, ways of disarticulating these absurd utterances.

"THEY DON'T ACCEPT THE *Map of the Absurd* emerged from the collective strolls and walks during my time in MAR's exhibition pavilion.⁴ Jandir Jr. and André Vargas, also educators, always agreed to walk around with me when we were on the same exhibition floor. we often returned with objects found on the floor as we were led by our feet circulating through the space.

at a certain point, Jandir started to collect these objects and proposed to the education team that we should all collect them – paper clips, entrance tickets, toothpicks, pieces of thread, keys, etc – creating the *Mimaxarabu*,⁵ activity-devices that proposed an imaginary collective production by the people who circulate inside the museum (the visitors). organised on a piece of cloth⁶ spread out on the floor, the objects were made public, fabulated as archaeological elements of a recent time, fictionalising narratives of origin and of the people behind the objects.

i have described the *Map of the Absurd* and the *Mimaxarabu* with the aim of underlining the critical reflections and movements that such activity-devices generate in the identitarian constructions brought in by MAR's visitors. beyond this, i wish to bring up, in this final stroll of words, what these processes have in common. regarding the actions thought out primarily for the museum's team of educators, even before they become devices and reach the visitors, it is of fundamental importance that we, workers who daily tread the ground in such places, and consequently transform them, are also seen as one of their audiences.

the Map is a listening strategy to bring educators out to a collective creation, to strengthen dialogical practices between ourselves and with/for visitors. this is also the case of the *Mimaxarabu*, when Jandir mobilises us, even if indirectly, to turn our attention to the floor every day.

"THE INDIAN EXHIBITION IN BOTAFOGO IS BETTER THAN THIS ONE BECAUSE WE CAN BUY THE STUFF INDIANS MAKE."

⁴ "Exhibition pavilion" refers to the architectural space that MAR dedicates to its curatorial program.

⁵ "Mimaxarabu," a term of the Huni Kuin people, borrowed to name the activity, would approximately translate as the idea of "collective material production."

⁶ This cotton textile was part of the Art Station in the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã – Indigenous Rio de Janeiro* and was available to be related/used in educational contexts which, during the exhibition, discussed intercultural conventions about 'art,' 'creation,' 'identity.'

in this way, i see, with the steps taken and those yet to be taken, how essential it is to refocus attention on the ground we tread, to what exists and comes to exist on it, to what we inhabit and to what inhabits us.

"FOR ME THERE IS NO POINT IN MAKING AN EXHIBITION ABOUT INDIANS. THERE ARE SO MANY CIVILISATIONS THAT HAVE CEASED TO EXIST! THEY SHOULD ACCEPT THAT THEY ARE NO MORE."

"BUT IF ONE HAD TO RETURN LAND IT WOULD HAVE TO BE THE WHOLE OF BRAZIL, WOULDN'T IT?"

"PUPILS, LET'S LOOK OVER THERE, THE TEACHER IS GOING TO EXPLAIN THE CAVE PAINTINGS TO US."
(ABOUT THE PIECE RIVER PARAUPEBAS, 2013)

TO DREAM IS AN ART

Miguel Verá Mirim

I have been working with wood carving art for 20 years. I started when I was five. Now I am almost fifty (laughter). It was my father, now deceased, who taught me to make little animals carved out of wood and how to make straw basketry. One thing important to me is my love for animals. First of all comes the love for animals. Those I've seen in the forest, close up. For I have seen a jaguar. A cub, ha, ha! I have seen coati, for the elders raised coati cubs. This is where my inspiration to carve little animals out of wood came from.

Photography and new technologies were trickier for me, but I learned those too. But that was later. In 2008, some people from Canada came over and offered training in photography in five or six villages in Rio de Janeiro. Through this first contact with this kind of skill, I started to take photographs of the prayer house and later of landscapes. These were my first interests. Now I have started to get acquainted with other technologies and to take other types of photographs in the village. Then I started to handle cameras.

This experience was different from the work developed at the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã*, which was a more collective experience. It was no longer a matter of my own ideas but those of the community. It's nothing complicated, it's just more collective, ideas coming from various people. So, the exhibition work was very collective. First there was a meeting in a village in Paraty, Rio de Janeiro, which I attended as a representative of my own village. When we came home from



the meeting, we set up a gathering in our village and I recounted what had been proposed. Then we had some time to think it over and later held another meeting with all the families. We thought it would be a good idea to work in the village and to show it to a wider audience at a later date. Even though we knew that this was a task of great responsibility, we accepted. We thought it was very important for many people to see photos taken by people from the village in the exhibition.

For me, to work on an exhibition with the museum people was not easy because I had to speak a lot of Portuguese. Normally I don't speak much Portuguese; I speak mostly Guarani Mbya, my language, and so I was able to learn to chat for a bit longer than I normally would. I went through a lot of experiences, because I spent time with non-indigenous people and they were interested in what it means to be an indigenous person, how life is in the villages. Because non-indigenous and indigenous peoples have equivalent knowledges, but different. Each one has their own history. To a certain measure, we live a common history, but one told differently.

And as I worked together with non-indigenous folk, I learned about their point of view and this helps to understand their perspective. At the same time, it is very important to realise how our thinking impacts on non-indigenous ideas. This was a good experience for me, for I learned that sometimes, in the dialogue between our understanding and that of whites, some positions appear as opposites. It's like what happens in a translation. Sometimes, when we translate something from Portuguese into Guarani, the words come out meaning their opposite. Something like when English is translated into Portuguese.

This happened in the past, with what non-indigenous people recount as the history of Brazil. We tried to understand: what was the "discovery" of Brazil? And they told us that we didn't live in one place. There was a different indigenous community in every corner of Brazil.

I took these photos for the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã* in the course of three days. First, I talked to people in the village and set a date and time, so that they could prepare and not be caught off-guard, or waste their time. I didn't have much time to take the photos and choose which ones would make it into the exhibition. The person who was photographed chose the picture he or she most wanted to be shown. For one of the photographs, we decided that we

would prepare a traditional dish. So we started to prepare fish with *rora* (corn flour) to feature in the pictures. So, it took a while before it was ready. I had to go and catch the fish, then I came home, and then there was the time needed to prepare the fish. My mother-in-law, Iracema, prepared the food. It took a long time, the full process. But quick at the same time. In the end, we did not use the photos for the exhibition, choosing instead another sequence.

There are the body paint photographs too. We paint our faces with genipap. We grate the genipap. Then we place the paste on a piece of cloth with a little water and squeeze, extracting a liquid from the pulp, a strong juice. Then we grind charcoal and mix it with the concentrated genipap juice and let it stand for 15 or 20 minutes. Then it is ready to use. This is when the painting starts! On the body, on skin! We grow genipap in our village, but it was not yet ready to pick. So that time, we got genipap from the city, in the neighbourhood shops here in Maricá, Rio de Janeiro.

We, Guarani, make similar art. Different, but alike. And for the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã* we made different art, intentionally different, specifically for the exhibition. In one of the meetings with other relatives, during the research, our thinking on this question was the same, for there were relatives from Paraty there and we were surrounded by many artists. We thought we wanted to show our Guarani ways, our *Dja Guata Porã*. We did our best to understand the non-indigenous, to make the audience understand more or less how we indigenous peoples are. To learn that one doesn't just do art. For the arts are different. Each little animal I make in wood is different. Each art that our relatives make, the Guajajara, the Guarani Kaiowa and others, is different. And as they come from different places, they set out to narrate, to show their own reality, show how they experience their struggles. Even though all of us indigenous peoples have our struggles, other relatives of ours from different peoples show realities that are different from our own, the Guarani Mbya. And so each of our manifestations is different from the others.

In the process of the *Dja Guata Porã* exhibition, I learned that our means of expression, our art, was photography. And other relatives from other places in Rio de Janeiro did it differently. Our greatest concern was to show our art. This is why we talked to various people about our struggle for indigenous rights. For the rights of the indigenous peoples who live close to or within cities. Such conversations were held in order to seek a solution. This is why we

found the strength to do the exhibition at MAR. It was not easy to get to that place. And this was a victory for us, to be able to show our own work. To make art and show it. To think about how it was going to be, for I think one way and another indigenous artist thinks another way. In this way, each village exhibited something that was a great achievement for all the indigenous peoples of Rio de Janeiro. Everything we do with the image is important to us. What we do with images outside the village is important to us. Our image is like the *exara'u*, or dream. What happens when you dream about something? Your spirit leaves your body and travels, it goes far and may be in danger. With a photograph it is the same. When I asked the village elders here if I could show photographs in the exhibition, they told me that everyone will see the image we use and the image will travel very far and you don't know how far it will go.

A lot of people go to exhibitions and take a picture, and so take away a photo of your photo out to many different places. It is not just about the photo, but it is an image of us that can be taken to places we don't know. So, when I asked the elders if we could use photographs in an exhibition, they answered: "well, it could be a good idea or it could not. If you want to, you can do it. It is not good but could be good too, it depends on what you are using the photograph for." With this situation I learned with the elders that when you take a picture of children it can be bad for their spirits and it could also be bad for adults. Though children have a more fragile spirit. When you take the photograph, it can go far and end up in hands that can use it to do wrong, to earn money, or to do other kinds of wrong things. This is why the elders told me that we must be careful and not do a lot of work with photography. This I also learned from them in the process of the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã*.

I also did a residency in the School of the Gaze, at MAR. For three months, I went in twice a week doing activities in partnership with the MAR people. I talked to the public and there was mediation between me and the public carried out by educators. I remember one day I was asked how art with ropes was done. I answered that it was possible. We had a few lengths of rope and they were short and colourful, each one a single colour. And each person had a piece. So, the image of the rope, which is not enough to make anything by itself, does allow people to help each other, by linking the short lengths of rope they had. Besides, I thought that the diversity of colours in the exchange of ropes between people, or in the joining of two or

more lengths of rope was very good! And the different colours circulating amongst different people, one being linked to another. And others just being exchanged between people. And people came in and chose to participate, picking a rope as they turned up. They started to exchange the ropes. As people arrived, we presented the idea to them and they agreed to take part. The exchange, the circulation of pieces of rope between different individuals meant, for me, that there was no prejudice at play there. The ropes in various colours were being linked and mixing and changing places, all of them interacting in the same movement, in the same space. This happened when I did my residency.

In another opportunity we used textiles, pieces of cloth. A square piece of cloth was to be folded in whichever way we wanted. I learned that each person folds it differently. Here you could see that people think differently. Some think of folding triangles while others think of folding squares. This makes us deal with the outlook of others, to accept them. Because we can't think that we are the only ones in the know. Only I know. People act like that, as if some people knew more than others. Sometimes this does not work. We always need another person to complement our knowledge. This I have learnt.

The audiences for the School of the Gaze's activities were diverse. Sometimes there were children of ten to twelve years of age. Sometimes only adults. Sometimes there were two people talking to me, asking questions. And to each one I spoke differently, for the younger ones and children ask us to explain everything in detail. They want to know more. Teenagers asked about simple things, such as how I live in the village. I answered telling them of our ways. There was also an audience of researchers, who were more interested in our ancient knowledge. So, the experience depends on the audience. We have to gauge the public. And this was also a very good learning experience.

A FEW PERSPECTIVES ABOUT ART IN THE GUARANI VISION

Sandra Benites

My relationship with art began in 2016, when I was invited to participate as a curator of the exhibition *Dja Guata Porã: indigenous Rio de Janeiro*, together with three other curators: Clarissa Diniz, José Bessa and Pablo Lafuente. The work process took the form of meetings, conversations, the sharing of experiences... which allowed for the elaboration of my own contribution. I knew nothing of what the West understands as art. I knew how western society understands indigenous art, because I had come into contact with a few of those things. But I had no clear idea of what 'art' was for the non-indigenous. From this invitation and from the debate that gave form to the exhibition, I started to observe more closely how the *juruá* think their relationship with art, and how we, the indigenous peoples, deal with what the *juruá* call art.

The practices the *juruá* call "art" are present today in the Guarani villages, but their dynamics are always associated with Guarani ways. The Guarani are used to adapting to things, and do not respond with much estrangement to what comes from outside. They act so that what comes in ends up strengthening their Guarani ways, so any practice is thought of from this way of being.

Us, the Guarani, learn by listening, observing, practising, following the older people, be they the *kyringue*, the elders, or our parents, uncles or grandfathers. The child has to listen and observe through experimentation from an early age. They practise step by step, according to age. This is how we learn and achieve *arandu*, knowledge, which is imparted in various places and at various times. In order to learn our way of doing art, it's necessary to live together with the others in the work of *kokue* or cultivation, in the fields. In this way, we learn to hunt, to fish, to make sacred objects and gifts. We also learn from different people. Our way of passing on knowledge and teaching is special for us. It is connected to our Guarani way, our way of educating children, through oral-based pedagogy. We have our own processes of learning and teaching; these are little known by the non-indigenous, and often we suffer discrimination and prejudice due to the lack of knowledge on the part of the colonisers.

In the relationship between the collective and the individual, it is fundamental to develop listening, *oendu*. As Guarani, we

think that we all are educators, able to teach each other directly or indirectly. Everybody's well-being depends on individuality, and this is why it is important to understand and recognise both individuality and collectivity. Not knowing how to listen will always result in conflicts, confrontation and violence. Guarani education is quality education, and unless we practise our ways and our rites of passage, there will be no *teko porã rã*, future well-being.

Adults and youngsters wake up very early: only children can get up later. We start the day taking *cimarrón*, preparing our first meal as we sit around a fire and talk about our dreams. The most senior people always advise us and assign tasks to everyone, and are constantly teaching us.

And so we carry on. During the day we go about our tasks, and at dusk we prepare to go to the prayer house, *opy*, the most important place in the village, where conversations and knowledge meetings take place. We thank *Nhandecy Eté* and *Nhanderu Eté* for another day of health and life. We also ask for advice, pray, sing and listen to the *aywu porã*, our good words. Night is the time when the children are with their mothers and fathers around a fire, when we teach them and tell them stories until they fall asleep.

The collective respects individuality, and this is why there are things that are carried out by a group and others that are done individually, so that each person can express his or her own creativity and ability. The production of art depends on each person's creativity. Each individual produces his or her object in relation to the history of *Nhanderu Eté* and *Nhandecy Eté*: their vision of the world, how the world was born to us.

A person that produces art, for instance, an object sculpted in wood for another person or for children to play with, shows ability and creativity, regardless of whether the object is sacred or not. The sacred nature of the object depends on the person who receives it, on the context in which it was conceived and on who made it.

The production of art is inspired by Guarani cosmology.

The Guarani word for art is *tembiapo*, the result of someone's work. This is why I have the habit of saying that art is in itself individual creativity; making objects such as baskets, wooden animals, seed necklaces, arrow and bow, ceramics, *akã regua* or a bandanna for the head, body painting, dance and singing... these are knowledges related to collective knowledge, transformed into objects by means of individual labour.

The activities developed by communities benefit the collective.

Everyone is invited to take part in the *tekoha* or village activities, always according to their abilities. The children learn group work, cultivating the fields, or cutting wood during the passage rituals. They always work alongside the elders, who take responsibility for imparting knowledge. The elders teach them how to do things and the youngsters begin to practice this know-how, listening to the life stories of the older ones, listening to advice about different matters, learning, for instance, how to treat women.

The elders' teachings always begin with tales about the origin of the world, sacred myths, the traditional narratives. Advice and knowledge are imparted in this way, but they are learnt through practice and work. The idea of constant transformation is based on our ancestral origins.

Dja Guata Porã was an exhibition that we managed to develop together as a group, indigenous people and *juruá* with their differing views, by listening to one another and through dialogue between the communities and the museum team. It was my first experience as a curator or, to use the words I feel more comfortable with, a mediator between the indigenous people, the project team and the



institution. It was a singular, harmonious process, which demanded listening and dialogue from everyone, whether directly or indirectly involved. One of the things I was able to bring about was that the exhibition took place as a form of collective production, both by the indigenous people and the non-indigenous team. It was an ongoing process, and quite different from the way that exhibitions of ancient objects are usually carried out in museums. When we initiated the project, we did it by means of a process that would help us think about what we needed to discuss and show, and about the challenges we might face on the path towards materialising our thoughts. Here, the recordings made by the *juruá* of indigenous memory and storytelling proved fundamental, and were reflected in the big serpent drawn by the indigenous artist Denilson Baniwa. It was crucial to be sensitive throughout these negotiations, so as to allow the other to remain other and not to be embraced because he or she thinks the same as us. Because this would mean a continuation of colonisation. It is vital to balance out the thoughts, to always include everyone, and to accept the feelings of estrangement that can result. An estrangement that is fundamental to understanding and including diverse ways of thinking.

EXHIBITION CREDITSCURATORS

Clarissa Diniz, José Ribamar Bessa, Pablo Lafuente, Sandra Benites

CURATORIAL ASSISTANT

Julia Baker

RESEARCH

Ana Paula da Silva, Ignácio Gomeza Gómez, Leandro Guedes, Mariane Vieira

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Cristina Gouvêa and Marcus Vinicius Santos

VISUAL IDENTITY

Priscila Gonzaga and Denilson Baniwa

GUARANI NUCLEUS

Tekoa (village) Ka'aguy hovy porã: Adriano Karai Mirĩm, Amarildo Karai Mirĩm Y'apoá, Iracema Nunes, Joventina Kerexu, Juliana Yvarete, Luciana Parapoty, Miguel Verá-Mirĩm, Ramon Karay, Seu Pedro de Oliveira

Tekoa Sapukai: Domingos Benites, Algemiro da Silva, Maurílio dos Santos, Valdir da Silva, Alzira Benites, Aldo da Silva, João da Silva, Ildo Benites, Délcio Benites, Ricardo Souza, Isaias Aquiles, Pedro Aquiles, Gonçalves da Silva, Nicanor Aquiles

Tekoa Dje'y: João Mendonça Martins Filho, Teófila Mendonça Martins, Maura da Silva, Márcia Mendonça, Demécio Martins, Vilma Mendonça Martins, Wellington Werá da Silva

Martins, Nina da Silva, Eliza da Silva Martins, Gabriel da Silva Martins, Sônia Mendonça Martins, Pablo Natalício de Souza, Sheila Mendonça Martins, Jorge Mendonça Martins, Maxsuel Martins Rodrigues, Yara Cunha Karai Mendonça de Souza, Adrian Awa Tupã Mendonça, Ronni Martins de Souza, Roni Awa Tupã Guyrapa Mendonça de Souza

Tekoa Ara Ovy: Jovane Karai Tataendy, Felix Karai, Guilherme Kanno, Angélica Silva

Tekoa Itaxĩm: Alexandro Kuaray, Romário Mariano, Ivanildes Pereira da Silva, Ricardo Mariano da Costa, Alberto Alvares, Ana Lúcia Ferraz, Catarina Gonçalves, Diogo Campos, Frederico Lemos, Letícia Para'i, Luiz Guilherme Guerreiro, Daiane da Cunha Barbosa

PATAXÓ NUCLEUS

Aldeia (village) Iriri Kãñ Pataxi Uy Tanara | Apohinã Pataxó, Awiri Pataxó, Puhuy Pataxó, Aridawê Pataxó, Raoni Pataxó, Terená Pataxó, Caila Pataxó, Açucena Pataxó, Nawã Pataxó, Xohã Pataxó, Kaxú Pataxó, Muriá Pataxó, Atekay Pataxó, Akuã Pataxó, Itohã Pataxó, Leonardo Pataxó, Maiana Pataxó, Mairy Pataxó, Tamikuã Pataxó, Mikai Pataxó, Yasmin Pataxó, Tapurumã Pataxó, Anaiá Pataxó, Anauá Pataxó, Suellen Pataxó, Jabis Pataxó, Kaluanan Pataxó, Kanauã Pataxó, Awa Tupã Werá, Stefanni Guarani

Anari Pataxó, Bianca Arruda, Luiz Mayerhofer

URBAN CONTEXT NUCLEUS

Afonso Apurinã, André Miguéis, Arassari Pataxó, Associação Indígena Aldeia Maracanã (Aiam), Carlos Tukano, Centro de Etnoconhecimento Sociocultural e Ambiental Cauieré (Cesac), Centro de Referência da Cultura dos Povos Indígenas da Aldeia Maracanã (CRCPIAM), Cordelia de Mello Mourão, Dauá Silva, Davi David Bert Joris D, Dinho Moreira, Eduardo Kblô, Elvira Sateré Mawé, Garapira Pataxó, Geoffrey Michael, George Magaraia, Guilherme Fernandez, João Araió/Olho de dentro, Latuff Cartoons, Leandro Pagliaro, Leila Holanda, Mariana Villas-Bôas, Marize Vieira, MUTA arquitetura (Domitila Almenteiro, Fernanda Petrus, Fernando Minto, Pablo De Las Cuevas, and Thomas Burtscher), Nádia Maria C B Meirelles, Niara do Sol, Pedro Prado, Raquel Couto, Sallisa Rosa, Sergio Oliveira, Tamur Amara, Thales Leite, Thiago Dezan, Vângri Kaingáng, Yuseff Kalume, Zahy Guajajara, Fernando Tupinambá, Pita, Picuai, Mayra Guajajara, Maynumi Guajajara, Afonso Apurinã, Ana Maria Kariri, Camaiurá Pataxó, Carlos Tukano, Damião Carvalho Tikuna, Dauá Puri, Funatxo Fulniô, Idjarrure Kadiwéu, Iketika Fulniô, José Guajajara, Maynumi Guajajara, Nûdia Fulniô, Pakari Pataxó, Sandra Benites Guarani, Sandro Xucuru,

Tcharry Guajajara, Tmei Asurini, Txfladia Fulniô, Uáli Kamayurá, Vangri Guajajara, Xokléu Fulniô

PURI NUCLEUS

Adalberto Junior Frito, Aline Rochedo Pachamama Puri, Apoena Puri, Carmel Puri, Carmelita Puri, Dauá Puri, Declar Sodré, Felismar Manoel, Jurandir Puri, Marcelo Lemos, Marcos Poena Puri, Maria Luisa (Quilombola Anamastê), Muta arquitetura (Domitila Almenteiro, Fernanda Petrus, Fernando Minto, Pablo De Las Cuevas and Thomas Burtscher), Nenen Lupm, Opetahra Puri, Pepe's Studio, Rosanea, Solange Opehtara, Zélia Ponã Puri

NATURE STATION

Niara do Sol

COMMERCE STATION

Josué Carvalho

ART STATION

Ailton Krenak, Anari Pataxó, Daiara Tukano, Denilson Baniwa, Edson Kayapó, Iba Huni Kuin, Joana Moncau, Josué Carvalho, Rosangela de Tugny, Sandra Benites, Varin Mema Marubo, Zahy Guajajara

EDUCATION STATION

Anari Braz, Luiz Guilherme Guerreiro, Aldeia (village) Iriri Kãñ Pataxi Uy Tanara | Awiri Pataxó, Puhuy Pataxó, Aridawê Pataxó, Raoni Pataxó, Terená Pataxó, Caila Pataxó, Açucena Pataxó, Nawã Pataxó, Xohã Pataxó, Kaxú Pataxó, Muriá

Pataxó, Atekay Pataxó, Akuã Pataxó, Itohã Pataxó, Maiana Pataxó, Mairy Pataxó, Tamikuã Pataxó, Mikai Pataxó, Yasmin Pataxó, Tapurumã Pataxó, Anaiá Pataxó, Anauá Pataxó, Suellen Pataxó, Jabis Pataxó, Kaluanan Pataxó, Kanauã Pataxó, Awa Tupã Werá, Stefanni

WOMEN STATION

Eliane Potiguara, Niara do Sol, Sandra Benites, Socorro Borges, Varin Marubo

LANGUAGES STATION

Rodrigo Marçal, Rádio Yandê (Denilson Baniwa, Anápuaká Muniz Tupinambá Hã-hã-hãe, Renata Machado Tupinambá)

TIMELINE

Aaron Guajajara, Adelson Santos, Ailton Krenak, An Baccaert, Angelo Agostini, Antonio Cruz, Antonio Firmino Monteiro, Antônio Lúcio, Bruce Albert, Carlos Gradim, Carol Potiguara, Charles Bicalho, Claudia Andujar, Cláudio Kewe, Cristiano Navarro, Curt Nmuendaju, Darcy Ribeiro, Davi Yanomami, Edson Medeiros Ixã Kaxinawá, Escola Yawará, Fábio Nascimento, Feliciano Lana, Feliciano Yaba, Franz Keller, Gerônimo Sehe, Gert-Peter Bruch, Gilberto Butowsky, Hans Staden, Harald Schultztz, Heinz Forthmann, Iba Huni Kuin, Isael Maxakali, Jean de Léry, Jean-Baptiste Debret, João Pacheco de Oliveira, João Roberto Ripper, João Sant'Anna, Johann Moritz Rugendas, José Louro,

José Maria, Karina Puri, Leandro Joaquim, Leolinda Daltro, Leonilson, Luiz Lana, Luiz Thomaz Reis, Marc Ferrez, Marcelo Camargo, Mídia Ninja, Milton Guran, Molixa de Tavora, Nicola Mu, Norman Lewis, Orlando Brito, Orlando Farias, Paulo Sampaio, Poma de Ayala, Protasio Nene, Rafael de Castro y Ordóñez, Rogério Carneiro, Romildo Gurgel, Sonia Silva Lorenz, Teresinha Rocha, Theodor de Bry, Toledo Piza, Vincent Carelli, Zelito Vianna

COLLECTIONS

Acervo Câmara dos Deputados, Acervo CIMI – Conselho Indigenista Missionário, Acervo Estadão, Acervo Fundação Cultural de Blumenau / AHJFS – Coleção Indígenas, Acervo Jornal do Brasil, Acervo Mídia Ninja, ADIRP/ Câmara dos Deputados, Agência Brasil, Arquivo Histórico do exército, Arquivo Histórico Regional de Passo Fundo AHR, Arquivo Nacional, Arquivo Público do Ceará, Biblioteca Nacional, Carta Capital, Comissão Pró-Índio do Acre, Egydio Schwade, Embrafilme, G1, Hemeroteca Indígena, IBGE, Instituto de Arqueologia Brasileira (IAB), Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), Mapoteca do Itamaraty, Museu do Índio, Museu Histórico Nacional, Museu Imperial de Petrópolis, Museus Castro Maya, Pajé Filmes, Palácio Pedro Ernesto, Projeto Leonilson, Spensy Pimentel, UOL

We carry on helping
one another

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Nilce de Pontes
Pereira

I, Nilce – I am engaged in the practice of agroecological cultivation – am reminded of our community *mutirão* (the coming together of a community in order to perform work that is too much for any single individual). When we do a *mutirão* at the *quilombo* (traditional rural settlements originally made up of former slaves who had escaped captivity), it is a time of celebration – of life, good times, of food abundance. We take helping one another as a principle. It is also a way of helping out in times of difficulty.

The arrival of my great-great-grandfather in this region happened under circumstances of mutual help, as he, family members and friends cleared paths in the jungle in order to conceal and produce food, in flight from the slavery imposed on my ancestors.

To this day, when we come across a recently formed family, a family in danger, or facing disease, we organise a *mutirão* – even if it is just for the sake of throwing a party. A *mutirão* might be held to build a house or a fence, to clear a patch of land, clear out grazing land or even for building a pig trough. A *mutirão* does not depend on the size or the amount of work to be done. It doesn't matter if the task is finished or not. It can be a small *mutirão*, which we call a “picheca” or “reunida,” terms used to mark a difference from the idea of labour, heavy work.

The person organising the *mutirão* calls people to come over. Each one brings a tool. Some women and a few men are given the task of preparing the food, while other men, women and children carry out the *mutirão's* work for the day, which could be preparing a plot, planting, clearing jungle or harvesting rice, beans or corn. When heavier work is involved, women and children take water and even a shot of *cachaça* to the thirsty workers; this is natural in a *mutirão*. The head of the *mutirão* provides food for the working day and throws a party at the end. Usually there is an accordion player or, lacking one, a sound system. Food and drink are offered during the party, which carries on into the small hours, perhaps as late as 8 a.m., when breakfast or even lunch is served.

I remember the bigger *mutirões*, when the work demanded much effort from everyone. These were gatherings that never numbered less than a hundred people, demanding a great deal of care from everyone, both to prepare and store enough food. In

other words, there is work for all in a *mutirão*; one just turns up and joins in. There is no fixed time to start work. People arrive, feed heartily on fried or cooked manioc, fried cupcakes and bread, sweet potato and polenta, *virados* beans, all of this at the homestead or in a shed by the vegetable patch. Those who appear later are always welcomed by all those already at work. At lunchtime everyone eats, at the patch or at the homestead. Usually, a *mutirão* does not go on past lunchtime. The menu is based on a lot of greens, manioc, chicken innards mixed with flour and pork. For bigger *mutirões* a pig or two are always killed. A lot of free-range chicken is served as well, plus much pink lemonade.

After lunch there usually is a celebration, livened by the guitar, accordion, tambourine, triangle or any other tool that produces some appropriately similar sound, such as spoons, plates, a drum, a can. The festivity is fuelled by *cachaça*, for those who like it, and coffee. Many tales are recounted and the lives of ancestors are recalled, and in this way the memories and identities of a people are revisited. Jokes are told, and there are games – hoop-throwing, lassoing, arm-wrestling – and card games such as *truco*. Families coming from far away stay on to the end of the party, which, as I mentioned before, culminates with a country-style dance that lasts all night.

So, for us *quilombolas*, keeping the tradition of the *mutirão* has been an honour and a way of not losing the community concept of mutual help, whether in times of difficulty or in times of celebration. The interaction between the young, the elderly, women and children is what marks the tenor of the activity, as we build respect, the concept of helping one another and passing on knowledge.

One of the advantages of carrying out a community *mutirão* is that, as we socialise our knowledge and practices, we are fixing these in the children's imaginary, who will in turn value their roots and their ancestry. It is clear to me that when a *mutirão* is held, we are celebrating lives and recalling memories; during lunch and afterwards there are so many tales and life stories to share. So for us, the *mutirão* is not just work. Its meaning is much greater.

In the last few years this activity has lost its strength, but we still carry on. We face many environmental restrictions and licensing difficulties because we use the slash and burn technique, the *coivara* system, to clear land, which involves managing fires to burn down short vegetation and fertilise the soil with the ashes. We are fully aware that the irresponsible use of fire has harmful



consequences for the environment, but fire management has always been a part of our culture, involving our rites of passage, of protection, of care and food security. For anyone living outside our reality it may be difficult to understand why it is important for us to uphold the tradition of fire.

This tradition is not confined to planting food, it also involves ancestral knowledge that has much to do with the health of the food, the health of the body and the health of the soul. When we defend the slash and burn management, which is carried out on a small scale of family agriculture, we are saying that this is much more than just planting and harvesting. For us food is life and life is food. This is how we care for our territory.

Today, during the pandemic, the *quilombola mutirão* was reactivated to mobilise communities as we sought vaccination against COVID-19. We set up a task force involving different organisations and social movements including the Articulation and Support Team for Black Communities of the Vale do Ribeira (*Equipe de Articulação e Assessoria às Comunidades Negras do Vale do Ribeira – EAACONE*); the Socioenvironmental Institute (*Instituto Socioambiental – ISA*); National Coordination for the Articulation, Support and Organisation of the Rural Black Quilombola Communities (*Coordenação Nacional de Articulação, Assessoria e Organização de Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas – CONAQ*), of which I am a member; the federal and state-level Public Prosecution Services; federal and state-level Public Defender Offices; and we have also asked the Federal High Court to pay special attention to the indigenous and *quilombola* peoples, together with the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (*Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil – APIB*). Here, in the state of São Paulo, we have asked the government for the immunisation of the whole *quilombola* territory, as part of the federal initiative already underway. We have managed to take the vaccine to every community but the vaccine roll out is not yet finished. Here at the Quilombo Ribeirão Grande Terra Seca, which is my community, we have all been immunised. We self-organised so that everyone was able to come over, get the jab and return home without any overcrowding, following the public health protocols.

But many *quilombolas* find themselves in desperate need of basic resources because they have been evicted from their territories, because the government has not returned the land to those to whom it belongs, or because such territories have been taken over

by large real estate enterprises, by parks, by large-scale farms and even by nature conservation initiatives, where we do not fit in. All of this places the traditional communities in extreme poverty. Here in Vale do Ribeira, the São Paulo government is developing a project called “Valley of the Future” (*Vale do Futuro*). We have no idea what this actually means or who in fact the beneficiary is. As I see it, the government is taking advantage of communities’ fragility resulting from the pandemic in order to approve mining projects that involve building dams, dismantling public structures and carrying out privatisations. And even under these constant threats, with our property rights issues unresolved, we continue to help one another. We offer help with whatever food we can give away, organising food hampers and delivering sustenance to those who have no land to farm.

My name is Jonas, I am seventeen years old and Nilce is my mother. I remember that the *mutirões* were organised far in advance, like a month ahead, two months. A lot of people always came down to the *mutirões*, 50 to 80 people, and everyone worked, regardless of age or bodily strength. Children and the elderly joined in. Children came over just to learn from the *mutirão* and when they wanted to help, they carried water bottles for the older ones who were doing the heavy work and who would be too tired to walk up and down to fetch water. It was usual that before setting off to the place

of work everyone had a hearty breakfast. Coffee was made and bread with minced meat or sausages was served to those who did not want a proper meal, which was also offered so that people could spend a longer time working and do a better job. In the middle of all this, *cachaça* and a good yarn circulated. People always joked a lot and some people even stayed overnight. They drank *cachaça* at night and worked the next morning, no harm done. In the afternoon everyone rested in order to attend the night-time dance. This is what I remember of our present-day *mutirão*.

Culture under construction.

Vila Itororó: the making public (of a place)

I worked as the curator of *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* (Vila Itororó Open Construction Site). I share authorship of the project with the other team members: Fabio Zuker, Graziela Kunsch, Helena Ramos, Peroba Capoeira, Francesca Tedeschi, and many others involved. The project was carried out within Instituto Pedra, headed by Luiz Fernando de Almeida, who invited me in 2014 to think about how to open Vila Itororó's restoration work site to the public.

What follows is an account and reflection on the work we carried out during those years, from my perspective. More information about the Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto project and

the history of Vila Itororó is available at vilaitororo.org.br, in the form of photographic archives, books, articles, videos, artwork and records of all the activities carried out between 2015 and 2018.

I dedicate this text to Cida, Denis, Emanuel, Monique, Priscila and all the people who we met throughout this project and who passed away before their time, only because they were poor, while we were attempting together to find ways to give Vila Itororó back to them.

Benjamin Seroussi

'Why don't we fit in this project?'

Antônia Cândido, recorded statement documented in *Excertos da Vila Itororó (Excerpts from Vila Itororó)*
Graziela Kunsch, 2006-ongoing



AN INVITATION

In the end of 2014, I was invited to develop a heritage education project at the Vila Itororó restoration work site. The architectural ensemble, over a hundred years old and in ruins, of around 10,000 m², occupies the core of a block in São Paulo's city centre. This site had always been a place for dwelling and leisure. But, once listed in the name of "public interest", the residents – low income and lower middle class people – were evicted and rehoused by the municipal authorities in order to establish a public cultural centre on the site. The city administration hired an architecture office called Instituto Pedra to undertake restoration of the site. The institute had to work with a project designed by other architects (in the 1970s and early 2010s), raise funds, finalise the executive project and carry out the restoration of the houses. It was them who invited me. I had at my disposal:

- A budget of R\$ 500.000 reais;
- A one-year contract;
- An article by architect Sérgio Ferro ("Sobre a Anormalidade como Norma", *Móbile #1*, 2014, CAU/SP) about the importance of opening building sites;
- The trust of the architecture office;
- An 800 m² warehouse attached to the site (to be shared with the architects and contractors).

There was no control over the future beyond this one year.

THE FUTURE DOES NOT EXIST

Every project exists and grows in a context to which it seeks to respond.

São Paulo is a peculiar city: it changes constantly in order not to change at all. Caetano Veloso wrote a tune based on Claude Lévi-Strauss' surprise, related in *Tristes Tropiques*, 1955, as the anthropologist visited the city for the first time – "here everything seems like it is under construction and already in ruins". Over half a century later, the city is still full of recent buildings already in ruins and hundreds of idle construction sites. Announcements are made about the building of a hospital, a cultural centre, a new metro line that are rarely carried out. It is as if the future were a never-fulfilled promise, in the name of which the past is erased and the present destroyed, serving the interests of a few.

The first two questions posed by visitors to a construction site are always the same: What is it going to be? When is it going to be ready? These are reasonable questions, but how can one answer? Who has the authority to respond to such demands? Who controls the future? One could retort these questions with other questions: When is São Paulo going to be ready? How long have we been waiting for places to be ready so that we can start to use them? I believe that we must replace the *effects of announcements* with what we might call the *effects of enunciation*. In other words, instead of promising something distant and abstract, we must put a concrete thought or idea into practice right now. We must find ways of intervening in the present. For, in a certain way, places are always ready; they exist in the here and now, if only as a potential.

HOW TO INHABIT CULTURE?

With the need to intervene in the present, we had to understand how to move about, how to test out the elasticity of things, define what was fixed and what was variable. We started by opening the warehouse. We maintained one toilet and small offices, and the rest was kept free for uses yet to be discovered.

It was then necessary to rethink what "heritage education" could mean. Wouldn't the best way to carry out such education be precisely to invite people to use the space and participate in the formation of a collective to think about the public dimension of a heritage that was still being disputed? In this way, the educatees would assert themselves into thinking subjects and audiences would cease to be targets and become protagonists.

It was necessary to redefine the terms used in the equation of the initial invitation and the horizons it suggested: "public" "cultural" and "center." Why does "culture" need "centres"? Who is this abstract "public"? As formulated in a 1977 video about Vila Itororó, which we found on the Internet: What is more 'public,' "a place that is today the home to lower income people and who enjoy relative comfort here" or "a place for a simple weekend stroll for the residents of other neighbourhoods?" (a Super 8 film made by Ivana de Carvalho Lemos in 1977 as a project for a course at the Architecture Faculty Brás Cubas). Lastly, what do we understand as 'culture'? The notion of culture extrapolates art practices to embrace the way we organise our lives, in space and time. And if so, shouldn't housing have a space in culture, and in its specialised centres?

All these questions can be summarised in the formulation that I would refer to as “the curatorial problem” of the project: what does it mean to set up a cultural centre in a housing area? Or, how to inhabit culture, conceptually and physically?

EXPERIMENT OF A CULTURAL CENTRE

“It’s open!” – an easily made announcement. A simple move but with complex consequences. Simple because one just rolls up the iron shutter one morning, places a table in the middle of the space, sits behind it, as a kind of curator for the day, to watch and wait. But this has complex consequences. A timetable must be arranged; the fact that the space is open must be advertised; how to get in must be made clear; the risks involved must be assessed; everyday street violence must be tackled, among many other things. This complexity, however, offers a starting point that sets everything else in motion: from a fixed project (in the architectural sense of a future projection) to a place in becoming (i.e. futures that exist in potency in the present). The construction site turns into a temporary cultural centre, or, better said, an experiment of a cultural centre, dynamic and unstable, always threatened in its existence, but existing nevertheless. In such a space, the heart of the project becomes the process in itself. The aim is not to curate the warehouse (organise workshops, exhibitions, programmes or other activities), but to understand that the opening of the warehouse is itself the curatorial project.

When I write “experiment of a cultural centre,” I am not saying that the space was obliged to feature an experimental programme. The ‘experiment’ does not refer to ‘culture’ but to the carrying out of a test and trial on a real 1:1 scale. Even though it was impossible for Vila Itororó to fully operate due to the restoration work underway, in the warehouse (and in each additional space we took over) we could test out the project’s existence. When saying that the process is the project’s core, the word “process” (what is happening, what is being done) is not opposed to the word “result” (the completed work, the finished space). It is a change of the way the same object is considered. We wanted to look at the space and at the processes that intersected it in other ways, as if we were refocusing a lens. In other words, to look at process does not mean denying the result, but instead, recognising that the result is also a temporary construction, a process, or a fragile balance, stabilised at a given moment. Balance is always subject to motion before reaching another equilibrium.



Imagine a museum with its opening hours, its entrance hall, its ticket office wedged in a corner at the back of the entrance, the turnstiles giving access to the proper museum space, air conditioning, rooms with doors large enough for works of art to fit through, tape on the floor in front of each painting marking the approved distance of visiting bodies, the presence of guards in each room to ensure compliance with museum rules, freight elevators at the back to facilitate the setting up of temporary exhibitions. Imagine that this is all just a response – another kind of balance, a very stable one in this case – to certain of the public's expectations, to specific rituals understood as an adequate cultural manifestation, to a certain kind of object-oriented art production demanding temperature and humidity control, aimed at disinterested visitors who expect to leave the venue with a set of fond memories, a (flash-free) snapshot, and a postcard or catalogue of what they have just seen. Instead of looking at what the place is (a museum), what I want to point out here is what it does (to the bodies and to the artworks), and how it does what it does (by means of the space, its rules, its teams). I want to dwell on the processes that are embedded in the result.

In an experiment of a cultural centre, the processes are not yet crystallised. Everything is a lot more malleable. How to host an audience? What do we understand as an audience? What should the opening hours be? What behaviours can we consider acceptable? What rituals should be followed or established? Do I have to lower my voice? Which parts of the space must be locked or protected? Which areas might be dangerous and require specific safety protocols (prior authorisation, supervision, use of a safety helmet, etc.)? What is the role of the technical staff? What kind of activities can take place? In an experiment of a cultural centre, everything is a potentiality... unless, perhaps, the curator's and other cultural workers' limited imagination.

LISTEN TO THE SPACE

Look around. Is there an object on the floor that catches your eye? Pick it up. Hold it. Look at it. Smell it. Feel its texture. What does it offer in terms of the differences between materials, its past uses, the other people who might have held it in their hands? Listen to it and talk to it. Be its spokesperson. What is it saying for other people to hear? What is it saying to the world? How does it want to be used? Does it ask to be thrown away? Or to be stored with care? Now,

sit down in Vila Itororó's central patio and do the same. Of course, it won't fit in your hand, but try to see it as a whole, be sensitive to the smell, the textures, to what it is made of, different materials, past uses, the fond memories of those who have lived and played there. Listen to it. Try to abstract your initial judgements – your prejudices. Listen and speak for it. Be its spokesperson. What does it ask you to tell other people? What does it ask you to take care of? Graffiti on the wall? A piece of decoration? Or decoration that is missing? Is it a recent or old construction? Is it asking you to remove something? A wall? A staircase? A smell? What does it ask you to reinforce, reclaim, or create? A memory embedded in some corner? Who should be there next to you? And who are you in the middle of this space? A guest or an intruder? Where does the sun shine brightest? Where is it cooler? Which spaces are more intimate and which more exposed? Where is a good spot to sit down and listen to the distant rumble of the city? Where do you feel like running around? Or hiding? Or digging the ground?

We invited the architects and the whole Vila Itororó team to take part in this exercise of humility before the space. The exercise was led by permaculturist Peter Webb as a way of systematising the practice of listening to the space that we were engaging with. It helped us to put technical knowledge to one side, or better said, to understand that there are diverse elements of technical knowledge and that they are all translated through a perception of space that is eminently subjective, i.e., political. This exercise of empathy with the space, an object that remains for the time being without a subject to represent it, was a way of opening fissures in the specialists' certainties and imaginations.

HERITAGE IN DISPUTE

Spokespeople are always at a risk of mistaking their voices with those whom they are supposed to represent, allowing their own projections to speak louder than what they should be listening to. And so where a young father will see a crèche, a curator may see a museum, and a sports fan a gym. This is why it is important to think about space as a palimpsest and to delve in its many layers. We should look at the past avoiding the illusion that our present is the only possible consequence of the past. The past was once a present with all potentialities open. So, it is important to look at the past as something unresolved. In the specific case of Vila Itororó, to go

into its history is to delve into São Paulo's complex housing history. It is a history that is still up for grabs; it is too long and complex to go into details here. But it is important to look at the role played by dispute in this history if we are to understand the situation we find ourselves in today.

As soon as Vila Itororó had been listed as a building complex of public interest and an object of heritage attention, it also became an object of dispute. The question of how it would be conserved and redeveloped and to what end divided residents, proprietors, architects, the local community, public authorities, real estate speculators and heritage departments. As time went on, arguments took shape, gained force; certain names and spokespersons came to the fore. If the heritage aspects of a place are a value given by people – what the Venice Charter, a document written in 1964 and key for the heritage field, calls “cultural significance” – then all the interested parties could contribute to the definition of the object, and to the elaboration and resolution of the controversy.

In the case of Vila Itororó, something strange took place. Recognition of its cultural value involved evicting the residents who had given the place part of that value. This fetishization of heritage constituted an act of self-destruction, as if desire itself smothered the object of desire. So, we asked ourselves: what has kept Vila Itororó

standing (not physically but symbolically)? Who is to decide which bits of this eclectic building complex that has changed so much over the years should be preserved, and which destroyed? What are the politics behind the practical decision making which favours one time layer over another? Which layers should be conserved, redeemed, refurbished and re-instituted? The most recent? The original buildings now almost disappeared? The smallholdings that were here before the buildings? How do these choices influence (by fostering or ruling out) the uses of the space in the present? Which additional developments would represent excrescences and which would tell fundamental histories? As Vila Itororó's original creator kept changing it until his dying day, subsequent residents did the same. Where he would have laid flag-stones,

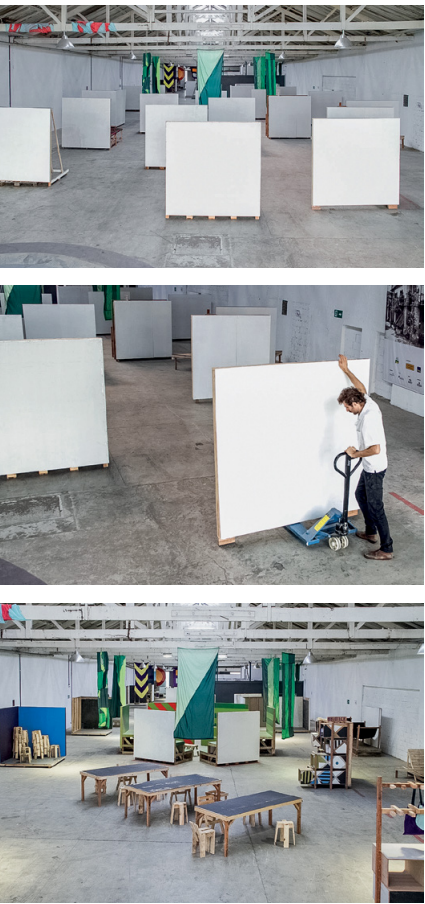


they improvised a wall. Each wave of dwellers has left its marks. Is the shoddy brickwork addition encrusted between the palazzo's columns something that needs to be removed or is it the fruit of the evolution that has always characterised Vila Itororó? If we remove the improvised alterations, don't we risk freezing Vila Itororó's history at a distant point in the past, threatening the possibility of reading the whole? At the same time, perhaps it is precisely the fraile patch-ups that have kept Vila Itororó standing.

LOOSE SPACES

It is important to speak softly in order to listen better. In spatial terms, this means that one does not have to make permanent and definitive interventions in order to potentiate this kind of space. This idea guided part of our work, both in the warehouse and the rest of Vila Itororó. In the case of Vila Itororó, despite major misunderstandings (and very little debate) between the curatorial team and the architects about what to preserve and what not, the spaces were not adapted to specific future uses. Recognising that uses might change with time, the architects decided to maintain the original scale of the rooms (for instance, not pulling down internal partitions to create a library, as initially planned), leaving it to future users to adapt their expectations to the renovated spaces; it was also understood that housing was and continues to be the most obvious potential use.

The warehouse was adapted so that it could accommodate the widest possible variety of uses. The French-German collective Constructlab was invited to develop a basic design that would keep the space free but functional. Surveying what the possible uses might be, beyond those expected of a cultural centre, was a seminal moment. The verbs “contemplate,” “visit,” “admire,” “enjoy,” usually used to describe what can be done with an art space, gave way to other verbs such as “imagine,” “play,” “sleep,” “make a date,” “read,” “discuss” or “eat.” So, shelves, benches, chairs, a swing, a slide, a bar, a climbing wall, a bicycle rack, an archive, a cloakroom and an assembly space were built in the centre of the space. Each of these possible functions was translated into an architectural module – minimal and mobile constructions that could be reconfigured in all sorts of ways – using simple transpallets, a common item on any building site. The modules acted as triggers, geared towards both every-day, spontaneous uses (as a pleasant and inviting neighbourhood facility) and



upcoming planned activities: chats, visits, workshops, research and publishing.

What we sought was to set up a programme characterized by looseness. “Programme” in the sense architects use when listing the uses of a space (for instance, the standard programme of a house for a small family is having two rooms, a bathroom, a spacious kitchen and a laundry); and “loose” in the sense that we wanted to let the users define uses grounded on – or in friction with – what we offered. In this way, a bench could become an object to skateboard over; an empty area at the centre of the space a dance floor; a wall a pair of goalposts; and so on. A possible reference could be the Ibirapuera Park Marquee by Oscar Niemeyer. A long cement pathway was laid down the middle of the park, with a concrete canopy above, and this was enough to spark countless possible uses. But there is nothing looser than this infinite marquee in terms of its architectural programme. Niemeyer could not have anticipated the majority of the uses that take place there today. Regardless of whether the sun shines or rain falls,

it is Ibirapuera Park’s most democratic and diverse space. Instead of focussing on built spaces – which are ‘full’ – our attention turns to free spaces – ‘empty’ – and their potential.

The result worked. It made the place inviting and removed some of the symbolic barriers that are usually present – although invisible – at the entrances to cultural centres. Sometimes users asked if it was a shop and if the stools were for sale (shops are less intimidating than cultural centres); sometimes they asked what it was all about and started conversations with the curators sitting at the entrance. In any case, people made more and more use of the space and thought of it as their own.

ABOUT SPONTANEOUS USES

The person who determines the use of a cultural space is often the curator. At least this is what he or she thinks. But fortunately, what spaces are used for always evades the intentions of those who plan them. There are happy examples of this kind of situation. Circulation spaces at Centro Cultural São Paulo are occupied by dancers who come to rehearse their breakdance and k-pop routines. The

central space at Centquatre-PARIS is usually crowded with people dancing, reading or just resting. In the case of Vila Itororó, we wanted to invert the traditional approach and potentiate the uses suggested by the users to progressively shape the space. We thought this would be the only way to go beyond the bounds of our – the curatorial team’s – imagination. Audience engagement stopped being a matter of seeking to educate, but became a process of listening and monitoring whatever arose in the space. There was no longer a target audience, but a slow collective building which resulted in an audience.

This doesn’t mean we didn’t invite specific groups who usually feel less authorised to present proposals. This was the case of Vila Itororó’s former residents. Even before the site opened, we invited them to visit their former homes. Although they had been rehoused in nearby social housing units, the violence of the evictions they had suffered was still a vivid memory for most of them. A small group was still fighting in the courts to have their usucapion rights recognised and, in an unexpected turn of events, Vila Itororó became the place where they met to discuss this historical reparation.

When we opened the warehouse, people came shyly in and sat down on the benches; then they talked to the team; then they brought their friends along and finally began to use the place on a regular basis to study, rehearse, rest or have lunch, etc. We called these “spontaneous uses,” in order to stress the fact that they were not led by the technical staff. On the contrary, these uses guided the team’s work. It was up to us to monitor and adapt the space – placing, for instance, mirrors on the backs of Construct-Lab’s modules so as to accommodate dancers and their needs, or making cupboards available to homeless people to store their belongings during the day, or bringing in extra tables for students. As well as spatial adaptations, it was also necessary to establish a set of agreements to make cohabitation run smoothly. We preferred the word ‘agreements’ in opposition to ‘rules.’ While rules contemplate general demands and aim at organising an indiscriminate mass, agreements emerge from specific practices and from the conditions of cohabitation by radically different groups. Rules regulate public spaces. Agreements contemplate spaces that are a component of *the commons*. In this way, we guided the practical transformation of what had been intended to be a public cultural centre into a *common* space.

Not all activities were necessarily welcome at Vila Itororó.

It was not a populist project where we would meet every demand, as we thought this would end up reproducing power relations that pre-exist the site, where those who speak louder get more space. On the contrary, it was a building exercise, necessarily slow, delicate and organic, of a truly democratic space. We did not deliver a service to the population (in the sense of meeting demands), but worked to make the place useful. To the visitors who wanted to know what the space was going to be, we always responded with a question: “how could the space be useful to you?” The use of the word “useful” is in part a reference to the work of artists and thinkers such as Tania Bruguera or Stephen Wright. It does not limit what is understood by the term ‘culture’ to something merely instrumental (which has more to do with the idea of the ‘instrumentalization’ of culture, rather than its ‘usefulness’). To think about the usefulness of art and of cultural spaces is a practical way of blurring the distinction between art professionals and the visiting audience, between culture and other spheres of life. It brings to the surface the imaginative forces and the disruptive powers of culture, of art and of its various manifestations and keeps them closer to the body and to the immanence of daily life.

The technical team in charge of the work ended up calling itself the “cultural activation” team, distinguishing themselves from the team of architects. Such cultural activation complemented the as-built drawings, archive research and architectural projects. It pointed to new possible uses for Vila Itororó and rehearsed a possible management model. We carried out public consultation in the deepest sense of the term. Not by means of open debate but through an experiment carried out at a real scale. Not only did we discover all sorts of unforeseen uses, but we also uncovered the different histories of Vila Itororó. For instance, it was after a circus group used the warehouse to rehearse that we discovered that the circus had always played an important part in Vila Itororó’s history. It was as if past uses had returned. Looking to the future, the spontaneous uses that arose outlined new possible programmes for the houses being restored. Why not dedicate one of them to the circus? How to include the demands of homeless people – from the need to store their belongings during the day to providing democratic access to water



(quality public bathrooms, showers and drinking water)? Which of the practices that emerged in the warehouse suggested a need for the neighbourhood and the city?

This focus on spontaneous uses generated various shifts in the way the cultural activation team understood its work. Instead of mediating the relations between audience and content offered in the space, as usually happens in a cultural centre, we began to mediate the relationships between the diverse groups using the space. The agreements, published in Vila Itororó’s website, are the most concrete manifestation of this horizontal mediation work:

- ① *Actions must take place during opening hours and in spaces designated by the cultural activation team (it is not possible to book an area in the warehouse);*
- ② *Actions cannot have commercial, advertising or party-political purposes.*
- ③ *Each individual/group must respect the other individuals/groups using the space, including the permanent workers at the site;*
- ④ *Fairs, exhibitions or public presentations will not be welcomed as spontaneous uses. Processes and rehearsals, rather than results, take priority because this is a work site where everything – including the very notion of culture – is under construction.*
- ⑤ *The collective agreements can be revised and rethought by the public with the cultural activation team and new agreements can be created, based on inspiration, needs and problems that emerge from the users themselves.*

The latter agreement aimed to secure that this arrangement was dynamic and, even if the cultural activation team played the role of guardians, the team did not have a monopoly in its formulation.

Street dance, ballroom dancing, yoga, self-defence for women, capoeira, circus rehearsals, theatre rehearsals, study groups, martial arts, medieval fencing, gypsy dance, skateboarding and many other activities came to comprise daily life at Vila Itororó. Perhaps two activities are worth a mention as they give examples of uses that demanded radically different monitoring by the cultural activation team, either stepping aside or getting fully involved. On the one hand, the team stepped aside in order to allow free play, which consisted in

keeping the place open, but with only a few objects, so that children from the surrounding areas could invent their own play and resignify the space without an adult leading the activity. On the other hand, the *feira junina*, a traditional winter open-air festivity organised by former residents of Vila Itororó, demanded the team's full involvement to recreate an event that had been a landmark in the history of Vila Itororó over the decades. In the years 2000, under the threat of eviction, the *feira junina* had become an act of resistance. So, the party was reinstated, offering a festive opportunity to keep the struggle alive – because those involved in struggles know that festivity plays a central role in every strike, walkout or political act. The former residents could also use the event to raise funds for the group, which would now grow to include other local residents and supporters. In an eminently segregated city, the party at Vila Itororó was a respite. The cultural activation team always knew that it had been the evictions that had made their work happen. This replacement of one group by another was inseparable from a whole range of violences: housing replaced by an exclusionist understanding of culture; from mainly Black people to a mainly White team; from poor or lower-middle class to mostly middle or upper-middle class. But we did not see this as a primal stain preventing any type of work. On the contrary, it was both the project's point of departure and its destination. The aim was to make intermediaries increasingly unnecessary, that is, to create conditions that would make it possible for us to withdraw and the residents to return, not necessarily the former residents, but others, on the understanding that housing for ordinary people had a structural role to play in this historic ensemble and should be maintained.

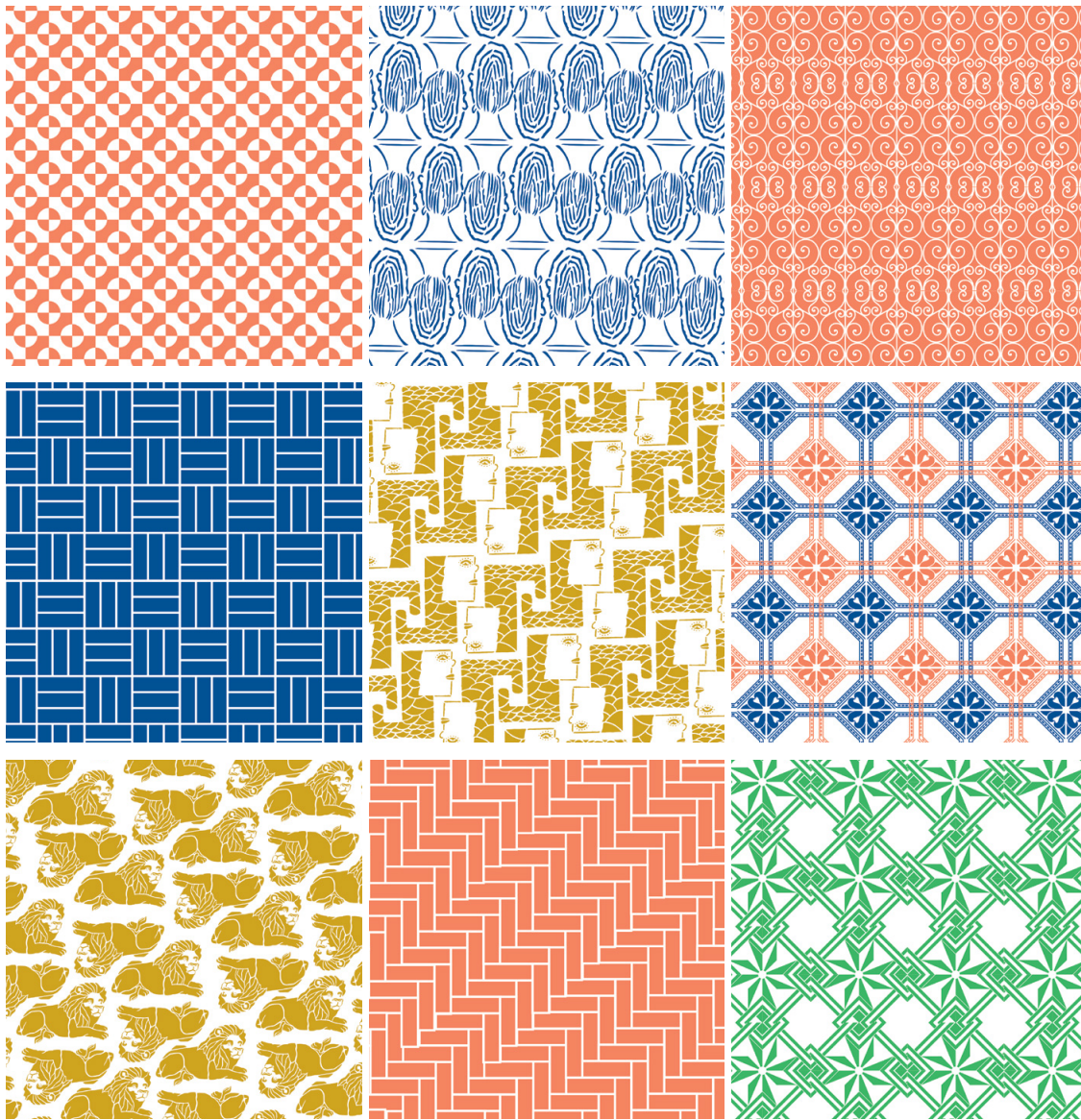
THE THICKNESS OF THE PRESENT

A year goes by quickly. One of the challenges of this project was to reach a point of no return, or at least, a solid base. As the months passed, the Vila Itororó that had been boarded up and reduced to silence with the eviction of the residents regained its voice and could be heard again. Thanks to its now many spokespersons, it ceased to be just an object of heritage politics and became a subject, an active agent in discussions of its fate. The audience in construction became an active agent in this process.

In addition, a number of partnerships were established creating alliances with various entities that would prevent further abandonment or hollowing out by the next municipal

administration, as is usual in Brazil, where government policies systematically crowd out any overriding state policy. Unlike many countries around the world, particularly European countries, where the participation of public powers is the guarantee that projects will continue beyond the short-term caprice of private interests, in Brazil, the public sphere is the object of constant (private) disputes, even among its lower echelons. Americans call this the “spoils system.” A change of mayor can lead to the replacement of dozens of technical staff in cultural centres. So, as soon as we joined the project we sought partnerships, which we understood as ties that would consolidate the project. This was the case with the Innovation and Technology Secretariat which started to use part of the space at Vila Itororó. This ensured internal dialogue between these public bodies. If the Culture Secretariat (legally in charge of the Vila) wanted to close down Vila Itororó, it would have to bear the onus of a dispute with another municipal secretariat. In the same way, one of the houses standing at the centre of the architectural ensemble was ceded to the Goethe Institute. A contract was signed with the City Hall, and with a mandate stretching beyond the mayor's term of office, in order to ensure that, in case of a change of administration, a delicate negotiation would have to ensue between the mayor and an institute of international relevance with diplomatic representation in the country. These are just a couple of examples of how partnerships were used to consolidate the project's existence.

Another strategy was to commission art works installed in the space. The idea was to set up a kind of exhibition, neither temporary nor permanent, but structural, where the pieces of art contributed to an understanding of the place, intensifying certain uses and strengthening the presence of the audience in the more developed areas of the site. The works of art played another role: we wanted to challenge the idea that art has a gentrifying effect. Art can be instrumentalised in gentrification processes, no doubt, but there is a type of art production that runs against the grain of gentrification. A few of the artists invited worked towards that end. Just as ConstructLab's furniture was a fundamental step in opening the space to a diversity of users, the paintings carried out by Mônica Nador and JAMAC generated a new iconography for Vila Itororó involving the former residents and inhabitants of the surrounding districts, and once again strengthening bonds of trust with those who had a fond



relationship with the place but mistrust of any project spawned by the mayor's office.

Panapanã, a project by Carla Zaccagnini, invited the audience to visit Vila Itororó's central patio and explore a garden cultivated to attract butterflies, planted in mobile flowerbeds. The idea came about not only because there had been lots of butterflies around before the tractors moved in, but also because the insect became a metaphor for the radical transformation the space had undergone, a transformation that may look attractive when seen from afar, but whose process had been one of extreme violence. *Parapanã* had an audio-guide device that told stories of transformation, some close to

Vila Itororó and some further afield.

Excerpts from Vila Itororó, by Graziela Kunsch, was the least palpable project in spatial terms but the most palpable in time. It is an online audio-visual archive that cuts through – like a surgeon's scalpel – the recent history of Vila Itororó, bringing the vanquished's voices. It might be described as a “core sample” (in Portuguese “*teste-munho*,” meaning testimony or witness), in the geological sense of the word (a cylindrical sample of what lies under a spot on the earth's surface, showing different time layers). Before working at the open site, Graziela had filmed and participated in the residents' struggle against eviction. The website therefore follows Vila Itororó's history over ten years. In the course of time people grow older, change their opinions and the roles they play in this history. It amounts to an anatomy of power, and shows how Vila Itororó represents a living document of state violence.

Symmetrically, in space but not in time, the Raumlabor collective, invited together with the Goethe Institute, carried out one of the most daring projects, one of interlocution with the building restoration process. A space was set up, named *Goethe na Vila* (*Goethe at the Vila*), which consisted of refurbishing one of the least accessible houses. Once restored, the dwelling housed the various practices of a succession of resident artists (recruited through an open call for projects) – practices that proved to be very diverse indeed, and included mounting a children's carnival, setting up a hip hop studio, a capoeira school, and a home appliance and furniture repair workshop. This project, carried out in conversation with the architects, showed that the refurbishment itself could also follow alternative paths, rather than the reconstruction of a dreamt-up original that had never existed as such (which characterised one aspect of Vila Itororó's restoration). While making the house function, Raumlabor retained the marks left by time, while anticipating a diversity of uses; all interventions were reversible (metal doors, concrete stairs, wooden studio), but very useful in the present, and relatively cheap to carry out. If, for the cultural activation team, this represented an alternative approach to refurbishing the ensemble, for the architects it was just a temporary patch-up. Today, however, while many houses have been refurbished definitively but remain in disuse, we remember the Raumlabor project, which made it clear that with only minimal refurbishment, a space can be opened to thousands of people.



A COMMON PROGRAMME

At the beginning of this text, I quickly warned the reader that, in addition to the space, the budget, time frame and other conditions, we were also limited by a pre-existing project aimed at what the municipal administration imagined would be the future use of the restored Vila Itororó. According to this document, Vila Itororó was to become a memory centre for the neighbourhood that told the history of the site, including an Italian restaurant (since the neighbourhood is considered an Italian immigrant area), a piano bar, a toy room, a library, a performance space with a stage, a large central square, a pond, several shops and a few artist residency studios. The project had been put together by specialists working behind closed doors. It had used a reference from the 70s and had tried to adapt it to present times. This had been the driving idea behind Vila Itororó's listing as a site of public interest – a curious notion of 'public,' elaborated without any public consultation.

The project we developed at Vila Itororó aimed to gradually deconstruct the original plan that we had inherited, which displayed the lack of imagination of those who had conceived it, rather than any serious reflection about what Vila Itororó really is and so what it could become. This showed in the poor quality of the as-built drawings we received. The Instituto Pedra's architects had to carry out these drawings afresh (since the previous architects did not have full access to the site because of a lack of engagement with the then residents). This lack of research and imagination was also blatant when looking at the use programme based on a superficial understanding of Vila Itororó (one of the first things we did was research into the history of the place). The spontaneous uses that arose, research in municipal and national archives, the discovery of additional information about Vila Itororó, the testimonials of numbers of people and the structural work, all contributed to and constituted our understanding of how the space could work. A new programme for Vila Itororó was being put together collectively, replacing the earlier (distant, abstract) project with a common programme that was closer to the specific needs and demands of the place and its users.

We replaced the idea of a restaurant with a community kitchen. We exchanged the design store for the site's carpentry workshop, which stopped being used exclusively for the restoration work and was opened to the public. Instead of a garden for leisure uses, a rich agriforest grew up, fruit-trees, native trees, vegetation (which

the restoration work unfortunately later wrecked after one of the many arguments between the different teams working at Vila Itororó). Instead of the customary guided tours, visits to the site encouraged people to participate in discussions of issues related to the Vila Itororó project and its processes. Instead of a pond, the idea of reopening an old local swimming pool came up, fed by the spring that gives Vila Itororó its name – the word "Itororó" originates from words in the native Tupi language: "i" [water] and "tororo" [noisy or in large amounts], although this initiative proved impossible to carry out.

What was going to be commercial (shops, restaurant) or represented some kind of service (visits), became community-based (kitchen, carpentry). What was static (garden, pond) was put to collective use and management (agriforest, natural pool). Some spontaneous uses evolved into workshops (yoga, circus), but always developed with care so as not to replace collective mobilisations. Ways of listening multiplied, established themselves and became increasingly fine-tuned over time. This was the case with the Public Clinic of Psychoanalysis, implemented by Graziela Kunsch and Daniel Guimarães with a team of psychoanalysts, who carried out individual or group sessions, free of charge, around the Vila Itororó site. The programme continually invented new formats such as the "Cinema sem fio", proposed by adjunct curator Fabio Zuker: our team programmed the first film and thereafter, the audience suggested new titles for the following screenings, making sure to form a link between each film and the next.

Life at Vila Itororó evolved way beyond the cultural activation team's capacity but, thanks to agreements and partnerships, this translated less into a total loss of control and more into a decentralisation of power. With project manager Helena Ramos, we set up an economic model that allowed for this rich cultural life to take place without necessarily weighing on public funds: the idea of bringing social housing to Vila Itororó could, for instance, cheapen the security measures needed – because Vila Itororó would become a regular set of streets (rather than a space closed at night needing surveillance); articulating existing activities rather than programming from the top down; building temporary spaces to meet specific demands. It would be enough just to administer what was already flourishing. The common programme meant fostering and implementing a set of conditions that can be summarised as *the commons*.

VANQUISHED, PERHAPS

It is difficult to write about a project that somehow already ended but still goes on. I considered writing this text in the present tense, but, like Vila Itororó, a place where time has ceased to be linear, I lost my way in trying to keep the tenses consistent. I would like to conclude with an attempt to evaluate the project. Looking at the state of Vila Itororó today, I see that we were partly beaten, which perhaps, was to be expected. But that does not mean it was a failure.

In order to decide whether *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* worked or not, one needs to establish a few criteria. What would these criteria be? Whether the construction site is still open? Did the activities keep going? Does Vila Itororó now house families again? We joined the project knowing that we had no control over the future, but in the course of the project, we created conditions for the process to extend beyond one year. Right from the start, we tried to consider a range of future possibilities into which the project could evolve. This range helped us to frame what might be desirable outcomes.

On the one hand, 'the best of the best case scenario': to continue and broaden the work already initiated; to open the restored houses in response to the possibilities arising from the common programme and from spontaneous uses (clinic, kitchen, carpentry, circus, spaces serving the neighbourhood, infrastructure for homeless people, among others); to commission new structural artwork and carry out regular maintenance of the existing works; to get the swimming pool going and to carry on with restoration work while preserving the traces and layers of history; to renew partnerships and establish new ones; and, finally, reintroduce social housing into the Vila Itororó as well as other forms of living together in order to promote individual and community life there.

On the other hand, there is the 'worst of the best case scenario.' In this situation the municipal administration is unable to figure out where Vila Itororó fits into the existing municipal management models and normalises its administration, framing it within dysfunctional formats; it appoints a manager without funds and without permanence; reinforces the workshop programme, obfuscating and domesticating spontaneous uses; replaces the focus on processes with one that favours the spectacular, artificially boosting the number of visitors, but with no proper understanding of the place, and weakening the role played by Vila Itororó in the cultural scene; the space is filled with objects and activities, so as not to have

to deal with its real potential or anything unexpected, but only with the easily feasible and expected; leaves structural art work to decay; neglects the space's visual identity, rendering the signals loud but no longer legible; it does not renew partnerships; it does not communicate with the Housing Secretariat (as it had done with the Innovation and Technology Secretariat); it freezes the process of opening the now restored houses due to the sheer lack of administrative structure – and imagination – leaving them to rot all over again. This is the situation of Vila Itororó today.

Nevertheless, the situation lies somewhere between 'the best of the worst' and 'the worst of the best.' The project that we inherited when we arrived has been deconstructed (although it can always make an unexpected come back) and the project that we designed struggles on but functions partially, in terms of accommodating spontaneous uses and their energy. In this way, Vila Itororó, which should not have opened until the restoration work was completed (and, as expected, it never did), continues to fulfil a social function. An expanded understanding of culture is still on the agenda, and even if it has lost the opportunity to test new public policies, Vila Itororó is still here, still open and remains in dispute. This text unfolds this experiment, one which I hope might serve as inspiration in all sorts of other situations around the world.



Who is a public utility for? + The *canteiro* (building site) as project + An inhabited cultural centre

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It took me a long time to start and finish writing this text. I only managed to begin after I had left *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* (Vila Itororó Open Construction Site), where I worked from March 2015 to April 2017, responsible for “formation of public”. I tried to put on paper what I had thought and said over and over again during the previous two years. The text is divided into three

parts, based on the three sections imagined for a book about the *canteiro*, which was never published: 1. *Vila Itororó as agency/Vila Itororó's recent past*; 2. *The thickness of the present*; 3. *The possible city*. The three parts of my text also reflect the roles that I took on at Vila Itororó, over ten years: as video-activist/journalist, educator and artist. Appropriating a passage by psychoanalyst Enrique Pichon-Rivière,

my text is inevitably autobiographical, insofar as an author does not only refer to the conceptual basis of the subject matter, but to a range of personal experiences and the bonds that develop along the way. It is my small contribution to this unique context and also a farewell.¹

1 Text originally written in 2017. Today, in 2021, a lot has changed in this context. But I chose not to update the information so that the utopian window, which we lived then, can be kept open to inspire other people.

Graziela Kunsch⁹⁵

1. WHO IS A PUBLIC UTILITY FOR?

The fundamental function of the architectural drawing today is to enable the commodity form of the architectural object. Sérgio Ferro, “O canteiro e o desenho” (1976)

In January 2006, I read an article by columnist Mônica Bergamo, in the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, announcing that the complex at Vila Itororó, located in São Paulo, in the central neighbourhood of Bela Vista, was going to be transformed into a “cultural tourism hub,” or “some kind of cultural centre,” by the Municipal Department of Culture. The idea was, through public-private partnerships, to convert the Vila Itororó houses into “restaurants, art galleries and even a temporary residence for international artists.” The project had taken up where it had left off thirty years earlier, with plans drawn up by architects Décio Tozzi and Benedito Lima de Toledo, among others. The text mentioned that the area had become a crowded, run-down tenement home to dozens of families, and that the local government had promised that the families would be rehoused nearby.²

I had never actually been to the Vila before, but the previous year I had been an assistant on a documentary film course, and had overseen the work of film students from the ECA-USP, the School of Communications and Arts at the University of São Paulo, who had done some work at the Vila. So, I had an idea of what the people who lived there were like and I suspected that the story wasn't quite accurate. Moreover, it would not be simple to keep those families in the Bela Vista neighbourhood.

As a member of Indymedia Brazil, I went to Martiniano de Carvalho Street to investigate the situation. I saw the Vila from up above and summoned up the courage to go down the long stairway. I started talking to the people I met. I used to say that I rang their doorbells or knocked but that wasn't necessary. There were people in the patio, doors and windows were open, and one person would introduce me to the next. They all told the same story: they had never heard of any cultural hub and knew nothing about the fate of their homes. Each family had only talked to two social workers, who said that everything on site had now to be preserved and protected and that all the families would have to leave. But that the city authority would offer each family what they referred to as a “*coxinha* voucher”³ (an expression denoting an indemnity cheque for the sum of 5,000 *reais*) to help each family “return to their place of origin.”

2 Article published January 20th, 2006. Available at <folha.uol.com.br/fsp/ilustrad/fq2001200608.htm>.

3 “*Coxinha*” is a popular, cheap chicken snack in Brazil. (Translator's note).

Imagine the violence and trauma of this for someone like Dona Tercina, who had lived at the Vila for 63 years. It was a fact that some families had come to São Paulo from North-Eastern Brazil – this is what lay behind the prejudice implied in the phrase “return to their city of origin,” prejudice against people from the North-East, the *nordestinos* – but, nevertheless, they had chosen to come and make this city and the Vila their home. And they had been there for more than five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty years... All the people under the age of thirty had been born and raised in the Vila and had studied at local public schools. Until 1997, the families had paid rent, but the Leonor de Barros Camargo Foundation, which had owned the property of Vila Itororó for over twenty years, stopped sending pay-slips to the residents. This action, as well as the absence of any kind of buildings maintenance, which was so necessary, signalled that the property had been abandoned by the owner. Dona Lourdes still kept the receipts for all rental payments she had made during almost three decades and told me she didn’t want money from city hall: “Money (is something) we spend. I want a house to live in.”

When on January 23rd 2006, the then mayor of São Paulo, José Serra declared the entire block where the Vila is located an area of *public utility*, the families who lived there should have been recognized as the true owners of the houses under the law of adverse possession, or *usucapião* in Portuguese. *Usucapião* comes from Latin and means “acquire by use.” It is the right of domain that a person obtains over property due to the fact that she/he has used this property continuously for a certain period of time. In urban policy legislation appearing in the City Statutes, this period is five years. From the owners’ abandoning the Vila in 1997 to the declaration of “public interest” made in 2006, the residents had inhabited Vila Itororó for approximately nine years.

The families reacted to the absurd proposal put to them by the social workers (verbally, not in writing) by coming together to discuss the situation and starting to organise. The first act of resistance was to refuse to attend meetings scheduled at the Secretariat for Municipal Housing unless a residents’ committee would be allowed to voice their demands. When a meeting did finally take place, I was able to record the whole proceeding on video, positioning the camera at the end of the table, opposite Elisabete França, Superintendent of Popular Housing at that time.

Confrontation was inevitable. Ms França stated that the city hall did not evict anyone, and that it was the owners who had made requests for repossession, ignoring the fact that in the case of Vila Itororó, the party interested in expropriating the site from the residents

was the Municipal Secretariat for Culture. The residents asked about the proposed cultural centre but all answers were evasive. The only concrete explanation was a fresh proposal to the families to leave the Vila. This time, they were to receive credit of between 20 and 40 thousand *reais* to buy a property to that value. This subsidy required families to have an average income of five minimum wages. Only 5 out of 71 families⁴ were willing to accept the offer. In any case it would be impossible to find a property in this price range in the Bela Vista region, which enjoys good public transport, schools, day care centres, hospitals, cultural spaces and employment opportunities.

So, resistance needed to be kept up and to strengthen. I suggested they appeal to architects and town-planners, given that what was in dispute was an architectural urban development project. The residents needed to take the conflict into the public sphere and voice their opposition to the eradication of an entire community, which was the policy being pursued by the city hall, backed by the press.

A few days later, a book by Sergio Ferro was to be launched at the headquarters of the FAU-USP, the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo, on Maranhão Street, and I thought that the event offered a good opportunity for us to meet left-wing architects who might show support for the Vila families. I told a group of residents a little about Sergio Ferro and the *Arquitetura Nova*⁵ collective’s views and critiques of how architecture was produced in

⁴ The number of 71 families was reported in a survey of the conditions of habitability among the residents of Vila Itororó carried out in 2006 by the research group *Vida Associada* with the *MoSaIco* model office, both belonging to the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. This study analysed the number of rooms and people per housing unit and the conditions of the buildings according to structural stability, building modifications and the conditions of comfort and environmental sanitation. They reported that, at the time, Vila Itororó housed 71 families made up of 250 people. Of these families, 33 had adequate living conditions and 27 lived in precarious conditions. The remaining 11 families were not classified. (Information presented by architect Felipe Moreira at the open construction site, on the occasion of the workshop “The culture of housing in Vila Itororó”, August 2015, which involved 60 architecture students and architects and was coordinated by Aline Fidalgo, Lizete Rubano, Lucas Fehr and Felipe himself. The survey document represents very useful and valuable material to counter criticisms such as those made by the then Secretary of Culture, Carlos Augusto Calil, who always referred to the extreme case of a man who lived in a hole in the wall to talk about poor living conditions in the Vila, as if all residents shared the same living conditions. Many houses that appeared in the survey as precarious, are houses with two to four rooms, but with inadequate sanitary facilities).

⁵ *Arquitetura Nova* (New Architecture) was a collective formed by architects Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Sérgio Ferro between the late 50s and 1961.

Brazil and I volunteered to write an article to inform people about what was going on at the Vila. Once the text was approved, we made copies to distribute and set off to the FAU. Our group consisted of myself, equipped with a video camera; Cida Santana, then aged 51 who had lived at the Vila for over thirty years; and Giovanna Cândido, then 14 years old, who had been born there. Our “Request for support from architects and town planners” was widely distributed among those present and the two residents had the chance to talk about the situation at Vila Itororó with people who included Erminia Maricato and Nabil Bonduki, who had argued in favour of granting the families permanent status in the Vila in the early 1980s (in opposition to the project proposed by Décio Tozzi), and younger architects and urban planners, such as Beatriz Kara José, who had researched the role of culture in gentrification processes, and Renato Cymbalista, for whom heritage conservation at Vila Itororó meant preserving its residential use.

All these architects and urbanists agreed to allow me to film their conversations with Cida and Giovanna and those interviews, which we published on Indymedia, proved useful to the struggle. But the person who responded most quickly and vehemently to the residents’ appeal was Nadia Somekh. As director of the FAU-Mackenzie, the School of Architecture and Urbanism at Mackenzie University, Nadia offered to invite Décio Tozzi to present his project for a cultural hub at the University and, together with the collaboration of members of the Fórum Centro Vivo (Living City Centre Forum), we organized a debate between José Eduardo Lefevre as representative of the Secretariat of Culture, Antonia Cândido as representative of the residents of Vila Itororó and Nabil Bonduki as defender of housing in city centre districts and local councillor. This night later came to be viewed as a milestone. Nadia began the debate by defending the importance of the social dimension of architectural projects, positioning the debate about Vila Itororó as a discussion about the role of the architect. Décio Tozzi started to present his project but, little by little, the debate was taken over by the families from Vila Itororó, who arrived late because they had travelled there on foot. When Décio finished presenting his drawings – drawings inhabited only by waiters and youthful tourists – it was Antonia’s turn to speak. She asked why she didn’t fit in his project and, although I was unable to catch what happened with my camera because it all happened so quickly, Décio walked out of the room, complaining that he had gone there to explain his project to architecture students, not to residents.

Lizete Rubano made a vital contribution to this issue arguing that “there was no difference between showing the project to students and showing the project to the residents”; Nabil Bonduki too, “a city

hall project must be the result of a public discussion process”; and Aline Fidalgo argued that a public competition should be held for a new project; and so on... From this point on, the struggle opened on many fronts and gained supporters in different fields, including the setting up of AMAVila – Associação de Moradores e Amigos da Vila Itororó (Association of Residents and Friends of Vila Itororó).⁶ Nevertheless, I prefer to end this first part of my text with the architects’ posturing because it says a lot about the whole process whereby the Vila Itororó became a heritage conservation site:

Who decides what is heritage?

Who decides what a public utility is?

Who is a public utility for?

People have no power when it comes to the decision-making processes over what the terms ‘public utility’ or ‘public interest’ mean in real terms. It is market forces that end up defining how these two expressions are used, which in turn drive State policy.

2. THE CANTEIRO AS PROJECT

By ‘left’ I mean a root-and-branch opposition to capitalism. But such an opposition has nothing to gain, I shall argue, from a series of overweening and fantastical predictions about capitalism’s coming to an end. Roots and branches are things in the present. T. J. Clark, “For a left with no future” (2012)

Shortly after the AMAVila came into being, I felt that my presence was

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The video recording of these and other testimonies, as well as other moments during the resistance movement, can be seen in the archive work I produced: *Excertos da Vila Itororó* (Excerpts from Vila Itororó) – <vilaitororo.naocaber.org>. “Excerpts”, the term I proposed, are videos consisting of a single take each and also pieces in a larger process, seeking articulation. As well as reusing recordings from 2006, I have continued filming in this context and the archive continues to grow. Today, more than a decade later, it is possible to identify a series of transformations that have taken place over time and some aspects which have remained the same – at Vila Itororó itself, in the lives of those who lived there and in the roles of those who, in different ways, contributed to the changing context. According to the curator Benjamin Seroussi, in the text that introduces the website, “the excerpts are incomplete by definition; do not excel in technical quality; and show what is being filmed as much as they point to what doesn’t fit in the image frame. The archive recounts a history that goes against the grain, a counter-hegemonic story, in the struggle against the erasure of the stories of the people who lived at Vila Itororó – including excerpts from recorded discussions of the excerpts with residents and in other public situations.”

no longer essential to the struggle. There was now a collective organization there and various groups supporting the residents, and I needed to attend to my personal life. I distanced myself from the struggle and from the day-to-day life of the Vila and, although now a distant but very vivid memory, I thought of the day when I filmed Cida in her kitchen. I recorded her cleaning a chicken for almost sixteen minutes. I took in every detail of the kitchen – the dishes placed tidily on the draining board, the embroidered cloth over the water filter, the home-made curtain under the sink, strainers and ladles hanging on the wall, the rack for paper towels with paintings of cows on it – and all I could think was that one day before long, an artist like myself would be in Cida's home, doing some 'art' residency. If Vila Itororó was going to be a cultural centre, it would be a place I would never want to set foot in.

The eviction of almost all the families happened in the second half of 2011, during mayor Gilberto Kassab's term of office. Antonia's family stayed on longer in the Vila but was removed in February 2013 by the police, just after Fernando Haddad's new administration came to office. Thanks to almost six years of resistance (seven in the case of Antonia), the families won the right to remain in the city centre of São Paulo, in three high-rise CDHU buildings (Companhia de Desenvolvimento Habitacional e Urbano do Estado de São Paulo – São Paulo State Housing and Urban Development Company). Of the families from the Vila, 53 went to live very close by, on Rua Conde de São Joaquim; 36 went to live approximately twenty minutes' walk away, on Rua São Vicente; and 16 went to Bom Retiro, further away but still considered a part of the centre.⁷

The apartments were subsidised: a third of the rent was paid by the city authority, a third by the state government and the other third by the family, at a monthly rent of approximately 200 *reais* on a 25-year tenancy. After years of insecurity and the constant threat of imminent eviction, deliberate neglect by the local authority, which stopped rubbish collections and lighting at night (despite the patio being officially designated a public thoroughfare), constant police

⁷ The total number of families supported by legal assistance from the SAJU-USP in the process of expropriation was approximately 60, but in addition to the families who lived in the Vila for many years, people who occupied abandoned properties in the area and in the Vila block were also included in CDHU statistics. In addition, some of the Vila families receiving support were rehoused in more than one social housing unit. For example, Antonia's family lived in one house unit in the Vila, but was granted three housing units, one for herself and another two for her two daughters' and their young families. (Collaboration by Otávio Constantino, member of SAJU, in an email conversation with the author, and by Edivaldo Santos, former resident and, since the move, caretaker of one of the three buildings).

presence and the state of decay of many of the houses, many families considered the agreement a victory. But those who did not want to leave their homes had no alternative than to go. Even with all the difficulties listed above, the Vila was still a very good place to live: there were houses in good condition, big houses, a vibrant community life, a patio for children to play in, space for growing fruit and vegetables, animals could be kept on open land... The SAJU-USP legal counsel took the case to court, suing for adverse possession in 2008 to claim the monies due as indemnity for expropriation, which remain unpaid due to a court order (if the property rights of the last residents of the Vila are eventually recognized, they will receive this money; but if not, it will go to the Fundação Leonor de Barros Camargo).

In December 2014, the curator Benjamin Seroussi uploaded a public post to Facebook, announcing that he was to take over the curatorship of the Vila Itororó project. I found this information very strange, as I had worked with Benjamin not long before this at the 31st São Paulo Biennial, and I was aware of his critical stand. I sent him a DVD of the videos I had made at the Vila and asked him if we could talk. He told me that he had become involved in the project through Luiz Fernando de Almeida, the president-director of the Instituto Pedra and architect-coordinator of the restoration works at Vila Itororó. Luiz Fernando wished to open the building site to visitors, to make the project a "*obra sem tapumes*," and invited Benjamin to put this idea into practice. As he explained the project that they imagined, I felt it was my duty to collaborate in this process.

Based on his previous experience at the Casa do Povo, Benjamin suggested setting up a temporary cultural centre in the middle of the building site. Instead of carrying out restoration work for years behind closed doors, leading to the inauguration of a finished new cultural centre, following the vision a handful of people – the mayor, the secretary of Culture and a few architects – the Vila Itororó Open Construction Site project would be a cultural centre assembled collectively in the immediate present. This might not necessarily match the cultural centre of the future that Vila Itororó might become, as that would depend on whoever was in power when that time came. But the project would build a cultural centre in the here and now, under present circumstances.

There were two motives behind opening the site. The first was to share and publicly debate the restoration process, so that it would not be restricted to the entities responsible for heritage conservation alone. To give one example of an alteration to restoration work which was made due to public participation, there is the long staircase across

the paved area beside the Vila from the entrance on Martiniano de Carvalho Street (the same stairway I mentioned in the first part of this text). The 1970s architectural project, updated in 2006, foresaw the removal of this stairway and the construction of a supposedly smarter and more attractive stairway, which would take advantage of the slope down from Martiniano de Carvalho Street descending in a zigzag and built of bricks similar to those already in place. With this design, the patio area would supposedly gain more area. It happened that every time a former resident or visitor to the temporary cultural centre looked at the 2006 architectural model displayed in the building site office, the first thing they would ask was: “Where is the stairway?” The stairway was a key reference mark for people to orientate themselves on the model, and also a very striking visual feature of the Vila. Having frequented the Vila myself, I argued with the architects that those stairs did not take public space away from the patio area. The stairway itself *was* a public space. People sat there to rest, to talk and even to watch plays put on in the patio, like a sort of grandstand. When the sun was strong, the stairs provided shade. When it rained, people sheltered underneath the structure. Finally, as historical research into the Vila progressed, a third argument in favour of preserving the stairway was discovered: in the first decade of the Vila’s existence, Francisco de Castro, its founder and the only owner who ever lived there, would park his car in a garage on Martiniano de Carvalho Street and would enter the house through one of the walkways, at the top of the building. The tenant population would enter the Vila from below, where the river entrance was, now Maestro Cardim Street/23 de Maio Avenue. So, when this stairway was built, it represented an act of democratization of access to the Vila. These arguments were developed and discussed on site and finally led to altering the original project to retain the stairway. Furthermore, changes of this sort mean that the original architect’s drawing no longer dictates the whole production: the *canteiro* changes the design project.

The second reason for opening the building site, and to me the most potent one, does not have to do with just the buildings (which bits should be demolished, which preserved), but what they are used for, and for whom. It is the opportunity to experiment and debate the Vila’s potential future uses that is important. Or the admission that we have no idea what the future might hold, and that we must make maximum use of Vila Itororó as it is right now, in the thickness of the present. It is no longer possible to reverse the eviction of the residents, as CDHU housing policy forbids families who have received assistance from benefitting a second time (this could only change as a result of



strong political will at the top and determined struggle at grass roots level). But it is still possible to prevent Vila Itororó from becoming a heritage site devoid of collective memory, and make it a cultural centre that (unlike existing cultural centres) is truly *public* – embracing culture rooted in everyday life, a centre used by ordinary people, including the Vila's ex-residents.

To make the uses of the temporary cultural centre diverse, wide-ranging, comprehensive – surprising even – the most significant curatorial proposal for the space was to think of the warehouse⁸ on the site as a large covered square, open to spontaneous uses by the public. This is a bit like the marquee in the Ibirapuera Park and the common areas of the CCSP – Centro Cultural São Paulo. But the mere existence of an open space, especially when it was previously used as a car showroom, and is wedged between two other car dealerships, is not enough for people to start taking over the space. We needed to encourage the public to come in and use the place. We ourselves became the first users. Throughout 2015, we, the cultural activation team, used the tables at the front end of the warehouse as our office, despite the noise and the pollution from the street. This gave us the opportunity to receive anyone who entered the site, who would ask what the place was, what was going on. We would explain the history of Vila Itororó and invite them to participate in shaping the cultural centre, which remained as yet, undefined. We invited them to join in and make use of the place.

SELF-FORMATION OF PUBLIC

Together with the first users, I was responsible for writing a set of rules for managing whatever spontaneous uses arose. This might sound like a contradiction (for spontaneous actions to be regulated in some way). The rules were open to question and review, but were put in place to foment public input and activities and groups and try to safeguard co-habitation by different people doing different things, without one group or activity dominating the others:

① *Actions must take place during opening hours and in spaces designated*

8 It is important to make clear that the Vila Itororó construction site includes both the patio area and the buildings in the Vila, where the actual restoration work is taking place, as well as the warehouse building, with an entrance on Rua Pedroso 238. The warehouse, also built in the 1920s, was never a part of Vila Itororó, but was expropriated to create a fourth point of access to the Vila, which already had access from the other three streets enclosing the block it occupies. The warehouse building is located on the upper part of the land and also forms part of the construction site as it is there that the construction offices, a workshop for restoring ornaments from the main house, a joinery workshop, storeroom, changing room and workers' kitchen are located.

by the cultural activation team (it is not possible to book an area in the warehouse);

- ② *Actions cannot have commercial, advertising or party-political purposes;*
- ③ *Each individual/group must respect the other individuals/groups using the space, including the permanent workers at the site (for example, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, religious intolerance behaviour etc. are not allowed. // It is possible to carry out activities using sound equipment or a musical instrument so long as the volume does not interfere with other uses simultaneously underway);*
- ④ *Fairs, exhibitions or diverse performances will not be welcomed as spontaneous uses. Processes and rehearsals, rather than results, take priority because this is a work site where everything – including the very notion of culture – is under construction.*
- ⑤ *The collective rules can be revised and rethought by the public with the cultural activation team and new agreements can be created, based on inspiration, needs and problems that emerge from the users themselves.*

There have been many spontaneous uses so far: rehearsals by various circuses, theatre, music and dance groups; groups learning to play the accordion; benches used to rest/sleep; the kitchen used for cooking and eating; tables used for study; picnics; birthday celebrations; mother and baby groups, where babies play while mothers exchange experiences about motherhood and help each other out; birth doulas meetings; samba groups; various games; improvised football matches; skateboarding; massages; embroidery; painting; woodcut; tarot; fencing; assemblies of struggling high school students; a meeting of the MTST – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto (a housing movement); and assemblies of the former residents of Vila Itororó; among others.

Homeless people who had been living on Pedroso Street and Maestro Cardim Street for years took part in the space's regular activities and were able to walk there with their dogs, use the bathroom sinks to wash, which pointed to a need to equip Vila Itororó with public showers. They even used the bathroom for sex, which raised the issue of a need for public places of intimacy in the city. These uses by homeless people may be common at other cultural centres wherever access is granted freely, but at the Vila Itororó open site, actions that were seemingly ordinary and every-day, some even regarded as criminal, when taken seriously, have the potential to feed and transform a project such as this, expanding the notion of culture, or of what constitutes a cultural centre.

Among these spontaneous uses, there was a strong stimulus for free play – activities which aren't directed and, in the case of children, take place without mediation by an adult (who nevertheless can

stay nearby and watch). There are wooden structures in the warehouse including a slide, a swing and a climbing wall for children to play on, built during a workshop with the Constructlab design group, but there is also plenty of open space, odd corners, balls and pieces of textile. There is no particular area designated for play, only an understanding that the warehouse – whose doors stay wide open – is an extension of the street. If street games are no longer common in São Paulo, in the patio of Vila Itororó this practice thrived before 2011 and it is important not to lose it. It should be recognised and preserved as a form of intangible cultural heritage.

During visits to the patios between the houses, the public is always encouraged to imagine, debate and take sides in discussions about Vila Itororó and its heritage. One of the challenges facing the person who leads a visit is to listen actively to the ideas about the past, present and future of Vila Itororó of all those present and mediate a debate that sustains the dispute productively. To “listen actively” means listening not only to histories and positions similar to our own, but to listen to that which we do not yet know, or control, or even to those we condemn. The construction of a democratic public space implies the recognition of difference and distance and, from there, building something together.

The “Cinema sem fio” programme, conceived by the adjunct curator Fabio Zuker, is another strategy for constituting the open construction site’s public. The first film in the programme, *Esse amor que nos consome* (This love that consumes us) by Allan Ribeiro, was selected by the team because it brought together issues of housing, resistance and culture, but all the subsequent films have been chosen by the audience themselves, based on the last film they have seen and then debated collectively. The individual who suggests the film receiving the most votes is then made responsible for coming to the next screening and explaining the thread that links this film to the previous one. This ensures the continuity of both the programme and the audience (who of course choose the films they most want to see).⁹

The self-named Coletivo Riacho¹⁰ is an intergenerational neighbourhood collective bringing together children, young people,

⁹ The cine-club screenings are monthly, taking place on the first Thursday of the month, and are still going on today. So far, over twenty films have been shown and debated and I always hope that, someday, a cinephile will look through the list of films and try and identify, through critical analysis, the collective thread that was built: <vilaitororo.org.br/como-habitar-a-vila/sala/cinema-sem-fio>.

¹⁰ In a reference to the Itororó stream, the origin of the name, which today runs in a conduit under 23 de Maio Avenue.

adults and the elderly, which includes neighbours from the vicinity of Vila Itororó who were already regular visitors to the construction site, former residents of Vila Itororó, artists from different areas, teachers, students and members of cultural, educational and social assistance associations operating in the Bela Vista/Bixiga neighbourhoods among different races, genders and social strata. In 2016, the collective met every fortnight, on the first and third Saturday of each month. On the first Saturday, I would attend the meeting and on the third Saturday the meeting took place without my presence. At the beginning, the idea was for the group to decide how to make use of 30 thousand *reais* from the cultural programming budget, and to discuss the present and near future of the Vila. The group also collaborated by disseminating information about the project in the neighbourhood. Limits imposed by the Lei Rouanet (Rouanet Law, the tax incentive funding mechanism that supported the restoration) made the process of deciding how the funds could be used very difficult and frustrating (any activities had to be already listed in the pre-existing terms of the heritage education project). There were also limits imposed by the building site itself: a football championship planned to take place beside the swimming pool, where in the past a number of floodplain soccer games (*futebol de várzea* in Portuguese) had been played, could not be authorized.

The collective’s most strident initiative was the traditional Brazilian festival that takes place in June, the *feira junina* of 2016. For years, *festas juninas* were held in the Vila Itororó’s patio. Organized by the then residents and open to anyone who wanted to come, the *festas juninas* took on a special meaning during the Vila’s resistance movement, pinpointing the fact that housing and culture easily co-exist in the same space. Keeping this event going – proposed, organized and directed in part by ex-residents – was a way of sustaining their struggle. It was not a matter of chance that in November 2016, following the former residents’ input into the *feira junina* and other events at the building site, they organized an assembly in the warehouse – proposed as a spontaneous use – to debate the progress of the adverse possession legal proceedings. This was the first time that former residents organised an activity at the construction site under their own steam, without my mediation. It took almost two years of common work before they would act autonomously in the new context and this made me hopeful that they would continue to exercise their right to Vila Itororó.

While some of the activities carried out on the construction site/cultural centre can be understood as a practice of (re)construction of autonomy, the same cannot be said of the place as a building site with civil engineering underway. The site at Vila Itororó is very

different in that it is kept open, but at the same time very usual in the sense that a large building contractor is at work. All attempts at ongoing, collective and consistent training among the group of builders working at the site – for example, with regards to gender issues, or on what the Vila could one day become, or thinking and rethinking the way in which the site works – could not take place due to a lack of support from the building firm, which would have to permit these processes to take place within working hours.

The last activity that I would like to mention, and is particularly remarkable in the context of forming a “public” was the creation of a Public Clinic of Psychoanalysis, which offers free care to former residents of the Vila, and other victims of market or state violence, or anyone else who seeks out this support. The clinic was conceived as a way of repairing and not forgetting the effects of the violence that had taken place at the Vila (the forced removal of residents for the construction of a cultural centre) and also as one of the many open construction site experiments, aimed at broadening the notion of culture and what is expected of a cultural centre.

To develop this project, I worked with psychoanalysts Daniel Guimarães and Tales Ab’Sáber. Tales is no longer with us, due to methodological and political differences that emerged during the first months of the clinic’s existence. Together, the three of us defended that psychoanalysis is a right and that money is not a requisite for establishing the relationship between analyst and analysand, so we backed the idea of creating another, non-monetary way of mediating the encounters. And Tales made an important contribution, proposing a shift on Saturdays to host anyone interested in joining who was neither former resident nor activist (coming to us via social movements), without previous appointment. But our main difference, and I mention this because it has much bearing on the arguments I am putting forward in this text, is that for Tales, the clinic needed to be based on a “determinant setting” (“setting” is the technical term for the different arrangements made in psychoanalysis). This determinant setting would mean that the psychoanalysts would rotate in the shift, so that each time a patient came to the clinic she/he would be necessarily seen by a different psychoanalyst.

In light of day-to-day experience at the clinic, Daniel and I were more interested in continuity and deepening the conversations between analysand and a single analyst (to cultivate transfer) and in different arrangements that emerged in the analyst-analysed relationship, including the possibility of single sessions, and even sessions held outside working hours. The clinic is not a *service* provided by analysts,

but a *mutual construction*, open to changes that arise in response to use. Children started to use the clinic room as a place for reading and quiet games, calling it “the place of calm” and leading Daniel to say that when it comes to the Public Clinic, the “setting” is determined by the people.¹¹



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It is important for Daniel’s words not to be read in a demagogic way. “People,” here, includes the members of the Public Clinic. The different forms of the Public Clinic were born from the relationship between the group and the people who use the project. In a conversation about testimony with the Contraflê collective, in 2019, I spoke of how the Clinic’s users have tested out the practice of therapeutic groups, which became one of the hallmarks of this work. This and other texts can be read on the page <<https://naocaber.org/clinica-publica-de-psicanalise/>>. At its peak, the Public Clinic held 390 sessions per month, both *individual* and collective sessions, in the open construction site; published posters and the zine *Escuta mútua* (Mutual listening) <<https://naocaber.org/zine-escuta-mutua/>>; and mediated listening circles among women, in a Sesc (Brazilian cultural institution) unit. This is the only footnote I have updated in this 2017 text, in 2020.

Untitled (We are the public of the public interest), Graziela Kunsch, 2018

In March 2018, the São Paulo Municipal Secretariat for Culture considered closing down the Vila Itororó open construction site. In a public notice, the secretary claimed to be "evaluating the best way of using Vila Itororó, taking into consideration its historical importance for the city and the *public interest*." Photographing the different publics that use the open construction site with this banner, which says "We are the public," was a way of making the notion of 'public' less abstract, or of saying

"then you should come talk to us, as we are the public of the *public interest*." This action, along with several others who argued for the continuance of the open construction site, have kept the doors open and allowed the current project to continue.

Production of the banner: Laura Viana, Ingrid Laís and Graziela Kunsch, with the collaboration of Eliana Baroni, Luiza Viana, Maria Cordeiro Alves, Mônica Simões and Shirley de Barros
Photographs: Alexandre R. Pereira

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3. AN INHABITED CULTURAL CENTRE

Upon entering the then abandoned Fábrica de Tambores in the neighbourhood of Pompeia for the first time in 1976, what most aroused my curiosity, in view of a potential restoration to transform the site into a leisure centre, were the warehouse buildings laid out rationally according to English design plans from the early stages of European industrialization, in the mid-19th century. Yet what I found most captivating was the elegant and pioneering concrete structure. When I visited it for the second time, on a Saturday, the atmosphere had changed: no longer the elegant, solitary structure, but a joyful public, children, mothers, fathers and elderly people streamed from one pavilion to the next. Children ran, youngsters played football under trickles of rain that fell from the cracked roof tiles, giggling as they kicked the ball across pools of rainwater. Mothers prepared barbecued food and sandwiches at the entrance on Clélia street: children gathered around a puppet show close by. I thought: all of this must carry on just the same, with such joy. I returned many times, on Saturdays and Sundays, until those joyous popular scenes were clearly imprinted. Lina Bo Bardi, "O projeto arquitetônico" (1986)

I wonder if, as the restoration work progresses, one of the houses at Vila Itororó may come to accommodate the Public Clinic of Psychoanalysis, which is currently held in the warehouse building. Will work at the clinic still have to be voluntary, or will it be funded as a part of public policy?¹² Will the patio go back to being a place for free play, for football games and where local festivals such as the *feita junina* are held? Will there be public showers and spaces of privacy for street people? A movie theatre, with a programme that is created, debated, and shaped by its audience, who in turn only constitutes itself as an audience through the very process of participation? Will the Coletivo Riacho become responsible for the collective management of the Vila together with the former residents?

12 The work carried out by the Clinic's psychoanalysts is driven by political will, and the experience counts as part of their training. Whenever possible, they receive a small stipend equivalent to a monthly travel pass (the idea is that they do not have to disburse money to actually do the work, and that with this small stipend, they will be able not only to travel to and from the Vila but also travel across the city for a month.)

I do not know. The truth is, there is a strong chance that Vila Itororó will become the worst kind of cultural centre: elitist, tourist-centred, gentrified and gentrifying.¹³ Still, the democratic process we worked to put in motion at the open construction site implies the ever-present possibility of reviewing and questioning decisions taken in the recent past, and of redirecting the course of events.

At present Vila Itororó is owned by the State government (which was responsible for the expropriation in a joint action with the municipality) and was turned over to the Municipal Culture Secretariat for "cultural purposes" on a 99-year lease. In response to this situation, our team have enquired again and again, repeating the arguments formulated during the years of resistance: why did the people living at the Vila have to leave their homes so that that area could be used for "cultural purposes?" What are cultural purposes? Is transforming a home into a restaurant a cultural purpose? Doesn't inhabiting a place constitute a cultural purpose?

In 2006-09, in view of the threat of eviction then facing the Vila families, a group of architects and architecture students developed a counter project in dialogue with the residents (the Vida Associada research group and the architecture firm MoSaIco, both stemming from the FAU-Mackenzie School of Architecture and Urbanism). But this design too keeps culture and housing quite separate. Given that the Municipal Secretariat for Culture was absolutely determined to expropriate the Vila Itororó houses and adopted an unyielding stance in this regard, the counterproject proposed that all the old houses on the site would be used as parts of the cultural centre. The area where the warehouse currently stands, initially intended to be made a public square providing access to the Vila, was to be expanded by taking over the land occupied by the adjacent buildings, to construct three low-rise

13 The term "gentrification," derived from "gentry," was first used by the sociologist Ruth Glass, based on her studies of the city of London in 1964. The author used the word to designate the process of expulsion of low-income populations in particular central neighbourhoods of the city, their subsequent substitution by middle-class residents and the renovation of the housing units, which ended up fundamentally transforming both the spatial arrangements and social content of these urban spaces. Many cultural centres perform a gentrifying role, as they attract better-off audiences wherever they are established. In the districts surrounding large cultural centres, rents and the prices of other goods and services tend to rise, making the permanent residence of poor or low-income populations unviable (when this population has not yet been displaced or evicted through the plan to set up a cultural centre, as in the case of the Vila Itororó).

apartment buildings destined for social housing, with different types of residents, which would be determined through discussion with the Vila Itororó families.

The plan was to keep the original residents in the area and thereby avoid gentrification. Even the proposed square would be retained, as the blocks would be open at ground level with free circulation between the buildings. It was an intelligent, context-appropriate project, which would allow the municipal authorities to create their cultural centre at Vila Itororó, and create a square where the warehouse is today, while keeping the former residents only a few meters away from their original homes. The fact that this project was not even considered by the municipal authorities or by heritage agencies denotes that the real interest behind designating Vila Itororó a heritage conservation area, and for carrying out restoration works at the site was to drive out the low-income population to more distant, peripheral areas of the city, and replace them with middle – and upper-class people.

The only problem I can identify in the project is that housing is yet again kept separate from culture (with homes situated on the higher part of the site, and the cultural component on lower ground). Nevertheless, the architects' efforts produced a plan that can be considered viable and achievable under the circumstances. In any case, it would not be possible to accommodate all the families who had originally lived at the Vila if the refurbishment and restoration work was to meet the standards and regulations governing social housing, and, even more so, if some houses were to be taken over by the cultural centre. Seventy-one families had originally lived at the Vila, but only because some houses were subdivided into tenements or had self-built extensions called *puxadinhos* (a term that describes the widespread practice of building horizontal or vertical additions to existing buildings or housing – on the roof and into adjoining spaces). And even if living in new buildings would not be the same as living in the old houses, the patio would continue to exist as a large shared backyard, the families would inevitably circulate through and around the cultural centre, and for many, there would be genuine improvements to their accommodation.

I have outlined the Vida Associada/MoSaIco counterproject, because of its historical relevance, and as a reference for us to do a similar exercise today, in response to the current situation. The Vila's houses are empty and are being revamped. A project for a cultural centre drawn up by the municipal authorities still exists, which, nevertheless, does not encompass a programme of pre-defined uses. If we

were responsible for defining a new direction for the project, or even another counterproject, which would subvert the intentions of the original project, what would we do? We could simply refuse to do anything at all, in view of the implicit violence that underlies the cultural centre project. But we could attempt to do things differently, precisely because of the violence that took place at Vila Itororó.

INHABITING CULTURE

The project by Décio Tozzi, that forms the basis of the current restoration work at the Vila, was approved with many caveats by the institutions in charge of public heritage, as more of a preliminary study by nature than a complete project, as it was put together without all the necessary technical surveys having been carried out. Since Instituto Pedra started work and carried out the missing surveys, the project has been subject to a number of revisions. The first major revision was to conserve the residential characteristics of all the houses. Only the large main house had been listed as a heritage site at all levels, while only the façades and volumes of the other houses were protected – their interiors were to be demolished. The Instituto Pedra architects argued that the interiors should be preserved due to the value of their material aspects – patterned tile floors, painted ornamentation in the form of cladding, decorative tiles, window frames, doors, the way the spaces in the house were arranged – and for their immaterial value (preserving material aspects also preserves immaterial values). To demolish the interior of the houses would mean erasing the memory of the past use of most of the buildings as homes.

This was an intelligent move because: 1) if the plan is to turn the Vila into a cultural centre, there is no reason why this should not happen in domestic spaces (many cultural centres have been set up in former residential buildings); 2) if struggles were to ensue, with pressure from social housing movements, for example, for the Vila to be turned into social housing units, or if it is decided at the end of the 99-year lease for cultural purposes that the Vila should revert back to residential use, the domestic characteristics of the houses will have been conserved; and 3) if we manage to create a cultural centre that contemplates housing as culture, some houses could be residences while others could be destined to accommodate activities such as circus training, yoga practices, art projects, community carpentry workshops, public clinics, etc. that characterize an *inhabited cultural centre*.

If, as I stated in the second part of this text, it is well-nigh impossible for the people who used to live in the Vila to return to their former homes, as CDHU housing policy prohibits families who

have received assistance from benefitting a second time, how might they inhabit the Vila once again? How can we inhabit culture? What cultural practices comprise presence, permanence and cultivation?

Will former residents return to use Vila Itororó's swimming pool? According to the original project, this pool was to be turned into a water mirror. Thanks to the current project's revision, it will be restored as a swimming pool. It was originally São Paulo's first collective swimming pool, which then belonged to a private club, and will now be made into a public swimming pool. But who for exactly? Will former residents be able to use it? Will children and young people from day-care centres and public schools in the surrounding areas of the Vila be able to learn to swim there? Will people living on the streets have free access to the pool? Will patients attending the clinic be able to use it as part of their treatment? Will it be possible to fill the swimming pool with water from the river? Will there be filters to clean the water? Plants and fish? Who will be responsible for its maintenance? How might we learn about issues concerning the city's water resources from the way this swimming pool is managed?

Before it became part of the Éden Liberdade Club, the swimming pool had been part of the Helio-Hydrotherapy Itororó Institute, another project by Francisco de Castro in the vicinity of the Vila. According to a research by Sarah Feldman and Ana Castro using newspapers from that time, the Helio-Hydrotherapy Institute was described as "an enterprise of indisputable public benefit"¹⁴ which, situated next to the housing units, would bring together leisure, sport, contact with nature and healing: "From the swimming pool destined for swimming lessons, the Institute would also comprise steam, sulphur and scented baths, using waters with therapeutic properties, which would undergo analyses carried out by the State Clinical Analysis Laboratory. Mechanical exercise and fencing equipment, a dance hall and a garden for children were also included."¹⁵ A few months later, Castro named the project Parque Itororó (Itororó Park). However, he was not able to carry out his plans during his lifetime (he died in 1932) because the municipal authorities would not give the necessary permission to re-level Maestro Cardim street.

What will the Vila's landscape design be like? Will it follow the restoration model, which includes rows of palm trees lining the pavements and plants trees in the space where football games used to be played? Or will it take up the idea of a park, and reinstate the cultivation and farming practices of different residents over the course

14 *Folha da Manhã* newspaper, May 5th 1929.
15 Sarah Feldman and Ana Castro. *Vila Itororó: uma história em três atos*. São Paulo: Instituto Pedra, 2017.

of the twentieth century, who grew all sorts of crops all over the site?

Of everything that was planted, only a few trees remain, a mango tree and an avocado tree, the latter planted by Mr. Severino almost twenty years ago. There are also traces of São Paulo's first public agroforestry system, which persists and sprouts year after year. Vila Itororó's agroforest grew out of a long workshop in the open construction site, throughout 2015. However, early in 2016 the plants had to be removed and/or replanted in the Horta das Corujas, a vegetable garden located in another district, because of an unfortunate emergency that occurred in the renovation process of the houses. Although the agroforest no longer exists in its entirety, it lives on at the open construction site as memory, experience, and as a horizon.

I hope that, one day, different parts of the Vila are taken over by a great agroforest, with the Itororó Mirim River¹⁶ – now released from its underground conduit – flowing through it. Unlike a vegetable garden, in which vegetables are planted in rows, harvested and replanted, in an agroforest a variety of different plants are grown, jumbled up together, with different species coexisting alongside one another. Some plants require a lot of sunlight and these can shelter those that need shade; some only live for a few months (greens, salad leaves), while others live for years (fruit trees). With proper understanding of these temporal arrangements, it is possible to plan what to plant carefully to produce a year-round harvest. The agroforest could supply a communal kitchen, which both the Vila's ongoing public of inhabitants/residents and sporadic users of the cultural centre could manage and use. On the one hand, an agroforest is self-sufficient, in the sense that different species always help and protect one another; on the other, it needs constant care and attention. A handbook by Gilberto Machel – who ran the agroforest workshop at the Vila – written with Nádia Recio explains that this entails "consistently taking care of planting, keeping the soil always covered with branches and leaves, cutting and trimming plants that are about to die or are already dying, protecting them from domestic animals, weeding constantly, protecting against fire, pruning trees." With this kind of management, "in ten or fifteen years it is possible to grow a forest, which would take around eighty years to grow on its own."¹⁷

Who would be responsible for planting and cultivating an agroforest? Who will inhabit Vila Itororó in the future? Who will

16 This is the name given by the workshop group to the tributary of the Itororó river that crosses the Vila.

17 Handbook elaborated together with the Kaiowá indigenous people of the Indigenous Land of Panambizinho (Dourados, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul) and reproduced in the *Urbânia 5* magazine; available as a PDF at <<http://naocaber.org/revista-urbania-5>> (São Paulo: Editora Pressa, 2014).

comprise the various publics in this context, and with what level of engagement? To outline how our team attempted to answer these questions, I will return to a specific experience involving the stimuli for performances by the users.

Among the first spontaneous users of the open construction site was a duo of circus artists who lived next door to Vila Itororó called Trupe Baião de 2, Rachel Monteiro and Guilherme Awazu. The two of them began to train weekly, sometimes almost daily, at the site, and began attracting other circus groups to use the large warehouse building. One day, the Trupe put on a show in the warehouse. The rules of spontaneous use ban shows and spectacles, but it was inevitable that they present the work in the place where they had rehearsed it for such a long time.

On October 12th 2015, Children's Day in Brazil, we invited them to organise a circus workshop for children, for which they were paid. Thereafter, they became official circus teachers at the open construction site, giving two classes a week. When the neighbourhood collective Coletivo Riacho was formed, the pair joined the group. In 2016, they organized a square dance on stilts as part of the *feira junina* with the workshop group and, more recently, they organized another involving all the circus artists who were rehearsing in the warehouse, forming a group Coletivo Circense do Bixiga (Bixiga Circus Group), which has self-organized two large festivals at the construction site.¹⁸ Early in 2017, they invited an American artist traveling across Brazil to teach the “pernaltas” (literally, “long legs”, in reference to stilt artists) to Vila Itororó, and at the end of each class, all the participants prepared and ate lunch together in the warehouse kitchen.

The Trupe Baião de 2 duo could have simply put on a show at the temporary cultural centre and never come back, or they might have returned to perform a second show. But, instead, little by little, they started inhabiting the open construction site, cultivating a relationship with the space, with us and with Vila Itororó's immediate surroundings. As a result, we cannot help but think that one of Vila Itororó's houses should be devoted to circus activities, ideally managed by circus people themselves, and with circus people living under the same roof or in neighbouring houses. Or, at least, that they will use the collective kitchen, swim in the river-pool, etc. When festivals are

18 The festivals were organized with the involvement of the cultural activation team, especially the second one, in which producer Helena Ramos played an essential role. I insist on the use of the term ‘self-organization’ because the proposal came from the Coletivo Circense do Bixiga, who were responsible for the entire process. The circus artists included us in the process on their own initiative, and not the other way round.

held, a circus tent could be set up (or “planted,” as circus people say) in the patio.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of this story lies in the fact that it was only when the circus had already become a very strong presence at the construction site, that actress and former resident Laudi Tangará Fernandes recounted that several circus families had lived in Vila Itororó between 1940 and 1980.¹⁹ The circus artist Décio Tangará used to live in a trailer parked behind the main house, in which he travelled to put on solo shows in various cities. I cannot think of a more powerful image to describe the fusion of inhabiting/housing and culture that had already occurred at Vila Itororó.

In my last two meetings with Coletivo Riacho before leaving the project, I proposed that we should consider the formation of working groups to debate the occupation of Casa 11 (House 11), a building in the Vila made up of nine apartments and fourteen rooms, then in the final stages of restoration. This building was due for completion in the first half of 2017, but at present remains without any (clearly/formally) defined programme. All the apartments are equipped with bathrooms and small kitchens and could be used as housing.

Experimental use of Casa 11 could become a model for the other houses at Vila Itororó. We envisage, among other possibilities, working groups made up of former inhabitants and members of housing movements; refugees and immigrants – including members of the USIH: União Social dos Imigrantes Haitianos (Social Union of Haitian Immigrants), whose headquarters is in the Glicério district near Vila Itororó (USIH has already self-organized a Haitian Cultural Festival in the warehouse, and its members took part in the play *Cidade Vodu* (Voodoo City) by the theatre group Teatro de Narradores (Theatre of Narrators), which was staged for almost two months in the Vila's patio); a youth group from Casa 1, a shelter for LGBTQI+ youth thrown out of their homes by their families, situated very close to Vila Itororó; a group of seamstresses from the central area of Bixiga; the Public Clinic of Psychoanalysis collective; and the Coletivo Circense do Bixiga.

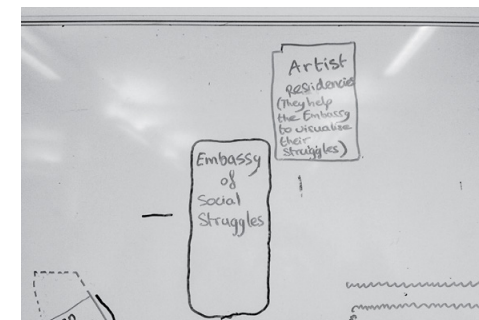
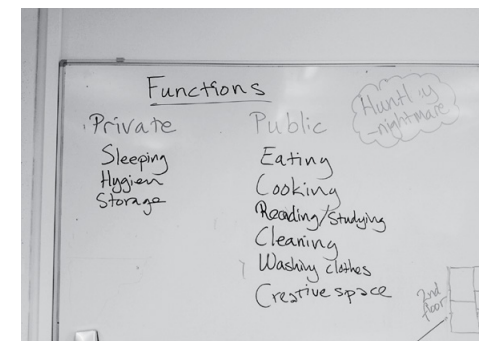
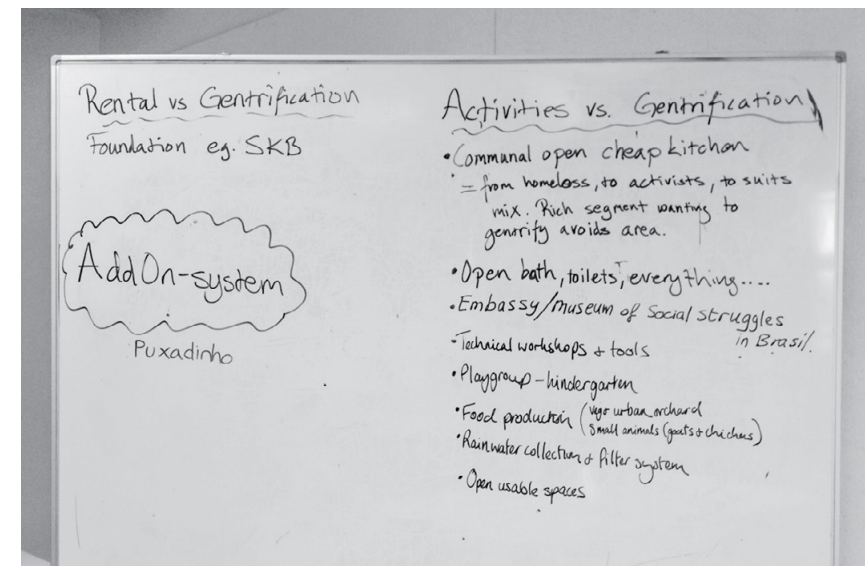
The idea would be to appoint a mediator for each group, who would be responsible for providing information and references to substantiate and fuel discussion. Regarding the public housing group, for example, we would invite architect Pedro Fiori Arantes to present and debate the possibilities and limits of social renting policies, so that the group could imagine, debate and design a concrete proposal for various ways the apartments could be used, for subsequent presentation to the municipal authorities. Each group could then suggest how residential units and modes of inhabiting could be adapted to their particular needs and interests, ensuring diversity in terms of occupation.

19 This and other audio testimonials may be heard (in Portuguese) in the section *Histórias em construção* (Stories/Histories in construction) at the Open Construction Site website – vilaitororo.org.br/historias-em-construcao/escutar-audios.

Frustration that this has not yet happened is nothing new. In 2015, we organized a number of talks, inviting guests that included Aline Fidalgo, Felipe Moreira, Lizete Rubano (who have been responsible, among others, for the project designed for Vila Itororó by Vida Associada and MoSalco) and the Municipal Secretary of Culture, Nabil Bonduki²⁰ to come up with ideas for the integration of social housing and culture at the Vila Itororó complex. We decided that inviting a competitive tender would be an inclusive and democratic way for this to transpire, but the secretary himself did not implement our proposal. The authorities claimed that any housing project would necessarily have to be carried out in partnership with the Municipal Housing Secretariat, which would be unfeasible. But from our point of view, regardless of whether a project is executed or turned down, it is essential to discuss the project in public, subject it to proper research and look at it in comparison with all alternative proposals. And it is essential for us to develop a vision, a collective construction of an imaginary to guide us in this struggle. The turn of events reflected a lack of political imagination when it comes to envisioning social housing that goes beyond the existing forms, one that encompasses the possibility of inhabiting culture.

At the end of 2015, I had the opportunity to host a workshop on “critical habitats” at a university in Stockholm, where I presented Vila Itororó as one of the case studies. Inspired by a social centre called Cyklopen, the students proposed a mezzanine that could be built using the warehouse’s wooden roofing structure, where hundreds of mattresses could be laid out; parts of the roof would be given skylights opening upwards. So, the warehouse’s spacious “attic” would serve as temporary accommodation for immigrants arriving in São Paulo, a dormitory that could be managed by immigrant and refugee organisations and be considered a cultural or artistic proposal, without the need to involve the Municipal Housing Secretariat. The same project also foresaw transforming the large main house into an “Embassy for Social and Political Struggles” rather than a museum. Public shower facilities would also be provided elsewhere on the site.

Another example I would like to mention – which involves habitation and reaches beyond existing policies – is the input by a homeless woman, Priscila, who made a locker to keep her belongings in the warehouse, open to other people in the same situation who wished to use it. Located inside a municipal cultural centre, this locker was used to safeguard her clothes, blankets and even a mattress, which the



20

I have not commented on this before, but Nabil Bonduki, who took part in the debate about the permanence of the residents at FAU-Mackenzie in 2006, and in meetings at Vila Itororó itself and a public hearing, became the Secretary of Culture responsible for implementing the cultural centre project between 2015-2016.

municipality itself would cart away if they were left outside.²¹

If we were to make it possible to play football at Vila Itororó as in the past, would it be really necessary to obtain backing from the Municipal Secretariat for Sports, Leisure and Recreation? Wouldn't it be more interesting to introduce a non-standardized football field, inspired by the way children play football in the warehouse? When I was filming one of these matches, even though there was an imagined rectangle on the floor of the warehouse, and pieces of wood or pairs of tennis shoes marking the goalposts, when the ball "crossed the line," behind two bleachers, the children ran behind them and continued playing before returning to the supposed football pitch. How would a football field inspired by this informal arrangement work outside? How would it be for adults to experiment playing football according to this kind of design?

At Sesc Fábrica da Pompeia, Lina Bo Bardi designed sports courts with ceiling heights below those prescribed by sport federations, meaning that they were inadequate for official competitions but could nevertheless foster recreational uses, or what Marcelo Ferraz would call "soft" sports. The pool was shaped like a beach, to accommodate small children and non-swimmers. Instead of a "Cultural and Sports Centre," the name initially proposed by Sesc, Lina suggested "Leisure Centre." It was not by chance that the architecture office had been installed on the construction site itself, where sports and cultural activities were already taking place before the architects started work. The role that Lina and her team played was, in her own words, to retain and broaden what was already going on there, nothing more, nothing less.²²

This type of experimentation with use-oriented programming prior to any definition of the architectural design has been repeated

21 In São Paulo, there is a sole "*bagageiro*" (name given to lockers for homeless population which literally means "luggage holder" in Portuguese.), located in the Brás district. Cf: <capital.sp.gov.br/cidadao/casa-e-moradia/albergues/centros-de-acolhida>. The youth group from the Bolsa Trabalho (Work Allowance) scheme from Fab Lab Itororó is interested in developing prototype *bagageiros* at different spots around the Bela Vista district in the city centre, in dialogue with the homeless population and with the team at Cisarte, a space for social and cultural inclusion within the Pedroso overpass, managed by the MNPR - Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua (National Movement of Homeless People), which already had plans to place a large *bagageiro* storage system there.

22 Marcelo Ferraz. "Numa velha fábrica de tambores...", in: *Cidadela da liberdade: Lina Bo Bardi e o Sesc Pompeia*. Organized by André Vainer and Marcelo Ferraz. São Paulo: Edições Sesc, 2013.

at several provisional spaces at Sesc Pinheiros, Sesc Belenzinho and currently at "Ocupação Sesc Dom Pedro II." But at the Pinheiros and Belenzinho units, which I was able to participate in, the complexes built did not reflect the vivacity of their provisional arrangements.

What if Vila Itororó could remain an open construction site forever? When Vila Itororó was officially inaugurated in 1922, it was not constricted by a definitive layout. Years before, Francisco de Castro had moved into the main house which then consisted of a basement and first floor. He built another two floors while living on site. He continued to live at Vila Itororó while his palatial, yet not so large, home and the other houses for letting were under construction. As the city grew, people were evicted or removed from old dilapidated tenements and more and more people looked for places to live. The small houses, that formerly housed one family, with a basement and a first floor, became houses for two families, one on the low-ceilinged ground floor, and another on the first floor. In recent decades, some houses were subdivided into tenements, and a number of *puxadinhos* added. As a housing area, the Vila has always been a place of permanent residence, but also a place in constant transformation.

Every time we were asked when the cultural centre would be ready, we gave three answers. The first, the usual one: providing regular funding continues, restoration will be completed by 2018. The second answer was that it is ready now: it is already functioning as a cultural centre. The third, that it will never be ready: if this cultural centre continues along the lines now established at the open construction site, defined by the uses set in motion by the users, it will remain permanently open to revision and transformation.

Unfortunately, when the Municipal Secretariat for Culture added Vila Itororó to the list of official cultural centres in the city of São Paulo, its team named the complex "Polo Cultural e Criativo Municipal Vila Itororó"²³ (Vila Itororó Municipal Cultural and Creative Centre). This name in no way reflects the practices and debates that developed at the open construction site. It would have been more appropriate to apply terms related to an "inhabited cultural centre," "park," "agro-forest," "club," or even "clinic," or "place of reparation" or carrying

23 Diário oficial da cidade de São Paulo, decree number 57528, December 12th 2016. The name had already appeared a month earlier in a public call for tender "Experimento Vila Itororó" (Vila Itororó Experiment), issued so that another non-profit association would take over the cultural activities at the open construction site, instead of Instituto Pedra, which would only be responsible for restoration.

out a listening exercise and choose a name democratically. Or simply stick to “Vila Itororó,” which has been its name ever since its creation. However, I would propose keeping the name *Vila Itororó Canteiro Aberto* (Vila Itororó Open Construction Site), for its sense of remaining forever unfinished and open.

I dedicate this text to the memory of Lourdes Moraes (1935-2016), who lived at Vila Itororó for over forty years, and also to the memory of Dênis Rodrigo de Almeida Bispo (1979-2016) and Priscila (Regan Chris Moschin, 1976-2017), who have left us because of the lack of loving care for the homeless. I hope Dona Lourdes’ great-grandson, Kauã, dearest one, may fulfil his dream of living in Vila Itororó once again. During my farewell, I was filming Casa 11, in a static long take, while Kauã and his brothers walked around the alley that led to Monsenhor Passaláqua street. Suddenly, Kauã entered the frame and blurted out: “I wanted to stay here.” “To stay here in what way, Kauã?” “To stay, stay, stay...”

Still from video documentation made at the end of an assembly, self-organized by former residents of Vila Itororó, held in the open construction site warehouse in November 2016. Almost 70 former residents were present at the meeting to discuss how the adverse possession proceedings were progressing. Between March 2015 and November 2016, many of the activities developed at the open construction site actively involved the former residents,

including the neighbourhood collective mentioned above and the *festas juninas*. Yet, this was the first time that they self-organized an activity by themselves, without my mediation. I only became aware that the assembly was to take place when they asked me if I would video record it. It had taken almost two years working together before they started using the open construction site autonomously.



Pikler-Lóczy Institute, Budapest, October 1969



February 1971
Photos: Marian Reismann. © Magyarországi Pikler-Lóczy Társaság



From doing together to doing on one's own: the necessary and indispensable contact between mother* and baby



*In order to provide a healthy development, the new-born needs to develop an intimate relationship with at least one primary provider. The mother is normally this main bonding figure for the child, but this role can be played by another adult who takes on *mothering*. In the present text, I use the mother as this primordial adult.

Carmen Orofino

The baby, absorbed in its hands, nested in the cot, senses the arrival of the mother. The mother comes close, observes and seeks the infant's gaze, touching and speaking softly. She says what they are going to do together. She invites, waits for the returning gaze, deciphers the answer and takes the baby in her arms, assuring it with the expression in her eyes and the firmness of a welcoming bosom. Together they go to the baby changing dresser.

There is a separation at birth. Bodies are split apart but still long for proximity. The baby and mother continue to be fused emotionally, in a very deep connection. The child has a fundamental need of this mother-other, of close contact with the adult who cares for it and provides for it. The encounter is not simple, but slow, gradual, seeking to satiate a mutual need for understanding. The baby needs to make itself understood while she faces the challenge of seeking to understand it. All its emotions are imprinted on this tiny being. Both mother and baby make them known and understood.

It is essential and decisive that this encounter takes place, that it really happens. That the mother is receptive to her baby's signals and is able to see, observe, interpret, and respond. In short, to engage. To get seriously involved, never denying presence, never denying communication.

But... can we communicate with our babies? Real communication? A conversation? The idea of talking to a baby, explaining something and even asking about the baby's preferences may sound strange. Is this really important?

When the mother talks to the baby aloud or through signs, touching and looking, she opens a path towards understanding, showing that the child is understood, and so helping the baby to understand itself. All children, in the first months of their lives, need this understanding and safety: knowing what is going to happen, knowing what is in store for them, in order to express themselves and take the time to understand questions and answers. And they do respond! Questions and answers start out as one of their actions in the world, the first gestures to organise their understanding of themselves and everything around them. In any case, we adults also like to know what is going to happen, what our options are; we find it easier to handle situations when we know what they are about.

This environment created between mother and baby, replete with feelings, gives assurance and strength to the child who

has just arrived in the world. Very early on, it realises that there is someone there, someone who ensures that its needs are met, someone it can rely on. It is in this affectionate encounter that the child realises that everything is going well, that its world is stable and that it can be sure of this. It is within this nest of proximity and intimacy that the baby finds strength and encouragement, and learns that it has somewhere to go when it needs comforting. It is in this relationship that the baby starts to perceive itself as similar to and different from the mother, a discovery that will prove essential to perceiving itself and its existence in the world.

Mother and offspring approach the baby changing dresser. She tells her baby what is going to happen, places it carefully on the table top and props up its head. She remarks that it seems to be liking it, as she looks into its eyes and places her hand over its body. She waits, makes sure that the baby is at ease on this different surface, smiles, tells it what she is going to do. The child looks up first. It already knows, for the mother always does this in the same way. Between one side and the other, one leg and the other, the mother asks permission and waits for consent. A gaze or a smile says yes. She offers two sets of clothing for choice, and it looks to the polka dot blouse. The mother helps and subtly the baby offers one hand, then the other. She smiles and says thank you.

When a mother takes care of her child, this constitutes an invitation to do things together. Something of real interest to the child, a moment of shared pleasure. This has a value that is not to be found in what we call stimulation. For the baby, the world is sufficiently rich in novelties; each small experience is significant. These discoveries offer the child the chance to get to know the world close up, according to its interests.

In this time spent together, when mother and child are partners in the small daily moments when she feeds, bathes or dresses her baby and involves the infant in these activities, the encounter is a tangible reality, one that deepens. The mother, in her attentive and sensitive relationship, gives the child the answers it needs and protection when it needs to be protected. The child, in its turn, perceives this presence through the voice, warmth, and smell of the mother... Actions flow together, led by touch and eye contact, complemented by speech. It is the mother's gaze that will prove indispensable to the future possibility of the child looking at itself.

The mother attaches words to what she is doing, to each detail. She carefully observes each expression in the child's gestures, who, invited to undergo these moments of essential care, increasingly integrates all sensations, treading a path of discovery closely accompanied by this other/mother, who gazes at and assures the baby. Such moments will be pleasurable for the child, not only because of what they represent, but above all for the pleasure of being with its mother. These sensations remain in the child's bodily and emotional memory, and it will retain them during the times it is separated from the mother.

Mother and child have a mutual understanding, one that improves. As it offers its hand, its foot, the infant understands that this is a recurrent ritual and that it can take part in this game, in this action that is always repeated in the same way. By being respected and given time to understand what is happening, the baby can participate in its own way, interacting, collaborating, responding, becoming active. This encounter is foreseeable, it is easy, with no surprises or hurry. It is therefore, through this encounter and all its small details that the child perceives its own body and understands that it can interact through it. As the baby becomes someone who participates, who interacts, it perceives itself as an interesting being who can do interesting things.

The mother once again invites. You know this, you already know this place. Now you are clean, warm. You will play. This is the best place; I know you like it here. Your favourite toys are here. There are others too that I have chosen thinking of you. They are a little further away. How happy you are! Yes, you can play. I will stay here, very close by.

The small child needs safety. In order to develop in tranquillity, curiosity and the desire for knowing, it needs to feel secure and, even when on its own, to feel protected by its parents' affection. It is by having felt safe in the presence of the mother as she changes nappies or clothes, feeds the baby or gives care in some other way, that it will feel confident to go a little further from the adults who take care of it. The child needs all these positive experiences in order to integrate this feeling of security: the conviction that its mother will be there when it needs her, but also that it has resources to take care of itself at other moments. It is important for the mother to step back little by little, so that the child can gradually move on to another



type of dependency, relative rather than total. She needs to step back so that the child discovers its own competences, its own resources.

It is during this precious time that the baby perceives and enjoys the realisation that it can grasp its own hand, bring it to the mouth, hold a foot, grasp small objects, experiment with the weight of its body on the ground, turn, turn back again... The mother's presence is necessary, but not for everything. It becomes a great pleasure for the child, who realises that it is "with itself" beside its mother.¹

This is a trusting relationship: the mother believes that the child has its own resources and the baby, in turn, is sure that it can count on her presence if needed. Sometimes a glance suffices. A glance from the other that is contained but that brings calm, so that the child may invest in free activity. The eye contact that gives assurance, so that it can carry on playing.

The alternation of such moments of spontaneous activity with other moments of engagement with the mother gives the child a feeling of potency. This is why it is so important that the child is familiar with the routines established by its adult, and that its daily journey is organised on principles of stability.

By experiencing the capacity of being with itself for brief periods, when it concentrates on an activity that it undertakes, the child shows its parents that they do not have to 'busy themselves with the baby' all the time. It 'knows' they are there. For brief periods, which may be longer or shorter according to the time of day, the infant is taken up with its own purposes and curiosity, attentive to everything it experiences through the body.

And the mother? She looks on, trusting in her child's development. As the infant realises its own competence in whatever it wishes to undertake, the child increasingly feels greater pleasure in taking care of itself, backed by the mother's care. Mindful of her presence.

The child's capacity to be apart from the mother does not constitute a distancing, but, on the contrary, a 'being together,' even when physically distant. Having established a history of cooperation and presence together with its adult, the child becomes capable of internalising these special moments. The child experiences the possibility of distancing itself without disquiet, trusting in the certainty

¹ D. Winnicott distinguishes the importance, for the child, of the 'capacity for being on its own,' which is totally different from 'feeling alone.'

of meeting again. During such moments of separation, the child's investigative and creative capacity is strengthened because it carries the adult within.

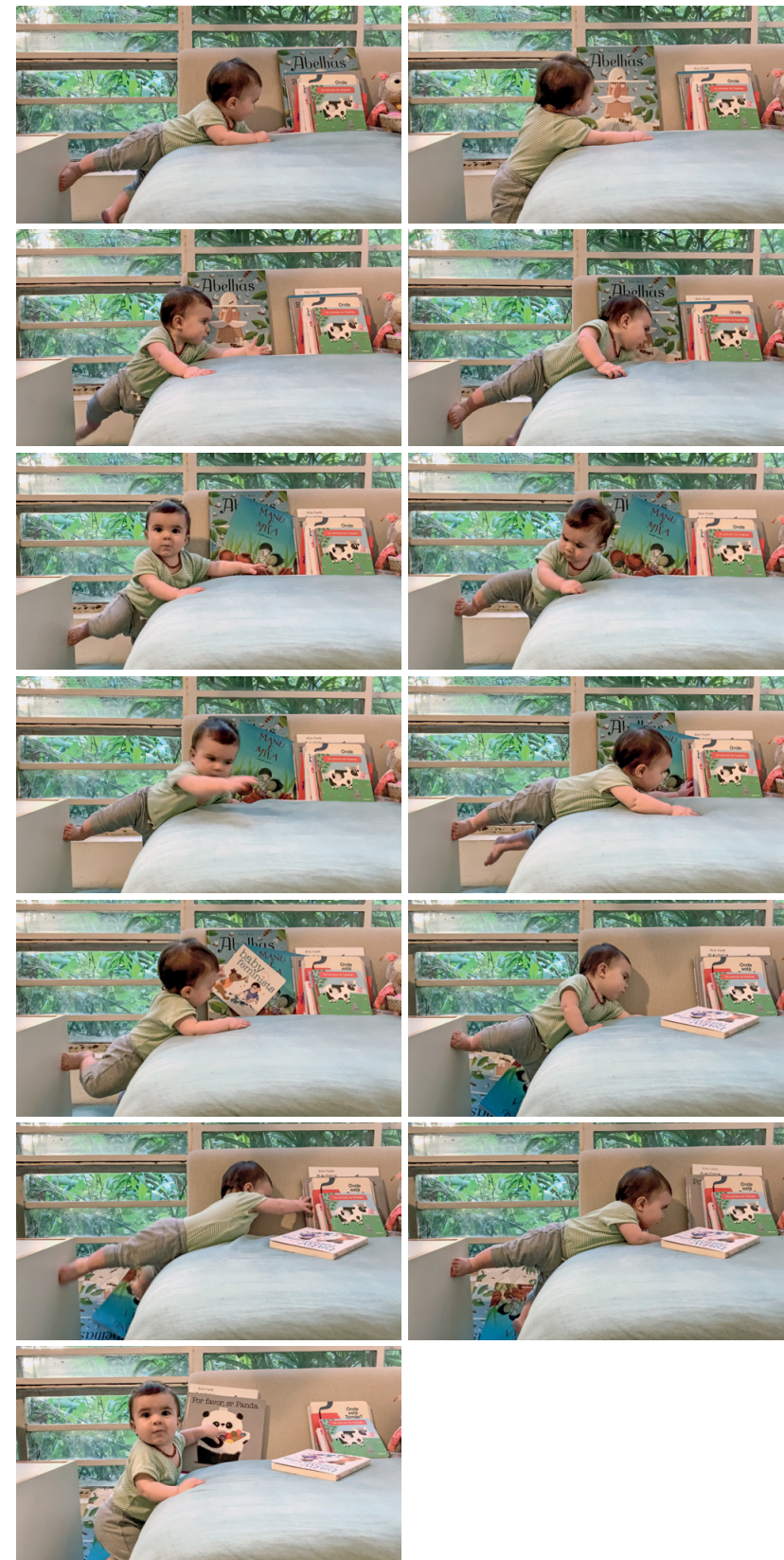
So, the child's confidence develops through the specific, trusting relationship with this other person, who is respectful of its entire being, its individual rhythms, its preferences and capacities. This space between the mother and the child, which they have built together, is increasingly filled with good memories, stories lived together, and it is this that allows the child to be apart from the mother and in autonomy.

A toy slips under the furniture, and the child stretches out to reach it. The baby realises this will not be easy. It stops, observes its own gesture and tries again, using new strategies. Its entire body is placed in a state of attention. For a moment the baby steps back and observes, concentrating on its objective. It peeks, stretches, moves the body closer and finally reaches the toy. At this moment, it looks towards the adult. The mother looks on, smiles. I saw you, she says with her eyes. I am proud of you. I am happy because you are happy.

Children experience the world in full through the body and this is why it is important for them to enjoy this right: the right to move freely, to perceive themselves as active all the time. Freedom of physical movement is the precursor of freedom of psychic movement, freedom of thought, freedom of choice. It is only through freedom of movement that we reach the possibility of autonomous activity.

Emmi Pikler, a Hungarian paediatrician who has studied children's development in depth during their first years, has put forward an original and revolutionary way of looking at the tiny beings, from the moment of birth.

One of her main discoveries is linked to the huge potential for acquiring knowledge that the child achieves through spontaneous activity. And the great interest that children have in their own activity, providing adults resist the temptation to interrupt and interfere in everything the child does. Or to decide what their child needs to do. The child who is secure in its relationship with the adult is active by itself, feels pleasure in its activities and marvels at each discovery. The mother invests a lot in enabling her child's initiatives, but receives a great deal of pleasure. Recognising the natural capabilities of children moved Pikler to dedicate her career to their study.



For Emmi Pikler, the baby, by means of autonomous postural development,² is able to go through all the learning phases of its motor development by itself and, by means of long and patient study, concentrate its attention and will on whatever activity it undertakes. It learns not only to move in different ways, more or less efficiently, but also observes, experiments, tests and overcomes obstacles and challenges, through active, exploratory, curiosity driven, living activities... The child has, therefore, an inborn capacity, and little by little acquires the autonomy required to carry out small self-regulating and self-inducing choices. An active feature of infancy that despite the baby's immaturity, providing it is respected and accommodated, will manifest very early in the baby's life. It is necessary that there is trust in everything that nature brings forth in the life and development of a small child.

Children have interests from early on. They have projects, curiosity, which often evade the logic of adults. And they are very capable of approaching the things that interest them, providing they are safe and their cognitive processes are recognised and respected. This does not mean abandoning children as they play.

The feelings that connect the baby to its mother play an important role during the process of achieving autonomy. When the child experiences moments of complete safety during its routines, it feels provided for and when it starts to play without the direct intervention of adults, the baby can integrate everything it has lived during the times mother and child were together. It can turn with interest and joy towards the outside world as it interacts with space and objects, for the moments of safety it has lived with the adult remain within.

Attentive observation gives the mother valuable clues as to when she need not interfere and what the baby is capable of doing and discovering by itself. As she observes how the child makes choices, how it analyses and finds solutions, how it is able to persevere and act with originality, she will become aware of the infant's great investigative and creative potential. As she offers this quality of

2 Emmi Pikler (1902-1984), grounded in her studies on observations of babies and young children, elaborated and confirmed the hypothesis that babies in good physical and psychic health, who live in a warm relationship, can by themselves make the transition from dorsal decubitus to walking without any help or teaching, if left free in their movements in a space secured by an adult. The autonomous postural development implies that adults do not anticipate the babies' position, such as sitting up a baby before it has achieved, with autonomy, the act of sitting up.

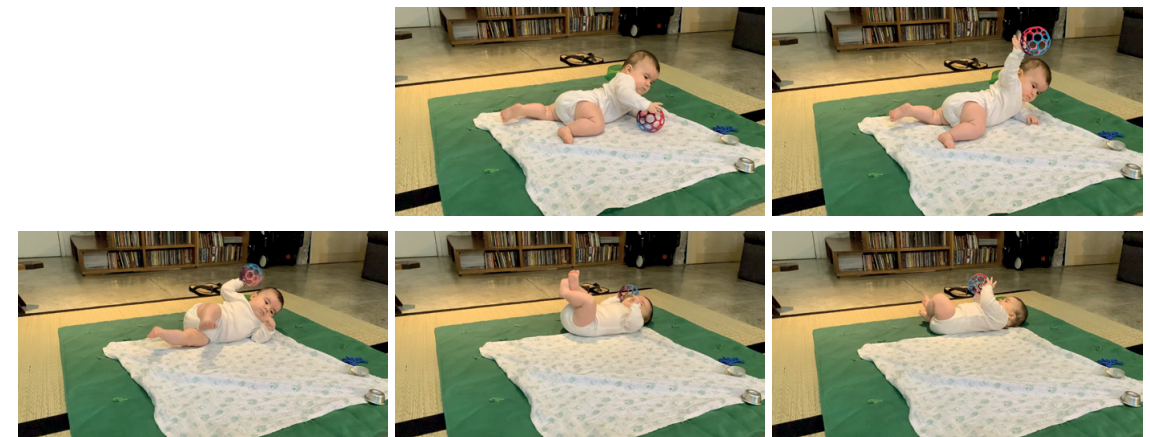
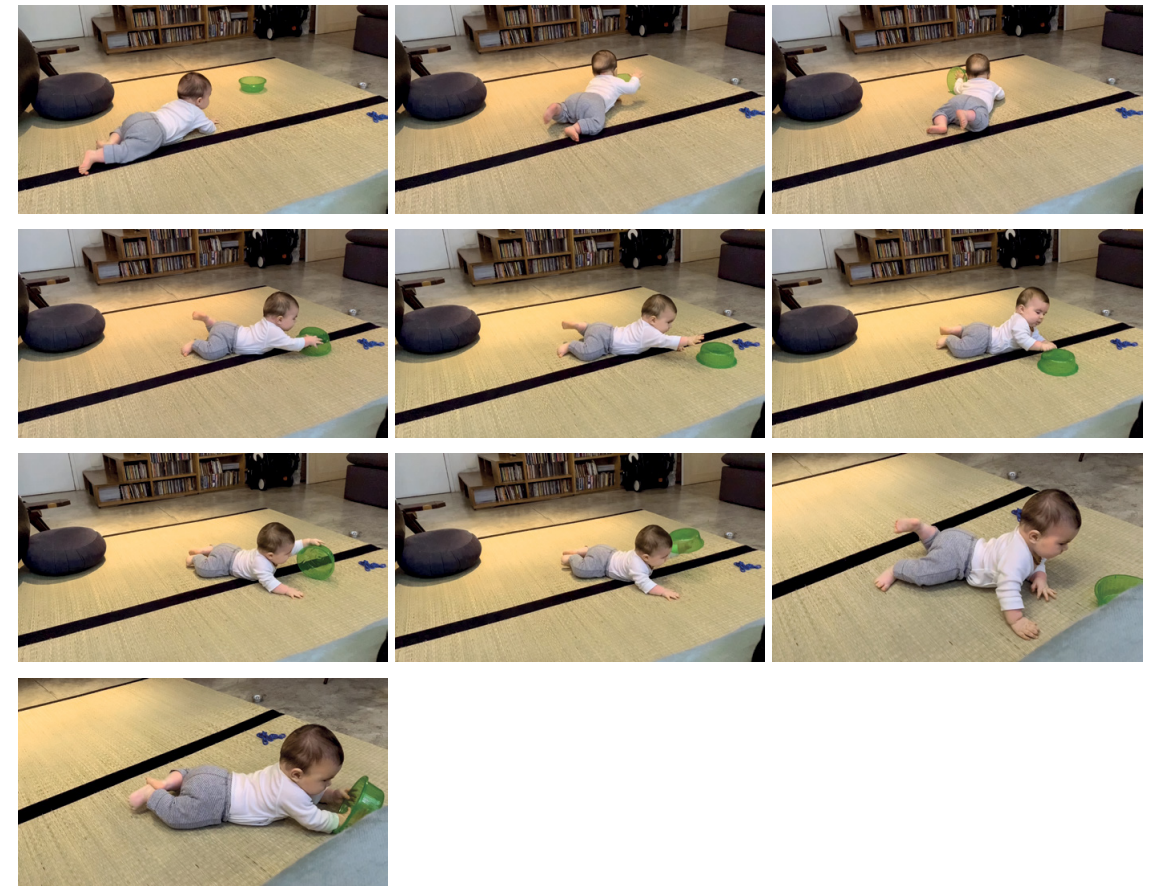
attention to her child, the mother encourages, strengthens and feeds the relationship between them.

It is essential for the child to make discoveries by itself. The mother supervises without leading, allowing exploration and exercise of the competences required, so that the child develops an increasingly autonomous attitude. As she organises the child's environment, the mother is mindful of the child's acquired capacities, and offers that which interests the baby and which stimulates the will to act, observing its evolution and preferences with a positive attitude, giving the child what it needs and allowing it to make choices autonomously about what is of interest. The child will undertake a succession of experiments as it discovers its own body in space. Initially, it will discover randomly and then it will practice what it has discovered over and over again, realising that it can act in increasingly efficient ways. With each achievement, the baby looks to the adult to share this feeling. And it is strengthened by recognising the interest the adult has both in the child and what sparks its interest. The mother helps the baby to become who it is.

Within this environment of affective security, we are invited to let children evolve according to their own capacities and desires, so that they can act in the freest manner possible. If we are able to distinguish, to observe with due silence and not intervene, we will have the pleasure of marvelling at what the child marvels at.











BABIES' DISCOVERY OF SOUND THROUGH AUTONOMOUS ACTIVITY

I have been studying the movement of small children for a long time. Eventually I focused my attention on the relationship between body and music, on the basis of my experience with children both as an educator and as a mother. I encountered Emmi Pikler's ideas at a very special time, and my vision of the baby's body suddenly sharpened, as if a very bright light illuminated everything I already knew. In the search to find more interesting and potent ways of working with babies and small children, I started to look into how babies discover sound. How might the free motor skill concepts expounded by Pikler contribute to this research? This led to the work *Music and Movement*, based on encounter and discovery. Encounters between mothers/fathers and children, encounters between children, their bodies and sound.

Once a week we meet – teacher, adult carers and babies – and sing songs together. We sit the adults in a circle while the babies are free to roam the enclosure created. I play the guitar or another instrument, mothers and fathers make the gestures characteristic of the particular song and the babies move freely.

A space is prepared on the floor, with cushions placed in a circle against the walls for the adults. So, a space is allotted to the adults. A space in the room, and a fixed time span during which the adults keep an eye on their children. Different materials are placed in the centre of the space chosen for their potential to instigate the babies' exploration of fine and gross motor skills. We prefer to select



objects and toys that have no specific purpose and that do not suggest a single approach to exploration, but ones that allow the child to investigate and invent a way of using them. They can be made from diverse materials: fabric, silicon, wood, hard or soft plastic, metal, with bristles or other textures, different scales and colours. The educators organise this space using elements that are in accordance with the children's level of development, so that they offer possibilities for exploration and discovery. For instance, objects that roll should be offered only to babies who are already able to crawl or walk, making it possible to extend their research/play if and when the object rolls out of reach.

The sound objects given to the little ones must be carefully assessed. Too complex an object brings in a multiplicity of stimuli that can confound and stress the child. It is important that the sound is produced exclusively as a direct cause of the baby's motor action, without the adult holding its hands to clap or to shake a maraca. The baby can discover sounds by touching objects with its fingers, nails, hands or feet, can discover sounds by banging one object against another, or even touching its own body, or touching the ground with different parts of its body. It is important that the baby enjoys the opportunity to make discoveries by itself and that during these first experiences with objects, it can gain awareness that its own action is the origin of what happens with that object. It is expected that the small child will act on the object of its own volition, without reducing the corporal and sound experience to one of surprise at sounds produced involuntarily (such as the sound of a dog barking by pressing a button). There is a long path to be followed before the baby understands the relationship between a sound and the movement that produces it.

The more diverse the child's experiences, the greater the possibilities for learning. The adults are expected to maintain an attentive and patient gaze towards the baby, its needs and interests, with no hurry, respecting its achievements, encouraging it to be active, and enjoying each moment. For the child, it is easier to progressively understand the relationship between cause and effect when its attention is not constantly demanded. Time, the number of toys available, the size of the space also facilitate this concentration. Respected for its singularity and autonomy, the child will experiment with actions such as holding, shaking, hitting, turning, rubbing and will enjoy the chance to perceive the sound effects of its own motor actions,

repeating them many times as it tries to integrate them, understand them and improve them. Later, these experiences will remain in the child's bodily memory, and contribute to its integral development. The songs sung by the adults also collaborate in building a safe and familiar environment. We sing the same songs over and over again and it is recommended that the carers also sing at home with the child. The babies seem to be enveloped in a feeling of comfort and safety when they see how its reference adult interprets the song.

In the *Music and Movement* encounters, the adults enjoy the opportunity to share a special moment with the baby in a temporary community, a group of other carers and babies. It is a time for sharing experiences, a time of mutual welcome. It is also a chance to talk about corporal development and organisation and focus on this process. The approach suggested to adults, mainly through the educator acting as a model, is that they should stay beside the child, supporting it with their presence. So that it can carry out specific experiments within its competences and capacities, without placing the baby in a situation that it has not reached by itself. Avoiding guiding gestures, or hand-holding while the baby performs a movement, or encouraging it to play this or that instrument. If the baby wants to, as the protagonist of the experience, little by little and in its own way, it will come to sing along and join in with the adults with gestures, dances and expressions.



Notes about what I have learned being a children's teacher

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Paulo Fochi

The reflection I want to share with these 36 notes consists of a series of ideas arising from what I have learned in my professional experience as a teacher, researcher and educator. The notes speak of children, curiosity, knowledge, the role of the adult and of pedagogical documentation. They are ideas built from a polyphony of voices, involving those authors who inspire me, professional colleagues with whom I maintain dialogue or with whom I have worked, and the children themselves, who have been teaching me for a long time.

Each note features a central argument and a mesh of relations with the other notes. They can be read individually, as small prompts for reflection, or as a sequence, so as to follow the way I have developed my thinking. They can also be read as individual itineraries:

Child itinerary: →3; →2; →4; →5; →6; →7; →8; →9; →11; →12; →13; →14; →15; →16; →17; →21; →22; →23; →24; →32; →36

Curiosity itinerary: →2; →3; →8; →4; →5; →6; →7; →9; →10; →12; →11; →13; →14; →15; →21; →22; →23; →33; →32; →30; →24; →36

Knowledge itinerary: →1; →2; →13; →15; →22; →23; →24; →3; →4; →6; →7; →8; →9; →10; →11; →12; →14; →16; →17; →21; →18; →19; →20; →25; →26; →27; →28; →29; →30; →31; →32; →33; →34; →35; →36

The role of the adult itinerary: →18; →19; →20; →21; →22; →23; →24; →25; →26; →27; →30; →15; →9; →10; →11; →12; →16; →28; →29; →31; →32; →33; →34; →35; →36

Pedagogical documentation itinerary: →22; →18; →19; →20; →21; →22; →1; →2; →3; →4; →8; →30; →23; →24; →25; →9; →10; →11; →12; →13; →14; →15; →16; →17; →26; →27; →28; →29; →31; →30; →33; →34; →35; →36

I consider all of these concepts (child, curiosity, knowledge, role of the adult and pedagogical documentation) to be structuring, and should be considered within the context of a school that is committed to children and effectively embraces children's subjectivity. This is why I chose to write about them.

What is common to all the itineraries is that they all end with an affirmation of inconclusiveness, which is proper to human beings and to the nature of knowledge, and stresses the circularity and continuity involved in the learning experience.

- 1 Knowledge is not static, neither is it ready and finished. To take on the complexity and unfinishedness of knowledge and the processes of knowledge is a fundamental starting point for changing power relations and the role of school in children's lives.
- 2 Curiosity is the first condition for knowledge building.
- 3 Children are curious and constantly make efforts to participate in culture and give it meaning.
- 4 The child arrives in the world open and longing to learn. The child's curiosity is the drive that structures enquiry about the world. Because it has this curiosity, the child constantly strives to understand and build meaning from its experience.
- 5 Children carry novelty within and as they arrive in the world, they bring new life. The adults' ethical challenge is knowing just how to present the world to children and to present them to the world, making sure that the novelty they carry within finds space to establish a dialogue with and to transform tradition.
- 6 Play is a language to the child. It is also an embryonic laboratory of citizenship, of cultural learning, of the legitimation of children's curiosity and of the activation of infantile culture. It does not serve any end other than the most exuberant possibilities, which are for the child to relate to the world and to itself.
- 7 As the child plays, it learns to recognise ways of responding to the problems that playful situations pose, and this generates great self-confidence in the child. The child learns to be attentive and present in its reality so as to seek solutions that may respond to its dilemmas.
- 8 The novelty children carry within is expressed through the diverse forms they deploy when playing, exploring and imagining. And it is

precisely because children do so that they manage to imagine new possibilities for the world.

- 9 Children need someone to create contexts for their play to take place and, even more, to protect them in their non-conventionality regarding modes of thinking and doing, so that they experiment and imagine new possibilities.
- 10 The contexts for children to play and investigate the world have to be open and feature a variety of materialities that widen possibilities for experimentation and create answers to the problems they create and perceive.
- 11 If children feel confident while acting in the contexts created for them, they will understand that they are capable of knowing and learning.
- 12 It is in the relationship between the external conditions adults create for children and their own internal conditions (curiosity) that children learn and build meanings for themselves and for the world.
- 13 Where curiosity is legitimated, the habit of questioning is also instilled; there is no hurry to conclude anything but, instead, there is a longing for knowing.
- 14 For the question to be legitimated, this learning context must provide the possibility for children to explore, imagine, try, do, do again, form conjectures, create hypotheses and elaborate explanations of phenomena.
- 15 The question is a way of establishing a dialogue with uncertainty and of driving thinking forward. It is fundamental to both children and adults.
- 16 Children are constantly asking themselves questions and adults need not place themselves in the role of answering them but instead place themselves in the role of making sure that the questions are kept alive and increasingly far-reaching.
- 17 Grounded in their own questions, children create theories to give meaning to their experience of the world.

- 18 The adult has to learn to listen to children. To do so is also to embrace the internal world of children, their ways of doing, thinking and saying.
- 19 Listening is a condition to be in relation with children. Listening is not being in a hurry to conclude.
- 20 When the adult listens to children and embraces their internal world, he or she discovers new possibilities for relating to them.
- 21 The repositioning of the adult and the child in the educational relationship also transforms the way in which knowledge is understood.
- 22 The good school for children is one interested more in building their overall well-being than in instruction, where attention is directed towards learning much more than towards teaching.
- 23 Learning is a constant process of construction, reconstruction, dialogue and relation.
- 24 The way children learn must be observed, thought about and narrated.
- 25 The way children's learning is observed must impact on the way adults build their relationships with them.
- 26 Pedagogical documentation is an excellent strategy for repositioning both adults and children within the educational relationship, for it involves a way of seeing, of reflecting, of doing, of thinking and of narrating both pedagogical routine and children's and adults' learning.
- 27 There are two coexisting processes involved in the Pedagogical Documentation strategy: one is related to the way the teacher plans, organises and creates possibilities for learning and the other is related to the way it renders children's learning and the pedagogical routine visible.
- 28 Pedagogical Documentation is also a strategy for education, research, and for supporting given praxeological knowledge. It connects, therefore, the contemporaneity that lies between the world of practice and the world of meaning-building; it does not evade the strong interpretative demand that is built from referential landmarks.

- 29 Grounded in a practice supported by Pedagogical Documentation, narrating children's learning is an important way of elucidating the manner in which they learn and of giving visibility to the complexity of boys' and girls' thinking.
- 30 The adult has to be interested in the ways the child learns and what it has to say and do. This interest must be genuine and open to the child's world.
- 31 When an adult narrates a child's learning itinerary, he or she also institutes landmarks to his/her own history, since narrative is a form of our and the other's subjectification.
- 32 As the adult narrates children's doings, he or she needs to render visible the complexity of their doing and saying. The adult needs to reveal the children's desires, interests and the ways children act.
- 33 The communications built by adults about children's learning and the pedagogical routine should recuperate the epistemic subject that lies within children and adults.
- 34 The communications built by adults about children's learning and the pedagogical routine must be taken as interpretations and not as reflections of reality. The child, as object of knowledge, is unreachable and that forces us to be rigorous in the construction of comprehension circles grounded in images, instances of production, children's dialogues and the voices of the adults who observe the children and build narratives about them.
- 35 Narratives that adults produce about children must be anchored in a humanitarian ethics. One needs to be attentive to words and images chosen to express what we feel, think, narrate and visualise about boys and girls.
- 36 Human being's inconclusiveness is an incredible possibility for creation and re-creation. We never conclude or close a learning experience; we only open the windows wider in order to understand the complexity of the world and of humanity.

The
moon
follows
me
because
it
likes
me

Ateliê Carambola Escola de Educação Infantil (*Atelier* Carambola Children's Education School) was set up in January 2014, the idea and dream of Josiane Pareja, also managed by herself, a pedagogue who has studied childhood for over 30 years. The Ateliê Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Pedagógica (*Atelier* Centre for Research and Pedagogical Documentation) came into being alongside the school. The joint launch of both institutions aimed to implement theory and practice simultaneously. Based on the ideas behind Reggio Emilia's (Italy) childhood schools and on paediatrician Emmi Pikler's (Hungary) approach to education, the school has two units, one geared towards children aged 0 to 3 years of age, and the other towards children aged 3 to 6 years. The research centre offers semestral courses on Malaguzzian pedagogical documentation, the role of the *atelierista* (studio worker) in the childhood school, the pedagogy of details (Piklerian inspirations) and play, among other topics. Over five thousand people have undergone training there.

Group II - 2018
Children Alice, 3y5m; Antônio, 3y5m; Beatriz, 4y1m; Filippo, 4y1m; Henrique, 3y4m; Joaquim, 3y10m; Julia, 3y7m; Leila, 4y; Malu, 3y6m; Nina, 3y9m
Educators Vitor Janei; Joyce V. B. Ferreira; Renata Batista
Atelierista Amanda Del Corso
Art direction Larissa Meneghini
Direction Josiane Pareja

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Ateliê Carambola¹⁵⁷ Escola de Educação Infantil and Ateliê Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Pedagógica

How is a project born?

At the start of every year our attention turns to the children's process of adaptation. At the same time, we focus on the scraps of information we gather from the games, speech, gestures and movements that take place every day, and on what is developing among and between the children; this grows into something material, concrete, becoming a project.

My own journey as a teacher at the *Ateliê Carambola* school, however, did not start at the beginning but in the middle of the school year. I joined the school in the second term in 2018 to take on Group 2, children averaging three years of age. They had been together since the beginning of the year, developing and producing research into light and shade. The *atelieristas* Amanda and Larissa had noticed that there was a potent dynamic at work in this group: narrative. The children loved to listen and create, interpret and reinvent stories, becoming the characters in each story.

I arrived in the middle of all that. I thought to myself: "Now what should I do? What path should I follow?" Josiane Pareja, the school's director, suggested I forget everything and concentrate on bonding with the children. Without this bond, nothing would happen. One must be open to all encounters, must let oneself be drawn in or taken over, open to the children's feelings, utterances, glances, gestures and signals.

Receptive eyes and ears are not something that one achieves or arrives at. This is not the finishing line but a point of departure. It is an exercise, something that demands constant care, attention and reflection. It is like creating a new body, a new sensibility, a different way of perceiving. It is the (re)invention of the teaching body.

The task is not easy, but nor is it impossible. And it is only when the body's sensibilities are fully attuned that one is able

to capture the traces of something that captivates us and takes us far away to never-before-imagined places, to other galaxies. This is what happened one cold, grey Autumn afternoon when I came back from lunch.

Children create their own theories. They are great researchers of the world, of nature and the universe. They inundate us with questions about how everything works, the reasons for this being like that and not some other way, how did this come about, where is that going... Their theories are invented less by the use of reason than by imagination. It does not much matter whether their speculations are true or false, whether they are further or closer to scientific theory or whether they are based on actual data. For, as the poet Manuel de Barros said: "Everything that is not invented is false."

What follows is a fragment of the fast-moving multiplicity that takes place every day at the *Ateliê Carambola* school. An unassuming record of the fantastic theories regarding the universe that children make up. We hope that you can follow this itinerary of ideas, theories and paradigms invented by these little scientists of everyday life.

Enjoy!

Vitor Janei



As soon as I arrived from lunch, I found Mariane drawing a hopscotch diagram on the ground. She told me that Leila had asked her to do this. I observed Leila drawing with chalk on the floor, next to the diagram. As soon as she saw me, she told me: "New teacher, I am making a hopscotch." Soon, Beatriz, Matteo and Alice joined in and started drawing too.

Leila and Alice then started to sketch and exchange a few letters. "This is my mother's letter," said Leila writing the letter E with a few lines. Alice answers: And this is my mother: M for Mariana.

Alice starts to draw a J and tells me: this is the letter for my doll Julie.

Leila gets interested in learning more letters and asks Alice to teach her to do the letter J.

Beatriz, who had heard the whole conversation, concentrating on her own drawing, said: I know how to make a Moon. Alice quickly came by in order to see Beatriz's moon and remarked: Ah, this is a full Moon. I asked: How do you know it is full?

Alice answers: Because it is like this, look, drawing circles in the air.

Leila approaches and exclaims: Round!

I again ask: And when it is not full, what is it like?

Leila answers: Cut out.

And who cut it out? I continue. "I don't know who cuts it. There are days when it's full, then it's cut."

Leila is a little reticent and tells me: Do you know there is an alien creature who lives in the Moon, in Space? It sleeps, it plays...

Beatriz starts to talk about the stars: The stars are up in heaven, in the night. Leila seems to want to show how to draw stars. One dash, then another.

Beatriz resumes her drawing of the Moon, looks at it and recalls the conversation about the letters:

I'm making a lot of Os.

This scene stuck in my mind. I wasn't sure why but I thought I should record it. I decided to take a sheet of paper and a pencil to note down the dialogue, before I forgot the lines. I sat down and started to write. The girls sat by my side and helped me to remember what they had said. We read and reread it until all were in agreement.

MOON INFLATES AND DEFLATES LIKE A BALLOON

Nina

Vitor: When the moon is not full, how does it look?

Nina: It fills up, fills up, fills up with air!

Amanda: Who fills up the moon with air?

Nina: It goes like this: sshhhhhh (and she makes a gesture as if it was inflating). And it fills up until it is big. It fills up on its own. Some years, it fills on its own.

Nina: When the moon is cut, the Moon... Imagine that it grows until the Moon is huge.

What happens to it?

Nina: It explodes! It goes like this... when it is too full, pow!

Then it explodes!

Bea: The Moon always goes up to the sky, at night, and then it explodes, see. When someone steps on a balloon, the balloon explodes!

The Moon... is heavy. No light person can lift the Moon. Because the Moon is very heavy. After, when the person steps on the Moon, it explodes.

Oh, when the astronaut flies, and jumps, it also spins. The girl astronaut spins in a dress, then the astronaut starts to fly. He puts his legs like

this, stretches his hand like this, and he flies.

Vitor: And who cuts out the Moon?

Bea: Ah!! It's the aliens!

Vitor: The aliens? And why do they cut it out?

Bea: It's because...

Alice: The alien eats the Moon up! He eats the Moon up, but then he gets a massive tummy ache, then he farts so loud that he dies.

We resumed the session where Beatriz and Alice say that the alien cuts up the Moon and eats it.

I ask them to draw this imaginary being.

Beatriz does the full Moon, then the alien and, finally, the waning Moon, which she calls "broken Moon." Then I ask why it is broken.

Beatriz: It is because... the Moon... cuts... The alien cuts it, and then it gets broken.

Vitor: How does he cut the Moon?

Alice: With a sword.

Leila: No, he doesn't have a sword. But only super-heroes have swords, don't they?

Vitor: Then what does the alien cut with, if not with a sword?

Beatriz: With a knife.

Leila: With his teeth, because he's very strong.

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THE MOON GROWS LIKE A CAKE

Alice

Amanda: But if the alien eats the moon, how does he get back into the sky?

Alice: He makes a big ball and puts it in the oven to bake. And when he takes it out it is a very big ball. He throws it up in the sky and it is a huge ball...

Beatriz: Then it becomes a new planet! Then it's all right!

Alice: Then... when it goes in the fire, it's no longer a Moon... it's a planet!

THE MOON FOLLOWS PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE IN THE CAR

Nina

Nina: One day in the car, the night I was going, we, me, my mum, Bento and Dante, we were out driving at night, the Moon, I saw, I looked up, and the Moon kept on following us, and it spun a few times, spinning a lot!

Then Nina draws the day when she was in a car, with mummy, Bento and Dante, and when she looked up to the sky and saw the Moon following her.

Nina: The Moon was "in half." Look at the Moon "in half" following me. Me, Bento and Dante were in the car with mum and dad. Because it was very dark and nobody wanted to go out into that storm again. Because it was very strong yesterday.

Amanda: Nina, you told us that the Moon follows you...

Nina: Yes, but it is not following me now – she

answers looking at the ceiling.

Vitor: How does it follow you?

Nina: Remember that she stayed cut out? It stayed up there in the sky like this... It is cut out because the astronaut cut it out with a pair of scissors.

Amanda: And why does it follow you?

Nina: It follows me because it likes me.

Amanda: Does it follow just you, or does she follow everyone?

Nina: It follows all people who are in a car at night. Later the Moon tells me that its astronaut has to land on the Moon, but then one day I was ill and Outer Space disappeared, and then they also do a "prunement" while we are asleep, and when we wake up it turns into a monster, and then we hide under the blanket.

The moon follows me because it likes me

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THE MOON TURNS AND SPINS ON ONE FOOT

Nina

Nina: And then it stays like this, look (moving about). And then she stays still. And when we are sleeping, it dances! And when we are awake it stays! And when we wake up, it dances in the sky! Not for real, it's faking!

Amanda: The Moon dances then?

Nina: But if it dances too fast the Moon has to run along and make an effort. If it doesn't do that, it will walk.

Amanda: Do you know how the Moon dances?

Nina: Like this, look! – and then Nina spins around.

Amanda: Spinning?

Nina: (still spinning): Just like Bea, but very much like the Moon. It stands on its toes and... (spins). But when I woke up and took the blanket off I saw a huge shadow coming into my room. It was the astronaut; he was very tiny. I took him and threw him up to the Moon. And there he stayed on his own, and he found his family there.

THE MISSING MOON

Antônio

In one session I showed a video with the phases of the Moon, showing the relationship between light and shade. The reaction was laughter, the children laughed a lot. Then I showed the video again, pausing, and we talked.

Vitor: What is happening to the Moon in this video?

Antônio: I don't know... Because the Moon, when it goes like this... Look (hides his arm inside his shirt)... Missing...

Look, it stays behind the clouds. Look here. And then, like it appears, and then goes missing again, appears. Then, it stays like this (slowly takes his arm from inside his shirt).

HOW TO GET TO THE MOON

Filippo and Malu

aMalu and Filippo are taken to a session to talk about the phases of the Moon.

They say they don't know why the Moon is sometimes full and sometimes cut out.

Filippo draws the cut-out Moon and Malu the full Moon.

Malu: The Moon looks like a head.

Filippo: But it has no eyes.

Amanda: And where does the Moon go when it is not in the sky?

Filippo: It goes to the United States.

Amanda: What could we do to get to the Moon?

Malu: A pogo stick.

Filippo: No, with a pogo stick it's difficult; it would have to be a rocket.

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Malu: Or a plane.

Amanda: And how would it be with a

pogo stick?

Filippo: You have to jump very high.

Malu: We need to get a ladder too.

Filippo: But the ladder is no good, a ladder is

no good, that the Moon is a lot bigger than the ladder. And the Moon is up there in space.

Malu: Because the Moon doesn't come down from up there.

Filippo: That's it, the Moon doesn't come down.

THE MOON PULLS THE SEAWATER

Joaquim

Joaquim: I watched a cartoon and then I saw that the Moon was pulling the water.

Amanda: What water?

Joaquim: The water in the sea, by the beach.

Filippo: And the little fish will live without seawater?

Joaquim: The Moon pulls it little by little.

Filippo: And the little fish die without water?

Joaquim: No, they have a big bucket – this big – with water and they pour it into the sea.

Filippo: No, little fish don't have a bucket.

Joca introduces the hypothesis that the Moon is responsible for the oceans' tides. This theory was based on a cartoon he had seen. Nevertheless, he is unable to explain how this phenomenon takes place. When Joca says that the Moon pulls the seawater, Filippo automatically imagines that the Moon literally takes the water out of the oceans, and in his imagination, he sees the sea dried out, the fish dying.

bucket" of water that is poured into the sea at the moment when the Moon pulls the water out.

As he tells us about the actual phenomenon that the Moon is responsible for tides, Joaquim still does not understand that "pulling the water" is not literal but a natural force that the Moon exerts over the oceans.

So, in order to understand why the Moon "pulls" the sea water, Joaquim says:

The Moon takes the sea water and gives it to the tree, so it grows to be as tall as the others.

In fact, Joaquim is trying to understand the phenomenon he saw in the cartoon film, and gives a plausible explanation to Filippo, who is sceptical about the Moon pulling water.

We can also see that, with this theory, Joaquim is trying to explain the phenomenon of rain. After all, if the Moon extracts water from the sea, it needs to do something with it.

In another session, Joaquim is invited to do a drawing of a spaceship from imagination.

Joaquim: Do you know what this button is for? This button makes daddy's belt appear. So that the police won't catch daddy. This is daddy's, this is the little son's, this is mummy's. Look, my

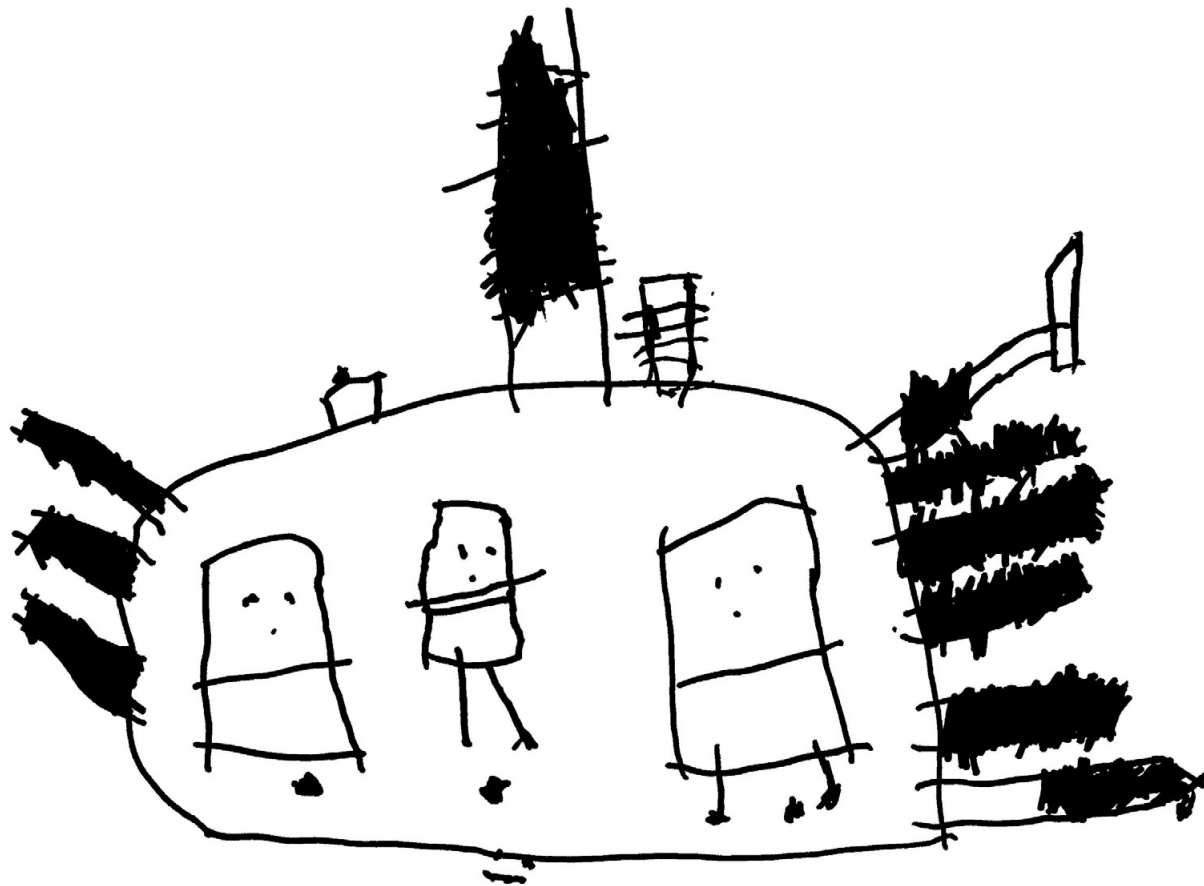
When Filippo opposes Joca's theory, showing that he thinks it is almost unbelievable that it is possible for the Moon to pull water out of the sea, Joca takes the attitude of someone who is thinking about his friend's argument in order to understand how this phenomenon takes place and how he can explain it. He tries to explain that the fish do not die because there is a "big

spaceship will have a thing for... look, inside here must stay all blacked out, because there is petrol there. Here inside are three petrols. The petrol is for it to fly, but if one part of the fan breaks down... the petrol.

Joaquim explains to us that his spaceship works in the following manner: there is a fan that produces the wind driving the vessel forward. If the fan breaks down, there are five petrol tanks

that spring into action, preventing the spaceship from coming to a standstill.

Antônio, who also participates in this session, tells me that the spaceship will have to feature a clothes hanger so that the “fan doesn’t fall off.” They tell me the spaceship has a torch, a drone, a fan-engine and petrol tanks, as well as a ladder.



THE SUN IS A FIRE-PLANET AND IT GETS DIZZY AS IT SPINS

Henrique

In the course of the sessions, Henrique is progressively absorbed with the theme of outer space.

For all the questions we pose about the Moon, the Sun or the planets, Henrique formulates a theory.

Henrique: Do you know why? There is a planet of fire... the Sun! And it can burn our faces. We can even die.

Filippo: The planet of fire is Mars.

Henrique: Yes, but the Sun, the Sun, remember that Vitor was here and he explained it? That the Sun has a ray. It has a ray that is very... It is

of fire.

In another session, now working with clay, Henrique gives life to his theory, and makes a Sun with rays and a hole where the rays exit, originating from an internal lamp.

Henrique carries on explaining his theories about the Sun:

“Around the Sun, and planet Earth goes round the Sun. And the Sun goes dizzy. It gets dizzy, do you know why? There is an energy that makes the Sun dizzy and it falls down to the ground.”

These sessions with three-year-old children, when we recorded their provisional theories, took place between August and October. The exercise proposed to the educators was to truly understand children's narratives. With each session we saw new ideas emerge and we realised that children of three already have lots of their own questions about their surroundings. More than that, we could see that the children formulated very similar answers, as if the answers to specific questions were inborn.

Four children told us that the Moon is full because it fills up with air, drawing a metaphoric line between the moon and a balloon. The children participated in separate sessions; they did not hear each other's theories and then repeat them. At three years of age, children seek explanations for the phenomena that surround them, and such explanations are grounded in their previous knowledge of the world. At three, all or almost all of the children who live in a megalopolis know or have seen a balloon; and with this they are able to draw a parallel between its characteristics and those of the Moon: both are round; both stay up high.

We also noticed that, perhaps, intuitively, the children brought correct concepts into their theories, which then entered into an exchange with the phenomenon of the solar system, such as, for example, when Henrique tells us that the Sun is a fire-planet and that it spins around until it gets dizzy, or when Nina says that the Moon follows her family as they travel and ends up "spinning and spinning." Or when Antônio uses the sleeve of his shirt in order to explain how the Moon hides and this is why sometimes it appears full and sometimes as a crescent.

These are all provisional theories formulated by very young children, with time and space to develop their ideas. Moreover, the children's provisional theories rub shoulders with actual scientific theories, formulated through extensive research.

This documentation was originally presented at the *Mostra Cultura da Infância* (Childhood Culture Show), which has taken place at Ateliê Carambola every year since 2014. It is part of the book series *Coleção V Mostra Cultura da Infância 2018*, consisting of five pedagogical documentation projects: "The Moon Follows me because it Likes me"; "Boat-House"; "Feeling is Everywhere"; "Narratives of Fear" and "A Park for Birds."



After several months, the process of building a park for birds in the school yard came to a close with the children drawing their "bird-selves" on big sheets of paper. The drawings were displayed on the yard wall.

Gabriel: I paint it purple and you paint it yellow.

Árion: Right.

Satya: Does the green go here, Rafa?

Rafael: It is, but in the middle of it.

Satya: I painted sort of here, look, Rafa. Just a little.

Rafael: It's good, don't use more green.

① In "Common and Individual Space,"* we all operate on equal rights - the students and the professor and his assistant. Each of the participants has a defined "own space" and then there is a space constituting a field of common activities. The structure established foresees individual definitions of the scope and features of the "individual space" and indicates the individual aspects of activities in the common area.

② We agree not to use words, but - broadly speaking - visual signals, the repertoire of which depends on a situation. These can include painterly or spatial signs, gestures towards other participants, symbols and emblems, etc.

③ The aim of a task is not a work of art of a fixed shape, but a process of communication between the participants without using verbal language.

④ The course of a process taking place in time and space may not be planned in advance. It depends on the invention of participants and mutual contact. Because the process cannot be foreseen, it is always a road to an unknown destination. The process is documented using photography and, when necessary, commented on outside the studio.

⑤ The self-limitation adopted by participants is the resignation from destructive activities, unless they open possibilities for new experience, since the process of communication by means of a uncoded language is too fragile and easy to rupture.

"Common and Individual Space," as we have already said, takes place in time and space and is a process of communication between the participants without verbal language. Participation demands being open to unpredictable situations and to the individual expression of others, the ability to improvise, the readiness to undertake dialogue. Manifesting one's personality takes place together with others but not at others' expense. The participants have to grasp the meaning and maintain the dialogue, in which the shape, meanings, atmosphere and direction of the process is being determined. We should not treat the process of communication as a "group creation," the process is not directed towards any specific work of art; it is nothing other than being in time and space. Theoretically, it can last as long as participants have energy and motives to continue. The process is not directed towards some compositionally adequate or correct ending. It can be interrupted by chance, for instance because of the calendar determined by the academic year. But the process taking place in time and space can take on its own inner dramaturgy and rhythm.

Documentation is merely a by-product, and the verbal commentary, used when needed, belongs to the didactic component and happens outside the process itself. Although the main rules of the exercise were repeated, each edition of "Common and Individual Space" had a different beginning, course and ending. The initiation of the process had to be prepared in advance and this task was undertaken by the pedagogues. Sometimes, the starting point was photographs or plaster casts of the participants' faces. It was the most individual space you can imagine. The common space was some part of the studio, for instance a table or a piece of fabric laid on the floor.

Grzegorz Kowalski, 1985

*In this document, Grzegorz Kowalski uses the name "Common and Individual Space" to describe the exercise practiced by him and students in the sculpture atelier he was responsible for. In its early life he referred to this exercise by a variety of names but with time a definitive epithet emerged: *Common Space, Individual Space* (*Obszar Wspólny, Obszar Własny*, abr. OWOW).

Starting point - opening of the wooden box and revealing of the "corpse"
- naked model, Mariusz Maciejewski



Positioning themselves against the box-coffin. Roman Woźniak puts his head into the smaller box. Monika Zielińska climbs the ladder.



Replacing the model with snow and melting it



Monika Zielińska grows watercress as model's pubic hair.



She makes sandwiches with watercress and serves them to other participants.



Jan Kubicki shaves the model



Jędrzej Nistrój turns the coffin into the bathtub



Monika Zielińska drills a hole in the box/bathtub



Grzegorz Kowalski washes his face with the water from the box



Artur Żmijewski hoists the model on a special construction made of metal mesh



Monika Leczew (in a swimming suit) joins Mariusz Maciejewski in the bathtub



Mariusz Maciejewski shows up at the studio clad in a suit



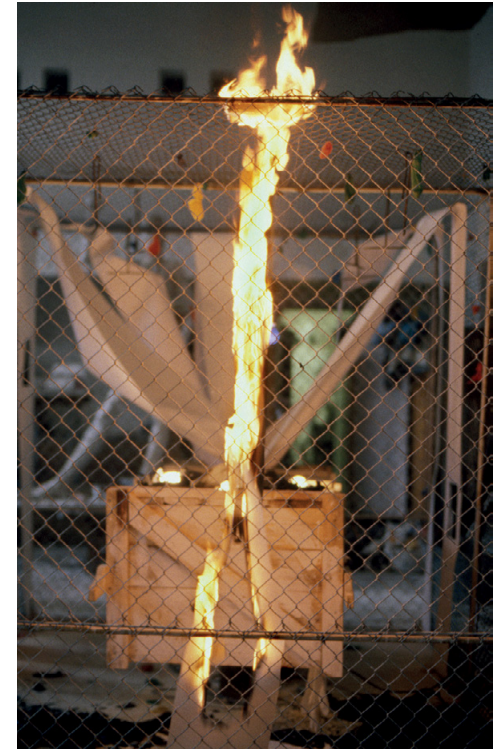
Monika Mioduszewska dances with Mariusz Maciejewski.
He's not a passive model anymore



Jane Stoykova turns the box upside down, Jędrzej Niestrój places it inside the metal mesh. Mariusz Maciejewski hangs paper rolls with his photos and leaves the studio. Grzegorz Kowalski sets the paper rolls on fire.



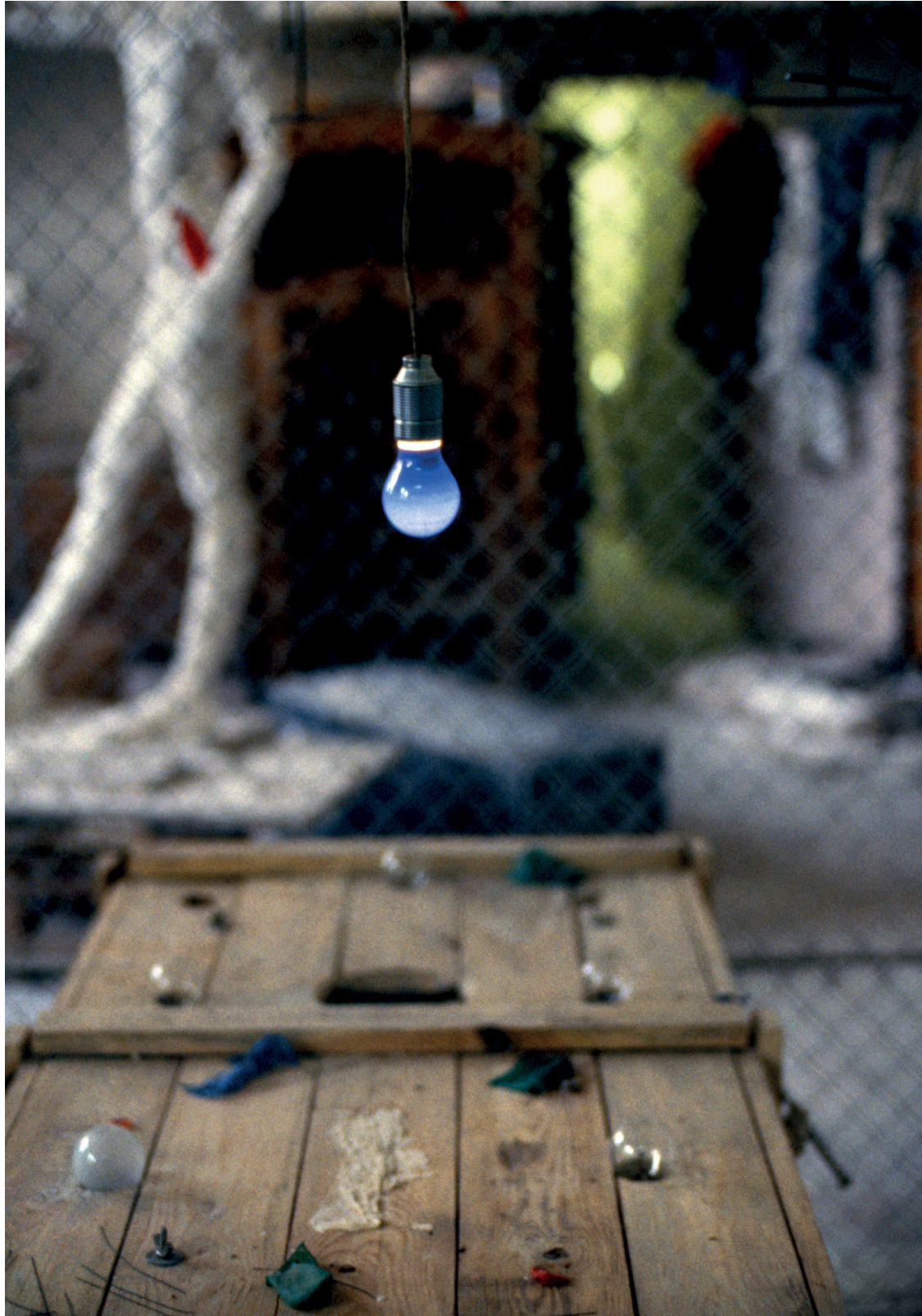
Fire



Blue lightbulb left after the fire



Blue lightbulb left after the fire



Leftovers



Common space, individual space

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Monika Leczew bring in the plants. Final feast around the box



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Karol
Sienkiewicz

1.

Let us imagine a group of people locked in a room. Under other circumstances they would be talking freely but something has silenced them. They feel the need for contact and conversation (since what is the alternative? emptiness? boredom?). They have at their disposal their bodies, gestures, as well as everything that is to be found in the room. The sequence of events depends on their good will and imagination. In a nutshell, this is what *Common Space, Individual Space* (*Obszar Wspólny, Obszar Własny*, abr. OWOW) is about: the atelier is the space, and the group of people is made up of students, the professor and his assistants.

In 1985, Kowalski enumerated the rules governing OWOW. He clearly stated that the participants act on equal rights, regardless of whether they are students or teaching staff. They may act individually within their individual space (either defined in advance or by the participant him/herself) or in dialogue with others in a common area. Communication, however, should take place without the use of words, by means of visual elements and/or gestures. The process has no script or plan, just an initial situation, usually staged by the professor. In order to maintain this fragile communication, all participants should restrain from acts of destruction.

Elsewhere, Kowalski noted that:

It is a task in which co-participation is a necessity, as is the explicit expression of oneself in changing situations, and the awareness of having to constantly make choices. It is not about “inventiveness,” but about ***taking responsibility for the process of communication***.

During the academic year 2004/2005, he commented on the character of the task in the following way:

Communicating by means of a language prone to modification during its creation demands ***good will and intuition*** from the participants. The participants should be open to new, difficult-to-foresee situations, and to

the expressions – often unacceptable – of the others. In such instances withdrawing to one's "individual space" is possible, as if it was a snail's shell. Participants have to show their ability to react, retort and improvise.

What does this signify in practice? The place where the OWOW takes place is (usually) the atelier. This is where the students, the professor and his assistants, called the **participants**, meet at a designated time and act. Actions take place in sessions lasting a couple of days, punctuated by breaks. While practical aspects are, of course, decisive, it is the dynamics of the actions that first and foremost will determine the frequency and length of the meetings. An external caesura may occasion an interruption, for example, the end of an academic year. The subsequent session starts at the point where the activities of the previous one left off.

Seen from the outside, OWOW may be reminiscent of a performance spontaneously set in motion by a group, a happening, or even a piece of theatre. Participants may act or watch the actions of the others. Passivity is also meaningful. Some gestures are so ostentatious that they do not allow for the intervention of others; they become a one-man show. Others, on the contrary, provoke interaction. There are also very intimate gestures, hardly noticeable, performed in silence, as if in hiding, alone, or even during the absence of the others, or between particular sessions.

Apart from the space and time framework, there are also topical motives imposed by Kowalski. It is he who decides the character of each initial situation, defining the common space and the original individual spaces. In the different realizations, "individual spaces" may contain or consist of, for example, photos of the participants, plaster casts of their faces, places allotted at a table, a suitcase ascribed to each of the participants, brightly coloured circles, etc. Interventions usually start with those "individual spaces." But they never end with them. As a consequence of non-verbal negotiation, "individual spaces" are usually appropriated or abandoned for the sake of dialogue. Individual participants sometimes find "individual areas" for themselves, building new seclusions or "telling their own stories." Sometimes, the initial situation does not clearly define the "individual spaces." In this case, everyone searches for their own space (as in OWOW XI *Wardrobe*).

Participants bring various objects and props to the activity sphere, the "common area." Common action often takes the form

of constructing new signifying structures, or just building for the sake of building. Nevertheless, the aim is never the creation of an object or installation, but a process – communication – and (to a lesser degree) cognition.

OWOW directs students' attention to the communicative quality of art and makes them sensitive to the presence of the recipients. At the same time, it also draws attention to the part played by gestures that are less loaded with significance, which serve to keep up the process of communication. So, communication is considered as a value in itself – it creates social bonds. (Jacques Lacan called activities of this type, performed for the sake of interaction itself, "empty gestures," enabling him to define the figure of the sociopath, who is not able to comprehend these empty gestures.)

Of course, if the process is more important than the creation of artefacts, then destruction is bound to occur as well as building, clearing the playing field when a given situation becomes too littered. This means momentarily suspending the ban on destruction. Indeed, the practice of communication is more important than any principles or rules. To keep the dynamic going, sometimes one has to raze the effect of another participant's gesture. And these moments of hesitation and negotiation are probably the most interesting elements of the process.

A task in which all the participants cooperate and negotiate their own positions teaches a specific attitude: humility, control of the ego. It shows that creativity, even when it is not based on participation, does not function in a void. The more or less active recipients may accept it, reject it, reply to it, make it their own, or even – to our horror – pay absolutely no attention.

After terminating the process or one of its stages, a meeting is held for analysis and discussion of the process, attempting to describe it in a systematic way, verifying whether intentions were correctly decoded. Here, **documentation** comes in handy. The first OWOW realizations were documented as photos and slides. OWOW VIII (1992/1993) was the first to be documented on video. OWOW XI (2006/2007) introduced a novel requirement whereby students each created a film about their own OWOW activity. This influenced the character of the task: active participants became observers whenever they stood behind the camera, and any action took on the form of an appearance before the camera. The presence of the camera seemed to hamper spontaneity. It also increased the significance of the recording

and editing of the film as a final composition of events, instead of the hitherto improvisations. In OWOW XII, despite a clear division between participants and operators, this went even further: action was filmed with a camera situated just below the ceiling on a hoist; the participants had a monitor to view what was being recorded in real time, giving them some control of the images captured.

Photos and films also serve another purpose – they can be shown to others. Although this was not the main purpose of the first OWOW realizations, it became more important over time. In 1991, an OWOW session (Supper) was held in public.

2.

Grzegorz Kowalski started working at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw after graduating in 1965, first as an assistant to Oskar Hansen, and later to Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz. In 1980, he was invited to take over the sculpture atelier at the Industrial Design Department. Later, in the mid-80s, Kowalski took over the graduate atelier at the Sculpture Department from Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz and has been running it ever since. As well as more traditional activities, such as sculpting nudes, there were other types of activities that were more open-ended, with greater freedom in terms of the means and media adopted. Kowalski wrote in 1987:

The atelier programme includes elements of traditional sculpture techniques and elements of the artistic language that has emerged in the course of the evolution of sculpture and art in general. The atelier hosts the creation of sculptures, space-time configurations, and also actions and activities that leave a trace in the form of photography.

Therefore, responses to the tasks envisioned for students often took the form of performances or even unannounced interventions or interactions. One example was the action by Artur Żmijewski, who responded to the task “**I am**” (“**Jestem**”) in an unusual way. His provocative performance from 1993 is described by student Grzegorz Matusik:

Almost all of us were sitting at a table: drinking coffee or tea; there was an idyllic, family atmosphere. Out of nowhere, Artur Żmijewski takes out a kilo of sugar from

his bag and fills up a “sugar-bowl.” It is not very large, but he keeps on pouring. Sugar spills over the sides creating a nice, white cone. Everyone liked it, but only until he spits into the coffees Łukasz and Kowalski are drinking and starts stirring the mugs belonging to the rest of us with a finger covered in saliva. He then gives out pieces of paper and pens. There are a couple of words written on the sheets of paper... “He loves me, he warms me, he scuffles – he wants me not, he grunts, he tussles...” In general, the phrases were rather indefinite and somewhat “put on,” in Artur’s style. A moment of disorientation, uncertain glances, consternation. It is only when Łukasz – with total calm and without any confusion whatsoever – begins to sip on his saliva-laced coffee that something begins to happen: Kowalski makes a straw out of paper and drinks his salivated coffee through it (cleverly, since the saliva floats on the surface) and then spits into Artur’s mug; [...] Everyone apart from Kaśka Górna (overtly disgusted) drank their beverages, contaminated by Artur, impregnated by Żmijewski.

In his own text, Żmijewski commented:

My intention was to upset the comfort of the agreement that is art. [...] But, of course, it was not the gesture of a simpleton, but of a sophisticated person; my phlegm made its way to you in a roundabout way. This was a testimony of a certain affinity with the legacy of Gombrowicz. [...]

So, when I experienced the truly cathartic power of performance, the purifying power of art, it was constructed in such a way that the participants (the audience) were placed in a situation in which they had to keep their emotions at bay, although roused by the way they were treated. [...]

Yet another theme that inspired me was the desire to escape the obvious, the security offered by ART, that pampered other dimension, that other level of reality, which one reaches through the boost provided by

a performance, object, or image. In my opinion, art is often a shelter in which some people hide or take cover from sensitive issues and taboos. The ARTIST protects them from real responsibility. However, that I condemn such a policy is not the point. [...]

To sum up, on my part it was a desire to construct (on a minimal scale) a situation analogous to those which we often encounter in everyday life, [...] when we are physically or mentally kicked around, manipulated and are unable to provide an adequate response to the wrongs suffered, whereby we accumulate bad emotions in our bodies.

Students' actions had the character of performances, often based on **interaction**, especially during the annual outdoor trips to Dłużew, where the countryside school premises of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts are located. It was at Dłużew that Jacek Markiewicz took his friends on a trip to the mysterious cellars in a trolley, while Paweł Althamer would meditate in a snowman outfit (1991).

The categories of "common area" and "individual space" proposed by Kowalski prove useful when it comes to understanding these expressions, especially when artists/students transgress the notion of the art-object. Artists could focus on their own interior, close themselves off in an "individual area" or create situations with the participation of others. The situation could also be directed at specific individuals. In response to the task entitled, "Metamorphosis of space" ("Metamorfozy przestrzeni"), Żmijewski addressed his *Monologues to People* to particular individuals (1994).¹

This aspect of the **private and social** meaning of art was interestingly highlighted by Paweł Althamer in his diploma defence (final exam, June 1993). He simply exited the room where the examination was to take place, leaving the jury with a sculptural self-portrait and a film. The film recorded his actual escape – a journey into a forest, where he removed his clothes, in an act of union with nature. In this way, Althamer enclosed himself in an "individual space." During a previous performance at the atelier – in response to a

1 See also: Artur Żmijewski. *If it happened only once it's as if it never happened / Co się stało raz nie stało się nigdy*, exhibition catalogue of the Polish Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warszawa 2005, p.205.

task entitled "Cardinal," he appeared before the students, secluded in his own world by means of marijuana. Those present were confronted with his image under the influence of the drug, sitting naked on a metal tub.

The day before, it had been Katarzyna Kozyra's turn to defend her diploma. The artist recounts how she found the process of creating a sculpture from stuffed animals placed one on top of the another (a horse, a dog, a cat and a rooster) deeply emotional. She was suffering from a severe illness; while she was sourcing materials for the sculpture, a horse was actually put to death for her. Today, she says that she felt awkward explaining herself and her work in relation to her illness, although *The Pyramid of Animals* pointed to a universal message. With her latest exhibition at the Zachęta Gallery entitled "Casting," (opened December 2010), an endeavour to create a film about herself, she insists on the inseparable connection between creative processes and life. "My projects are my life. I cannot separate the two," she says in an interview.²

Like Kozyrev and Althamer, Jacek Markiewicz defended his diploma by creating a situation of provocation. He made a film in which, naked, he worships a medieval crucifix. For his defence, he invited the employees of a company he was working for (disposable packaging wholesalers), which included his father. Their reactions to the film were recorded using a video camera, showing the images on an outside monitor.

It was around this time that the students and graduates of Kowalski's atelier began to be regarded as an **informal artistic group**. In the following years, the group grew, joined by recent graduates and important artists from the critical art milieu including Katarzyna Górna (diploma in 1994), Artur Żmijewski (1995) and others. Exhibitions organized by students, especially Artur Żmijewski (who also edited an ephemeral magazine linked to the *Kowalnia* atelier entitled "Czereja") also contributed to the perception of the artists as a group.

Kozyra, Althamer and Markiewicz's diploma works were ground-breaking in another sense: they all used **video**. This in spite of the fact that the students received their diplomas as "artist-sculptors." Over time, video played an increasingly significant role. Several *Kowalnia* graduates – Kozyra, Górna, Żmijewski, Malinowski – expressed

2 *Grzesznica. Z Katarzyną Kozyrą rozmawia Mike Urbaniak*, „WAW”, no.2 (2001), p.21.

themselves mainly through photography and film. As Kowalski stresses, changes brought about by the students themselves in 2001 led to a radical reformulation of the atelier's programme and to its transformation into an Audio-Visual Space Atelier. The medium of sculpture was replaced by film (made possible thanks to the knowledge and experience of Kowalski's assistants: Jędrzej Niestrój and later Łukasz Kosela).

The atelier retained its continuity, as determined by Kowalski's unchanging didactic principals. He describes his method as the **didactics of partnership**, after Oskar Hansen.

"To teach art or to form artists?" Kowalski asks, making his atelier a place where "forming" dominates, in contrast to the majority of Academy ateliers, in which "teaching" dominates.³ The basis of Kowalski's position is postulated in "world view, intellectual and artistic freedom." This goes hand in hand with a focus on students' individuality and the will to stimulate and develop it. The professor also assumes that cognition through art is close to cognition of self (self-analysis), and that art and life are intrinsically linked. As for choosing the of means of expression, these are meant to emerge from individual needs and not the other way round. The aim of "formation" is for students to develop an individual language during their studies and to gradually become independent from the authority of the professor (also through revolt or polemic). Thanks to this freedom, a "mutual flow of impulses" can take place (in terms of professor-student, student-professor dynamics). As Kowalski wrote, this flow:

places specific demands on pedagogues: of tolerance, openness, the necessity to credit half-thought-out and quirky conceptions, and at the same time to critically evaluate them.⁴

OWOW is, of course, a key element in this didactic system.

When a new Department of Stage Design and

3 Grzegorz Kowalski, *Uczyć sztuki czy kształcić artystów? (kilka spostrzeżeń szarłatana)*, in: *Polskie szkolnictwo artystyczne. Dzieje - teoria - praktyka. Materiały LIII ogólnopolskiej sesji naukowej Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, 14-16 października 2004*, ed. Maria Poprzęcka, Warszawa 2005, pp.21-25. See also: *Babel w rzeczywistości. Rozmowa z Grzegorzem Kowalskim i Romanem Woźniakiem przeprowadzona 19.01.1992 w pracowni R. Woźniaka w Warszawie*, "Magazyn Sztuki", no.1 (1993), pp.30-41.

4 Grzegorz Kowalski, *Uczyć sztuki...*, op. cit., p.22.

Multimedia was being set up in Warsaw in 2008, Kowalski opened another atelier there. This will host the newest OWOW initiative with students from both departments participating.

3.

The rules governing Kowalski's didactics of partnership are clearly connected to his own creative work and method:

My aim is for my form to become a potential form. [...] Into the process of maturation of form, I consciously incorporate "the happening of surrounding things," or the cooperation of people from the innermost circle. It is not sharing responsibility but rather permitting the multidimensionality that the co-participants grant to the form.⁵

Kowalski's philosophy of art has found its most complete manifestation in what have been called question-actions, in which he creates a framework for invitees to give answers to specific questions. *Chair* (*Krzeseł*; 1975) could be seen as the first question. Naked men and women appeared in front of the artist's photo camera, adopting different poses and defining themselves in relation to an object – a chair – and a medium – photography – all according to their wishes. When working on *Chair*, Kowalski noticed that while posing, the models commented on the situation in interesting ways. This gave rise to the idea of asking questions to which invitees would reply by posing for photos and composing short texts, for example, statements recorded on tape. The questions were the following: *Could you and/or would you like to turn into an animal in front of my camera?* (1977–1978); *Could you and/or would you like to treat me as an object?* (1979); *Would you like to return to your mother's womb?* (1981–1987).

There is another side to this strategy of "potential form." Placing something created in such a way as a centre of attention offers the possibility of manipulation. Maybe this aspect of Kowalski's work is present in the word "shaman," which he likes to use to describe himself. Not only does he create situations that enable others to express themselves, but also decides about the general focus by defining the frames for those expressions and by giving them a final

5 *Inne Przestrzenie. Artyści Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie*, exhibition catalogue, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts 3A, Warszawa 1993, p.38.

form (tableau, photography, film). This runs through both his own creative work and didactics of partnership. It could also be described (perhaps perversely) as a **didactic oeuvre**.

In the end, the difference between action-questions and atelier tasks is not that great. Apart from the important didactic role in “given” and “required” aspects of the tasks, there are the frames within which students operate when responding to a task. Undoubtedly, Kowalski’s position at the Academy gives him more scope for controlling the process. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the Academy, Kowalski’s method constitutes a lax approach to Academy norms.

On the one hand, Kowalski says:

I share the atoms of my own conception with students.

It is feedback based on giving some and getting some.

On the other hand, Artur Żmijewski described this feedback in a slightly different way:

It has an aftertaste of ambivalence, since it involves using people, secretly winning them over as coalitionists, turning them into supporters – with or without their agreement.⁶

It is possible to note the moments when didactic principals have intertwined with Kowalski’s own work. These were during actions that Kowalski himself inscribes in his action-questions; for example, the question/quotation taken from Juliusz Słowacki, first posed to students, and later to artist friends: *What Does the Corpse’s Glazed Pupil See?*⁷ (*Co widzi trupa wyszklona źrenica*).

Kowalski posed his first “questions” to the milieu assembled at the **Repassage Gallery**, on Warsaw’s Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, run by Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars. Many of the actions at Repassage took place within this tightly knit group of gallery friends. It should be noted that the generation of artists for whom the events of March 1968 proved a formative experience relied on small-scale actions among groups of friends, a closed circle which created an enclave opposed to the hostile world

6 Artur Żmijewski, *Osudarski ekumenizm*, “Czereja”, no.2 (1993), p.4.

7 Kowalski presented collected responses at exhibitions under this title. See also: *Co widzi trupa wyszklona źrenica*, exhibition catalogue, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 9 Sept – 27 Nov 2002, Warszawa 2002.

outside. Repassage’s monographer, Maryla Sitkowska, wrote that:

in realizations by the gallery artists, there is a common thread of treating the processes of life as a material, the role of the artists as initiators and “regulators” of those processes, finally abandoning the means used by the majority of artists, the materialization of artistic accomplishments in the form of objects (unless they take the form of documentary tableaux).⁸

Most Repassage artists frequented Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz’s and Oskar Hansen’s ateliers at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. However, the Repassage method was also the outcome of post-1968 doubts about Hansen’s modernist faith in bringing up society by “shaping human surroundings.” The Ateliers co-operated closely with one another. Kowalski, the Cieślars, Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek (who, at the time, made up the KwieKulik duo) all studied there; later this also applied to Kowalski’s assistants – Wiktor Gutt and Roman Woźniak.

The origins of “Common Space, Individual Space” may be identified at Jarnuszkiewicz’s and Hansen’s ateliers (where Kowalski both studied and worked as an assistant). At that time, the Faculty of Sculpture at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts was a place where “encouraged by a favourable response, they [students] start testing the potential of processual, participative praxis, collective and interdisciplinary actions.”⁹

8 Maryla Sitkowska, *Wstęp*, in: *Sigma, Galeria, Repassage, Repassage 2, Rerepassage*, exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw 28 Jun – 1 Aug 1993, Warszawa 1993, p.11.

9 Łukasz Ronduda, Michał Woliński, *Games, Visual Conversations, Activities and Interactions*, “Piktogram”, no.5/6 (2006), p.27. See also other articles published in this issue of “Piktogram”.

SOFT PLAY

Bianca Hisse
and Shahrzad
Malekian

In 1959, **Oskar Hansen** wrote:

today we are able [...] to begin creating a new, more organic art of our time, an art based on the compositional basis of Open Form. It will create a sense of the necessity of the existence of us all, help us define ourselves and locate ourselves in the space and time in which we live.⁴⁰

The theory of Open Form, formulated mainly in the field of architecture, assumed among other things the participation of users/recipients in shaping form, creating space favourable for communication and human, and the integration of art. It was also based on a fundamental faith in man and a plurality of attitudes, which aimed to allow creators scope for full self-expression. At the beginning of the 1970s, the notion of process was brought into the curriculum at the Atelier of Planes and Solids headed by Hansen, mainly in the form of visual games organised during open-air meetings at Skoki. In December 1971, during the Young Creative Atelier Meetings in Elbląg, discussions held in the hall of a cultural centre were moved outside into the open air on the instigation of Przemysław Kwiek. Two groups (*Blacks* and *Whites*) “discussed” using visual means, in a game that presaged the kind of tasks implemented at Kowalski’s atelier.

But Kowalski’s method also has origins in the atelier mentioned above run by **Jerzy Januszkiewicz**. His didactic method was extremely unorthodox. It placed the main emphasis on individuality and appreciated the importance of the process. New emotional exercises on “poetic metaphor” were introduced when Kowalski became his assistant. Another principle put forward by Januszkiewicz was an openness to new media (for example, proposing “flavoured self-portrait” as a task).

Games and other cooperative tasks were also conducted by the **KwieKulik** duo, consisting of Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek. The artists wrote in 1978:

We believed in the possibility of non-conflicting cooperation with other artists, in the possibility of group work, free from the problems of authorship [...]. The artist

10

Oskar Hansen, *Forma Otwarta*, „Przegląd Kulturalny”, no.5/535 (1959), p.5, reprinted in: *W kręgu Formy Otwartej*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts Museum, 25 Apr – 23 May 1986, Warszawa 1986, p.8.

should be free and disinterested, and “the new” should emerge on the verge of me-others, during cooperation.⁴⁴

KwieKulik, among others, were co-authors of the film *Open Form* (1971), which involved collaborations by artists working in various specializations. One part of the film consisted of a game about the face of an actress. Łukasz Ronduda described it as follows:

Artists communicated (played) both by means of visual form, and different types of action. The game experience was related to awareness that one is conditioned by the “statements” of others and that one influences the conduct of the others through one’s decisions, for example, by limiting or broadening their possibilities of choice.⁴²

KwieKulik also instigated games with the audience (among others at the Latająca Gallery in Toruń in 1972 and in Arnhem, Holland in 1979).

Wiktor Gutt’s and **Waldemar Raniszewski’s** work headed in a different direction. They conducted Visual Conversations, interactions using the body and other visual means ranging from uncomplicated visual dialogues using pieces of paper to more complex actions. The artists conducted a *Grand Conversation* with each other from 1972 until Raniszewski’s death in 2005. Here, photography played an important role, documenting the communication process. Unlike KwieKulik, Gutt and Raniszewski were fascinated by

11 Quote from: Łukasz Ronduda, *Od odmian czerwieni do odmian szarości. Sztuka i polityka w działalności KwieKulik w latach 1971-1987*, in: *KwieKulik. Forma jest faktem społecznym / Form is a fact of society*, exhibition catalogue, BWA Wrocław, 16 Jul 2009 – 7 Feb 2010, Wrocław 2009, p.15.

12 *KwieKulik. Forma jest faktem społecznym...*, op. cit., p.30.



Breathe in slowly through the nose and as you inhale, tightly clench your toes, tightly clench your hands, tightly clench your jaw. Release the tension with a long, soft, gentle sssshhh...

Melting glaciers, coral reef death, wildlife disappearance, landscape alteration. With this rapid transformation, it is impossible to not feel a sense of profound loss. Why has it been so hard to describe such a thing as ecological grief?

“primitive” cultures and bodily expression and worked with children and the mentally ill (seen as the *others* of contemporary civilization).⁴³ They also brought about significant shifts within the framework of the artist-model relation. In their actions, a model was not only the object of an artist’s work, but rather became an equal participant in an interaction.

4.

The first realization (OWOW I) took place at the Faculty of Industrial Design in the academic year 1981/1982. It was attended by students of the faculty, Kowalski, and his assistant, Wiktor Gutt. The subject of the task was *My alter ego in relation to the atelier*; “individual spaces” were defined as photographic portraits of the participants. Kowalski states:

A field was clearly demarcated, around which individual spaces – photographs of the participants – were situated. [...] Students did not limit themselves to the field proposed, but expanded their actions into the whole space of the atelier. The window and doors constituted the border dividing the “common space” from the rest of the world.

It is worth considering the historic background to these events. The task took place just after the introduction of martial law in Poland. The atelier became an enclave cut off from the hostile outside world, as affirmed by Kowalski:

We have to remember the atmosphere of those times. We integrated in the atelier against the unpleasant reality of martial law. Its character was that of a meeting of underground activists, slightly...catacombish.

The second realization (OWOW II) – *The Feast* – took place during the academic year 1982/1983. Again, the initial situation took the form of a kind of table, a Roman-style feast. A mirror covered with black fabric lay on white passe-partout. Places at the “table,” laden with food, were marked with plaster masks of the participants’ faces as “individual spaces.” The masks, as well as interventions made on the masks, were then replaced with the participants’ bodies, who

13

See also: Łukasz Ronduda, *Visual Conversations by Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniżewski*, “Piktogram”, no.5/6 (2006), pp.72-80; *Grand Conversation of Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniżewski, 1972-1976*, “Piktogram”, no.5/6 (2006), pp.81-97.

carried out performative actions. During the process, several national motifs (the colours red and white) were introduced, but also several contemptuous remarks about the martyrologic nature of martial law.

The third **realization (OWOW III, 1983/1984)** was *The Tower of Babel*, referring to the principle of not using verbal language. The initial situation was composed of mounds of earth piled on linoleum to make a circle. Perhaps limiting the number of participants to seven was necessary to ensure the clarity of the process. Clarification of the subject may also have influenced this decision:

The human pursuit of perfection considered by divine law as conceit and the confusion of languages constituted the foundations for the à repours concept of the Tower of Babel. From the confusion of languages came the building of a single reality: polymorphic, multi-dimensional and shared.

The topic was treated literally; a vertical structure was constructed, and the actions took place vis-à-vis this vertical axis. Simple word games, initiated by Kowalski, were played. Various elements were introduced and interpreted symbolically: the egg, as the centre, the beginning (Kowalski responded to the egg with an image of the cosmos). There were also religious symbols: crosses (a cross made of ice which melted); the six-pointed star; as well as references to the regime: a red outline of the Palace of Culture and Science.

Some of the activities took place in full awareness of the presence of the camera: Wiktor Gutt performed his word play in front of the camera. It was only through a photograph, using the light emitted by a candle, that the space was clearly depicted.



a body without organs
a free body
a wild body
a rebel body
a suspended body
a drowning body
a body performing collective movements
a body that refuses
a body that hides
a body in danger

The next and **fourth realization (OWOW IV, 1985/86)** took place at the Faculty of Sculpture, where Roman Woźniak acted as Kowalski's assistant. Once again, the initial element was a table (this time, a normal table) bearing photographs of the participants.

Activities began by transforming the faces/photographs, as well as the table; it was a large room which provided space for extensive activity. The atelier became a kind of "wild" installation. Two students, Sylwester Ambroziak and Jerzy Fudala, played a decisive role in this. Kowalski said:

They came in one night and totally adapted everything in the atelier emphasizing its "Space." They painted the walls. In this way, they annexed the atelier.

The exercise which Kowalski treated as the **fifth realization (OWOW V, 1986/87)** differed significantly from previous years because of the rules governing the tasks. It bore a slightly modified name: "**Common and Individual Space.**" The conditions were described as follows:

The atelier is divided into 12 squares. Participants select the individual fields where individual installations are to be created.

In the first stage, they work on a model. The projects evolve, their mutual relationship is discussed.

The realization (1:1) is a verification of the form and scale of individual installations and their semantic and compositional relationships.

So, interaction was based on models and could not be as spontaneous as in previous OWOWs. In fact, the rules governing the task were so different that this edition should not be counted as an example of OWOW. Nevertheless, apart from the issue of scale, "Common and Individual Space" did address matters important to OWOW in general: neighbourhood, visual "negotiation," integrating actions made by different people. Unlike OWOW, the exercise was aimed at creating a "work," a common installation in the atelier, with a final form in which it was difficult to discern traces of the negotiation process or the interactions that had taken place.

The **sixth realization (OWOW VI)** took place in March 1990 under the slogan *Vivi la liberté!* This may have been a reference

to the anniversary of the French Revolution, or to the changes that were taking place in Poland at the time (following the end of communism). It may also have constituted a word of encouragement in the furtherance of spontaneous action, and the rejection of restrictions and social taboos.

The point of departure was a table with holes cut in it. The participants were seated in such a way that their heads protruded through the holes in the table. Kowalski recounts the conceptual source:

We wanted to draw attention to facial expression. But many years ago, I had a dream; I dreamed of a work which was never realized, with live heads on a table.

But the overt proposal to work with one's own head and the heads of other participants was not taken up. In one of the first moves, the table was suspended from the ceiling, and took on different roles in other activities (as a hanger for the heads of cattle brought from the abattoir, or a perch for live chickens) – even though the individual holes, as well as the spaces underneath them (for example, Roman Woźniak's motionless performance) were still treated as the participants' "individual spaces." Almost immediately, the action filled the entire atelier space and gestures often consisted of introducing quite sizeable objects, such as the silver phallic form suspended by Jacek Adamas, linked to a tree outside the window by a piece of string that made it move with the wind, or his diverting sunlight with mirrors placed outside. Althamer marked a separate "individual space," first by drawing a clay circle on the floor, and then by building a jute tent reminiscent of an Indian tepee. The table top was finally burned in



From vertical to horizontal:

the emptiness
the gap
the silence
the ambiguous
the falling
the flying
the freeze
the trauma
the good
the bad
the oppressor
the oppressed
the mediator

the courtyard of the faculty building. In the ensuing fire, one of the participants, called “Czosnek” [Garlic], baked clay pendants, which he gave to the others.

The **seventh realization (OWOW VII)** was particularly unusual: **Supper** was held at the Dziekanka Gallery on 5th and 6th December 1991, alongside responses to the task entitled “Cardinal,” which was being held there. The students taking part in the action did not treat it as an edition of OWOW, but as Kowalski’s proprietary work, which he invited students to participate in. Kowalski himself said that:

...[it] possesses the characteristics of OWOW only in the sense that there was a defined margin for individual actions.

The conditions for the tasks were included in the following atelier programme:

The “Common Space” is the delineated space, the table and dishes, as well as the assumption of silence on the part of participants. The “Individual Spaces” are the individual behaviours with regard to the situation, the co-participants and the unexpected reactions of spectators.

The situation alluded to the iconography of the *Last Supper*, cited by hanging a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting in the gallery. Behind a metal mesh, separating the audience, a long table was set with food, around which the participants were seated. Kowalski recalled:

The whole thing had to rely on a certain standstill, on slowing down. Even when we ate and drank, we tried to do it in slow-motion. Since almost nothing was going on, there was terrible confusion among the viewers. [...] Monika Leczew, aspiring to a central role, painted herself white and donned a white robe. She sat down at the centre, taking the place of Christ, thus changing the sex of the main character. There were also two items that had been brought in: [Ryszard] Lech sat wearing a triangular metal hat, and Monika Dzik made a container into which – in front of everyone – she poured wine. The wine dripped slowly into a second vessel below.

The eighth **realization (OWOW VIII, 1992/1993)** returned to the old OWOW format. The initial situation consisted of a wooden crate, around which students were gathered. Inside lay a naked male model, Mariusz Maciejewski (later a student and graduate of the Kowalski atelier). As such, Artur Żmijewski gave **OWOW VIII** the *post factum* title of **Wooden ravioli, stuffed with cold meat**. Kowalski commented on his idea as follows:

There is a sort of inferiority of the model at the Academy. The model is treated subjectively, as a body, as physicality. This relationship of inferiority, inherent to the academic system, also had its sense here. Except that what could have been assumed at some point – this subjectivity – was restored to him, or he himself reclaimed his subjectivity.

The first actions were carried out on the model. Monika Zielinska sowed a bed of cress in his lap (Żmijewski called it a “necrophiliac flower-bed”), and when it grew the student cut it and used it to make sandwiches, which she then offered to the participants. Commenting on the task, she wrote:

The cress was my reaction to the corpse. I wanted to bring life, the green vegetation of spring, while sanctioning the status of M. [Mariusz]. Instead of a corpse, it became fertilizer: the ground and foundation of a new being.¹⁴

14

Obszar wspólny i obszar własny. Komentarze do zadania grupowego z pierwszej połowy 1993 roku, “Czereja”, no.4 (1993), p.7.



A single body cannot push alone a transformation in the world.

Jan Kubicki shaved the model. Jędrzej Nistrój filled the box with water, turning it into a bathtub. Dressed in a swimsuit, Monika Leczew joined the model in the crate/bath. Grzegorz Matusik divided the model's body into pieces using a felt-tip pen and numbered them. Using a construction made of metal mesh, Artur Żmijewski lifted the body, an action taken up by Anna Mioduszevska, who squeezed flour-and-water dough through the netting.

In later actions, undertaken without Maciejewski's participation, the crate was turned over and surrounded by a gazebo made of metal netting. The final event was arranged by Kowalski and Woźniak. It was a feast at which all of the participants were dressed in either black or white; Kowalski dressed in elegant, black female attire and painted his nails red, while Woźniak appeared in white.

Half way through the process there was a break in activity, during which the actions performed previously were discussed. Żmijewski commented:

The magma and chaos of the actions were structured, organized in phases and cycles, series and consequences. [...] What is he [Grzegorz Kowalski] searching for? It looks as though he is creating a dictionary, looking for an alphabet; subsequent actions are subordinated to letters, characters. So, he favours language, sequences of interdependent forms; he is looking for a consistent, meta-logical transformation, effect from effect. I searched for consequences in the content, in the meaning of shapes, in the interpretation of actions.⁴⁵

The next realization, **OWOW IX**, took place six years later, during the 1998/1999 academic year. The theme was *Living Class*, a reversal of the title of Tadeusz Kantor's performance entitled *Dead Class*. The "common space" was the classroom – with school benches where participants sat in pairs (the notion of neighbourhood). As in some previous realizations, their photographic portraits were set before them.

On the initiative of Czesław Kałużny, the "class" space was separated from the studio using plastic film. The first activities consisted of intervening in one's own portrait. Kałużny built a kind of confessional, in which he placed Kowalski's photograph. In the next movement, Anna Konik put a monitor in its place and sat the

professor in front of it. The monitor displayed a live feed of what was going on in the classroom.

A feast was also arranged in the "common space," which Kowalski described as follows:

It was a sort of casual event. We just sat and ate. [...] A class party.

In the 2000/2001 academic year, a new initiative "**Następny, Next, Nächster**" was introduced which, in future realizations, would come to resemble OWOW. The atelier programme states:

Data: own person or substitute, specific space contained between points defined as entrance and exit, time 120 seconds (max), any means of expression, [...] video recording (provided by the atelier). Required: during the first stage: to grant an individual character to the path travelled (between entrance and exit). To compose time and space. During the second stage: by making use of the recordings of all compositions, edit them, so as to create a new, coherent compositional quality (the problem of compositional implications).

The first two realizations of "Next" (2000/2001; 2003/2004) placed emphasis on the transition between the two points: entrance and exit. Subsequent projects (2005/2006; 2007/2008 – *Chair*) put more emphasis on reacting to the situation encountered before the camera, as left behind by the previous participant. During these years, "Next" replaced OWOW in the atelier programme.



The way towards a horizontal collective structure

"Anarchy," "chaos," "mayhem,"
"havoc," "ragnarokk"

The **tenth realization** of OWOW called *Suitcases* (OWOW X, 2004/05) constituted a return to the task's classic format. The core of the "common space" was a rectangular space in the studio, whereas "individual spaces" were suitcases assigned to the participants (the suitcases being a motif in Kowalski's own work). The atelier programme for that year reads:

A suitcase bears specific meaning – movement, dreams of travel, but also exile, destruction, or salvation... The last connotation evokes the memory of 20th century experiences. [...] Suitcases as individual spaces impose a clear disposition for mobility, which is a significant novelty in our task. In this way, it is possible to move and check the individual spaces in different situational contexts, as well as conduct a collective "trip" to a different situational context.

After terminating this process, the "individual spaces" were taken to an open-air session in Dłużew attended by the group after completing OWOW X. The suitcases became the field and outcomes of individual student activities. For example, Paula Quinon:

sowed grass in her suitcase, and left it among the "wild" vegetation at Dłużew for two weeks.

OWOW X will be remembered for a moment of destruction in the form of a deranged action by the atelier's model, Daniel Zarewicz, which led to the eradication of the themes and termination of the process underway.

The **eleventh realization** (OWOW XI, 2006/2007) named *Wardrobe*, had no clearly defined "individual areas." Kowalski posted on the *Kowalnia* online forum:

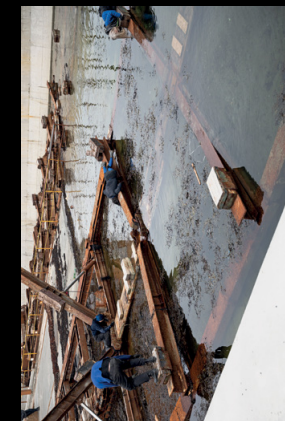
This everyday piece of furniture has for centuries been used to store things that are removed, used, hung or set aside, and then re-used until they are totally or partially worn out. A piece of furniture, which served an individual, or sometimes a brotherhood, for example, in the sacristy, court, or club... The wardrobe as a metaphor for intimacy, possession, concealment, storage, opening and closing...

Activities undertaken in the course of OWOW XI could take place in one of two areas of the studio painted black or white (it had been painted these colours in the summer of 2006), or in both spaces at the same time; the choice of colour provided the background to events. Kowalski introduced a novel requirement: to shoot and edit films as interpretations of the activities taking place in the space (two students, Anna Molska and Anna Senkara, made videos documenting the entire OWOW XI process). This meant that often students did not treat the task as a process, but as a series of individual actions, turning the "common space" into a film set, which was sometimes closed to other participants (for example, in Marta Kossakowska's actions). It could be postulated that the cameras became "individual spaces." Kowalski noted that:

One characteristic of this year's OWOW was the clear distinction between activities that are a continuation of preceding movements and themes of meaning, and, on the other hand, individual actions, often structured as complex and separate (from the course of the OWOW) performances, quasi-theatrical forms and group activities. The OWOW has been dominated by the latter.

Integrating gestures were particularly worth noting, for example, the introduction of a simple acoustic device by Tomasz Waszczeniuk, as described by Kowalski:

The loudspeaker emitted the sounds of footsteps, stomping, kicking; this was accompanied by lights going on and off. With time, the microphone began to be used



How do bodies with specific past geographic and historic memories resist the political situations produced by various power regimes? How to trigger structural shifts in the oppressors machinery?

with the intention of modulating sounds, breathing, huffing and puffing, knocking, clattering, whistling... etc. The **twelfth realization (OWOW XII)** in April 2010 merged the principles of OWOW and “Next.” The exercise consisted of several sessions in the “common space,” where “individual spaces” were marked with coloured circles. A series of performances took place before the camera, the so-called self-presentations based on the rules of “Next,” i.e. a sequence of filmed responses to the situations encountered through predetermined speeches.

Again, the documentary approach clearly influenced responses to the task. The studio space was surveyed by the camera suspended from the ceiling and the images captured were displayed on a monitor. Participants performed in awareness of the point from which they were being monitored. So, they often performed animations on the floor (Julia Buy-Ngoc had previously used this method to translate dance into the language of animation).

This task tended to demand more physical involvement from the participants. Actions were carried out in rhythm to simple music played live by the student Wojciech Urbański. The task’s visual nature was influenced by the simple geometric shapes (circles) and basic colours that Kowalski had chosen.

Similar principles are to be applied in the next instalment (**OWOW XIII**), which will begin in February 2011; documentation of this OWOW is to be shown at the Prague Quadrennial. Each participant will be able to bring guests into the “common space” – a novel element. Activities will begin with “self-presentations,” as in OWOW XII from the previous year, and then continue with the OWOW classic format. For the first time, OWOW XIII will be held at Kowalski’s atelier at the Faculty of New Media and Stage Design.

5.

In 2005, Paweł Althamer, Katarzyna Kozyra and Artur Żmijewski were invited by the U-Jazdowski Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw to mount individual exhibitions. Kozyra showed *Punishment and Crime*, while Althamer proposed to the curators the idea of a group show displaying work by his colleagues at the Kowalski atelier; Żmijewski also contributed to this proposal. During their discussions, the traditional exhibition format developed into the “**wybory.pl**” project, a repetition of the atelier group task or OWOW. Students who

had undergone OWOWs between 1988 and 1996 and Kowalski himself were invited to take part. But this time Althamer and Żmijewski, rather than Kowalski, created the framework and conditions. Activities took place in the Centre’s exhibition space. The exhibition was officially opened six weeks after the **wybory.pl** process had begun, exhibiting the outcome of the process at that point. Żmijewski wrote:

The starting situation for the game was a square, white room, [...] The room was made of four sliding panels. When these four elements were closed, the room became a cage without door or windows. The initiating gesture was to shut all the participants inside.¹⁶

Leaving aside the question of institutional critique – although this was of great importance to the project – I would like to point out two aspects: firstly, the relationship between the non-verbal communication process and the outside world; and secondly, destruction.

The main difference compared with OWOW was the break with the (unwritten) rule of acting solely within the bounds of the atelier as a separate, extraterritorial fragment of reality. In an interview dating from the early 1990s, Kowalski and Woźniak described the atelier as an “enclave” and a “bubble within reality.” Żmijewski’s text summarizing “wybory.pl” began with a critique of the atelier construed in this way:

This community was additionally created by the line separating it from the world outside, which did not know

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Artur Żmijewski, [S]election.pl. *Repetition of the Students’ Exercise ‘Common Space, Private Space’*, “Piktogram”, no.5/6 (2006), p.128.



Mutual support:

Something between a fight and a conversation

A subtle game
A soft play

its secret. Kowalski also used to affirm the atelier in private statements calling it (I am quoting from memory), “a hothouse where delicate plants are able to flourish.” The students were the delicate plants. Both the bubble and the hothouse are metaphorical descriptions of a situation of comfort, of isolation from the influences of the outside world. How far is this beneficial to education, though?¹⁷

Some participants in “wybory.pl” were allowed to invite guests to participate, with Żmijewski calling the latter “cataclysms” or “the raw elements of reality.” These included groups of preschool children, middle-school girls, escort agency workers hired by Jacek Markiewicz, and the female students from a make-up school. Some of these, especially the preschool children, introduced an element of pure, mindless destruction into the action. In response to this disruption of the subtle threads of the process (based on earlier atelier activities), many people withdrew from further participation in “wybory.pl.” But destruction was also introduced by the participants themselves. Żmijewski describes the following situation:

On November 1st, we met at the Centre for Contemporary Art for the traditional glass of wine. I brought whisky, Żytnia vodka and coke. [...] We did not know that ‘November dziady’ (ancestral spirits) were also invited to this meeting. But ‘dziady’ are ghosts and they work in invisible ways. They mingled with us and caused drunkenness and quarrels. Bottles and glasses were smashed against the walls, everything movable was overturned. Even loudspeakers and DVD players were destroyed – they were simply trampled underfoot. ‘Dziady’ obliterated our critical faculties and replaced them with madness.¹⁸

Banning all acts of destruction is one of the basic rules of OWOW, nurturing the potential for communication that destruction would hinder; it also aims to maintain the continuity of the process. This was the case at the tenth edition of OWOW, when the previous conditions were overturned by one of the participants (incidentally, a self-proclaimed participant). Żmijewski criticized the prohibition of destruction:

17 Ibidem.
18 Ibidem, pp. 140-141.

Making sure our actions are protected from destruction handicapped our knowledge of the mechanisms of destruction: we do not learn to destroy. We repress anger and aggression but obviously they always come back, this time as demons.¹⁹

Kowalski replied to Żmijewski's text in a letter, in which referred to the “elements” brought in, especially the pre-schoolers:

Their authentic play among the ruins changed the rules radically. From then on, it was impossible to communicate, to create a language, to stop and think or act on a smaller scale. The Common Space became [...] the domain of screams.²⁰

But Kowalski also noted the important cognitive value of this rule change (he withdrew from “wybory.pl” when it occurred). He wrote to Żmijewski:

You did touch upon the highly important question of taming aggression, the natural urge for destruction, and of the suppression of evil in general.²¹

Żmijewski introduced the method borrowed from OWOW and used in “wybory.pl” into his own projects: foremostly, in the film *Oni* (*Them*; 2007). He organized a game based on visual communication between four groups: representatives of the far-right All-Polish Youth movement, women who identified with the Catholic Church, young leftists and young Jews. Each group first created its own symbols on large sheets of paper. After that, actions were conducted together and participants could modify both their own emblems, as well as those created by the other groups. One of the most frequently used methods was destruction (especially in relation to the “Notched Sword” (Szczербіec), the symbol of All-Polish Youth, which was painted over and over again). The film ends with a fire, extinguished by the artist.

A similar confrontation occurred during an open-air game in **Dłużew** in February 2008. Żmijewski travelled there with

19 Ibidem, p.129.
20 Grzegorz Kowalski *Wites to Artur Żmijewski*, “Piktogram”, no.5/6 (2006), p.148.
21 Ibidem. For more on “wybory.pl” see also: *Participation. discussion between Joanna Mytkowska, Grzegorz Kowalski and Artur Żmijewski*, in: *1968-1989: Political Upheaval and Artistic Change*, ed. Claire Bishop, Marta Dziewańska, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw 2009, pp.113-130.

group of students from several Berlin art schools. Students from Kowalski's atelier were offered a choice – to participate in Żmijewski's "improvised games," or respond to the professor's task.

In "The Game" proposed by Żmijewski and conceived as a continuation of OWOW principles, the starting point was the distinction between the "Poles" and "Germans" (the quotation marks are intentional – although the "Poles" really were Polish, the group of "Germans" included people of different nationalities residing in Berlin on a permanent or temporary basis, including two Polish women).

On the *Kowalnia* Internet forum, Żmijewski wrote:

The game we want to initiate is of a dual nature:

- It is an exercise of communicating "outside known languages" (this is the formal dimension of the exercise);
- It is a group process: i.e., a struggle for leadership, for who is right, application of a variety of skills and competencies, ways of assessing the "other" through acceptance or marginalization; the creation of a community or its dissolution (this is the organic, psychological dimension of the exercise).

The first meeting was confrontational in nature. The "Germans" activities (standardization of their costumes by donning ushanka hats and emblems of Berlin; the transfer of the "Poles" to a sandpit) were immediately compared by the other side to the events of World War Two.

Subsequent discussions showed that the Poles associated the sandpit with Auschwitz, tourist souvenirs (coat of arms with German colours) with Hitler, and the word "Germans" with conflict and war. (Żmijewski)

Later the same evening the other party took the initiative:

The Germans are divided – several of them are in the room; they are threatened with clubs banged against the floor. The others have three hostages: Poles who have blindfolded themselves. This too had strong associations for me – the Nuremberg Trials – those who should have been punished were indeed punished. For what? For

those who were blindfolded. All the hostages were apparently German – in fact, they made visible a fantasy about guilt: these were the ones who were mistreated. (Żmijewski)

When the Majewski process of confrontation and "reconciliation" (mutually getting to know one another) had exhausted itself, the activities became more reminiscent of the OWOW atelier. But the groups still deliberated together, the "Germans" rebelling against Artur Żmijewski, whom they accused of creating his own work by shooting his own film (similar to previous work of his based on visual games organised with the participation of other people).

On the occasion of the Dłużew game, although not the work of Artur Żmijewski, he spoke of the limitations of art and of thinking in artistic categories, formulating his own "game theory":

In my opinion, the potential of games lies in shifting the attention from artistic activities towards social relations and the extraordinary possibilities offered by community games, which consist of opening direct access to the collective unconscious. [...] For now, the human costs are too high – we do not know how to navigate the field of unconscious forces and the extra-conscious exchange of information. [...] However, we are corroded by an uncontrolled group process, taking place without any framework or structure and so infecting our relations, also outside the game.

Here lies the fundamental difference between Kowalski's and Żmijewski's positions. The former remains within the walls of the Academy, where risk is not an option. Everyone must leave OWOW safe and sound in terms of both body and mind – even at the expense of cognition. OWOW remains a didactic action, whose main objective is to maintain the communication process. It is language teaching. While Żmijewski risked rejection by his own group, Kowalski cannot afford to do so.

Kowalski's initiatives are probably closer to Paweł Althamer's approach to group action. The latter's activities are, however, neither confrontational nor didactic in nature, but rather therapeutic. He has collaborated with his own family, with a group of mentally handicapped people (Nowolipie) and with his neighbours at Warsaw's Bródno district (*Common Task*, 2009), using the position

of artist to create a community. The question remains: whether Althamer is or is not the only bond within such a community, as a charismatic leader. Could it operate without him? Charles Esche compared Althamer to the ambiguous Brothers Grimm character: the Pied Piper of Hamelin. The flautist/rat-catcher uses his magic music to lure the rats out of the city and drown them in the river and then, when the city refuses to pay him for it, lures the children away by similar means. Althamer's attitude is equally ambivalent. One suspects that the artist seduces and manipulates at the same time. Esche writes:

To start with, any close encounter with a work of Paweł Althamer is always slightly destabilising. We are never quite sure which side he is on, or what point he is making.²²

One could say that, like Kowalski, Althamer possesses a "group creative personality" (which could hardly be said of Żmijewski), and sometimes practices "didactic creativity."

6.

In recent OWOW realizations, Kowalski, the instigator of action, is clearly heading towards a form of synthesis. This has happened as the camera has ceased to act as a means of monitoring the process, but become the element that triggers and informs it. One of the objectives now is an **end result** – a film intended for exhibition, as a "coherent work." Even if OWOW takes place in a confined atelier space and among a group of participants, it assumes the presence of a subsequent spectator.

This need to "control" seems to contradict the very core of OWOW, the risk of confronting that which is not fully predictable.

Finally, we can compare Kowalski's tactics to "the ignorant schoolmaster," after the book by Jacques Rancière, dedicated to Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot was the author of a "universal" teaching method, claiming that illiterate parents can teach their children how to read. Rancière criticised the educational theories of Bourdieu and Althusser, and eulogised lessons in intellectual emancipation, which presuppose equality in practice. So, following the experiences

of Hansen and Jarnuszkiewicz, Kowalski became an "emancipatory master." But at the same time, he differed from Hansen, whose didactics were based on clearly defined rules and precepts. As a result, Kowalski sometimes had to accept and embrace works he did not fully approve of (for example, the diploma work by Katarzyna Kozyra – *Pyramid of Animals*). Rancière (Jacotot) writes: "one can teach what one doesn't know providing the student is emancipated, that is to say, providing he is made to use his own intelligence."²³ Rancière's metaphor recognises the problem of freedom and helps to obliterate the boundaries between art and education; it also broadens the spectre of artistic creation.

Common Space/Individual Space is a powerful metaphor for art, art making and the position of the artist. It is the question of balance that we are seeking to resolve and/or struggling with in our lives, regardless of whether we are artists or not. The psychotherapist would say that Individual Space equals closure, encapsulating yourself, a narcissistic focus on self and grandiosity. Common Space is an impulse towards life, towards other people, but involves certain risks.

Thirty plaster figures

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Ane Hjort Guttu, Stacey de Voe and Dag Erik Elgin²¹⁵

In central Oslo, at 32 St. Olavs *gate*, there is a building with a garden and an annex. The complex, which is next door to the Royal Palace, was built for Norges Geografiske Oppmåling, today, the Norwegian Mapping Authority. It first opened in 1880 and it was here that the maps of Norway were made. A century later in 1982, Statens kunstakademi (the National Academy of Art) moved into the building. At that time, the academy was a classic teaching-led school dominated by its professors. Unlike the rich-in-tradition academies in Copenhagen and Stockholm, it had never before had its own premises but had merely rented space in various buildings in the centre of Oslo. The National Academy of Art was located at St. Olavs *gate* for about 30 years, before merging with five other visual arts-focused educational institutions, which comprise today's Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo (KHiO, Oslo National Academy of the Arts), located in the Grünerløkka neighbourhood.

In 1954, the National Academy of Art began buying works made by its students. A jury consisting of the school's professors had a special budget for this purpose, and they selected the works they thought were the best. The purchases resulted in a collection that amounted at the most to 530 works: paintings, prints and nude studies in plaster. The collection was moved to St. Olavs *gate*, put in storage and almost forgotten. Eventually it was taken to KHiO, where it was stored in the basement.

Now, in 2021, the Norwegian government plans to sell the property at 32 St. Olavs *gate* to the highest bidder. This is just one of several similar sales; the government wishes to dispose of as much state-owned property in its portfolio as possible. Several prestigious buildings in Oslo have already been sold: the old Deichman Public Library, the electric utility company building Oslo Lysverker, the former premises of the National Library of Norway, and those of the old telephone and telegraph company Televerket. It is expected that the buildings that formerly housed the National Gallery, the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design and the Museum of Contemporary Art will follow.

Coinciding with the sale of 32 St. Olavs *gate*, this year's graduating students at KHiO have been given the opportunity to

hold their degree exhibitions in the building. The works have been installed at the same time as prospective buyers view the building, and it has been strange to see the art students working in the same rooms as the millionaire investors carrying out on-site inspections.

As part of the graduation exhibition, a selection of works from the academy's long-standing art collection is also on show, namely all the nude studies in plaster. These have been pulled out from KHiO's basement and transported back to their former home. The following text recounts a conversation between three of the people who initiated this transfer: Stacey de Voe is currently a student at KHiO/the Academy of Fine Art; Ane Hjort Guttu is a professor at KHiO and studied at the former National Academy of Art from 1996 to 1998 when it was still at St. Olavs gate; Dag Erik Elgin was Guttu's professor, but also studied at the academy in the 1980s. The conversation therefore takes place between the representatives of three generations of artists and academy students, who discuss the collection, the school, the building and the city.



Ane Hjort Guttu: What can we learn from these plaster figures? We know they were the outcome of what were presumably obligatory modelling assignments, but do we know anything more about them? What can they tell us today? Do they also have a political aspect, and if so, what does that consist of?

Dag Erik Elgin: I think we can begin by stating that we all reacted the same way when we came across this swarm of dusty, white figures; we experienced an immediate, albeit ambiguous, sense of communion with them.

Ane: They were like a group of ghosts no one cared about.

Dag Erik: These are works executed by individuals who stood together in a room, with the same model, and modelled. Historically, this activity relates to an academic tradition and an ideology, but our access to them primarily concerns how these works come to us today. And they come to us as a dusty group, put away, out of circulation, as physical mass and materiality. The lack of care for them over many decades is an important component in this encounter. They are experienced as forgotten and irrelevant. Nevertheless, the feeling of human presence is still strong, just as it often is with sculptures originally made in clay, for one sees imprints of the hand that worked the material.

For me, this is a story that is mostly about changing ideologies and forgetting – the negative imprint of the institution's history. There is an encounter

between big and little politics; the ideologies and the individual, mediated through a collection of works in plaster kept in storage indefinitely, marked by a collective indifference and loss of memory. Here's an important question: Why is it so difficult to take care of these works of art and studies in an art academy? Do you have any thoughts about this?

Stacey de Voe: I think it is not a matter of caretaking being difficult work; it's just that it lies outside the so-called *framework of responsibilities*. This invisible scaffolding is essentially the pillar of administrative work, and in this case, historical remnants or traces are left behind by default, beyond the administrative boundaries of the institution.

Ane: I agree. The detailed curricula, which include an overview of courses for each study programme, with learning goals, outcomes and so forth (this is all now obligatory in Norwegian higher education) stand in the way of taking responsibility for things that are not stipulated. This is also a well-known pedagogical experience; as soon as you determine exactly what the students should learn, and (as is normal in Norwegian schools today) at all times inform them of what the curriculum is, they get the idea that they do not need to learn anything other than the curriculum. The same is probably also the case with this collection at KHiO; it hasn't been formulated anywhere that anyone should *take care of the collection*, so no one thinks of it as their

responsibility. But when I saw these crates of art in KHiO's basement, it was also very clear that they had been put there in 2010 when the academy was forced to move, and that since then, none of us have had the time or energy to get things organised, so they were forgotten.

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Stacey: I really like this notion that you have brought in, Dag Erik, about institutional history having a negative imprint. As you (so beautifully) alluded to the academic tradition of the nudes, I can't help thinking about the sitters rather than the sculptors. It is not only an academic tradition but also a colonial one. I heard once that provenance is also referred to as custodial history, and this made me think of this re-emergence of plaster nudes as a janitorial practice, or in this case spring cleaning.

Ane: Like dust swept out from the corners to be gotten rid of? Or we can see them as zombies coming back to haunt us, or, alternatively, as accompanying us at the old art academy's funeral wake.

When you talk about nude models, Stacey, I naturally had the same reaction; these disrobed persons must have had to stand for hours so the students could study them. But at the same time, I need to see them in a more complex way than just putting them at the bottom of the hierarchy as exploited persons. I belong maybe to the last generation that received instruction in nude drawing, mostly at the school I attended before entering the academy,

but we drew models for the entrance exam to the National Academy of Art in Oslo in 1994. And I experienced sitting with a nude model in front of me as liberating – the sexual aspect of staring at a nude body evaporated quite quickly, and soon you just sat there in front of a volume with twists, tension, movement and inertia. At its best, there was intense concentration in it, and it was not inherently oppressive or hierarchical. The older models we had were strict; in the breaks they always wore a dressing gown and walked around criticizing the drawings. I was also a model myself. I think I liked being able to be naked in a 'professional' way. It eventually became very natural.

I don't mean to excuse the blatantly hierarchical and sexist structures established around the use of nude models in the past. But if we are going to look at precisely these models, they were working from 1954 on onwards, so they were not necessarily terribly poor, nor were they prostitutes. Historically speaking, the status of models changed parallel to sexual liberation, and Edvard Munch's model Birgit Prestøe, for example, was proud of her career as an artist's model, seeing herself as making an important contribution to Munch's work. So, I waver between seeing this army of ghosts as victims and as respected representatives for all those who, at whatever time, have made the production of art possible.

Stacey: I think we must view them with a double gaze.



Ane: On these scrappy labels attached to the figures, we read the names of both the artists and the models, so they must have cared about who the model was. Incidentally, I found a quote from Prestøe about Munch: “I thought he was delightful to look at, beautiful as a young Apollo, wise as an ageing Zeus.” I like how the model, in this case, sexualises the artist.

Dag Erik: Yes, the gaze is turned around. The model I drew for the entrance exam was Hanna Brieschke, who had also been Edvard Munch’s model. To pursue the idea of changing the direction of the gaze a bit further: perhaps drawing nudes also de-individualised the potential students to some extent? But even though everyone was gathered together around the nude model as an assignment, it was nevertheless a matter of identifying the individual suitability of prospective students on the basis of this established norm. Are there common criteria for being able to identify good candidates in 2021? If so, what are they?

Stacey: I don’t think I have a concrete answer but more a hope or a dream with regards to reflection. The common denominator is the candidates’ capacity for reflection, expressed in various ways, and that is also where I find the tradition of nude models somewhat outdated. A room of twenty students, all trying to capture the same thing, yet from different angles. One could argue that there is a great deal of storytelling involved in sculpting; however, the goal is, after all, a representation or mimicry of life.

Ane: Yes, we look for a capacity for reflection, a certain maturity indicating that the student knows what she is doing. The most important thing about the entrance exam is to ensure that what the candidate says about what she does corresponds with what the admissions committee sees, and that there is original and interesting thinking that can be found in the work. But we no longer use the methodology of asking everyone to do the same assignment in order to single out the best students.

I see with my mind’s eye these old professors who purchased the plaster figures. They stand in front of these works and the first thought that comes to mind is: *These are good*. What they meant was that they were good in a purely formal sense, but that they were also expressive and meaningful in some way or another. I myself think they are unbelievably meaningless as individual objects. And as a mass, they reflect for me, first and foremost, homogeneity and a kind of totalitarianism; the notion that everyone at the school clearly agreed on what it was important to do, and that it had to be done in some particular way. Terrifying. I find that there is more room for difference today, but it is of course difficult to pass judgment on the present.

Dag Erik: Yes, just as elsewhere in society, there is more room for difference today, also in art education. But there is no unconditional individuality; it is linked for the most part to an ideal about individualism. And individualism is something different from

individuality. The army of silent plaster figures bears witness to an ideologically petrified legacy dating back to the Académie Royale of 1648. Throughout history, we have seen various initiatives that challenge the academy’s control regimes, examples being the French painter Gustave Courbet in the 1800s, or the collective pedagogical models of Black Mountain College from 1933 to 1957. But these initiatives often remain limited in scope, and they are essentially more temporary and tactical than long-term and strategic.

Today, the financing of art education is ideologically linked to goal steering and a politically-driven demand to see art as an occupation. This may be our era’s academism.

Ane: Yes, and it’s interesting to observe how control has been staged in different ways throughout history. Back when art education was freer, in the sense of being steered more by the individual student, the methodology seems to have been correspondingly narrower and more controlled. But when the pedagogy is freer, the state comes in and





tries to take control. It seems like the amount of control is constant.

Dag Erik, you have been interested for a long time in provenance, that is, in the history of art from the time of its origin to the present. This includes each place where the art has been and the care it has received along the way. It seems like this interest of yours pertains to all types of art, from world-famous paintings to unknown student works. What is it about provenance that you find so interesting?

Dag Erik: It has to do with an interest in personal and collective memory and how meaning is developed and formed materially. How we deal with physical material is meaningful, regardless of whether it concerns everyday objects, property or art – how we concretely take hold of it and how its meaning can change as a consequence of our touch. Provenance raises questions broaching many fields, for instance, law, politics, economics, ethics

and aesthetics, and it is rooted specifically in objects. The artistic production of meaning arises first with the artist, but then more meaning accrues due to the art's social circulation, often through persons who are linked to a specific work of art. We can call it society's continuous post-production. We experience, for example, that the meaning of buildings, objects or works of art changes when property rights change. And also the absence of interest, that something is forgotten or stowed away – this too represents production of meaning by the sender (in the sense that there are both senders and receivers of meaning).

Ane: The lack of interest in these plaster works is practical, pedagogical and political: the study of nude models was abandoned, as Stacey points out. It was viewed as colonial and irrelevant to teaching contemporary artists. So for you, the lack of interest in these works is as interesting as any possible interest they may have received?

Dag Erik: Lack of interest does not mean that something is erased. A neglected collection of plaster figures is a symptom of a more comprehensive phenomenon, for example, the historical fact that there has never been a building that can accommodate them. In Norway, the pedagogical-institutional presence of art has never led to the erection of a monumental building such as we see in other European countries. And this can of course seem to result in freedom – that art education did not manifest itself as a *royal* art academy

but instead was established as a *national* art academy, through the initiative of the artist Christian Krohg. And by the way, parliament voted it through by a very narrow margin. But first and foremost, this is a sign of irrelevance, which reflects that art has never been rooted in a political institution here in Norway. We also lack comprehensive archives as such; the closest we come to an archive here is probably this collection?

Stacey: Yes, and I also see this building itself, St. Olavs *gate*, as a huge archival object. The building breathes, and to this day, it has energy concealed and stored in all the notes in permanent marker, all the strange toilet art, random frescos and traces of debauchery.

Ane: If we are going to talk a little about this exhibition at St. Olavs *gate*, then I think there are several aspects of it that are interesting. First, a graduation exhibition can be used as a political tool. I think the graduation exhibition as a form is usually quite uninteresting – there's something petrified about everyone needing to present their own works in the same room; this breaks with the principles according to which we teach, which emphasise the process, context, collaboration, new forms of presentation, etc. But in this particular case, it seems important that the students occupy this building and use it, and that they thereby simultaneously enter a political arena of battle.

Furthermore, at least for me, it has opened up the possibility of there being a free space in central Oslo. A completely run down, uncontrolled

and unregulated area in the heart of the city. It makes me understand that I am actually grieving over Oslo such as it now appears, as a city that people cannot afford to live in, where all the buildings and functions stand out as rhetorical; from the cobblestones laid on Karl Johans *gate* in 2004, which were intended to mobilise a form of nineteenth-century romanticism, to the quay at Tjuvholmen, with guards to prevent people from using as a place for swimming. I want a city centre in which students, the poor, families, ordinary people, can feel at home.

Stacey: Yes, and I think we should pay more attention to the land that surrounds 32 St. Olavs *gate*, as it adds to the publicness of the area. In fact, it has a more open and contested history despite its royal appearance. The other day I had a meeting with the artist Lars Sandås who told me about the area from Slottsparken, down Karl Johans *gate* and up to the Storting, formerly known as 'the walk of shame.' For several decades, it was mainly occupied by the open drug scene. The word *shame* did not refer to people's addiction; rather, it was projected onto the police, since they, as law enforcement officials, could be seen chasing the addicts up and down Karl Johans *gate*. This happened from the 1960s to the 1990s, a period that also covers part of the time when the art academy was located on St. Olavs *gate*. Sandås proposed putting up a memorial in Slottsparken commemorating the city's first open drug scene, but the proposal was turned down by the Royal Palace.

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Ane: Regarding the sale of the property on *St. Olavs gate*; I've looked at the main buildings the government has sold in recent years, and in all cases, the new owner emphasises that the use of the building will now change, it will contain 'public-oriented' activities and become a 'large living room' for the city's inhabitants. I feel almost nauseated by all the large living rooms we are now going to have around us. At the same time, the former National Academy of Art was not experienced as accessible to 'the public,' with the exception of the café. So how is it possible to defend the view that precisely this privileged property should be used to teach a limited number of middle-class young people rather than, for instance, to turn it into a gigantic park facility with cafés and restaurants?

Stacey: Exactly. This paradox has had me staring at the ceiling until three in the morning since we've occupied the building. The argument for turning the building into a public space has inevitably sparked some contradictions. I remember having similar feelings when the new Deichman Public Library opened in Bjørvika; an already completely gentrified neighborhood. Despite delays in construction, the building and its opening to the neighborhood felt slightly overdue, as if Deichman had been too busy putting on its make-up to realize that the party in Bjørvika had already been going on for years. What did open was not a library but an activity centre. Shiny

and see-through, I walked through it on the opening weekend with a pout on my face while kids ran around, ecstatic about all the new amenities the space had to offer. A few visits later, and after talking to many employees, I realised that this new space was more open, more accessible, and most importantly, more desired than it had been at its previous location.

Ane: I understand what you mean, and I think your observations about the new Deichman Public Library are interesting. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between a public library and these 'large living rooms', or Espresso House, for that matter: namely that a library is still free to use and accessible to everyone. This, in my opinion, gives the libraries a special position or status, and it makes it easier to reconcile oneself with the new Deichman building.

Stacey: Ane, I know you have worked specifically with these thematics, but have you given any thought to the effect that the different architecture of art academies has had on the public sphere? The notion of audience has strange connotations in the context of an art school since it is often just seen as an extended version of the student body. And the activity of the school usually aims at reaching a wider segment of the city's population, yet fails to do so. Having now spent a significant amount of time at *St. Olavs gate*, I can imagine that it felt just as closed as the old factory building we now inhabit.

Ane: It was actually more closed



than I experience KHiO today. But that was also because the students were not encouraged to exhibit their works in galleries or other venues, or to participate in the public art scene. At the time, the reigning idea was that it wasn't good for us to be exposed to the field too early. So, we went in and out of the doors here without the activity having any visible consequences in the wider environment – with the exception of the café, that is, Café Nordraak, which for a decade was very popular. The cultural elite sat and drank there every Friday and Saturday at the same time as the junkies hung out in Slottsparken.

As to the question about school buildings in the centre of town: first,

we must work to make art education accessible to more people, or at least to make it accessible to people who represent a wider segment of society. Second, the city centre should have a diversity of areas to be used for different activities. One can say many things about students, but they are usually socially involved actors; they create and use the city in different and more active ways than do, for example, employees in the public and private sectors. It is important that students localise central parts of the city, even though the school itself is not experienced as a public area. But in addition, it is our responsibility that the school is made visible to the wider society. Students and teachers at the

academy have unfortunately always cultivated a self-image that suggests exclusivity, being 'the chosen'. It is time to give up on this.

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Stacey: It's almost as if this text is a preamble, a speculation over something about to unravel. I would like to be a bit more imaginative in our thinking around these plaster figures: Can they speak to each other? If so, what do they say?

Dag Erik: When I look at them from an external point of view, I feel that they are asking for what could be called 'historical empathy,' and that this sort of empathy is difficult, if not impossible, to give. To the extent that the material can be made to speak, I think it needs to happen through the type of activation that a physical transfer involves. When you lay hold of an object and pack it in protective bubble wrap, lay it carefully in a vehicle and drive it through the streets, it becomes in many respects a new production; the very movement and handling corresponds with the object's creation, which in its time was also a matter of a physical handling of the material. Obviously, the way we handle the material today is different from the time when the objects were made, but neither do I think that access to what we call collective memory concerns re-establishing something from the past. But by allowing a historical material to pass through our hands and thoughts, it can become accessible; we can make it speak through our own experience here and now.

Ane: The action of carrying the plaster figures into the old school building was quite personal for me, since I attended the academy when it was here at St. Olavs *gate*, and I associate the building with the people who walked the halls, the activities that took place in the rooms, a type of life that has now vanished. For an artist, the space in which art comes into being, the studio or workroom, is as important as home. And when we unpacked the figures and positioned them in the room today, I noticed that I had already started to like them a bit, many of them had names, and even the one I disliked intensely the first time I saw it (a Fascistic, bearded head) had some appeal. The heads are very good to pat.

Stacey: Regardless of tradition, I think now is their time. They have something to say, and we should take the time to listen and see what we can learn from the sculpted ripples and folds in their flesh. As we stand side by side, I hope their residue accompanies us into this future of uncertainty.



He had a camera and took a picture of us.



Here's the picture he took.



At school and - everywhere...



I can't decide things for myself.



The first thing we'll do is guided reading -



We'll set the clock at four o'clock



And how many minutes after four is it now?



Then just move the hands according to what Berit says

The opossum and the snake²³²



Pablo Lafuente²³³

Ane Hort Guttu's film *Frihet forutsetter at noen er fri* (*Freedom Requires Free People*, 2011) accompanies Jens, a young boy, while he negotiates a space for himself at school, amidst his teachers and fellow students, accompanied by Ane, whose camera allows us to witness situations not usually accessible to those of us who are not teachers or students. The film begins with Jens getting hold of a camera to take a photograph when he's supposed to be the one photographed – a gesture that inverts the relations that we as spectators, that Ane as a mother, and that the teachers and his fellow students expect from the situation. With surprise, but also with empathy, Ane presents Jens's act as a gesture that functions as a precedent: in the days and weeks to come, his response to any given situation within the school will involve a similar attempt to question protocols, authorities and sequences, as well as any underlying assumption or goal. He has the urge, the habit, or both, to interrogate any collective dynamic of learning and sharing, as if every situation and process required actual negotiation between children and teachers before they entered it. As if Jens were stating, from an unknowingly Kantian stance given his young age, that the process of education must always be a process of self-emancipation, of leaving behind a minority for which one is ultimately responsible.

Processes of education are always processes of change, individual and collective. How such change comes about depends on the values, methods and visions from and through which the education process operates, but continuity and construction may be as common as acts of questioning and reconfiguration. Perhaps these are two approaches, and also two traditions, that are part of every process of change; or maybe this assertion is the result of an insistence on a dialectical understanding of how the world, or some things in it, work.

As if it were a fable, or a narrative of origins, these inclinations in confrontation and their respective behaviours may be exemplified by two creatures, both extremely important to originary populations of the Americas: the snake and the opossum.

The snake-canoe, or *cobra-canoa* is, for the Desana, Tukano, Baniwa and other peoples of the Rio Negro, responsible for the origin of humanity. In her journey from the Baía de Guanabara, where the city of Rio de Janeiro is today, along the North Eastern coast of Brazil and later the Amazon River and the Rio Negro, those she carried got off, became people and founded the cities and villages that still populate those banks and shores. This narrative of beginning

is repeated once and again in the accounts of the *pajés* and the elders, and only recently in written form. The continued existence of these peoples relies on the repetition of a narrative that is told over and over, shared by those who are part of the community and live in the same territory – a territory that, more than a place, is a relation, a way of living. In order to maintain that way of living, the snake-canoe must return in the voices of those who lead the community, so that others may learn it and eventually share it. The persistence of the community relies on the re-enactment, the repeated telling and listening, the maintenance of the ancestral tools that help us inhabit a world that continues to change.

The opossum, with its many names (*zarigüeya*, *gambá*, *mucura*, *sarigué*, *saruê*, *timbus*, *cassaco*, *micurê*, *zorro*, *tlacuache*, *raposa*, *huanchaca*, *comadreja*, *rabipelado*, *churro* or *canchaluco*) is present in nearly every biome of the Americas, but it's in the Mesoamerican and Andean regions where she appears in cosmological narratives. A living fossil, with an anatomic structure that hasn't changed for over 65 million years, the opossum is a creature of the night and also a marsupial – and, therefore, like the snake-canoe, her body functions as a recipient, a vessel. But her exceptional character resides elsewhere, in the way she reacts to danger. When her life is at risk, her vital signs immediately decrease, her muscles paralyse, her lips retract, and her body releases a smell of decomposition, which often allows her to escape the condition of prey. In order to avoid death, she pretends to be dead, as a reflex. And when she awakens, after a few minutes or some hours, she continues to be part of the world of the living, having had an experience of the dead and their world that she's not (yet) entitled to. Her defence strategy, her way of avoiding the end of what she is, takes her to a world that is not for her, only to come back later and disrupt the separations dictated by the cosmological order. And she doesn't return empty-handed. She returns with the knowledges and experiences that she had the opportunity to access: in Mesoamerican narratives, like a Prometheus, she brings fire to humans, while in today's Ecuador she's considered a creature of gossip, who doesn't even need to open her mouth in order to activate her potential to destabilise. The mere possibility of her speaking, her own presence, her existence, are disruptive in themselves.

If the snake constructs community through repetition of the ancestral, the opossum disrupts the order through her disregard for structures and legitimacies. Both their presences are symbolic,

and their impulses are beyond divergent; depending on the way they are enacted, they may be contradictory. Perhaps because the opossum is ophiophagous: she is immune to the snake's poison and may, ultimately, feast on her.

As ways of understanding the process of education, it is tempting to embrace the opossum as the cultural mediator who, operating within the institution of art and education, reconfigures spaces, accesses, knowledges and possibilities. A foreign, or at least a subaltern figure, whose own body, function and behaviour imply the possibility of a reconfiguration that, ultimately, could undo the institution from its core. By redrawing lines of authority and legitimacy, she relativises the importance of the institutional space that she occupies, and exposes its privilege; she brings fragility, rather than consolidation. And, as a snake-eater, her actions weaken communal processes. Like Jens's actions in the school, when they disrupt the shared pedagogical process they interpellate, cultural mediation understood as a process of reconfiguration acts against the maintenance of tradition that is fundamental to the persistence of indigenous peoples and their cultures, among other communities. The recurrent telling of the story of the snake-canoe doesn't increase the cultural capital of the community; it provides its grounds. The opossum digs holes underneath them.

The opossum's urge to fake death, strategic but involuntarily, resembles Jens's apparent need to question every situation in which he finds himself trapped. It is as if he were forced to do so in order to guarantee the survival of his own self. At a certain point in the film, Ane asks Jens if he feels free when he flees to the nearby forest during school time. He responds that when he escapes, he just feels like he's escaping. In another conversation, later on, he seems to reply to that same question by identifying a moment of freedom, when he can actually be 'himself': his walk home after school, on his own, in the dark. It is not the location, then, that defines the state of freedom, but the movement: the moment of emancipation, of self-determination is brought about by the process of walking away from the school, towards another realm, released from the school dynamics and their demands and moving towards others; carrying those dynamics with him, as something that has been learnt even if precisely to unlearn it.

The moment 'after', not necessarily 'as a consequence of' or 'in spite of'. At night, when there's no longer sunlight, away

from the focus, from the camera's sight, and from ours. Here may reside a possible strategy to avoid a direct confrontation between the snake and the opossum, and therefore avoid the risk of one being annihilated by the other. Both the snake and the opossum are furtive creatures, only visible when they make themselves seen; and being seen may lead to being at risk. Like them, education processes may also happen elsewhere, away from the institution; fluxes and processes, related or not to those that occur within it, happen outside the visibility granted by the institutional platform, and those moments needn't be incorporated within it. In their discretion, the snake and the opossum show us that any conflict or contradiction between them doesn't need to be resolved inside the space of visibility, and that the search for synthesis and resolution is a red herring. That a defence of intransitive behaviour, of actions that don't aim for a result or respond to a specific function, are fundamental. And so the snake and the opossum may cohabit, not necessarily facing each other, but looking in multiple directions, towards the inside and the outside.

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This brief text condenses a series of experiences I have had in recent years in institutions dedicated to education, as well as institutions that claim education as essential to their identity and practice. Some sort of continuity through difference: teaching artists and curators in an urban university in Western Europe and teaching art to non-artists in a rural university on the North Eastern coast of Brazil; conceiving as a curator a large-scale biennial in São Paulo that was to be mediated by an education team of around 300 people, and coordinating 28 educators in a cultural centre in Rio de Janeiro with the task of mediating exhibitions curated by others; creating an artistic programme for a museum of modern art in an attempt to undo the centrality of 'art', while conforming indigenous cultures into an exhibition to be hosted by another art museum. In all those cases, dealing with the combinations of formality and informality that often characterise art-related contexts, partly as an inheritance of the process of deskilling that took hold of artistic, and later curatorial practices, from the 1960s onwards. A deskilling that, like Jens's questions, was nurtured by an emancipatory spirit often imagined through the lens of exclusively individual positions, which it eventually served.

But specific skills are key when it comes to education. Techniques, methodologies and knowledges born within educational contexts, and in dialogue with practices and theories of education,

well beyond the 'artistic' or the 'curatorial'. Institutions that work with education need people who work as teachers, educators and mediators; people who do things that artists, curators and managers, by trade, focus and interest, are not ready to do. Those teachers and educators may also work with continuity and construction; or with critique and reconfiguration. Or, rather, with them all, at different times and spaces, in an attempt to construct a 'common culture' through the engagement of conflictive, sometimes incompatible positions.



Focusing on the invisible, organizational practices of Casco, some skeptics found the unlearning practice to be a form of naval gazing or hyper reflexivity, and doubts were constantly raised on whether its aims could actually be achieved. Others claimed that the risks of failure, which could influence the public funding Casco gets, were too high and that it was better, therefore, to leave things as they were. The broader and lingering question has been: Wouldn't it be better just to focus on art as we know it? The current and expanding #MeToo movement and those decolonizing institutions would answer this question with a resounding no. Starting with the fields of art and culture across the world, often-BPOC women artists, producers, researchers, and administrators alike are speaking out about the sexist, racist, patriarchal, and capitalist-colonialist conditions of their work. These self-same conditions have been the subject of critical art works, but rarely have they "betrayed" the contradiction between what they (re)present and the reality of (re)producing such representational works. Is this what we call systemic? **As artistic and cultural producers we ask: If art and cultural productions express a desire for social change then doesn't what we show need to be**

reconnected to the conditions in which our art works and shows are made possible, so that this process might become leverage for the change itself? To embark on this process, we believe, is exactly how *institutional critique* as an artistic genre and the ensuing *new institutionalism* as a key artistic discourse of the last decades could move forward, namely to activate the front and the back of an institution, the visible and the invisible, to operate *in tandem*. Institute as you (re) present, and even blur such divisions!

INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE—REVISITED

As an artistic genre, **institutional critique** comprises of artistic investigations into and responses to *both* the art institution *and* the institution of art itself by exposing the institutional apparatus on which the category of art relies. Critique takes place via investigations into the art market, galleries, collectors, sponsors, local and national government museums, art spaces, self-organized groups, and artistic practices, among others. A red thread crosses this two-fold understanding of institution, whether it's an art institution or an institution of art, that implies **the institution is in fact inside of us and shapes the embodied and habitual ways we work and relate to each other**. Artist Andrea Fraser, a seminal protagonist of institutional critique, described the dynamic in the following words: "So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a "totally administered society," or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves."¹

With this immanent notion of institution in mind, our approach in *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* has been to study and (if necessary) intervene into the art organization Casco as an exemplary "body." This approach takes a tangential or critical measure to so-called new institutionalism, the art institution's own take on institutional critique. The practice of new institutionalism carried on the legacy of institutional critique in self-reflexive yet only discursive

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Andrea Fraser, "An Artist's Statement (1992)," *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. Alexander Alberro (MIT Press, Cambridge, 2005), 104.

forms,² making discursivity the medium of presentation. Instead, *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* has taken a performative form—as an expanded form of performance—in looking at the institution and working with the team as a site of group coordination (including human and non-human actors) in different spaces (also globally) and across different times, including habits and working routines as the embodiment of the institution. Consequently, the practice of "institutional critique" enacted by *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* has been negotiated, in the first instance, amongst those who work at Casco and embody the institution in interaction with Casco's wider community, while it has also been shared with a wider public. We, the whole team of Casco, including one or two interns and Annette Krauss, have carved out this site for unlearning within our working hours in the form of bi-monthly collective meetings. During those hours, we collaboratively examined the spatio-temporal, embodied, and material relationalities inherent in the institution of Casco.

COMMONING INSTITUTION

In the background of this performative collective practice is Casco's 2013–16 program "Composing the Commons," which was named in reflection of and as a continuing guideline from the past program, which involved participatory and collective forms of artistic production in tandem with a broader social movement.³ The necessity to reflect on collectivity on all levels, including political, economic, and psychological ones, was sensed and charged with an urgency to resist the expanding privatization and financialization of space, time, and subjectivities entangled with ongoing conditions of coloniality; and not least, increasing forms of precarization and competition that underlie all of our relations. The term "the commons" seems to allow this multiplex of concerns. In simplistic terms, the commons are

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As a series of curatorial, art educational as well as administrative practices (from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s), "new institutionalism" consisted of attempts to establish alternative forms of institutional activity of mostly medium-sized, publicly funded contemporary art institutions. It mainly resulted in a shift on a discursive level, "away from the institutional framing of an art object as practiced since the 1920s with elements such as the white cube, top-down organization and insider audiences" which at the same time opened the institutions up to new forms of managerialism and corporatization. See: Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger, "New Institutionalism Revisited." Online: <<http://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/new-institutionalism-revisited.html#.WwkNwqNh2Hp>> (Accessed June 2, 2018).

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The first long-term project at Casco "The Grand Domestic Revolution" (2010–12) was a central work in this direction.

established through a collective management of common resources which can be found in different historical and cultural contexts. To translate its meaning and operations to a viable present day understanding and practice means to complicate it. For instance, one of Casco's central approaches to the commons is a feminist perspective that, after Silvia Federici, seeks to collectivize domestic and reproductive labor that has been made invisible or devalorized, as manifest in gendered and racialized forms of no payment or low wages. Federici's research on women's legacies of the commons beyond Europe and the Western idea of land enclosure are a crucial part of our "complication" of the commons.⁴ The concept of "the undercommons," as elaborated by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, underlies the poetics and agency of collective resistance and struggle that takes place *beneath and within* the existing system, pointing to anti-slavery struggles, hence differentiating itself from the institutionalized commons with its potential to be trapped into a logic of management and control. Instead, as a form of collective struggle and mutual learning, "study" is a way of commoning "under the existing institutional radar" that resonated strongly with a collective desire felt within the Casco team and in its wider networks, most notably Arts Collaboratory, in the name of a "desire for deep understanding."

This approach to the commons has been accompanied by a number of artistic and other collective experimental inquiries over several years, and has entailed the question of how Casco, as an art institution, relates to the commons. A few marking points plot out the answer to this question. One is our exhibition titled *New Habits* (2014) which was special as it inaugurated Casco's new location and building. Alluding to Casco's new "body," the exhibition took a cue from Giorgio Agamben's recent research into Franciscan communities⁵ while responding to the artists who we were working with at that time.⁶ Agamben's main thesis describes how the Franciscans evaded authoritarian institutions like the church by focusing on common rules and ethics of "use" against those of "property," and "poverty" against "wealth." These rules are loose in comparison to

4 Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," *The Commoner*, 2012. Online: <<http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>> (Accessed June 2, 2018).

5 Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

6 The new premises of Casco, we found out, used to be a convent that lived according to the Third Order of Saint Francis, a history that connected us more closely to our research than we had anticipated.

laws and involve "forms" including what to wear, whereby "habits" are named in double senses. At the same time, artists like Aimee Zito Lema, Christian Nyampeta, Ayreen Anastasa, Rene Gabri, and Sung Hwan Kim brought certain demands within the team and Casco's surrounding communities to exercise their daily practices, from what and how to eat, to how to deal with daily rhythms as part of their artistic projects. It is also in the context of dealing with "habits" that Annette Krauss, Casco's long-term collaborating artist, and the whole team of Casco agreed to start the *Site for Unlearning* venture. This journey has proceeded as much as interwoven with the wider collective working process of the Arts Collaboratory network, which Casco is part of. For most of its members—comprised of twenty-three art organizations based in the so-called "Global South"—and the only and main funder from the Netherlands, Stichting DOEN, it did not take long to realize that unless they the underlying and invisible structure for their program was changed they could not further their respective local artistic-social engagement as well as their trans-local collaborations. By structure, we mean those hierarchical colonial-era labor and financial relations that most of the member organizations inherited. We need to "do commoning" in our institutions. In order to do so, we also need to unlearn our old habits. These twin concepts echo back and forth, again and again.

UNLEARNING INSTITUTION

What do we mean by unlearning? It's also our habit to attribute positive value to those learning and art institutions in general that have been busy with positioning themselves as a place for learning. Then, why *unlearn*? To approach these questions requires us to look through the relationship between learning and unlearning to explore the connecting tissue between unlearning, learning, lifelong learning, and institution. Here (and in this book as a whole), lifelong learning—as learning from cradle to grave—is examined as a specific derivative of European knowledge economies since 1990s, and one of the dominant conceptions of learning that is accumulative, progress-oriented, and institutionally driven for economic profit. Many scholars agree meanwhile, that lifelong learning's economic focus pervades institutions and subjectivities today. As an art institution and artistic practice with research and experimentation as key modalities—for instance, the programming of artistic research projects around the commons—*Site for Unlearning* (Art Organization)

might be actually reinforcing this kind of “lifelong learning” agenda.

“Unlearning,” in the terms set out by Annette, juxtaposes this agenda and instead echoes an expression coined by post-colonial feminist thinker Gayatri Spivak, “unlearning one’s privileges.”⁷ Spivak urges us to find ways of questioning and reworking one’s assumptions, prejudices, and histories in order to tackle injustices in a globalized world. In other words, unlearning is less about acquiring new skills and knowledge and more about taking on an active critical investigation of normative structures and practices in order to become aware and get rid of taken-for-granted “truths” of theory and practice with the aim to think and work through inequalities in everyday life. **This notion of unlearning, hence, directs our attention to habits again.** Habits are those practices of thinking and doing through which we engage bodily with our daily environment, practices that have always already slipped our rational analysis. They constitute learned gestures, rhythms, or postures of our bodies that are incorporated in a particular space and time. Therefore, habits form the political identity of our bodies and are inseparably linked to the world views and knowledge that we consciously and unconsciously perform. **We know how difficult it is to become aware of a habit, let alone getting rid of it, and therein lies the complication.** Have you ever successfully rid yourself of your stress-induced hair pulling habit? Or attempted to banish the habit of thinking, after Spivak, “that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs” in encountering each other?⁸ It needs extra work, energy, and imagination—mentally and bodily—in order to get rid of a specific working and thinking “direction” and engage in a different one.

So, in this light, and while the art institution itself is fed by the capitalist economy and its logic of accumulative learning, advancement, and growth we could reasonably question whether it is even possible to unlearn something like an art institution. While attempting to confront what we have internalized to be impossibilities, **unlearning marks both an engagement with institutional processes that has the potential to break with the promise of limitless economic advancement and growth, and an attempt to intervene in the institution of learning itself.** Not surprisingly, one

7 Susan Harasym, ed., *Spivak, G. The Postcolonial Critic* (Routledge, London, 1990), vii.

8 Gayatri Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* vol 103 (2004): 523–81, 532.

of the recurring discussions in our collective meetings revolved around the sheer impossibility of unlearning, and whether we should return to more pragmatic, “possible” organizational business as we know it.

We didn’t. Instead the experiments we conceived of (see more on them below) also have to be seen as collective research into the politics of (im)possibilities that play a crucial part in approaching processes of unlearning within an organizational structure. They build a support structure for this research with and into an institution when the collective encounters dominant forms of thinking and behaving, (affective) structures of impossibilities, and their entanglement with embodied knowledges.

Thus, *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* is both an attempt to thicken these practices of unlearning and a means of feeding the embodied imagination towards unlearning capitalism within the institutional structures of an art organization. This resonates with learning the commons in the formation of new habits.

BEING BUSY AS AN INSTITUTIONAL HABIT

Should there be any preexisting methods for unlearning, one might be to set the terms of collaboration. The whole team of Casco and Annette⁹ agreed on having two-hour-long bi-weekly or monthly meetings at the Casco office, during which we approached the questions of what we wanted to unlearn, how to approach unlearning, and what we were struggling with and what we agreed upon. The team made a decision not to claim these meeting hours as extra working hours but to integrate them into their general working hours, while freelancing work was reimbursed. Our identification of institutional habits for collective unlearning was intertwined with a vision for the commons that is enacted, visualized, and formulated in exhibitions, public discussions, publications, community work, and the way Casco as an organization is run on a management level, including its administrative ethos and its methods of production and communication. After a few meetings, a common priority to unlearn **our problematic relation with a sense of busyness arose. “Feeling busy” is a psychosomatic state that causes anxiety and frustration.**

9 The team has varied in size from four to nine people. Over the period of the collaboration the team at Casco has consisted of six to eight regular staff members and two paid interns. Additionally, two to three freelancers (including Annette), have been connected to specific project phases. This includes the continuous transcriptions and comment on each meeting by Whitney Stark and the designer Rosie Eveleigh.

Ying Que, who by then worked as the Community and Project coordinator at Casco, expressed this sense of busyness at Casco in the following:

Yes, it is like when you ask someone here, “how are you doing?” and they reply, “Very busy, very busy. I am so busy.” A couple of years ago, I read an article called “Stop the Glorification of Being Busy” and from researching that further, I came upon this collection of essays by Bertrand Russell entitled, *In Praise of Idleness*, which campaigned for a twenty-one-hour work week. This could be quite interesting for us, as we seem to always be so very busy and quite stressed. It is just part of our rhythm to try and deal with our workload, balancing our work ethic with work and life together. [...] I thought it might be interesting for us to look at unlearning the internalized processes of having to produce results, measurable results, of being productive in that sense: to be in the office for eight hours and present Excel sheets, project plans, schedules, and e-mailing. There is this opposition of having to be productive versus doing nothing, in which doing nothing is just considered unproductive, while it could actually be quite elevating for the spirits and inspiring. You can be quite tired and so not really think things over because you have to produce all the time.¹⁰

In subsequent meetings and conversations, we—the team and Annette—discussed and accounted for different problems of being busy and the relations to our working environments that have concerned all of us. The conversations gained a certain momentum on the occasion of a mis-hearing—of the word busyness as business. Closer study assured us that feeling busy is not just a banal sense of pressure we happen to share. Busyness is the constant demand for productivity in terms of commodification, including production and reproduction, and brings about an increasingly unpleasant and often-times unhealthy state. Our study of institutional habits of busyness

10

This quotation is an early articulation from one of our initial conversations in 2014, then audio-recorded and transcribed as part of the meetings of *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*. It is taken from one of four *Transcription-Booklets* that we produced for the *New Habits* exhibition.

and its relationship to business revealed that we were interested in those moments of busyness that are in fact materializations of what we understood as business—as the neoliberal condition of profit orientation and economization, with its driving force of optimization. **“Busyness in the neoliberal sense comes from larger societal processes that celebrate being busy and equate its effects to signs of being a productive citizen with a successful career and vibrant social life.”** Artists are busy. CEOs of big companies are busy. Students are busy. Bankers are busy. Activists are busy. Professors are busy. Mothers are busy. Even our children and grandparents are busy. The Casco team is also always busy. How can we ever unlearn this habit of busyness, or as we call it, busyness/business?¹¹

Let’s come back to Spivak. Habits, she claims, cannot be disabled through the classic philosophical re-examination of an argument and its premise. Instead, she argues for the **“training of the imagination,”** which could result in an aesthetic that *“short-circuits the task of shaking up the habit of not examining [the premises].”*¹² This aesthetic short-circuit comes from weaving together literature, literacy, and political intervention as a way of “training the imagination for epistemological performance and [...] intervention.”¹³ For Spivak, this involves a “productive undoing” that must be carried out along the “fault lines of the doing, without accusation, without excuse, with a view to use.”¹⁴ Hence, in her spirit we entwine our performative approach and the study of the affective structures of (im)possibilities. In this sense, unlearning institutional habits has a double trajectory involving ongoing discursive and critical investigations coupled with bodily interventions, structural literacy,¹⁵ and imaginative jumps.

The potential of this double trajectory lies in the very linking of aesthetic and social forms made possible through the activation of a performative register; an understanding of form that speaks beyond the discourse of aesthetics to connect aesthetic, social, and historical contexts. This aesthetic-social form resonates with the compelling work of literary critic Caroline Levine who ties form to

11

Excerpt from collective writing: Team at Casco, and Annette Krauss, “Site for Unlearning (Art Organization),” *The Public School for Architecture*, ed. Lars Fischer, Rachel Himmelfarb (Brussels: Common Books, 2015), 101–23.

12

Gayatri Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 6.

13

Ibid, 122.

14

Ibid, 1.

15

In the sense of becoming able to read structural trajectories entangled with our daily everyday practices.

politics, as in her view form not only organizes works of art but also political life.¹⁶ In a similar way to *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*, Levine articulates an expanded idea of form as being the “work of form to make order”¹⁷ through specific arrangements, configurations, and distributions. Thus, if form organizes not only art but political life, it equally organizes the *ways* we know art, politics, and institutions. Against this backdrop, we propose to look at our collaboration, the work at Casco, and the unlearning project from another perspective, namely as **forms of organizing**. *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* is both deeply embedded in an understanding of the institutional that is embodied, performative, and process-orientated and it attempts to push, reconsider, and in the best case unlearn the very limits of what form is and does in this particular institutional context. In this sense, it is a study of organizational forms to understand how aesthetic form functions in overlapping and colliding in arrangements with other social or political forms in order to thicken processes of unlearning.

UNLEARNING BUSYNESS/BUSINESS

The aims of our two-hour-long bi-weekly or monthly team get-togethers at the Casco office raised certain questions: How did we attempt to train the imagination? Were we able to produce an aesthetic short-circuit? Have we unlearned busyness/business? We were constantly in search of what and how to unlearn together. With no pre-given solution or methods available we sometimes got tired of this process. But as we met and studied together, this constant searching and questioning eventually led us to fourteen exercises,¹⁸ which we called *unlearning exercises*. To a certain degree, these unlearning exercises first instituted what we now do on a regular basis and have begun a body of (art) work. Among the fourteen, some have remained one-off trials, having nevertheless been important for our unlearning investigations, their development, and connected experiences. For example,



16

Ibid, 3.

17

Caroline Levine, *Forms. Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

18

The etymological origin of the term “exercise” in Latin is “*exercere*,” meaning “keeping busy,” connoting its use in hierarchical disciplinary contexts such as existing educational institutions, (professional) sports training facilities, military training facilities, and so on. We aim to grapple with the double bind of the term exercise, hence proposing the term “unlearning exercise.”

“Care Network,” as inspired by the *Nanopolitics Handbook*,¹⁹ revealed professional and emotional relationalities of interdependency within the team. This led us to “Mood Color,” through which we hoped to address and take care of some affective interactions occurring in our team. Affect hugely affects relationships but is hard to articulate and express—even more so than emotion. “Time Diary” aimed to track our use of time over a week. While it may resemble a managerialist time management method, in our case we hoped to examine how our management of time(s) causes busyness in the hope of finding other modalities of time and rhythm towards allowing and finding value in so-called “really unproductive” time. Other unlearning exercises have become long-term engagements including organizing “Collective Reading” time for sharing relevant reading materials and ensuring a regular team “meeting” to allow sufficient time for face-to-face conversations. More challenging, ongoing unlearning exercises include “(Collective) Authorship” through which we address the politics of citation and authorship, including within *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)*. “Property Relations” is the one that caused the most resistance and discomfort within the group, including the question of how it related to unlearning busyness. Other questions included: What do each of us own? What do we own collectively? What does the art organization own of us? Is there a different way of sharing? Bifurcating from this is “Well-being and Wage,” the ongoing, unresolved exercise of reconsidering our wage systems.²⁰ The process of unlearning busyness is indeed the process of unlearning the capitalist logics of relations in all facets towards the commons. The “impossibility” of unlearning is an acknowledged possibility given that Casco’s economy is heavily dependent on public funding whose measures and expectations are not so different from “busyness” in other areas; in the case of art, product and profit are audience numbers and visibility. Yet, what if this very impossibility is what capitalism teaches us; what if the mechanism of learning, as an accumulation of knowledge and skills, lets us learn that unlearning is impossible? Could we make the impossible possible?

19 Care Network is inspired by the *Nanopolitics Handbook: The Nanopolitics Group*, Paolo Plotegher, Manuela Zechner and Bue Rübner Hansen eds. (New York, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013). Online: <<http://www.minorcompositions.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/nanopolitics-web.pdf>> (Accessed April 4, 2017).

20 Inspired by Chapter 5, “Take Back Property: Commoning,” J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy, *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 125–58.

CLEANING AS A NEW HABIT

Weekly collective cleaning is the exercise that has become the most established as a new institutional habit. Every Monday after the weekly team meeting the whole team cleans the office together. As office cleaning was always a team task it has never been outsourced, however it was mostly being done by just a few people in the team. One day, two of those who often did the cleaning sent an e-mail out to the rest of the team with a plea to pay attention to this problem. The email was signed off with the poignant remark “*from your lovely housewives.*” This instance happened during the early period of our collaboration and it became the subject of one of the unlearning meetings. An idea was put forward to try to make cleaning together every Monday at the same time a regular collective unlearning exercise. Which we did and still do.

And, a reader might ask, are you no longer busy? Our answer is “No.” We feel less busy, but we certainly have even more work to do. The habit of collective working processes in the spirit of the commons does take much more time than a hierarchical decision making and labor process, even though we don’t follow the logic of consensus-based decision making. Neither does it guarantee that the decision is right. As much as we have funding institutions that support our engagement with the commons and unlearning process, there are others that do not understand our efforts and would rather undermine our work-practice by relegating it into the realm of invisibility. Or, to tell the story from a different angle, regular cleaning at Casco as a micro habit, act, and gesture implies much more than its scale proposes and perhaps even more, as we still clean even when we encounter the desire to postpone the work because we feel busy. The implication of this ongoing practice embraces not only the whole organization but also the notion of art as our primary focus. What do we mean by this?

THE ART AND POLITICS OF CLEANING

Here we return to reproductive labor, or domestic labor and maintenance, a familiar subject of Casco’s program. The long-term research project *Grand Domestic Revolution* (GDR, 2012–12 and touring as *GDR Goes On*) has focused on domestic labor as gendered, racialized, invisibilized, isolated, and inviolized labor. GDR brought works like *Women and Work* (1973–75) by Mary Kelly with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, and *Nightcleaner* (1972–75) by Berwick Street

Film Collective to the program. It presented *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969) by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who radically questioned what is subsumed under avant-garde and conceptual art and contested the separation between the artwork and housework as being artificial. Working along these borders, her manifesto interrogates forms of domination and exclusion perpetuated by the hierarchical relationships between maintenance and art, and maintenance and development. Above all, a group of cultural workers, including the shifting team at Casco and Annette formed ASK!,²¹ in an attempt to align with the cleaner's movement in the Netherlands and the struggle against the international division of labor. At that time the cleaner's movement included the Dutch Labor Union (FNV) and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU), most members of IMWU work as domestic workers yet are also undocumented migrants²². With the support of artist Andreas Siekmann we created a series of isotypes that represented domestic workers as militant workers to be stenciled on the street along with the motto by the Domestic Workers' movement; "Domestic Work is Work" or "Recognition and Respect for Domestic Work."

After some years since the beginning of the domestic worker's movement in the Netherlands around 2011, there has been no legal improvement for those migrant domestic workers and so their working—and living—conditions remain extremely precarious. The GDR exhibition and performative actions of stenciling have stopped, yet cleaning has become a habit of ours that remains a constant reminder for the status of (migrant) domestic labor not only in our organization but in a broader social context. This is a reminder that the pervasive social inequalities that perpetuate the colonial-capitalist structure are still increasingly racialized and gendered. In the face of these constant, sticky reminders, how can we continue to "produce art"

21 The members of ASK! experimented with making visible the conditions and demands of "invisible work" of domestic workers in the Netherlands while reflecting on our own "domestic conditions" in the cultural sector. See Sven Lüticken, "Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art," *Afterall* vol 40 (Autumn/Winter 2015). Online: <www.afterall.org/journal/issue.40/social_media> (Accessed June 3, 2018).

22 For more details see "Toilet (T)issue #3: Against All Odds—Migrant Domestic Labor Struggle and Forms of Organizing," in *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning*, eds. Binna Choi, Annette Krauss, Yolande van der Heide, Liz Allan, 2018, Valiz/Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons.

in the way we used to know, especially if we desire to bring art for the society of the commons? Speaking of "we" again, with this question we are not alone. Feminists theorists Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt claim that the tension between art's presumed autonomy and the underlying material condition is acute. Autonomy, they say, is a practice that is always already infused and grounded in reproduction, yet structurally "invisibilized" in order to retain its relationship to capital. "The modern stakes for the autonomy of art had to do with severing itself from productive labour, conceivably to counter a world where the mental and manual labour brutalized some and idealised others." The basis for this form of autonomy has been "the unfulfilled utopia of avant-garde as unalienated labour," while the labor of maintenance and reproductive work has remained alienated, resulting in its ongoing difficult existence within the realm of art.²³

FOR AN ART INSTITUTION THAT IS NOT BUSY, AS...

The unlearning exercise "Rewriting Maintenance Manifesto" is an enactment of rewriting Ukeles' manifesto. Both manifestos engage with the fact that while reproductive labor often symbolized by cleaning it is not about cleaning alone. In the case of art institutions reproductive labor also includes, for instance, maintaining the work space, archives, and library, personally welcoming visitors with a cup of tea, and taking care of oneself when sick or feeling down, and many other relations, including those with artists and migrant domestic workers. These tasks are now acknowledged as part of our workload alongside fundraising, negotiating commissions, managing budgets, traveling, preparing, learning, teaching, making, and collaborating. Here, the commons are not only the subject, but our guide for ways of working and instituting. Hence, we have even more work and it's hard to not be overwhelmed by busyness. Perhaps it's even harder since the more explicit we became with our intention and engagement with new practices of the commons, the greater the number of skeptical eyes came to focus on the mistakes and contradictions that might prove our vision to be an *impossibility*.

... OTHER FORMS OF GOVERNANCE AND EXPERTISE UNFOLD

In January 2016 we had the opportunity to discuss

some of the unlearning exercises with feminist geographer and economist Kathrine Gibson in the context of the forum “Commoning Economy” at Casco. We had been struggling with the way “Time Diary” and “Wage and Well-Being” were resembling a managerialist method to optimize time management after intending instead to examine how our management of time(s) causes busyness in the hope of finding other modalities of time. Gibson linked time and busyness to the notion of expertise and, in this case, the shifting nature of the team at Casco, proposing “cross-training time” as a new modality where organizations allow time to their staff members to “skill other people up in one’s own skills. [...] It is about a certain spare capacity, so when it’s needed, that capacity can be used.”²⁴ Gibson noted that this time, particularly absent in the cultural sector, could be a sort of “resilience measure for organizational work”²⁵ in case people get sick or leave the job. “Cross-training time” can also be understood more radically, as a thorough structural implementation of this time modality poses a challenge to the habit of hanging on to competencies and expertise needed to uphold a regime of productivity and its time patterns. In a more expanded form, it could be further seen as a step towards articulating and practicing another form of governance and sharing of power—a form of governance particularly interesting with regards to commoning. This responds to a question that we are frequently asked: Why would it be important to meet in person, spend time together, and study our working conditions together when instead, we could individually read analysis of neoliberal working conditions? The collaborative study of busyness/business—in all its impossibilities—sets out to intervene in the economy of time in order to thwart the interpellation by the business modalities of an art institution and one’s own artistic practice. This desire for intervention addresses questions of governance and expertise, and puts forward the attempt to break open hierarchies of (knowledge) production. It is on these grounds that **a collaborative study and practice is crucial for the project of unlearning.**

Ultimately, questions of governance and expertise ask for a different sharing of power and conjure again the debates on the commons and forms of collectivity. Following a conversation

24 From transcriptions of the audio-recorded “Wage and Well-Being Workshop,” January 18, 2016, Casco archives.
25 Ibid.

between Mara Verlić and Stavros Stavrides on the commons and governance, the claim to regulate power collectively is a pivotal one in commoning processes. Relating to the rotation of duties in the Zapatista movement in which people build forms or organizations to govern themselves, Stavrides argues that the accumulation of power is **“not only a question of personal ethics; we need to have concrete social mechanisms that prevent the accumulation of power.”**²⁶

In a somewhat surprising turn, Stavrides grants institutions a role in this, seeing them not only as normalizing technologies in the accumulation of power but emphasizing their potential as so-called **“threshold institutions”**²⁷ to come. These counter-institutions are based on the sharing of power, on equality and solidarity, and therefore necessarily prefigure a future differently. Their processes cannot be implanted top down, but emerge through experiments in practice, which, as Stavrides stresses, are and will be contradictory, ambiguous, and messy. Against this background, the *Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)* works towards a mechanism that could regulate power (in the institution of Casco) collectively. Concomitantly, if unlearning and the commons are dedicated to other forms of collectivity and organizing, the question of governance (and expertise) is crucial and needs to be confronted. This is what we would see in the coming, determined paths of Casco as “Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons”—however contradictory, ambiguous, and messy they might be.

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26 Stavros Stavrides and Mara Verlić, “Crisis and Commoning: Periods of Despair, Periods of Hope,” *Spaces of Commoning, Artistic Research and The Utopia of the Everyday*, ed. Anette Baldauf et al. (Berlin, Vienna: Sternberg Press, 2017), 56.
27 Ibid, 54.

Protect your refusal: exhaustion and unproductivity

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Jota Mombaça

"I am so expensive I am worthless"
Tasha & Tracie

"Arriving late is decolonizing work"
Bhenji Ra

I am sad. But I decided not to write about this sadness, at least not to the point of exhausting it in the text and hollowing it out, thus, dumping it in the shallow grave of elaboration. On the surface of the word. The years writing and being read have decanted in me the ever-renewed purpose of also cultivating the unutterable. And to leave, there in the zone of indefiniteness that skirts every enunciative gesture, a space always open to a possible plunge into the dark and dense ocean of mystery and secrecy.

Since 2015, I have lost five molars. But I decided against writing this autopsy, at least not to the point of rendering my entrails transparent and, therefore, immediately available for the readings of whoever. That the loss of my teeth temporally coincides with my movements of access to certain global contemporary art circuits does not strike me as mere coincidence, but an effect of this very process that, among curves and accidents, renders viable, in my tongue, the gesture of recounting these years writing and being read.

Don't get me wrong. I do not resent my position. I also do not cease to consider the cost of sustaining it, that is: the five teeth counted as missing and this sadness that begins and ends in the prolonged crisis of inhabiting hostile hospitality circuits, in which my body is received as an object inseparable from the logics of value that condition my work, thus making me inseparable not only from the work, but from value too. As a valued artist and writer (that is, integrated in a certain circuit of economic distribution and access, from which I am summoned to be consumed, found and seen), the fact of winning the game does not cancel out nor does it contradict the fact that I am playing a game in which it is impossible to win (the holes in my mouth and the weight in my chest being the evident signs of this).

The paradox of Black and Indigenous success – when measured on the basis of categories and schemes of value set up by coloniality and Whiteness, as well as by cisgendericity and its fantasy of self-established subjectivity – resides precisely in the fact that the choreographies of access to certain modalities of systemic power (such

as recognition in the fields of the arts and of knowledge production, for instance) are always conditioned by the re-inscription of people's lives and creation, groups and historically sub-humanised entities (racialised), into the market and its regulatory movements of value (and of life).

In the text *The Cognitive Plantation* (2020) – grounded in the generative encounter with Denise Ferreira da Silva's perspective regarding what she calls “negative accumulation” – I seek to elaborate on the problem of the reinsertion of Black and Indigenous lives (through their creations) as “critical commodities” by the contemporary art and knowledge production circuits, in view of the continuity of such processes with the slaving tradition established by this modern-colonial-global project of White supremacy (namely, that of incorporating Black and Indigenous lives as commodities). In the *Cognitive Plantation* – this territoriality consumed and consummated by the speculative strength of our gestures of invasion and of negotiation, as well as by the systemic capacity for updating extractive processes geared towards the perpetuation of colonial projects of ontological and material extortion of Black and Indigenous communities – the fantasy of agency is a trap, a corollary to the fantasy of access.

Although the problem-situation of racialised creators in the contemporary art world does not result in the exploitation and total obliteration of their lives (as was the case of our ancestors' problem-situation in face of colonialism, or still of those of us who are not able to access the possibility of being exploited by the system of art and knowledge production), in the relationship with the consumption and inclusion procedures of our creations by means of the art circuits we do not avoid confronting the position of commodity and its brutalising legacy. This means that the access of our work to the institutional and market circuits is extensive to our de-agencying regarding the possibility of interruption of the advance of the market and the institutions over the existential territory where we engender our lives.

To confront this non-emancipatory dimension of access – although it characterises a movement that is not able to immediately exceed the domain of critique – opens the possibility for a reconsideration of the terms defined by the now calcified representational critique of the second half of the last century, which contributed to the formation of the problem-situation in which we find ourselves now. In other words, such problematisation seeks to disarticulate the

automatic association between the representation of access and the programme for the emancipation of subalternised bodies and communities – that is, the demand that every inclusive justice programme must depend on the unviability of another collective answer by the subjects supposedly redeemed by that which is not ‘yes.’

✱

No. A tense word of unviable inscription in the languages forcibly accustomed to the grammars of subalternity. Heaviness in the voice, limit-gesture: how to make it cease, here, now, what is described as unsurmountable? Or further: how to engender, in the interval between exhaustion and unstopability, an unproductive curve that allows not only for the body's rest and a cultivation of the self, but for the interruption of the obliteration circles of ontological extortion that are tensely inscribed in Black and Indigenous lives in relation to the social-colonial world and their circuits of economic and energetic exploitation of life?

Such questions herald the density of the gesture pre-announced by the title of this essay. After all, the imperative for the protection of refusal only gains meaning when the right to perform it is at risk. As the “no” is a problem-word, or an inaudible sound for dominant ears when uttered by subalternised mouths, we are summoned to join in an unrestricted flux. In face of a still colonial world, with its restraining grammars and excluding choreographies, the problem of Black and Indigenous agency is updated as a development of the imposed traditions of coloniality and White supremacy (extractive and slaving traditions).

The summons to productivity, in the context of access to institutional and market structures of contemporary art by racialised artists, seems to derive from an equality project that ignores the processes of negative accumulation¹ that characterise the histories of total extraction of Black and Indigenous productivity in the context of the energetic and material constitution of the world as we know it. Thus, the need to respond to the demands of inclusion with productive gestures is configured as a demand for dedication to the reform and maintenance of the same circuits in which our problem-situation is rooted. Formulas such as “occupy, work and transform” and “change the system from within” depend, thus, on our consent to the unstopability of racialised work in the context of the cognitive

1

See Denise Ferreira da Silva. *A Dívida Impagável* (The Unpayable Debt), 2019.

plantation; and consequently, to our commitment to that which in theory we are struggling to transform.

How then, in the moment of access and beyond, to sketch out an outline that limits the processes of total extraction of Black and Indigenous lives and creation as commodities?

✱

[illegible]

How many noes do I have to say until the possibility of refusal is decanted here? And how to exceed the individual register of this question?

✻

For about the last two years, a desire to stop writing grows within me. If part of this desire derives, to a certain measure, from the self-negation processes experimented by myself and by so many other racialised writers, as a side-effect of the silencing traditions socially imposed on us, there is also something in this longing that is not explained by this dimension of the relationship between race and writing, but rather by another expression of the same problem-situation, this being informed not by the historical processes of silencing, but by exhaustion in face of the institutional demand for the word.

Maybe it is the case that I should name this desire in another way. Perhaps as a desire to stop writing in a certain manner, with a certain constancy, in view of a certain deadline, in response to a certain proposition, while the stumps of my teeth wait in the gums for their own burial. Perhaps this desire to stop writing is also a desire to look at the teeth. Or, to shorten the sentence: a desire to stop.

(And, here, I feel compelled to write again² about the unstopability, in order to try to better explain in what way the feeling that I should work as if I am running was so deeply sewn onto me, by means of structural and molecular processes, to the point of me forgetting how to spell the word p a u s e).

(But I refuse to write about this again)

The possibility prefigured by refusal is not reduced to the pause, but certainly passes through it. Articulated in relation to the questions that make up this text, the movement of refusal is not one of resistance, because it is not the case of rejecting the scene of inclusion in order to immediately join the scene of some other work, of some counter-institutional productivity that there may be. If the refusal gesture sketched out here – the performance of the black and indigenous no – engenders a possibility, this one must, in face of the extremely sophisticated ways of appropriation and extortion that are characteristic of the cognitive plantation, start with a movement towards unproductivity, that is, towards the possibility of a non-valorised experience, outside the curve of value. So expensive it is worthless.

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Co-editor Daniel Guimarães

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Packer

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Assistant Julia Pinto
Image processing Carlos
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Oslo

A POST- CAPITALIST LEXICON FOR IMMIGRANT ARTISTS



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The story of Myntgata 2 – from an artist's organisation point of view

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On 17th October 2017, I attended an open hearing regarding the future use of Myntgata 2. The meeting took place nearby, at the Oslo Military Society in Myntgata 3 to be precise. I brought with me a short memorandum based on a mass of solid documentation and input from the artists of UKS (Young Artists Society) carefully and collectively prepared over several years. The goal was for Myngata 2 to be used as a place of work for artists. Less than a year later, it was announced that the building would be used both as the headquarters of osloBIENNALEN and as temporary studios for artists. By the end of 2018 more than 60 artists had been offered studio spaces in the building. But how did we get there, and how does the future look like for artists in the still rapidly developing city of Oslo?

BACKGROUND

The infrastructure for artists in Oslo has been and remains under great pressure. It has been pointed out several times, repeatedly and over time, that the increasing prices and decreasing available spaces pushes the artists out of the city. Buildings that previously housed art and cultural actors have been demolished or renovated to be rented out as housing, office space or for other commercial activities to other sectors with greater economic capacity. On the part of the municipality, it would appear that the vast majority of other needs must be met before offers to artists enter into consideration. This development has led to the closure of several key collectives, shared studios and artist-run spaces and venues; several professional venues for contemporary art have been forced to move and have been reduced to a precarious existence in temporary premises.

To understand the background to the temporary studios at Myntgata 2, it is important to take into account the long-term work that the artists' organisations in Oslo have been carrying out for a number of years. The evolution of the studio situation and the lack of long-term, stable infrastructure has been well documented in several surveys and reports initiated by the arts and culture field over the years. This work has been going on in uneven spurts and phases, and with differing outcomes. My own experience stretches back to 2012 when I was first elected to the board of UKS. But before I get to the part of the story I know best, I want to cast my gaze even further back to the long lineage and the ongoing commitment to this cause by artists and artist organisations.

THE STUDIO SITUATION IN OSLO - AN OLD SONG

The artist studios in the old Trafo power building in the area of Tøyen East in Oslo are one of the best-known, concrete results of artists' organized work to improve the studio situation in Oslo. This breakthrough – setting up studios in the old electrical sub-station – took place in the early 1970s. But it was not until the 2000s that the Agency for Cultural Affairs took co-responsibility for the building. The building, now takes pride of place in the City of Oslo and its studios-for-rent system, but this is mainly due to the artists who turned their attention to the then abandoned and dilapidated building. I am not going to recount the whole story, but I can briefly sum up some of the important milestones. It was UKS with its studio committee that focused on the studio situation in the city and this building in particular, which resulted in the municipality-owned Oslo Lysverk allowing artists to take over the building rent-free in 1972. Several years later in 2002, Hafslund wanted to sell the building as part of the privatisation of the electrical

company. Once again, artists had to come together and act to preserve the studio spaces in the building. A tenants' association was established that managed to block the sale, so that the municipality itself took responsibility for the building. It was not until 2008 that the Agency of Cultural Affairs started to run the building, making it possible to offer subsidized rents. The reason I have included this story is to show that there has been a long-standing need to improve the availability of studios in Oslo, which artists have responded to through self-organization and by taking over empty buildings, and as a key goal in artist organizations.

REPORTS AND SURVEYS - A NEW STRATEGY PROVIDES A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

When I was elected to the board of UKS in 2012, the studio situation was high on the agenda. "Everyone" knew it was bad, but there was no structured, up-to-date evidence supporting artists' personal insights and experiences. The provision of specific data and information was important to UKS, so that a common understanding of the studio situation could be established between artist organisations and the municipality. And so UKS initiated a studio survey for the major cities in Norway conducted in 2013 by the research institute and foundation Telemarkforskning.

The Studio Survey (Atelierundersøkelsen) concluded that: "Both in Oslo and Stavanger, there has been considerable pressure on city centre areas for several years. Our survey shows that over time, urban renewal, densification and property development have often lead to a standard price level that can force artists to leave their studios in city centres. In Oslo, several large studio communities have closed down in recent years as a result of property development and rent rises." (page 52)

The survey gave the artists an external and independent confirmation of what so many had sensed as

they moved from one building to another. This is a trend that has continued at the expense of the artists, despite broad agreement on the positive effects of art and cultural activity on urban development.

The results of the studio survey were further developed in another survey *Mulighetsrom - Kunsten og Kunstnernes plass i fremtidens by. Oslo og den nye kunsten* (2017), in which it was noted that pressure is particularly high in Oslo city centre: "Culture has played a significant role in making the central districts more attractive to wealthy private buyers and businesses, so-called gentrification. In this process, neither the artists nor the smaller art institutions are allowed to share in the value creation they have contributed to, but are driven out to the next cheap area."

At the same time, it was also pointed out that the ongoing tendency may lead to further deterioration in the period ahead: "From a longer term perspective, however, the tendencies are disturbing. By 2020, 11 privately-located studio communities, with a total of about 154 studio spaces, will disappear. In addition, two studio communities, with a total of 46 single studio spaces, have an uncertain future after this. Since 2007, 24 studio communities have been shut down. The studio survey showed an under-coverage of 25% in 2014. Since then, Oslo has lost four studio communities, with a total of at least 85 single studio spots (Cort Adelers gate 33, Rolf Hofmos gate 40, Youngs gate 6 and Grünerløkka Kunsthall). Although several of the artists concerned may have found new premises elsewhere in the city, it gives an indication that the situation is characterized by great uncertainty."

The Agency of Cultural Affairs had also recognised the need to strengthen infrastructures for artists, and already pointed out in its consultation statement to the Municipal Plan for Oslo towards 2030 (adopted in 2015) that "The overall vision 'Smart, safe and green' in our view

only describes to a limited extent the cultural dimension that the ongoing development of Oslo as a society entails. [...] Oslo currently has a documented backlog of rehearsal and production facilities within all branches of the arts and culture. In order to achieve the municipal plan's objectives for a leading city of culture and value creation, it is essential to look at a larger plan for arena development."

In my opinion, the factual awareness of the situation and a shared understanding between the art field and the municipality was crucial to the decision to use Myntgata 2 to provide infrastructure for artists, especially studios and production facilities.

THE FUTURE

It has been almost three years since the news broke that Myntgata 2 was to be used as premises for temporary studios and today the situation for the artists renting in the building is extremely uncertain. There is little to suggest that there will be any long-term offer for the artists in the Kvadraturen district, of which the Myntgata quarter is a part. At the same time, the rest of the city continues to develop negatively for artists. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the artists of Oslo to find workspaces and affordable housing. At the same time, the situation described in artist organisations' surveys and reports has made its mark on the municipality's art plan. This provides a good basis for legitimate claims that long-term and stable infrastructure must be established for artists in Oslo so that in the future the city can be a place where artist can live and work regardless of their social and economic background.

Artists' studios and a biennial under one roof?

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Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk

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Public space is not an alternative exhibition space; it is not the white cube moved out onto the street where the associated conventions and framework of understanding can come together naturally. Away from the safe zones of art, events and processes take place at different speeds with no-one fully in control. Art in public space requires a spatial awareness that takes into account its coexistence with other parties, interests and perceptions.

When my colleague Eva González-Sancho Boderó and I were asked to develop a model for a biennial of art in public space, our starting point was the set of conditions and frameworks that *distinguish* art in public space from art in galleries and museums. Not only relationships with audiences and the specific conditions of presentation, but also factors that have to do with the production and location of art, how the art is made and where it is placed or programmed.

We were originally commissioned to carry out the pre-project Oslo Pilot, a project intended to investigate the role of art in and for public space. They included various formats, large-scale physical works, less voluminous productions that interacted with different types of public, performative and text-based works, symposia and publications. The experience we gained during the pilot period made it clear that the absence of specialized art spaces alters the regulations governing how art is created and presented. When we move out of galleries and museums, it is no longer about exhibiting works of art. The idea of exhibitions is really a too limited a concept to describe the situation that surrounds works of art in public space. It is about facilitating processes that are able to take care of the entire life cycle of the work of art. This means assisting artists with ideation, localization,

production and completion of works. Here, the premise should be that the artists themselves choose place and space as opposed to being assigned a location, precisely because public spaces and places are more than just physical places; they are contexts that the artist actively uses and responds to. Furthermore, it is about creating forms of communication that are based on an artwork being in what we can call a «casual everyday flow of movement” and not in a designated and protected space. It is also - and not least - about entering into dialogue and collaboration with institutions, employees, landowners, government and other public and private parties, as well as all the people who in different ways claim ownership of the spaces, places and contexts that act as the setting and framework for the work of art.

From the outset, the production of new works of art was a priority for the biennial. We wanted to make it possible for the artists to carry out research, find places, test ideas, and participate in production and assembly (whenever this made sense or was necessary). A combined biennial headquarters and studio would be, from our point of view as curators, ideal. This combination reflected our curatorial decision to make osloBIENNALEN not only a presentation format, but to provide production apparatus and infrastructures that would serve artists.

We were eager to find a basecamp that could become a place for artistic thinking and activity in interaction with the local art scene. Close contact with Oslo's own art scene was important to us. There are several reasons for this. The osloBIENNALEN is entirely the initiative of the City of Oslo. For us - as curators - it was important to create contact between the biennial initiative we were responsible for and the other incentives Oslo Municipality implements to support production and viewing.

When the opportunity to take over Myntgata 2 arose, we and our directors were clear that this would be

a good building for our purposes. We also knew that artists' organizations hoped to use the building as studios. We were working within the Agency for Culture, while the artists' organizations worked at influencing the same system from outside. There was no conflict there – several horses were pulling in the same direction.

So Myntgata 2 was managed on the principle of sharing. The press release announcing Myntgata 2 as the biennial's future headquarters also invited artists to apply to the City of Oslo to rent studio space in the same building. Oslo Municipality's committee for subsidized studios was to process the applications. This is an important point. The biennial could not and did not want to have any influence on *which* artists it would share the building with.

Myntgata 2 has four full floors. The biennial was allotted a floor that is used partly for administration and partly as a guest studio and project room connected to the biennial program. But on the same floor there are also several studios that are rented out to artists via the municipality's scheme, which means that the biennial is not isolated, but is part of an artist studio community. In addition, the biennial has a larger area in the basement, originally a canteen. This room is used as a combined meeting room, seminar and presentation room, workshop and project room. It is loaned free of charge to the artists who have studios in the building.

Intentions and plans to share are one thing, but what is the real experience of working in and using the building? Has it become a place of informal and spontaneous meetings, exchanges and passionate discussions about art, where different collectives meet and get to know each other? My experience is based on the fact that I helped set up the biennial's premises and worked here from the autumn of 2018 until the spring of 2020. I cannot comment on the kind of dialogues and relationships the artists who

rent studios have established between themselves. What I can talk about is how I experienced the biennial's interface with the artists in the building. The short answer is that the original expectations were not met to any great extent. If you walk through the different floors of the building, you are not likely to meet anyone or hear anyone. You might see someone in the stairwell, or entering or leaving a studio. You might hear voices behind closed doors. But it is generally a quiet building. This is due to several factors associated with the use and layout of the building.

Visual artists mostly work alone. Art production normally takes place in private spaces, unlike theatre, film or music, in which several people participate in creation and production processes. For many visual artists, alone time in the studio is the core of their work.

The architecture of the building is another factor. Myntgata 2 is a neo-renaissance building, put up in 1898 as a cavalry barracks. Later it housed the Ministry of the Environment from 1972 to 2015. In 2017, Oslo Municipality bought the building together with other buildings in what is known as the Myntgata quarter.

The building is laid out around a central stairwell with almost symmetrical wings on each side. There are long passageways, many single rooms and a small reception area at the entrance. As soon as we moved in the biennial staff realized that the layout would not bring people together naturally. We needed a room that could become the heart of the house, a place to socialize and hang out with each other.

A combined canteen and café was therefore high on our list of priorities. This would be used by the artists in the house, by the biennial staff, biennial guests and visitors. This, it turned out, was not possible due to building regulations. As both the biennial and the artists are tenants with temporary leases, there was no possibility of altering the building's facilities. The cafe was never realized.

The project room in the basement and other rooms the biennial has at its disposal have made it possible to arrange meetings, presentations, discussions and screenings for those who work in the building and visitors. People meet here, but that does not make up for the informal hang-out that a combined canteen and café could have provided. The biennial pays the rent for the project room and it is well used by some of the artists in the building - and as such, it is a shared resource of mutual benefit to both parties.

In Myntgata 2, people mostly meet by appointment or at advertised events. You meet by virtue of being a host or guest. The energy generated by chance meetings, by working together and talking freely in a communal space has never come into play. This is a lost opportunity which, I think, is one of several reasons why the biennial and the artists who rent studios in Myntgata 2 have never become very close colleagues.

The biennial continues. The artists work in their studios. In a while, everyone is to leave. In the long term Myngata 2 is to have new occupants – a high school is scheduled to open here in 2025. Then the osloBIENNALEN and the artists who once worked here will be nothing more than a memory, a whisper in the corridors - or to borrow from the title Sindre Andersen used when he wrote on behalf of osloBIENNALEN about the sculptures of Michael Ross: a fairytale that whispered itself.

Myntgata 2 – A Temporary Arena for Art

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Special consultant for Oslo Municipality's Agency for Cultural Affairs (Kulturetaten), Grants and Development Department Section for Arena Development.

The section is responsible for assessing the facilities allocated to arts and culture in Oslo and helps to ensure that artists have access to production facilities.

Mari Opsahl²⁸⁵

The establishment of the old cavalry barracks at Myntgata 2 as the headquarters for osloBIENNALEN¹ and as temporary studios for the city's artists was the outcome of several factors. Among these were long-term endeavours by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to secure spaces for art production, political lobbying from the city's arts community, osloBIENNALEN's need for premises and intervention by the Vice Mayor for Culture. The Art Plan for Oslo (Byrådssak 18/19) was underway at the time of the municipality's purchase of the Myntgata 2 quarter. Myntgata 2 is an instructive example for the City of Oslo as it continues to work towards securing production facilities for artists. Administration of the cavalry barracks has temporarily fallen under the auspices of Kulturetaten. The agency aims to secure alternative premises for art production when the buildings are eventually converted into a secondary school.

A BACKWARD GLANCE AT OSLO MUNICIPALITY'S ART-STUDIO POLICY

Oslo Municipality's policy of securing production spaces for artists dates back several decades. Some of the city's larger studio facilities, such as Frysja and Tøyen Trafo, were set up in the 1960s and 1970s as artist-driven initiatives but eventually came under municipal administration. Over the years, several more municipal art-studio collectives were established, and the number of studios has increased in recent decades. However, research into studio availability has shown that Oslo has the most limited access to studios among the larger cities in Norway.² There are a

¹ The City of Oslo's international biennial for art in public space

² Å.D. Haugsevje, B. Kleppe, & M.T. Heian (2014): *Atelierundersøkelsen. Ateliersituasjonen i Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger og Tromsø*. TF-rapport nr 337: <<https://openarchive.usn.no/usn-xmlui/handle/11250/2439558>>.

great many artists living and working in the capital, and the municipality has no baseline regarding the extent of the facilities on offer. In other words, there is no politically agreed-upon goal regarding the percentage of artists who should be offered subsidised studios, and competition for municipally subsidized studios is fierce. Most artists have found studio space in the heated open market, with all its attendant challenges.

The studio policy is rooted in the City Council's resolution 78/2006, entitled *Kultureiendommer – Prinsipper og retningslinjer for tildeling av lokaler og beregning av husleie – Nærmere retningslinjer for tildeling av lokaler i kultursentrene Frysja, Tøyen og Kirkeristen*.³ As the title indicates, the resolution concerns three locations, but affirms that the City Government has authority to define certain buildings as 'cultural real estate' and to apply the principles set forth in the resolution when renting them out. In this way, resolution 78/06 set a precedent for the municipality's studio policy. Today's practice is still based on this resolution, even though the number of artist studios is now far greater than in 2006.

Forskrift om tildeling av subsidierte arbeidslokaler (Regulation Regarding the Allocation of Subsidized Work Premises) was enacted in 2008 and still applies when allotting artist studios.⁴ The regulation stipulates that subsidized studios may be allotted to visual artists, craft artists, and makers of applied art with home address and place of work in Oslo. Artistic activity and production are to be the applicant's main occupation, and they must document a high level of artistic achievement. The regulation intends to ensure predictability and equal treatment of applicants.

³ Cultural Real Estate – Principles and Guidelines for Allocating Premises and Calculating Rents – Detailed Guidelines for Allocating Studios in the Culture Centres Frysja, Tøyen and Kirkeristen.

⁴ Oslo kommune (2008): *Forskrift om tildeling av subsidierte arbeidslokaler, Oslo kommune, Oslo*: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/LF/forskrift/2008-12-18-1601#KAPITTEL_4>.

The task of allocating studios is performed by a committee consisting of representatives appointed by Oslo Municipality and representatives nominated by Norske Kunsthåndverkere, Norske Billedkunstnere and Norske Brukskunstnere (the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts, the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists, and the Norwegian Association for Applied Arts, respectively). Kulturetaten acts as the committee's secretariat. Under normal circumstances, contracts are issued for five-year periods but with provision for a possible five-year extension. Kulturetaten will revise the regulation in 2021, and a decision will be made as to whether more groups of artists can be included in the scheme.

At the time when the possibility of setting up temporary artists' studios at Myntgata 2 arose, Oslo Municipality administered 223 subsidized studios.⁵ This number had risen from 172 studios in 2006. The temporary production facilities at Myntgata 2 and Ila pensjonat increased the number of studios by 155, making a total of 378 studios. 72 of these are at Myntgata 2.

BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF SPACE REQUIREMENTS FOR ARTISTS

Kulturetaten's section Kulturutvikling (Cultural Development Section) was established in 2013. Its mandate, given by the City Government Department for Culture, was to develop arenas for culture in Oslo. This development was to take place through collaboration with cultural actors in the city, and through mapping premises operated by both the municipality and the private sector. An important part of our work was to evaluate the need for premises and to determine how the municipality could help with access to premises, thereby facilitating cultural expressions.

⁵ Oslo kommune, Kulturetaten (2017): Årsberetning 2017, p. 8: <<https://www.oslo.kommune.no/etater-foretak-og-ombud/kulturetaten/arsberetninger-fra-kulturetaten/#gref>>.

The decision to build a milieu for culture arena development arose from the need to broaden knowledge of the city's cultural infrastructure requirements. The topic became a major talking point due to increasingly visible gentrification processes and an awareness that many cultural actors had problems finding and retaining rental contracts in the private real estate market. The growing need for housing in an expanding city supplanted the need for public cultural arenas, especially in the city centre. At the same time, there was an ambition to build cultural infrastructure in Oslo's outlying neighbourhoods – areas where the concentration of cultural facilities is low. Kulturetaten's arena-development initiative has grown and increased its capacity. From its origins as a team, it has now become a separate section. Awareness of the need for cultural infrastructure in Oslo is growing, also among other municipal agencies. The concept of cultural infrastructure is now included in *Kommuneplanen* (the Municipal Plan), which is Oslo Municipality's primary steering document. It is challenging however, to extend the significance of this to other planning documents, in zoning plans, and in strategies for ensuring that certain areas are set aside for cultural purposes.

Two overlapping processes have been important in building knowledge of space-related needs within the culture sector. The first was the cross-sectoral mapping of space-related needs, initiated by EBY (the Agency for Real Estate and Urban Renewal) in 2016. The second was the mapping carried out by Kulturetaten, in 2018–2019, of existing premises for the production and presentation of visual art, the performing arts and music.⁶ In the latter, 1,595

6 Oslo kommune, Kulturetaten (2019): *Oslos kulturelle infrastruktur - kartlegging av produksjons- og visningslokaler for profesjonelle visuelle kunstnere, scenekunstnere og musikere*: <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/13323576-1556887105/Tjenester%20og%20tilbud/Politikk%20og%20administrasjon/Etater%20foretak%20og%20ombud/Kulturetaten/Oslos%20kulturelle%20infrastruktur_rapport030519.pdf>.

musicians, visual and performing artists were asked about their access to work spaces, barriers to such access, and the facilities they require for their production. The mapping showed that about a third of respondents lacked access to work spaces, with noticeable variations between respondents from different branches of the arts. Storage space and shared workshop facilities were also found to be limited.

WORKING TOWARDS AN ART PLAN FOR OSLO THROUGH DIALOGUE

The building nicknamed “Borgen” in the Gamlebyen neighbourhood was demolished in 2013. Approximately 200 artists and musicians and lost their studios. The building had been in use for this purpose since the 1990s. “Borgen” was owned by Statsbygg (the Norwegian government's building commissioner, property manager and developer) and was demolished to make way for Follobanen (the Follo Line, a high-speed railway). Due to gentrification and high rents, it was impossible for the artists to find comparable studios in the city centre. This led to significant protest from the arts community. Even though the municipality did not own Borgen, the consequences for the artists were so obvious that cultural stakeholders expected the municipality to take action.

On 25 May 2016, the newspaper *Morgenbladet* criticized Oslo Municipality for a lack of strategy for the visual arts sector. The municipality was challenged to prioritize diversity and heterogeneity, and to tackle the problem of exclusion in a city rapidly growing in response to changing economic conditions. In August of the same year, Unge Kunstneres Samfund (the Young Artists' Society) organized the seminar *Boms eller protagonist* (Bum or Protagonist) addressing the growing pressures on the city's art infrastructure. The focus was on artists' living and working conditions, and the opportunities to exhibit their work. The seminar

addressed the need for studio space, shared production facilities, and small and medium-sized institutions.

In response to these initiatives, Kulturetaten invited representatives from the visual arts – especially those concerned with the situation regarding production and small and medium-sized exhibition venues – to discuss the municipality's policies, potential and challenges. One such meeting on 30 November 2016 became the starting point for a long-term dialogue. The visual arts community demanded a comprehensive art plan for Oslo, and its representatives were advised to lobby the City Council to mandate such a plan. Kulturetaten also conducted a full review of its own resources and came up with specific recommendations for the city authority's policy-makers on further work.

On 7 December 2016, the City Council passed a resolution to formulate an art plan for Oslo:

K55(V28) The establishment of more artist studios in Oslo: The City Government is asked to present an Art Plan for Oslo that deals with infrastructure, work places and exhibition opportunities for art. The plan should contain evaluations of the interaction between state, municipal, private and non-commercial actors in the field of art. The plan should contain recommendations for how Oslo is to be developed as an international art city grounded in its local arts community.⁷

All of these movements contributed to a more comprehensive and proactive strategy for the municipality's art policy.

⁷ Oslo kommune, Byrådet (2019): *Kunstbyen – Oslo kommunes Kunstplan. Byrådssak 18/19* (2019), our translation: <https://tjenester.oslo.kommune.no/ekstern/einnsyn-filmlager/filtjeneste/fil?virkksomhet=976819853&filnavn=vedlegg%2F2019_01%2F1287214_1_1.pdf>.

Another important initiative, which came from the visual arts field itself, was the book *Mulighetsrom – Kunsten og kunstneres plass i byen* (Room with Possibilities – Art and the Place of Artists in the City), published in March 2017, which described the situation and the challenges it posed.⁸ Work on Oslo Municipality's art plan began in 2017 and built largely on knowledge gathered through dialogue with stakeholders in the arts field. Several open consultation processes were organised. The plan was presented to the City Council in January 2019 and serves as the foundation for the art policy the municipality now pursues.⁹

Kunstplanen (The Art Plan) has three main goals:

- ① To make art accessible to everyone in the city
- ② To provide suitable conditions for art production and exhibition venues
- ③ To develop Oslo into an international art city grounded in its local arts community

One of the measures outlined in the art plan is to make better use of buildings owned by the municipality for cultural purposes, whether temporary or permanent. The use of Myntgata 2 as a temporary art venue is one example of how this measure has been put into practice.

MYNTGATA 2 BECOMES A VENUE FOR ART AND CULTURE

In June 2017, Oslo Municipality bought Myntgata 2, a city block, from Forsvarsbygg (the Norwegian

⁸ Espen Røyseland et al. *Mulighetsrom – Kunsten og kunstneres plass i byen* (Oslo: UKS, 2017).

⁹ Oslo kommune, Byrådet (2019): *Kunstbyen Oslo – Oslo kommunes kunstplan. Byrådssak 18/19*: <https://tjenester.oslo.kommune.no/ekstern/einnsyn-filmlager/filtjeneste/fil?virkksomhet=976819853&filnavn=vedlegg%2F2019_01%2F1287214_1_1.pdf>.

Defence Estate Agency). The goal of the development was to secure facilities to meet municipal needs, while contributing to urban development and reinvigorating the central Kvadraturen area. EBY headed a cross-sectoral work group to study and make recommendations for the future use of the block. The group was asked to look into multi-user facilities, co-location, use as a school, and to evaluate these options by comparing them with other possible uses.¹⁰ Kulturetaten was asked to submit a needs-assessment report for the culture sector. In its report (October 2017), Kulturetaten emphasized the city's need for rehearsal rooms and spaces for art production. It also underlined that the use of Myntgata 2 as facilities for art production would underpin the Kvadraturen's existing strengths and its cluster of art organisations and galleries, thereby contributing to realising the goals of the *Handlingsprogram for økt liv i Oslo sentrum* (Action Plan for Increasing the Level and Quality of Life in the Centre of Oslo).

At this time, the municipality was renting out 223 studios at subsidized rents, but demand greatly exceeded supply. Kulturetaten estimated a need to increase the municipality's studio capacity by 20,000 m² within a decade (doubling the then-available studio space). Kulturetaten therefore recommended that parts of Myntgata 2 be adapted for use as production facilities for art and culture, arguing that this would help meet artists' space-related needs and revitalise the city centre.

At the same time, osloBIENNALLEN sought premises in the city centre for production and presentation. To co-locate artist studios and the biennial's premises seemed a potentially productive arrangement. Therefore, when the

¹⁰ Oslo kommune, Eiendoms- og byfornyelsesetaten (2017): *Utredning og anbefaling - Myntgata 2-kvartalet*: <<https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/13261964-1513596169/Tjenester%20og%20tilbud/Politikk%20og%20administrasjon/Etater%20%20foretak%20og%20ombud/Eiendoms-%20og%20byfornyelsesetaten/Utredning%20og%20anbefaling%20av%2015.12.2017.pdf>>.

opportunity to lease premises at Myntgata 2 first arose, Kulturetaten chose to implement this plan, signing a five-year loan agreement with EBY allowing osloBIENNALLEN and the artists to move into Myntgata 2 in 2018.

Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, in his text in this publication, has stated that the potential of the former cavalry barracks has been only partly realized. The lack of optimal common areas, due to building regulations and the fact that the building is only temporarily in use as artist studios, can explain this partial realization. That said, many artists have benefited from functional work spaces during this time, even though the temporary arrangement makes the situation somewhat unpredictable. The artists have contracts to June 2023. osloBIENNALLEN moved out in June 2021.

Kulturetaten views Myntgata 2 as an important learning experience in how to use municipal property for temporary, cultural purposes and considers that the presence of the artists has contributed to making Kvadraturen a livelier part of town. However, the municipality has chosen to prioritize a secondary school at Myntgata 2, so Kulturetaten now aims to secure artist studios elsewhere in the city.

THE WAY FORWARD AFTER MYNTGATA 2

Myntgata 2 is to be converted into a secondary school. Kulturetaten collaborates with the schools sector to determine whether parts of the quarter still can be used for cultural activities, such as rehearsal rooms, exhibition and concert venues. The continued use of the cavalry barracks for art production is not in accordance with the overall plans for the quarter.

Kulturetaten is working to find premises to replace the studios lost when the temporary contract for Myntgata expires. We are preparing a comprehensive development strategy for cultural real estate. Our efforts center on ensuring premises for art production. Kulturetaten has been allocated

the task of having Ila pensjonat permanently designated as 'cultural real estate'. If this can be achieved, as many as 85 artists' studios will be added to the portfolio on a permanent basis. It may be necessary to consider merging rooms or making other alterations that will create functional studios.

Kulturetaten wants to provide studios that are *suitable* for art production and, in line with *Kunstplanen's* guidelines, to secure shared workshop facilities. These are long-term projects carried out in collaboration with other municipal agencies. Among other things, we are developing a *strategy for ensuring that areas are set aside for cultural purposes*, which takes into account the municipality's combined apparatus and resources for securing cultural infrastructure. These "behind the scenes" efforts will hopefully yield tangible results in the near future. As always, political will and financial resources are prerequisites for success.

Open Studios – Why we should establish a permanent artists' house in central Oslo

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Nina Strand²⁹⁷

On 1 November 1999, a small French artist trio calling themselves the KGB (after their first names Kalex, Gaspard, Bruno), managed to break open the cemented-over door of 59 rue de Rivoli in the centre of Paris. The building had been abandoned by the Crédit Lyonnais and the French state for 15 years, and the trio reclaimed it in order to create a place for artists to work. The French government tried to get the artists evicted, but the press became interested and the coverage made the possible eviction unpopular. The artists formed a good relationship with the politician Bertrand Delanoë, who at the time was standing for election as the city's mayor. He visited the artist collective with the promise that if he won the election, he would legalise the occupied building. Delanoë was duly elected, and kept his promise, and 59 Rivoli has been open to the public ever since.

I remember visiting with my niece some years ago. She loved this place where you could see 'real artists' working. Her enthralled curiosity has stayed with me ever since, as has the artists' sense of freedom, autonomy and resistance. French artists in general have an inspiring history of occupation. Even today, during the pandemic, the Théâtre de l'Odéon, in Paris is being occupied by artists fighting for better terms for their practice. Maybe artists should do more of this in Oslo, initiating a wider dialogue with the public, making more noise, being more publicly present. And perhaps the newly established studio collective in Myntgata is a perfect place to achieve this.

In 2018, Oslo Municipality established temporary studio communities in Myntgata and at the Ila pension, which, according to their reports, has contributed to better access to production facilities. From a national studio survey from 2014 we know that Oslo and Stavanger have the worst conditions for artists. The large number of artists in Oslo

who do not have access to the municipal studios must either pay very high rents in the private rental market or work from their own kitchens, a solution that for many has a direct negative effect on art production. Representatives from the City Council have explained that they aim to offer more permanent production premises for rent in the long term. This plan was created under the guidance of the previous vice mayor of culture in Oslo, the social democrat Rina Mariann Hansen, and is currently being followed up by UKS, NBK and BOA and representatives from Myntgata, inviting the current vice mayor Omar Samy Gamal to visit the studio complex after the current lockdown to get a better idea of the need for such a place.

We know that we are lucky, that the funding situation for visual artists is better here than in most countries, but it could be even better. It can always be better. And maybe we should adopt this French attitude of resistance. Norway is currently run by a right-wing government, and we are making art in a political climate that doesn't really understand the importance of it. We watch politicians on TV claiming that artists on grants have drinking straws in the treasury, draining away the country's capital. They believe that artists should make work that sells and be self-employed. Perhaps they don't realise that art is what gets them through the day, via the music to which they listen, the films they see, the books they read. We've had ministers of culture who have never visited an independent art gallery. Some years ago, Culture Minister Thorhild Widvey said she wanted to take a new look at the visual art field with her 'business-glasses' on. She wanted to investigate artist's economy and talked a lot about entrepreneurship, a strange word to use when talking about art. A performance by Tori Wrånes, for example, can't be bought and hung on a wall. And we already do so much by ourselves. In her 2015 1st of May speech, fittingly held outside of Edvard Munch's old studio

at Ekely in Oslo, artist Marianne Heier said that art is the stone in the shoe, the pea under the mattress, the break in the rhythm. Maybe that's what art is to many politicians: the annoying pea under a mattress, the incomprehensible break of rhythm. Uncomfortable and uncontrollable. We need to do something about this.

The coverage of art in Norwegian newspapers is shrinking. I wrote about photography for a Norwegian newspaper for 12 years before they shut the column down. Last week a colleague with a similar job told me that she had been fired from the newspaper for which she writes. If this continues, there will be less and less coverage of the arts. But maybe we can occupy the space in other ways, by fighting for more public commissions and open studios, exposing every Norwegian to more visual art in their everyday lives.

'Being an artist is a way of being in the world. It is an existential choice', says Ole Jørgen Ness, one of my colleagues here in Myntgata. In addition to his own practice, he runs 222T, an artist-run gallery project in collaboration with Marit Følstad. Ness says about our community that: 'in a short time, a dynamic professional environment has been established where several players run external activities'. (I also run my publishing press Objektiv in the building, and the digital art journal *Kunstkritikk* has its office on the first floor.) 'Together we form a group of academically educated and professionally active artists whose activities represent a cultural capital that is worth managing properly. All politicians talk about art and artists as a valuable and important resource. If we are to take them seriously, we must be able to expect these beautiful words to be translated into concrete action.'

Currently, in April 2021, none of the artists in Myntgata knows how long they will be able to keep their studios. The contract refers to the possibility of a 1 + 1 year extension, and recently we got a short extension due to

coronavirus. The plan for Myntgata 2 is for it to become a school, but the floor plans do not match the building, and it looks as if it will be an expensive restoration. In addition, the city's Byantikvaren has secured the protection of several of its walls, and so there is uncertainty about whether a new building can be constructed in the garden.

Our motivation for inviting Gamal to visit the studios is to ensure the prevailing – and strengthen the future – studio situation for professional visual artists in Oslo. In terms of resources, it makes sense to build on what has already been established. With its location in central Oslo, Myntgata can serve as a base and a long-awaited powerhouse for the entire city's art environment. With 60 successful and productive artists, it has quickly established itself as a popular meeting place. With various exhibition rooms, book publishers, and ideas for a joint workshop, it is a permanent solution, a clear win-win for the city. The professional environment represents a value that might be lost if we do not establish this, and we hold the municipality responsible for protecting this productive environment. The list of artists at the house in Myntgata should be a good enough argument to let us continue with our work. We are a bonus for the city.

I believe, for all the reasons mentioned in this statement, that we need to establish a permanent artists' house in central Oslo. This is not just for us and our work, but also to be more visible to everyone, to bring visual art back on the scene in Oslo.