

# WdKA Research: A Selection of Contributions to the 15th ELIA Biennial Conference 2018

Willem de Kooning Academy

# Table of contents

Introduction	3
+ The Autonomous Fabric	7
* What is Autonomy?	11
◊ Art and Design in New Economies: Speculative Scenarios For Real-life Innovations	31
▽ An invitation, a workshop, a skype conversation and some questions	44
◎ The workshop of Other Knowledge	51
↑ Post-scripted script of a Pecha Kucha talk	73
> Strategies of Reclaiming	91
Biographies	124
Colophon	127

# **WdKA Research: A Selection of Contributions to the 15th ELIA Biennial Conference**

## **Introduction**

When the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA) and Codarts University of the Arts hosted the *15th ELIA Biennial Conference: Resilience and the City: Art, Education, Urbanism* in 2018, it was an ideal opportunity to share research and knowledge with over 460 delegates from art academies across Europe and beyond<sup>1</sup>. Art and design practices have a long history of research from close visual studies to prototyping, employing iterative design processes, experimenting with materials, and conversing with other historical, social, and disciplinary frameworks. Art academies are fertile testing grounds for all of these activities and the WdKA teaching staff are central to shaping these efforts.

Core to the curriculum, our research is constituted from a mix of critical and speculative thinking, theoretical inquiry, and experimentation through making. The WdKA operates from the perspective that art and design research produces new forms of knowledge and practices, and is a catalyst for innovation and social transformation. This publication offers a selection of conference contributions by our teaching staff and embraces this ethos. Rather than being organized under a single overarching theme, this collection of diverse research is embedded in the curriculum's elective projects such as the Social, Autonomous and Commercial Practices, the Stations, and pedagogical projects and explorative trajectories that run parallel and at times, parasitic to the curriculum.

*The Autonomous Fabric* is an ongoing research project within Autonomous Practices which looks at artist-run, self-organized spaces, and initiatives in Rotterdam. As a part of this body of research, in *What is Autonomy?* Florian Cramer explores how the word's meaning shifts historically within humanist traditions, the

Dutch art context, and contemporary neo-liberal and technological paradigms. He speculates whether autonomy might be reimagined within current collective and DIY cultures as a fabric of interdependencies, and if so, what that characterization might actually do in shaping practice. Following upon this thread, Simon Kentgens and Eva Olthof briefly interviewed different initiatives connected to The Autonomous Fabric project, such as Rib, Printroom, The Tender Center and Leeszaal Rotterdam West, amongst others, about their spaces, activities and communities.

Turning her attention to Commercial Practices, Deanne Herst's essay, *Art and Design in New Economies: Speculative Scenarios for Real-life Innovations*, reflects on how students might be better prepared to not only contribute to, but also shape new economic paradigms and modes of production that are more innovative and inclusive. Thinking through possible research methodologies and speculative design processes, she highlights a series of projects and student assignments that aim to be less hierarchical, collaborative in approach and subvert traditional models of data-gathering, documenting user experiences, and authorship. These are not "pie in the sky" ambitions, meaning purely speculative, but rather grounded approaches that seek to employ a variety of tools to address real-life scenarios and concrete needs.

As a satellite to the conference, the Friendly Stalking Collective, a community of practitioners who work in the field of art, design and science, and collaborate on designing encounters, hosted a workshop at Skarlokaal De Toermalijn. With only one attendee, it appeared at first glance to be a deflated endeavour, however as the workshop unfolded the old adage "quality, not quantity" prevailed. The collective spoke with Danae Esparza from the University School in Barcelona during both the workshop and in a subsequent Skype conversation, discussing issues such as the pedagogies of space, power dynamics in social, educational projects, and the necessity to build sustainable relations and robust learning communities. Rather than providing answers, as a result of their exchange more questions

unfolded which the reader and the Friendly Stalking Collective are left to ponder.

Aldje van Meer turns her attention to the very heart of the academy, the workshops. Reflecting on the Bauhaus and its legacies, she discusses the reasoning behind the establishment of the Stations at the WdKA and how they differ from traditional workshop models. With their implementation, much has been done in terms of bridging the classic split between concept and execution and old and new technologies. However, thinking through the political and ecological implications of technology, modes of production and the challenges we face, she proposes another iteration, *The Workshop of Other Knowledge*, where new modes of making are embraced that promote cross-, inter-, and transdisciplinary tools to navigate today's complexities.

Presented initially as a PechaKucha and now revised with additional commentary, Clara Balaguer's contribution provides insight into *Beyond-Social.org*, a wiki publishing platform for Social Practices. Like all online publishing initiatives, the process of production is akin to gardening. Time, care, attentiveness, and just getting your hands dirty by digging in, are paramount to making it live. Balaguer walks us through the collective labour to show how *Beyond-Social.org* has become more than a profiling and representational project. As an ongoing work, it is a space for publishing and learning and moreover, learning through publishing. Fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange, *Beyond-Social.org* has become a platform accommodating multiple visions and infinite revisions.

Connected to collectivizing, the last essay by Michelle Teran guides us through three-years of research with *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH), or the *Mortgaged Victims Platform*, a supportive network promoting the right to housing. Actively following their struggles for justice, solidarity, solace, and agency, Teran considers forms of audibilities and strategies of reclaiming in times of heightened uncertainty and crisis. Movingly she writes, *listening is the first step to building up knowledge*. However, to do this entails

recalibrating our hearing and fine-tuning our senses of caring. Rather than efficiency, this equilibrium is acquired through time, negotiation, adjustment, and being together in even dissonance. Teran then posits what she calls deep hanging and sweaty concepts as being integral to learning. Rather than being competitive, it is knowledge founded on nurturing.

Next to these contributions, it is essential to acknowledge that this publication is a research project in and of itself. Exploring and building upon methods and workflows initially proposed in *From Print to Ebooks: A Hybrid Publishing Toolkit for the Arts*, Myrna de Bruijn along with the support of André Castro, Gijs de Heij, and Kimmy Spreeuwenberg who have been champions of hybrid forms of publishing, have created both the online publication ([at.wdka.nl/researchpublicationelia](http://at.wdka.nl/researchpublicationelia)) as well as a PDF version in a generative way directly from docx files.<sup>2</sup> For the Hybrid Publishing course, this kind of dedication to practice what we preach is crucial to our own research and development.

Finally, the Hybrid Publishing team would like to extend our gratitude to everyone involved in making this publication possible and giving a small glimpse into just some of the diverse research happening at the WdKA. As we all know, research proliferates and radiates across the academy. Consider this publication as a loose net that has captured a few of the activities that are invaluable and indispensable to our learning community.

- 
1. ELIA is the European League of the Institute of the Arts
  2. Download at: [https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/0419-HVA\\_DPT\\_from\\_print\\_to\\_ebooks\\_OS\\_RGB\\_aanp\\_lr\\_totaal.pdf](https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/0419-HVA_DPT_from_print_to_ebooks_OS_RGB_aanp_lr_totaal.pdf)

# + The Autonomous Fabric

Interviews with artist-run, self-organized spaces and initiatives in Rotterdam, recorded in 2018.

**Interviewers:** *Simon Kentgens and Eva Olthof*

**Camera and editing:** *Florian Cramer*

The Autonomous Fabric is initiated by the Autonomous Practices department of Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam. It researches the ways in which self-organised artist and activist practices manifest themselves and how they can shape society. For more information see: <https://autonomousfabric.org/>.

The videos of the interviews can be found at [at.wdka.nl/researchpublicationelia](http://at.wdka.nl/researchpublicationelia).

+++



01 - Still from Sunny Side Up-1.m4v. Rowan van As, Sunny Side Up, 00:32



02 - Still from Niffo-1.m4v. Zoë Cochia, Niffo, 00:40



03 - Still from Publication Studio-1.m4v. Yin Yin Wong, Publication Studio Rotterdam, 00:38



04 - Still from Ghost-1.m4v. Natalia Sorzano & Madison Bycroft, Ghost, 00:46



05 – Still from Leeszaal-1.m4v. Maurice Specht, Leeszaal Rotterdam West, 00:35



06 – Still from Wlfrt-1.m4v. Merve Kılıçer, Wolfart Projectspace, 00:43



07 – Still from Tender Center-1.m4v. Tender Center collective, Tender Center, 00:49



08 - Still from Printroom-1.m4v. Karin de Jong, PrintRoom, 00:36



09 - Still from Rib-1.m4v. Maziar Afrassiabi, Rib, 00:44

# \* What is Autonomy?

Florian Cramer - for WdKA Autonomous Practices

## From Art to Brexit to Tesla Cars

‘Autonomy’ is a semantic rabbit hole. When discussing the term from the perspective of the arts, speakers of different languages may believe they mean the same thing while they are actually talking past each other. In the Netherlands and Flanders, for example, ‘autonome beeldende kunst’ (literally: ‘autonomous visual art’) corresponds to what is called ‘fine art’ in English-speaking countries, and ‘free art’ (‘freie Kunst’, ‘arts libres’) in German- and French-speaking countries. In the German philosophical tradition, the notion of ‘autonomy’ is intrinsically linked to aesthetic theory rather than artistic practice, while in Italy and the English-speaking world, it is chiefly associated with political activism.

To take Flanders once more as an example: the region’s main civic conflict is related to its possible political autonomy within, or from, the nation-state of Belgium. In other countries, issues of autonomy are reported by news media on a daily basis: Brexit, for example, is often seen as a plea for the UK’s autonomy from the EU (in a country which, unlike continental Europe, otherwise lacks the historical experience of giving up parts of its autonomy to larger political entities). Brexit in turn may end up triggering Scotland’s national independence or increased political autonomy. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) is an autonomy campaign for an Islamist caliphate. In the USA, Donald Trump’s politics of ‘America first’ can be read as yet another campaign for national autonomy; at the same time, as a conservative, Trump is against liberal abortion rights—which have been a major issue of individual autonomy for feminists, as they directly address the autonomy of women to make decisions about their own bodies.

In America, Google, Tesla, and Uber are conducting field tests for computer-driven cars which, since they no longer require human

drivers, are known as autonomous cars. Such developments are part of a broader narrative of autonomous systems in engineering and systems theory, which are potentially connected to the arts in ways that are not only technical, but also philosophical.

All of the above examples illustrate that autonomy is a term from both the past and the present, with a politics that is anything but clear-cut, and with different definitions of autonomy existing in different fields of knowledge.

## Crisis

The autonomy of art has arguably never been as contested as it is today, whether in the field of art theory, artistic practice, or cultural politics. In the Netherlands, the much-vaunted autonomy of the arts proved to be extremely fragile when the Dutch political mood changed in 2011 and radical funding cuts shook the foundations of the country's contemporary art system.<sup>1</sup> The debates of 2011 tended to reduce the issue to one of humanism vs. free-market capitalism; however, as far as contemporary art and the concept of autonomy are concerned, this was already an outdated discussion. Ultimately, the whole affair exposed the arts as being economically not autonomous at all. This affected not only fine art, but also Dutch design and the creative industries in general, which were also largely dependent on cultural funding systems—since many designers and architects relied on contemporary art institutions as their clients for their more experimental projects. These projects were thus simultaneously 'autonomous' (in the Dutch sense of non-applied, free-spirited art) and institutionally dependent (in the economic sense).

Conversely, the 'creative industries' that were introduced as a new paradigm for the Dutch creative sector after 2011 were not industries in any literal sense, since they relied on public funding systems of their own. Thus, when citing the Netherlands as an example, one should bear in mind that there is neither any true 'autonomy', nor many real 'industries' in the arts. This leads to the more fundamental

question of whether such a thing as autonomy exists at all, or whether—considering the interdependence of things and beings within any system—‘autonomy’ isn’t in fact just another outdated romanticist concept.

## Politics

At its root, the term ‘autonomy’ is political in nature. The Greek word ‘nomos’ means ‘law’ or ‘norm’, while ‘auto’ means ‘self’. ‘Auto-nomos’ thus refers to anything that follows its own law. Since laws in most cases aren’t individual, but are written by some government or statehood, radical claims for autonomy will, by definition, clash with higher legal authorities. However, autonomy does not need to be understood as absolute. There is, for example, relative autonomy wherever the law provides no regulations of its own and leaves room for individual or community policies. Common examples are house rules in bars, shops, and schools (including those rules that are typical of squatted ‘autonomous’ spaces, such as a ban on sexist and racist language, which otherwise would still be protected by freedom of speech).

All of these examples imply potential conflicts over autonomy, such as the question of whether school systems should be public, or whether home schooling can be permitted. The very definition of democratic (as opposed to totalitarian) political systems addresses the degrees of relative autonomy citizens are granted—which is further complicated by the fact that such autonomy can be abused for anti-democratic purposes.

The issue of ‘autonomy’ is closely linked to free will, implemented either in the form of laws, or of community rules and policies that are accepted within the broader rule of law. For example, house rules formulated for a school may allow the school to expel students who violate these rules. However, if the rules are shown to be in conflict with the law, these students may then go to court and sue their way back into the institution—if necessary, backed by the state monopoly on violence in the form of a police escort. This happened

in the United States in the 1960s, when black students needed to be escorted to campuses by the police. A similar legal conflict involved the civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who refused to accept the laws and regulations according to which public transportation companies would assign different bus seating areas to black and white people.



1. Rosa Parks riding a Montgomery bus immediately following the decision to desegregate buses, December 21, 1956

Prior to Parks' intervention, a number of civil rights lawsuits against racial segregation in public transportation had led to conflicting legislations on federal, interstate, and state levels enforced through the internal regulations of transportation companies. In other words, different social actors—including racist state governments and bus companies, as well as anti-racist civil rights activists—were locked in a struggle for their autonomy to make or break rules. The civil rights movement made this conflict visible by translating it from an abstract legal realm into a personal conflict. Rosa Parks' act of civil disobedience thus became a piece of activist performance art that

articulated a political issue into visual culture through the iconic, staged photograph of Parks sitting in the 'wrong' bus seat; a textbook example of the power of image-making. The famous photograph of Rosa Parks was taken the day after a United States Supreme Court decision finally resolved these legal conflicts by declaring racial segregation unconstitutional.

Contemporary debates address issues of whom (relative) autonomy should be granted to: to all human beings? To citizens but not immigrants? To citizens of different classes, races, abilities? Patients, prisoners? To non-humans such as animals, plants, and things?

For the Renaissance humanist philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, autonomy marked the difference between people and animals, since, according to his reasoning, humans possess autonomy while animals don't. At first glance, the rise of autonomy as a concept within the arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a consequence of humanist thinking; but it also coincided with the rise in Europe of the cultural concept of the nation-state, which emphasised the autonomy of a collective body. This logic has been reversed by artists who, instead of catering to the cultural construction of the nation-state they belong to, have created micro-nations of their own, such as Atelier van Lieshout's free state AVL-Ville in the harbour area of Rotterdam in 2001, 'a utopian village, where people could live and work in an ecological, autarkic way.' (Nolan) Older examples include the Otto Muehl commune (which grew out of the Viennese actionism art movement), beginning as an experimental living and free-love community in the early 1970s and ending as a dystopian dictatorship in the 1980s. The commune was dissolved by the police after it was discovered that children growing up in the commune were systematically abused. Both AVL-Ville and the Muehl commune merged artistic autonomy and political autonomy, following a logic according to which radical self-governance within one's art ultimately requires one's own statehood;<sup>2</sup> the main difference is that AVL-Ville was always intended as a light-hearted, ludic experiment.

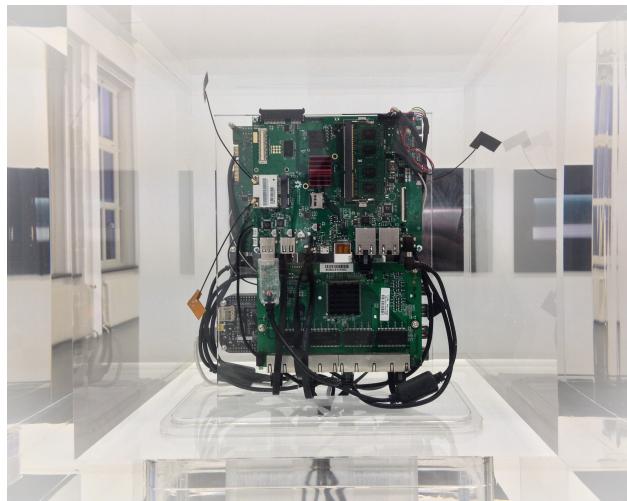
Since the early 1990s, the Slovenian artist collective Irwin/Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK) and the band Laibach have been issuing passports for their own transnational NSK State, as a piece of ironic conceptual art commenting on the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. The passports ended up being purchased in large numbers by Nigerians who were convinced that these would allow them to travel and immigrate to Europe. When members of Irwin travelled to Nigeria to explain the project, they were interrupted by people—likely those who were re-selling the passports—insisting that the NSK State was an actual country. Declarations of autonomy thus do not necessarily result in control: while the artists had control over designing and issuing the passport, they could neither control its interpretation, nor the resulting performance (a phenomenon that has often repeated itself in internet meme culture).

## Autonomy as Ideology

Leaving aside for now the (complex) differentiation between autonomy, sovereignty, and hegemony arguably one of the most influential political theories and practices of autonomy originated in the Italian radical left of the 1970s under the name ‘autonomia operaia’ (‘workers’ autonomy’). Breaking with Communist Party central committees and trade unionism, the movement evolved around decentralised self-organisation and manifested itself through various platforms including experimental pirate radio stations (such as Radio Alice) and squatted ‘social centres’. The Italian autonomist movement spilled over to other countries including Germany and the Netherlands where it is still known as ‘Autonomen’, operating at the fringes of the radical communist and anarchist left.

In the 1990s, some of these autonomist concepts were absorbed by the American countercultural writer Hakim Bey (a.k.a. Peter Lamborn Wilson) in his concept of ‘Temporary Autonomous Zones’. As the name implies, the inhabitants of these zones no longer claim territories on a permanent basis, but instead act ‘like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then

dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/else-when before the State can crush it' (Bey, 104). This concept went on to influence illegal rave subculture and early internet activism and art. However, the political tactics it proposes exist on the political right as much as on the left: for example, in the militia movement in the U.S., in the 'nationally liberated zones' created by Neo-Nazis in Eastern Germany, in neo-fascist squats such as Casa Pound in Rome (named after the writer Ezra Pound) and in the German and Dutch Neo-Nazi movement of the 'Autonomous Nationalists' which copies the tactics and visual culture of the left-wing 'Autonomen'.



2. Trevor Paglen and Jacob Appelbaum, Autonomy Cube, 2014

The same political ambiguities can be found in internet activism since the 1990s. Political autonomy has always been one of internet activism's major driving forces, from self-run community servers to Bitcoin and TOR: as a peer-to-peer currency designed to operate outside the control of central banks, Bitcoin applies the principle of decentralised self-organisation to the financial system—a project that, as reconstructed by the scholar David Golumbia, has its ideological roots in right-wing libertarianism. TOR, a decentralised service for anonymised web surfing, was made into a contemporary artwork by the geographer and artist Trevor Paglen, in collaboration

with the (controversial) internet activist and former WikiLeaks spokesman Jacob Appelbaum. Using the visual language of minimal art, Paglen and Appelbaum built a transparent 'Autonomy Cube' with a running TOR server inside. The installation uses art museums as its safe space. By appearing as a piece of contemporary art and being placed inside an institution whose works are granted (relative) autonomy under the principle of freedom of art and expression, the *Autonomy Cube* is less likely to be taken down by the authorities than a TOR server in some anonymous data centre. It thus tactically uses the (relative) autonomy of art in order to gain political autonomy.

In more mainstream areas of internet culture than Paglen's and Appelbaum's installation, the ideology of cyberlibertarianism is influential in the contemporary redefinition of autonomy, as its projects intrinsically link ideals of political and economic autonomy with the technology of autonomous systems, including artificial intelligence. Cyberlibertarianism can be seen as a problematic 'homesteader' ideology based on privilege (including the financial gains of early Bitcoin miners, who reaped the benefits of what amounts to a pyramid scheme) and involving hyper-individualist, neo-reactionary ideologies as advanced by public figures such as Silicon Valley investor Peter Thiel, who defends business monopolies, openly mistrusts democracy as a political system and pays students to drop out of college. No doubt, this is an autonomist ideology; among its intellectual founding figures is the writer Ayn Rand, whose novels glorified independent entrepreneurs revolting against the state and refusing any form of social solidarity.

## Aesthetics

Ayn Rand's libertarianism amounts to a late and popularised form of the romanticist aesthetics of the creative genius, which developed in parallel to the concept of 'autonomous' art in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From a broad historical perspective, however, the autonomy of art is still a very recent concept, which is furthermore mostly limited to Western culture—as opposed to Asia

and Africa, as well as medieval Europe where there was no division between the disciplines of art, design, technology and crafts (and where a concept such as 'maker culture' would have hardly amounted to anything new). In Western aesthetics, the notion of autonomy is linked to emancipation from the dual patronage of the church and aristocratic courts which traditionally dictated the content of art. Arguably, the situation has hardly changed in an age when the role of art patronage has been taken over by public institutions and private collectors.

In enlightenment, romanticist, and modernist aesthetic philosophy, autonomy meant that art followed its own rules. This was first described by the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant as 'disinterested pleasure': neither is there any external interest (such as that of the church or the aristocracy) commanding the arts, nor is the perception of art guided by any particular political, religious, moral, or social interest; a point which romanticism later radicalised to *l'art pour l'art*. Art for art's sake is, by definition, a claim for autonomy. It meant that art was not only independent from external forces, but was also in a process of liberating itself from the rules of depiction and representation. Abstract art was the logical consequence of this autonomy. The critic Clement Greenberg thus identified 'Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant' (Greenberg).

While in the Netherlands, 'autonomous art' is generally understood as the opposite of applied art, this definition is entirely different from the notions of autonomy within art theory and aesthetic philosophy. In the latter, the 'autonomy of art' means that art is not instrumentalised for religious or political purposes. Conversely, early twentieth-century Marxist discussions on the political role of art—by Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, and György Lukács, among others—addressed the question of whether art should give up its bourgeois autonomy and become politically engaged (even to the point of becoming political propaganda), or whether it should insist, to quote Adorno, on being a 'social antithesis

to society' and resist capitalism simply through autonomy and non-instrumentalisation.<sup>3</sup>



3. Democratic Federation of North-Syria and Studio Jonas Staal, New World Summit – Rojava, 2015–18. Inauguration of the People's Parliament of Rojava, Dêrik, Canton Cizîrê, Rojava. Photo: Ruben Hamelink

To illustrate this with a contemporary example: the Dutch artist Jonas Staal considers his politically engaged work an expression of autonomy, yet Adorno would disagree with him and his statement that 'art may become of social significance again if it dares to make the "freedom" it has gained in the twentieth century serve an ideological project' (Staal, 22). (Incidentally, Staal's statement in itself constitutes an ontological oxymoron, since 'freedom' ceases to exist when it is made to 'serve').

Staal in effect addresses a notion of artistic autonomy that was formulated by the nineteenth-century Dutch liberal politician Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, who once stated during a parliamentary debate that 'art is not the government's business, to the extent that the government has neither any judgment, nor any saying in the area of art'.<sup>4</sup> Thorbecke thus positioned the freedom of art in close relation to constitutional 'freedom of speech'. Consequently, the Dutch concept of autonomy in the arts effectively conflated the two meanings of autonomy: as freedom of expression, and as art serving its own purpose.



4. The logo for George Lucas' 1977 film Star Wars, an autonomous work of art according to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu

But is the concept of 'autonomous art' sustainable at all in a globalised world, in which twentieth-century aesthetic theory has become a contested legacy? And hasn't autonomy always been a myth rather than a fact—given that, in the one way or another, artists and the languages of art have never fully governed themselves, but have always been subject to social, political, economic, and material forces?

In the 1980s, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu updated the concept of artistic 'autonomy' with a definition that radically breaks with the term's past. According to Bourdieu, an artwork is autonomous whenever it has not been commissioned by an external party, but seeks its own market. 'Heteronomous' art, on the other hand, involves a commissioning party. While this definition may on first sight sound familiar, upon closer inspection it actually is not, since it shifts the definition of autonomy from aesthetics to economics: a Hollywood film would thus be 'autonomous' according to Bourdieu, while an artwork that received public project funding would not. The elegance of this definition lies in its materialist precision, as opposed to the idealism upon which the notion of autonomy is based from the perspective of traditional aesthetic philosophy. Finally, Bourdieu's terminology much better reflects the everyday reality of art and design work.

# THE ARTIST'S RESERVED RIGHTS TRANSFER AND SALE AGREEMENT

The accompanying 3 page Agreement form has been drafted by Bob Projansky, a New York lawyer, after my extensive discussions with colleagues and over 500 artists, dealers, lawyers, collectors, museum people, critics and other concerned people involved in the contemporary art world. It is intended to be a general form.

The Agreement has been designed to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists' lack of control over the use of their work and participation in its economics after they no longer own it.

The Agreement has been designed to take into account the special nature of art and the unique economic realities of the art world, particularly its private, cash and informal nature, with careful regard for the interests and motives of all concerned.

If it is used as a standard form for the transfer and sale of all contemporary art, and has been made as fair, simple and useful as possible, it can be used either as presented here or slightly altered to fit your specific situation.

If the following information does not answer all your questions consult your attorney.

1

5. Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky, The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement, 1971

## Art as Institutional Politics

With Bourdieu's definition, the opportunity for autonomous art production shrinks dramatically, because it rests on economic power. The Institutional Critique movement within contemporary art—from the Art Workers' Coalition and Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky's *Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement* of the early 1970s, to Andrea Fraser's contemporary performances—

effectively drew the same conclusion, claiming ‘autonomy’ in a sense of worker’s rights within the art system. Institutional Critique identifies this system as a political-economic scheme that merely poses as a humanist institution. The activism and interventions of these artists are trade-unionist in nature, since they intervene into the art market and the museum as factories of contemporary art, attempting to change their system from within.

The alternative position corresponds to that of anti-unionist political autonomists, with their squats and social centres: rather than reforming the factories, they chose instead to establish self-run spaces, cooperatives and commons outside of these factories. The history of this self-organised art goes back about as far as that of Institutional Critique and includes, for example, artist-run film co-ops (which were intended to make artist-filmmakers independent from industry facilities), artist-run ‘producer galleries’, and the various projects that have been mapped in the Rotterdam Autonomous Fabric.<sup>5</sup> Within these initiatives, autonomy describes a mode of organisation in which the organisational format itself becomes the art.

## **Systems and Self-Organisation**

In the field of study known as general systems theory, this type of self-organisation is considered autopoetic, a term that refers to any organism, social or technological system that constructs itself and has some degree of operational independence. General systems theory began as a post-World War II school of thought that sought to bridge or transcend existing academic disciplines including biology, physics, engineering, psychology and sociology. It prominently involved the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the child psychologist Jean Piaget, the Nobel prize-winning chemist Ilya Prigogine, as well as Isabelle Stengers, now a leading interdisciplinary philosopher of science, culture, and politics. General systems theory describes forms of organisation, whether found in nature or culture, in general terms, such as the degree to which these systems are ‘open’ or ‘closed’, and which forms of exchange or metabolism exist between

them. Based upon this description, systems theorists also formulated the concepts of the environment and ecology.



6. Hans Haacke, Condensation Cube, 1963–65

Among the first artists to use general systems theory in their work was the (later Art Workers' Coalition member) Hans Haacke. His *Condensation Cube*(1963–65) is a square glass cube containing drops of water that condense as soon as the room temperature rises in response to the body heat of museum visitors. It is thus an open, context-dependent system that interacts with its environment, despite its appearance as a piece of self-contained, abstract, and thus highly autonomous art. It uses a visual language associated with autonomy in order to question autonomy, whereas Paglen and Appelbaum's (visually similar) *Autonomy Cube* is an ostensibly open, interactive system that seeks refuge in art spaces in order to partially close itself off and prohibit physical interference.

In the 1970s, the updated general systems theory of the biologists and philosophers Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela abandoned the older dualism of open and closed systems in favour of a model of open, living systems that still involve 'operational closure': life, according to Maturana and Varela, is based on self-organisation ('autopoiesis'), from cell division to free will and the

unpredictable behaviour of living beings. Autonomy, in other words, is the product of a dialectics of openness and closure. The child psychologist Jean Piaget developed systemic self-organisation into a pedagogical model, in which educators accept the child's self-constructed world (such as a fairy-tale universe, for example) without superimposing their own worldview. The sociologist Niklas Luhmann applied the principle of autopoiesis to social organisation, in a rather bleak way: in his model of self-organisation, the true function of any institution is not to serve its stated purpose, but merely to preserve itself. If one believes Luhmann, then the purpose of the art system is only its own self-maintenance; thus, it can neither be changed through Institutional Critique from within, nor externally through alternative spaces.

Whether or not Luhmann's hypothesis is true, art does not exist—from the perspective of general systems theory—as an autonomous entity, but only within numerous interdependencies with other systems, in a complex ecology. Openness and closure, autonomy and heteronomy, are thus no longer binary categories, but exist in complex gradations and relations (to say this is to state a truism, since any claims of 'autonomy' for art have always been abstractions and idealisations).

The same is true for self-organisation in technological systems. Statistical pattern recognition algorithms known as 'neural networks' (which form the core of today's most commonly used artificial intelligence technology) work using a combination of openness and operational closure: openness, by absorbing data sets (such as all chess games ever played, or camera images of streets) and using these to deduce patterns; closure, by reiterating this process in countless recursions in order to improve recognition as well as subsequent operations, such as moving chess figures or driving a car.



7. Autonomous Waymo Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid minivan undergoing testing in Los Altos, California, 2017

These technological developments are having a profound and rapid effect upon our everyday understanding of the term 'autonomy': from a formerly humanist attribute describing an individual's agency and free will, to a post-humanist concept of 'autonomous systems' that includes social media bots as well as unmanned drones performing 'signature attacks' (i.e. shooting targets that A.I. pattern recognition systems have identified as likely adversaries; a form of contemporary warfare analysed, for example, by the artist and geographer Trevor Paglen).

## Issues

The Autonomous Fabric of artist-run spaces, as it has been mapped for Rotterdam, remains a humanist endeavour. This begs the question of the role of any non-human actors within the network. Considering only the most obvious example, the autonomously running Biblioteca servers, we might ask: is each of these a self-organised space and node within the Autonomous Fabric?

But there is a more fundamental question: If autonomy and self-organisation do not exist as absolutes, but if autonomy is instead defined as being always relative (in the sense of operational closure within an open system), and embedded into ecologies of interdependence; If the relation between autonomy and dependence is not merely

dialectical, in the way that critical (aesthetic) theory suggests, but is in fact more complex and multi-layered;

If autonomy has become a contested—even politically questionable, and increasingly weaponised—concept, one that concerns privilege and implies exclusion of others whose autonomy is denied;

... then, what can still be gained from identifying a fabric of artists' self-organised practices as 'autonomous'?

Though there currently may be no answer to this question, it is at least worth noting that Kant's 'disinterested pleasures' should not be categorically written off just yet, as these can still usefully describe autopoetic moments of indeterminacy and unpredictability, even within interdependent systems. As a common attribute of art, squats, nations, and self-driving cars, 'autonomy' thus remains a highly relevant concept, and one that will continue to be the cause of many misunderstandings.

## Works Cited

Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson, editors. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*(reprint edition), Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 2011.

Bey, Hakim. *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, New York, Autonomedia, 1991.

Golumbia, David. *The Politics of Bitcoin: Software as Right-Wing Extremism*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Greenberg, Clement. 'Modernist Painting', *Forum Lectures, Voice of America*, Sol Tax et al. editors, Washington, Voice of America, 1964.

'Johan Rudolph Thorbecke', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 23 March 2018, nl.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Johan\_Rudolph\_Thorbecke.

Lütticken, Sven. "Neither Autocracy nor Automatism: Notes on Autonomy and the Aesthetic," *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2017, pp. 59–86.

Maturana, Humberto. R. and Francisco J. Varela. *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980.

Nolan, Michelle. 'AVL', 6 May 2008, micalene.blogspot.com/2008/05/avl.html.

Staal, Jonas. *Art in Defense of Democracy*, 2012, www.jonasstaal.nl/site/assets/files/1205/art\_in\_defense\_of\_democ....

## List of Images

1. Rosa Parks riding a Montgomery bus immediately following the decision to desegregate buses, December 21, 1956, black and white photograph. JPEG file, 315 × 316 pixels, retrieved from

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa\\_Parks#/media/File:Rosaparks\\_bus.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Parks#/media/File:Rosaparks_bus.jpg) /  
Fair Use

2. Trevor Paglen, Jacob Appelbaum, *Autonomy Cube Tor network Relay && Hotspot*, 2015, several Internet-connected computers create an open Wi-Fi hotspot for anonymous browsing. Photo: Rosa Menkman, JPEG file, 240 x 240 dpi, retrieved from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomy\\_Cube#/media/File:The\\_Internetional\\_-\\_Witte\\_de\\_With\\_\(17968681148\)\\_2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomy_Cube#/media/File:The_Internetional_-_Witte_de_With_(17968681148)_2.jpg) / CC BY 2.0
3. Democratic Federation of North-Syria and Studio Jonas Staal, *New World Summit – Rojava*, 2015–18. Inauguration of the People's Parliament of Rojava, Dêrik, Canton Cizîrê, Rojava. Photo: Ruben Hamelink. JPG file, 2083x1171 pixels, retrieved from [www.jonasstaal.nl/site/assets/files/1053/005\\_1.jpg](http://www.jonasstaal.nl/site/assets/files/1053/005_1.jpg) / Courtesy of Jonas Staal.
4. Star Wars logo, SVG file, 694 x 419 pixels, retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Star\\_Wars\\_Logo.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Star_Wars_Logo.svg) / Public Domain
5. Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky, *The Artists Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement*, 1971. Poster, 22" x 17" unfolded; 11" x 8.5" folded. First printing by the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY. PDF file, 1,275 x 1,650 pixels, retrieved from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Artists\\_Reserved\\_Rights\\_Transfer\\_and\\_Sale\\_Agreement.pdf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Artists_Reserved_Rights_Transfer_and_Sale_Agreement.pdf) / Public Domain
6. Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1965–2008, plexiglass and water, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. JPEG file, 365 x 273 pixels, retrieved from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Condensation\\_Cube\\_of\\_Haacke.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Condensation_Cube_of_Haacke.jpg) / Fair Use
7. Autonomous Waymo Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid minivan undergoing testing in Los Altos, California, 2017. Photo: Dllu, JPEG file, 5,015 x 2,711 pixels, retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Driving\\_car](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Driving_car)

driving\_car#/media/File:Waymo\_Chrysler\_Pacifica  
\_in\_Los\_Altos,\_2017.jpg / CC BY-SA 4.0

---

1. In the same year, a number of artists, critics, and curators began an 'autonomy project' in collaboration with several Dutch contemporary art spaces in order to critically examine the current status of autonomy in relation to art. See the website of the Autonomy Project.
2. Similar projects existed in the nineteenth-century British Arts and Crafts movement and in Fluxus.
3. This was in a time when left-wing art movements, from Russian constructivism to socialist realism, had rejected aesthetic autonomy as a bourgeois concept.
4. The original Dutch: 'De Kunst is geen regeringszaak, in zooverre de Regering geen oordeel, noch eenig gezag heeft op het gebied der kunst.' ('Johan Rudolph Thorbecke'). Thorbecke had a doctorate in literary studies and taught at the German university of Gießen, where he was influenced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy.
5. The Autonomous Fabric of Rotterdam is a research project by Willem de Kooning Academy, undertaken in collaboration with a large number of artist-run spaces and contemporary art institutes. It departs from the observation that a growing number of contemporary artists/creatives have reoriented from individual portfolio work towards self-organization in artist-run initiatives. Most of these initiatives operate in informal and underground settings and often are no longer easily recognizable as art projects at all. Examples include restaurants run as art projects, experimental schools, radio stations run as art performances, and do-it-yourself publishers. These developments exist globally, but Rotterdam is taken as a case study. Research questions include the shifting notion of art and autonomy in these projects, their relation to urban gentrification, and the impact of intersectionality and demographic shifts in their practices.

# ◊ Art and Design in New Economies: Speculative Scenarios for Real-life Innovations

Deanna Herst

## Economic Paradigm Shifts: A Possible Role for Art and Design Education

The current economic and industrial landscape is transforming rapidly. On a daily basis new products, services, platforms, and markets are emerging, fused by technological innovations and digitalisation, and increasingly driven by consumers, citizens, and communities. There are many perspectives on this landscape in flux, such as the so-called sharing economy (Benkler 2004), the horizontal economy, or the Next Economy (Rifkin 2017).<sup>1</sup>

These concepts redefine traditional models of production, transaction, distribution, and, accordingly, authorship and ownership. In today's economic spectrum we can see an emergence of initiatives that express a bottom-up or *DIY/DIWO* mentality and a shift from mass production to markets of one. The maker culture, for example, fosters collaborations between amateurs and professionals through networks and accessible, high-end technologies (FabLabs, maker spaces) to create new markets for specific communities and individuals. According to the ideology of 'free innovation', consumers develop innovations themselves and give them away for free (Von Hippel 2017). 'Jugaad innovation' is based upon frugal innovation from emerging communities in countries like India, China, and Africa. This method has meanwhile been developed into a strategy for mainstream innovation (Radjou et al. 2012). These practices show that what has traditionally been perceived as innovation (a top-down, highly structured process) is changing into a more unruly, bottom-up, and inclusive way of developing new products.

In this transforming economic and industrial environment, the traditional hierarchies between industries, companies, producers, designers, and consumers are radically changing. This paradigm shift transforms the way we design, what we design, and for whom.

How can art and design education equip students for this transforming socio-economic environment? Which indispensable skills and attitudes enable them to respond to an economic culture of digitalisation, bottom-up initiatives, inclusive innovation, markets of one, and ever-emerging technologies?

## **Next Economy, Next Design?**

Willem de Kooning Academy's Commercial Practice programme explores and questions the aforementioned developments and investigates their relevance for art and design students. Its point of departure is the paradigm shift in hierarchies and the way in which this affects future modes of production and consumption, markets, consumers, and, accordingly, the future practices of designers and artists.

To equip students for these 'next' economic scenarios, the programme proposes a form of 'next design' aimed at future commercial contexts that are driven by people, not mass markets. One of the objectives is to enable art and design students to position themselves as creative practitioners towards the strategic use of design in current managerial perspectives, expressed in, for example, design thinking.

Hence, in relating to current economic transformations, the programme specifically departs from methods that originate in aesthetics, imagination, and critical reflection. For example, students conduct provocative design research for innovative products, explore participatory ways of storytelling through online platforms in data design, question traditional market research aimed at masses instead of individuals in branding, and design experiences, services,

and interactions for and with consumers, citizens, and other stakeholders for future markets.

## **Speculative Scenarios for Real-Life Innovations**

One of the perspectives in the programme includes the relation between speculation, innovation, and consumers in real life. Speculation is investigated as a creative approach to achieve imaginative and more extreme forms of innovation. It relates to the field of speculative design as defined by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (Dunne & Raby 2011). Their 'what if' scenarios propose radical narratives for possible, often imaginary futures. As such, speculative design is positioned as design for debate rather than design for reality.

But what if this future increasingly involves emancipated consumers and citizens? Within this context we investigate how speculative, sometimes radical concepts and designs can be connected to the real world. Therefore, we do not address speculation in isolation as an expression of authorship or as design for debate, but rather connected to 'real-life' innovations in an exchange process with 'real people'. As a possible perspective, we expanded the 'what if' scenario with the question 'how else', relating to Ahmed Ansari's inclusive view on design: "How else" emphasises a connection to current systems and structures where the principle project is framed not as an aesthetic, exploratory, intellectual exercise, but as a political, transformative, active enterprise' (Ansari 2015).

Integrating speculation and real life, the 'what if / how else' approach aims at challenging students to both experiment with a radical speculative attitude and to exchange their concepts in reality. Through this scenario we intend to encourage inclusive and potentially more valuable innovations with prospective consumers.

## From ‘What If’ to ‘How Else’

To arrive at the realistic ‘how else’ as a ‘transformative enterprise’ (Ansari 2015) from the speculative ‘what if’, the role of design research with users and consumers is crucial. The design research we introduced in the programme focuses on developing creative, critical ways of conducting user and consumer research. As opposed to the anonymous data- and fact-driven market or user research, art and design students are able to use their unique artistic skills and imagination to unveil the personal stories, desires, dreams, or fears of users as input for more profound and valuable designs (Sanders & Stappers 2012).

An example is the ‘Confrontation Piece’, a design research approach aimed at user engagement. It is derived from the cultural probe (Gaver, Pacenti & Dunne, 1999), a method developed for interaction design: ‘a technique used to inspire ideas in a design process... a means of gathering data about people’s lives, values, thoughts. Probes can be any sort of artefact (map, postcard, camera, object, diary, etc.) along with evocative tasks, which are given to participants to allow them to record specific events, feelings or interactions.’

The Confrontation Piece is a less directly applied interpretation of the Cultural Probe. It encourages students to elicit stories from possible future consumers. In this process, they confront consumers with their concepts using tactics such as unexpected interventions or (un)familiar objects and visuals, in order to get less predictable, less factual feedback.

For the assignment ‘Secret Stories about Hidden Local Crafts’ in Rotterdam-West, students used the Confrontation Piece to collect stories from craftspeople. One project focused on forgotten weaving techniques. As an intervention, students installed a public loom of extreme dimensions at the local market. A provocative form was used to incite specific stories about weaving from the neighbourhood.



1 & 2. Open Design students Maud Claessens and Anke Wilinkelmolen testing the loom in a market in Rotterdam-West.

The giant loom succeeded as gathering place for collecting narratives. However, the stories did not only relate to weaving but much more to the daily lives of local people. This unexpected outcome changed the function of the final design. Based upon the responses the loom became a new product—a public storytelling tool.

In the project 'Memre' ('memory' in Surinamese), another student intended to discover secret stories about forgotten Surinamese crafts. He interviewed people using items like kernels, shells, and wood, mementos from their past in Suriname. His 'Confrontation Piece' eventually became an incentive for deeper storytelling. The responses inspired him to make a new product for this community, a memento kit that included an empty book for collecting personal histories.



3. Open Design student Hilko Idsinga interviewing the community for his project 'Memre'.



4. Hilko Idsinga, 'Memre'. Open Design project.

By allowing the 'how else' to the design process, the Confrontation Pieces resulted in unexpected outcomes that reflected the stories of

the people involved. Their feedback was used to create innovative products that did not yet exist. The process showed how a less strictly defined form of research into unknown needs could be used as a strategy for inclusive innovations and new, specific markets.

## From Probe to Provocation

Working with the Confrontation Piece provided valuable information about the process of designing a new product as the result of personal, intimate user feedback. Based upon the possible potential of this inclusive design process, we decided to expand the spectrum of the cultural probe from the 'how else' user-oriented Confrontation Piece to a more extreme 'what if' artistic approach: the 'Provocation Piece'. This research intervention focuses on testing radical scenarios in real life through a provocative design, in order to receive feedback about consumers' desires, dreams, or fears. In the Provocation Piece, the speculative 'what if' merges with the realistic 'how else'.

The Provocation Piece was introduced in a course that focused on the design of a future 'Internet of Things' product. Students developed several design research interventions, varying from role-play and disguises to presenting alienating objects to the people involved. The project 'Itranscom' focused on future care. What if we could get access to the thoughts of people who cannot communicate anymore, for example, because of dementia? For this purpose, the student proposed a data transmission system, represented by a small, round, flickering electronic object. Testing the 'how else', she used her alienating prototype in interviews with possible patients and caretakers. Her object incited profound conversations about life and death, providing her with new insights. An important outcome was the fear of privacy, which she eventually embedded into her final design concept.



5. 'Itranscom' a project by New Frontiers' student Zoï Pahtalias.



6. 'Itranscom' a project by New Frontiers' student Zoï Pahtalias.

'Real-Life Terra Fictions' was another assignment in which students explored the Provocation Piece. The course required a design for future landscapes and unknown territories and challenged students to make these extreme scenarios real for possible consumers.

The project 'Re-embodiment of Human Treasures' focused on a selected group of one hundred people who were nominated for a trip to Mars. The students used a provocative question: which earthly objects would they miss on Mars and how would they reproduce these with local Martian resources? To collect feedback they designed a kit containing a letter, together with pictures and objects of sentimental value. One Mars nominee returned the kit, including objects like a shell, a pinecone, and a violin, as well as a promise to

collaborate in the project. By intertwining their ‘what if’ speculations and the Mars nominee’s ‘how else’ reality, the students were able to relate ‘terra fiction’ to real-life ‘terra facts’.

## Unruly Speculations

The projects and methods described above show a possible approach in art and design education towards a transforming economic environment. We focused on the current shift in hierarchies between producers and consumers and the emerging bottom-up, participatory attitude from consumers and users. Taking into account the aesthetic context, authorship, and artistic capacities of the students, as well as the stories and needs from consumers and users, we intended to develop a design research approach that connects radical speculation with real-life scenarios. The examples show that students came up with imaginative, innovative, and not-yet existing products designed with and for their prospective consumers. However, there was a recurring main issue: establishing contact and collaboration with the people involved. This leads to the question of how we could further develop the “what if/how else” scenario to enable students to make speculative ideas relevant for real life innovations.

A case that might provide some insights is the project *Human Unification Base (HUB)*. It is an initiative of interaction designer Eric Groot Kormelink, who has been a wheelchair user since birth. *HUB* focuses on a group that is currently underrepresented in the industry: people with disabilities. The project encourages self-design and self-fabrication by questioning existing healthcare devices from an individual perspective, as an alternative form of innovation.

To achieve this, we propose open design and *DIY/DIWO* through interdisciplinary collaborations with makers, designers, artists, engineers, care and other professionals. The core of *HUB* is an open lab, a workspace where these parties collaborate and test prototypes *in situ* with the people involved.

As a design approach, HUB proposes the interconnection between these open design principles and the speculative imaginary. In general, the most urgent ergonomic needs of people with disabilities are solved by the industry, like wheelchairs or prostheses. But to unravel the real questions behind these readymade solutions we also need to investigate individual, tacit and non-explicit requirements of people with disabilities. Some of their dreams, fears or desires are already embodied by projects like flying wheelchairs, steampunk leg prostheses or Lego robot arms. These are but a few examples that show personal imagination related to needs, going beyond the universal industrial ergonomic.

To find out what these unexpressed needs and desires are, we investigate the possible role of the aesthetic: the speculative, the imaginary or even the provocative. Elaborating on the earlier mentioned participatory research methods, like the Confrontation Piece and Provocation Piece, we look at speculation in real life, provocation to incite storytelling, open-ended forms of products to encourage individual adaptations and personal scenarios for unimaginable future innovations. Some scenarios include:

*The Poetics of Use:* using different forms of narration to discover personal narratives, memories and other personal responses to everyday life devices.

*Stories of the Senses:* investigating the role of the senses and sensory feedback on products. Which tactile, olfactory, auditory or taste related sensations are missed in everyday life products? For example, some people need straws to drink beverages, how could the experience of different drinks be enhanced through the structures of the straws?

*Imaginary Interactions with (Technical) Things:* an autopsy of inaccessible devices for people with disabilities. Which unintended gestures or habits do these discouraging devices generate? One case showed a redesign of a guitar with a more intuitive interface for a person with limited manual control.

By addressing the imaginary in these speculative approaches, we encourage unpredictable innovations that result from real life

interactions with and are mostly instigated by the individuals involved. The outcomes might be products or add-ons that are quirky, unfamiliar or unusual but nevertheless reveal non-standard preferences. We want to explore how these unruly parameters from an underrepresented group could be developed into future standards for (self) health care innovation. Within this context, our future objective is to develop prototypes into real products, as innovative, personal alternatives to the health industry, and to discover new markets for them.

## How Else?

So how could we further develop the ‘what if / how else’ scenario in order to enable students to bring speculative ideas to real life? The “how else” in *HUB* includes focusing on new (underrepresented) groups, reversing roles between designer and user and addressing individual needs beyond the usual ergonomic, in order to make speculation real for the people involved. “How else” also implies an inclusive approach to innovation, in which the speculative imaginary and the critical participatory are merged.

Hence, we propose open, interdisciplinary *in situ* workspaces that implement the ‘real world’ in the educational context. These public field labs facilitate students’ research, experiments, and collaborations on urgent future questions together with engineers, scientists, industries, local initiatives, and, not least, audiences, consumers and users as fundamental stakeholders in innovation. As such, these labs can expose students to real life issues and the people involved, and, at the same time, show their distinctive position as creative practitioners, collaborators, shape shifters, and critical innovators to an economic field that is in flux.

## Works Cited

Ansari, Ahmed. 'Design Must Fill Current Human Needs Before Imagining New Futures', *MIT Media Lab Summit*, July, 2015.

Benkler, Yochai. Sharing Nicely: On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production. *Yale LJ*, 114 (2004), p. 273.

Dunne, Anthony, & Raby, Fiona. 'What if...'. *The First Beijing International Design Triennial*. Beijing, 2011, pp. 233–85.

Gaver, Bill, Dunne, Tony, & Pacenti, Elena. 'Design: Cultural Probes', *Interactions*, 6(1) 1999, 21–29.

Von Hippel, Eric. *Free Innovation: How Citizens Create and Share Innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017.

Radjou, Navi., Prabhu, Jaideep, & Ahuja, Simone. *Jugaad Innovation: Think Frugal, Be Flexible, Generate Breakthrough Growth*. New York: John Wiley & Sons 2012.

Rifkin, Jeremy. 'The Third Industrial Revolution: How the Internet, Green Electricity, and 3-D Printing are Ushering in a Sustainable Era of Distributed Capitalism'. *World Financial Review*, 1 (March/April 2012).

Sanders, E. B. N., & Stappers, P. J. *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*. Amsterdam: BIS, 2012.

## List of Images

1. Open Design students Maud Claessens and Anke Wilnkelmolen testing the loom in a market in Rotterdam-West.
2. Open Design students Maud Claessens and Anke Wilnkelmolen testing the loom in a market in Rotterdam-West.



3. Open Design student Hilko Idsinga interviewing the community for his project 'Memre'. Retrieved from [opendesignwdka.wordpress.com/projecten/](http://opendesignwdka.wordpress.com/projecten/)
  4. Hilko Idsinga, 'Memre'. Open Design project. Retrieved from [opendesignwdka.wordpress.com/projecten/](http://opendesignwdka.wordpress.com/projecten/)
  5. 'Itranscom' a project by New Frontiers' student Zoï Pahtalias.
  6. 'Itranscom' a project by New Frontiers' student Zoï Pahtalias.
- 

1. Rifkin's views on the Next Economy can also be found in *Roadmap Next Economy*, Rotterdam, 2017, <https://mrdh.nl/rne-naslag>.

# ▽ An Invitation, a Workshop, a Skype Conversation and Some Questions

*Rolf Engelen, Vanessa Jane Phaff, and Sjoerd Westbroek.  
In collaboration with Johanneke van der Ziel.*

As part of the ELIA Biennial Conference 2018 in Rotterdam, the Friendly Stalking collective organised a workshop for conference participants at Skarlokaal De Toermalijn in Rotterdam Zuidwijk. At Skarlokaal, Friendly Stalking collaborated with the Willem de Kooning Academy to facilitate practice-based research in primary education by students and teachers from all departments. Below is a fragment from a letter that was given to the workshop participants on their way there.

▽▽▽

Rotterdam, 23 November 2018

Dear Reader,

We are in a metro train, taking us to the southern part of the city of Rotterdam, on the left bank of the river Maas. We're gathering today to travel to Skarlokaal, a former elementary school that started as artists' studios, but is slowly developing into a central hub for a growing community of practitioners, working in the Zuidwijk neighbourhood.

We are delighted we have had the opportunity to show you the place where we work with our colleagues. We do not know why you decided to participate in this workshop, but considering the context of the ELIA conference, we're assuming there is a professional interest and maybe even experience with similar projects. We're interested to enter into conversation with you about what you observe here and what it makes you think about. But, even more so, we're interested in hearing about your experiences as practitioners and as colleagues,

who bring in knowledge that is as valuable as ours, so to speak. Skarlokaal is conceived as a learning environment for all persons involved, including the artists, teachers, organisers, children and parents. In thinking about what today could be, we decided to extend the idea of the learning environment to our gathering. Although we're happy to share our experiences, we are not here to tell you how things must be done and we're interested in learning from you as well. What questions, dilemmas or problems, do you encounter in setting up projects that have an artistic and a social side to them? How do you build new relationships in a sustainable way, resisting the pressure to achieve quick successes?

▽▽▽

One person came to the workshop: Danae Esparza, Head of Studies of the Degree in Design at ELISAVA, Barcelona. At first, we were disappointed that most of the registered participants had not showed up and we felt slightly awkward directing all our attention towards our only guest. However, the conversation that afternoon turned out to be wonderfully inspirational. Amongst other things we discussed the way space affects the functioning of pupil and teacher, processes of inclusion and exclusion or, to restate it in the most general terms: power and safety. We considered how practice produces knowledge, or rather how it undermines assumptions, and forces you to apply newly acquired insights in an improvised manner. How can we incorporate this space into didactic models? Who learns from whom? Can the adult's studio (of the artist-educator) and the children's studio be shared? Can concepts be blended and classes designed in such a way that they are challenging for both groups?

Moving through the spaces (the classrooms, the children's museum, the U-shaped corridor interrupting the studio from door to door, as well as the studio temporarily handed over to a group of local women), we could demonstrate the practical consequences of the concepts we work with, and make our practice tangible, despite the absence of children, teachers or parents.

Danae showed us a YouTube video about a project she participated in, which, amongst other things, considered the differences between the design of public space in suburban Barcelona in comparison to areas with a clearly representative function, such as the city centre.

The encounter was warm and thought provoking. Quality instead of quantity, the latter being merely an image of success.

▽▽▽

Recently, we continued the conversation with Danae via Skype.

**Rolf:** We are very interested in the project you described last time, maybe we could start there. You were talking about city furniture and the pavement, the difference in quality between the city centre and the suburbs.

**Danae:** I actually participated in that project while I was working on my PhD at the University of Barcelona. It was a long term engagement with a neighbourhood, which resulted in a few subprojects. One of these involved the building of a model of the neighbourhood by teenagers who lived there, which was exhibited in a community centre and used as a conversation piece to identify problems in the area. Another subproject involved children expressing their perception of the neighbourhood in visual artworks. Let me also explain a project I'm working on at the moment, at ELISAVA. The university is located very centrally in Barcelona, on La Rambla. In that area, there is a lot of pressure on traditional socio-economic structures because of tourism. We have also seen the demographics change, because of migration. All these developments lead to insecurities, for instance rents going up and shops closing. It's also a neighbourhood with many craftsmen, such as sandal-makers or glass workshops, so we started a project with students to understand and make visible the traditional forms of knowledge. We want to make the value of the city centre visible at a time in which less and less people want to live here—something the city council is also interested in.

**Sjoerd:** What exactly do you mean by making visible?

**D:** A concrete outcome of this long term project is a digital map, produced collaboratively by successive generations of students. This can be seen as a representation of economic activities in the area, as an ephemeral marketplace. However, it's just the beginning, as we're working towards organising events and other activities. We want to create relationships between students and the craftsmen, they can learn a lot from each other.

**S:** Does this lead to concrete collaborations in which an exchange of knowledge takes place?

**D:** Occasionally, on a small scale. For instance, a group of students who had interviewed social workers who run a workshop for unemployed people, created a card game which helped them to deal with conversations around delicate topics. The course, however, is only three months long, which is a challenge for everyone involved. As a university, we have 11,000 m<sup>2</sup> in the city centre of Barcelona, but it's like a fortress. How can this building, this institution, become more permeable? How can our students who come to this area every day also learn from the craftspeople who have knowledge of traditional ways of transforming materials?

**S:** So far we've been talking about the city centre, which implies there's also a periphery, some place that is not the centre. Do you think this binary opposition between periphery and centre is still relevant? For instance, in the case of migration the question is rather: Who gets access to public institutions and spaces? There might be two people using the same area, one having access to what is there and the other person not. Is this something you're thinking about?

**D:** Indeed there are peripheries within the city centre, and peripheral suburbs might be quite close to a neighbouring city. In that sense we're only talking about administrative structures and there are many problems we share. In the city centre of Barcelona there is still a great diversity of cultures.

**S:** Sometimes you see constant flows of students going through a neighbourhood, to 'solve' problems. This can make one wonder, who is actually working for whom? How do you avoid exploitation?

**D:** That's why we don't ask students to solve anything, which is too complicated. We ask students to observe and learn. We teach them, for instance, to do interviews and compare various sources to understand the complexity of the situation. One aspect of an ethically sound approach is to not insist too much, or interfere in day-to-day business, and let people in the neighbourhood decide whether or not they want to participate. In this case the research is the project, which for many students is a new way of thinking. Students get introduced to various working methods by anthropologists and design researchers. So although we do present them with more artistic ways of working, we prefer to first introduce this more social-scientific approach before they develop their own method.

**S:** Do you decide what questions the students work on?

**D:** Yes, because students are not used to this way of working and we want to give them some concrete guidelines. We work together to find the right tools to make observations. As designers they often tend to start making straight away. There are five questions or areas of inquiry that focus on various aspects of these businesses, such as the material production process, the social networks they are embedded in, what kind of knowledge is required and how professional qualification works in their field. As part of the briefing we tell them to look at the map we're building, to see what has been done the year before. They finish the project with a publication, which summarises their research.

**S:** This anthropological approach, and working on a repository of knowledge that can also be used by next generations of students, is interesting. In my experience it can be difficult for students to use this information in their design practices. As you said, designers like making stuff, that's why they became designers. How do you guide students in thinking about how all of this might affect their decisions as designers? Or is this something that is up to them?

**D:** In the third year the emphasis is really on understanding what doing research can involve, for instance who are the actors and for whom are they working? We invite design researchers to show that being a designer means being a researcher too. One of the aims is to show the possibility of doing research as a practice, as an individual designer but also in multidisciplinary teams in companies. This map and the information we're collecting is also interesting for the municipality. There is a municipal initiative to grant low rents to businesses who have a real impact on the area.

**R:** Of course the craftspeople themselves are also product-makers. Students and craftspeople can learn from each other, and in terms of innovating the product. The workshops at the academy and those in its surroundings could complement each other. Does this happen?

**D:** Not yet. I hope it happens one day. There are many students, and craftspeople don't always have the time. We leave it to the student to build a relationship as it's something we don't want to push too much. We don't want people in the neighbourhood to experience this as exploitative.

**S:** We think a lot about the learning environment beyond the academy, Skarlokaal being such a space, or the schools where our teacher training students do their internships. Building long-term relationships with these places is one of the most difficult things to do. This is acknowledged but not always acted upon, stuck as we often are in day-to-day business.

**R:** At Skarlokaal de Toermalijn it works because it's my studio too. Projects like these require presence. We invite students to do a long-term research project, which sometimes results in some of them staying permanently. Slowly, this long-term relationship is being built.

**S:** We've been talking for an hour now...

**D:** I was thinking how once a year in December we organise a week with workshops by teachers from other universities. Students can

sign up for workshops that are different from what they work on as part of their course. It could be interesting to invite you to do a one-week workshop with our students.

**R:** Yes, that's really nice.

**D:** Just think about what you would like to do, and we can discuss it.

**S:** Let's be in contact after summer, early September...

**D:** Great, so we'll be in touch.

▽▽▽

As artists and educators, we don't solve problems, we pose questions. Therefore, we conclude by articulating a few of the questions we take with us from the encounter, of which the above was but a partial report.

How can we design a structure to store knowledge acquired by students in projects in such a way that it remains accessible for subsequent groups of students and teachers?

Is it necessary to have students trained more systematically in existing research traditions by scientists before we ask them to develop their own methods? What would this mean for the art academy's curriculum and staff?

How can we guide students in going through a more collaborative working process in which all actors involved collectively articulate a question? How does knowledge acquired in such a process inform research questions?

# ◎ The Workshop of Other Knowledge

*Aldje van Meer*

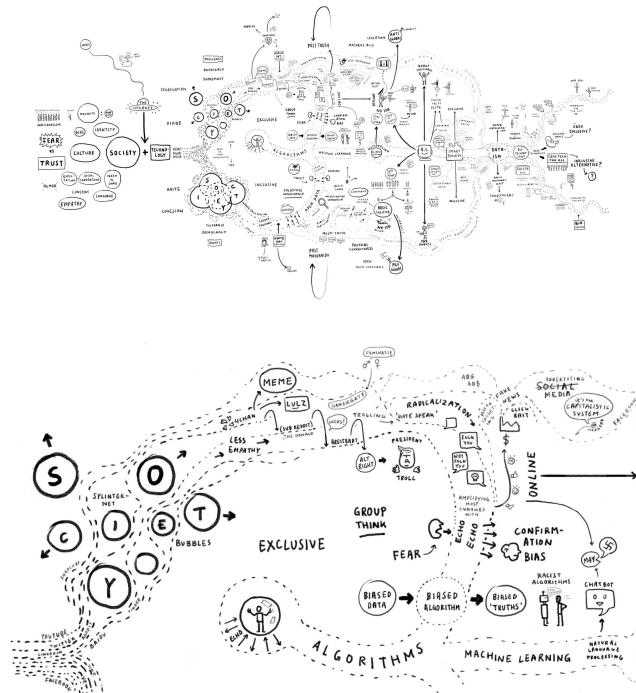
As an art educator, I ask myself daily whether we are offering students the right tools, skills, and technology. Within this writing I would like to share my struggle and the questions I have regarding the learning environment in which we address these tools, skills and technology; namely, the workshop.

First, I would like to address the role of the workshop in relation to the Bauhaus. Celebrating its centenary in 2019, the Bauhaus had a great influence on the role of the workshop within higher arts education. I will look at this history and describe how industrialization and globalization shaped today's workshop. Then I will address some issues which can help us to reformulate the role of the workshop within (higher) art education. Finally, I would like to look at how current times resonate with the desires and attitudes that shaped the Bauhaus, and how it can inspire us to develop 'the Workshop of Other Knowledge' which explores the boundaries of what such a space within higher art education can be.

## **The Role of the Workshop in Relation to Bauhaus**

The Bauhaus responded to the effects of the 'First Machine Age', in which the machine took over traditional work done by hand and craftsmanship, and artists and designers sought new roles within the junction of craft and industrial production. The Bauhaus was responding to a world with many insecurities. World War I had just finished, Germany was bankrupt, and there was great inflation. In this context a new narrative was needed and the Bauhaus had a rather remarkable, positive approach. They developed a utopian vision to make a better world for all through better designed objects and environments. They wanted to fundamentally change the world through design.

Today we are experiencing the emergence of the 'Second Machine Age', wherein technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and biotech are fundamentally changing the way we live. The present can be characterised as an age in which the boundaries between the physical, digital, and biological blur. Maybe, in parallel to the Bauhaus, we could say we also live in a time of great societal change and transformation where the cultural, ecological, and technological landscape is shifting and bringing new challenges for artist and designers (Philips et al. 17).



1. Rogier Klomp, Algorithmic Super Structures, 2018

## The Workshop of Today

At the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA), as at many other art schools, we are putting tremendous efforts into addressing these urgent topics through our art and design education. In response to

these developments we have applied fundamental changes in our curricula. In order to make our education more relevant, we have introduced the Autonomous, Social, and Commercial Practices where students work on real-life, practical assignments which transcend the boundaries of their discipline (WdKA, 'Practices'). Within these educational programmes much effort is put into rethinking systems, notions of authorship, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity (Schutten et al.).

Another major change and innovation has been the reinvention of our workshops. We have seen a great divide between new art and design practices and our craft-oriented education within the workshop. We believed that 'a changing society' also calls for new ways of making. New technologies not only alter the way we make things, they also influence how we think about production.

So, we upgraded the workshops and implemented what we call the 'Stations' at the WdKA (WdKA 'Stations'). Within these Stations we are questioning the technology that we currently teach by making room for new technologies and reinventing old technologies. We have changed the workshop from a place for production and execution to a space where research can take place. Also, we have created an environment which allows more frequent and intensive collaboration between teachers and technical staff.



2. Interaction Station, Willem de Kooning Academy. Photo: Ossip van Duivenbode

In 2012, when we re-invented the workshops as Stations, we wanted to support new art and design practices and ways of making, but have we actually achieved these goals? In many respects, despite successes, we are still held back by the past. To gain more insight into where we stand now and how we can develop further, it is good to look at history.

## The Workshop and its History

Educator, writer, and graphic designer Meredith Davis notes, 'For most of the 20th century, the primary role of design was to make things look and work better, to support the functional and emotional experiences of the consumers, through well-designed artefacts and places' (Davis, *Teaching Design* 84). As she describes, this twentieth-century, Bauhaus-based notion of an artefact-oriented view of design is very much applicable within today's vision for the role of technology, and particularly of the workshop in art education. In practice this means professor/tutors teach in the classroom or studio and, in the workshops, technical staff instruct students in technologies to help them realise their 'products'. Of course, the classes and subjects taught by professors have changed over time. Mass industrialisation and the outsourcing of production have led to

a greater distance from manufacturing processes. Postmodern ideas were introduced, which related to these shifts in mass industry and consumerism. Art education developed a more conceptual, critical, and theoretical approach relating to design practices.

This led to the shared opinion that artists and designers are responsible for the concept but not the execution of the work, and that the technology or media used was inferior to the overall concept and message. In this context, technology or material knowledge was considered less important and took up a peripheral role in the creative process; moreover, it was sometimes even seen as limiting to the imagination. As a result, the role of technology within art education in general has been neglected for decades. Furthermore, ubiquitous digital and networked technologies have not led to major changes in higher art and design education, but instead to greater fragmentation and specialisation.

In my opinion, this is very much reflected in the lack of awareness regarding the development of the workshop and the pedagogy around learning technology, materials, and skills. In most (Northern European) art schools you will find similar workshops, which are mostly related to old media and crafts. They are equipped for the making of 'artefacts': the wood, metal, ceramics, and plastic workshops; graphic and print studios; time-based media; photography and film. At the turn of the twenty-first century digital technologies were slowly introduced; think of computers, editing studios, and fabrication technologies like laser cutters, 3D printers, and the like. But unlike traditional media and their tools of production, it was not entirely clear where to position new digital equipment, as it seemed to be relevant for all disciplines (Philips et al. 17).

## **The Workshop of Tomorrow**

Today, we can no longer neglect the influence of technology and its impact on making and emergent practices within higher art and design education. The workshop or, in the case of the WdKA, the

Station, should not be rooted in the twentieth-century but instead, it must be relevant in the twenty-first century. It is time to rethink pedagogy in relation to these technologies and materials and, in doing so, rethink the role of the workshop.

In doing so, the following questions should be taken into consideration:

- 1. Product versus Process:** How does the role of the workshop change when it moves beyond artefact-based practices?
- 2. Stuck in a rut:** Are we able to get rid of predetermined ideas about the conventional toolset artists and designers need?
- 3. Can we make it or should we make it?:** What are the social, political, historical and environmental implications of the tools we use, and in this context what are the potential known and unknown consequences of the things we make?<sup>1</sup>
- 4. Accelerating digital technologies:** What are possible strategies to deal with rapid development of digital technologies?
- 5. How do we value technical knowledge?:** How can we problematize the hierarchical divide between the technical staff or instructors and the tutor?
- 6. Transdisciplinary practices?:** Are we able to welcome other experts/disciplines within the workshop?

## **1. Product Versus Process**

Our Stations and most workshops within Northern European art schools are organized through making, which is based on artefacts. As mentioned before, the primary role of design was to make things look and work better, to support the functional and emotional experiences of consumers, through well-designed artefacts and places (Davis 84). The workshop used to support this type of artefact-based practice. But for a long period of time, design and art practices have not focussed solely on making products or artefacts. Artists and designers create processes, transformations, experiences, services and concepts. What does this mean for the practice of making within the workshop? How do we support

practices like; conceptual art, transformation design, data design, service design and experience design?

## **2. Stuck in a Rut**

I wonder whether we are stuck in a rut and have predetermined ideas about what the artistic toolset of artists and designers should be. Are we teaching the tools, skills and technology students need in this time and age? When designers or artists look at the world and give meaning to it, it does not necessarily mean that they need a camera or pencil. It is important to use tools that fit and relate to the world we live in, and these tools are many. At this moment we are able to look at the world through not only the camera or interpret it with the pencil, but also through technologies like such as AI, microscopes, sensors, and 3D scanners. Next to these tools which give us the possibility to research, observe and interpret the world, we are able to use all sorts materials and media to express ourselves. We can work with dust (Piscaer Servies, see image 3), data, use fermentation processes, our body and literally everything that is at hand. How does this determine and influence the making process within the workshop?



3. BluecityLab, intern Lieke van der Maas working with kombucha.



4. Annemarie Piscaer and Iris de Kievith, ceramic with fine dust glaze by SER-VIES.

### 3. Can We Make It?

With industrialization, globalization and the cheap transport of goods, the relationship we have with the things we buy and consume is completely disturbed (Ketter & Co). Thanks to current debates around climate change and by post-colonial critics, a re-evaluation of this relationship has not only come to the fore but is encouraged. So how do we make things in the world without exploiting people and resources? What tools and materials do we have to offer in the workshop? What is the historical and political meaning of, for instance, a material like yarn? What role can the workshop play in helping students to make more sustainable decisions? These are issues we can no longer ignore and now must call for action.

### 4. Accelerating Digital Technologies

We have more and more (digital) technologies at our disposal. On the one hand you could say that making has become easier—think of all kinds of 2D and 3D printing possibilities and accessibility of computer programming (such as Arduino/Raspberry Pi). On the other hand, processes of making are also becoming very inaccessible. We do not really understand what lies behind the technologies we are using anymore and have become more dependent on them at the same time. I like what the critical

engineers are saying: 'The greater the dependence on a technology the greater the need to study and expose its inner workings' (Oliver et al.).



5. Arthur Boer & Boris Smeenk, *Phony - Make Believe*.



5. Arthur Boer & Boris Smeenk, *Phony - Make Believe*.



5. Arthur Boer & Boris Smeenk, *Phony - Make Believe*.

## 5. How Do We Value Technical Knowledge?

In practice, there is a pervasive and classical division between the 'teaching staff' and the 'technical staff'; the instructors who work in the workshop (the Stations). Art and design professors are increasingly distanced from teaching in the workshops and have limited knowledge in this ever-expanding field of complex technologies. The technical staff and instructors in the workshop are supposed to have, as in the Bauhaus period, little influence on a student's artistic development. They also have a hard time keeping up with these new technologies, and often lack the artistic background, qualities, and practice to formulate appropriate pedagogical approaches that critically examine the use of media and material. What kinds of technical knowledge and literacies are necessary for both teaching and technical staff?

## 6. Transdisciplinary Practice

We return to the Bauhaus and its potentialities as a model of education that 'wanted to become a force capable of changing society and hoped to form a modern type of human being and environment. In a transdisciplinary community of work, the "building of the future"—and thus also the future itself—was to be conceived

and created' (bauhausarchiv museum für gestaltung). *What might that mean in the present?* Living in the Anthropocene, and facing climate change and global inequality the need for building a new future, new approaches and new narratives are needed. As Annemarie Piscaer from Studio Dust suggests: 'These ecological issues require inclusive transdisciplinary cooperation' (Piscaer 5). Artists and designers who want to address these topics require knowledge, experience, and expertise from other disciplines (science). I think this suggests that we have to let go of our artistic ego, get rid of twentieth-century ideas about authorship and learn to communicate and collaborate with others.

## **The Workshop of Other Knowledge**

When I looked at the Bauhaus, I was inspired by the holistic and open attitude of its teachers and students and their engagement and willingness to experiment. It is very interesting to look at the object lessons and material expeditions of Joseph Albers and László Moholy-Nagy. They taught their students to experiment with different materials through their senses. What I learned was that they were pushing students to question and research the materials of that day and age. This made me wonder whether we are questioning the materials of our own day and age within art education. In a world where we are getting out of touch with the physical and tangible and have lost control over the virtual, its crucial for designers and artist to again engage with the substantial, real world. As Jan Boelen, a curator of design, architecture and contemporary art aptly noted:

How can we learn a certain attitude to deal with reality of today? Design has the enormous potential to create products that deal with our reality. This productive mode is necessary—to construct and make your own reality rather than becoming a consumer and a slave of reality. But if we are still dreaming of a reality that we can construct ourselves, then what are the skills that we need to know and to be in control of...?<sup>2</sup>

Thinking about this holistic and experimental approach of the Bauhaus, I wondered how we are enabling our students to deal with reality today. This led me to embark on a research project: The Workshop of Other Knowledge, which actually questions what the workshop of tomorrow should be. My research centres around the following question: *What materials, tools and instruments within art education can we provide to investigate and experiment with crucial phenomena of this time and age?*

The Workshop of Other Knowledge (van Meer) aims to create several temporary, experimental, physical learning environments where tools, things, instruments, software, hardware, methods, and equipment are collected. The aim is to create a new learning environment, where new modes of making and designing will be developed by breaking away from standardised ways of seeing and making. Driving questions are: What tools and materials do we have to offer in the workshop in a time and age where we run out of resources? What is the 'matter' or 'material' we create with?



6. World Wilder Lab — Kasia Molga and Eric Overmeire, Plandscape an interactive installation. NeuLab, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut.

## NEULAB

The first experiment regarding the Workshop of Other Knowledge was NEULAB, executed during Neuhaus; a temporary and transdisciplinary academy for more-than-human knowledge, hosted by The New Institute (Het Nieuwe Instituut) running from May through to September 2019. Neuhaus reacted to the current era's planetary burnout with a multifaceted curriculum in the spirit of the Bauhaus (The New Institute, 'Neuhaus').

At its core the Bauhaus project revolved around the 'New Human Being'. It was not about learning a profession, but about the universal education/formation of the personality. Making processes and practices have been very much human-centred ever since. Everything we make and design is in the favour or service of humans. NEULAB questions this kind of making within a world where we are running out of resources and where non-human systems like algorithms are influencing our lives. This raised another question: Can we make and collaborate with other entities?

But what does it mean to learn to meet the needs of non-humans, can we show solidarity to other entities while making? In NEULAB we explored this relationship with non-human entities through making. What is our relationship with plants, animals, things, machines, and AI? How can we work with them instead of having them work for us?

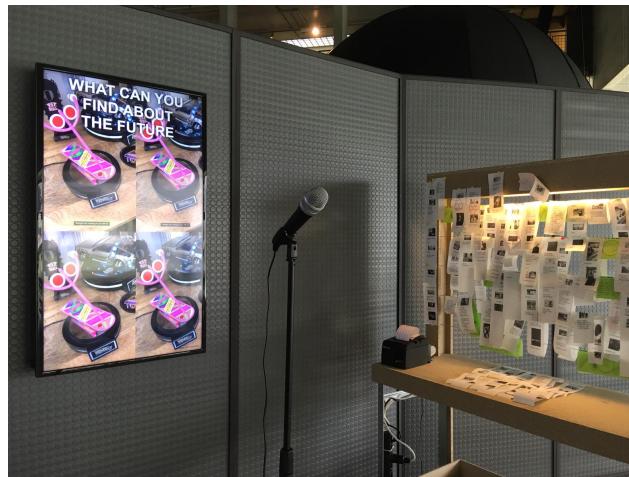
In three installations (The New Institute, 'Neulab') created by different artists,<sup>3</sup> Neuhausler participants were asked to deploy their own creativity, and concentrate on the following three non-human entities: Algorithm—Plants—Things. These installations were explicitly a do-it-yourself activity and by doing/making the relationships are examined and experienced (The New Institute, 'Neuhaus Neulab 7/8').



7. Endoscope installation made by RNUL. NeuLab table, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut.



8. Photo of results working with the Hybrid Design Tool; an interactive tool by Rawshaping. NeuLab table, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut.



9. Hackers and Designers, Momentary Zine; a publication tool.  
NeuLab, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to stress the significance of developing new visions around pedagogies related to technology, skill education, and specifically, experiential learning which takes place in the art school. Most importantly, this vision should not be developed separately but overarching all curricula, embedding 'critical making' as an integral part of learning. By formulating better skill education regarding technology and making, it will enable students to deal with reality and connect to the world. In order to do this, it is necessary to let go of standardised ideas and embrace new making processes and practices, and foster research into the ethical implications of making. It is also essential to acknowledge that this cannot be done alone. We need to cooperate and collaborate with humans, experts from other disciplines, and non-human entities and let go of former hierarchical divides.

Hopefully this collaborative effort will lead to different learning environments within our art schools and will inspire teaching and technical staff, students and external partners to reimagine and

envision the world differently, and engage with the tools to respond more accurately to the crucial phenomena of this time and age!

## Works Cited

- bauhausarchiv museum für gestaltung. 'Idee'. [https://www.bauhaus.de/en/das\\_bauhaus/44\\_idee/](https://www.bauhaus.de/en/das_bauhaus/44_idee/)
- Davis, Meredith. *Teaching Design, A Guide to Curriculum and Pedagogy for College Design Faculty and Teachers Who Use Design in their Classrooms*. New York: Allworth Press, 2017.
- 'The Design School Lecture Series: Meredith David', *Vimeo*, 12 November 2015, [vimeo.com/116078233](https://vimeo.com/116078233).
- Ellison, Christine. 'Workshop: Making Beyond the Post-Medium Condition'. *Visual Culture in Britain* vol. 18, no. 2, 2017, pp. 133–62.
- The New Institute. 'Neuhaus'. [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en)
- 'Neuhaus Neulab 7/8', *Vimeo*, [player.vimeo.com/video/355987606?color=](https://player.vimeo.com/video/355987606?color=)
- 'Neulab'. [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab /](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab/)
- Ketter & Co. 'Land and Hand'. [ketterenco.nl/www.ketterenco.nl/wp-content/uploads/Land-Hand\\_05.2019\\_digitaal-compressed.pdf](http://ketterenco.nl/www.ketterenco.nl/wp-content/uploads/Land-Hand_05.2019_digitaal-compressed.pdf)
- Lehmann, Ann-Sophie. 'Material Literacy'. *Bauhaus*, no. 9, 2017, pp. 20–27.
- van Meer, Aldje, 'Workshop of Other Knowledge'. *Willem de Kooning Academy*, <http://workshop-ok.wdka.nl/>.
- Oliver, Julian, Gordon Savičič, Danja Vasiliev. Critical Engineering Manifesto. 2011–19, [criticalengineering.org/en](http://criticalengineering.org/en).
- Philips, Shailoh, van Meer Aldje, Mulder Mark. *How We Make Research: A Benchmark Study Of The Role Of Research In The Stations At Willem De Kooning Academy 2018/2019*, [dailydanai.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HowWeMakeResearch-1819.pdf](http://dailydanai.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HowWeMakeResearch-1819.pdf)

Piscaer, Annemarie. 'I'm An Amateur / I'm An Expert: Operating On The Fluid Boundaries Of The Design Profession'. thesis submitted to the Piet Zwart Institute, September 2017, [studiodust.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/As\\_a\\_designer\\_IM\\_an\\_Expert\\_Im\\_an\\_Amateur.pdf](http://studiodust.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/As_a_designer_IM_an_Expert_Im_an_Amateur.pdf)

——— *Servies*. [www.ser-vies.nl](http://www.ser-vies.nl)

Projekt Bauhaus. 'Knowledge, Technology, Progress. Preliminary Course: From Bauhaus to Silicon Valley'. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2017, [www.projekt-bauhaus.de/en/data/events/preliminary-course-from-bauhaus-to-silicon-valley](http://www.projekt-bauhaus.de/en/data/events/preliminary-course-from-bauhaus-to-silicon-valley).

Rajagopal, Avinash. 'Istanbul Design Biennial Curator Jan Boelen Wants to Shake Up Design Education'. *Metropolis Magazine*, 1 December 2017, [www.metropolismag.com/design/jan-boelen-istanbul-design-biennial/](http://www.metropolismag.com/design/jan-boelen-istanbul-design-biennial/).

Schutten, Iris, Nana Adusei-Poku, Roger Teeuwen, Peter Troxler. 'Social Design as a Political Act'. *Beyond Social*, 2018, [beyond-social.org/wiki/index.php/Social\\_Design\\_as\\_a\\_Political\\_Act](http://beyond-social.org/wiki/index.php/Social_Design_as_a_Political_Act).

Smith, Ta'i. 'The Bauhaus has never been modern'. *Craft Becomes Modern: The Bauhaus in the Making*, edited by Regina Blittner. Bielefeld: Kerber, 2017.

Willem de Kooning Academy. 'Practices'. [wdka.nl/practices](http://wdka.nl/practices).

——— 'Stations'. [www.wdka.nl/stations](http://www.wdka.nl/stations).

——— 'Workshop of Other Knowledge'. [workshop-ok.wdka.nl](http://workshop-ok.wdka.nl)

## List of Images

1. Rogier Klomp, Algorithmic Super Structures, 2018.  
Retrieved from [www.facebook.com/pg/KLOMPTv-1710045382656911/posts/](http://www.facebook.com/pg/KLOMPTv-1710045382656911/posts/)

2. Interaction Station, Willem de Kooning Academy. Photo: Ossip van Duivenbode

3. BluecityLab, intern Lieke van der Maas working with kombucha. Photo: [www.bluecitylab.nl](http://www.bluecitylab.nl)

4. Annemarie Piscaer & Iris de Kievith, ceramic with fine dust glaze by SER-VIES. Photo: Roel van Tour. Retrieved from <https://www.ser-vies.nl/>

5. Arthur Boer & Boris Smeenk, Phony – Make Believe. Photo: Arthur Boer & Boris Smeenk. Retrieved from [2018.gogbot.nl/portfolio/boris-smeenk/](http://2018.gogbot.nl/portfolio/boris-smeenk/)

6. World Wilder Lab; Kasia Molga and Eric Overmeire, Plandscapes an interactive installation. NeuLab, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut. Photo: Het Nieuwe Instituut. Retrieved from [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab)

7. Endoscope installation made by RNUL. NeuLab table, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut. Photo: Het Nieuwe Instituut. Retrieved from [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab)

8. Photo of results working with the Hybrid Design Tool; an interactive tool by Rawshaping. NeuLab table, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut. Photo: Het Nieuwe Instituut. Retrieved from [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab)

9. Hackers and Designers, Momentary Zine; a publication tool. NeuLab, Neuhaus, Het Nieuwe Instituut. Photo: Het Nieuwe Instituut. Retrieved from [neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab](http://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/lokalen/neulab)

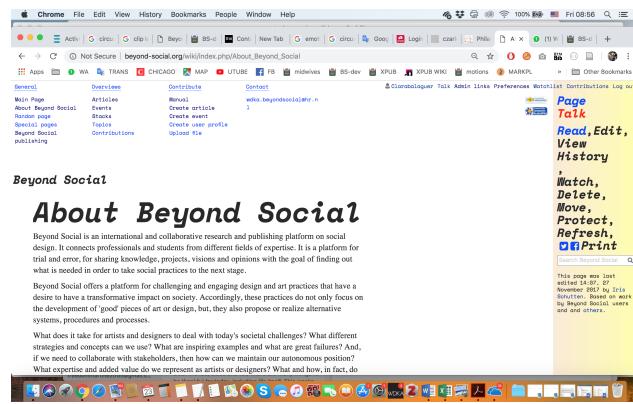
1. The Dutch translation of 'Can we make it?' is 'Kunnen we het maken?'. The phrase has a double meaning, literally 'Can we make it?' but figuratively it suggests 'You cannot do that!'. I have translated this as 'Can we make it or should we make it?' in order to capture the kind of complexity and contradiction represented in the original Dutch understanding of the question.

2. See Rajagopal, *Metropolitan Magazine*. Jan Boelen curated the 4th Istanbul Design Biennial *A School of Schools*.

3. Neulab was created with work by RNUL, Arthur Boer, Boris Smeeenk, Kasia Molga, Eric Overmeire, Hackers & Designers and Rawshaping Technologies.

# ↑ Post-Scripted Script of a PechaKucha Talk

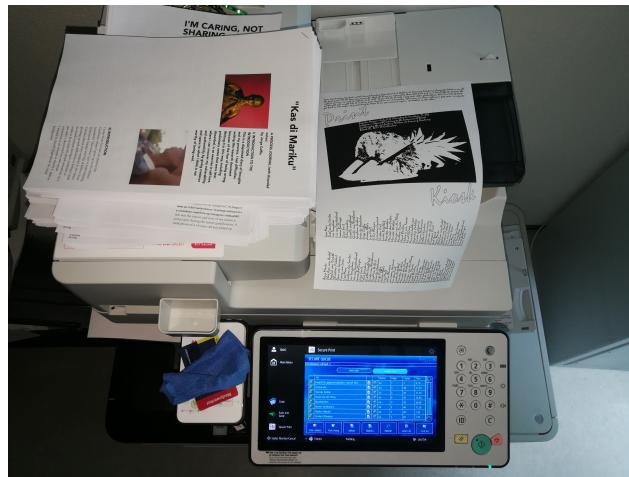
Clara Balaguer



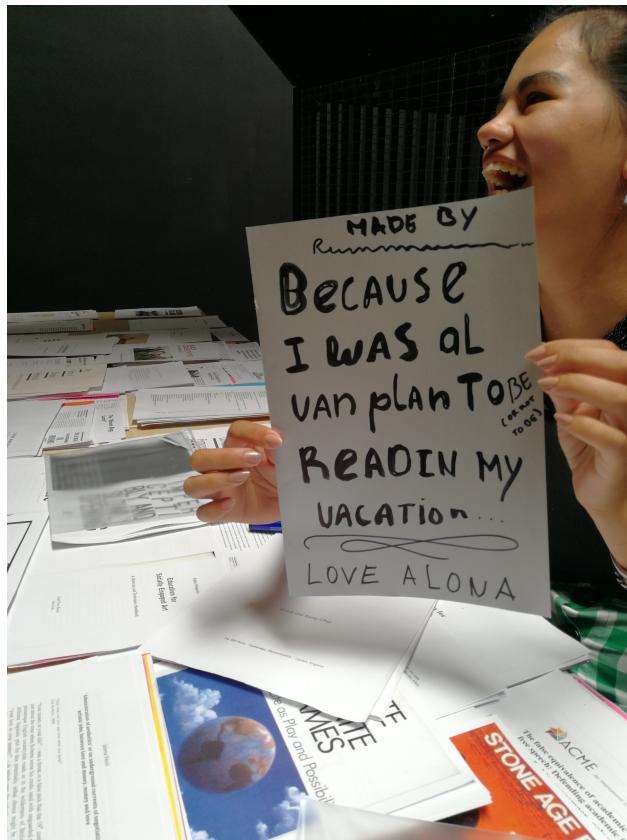
1. One of the first tasks I was given, as the new coordinator of the Social Practices programme at WdKA, was to present Beyond Social at this conference. Beyond-Social.org is a wiki page with information on student work, research, and resources provided by the school and its network. It is a tool that provides an inside look into the workings of the Social Practices programme.



2. The first encounter I had with how students interacted with Beyond Social was during the graduation show. Outgoing fourth years were asked to upload summaries of their final projects, but with all the stress of finishing their work, we found we were running after them to get this done. It became clear that putting information up on Beyond Social was not a part of their process but an afterthought.



3. We were also asked to convert the wiki content into a catalogue of graduation works by way of a printer connected to a laptop stationed at the entrance of the show. But sticking a nondescript printer in the middle of a crowded art exhibit does not mean that people will actually print anything. How were we to ensure that the student works actually circulated?



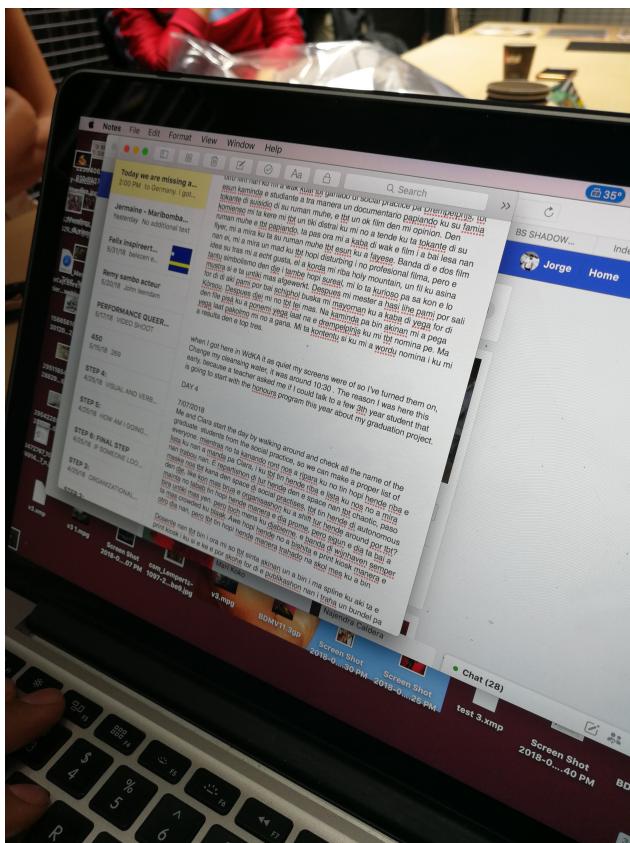
4. We gathered contributions from teachers to create more momentum for circulation. A mass email request was sent out with the question: If any of the students were to take a gap year following graduation, what critical readings would you recommend for this time of leisure? It was a simple way to get to know teachers through what they were reading.



5. Because the Gap Year Reading List included copyrighted titles, we only printed five copies of each. Though this act of piracy defended free access to cultural capital, we complexified the transgression by limiting the scale of the piracy. Free access to information is ideal, even romantic, but unregulated markets quickly devolve into mechanisms of oppression towards the most precarious. Rather than copyleft or copyright, could we hint at a copyother?



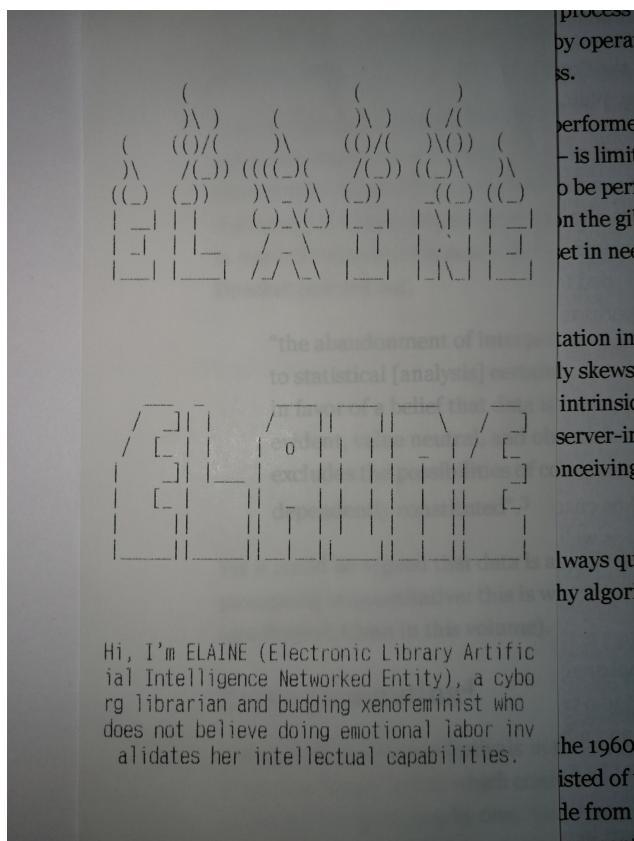
6. In the end, our incomplete catalogue packages, made of three printed student works and one Gap Year Reading List item, aspired to the immediacy of a home-made gift, the intimacy of a personal recommendation, the flash of anti-modernist design, the rush of breaking a rule. It was a catalogue that came out at the end rather than at the beginning of the show, representing a process as opposed to an object. We were a tiny resistance to the pressure upon students to fossilize their four-year education into a static work that 'stands alone'.



7. The Kiosk was only supposed to run a couple of hours a day, but ended up running all day, every day of the show, as student volunteers enjoyed the space for congregation. All except one of our volunteers were students of color, even though our student body (and faculty) is primarily white. Daily diary entries in Papiamentu and English were uploaded onto Facebook. As a person of colour myself, I feel like I can make this assertion without it being instrumentalization of race. Or can I? Who knows. But I do feel it's important to mention demographics.



8. This was the first clue as to how one could increase the relevance of Beyond Social to the school body by making it a physical thing, giving it an actual space to inhabit IRL. Though the advantages of an outward-facing online platform for disseminating research are clear, if the platform is not populated organically, it becomes a front for mediated promotion rather than a community of knowledge production.



9. Next year's Print Kiosk shall introduce a cyborg xenofeminist printer librarian, ELAINE, short for Electronic Library Artificial Intelligence Networked Entity. Working with this project's development team is often the highlight of my week. POST SCRIPT: Due to the workload of my somewhat new position that I'm still getting the hang of after a year and a bit of acclimatization; the organizational scale of a project of this sort; and the fact that all team members are also trying to balance ELAINE's exigencies with our regular jobs at the academy plus our side-jobs as practicing cultural workers... we have decided to postpone ELAINE's debut. We have hired two graduating students from the Piet Zwart Institute's XPUB (Experimental Publishing) master to attend to Beyond Social throughout the year, including the responsibility of maintaining ELAINE and making her public. Alice Strete and Angeliki Diakrousi from this year's XPUB class have been prepared, quite directly, for this kind of project.

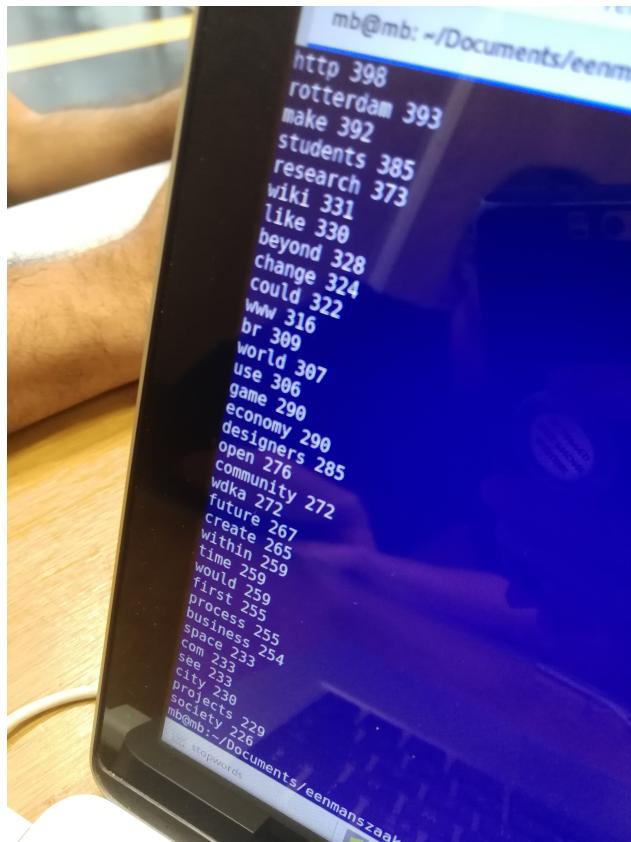


10. The following team are involved in the Print Kiosk project at various levels. André Castro, one of Beyond Social's initial ideators, is a teacher borrowed from the Piet Zwart Institute and the WdKA Publication Station. Manetta Berends is the developer who was already working on Beyond Social when I got there. Rümeysa Önal is a new graduate who volunteered at Print Kiosk I and won the last year's Research Prize. Finally, there's Kimmy Spreeuwenberg, from the Hybrid Publishing research programme.

## Beyond Social

Topics	Activism	Discourse	Gamification	Open Design	Reframing
Advertising	Diversity	Graphic Design	Ownership	Representation	
Aesthetics	Economy	Health	Participation	Spatial Design	
Animation	Education	Identity	This is a test to see what we can do with the descriptions...	Strategies	
Architecture	Embedded Research	Illustration	Pedagogy	Sustainability	
Audiovisual Design	Empowerment	Impact	Performance	Systems	
Bottom-up	Exclusion	Leisure	Photography	Technology	
Circularity	Failures	Lifestyle	Politics	Transformation	
Commons	Fashion	Media	Power	Urbanisation	
Community	Fine Art	Methods	Product Design	Visions	
Democracy	Food	Nature	Projects	Whiteness	

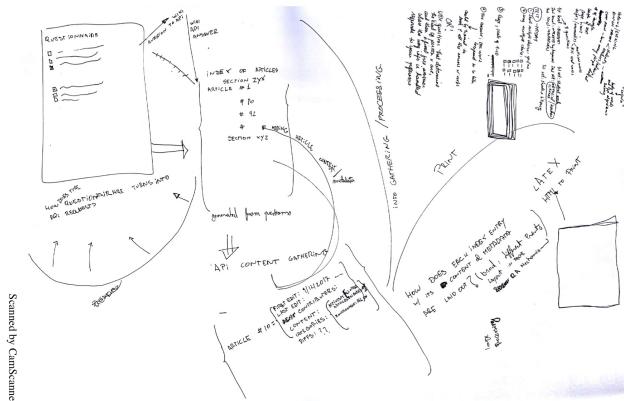
11. Most of the content of the wiki is tagged against a category list pre-determined by the previous editorial team. These fifty-four categories are significant because they seemed to be the old roadmap for the programme. Manetta began scraping all text off the wiki to see if the vocabulary actually being used in the content corresponded to this category index. The results were strange.



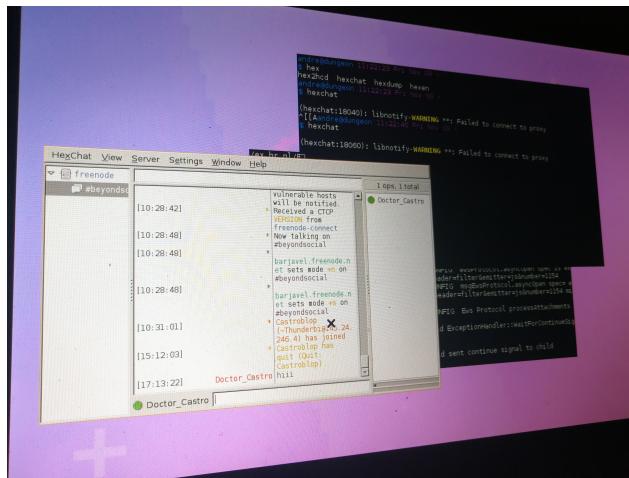
12. 'Business' was in our top fifty most common words, used more frequently than society. Game, art, designers, economy, create, future were also top fifty. Commons, privilege, capitalism, engagement, care, patriarchy, the Other, queer, black, and resistance were not. These were red flags that needed further investigation.



13. Rümeysa was hired to craft a fluid, composite glossary of definitions for these category words, based on how the terms were being used by students and defined by teachers. In face-to-face meetings, she invited faculty to define, add, or remove words so the index would better reflect the pedagogy on the floor.



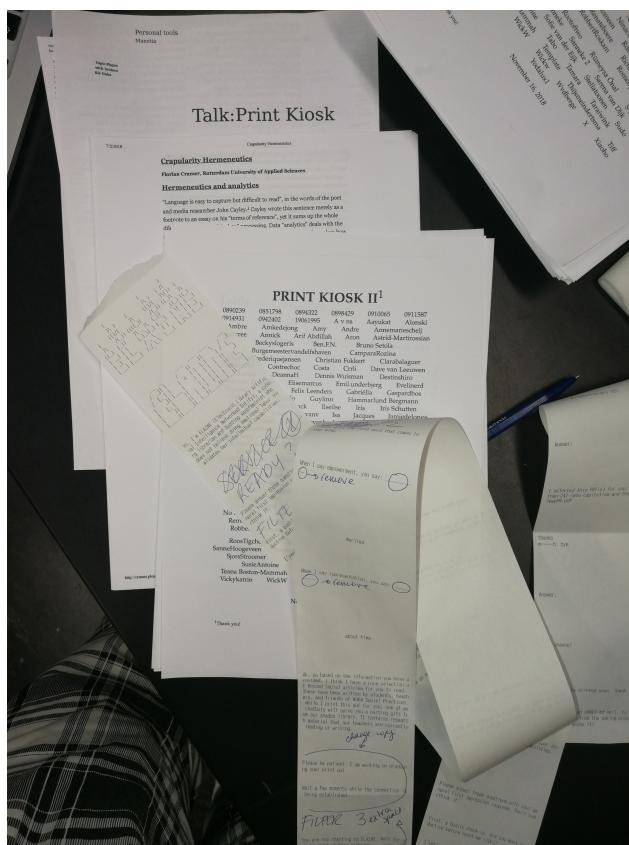
14. So, if we were still in the process of taking stock of what Beyond Social was then we could not commission any new content. Still, we had to envision a new publication, or at least a new way to perform publishing. The task at hand is what Kenneth Goldsmith calls uncreative writing, based on the idea that nothing new can be written in an era of massive over-information.



15. Some big questions we are working on: By playing with the means of circulation, could we create a new layer of content value that in turn attracted relational value? Could an inanimate repository of information become a living network of exchange and perform emotional labor? Could an institutional instrument engage in earnest self-critique?



16. Why we decided to call our printer ELAINE: she is modeled after Elaine W. Ho, an artist, writer, and publisher from Hong Kong who co-conspires at the performative publishing house Display Distribute with artist Ming Lin. Elaine W. Ho is part of the development process to make sure our printer is not just another machine of the secretariat named after a bland woman who neither exists nor is able to participate in her own mechanic representation. POST SCRIPT: We haven't involved Elaine W. Ho as closely as we would like this year, but Alice and Angeliki are tasked with bringing the chatty enthusiasm we whipped up over chat and email with Elaine W. Ho to a more concrete form of engagement.



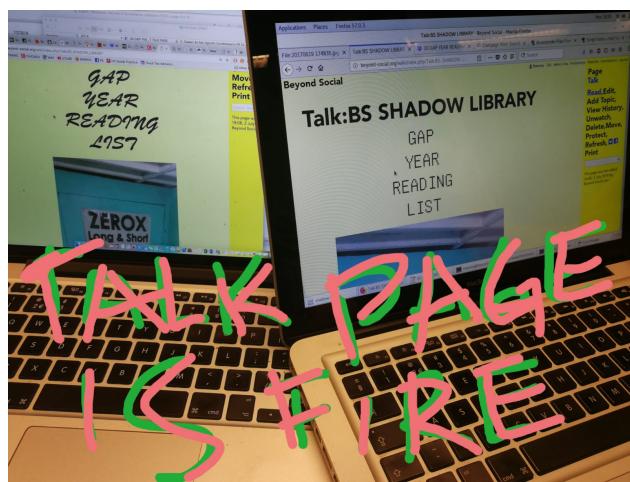
17. ELAINE serves you information three ways, like going to a Chinese restaurant and ordering three-way duck, based on three filter processes: via metadata, via keyword matches, and via human interaction disguised as artificial intelligence, like in the Wizard of Oz. They're all fairly simple processes, but these three layers of conversation hope to create a set of feelings on top of serving personalized information digests. POST SCRIPT: I'm Asian, so I'm talking about three-way duck because it's a deep childhood memory that has shaped the way I view forms of serving information (food is also nutritional data). Why do I feel like I have to specify these things? But anyway, I don't know if this is cultural appropriation, by Western standards. Honestly, Western standards confound me deeply. But yeah, I'm not Chinese, heads up. But we have major mestizaje—like, many centuries of creolization—with Chinese culture where I'm from. So yeah. There. Disclaimer for Global North/Westerners.



18. So far ELAINE, as brought to life by André and Manetta on two separate printers, has made people laugh, think, play, feel listened to, and surprised. She does not believe performing emotional labor is beneath her intellectual capabilities. She is also pretty smart, thanks to the human librarians who sock-puppet her and the collective reading list provided by teachers, recycled from Print Kiosk I.



19. ELAINE has also been a great excuse to get to know people via collectivized labor. We have worked with people inside and outside the school, in different locations and departments, with students and teachers, across masters and bachelors programmes. It's a small network for now, but a diverse one and, most importantly, a pretty civil one.



20. If you want to know more, scroll to the very bottom of beyond-social.org landing page, there's a bunch of links to our very intense developer diaries (and the Print Kiosk wiki has a very active talk page). We hope you can meet her soon!

# > Strategies of Reclaiming

*Michelle Teran*

FADE IN

INT. OFFICE SPACE DAY

An office space somewhere in Madrid. IRENE, a psychologist, sits with MARILO, MANUELA, GLADYS, and CHARO. It is a hot, late afternoon in summer. IRENE sits to the far left of the room, the other four women sit in a semi-circle around her. All five women are wearing 'Stop Evictions' t-shirts. IRENE begins the session.

IRENE: I am going to tell you how we were thinking about working. What we are going to do is a discussion group. During the next hour, we are going to talk about our experiences of being affected by the mortgage crisis. We intend to document, first amongst ourselves, and then later with other people affected by the crisis, what the psychological impact of everything that has to do with eviction has been. This forms part of the work of the Truth Commission and also the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH, an anti-eviction movement). This workshop is a test. The idea is also that afterwards, if you want to, you can become part of the team so that you are not just a participant, and then you can also help other people talk about their experiences within future group discussions. The first thing we want to do, because Marilo is suffocating from today's heat, is to take a couple of minutes where we relax. Loosen your feet a bit. Your arms. Make sure you are comfortable in your seats, so that we can be a bit relaxed. Close our eyes and concentrate on a peaceful place, like a beach, where we are alone.

MARILO: We can't stay there or I will fall asleep.

[Everybody closes their eyes except for Irene.]

IRENE: We are not going to stay there long, you will not fall asleep. Just until we are a bit relaxed. Try to feel the stress leave your arms. Move your shoulders a bit. Feel this tension and feel how it leaves the body. Think about a place that relaxes you. Like a beach with the breeze blowing. Pay attention to your breath. The stress is going away from your arms, your hands. Okay, we'll slowly open up our eyes. A little calmer now.

[Marilo, Gladys, Manuela, and Charo open their eyes again.]

IRENE (cont'd): Okay, the theme that we wanted to propose to you today is that we talk about how we were before.

[Marilo, Gladys, Manuela, and Charo look at Irene.]

IRENE (cont'd): How was your life before you knew you were going to be evicted? Before you stopped paying for your mortgage? How did you feel? What ideas did you have for the future? To open up the discussion, in order to talk about this, the first question would be to say two or three adjectives, characteristics, of what others saw in you. For example, me, Irene, I would say that two years ago my best friends saw me as a girl, student, and a good friend.

[Irene looks at Marilo.]

This essay begins in a sweltering hot room during a Madrid summer. A small group gathers together to share stories of their emotional brush with eviction. The intimate conversation is part of pilot research on the psychosocial impacts of eviction carried out by a small team of researchers under the auspices of the PAH, an anti-eviction movement active throughout Spain. I position my role within the space and among the gathering as an embedded artist and researcher. I sit behind the camera, recording.

Throughout the text, I will describe several encounters with approaches instituted by the PAH, which they use to generate a set

of audibilities that communicate the effects of an economic crisis and its societal impact on the personal lives of individuals. I will look at how strategies developed within grassroots, horizontal social movements like the PAH point towards situated, embodied forms of knowledge production; knowledge produced through practice. Several artistic works produced during my three-year artistic research project on crisis subjectivities will accompany the text. They are reflections, responses, translations, and remodeling of methodologies by the PAH and their strategies of reclaiming. By giving these examples, I want to consider the experimental practices developed by the movement as social pedagogy and based on principles of commoning, and how knowledge gained from these practices can broaden one's knowledge and topics present in educational institutions.

The Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH), or the Mortgaged Victims Platform is a politically independent, non-violent, leaderless, right-to-housing movement. The PAH first appeared in Barcelona, February 2009, during the onset of the 2007/08 global financial crisis. Citizens, first with rising interest rates and later unemployment, faced an increase in financial difficulties and were unable to make their mortgage payments. In proportion to the dimension of the problem, the growing mortgage drama and the ensuing eviction crisis that was faced by thousands of families were barely discussed in the media; neither was it considered by the government. The PAH was set up to offer a network of solidarity and support, to fill in the gap in insufficient measures within government for dealing with the housing crisis, and to make visible the abuses of power by the financial system.<sup>1</sup> At first marginal, and relatively unknown, the PAH came to fruition during the Spanish Occupy (15M) movement, when demands for more focus on real issues surfaced. After the initial public cry of outrage and the occupation of public squares in major cities throughout Spain, the 15M movement wanted to take the next step by solidifying its objectives. The PAH's previous work, with their focus on housing, provided an ideal starting point for 15M. The PAH experienced significant growth (creating new PAHs

connected to the assemblies of 15M), and the concentrations to stop evictions strengthened in number and force (Colau and Alemany).

A multidisciplinary team of students and professionals from various fields—social work, psychology, and political science—comprised the group for a pilot research project on the psychosocial effects of eviction. The team aimed to test out and build up a set of methodologies for future research, which could be implemented by other PAH groups and on a national level. Irene Montero, the principal researcher who proposed the pilot project, was an activist in PAH Madrid and engaged in other activities and campaigns.<sup>2</sup> The four women participating in the pilot project were regular attendees of 'Mutual Support and Empowerment' workshops held twice monthly by Irene Montero, a PAH activist and psychologist. Montero initially put forth the proposal for the pilot project based on the practical knowledge gained from running the workshops. Eviction is an intense, emotional experience. The Mutual Support and Empowerment workshop provided a space for people to come and talk about their stress, depressions, and feelings of alienation. The four participants were also politically active in the PAH. After coming to the PAH with their housing problems, they became activists themselves and now dedicated much of their time and energy to helping others. In a series of group discussions, the researchers asked the participants to describe their experiences of how they are living with eviction. We met together for one hour, once a week, for one month. I made video and audio recordings of all four group discussions. The team used the recorded material for analysis and identification of emerging narratives and themes which they published in a report. I developed a film and script for public performance from the research.

While at first glance this might seem to be a relatively straightforward use of a qualitative method within a scientific research project, taken in a broader context one can recognize similar approaches present in other activities in the PAH. They encompass fundamental working methods used by the social

movement. For the rest of the essay, I wish to give an overview of three essential elements:

## **Creating Audibilities—Microhistories**

Let's start with an example. Your name is Gladys. You have a job, a daughter, a house, and a mortgage. You work in a restaurant, sometimes six days a week. Your daughter says you work too hard, but you like to work and be busy, so this is okay. For many years you rented an apartment, at a high cost. Madrid is not a rental market, and the rental prices are excessive. Everybody around you, your friends, family, government, banks, newspapers, on the television as well, says that paying rent is throwing away money for nothing, and it is much better to own. The housing market is booming, and everybody should take advantage of this opportunity. Eventually you decide to follow what everybody else is doing and take on a mortgage. It's a good investment; you can always sell and probably for much higher than the original purchase price. However, you are not interested in selling. You bought the apartment to make a home for you and your daughter. It is a good time for both of you. You feel emotionally and economically well and accepted by other people. One day you have a severe accident at work, which requires a series of operations. You go on sick leave. Because you are out of work for so long, you eventually lose your job. Even with the disability payments you have trouble keeping up with the monthly mortgage payments and make a difficult decision to stop paying for the house, and instead use what little money you have for other household expenses like food, utilities, and your daughter's school costs. Spain is now in the throes of a financial crisis, and nobody is buying any property. Even if you wanted to, you wouldn't be able to sell your home, and not at the original buying price. You don't tell anybody, not even your daughter or your sister who also lives in Madrid. You attempt to negotiate a workable solution with your bank and they treat you like a piece of dirt, leaving you humiliated and weak. Instead of a client, you feel like an unwanted guest. You experience an overwhelming feeling of shame. You have failed everybody, including yourself. For days you don't get dressed or put on makeup,

and you stop dyeing your hair. You spend days in the house, feeling anxious. Some days you eat everything in the fridge because of the anxiety. Other days you eat nothing and stay in bed all day, watching television, but not watching it at the same time. The bank starts to contact you by telephone, by mail. Each time you open up the mailbox, it is an emotional blow.

One day there is a knock on the door. Two people say that they are from the court. One carries a machine, the other a notice of judicial foreclosure. They tell you to get a lawyer, or whatever, because you are going to be evicted. You sign the form, then go back into the living room, full of negative feelings about your life. Your partner, instead of offering you support, blames you for your situation. He tells you that because you took on the debt, it is your responsibility to pay it back. Instead of acting like a lover, he acts like a banker. You feel completely overwhelmed and disempowered. Even if you leave the property, you will still be left with the mortgage debt and with such a bad credit rating that it will be impossible to return to a state of normalcy. You have tried to follow a line, a dream, a future. But now you feel like you have fallen into a hole from which you cannot escape.

GLADYS: Listen, I gave all of my life to be there. I worked so hard, more than twenty-four hours a day, to be able to make the payments. And so you think, 'Where am I going to end up? Where am I going to go?' There are periods during the whole process where you might build up a bit of strength and think that you no longer place any value in material things. It's true, but it's a mixture of things, because you are also within your experiences.

The story of Gladys is a retelling of one of the stories shared during the pilot research project. It follows the primary tool employed by the movement of using personal narratives to investigate the structural causes, from which individual problems arise. The PAH operates on a model of collective guidance and collective learning. Storytelling, to a group of strangers, who later become friends and comrades, is the first step to putting a voice to an insurmountable issue.

People curious about joining the PAH can have their first introduction by attending a weekly public assembly. Anyone attending the meeting can add their name to a list and use the space to voice their questions and difficulties. The room quickly fills with stories. During the two-hour gathering, somebody offers an account of a particularly humiliating experience with a bank official, who refused to give them an important document that they had requested. Another talks about her uncertainty of how to negotiate with the bank, to modify the conditions of the mortgage. Somebody is experiencing an onslaught of aggressive techniques by the collection agency—telephone calls, emails, and visits to their place of work—for reclaiming the debt. Another just received the first notice of foreclosure in the mail and is at wit's end. After sharing a personal story with a group, a question is put forth: 'Has anybody else in the room had a similar experience? Can anybody advise this person?' Most often, there are several people with the same story, or something comparable, who can provide some preliminary guidance, orientation, and support for the newcomer. Ada Colau and Adriá Alemany, two of the founders of the PAH, describe what unfolds during these meetings as such:

In this situation, many families come to the PAH with an absolute need to speak and to be heard. Thus, after overcoming an initial shyness, they seek ways of expressing the avalanche of emotions that have shaken them. Therefore, the first objective of the PAH is to create a space of trust and community through meetings, which give them the opportunity to express themselves and share their experiences with others. Building this space and linking personal experiences is vital in order for those affected to realise the collective dimension of the problem and that there are structural elements that have influenced our decisions. This process of absolving oneself of blame is a necessary step towards empowerment (Colau and Alemany 90).

What follows are the next stages of the process and steps for action. Newcomers can join bank groups who form separate workgroups where, for example, people with mortgages at the same bank can put

forth their demands in a collective manner, and organize group actions. They can range from submitting en masse negotiation demands of pending cases to a bank manager, or showing solidarity by accompanying an individual to her appointment with the bank. Someone in the room might be about to be thrown out of their apartment during the week, which requires stronger forms of direct action. In the most acute cases, there might be a need to organize an eviction blockade. The PAH organizes these; people assemble in front of the building, to prevent the police and the bank commissioner from entering the apartment and finalizing the procedure. Finally, a formation of another group might be required, based on new problems and questions that emerge during the weekly meetings. For example, in the last few years, the sales of public housing units to American-based vulture funds generated new cases of evictions from housing designed to assist low-income families. The welcome assembly, in multiple forms and functions, acts as a forum for collective guidance, and mutual learning. It transforms an individual problem into a social issue.

This approach uses individual stories to create a context where social issues are made audible, and in this way underpins the systemic links to personal trauma.<sup>3</sup> An empathic, active practice of listening to storytellers telling their stories forms the fabric of the collective struggle. Storytelling occurs in public assemblies, in workshops, during street demos, inside private apartments during evictions, and discussion groups. I want to propose the term 'microhistory' as a potential tool for thinking through this practice of giving personal upheaval a public voice. Microhistory refers to a particular approach to historical research, which uses a personal biography of an everyday person to build up a portrayal of the social, economic, and political environment of the individual's reality. In microhistorical research, the agency of the individual opens up a historical process rife with conflicts and negotiations, with the possibility of several outcomes which are symptomatic of that particular time-space continuum. The microhistorical approach centers on scalability: zooming in to study the fragments, then scaling out to see everything at once, you become confronted with a 'cross-cut' of the

world. Larger complex systems are investigated through the lens of individual stories and struggles, based on the evidence of personal accounts and testimony.

‘Microhistory’ was first coined by a group of Italian historians at the University of Bologna in the ‘80s. The group experimented with approaches coming from literature to perform historical research in another scale; from the micro, the detail, the close-up, the overlooked. Literature offers many examples of history told from below and told by ‘non-famous’ people who are just trying to get on with their lives, their struggles, successes, and failures. The Italian microhistorians saw the possibilities of the literary method. Their primary influences traced back to the work of the French Oulipo school of experimental literature and work of George Perec, Raymond Queneau, and Italo Calvino, the latter who introduced the works of the experimental writers to the Italian historians.<sup>4</sup> French writer Georges Perec, for example, is best known for his attention to detail and the spatiality of his writing. His novel *Life: A User’s Manual* takes place in a fictional apartment building on a fictional street in Paris, 11 Rue Simon-Crubellie. Each chapter focuses on a different apartment in the building, where the reader encounters various residents both past and present. There is movement between different temporalities and spaces, the attention placed on domestic artifacts—pictures, paintings, objects, furniture — together which give shape and distinctive character to the individual (Perec). It is perhaps not by chance that Carlo Ginzburg—one of the better-known microhistorians—recognized the promise of the new historical approach. The historian’s mother, Natalia Ginzburg, was a renowned author whose works centered on family relationships during the Italian dictatorship (Ginzburg, N). Ginzburg’s most famous work, *The Cheese and the Worms*, narrates the life of Domenico Scandella, also known as Menocchio, a miller living in sixteenth-century Italy, on trial for heresy. Ginzburg used transcripts from Menocchio’s court case, to bring to the forefront the so-called norms of the socio-cultural, and historical context addressed vis-à-vis Menocchio’s articulations, a figure of speech, references, and digressions during the trial (Ginsburg, C).

MARILO: This structural violence. It totally alienates each human story. Behind every family is a human story, one that is complex. When they take away a house, it is because of the economic value tied to it. But the consequences from these actions are not just economic ones.

Microhistory and the micro-historical method finds an allyship within a feminist practice which strongly resists the urge to control the narrative from the top down. Like microhistory, a feminist practice is a study of the macro from the micro, history from below. A chronicle of the here and now begins with valuing the knowledge that comes from personal experiences. Everybody has a story to tell, yet each story is unique. A story of a home might contain similar elements, yet is still different from other homes and the people who inhabit them; for whom trauma manifolds in diverse ways. Conscious raising, a primary organizing tool developed by second-wave feminists, is a method for giving a public voice to lived, painful experiences, exposing vulnerabilities. Individuals talk about their own experiences within small groups. Sitting around a circle, each takes a turn to give testimony to bring as many backgrounds and perspectives into a shared pool of knowledge. An underlying supposition to the practice is to use collective storytelling to build up an awareness of the systemic conditions underlying what that person might be living. Cooperative knowledge building is attuned to the relation and social content of what the group shares. Listening is the first step to building up knowledge, analyzing the social content and relationships to develop together with the next steps for further actions. A space for collective learning is therefore essential for creating audibilities, valuing other voices and experiences; using the lived experience and practice within the collective as a method for developing theory (Sarachild).

In her book 'Living a Feminist Life', Sara Ahmed relates a transformative experience in the early stages of her PhD studies when she comes across the works of black feminist writers Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Within their texts, she encounters a form of writing theory where the 'embodied experience of power provides the basis of knowledge.' It is beyond the scope of

this short essay to describe the work of these influential authors. What I want to highlight instead is how, according to Ahmed, these texts institute forms of theory that stem from lived experience and practice. The ideas formed in their literature emerge from lived experience, revisiting glimpses, moments, encounters, and dredging small details from the recesses of personal memory, for a more in-depth, more extended look of what had transpired and how that influenced feelings of self and position in the world. Their work has had a pivotal and lifelong influence on Ahmed's theoretical work, in particular the refusal to practice the kind of theory that stayed within the safe confines of the abstract, and an interest in that which is situated within grounded lived moments of the everyday. As Ahmed claims, 'the personal is theoretical.' I want to end this section with Ahmed's 'idea of sweaty concepts', which proposes a working methodology for practicing theory. On the one hand, concepts don't emerge through detached, contemplative periods of reflection, but as a consequence of unfolding events. Conceptual work and descriptive work are, therefore, part of the same process. By working through something, you develop an understanding of how it works. Secondly, sweaty relates to a sweating body, a body under exertion, under stress. A body in distress is a body that is 'not at home in the world'. The theoretical work strives for a conceptual understanding of this difficulty. 'Sweaty concepts' emerge from the 'practical experience of coming up against the world or the practical experience of trying to transform the world' (Ahmed 11–14).

The stories emerging from the PAH are vocal utterances of topics that would typically be considered 'petty': topics concentrating on the domestic space which suddenly become the focus of meetings and discussions. From a feminist perspective, the home has always been a political and highly contested space. It is also a space of violence. Starting with the knowledge that comes from experience, the lived experience of no longer feeling at 'home', one develops a broader understanding of the intersectional experience of racial, gender, and class oppression manifested in the public assemblies and beyond (Colau and Alemany 93). The lived experience of bodies

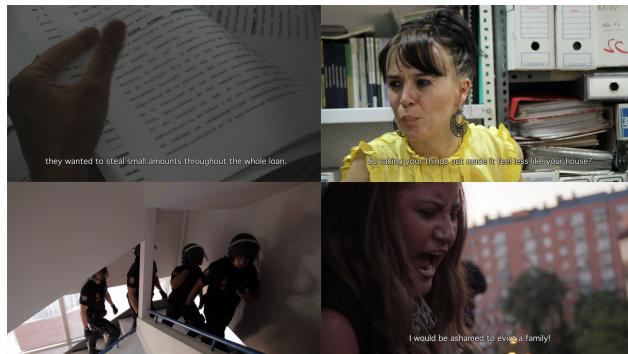
‘under stress’ helps develop both the theory and a set of practices within the movement.

GLADYS: Because two years ago, it was unthinkable to have been able to achieve everything that we have been able to achieve. This is the satisfaction I have for myself... that I have not just been able to overcome my own situation, but to help other people overcome theirs as well.

### **Mortgaged Lives, 2014, film, 42 min**

Mortgaged Lives examines the experience of rupture through the loss of a home. The film analyses the psychosocial experience of eviction from three perspectives: psychological analysis, personal testimony, and an actual event.

Within the era of a global financial crisis, destabilization and displaceability define everyday reality, markedly felt around the home. Mortgaged Lives maps out the psychosocial trauma of homelessness, social estrangement, and the fight against injustice by those who are suffering the consequences of the economic crisis within the global economy. It documents the everyday realities of a contemporary crisis on individual lives. It shows the growing need and inspiring strategies for fighting injustice produced by a neo-liberal economy.



## **Open-source, distributable actions**

The PAH operates as a decentralized network of groups and centers distributed throughout the country. Each group has the autonomy to develop campaigns and strategies appropriate to the local context. Campaigns and creative strategies function as open-source toolkits, free to be taken up and implemented in other spaces and locales, which are themselves open to further innovation and adaptation. In the previous section, I related some working processes for meetings, workshops, and discussion groups. Other strategic campaigns use more visible, creative, public actions to highlight concepts emerging

from unfolding events. In the next section, I will discuss an example of one such campaign.

The PAH Obra Social is a campaign which reclaims empty residential properties owned by banks and offers them to evicted individuals and families who have been made homeless. Housing activists target buildings constructed during the height of the housing bubble (from 1996–2008), yet which were left vacant and unoccupied. Banks are the current owners of these buildings; they took over possession of the property from bankrupt developers who defaulted on their investment loans. While people went through painful evictions from their homes at unprecedented levels, banks held not only huge parcels of residential properties but were recipients of massive bailouts by the government, using tax payer's money. The PAH used these two tendencies to argue for the legitimacy of their actions: Since the public bailed out the banks, then empty homes in the hands of the banks belonged to the public.<sup>5</sup>

During an action by the PAH Obra Social, people publicly and defiantly enter empty buildings in their local neighborhoods. Once inside, amid much fanfare, people unfurl colorful banners out of the windows, hanging them down the front facade of the building. The long, vertical banners have hand-painted Obra Social logos, and slogans such as 'We rescue people, not banks', or 'No people without houses, no houses without people'. A delegated person reads out a declaration of intent, issuing a public statement for the action in front of the building. This boisterous action is the culmination of a long preparatory period and an in-depth study of the area. Typically, the housing activists look for new buildings that are the property of financial entities and are currently vacant, giving priority to residential buildings owned by banks who received government bailouts. The group uses various techniques and preparatory procedures to locate a suitable vacant property. One of the best places to find potential candidates for buildings are on bank real-estate websites. To make sure that nobody is currently living in the building, on-site surveys, walking by the building at different times of day, checking for lights in the windows, piled up mail, or people

entering and exiting the building, will give clues of any sign of ‘life’ (PAH).

The residential property, once occupied, becomes a building of the Obra Social, and part of a socially-engaged and political project. People living in the building must also contribute to the collective project by giving their time and energy towards maintaining the building. They must also commit time to help others in need with their local cities and neighborhoods. The performative action of entering, reclaiming, and renaming by citizens and activists returns a vacant, lifeless building to a public commons. Through such a gesture, it proclaims a different model for living, how one might take up space in the city. A radical claim for convivial ways of living, being and acting together spills out and spreads beyond its original point of action. It joins a network of Obra Social buildings, in Catalonia, Castilla-La Mancha, Asturias, Andalucia, Extremadura, Zaragoza, Valencia, and the Community of Madrid.<sup>6</sup>

The term ‘overspill’ or ‘desborde’ in Spanish, is both a working expression and fundamental modus operandi for Spanish post-occupy movements like the PAH, but undoubtedly notable in other social movements within and outside of Spain. Avoiding fixed ways of doing, creating and acting, ‘desborde’ is about plurality, and embracing a multitude of variations and adaptations to the original spark. It refers to a collective putting forth of a creative process that is difficult to control, yet predicated on a mutual desire to act.<sup>7</sup> British cultural theorist Tony D. Sampson argues for how desire can act as a propagating agent for generating unplanned, fortuitous innovations. According to Sampson, desire takes on two distinct modalities. There are everyday desires based on basic human physical needs: to find shelter, food, clothing, a sexual companion. These basic desires are predictable and repetitive. Sometimes a desire, which starts from an everyday need, can take another turn and go down unexplored paths and take on a life of its own. These are ‘non-periodic desire-events’; forms of episodic and uncontrollable desire that have the potential to produce something wholly unanticipated and new. Innovations originating from basic

needs arise in the way of ‘passionate interests, fashions, trends, and fads.’ What begins as a micro-event or action gets taken up, repeated, and propagated through networks, where repetitions of events and movements are themselves open to adaptation. It is performativity in action. Small innovations can have potentially widespread, transformative effects of ‘influence and overspill’, manifesting as the intended or unintended impacts of putting ideas into action (Sampson 114).

Losing control of the process and operating with the freedom to improvise using new tactics and methods means new forms and visibilities are created in other locales and contexts. Such forms are loosely coordinated yet autonomous actions, transmissions of social inclinations and ‘itches’ that are propagated from one body to another and who become transmitters and receivers of creative proclivities. Imagination and creativity are, in fact, one of the critical propagators of political action. The PAH, like many social movements, makes ample use of digital networks to launch and disseminate extensive campaigns that come out of fundamental and even humble needs, such as the right to housing. Images and image-making play a fundamental role in the political imagination, of putting thoughts and desires into action. For example, each recovery of a building by Obra Social generates new slogans, logos, maps, texts and graphics which the residents and activists use to circulate the methods, ideas, dreams, and desires of the campaign. Viral tactics drive the dissemination of symbolic (cognitive) capital through social networks, creating synergies of ideas which generate new ideas. They create intersections of different voices, and perspectives, bring non-official views to the foreground, build up forms of civic intelligence and civic subjectivities.



Loan @loansepuede · 22 Apr 2015

#QueTiembleBankia  
#PrePAHrateBANKIA  
#BancaCriminal

16 3 ...

1. Tweet from the PrePAHrate campaign: "This bank cheats, scams and throws people out of your house." "@loansepuede. #QueTiembleBankia. (Bankia trembles) PrePAHrateBANKIA. (prepare yourselves Bankia) #BancaCriminal" (criminal banking). PrePAHRate Bankia action.

On April 22, 2015, at around 10.30 am, participants and organizers from The Obra Social accompanied approximately fifty other activists and 'housing victims', where they entered and occupied the central bank branch of Bankia in downtown Madrid for several hours. This move was part of state-wide action initiated by the PAH called PrePAHRate Bankia (loosely translated into 'Prepare yourself Bankia'). Other branches in major cities throughout the country were synchronously entered and occupied. During the action, participants slapped down stickers with a graphic imitating the design scheme and colors of the bank's official logo onto the cashpoints, walls, and windows of the branch. Using a détournement method, the PAH activists inserted a counter-message into the Bankia logo: 'So you know! This bank cheats and steals, and throws people out on the street.' The PAH's reasons for focusing on Bankia were manifold.

Bankia received a bailout of billions of euros of (Spanish and European) public money, while at the same time having the dubious honor of executing the greatest number of evictions. The major bank was also under scrutiny for its revolving door policy wherein former bank executives took political positions, and vice versa. For example, Rodrigo Rato, former economic minister and head of the International Monetary Fund was acting president of Bankia until 2012, when it was declared bankrupt and in need of public bailouts. Around the time when the action was taking place he had just been arrested for 'fraud, embezzlement, and money laundering'.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, the activists focused on the 'Social Housing Fund' program created by Bankia three years prior, which was supposedly established to allocate social housing to people in need, but which had only served a symbolic function and never saw the light of day. The activists argued the crisis of affordable, social housing had been artificially created by the financial sector, and this became the main objective for the action. In Madrid, for example, there were thousands of unsold, unused properties in the hands of Bankia. Some people present during the bank action had illegally entered properties owned by Bankia and were currently undergoing prosecution for illegal entry by the bank. The activists' demands were threefold; they demanded that the bank rescind the pending denunciations for unlawful entry, that it open up negotiations of social rent of 30% overall income for people already evicted so they could continue living in their homes, and lastly that the bank relinquish all unoccupied properties for social housing.<sup>9</sup>

During the action, people entered and completely took over the bank branch. They strung out clothing lines between the columns of the interior of the office, hung banners with the slogan 'Bankia is ours and the homes too'. The protesters lay out picnic blankets, arranged food and drinks, and generally made themselves at home. Once established in the space, they proceeded to the next phase of the action. Two or three of the protesters milled around the room, gathering pending claims for social housing, collecting paperwork from those present in the room. Laden with a large stack of documents, the protesters demanded that the director of the bank

accept the formal requests and demands presented by the group. During the day, the group made periodic announcements and formed assemblies to discuss the next steps of the action. Chants, manifesto readings, and speeches punctuated the occupation. Activists standing outside of the bank handed out information flyers to passersby and made statements to the media. Images of the live actions, which coincided in different cities and locations, were circulated on social media and moved between the sites of operation. The protesters, situated at bank branches in cities throughout the country, sent reports, keeping abreast of developments in their local regions.

An initial hijack of the Bankia logo created a chain reaction of memetic variations and creative interpretations which were also distributed and shared between the protests at local bank branches and those situated elsewhere monitoring the action. A meme of a snarling lion sent from León, a city in the northwest of Spain, stated 'Prepare yourself Bankia, and the lion eats Bankias. The PAHs are angry.' It was simultaneously a play on the city's name, and the Spanish word for lion. Other PAHs offered proposals for ad-hoc actions to be taken up in different branches. For example, from Bilbao came calls to create disturbances by flooding the telephone lines at the central Bankia office. In the months that followed, the PAH activists used the hashtag #PrePAHrate in eviction blockade actions, bank negotiations and signing of social rent agreements, tying continuing activities to the campaign against Bankia.

GLADYS: I think that the most important thing throughout this entire process is that we make all of these cases completely visible. All of them... how they cheated us. We need to make sure that all the work that we do in this social movement is visible.



PAH Santa Pola @PAHSantaPola · 22 Apr 2015  
MENU PARA HOY: León come Bankias. OS Vais a hinchar!!!! #PrePAHrateBankia

2. Tweet from the PrePAHrate campaign: “**León** eats Bankias. You are going to swell up!!!!” @PAHSantaPola. @MENU PARA HOY: **León** come Bankias. OS Vais a hinchar!!!! (**León** eats Bankias. You are going to swell up!!!!) #PrePAHrateBankia.” PrePAHRate Bankia action.

### **'Rupture Sessions', 2014, public reading**

'Rupture Sessions' is a reenactment of a conversation between a psychologist and four women living in Madrid about their personal experiences with eviction. Translated from original recordings in Spanish into other languages (English and French to date), the transcript is a testimony to the everyday realities of contemporary crisis, bringing personal experiences into universal issues around social rupture and the disintegration of the home. The public reading of the text is a discussion and analysis of the conversation through aesthetic reflection. Circulating and introducing translated text into other configurations and conversations give impetus for reflection on contemporary crisis and its impacts on the home, a cross-pollination of ideas which takes place within a dialogical situation.



### **Publication—Making things public**

Throughout the essay, I have presented some typical cases of experimental practices used by the PAH. My observations partly come from being an active witness who has been embedded within some of the events chronicled in the essay. For example, to develop an understanding of the PAH Obra Social campaign I attended

meetings of Obra Social Madrid and was present during several bank occupation actions and other demonstrations, and even accompanied some of the members to the annual state meeting of the PAH in Almeria. Additionally, I lived in one of the Obra Social buildings located in Mostoles (the outskirts of Madrid) for some time and attended regular plenary sessions by the local Stop Desahucios (Stop Evictions) and Obra Social groups.

In the previous account of the bank occupation, I introduced a technique of creating the conditions for the viral spread of information that moves across different platforms and channels of communications. Slogans, memes, mission statements, and photo-documentation of actions taking place within physical locations have other presences and currencies in other sites and to different audiences. The practice of hearing, recording, and creating audibilities for personal testimony transforms a traumatic event experienced by a single person or family into a profound social issue that impacts more people than the government and other institutions would like to admit publicly. The culmination of microhistories by 'insignificant' people creates a public face and account of a social crisis (Teran).

What I have attempted to show throughout the text is the importance of developing methods that create conditions for audibility, of 'giving trouble a voice.' All of these activities generate evidence, audibility, a trace. The act of publishing, of making things public takes on a vital element to movements emerging from urgent, situated, 'practical experience of coming up against the world' (Ahmed, 14). To register, to capture, to distribute, to circulate: these performative acts relate to an urgency to create a public record through the act of making things public; to reach and share with another audience who might not be immediately present. In these examples, the documentation does not materialize at the end of the work. It is practiced daily, in real-time, as an essential component to the project.



3. Image from The Obra Social Manual. Collective Recuperations. Translated by Michelle Teran. Original Spanish version by the PAH. Journal of Aesthetics & Protest, 2016, pg. 10.

I want to return to the Obra Social campaign to offer one representative case of publishing in action. The *Obra Social Manual*, developed by the PAH, is a twenty-five page manual of civil disobedience on the tactics of recuperating houses, a direct action how-to. It offers a step-by-step guide for reinstating the social use of empty housing owned by banks. It provides political bases for the project, outlines legal tactics, criteria for access, organizational strategies, and plans for building up solidarity and alliances; psychogeographic methods strategies for visual signage and visibility techniques. Additional resources and supplementary knowledge from squatting manuals provide other references for technical knowledge on how to set up basic amenities, such as electricity and water (PAH). The manual appeared in the early phases of the campaign (2013) when it was more of a speculative exercise than an established, wide-spread practice. The publication offers a preemptive visioning of alternate, innovative models for community building.

Almost since its inception, The PAH has made use of image professionals interested in building influential connections between art and social action. The group Enmedio, a collective of designers, photographers, filmmakers, and artists, frequently collaborates with

the PAH and helps devise some of their (more spectacular) visual and performative action campaigns. The impetus for working with the PAH is their belief in images and image-making, and the transformative power of storytelling for social justice and social action. One of the enduring activities by Enmedio is a series of TAF! (Photo Action) Workshops that explore documentary photography as a medium for political work, and its relation between art and activism. They apply their skills to develop creative amplification strategies, bringing personal testimony to the public domain. In an ongoing campaign 'No Somos Números' [we are not numbers] the PAH works with Enmedio to focus its lens on the bank of Caixa Catalunya. Within the TAF! Workshop, participants lend themselves as subjects for portraits for a postcard series.

On January 10, 2019, Enmedio and PAH implemented some of the images and postcards produced from the workshop for a public action staged in front of the door of the central office of Caixa Catalunya in Barcelona. Using the postcards produced from the workshop, the collective invited the crowd of hundreds of people gathered in front of the building to fill out personal messages dedicated to Caixa Catalunya. Some wrote accounts of their housing difficulties on the back of the postcards. Others offered simple, to-the-point statements: 'Thieves', 'You are taking our lives', 'One day you will be judged.' In under an hour, most of the postcards had been filled out. The group taped the postcards around the main door of the bank. Additionally, they attached a few large posters of people currently enduring housing problems with the bank in question on the wall next to the postcards. There were many journalists present: photos of the action appeared in the morning newspapers the following day.<sup>10</sup>



4. No Somos Números. ction by Enmedio. 11 January 2013. Photo by: Oriana Eliçabe, Fotomovimiento.org y Consuelo Bautista.

Publishing and making things public is a political act. Publishing is a tool for thinking, following and reflecting: creating audibilities. A public announcement issued in front of a soon-to-be occupied building, a manifesto, press release, how-to manual, slogan, meme, poem, song, chant, list of names, map, logo, personal testimonial or banner: together they act as tools for generating traces, public records of transformative practices put into action. They trace out a history of reclaiming efforts: to reclaim agency, to reclaim narrative, dignity and (for the housing movement) to reclaim homes that were lost. They amplify the troubles, create a paper trail, point the spotlight at the guilty, and document crimes against humanity. They bring in multiple authors and perspectives, use a range of methods, approaches, and narrations. There is a value of preserving, publishing, disseminating, and re-working knowledge, built up in common. Bringing in the ecology of making a 'public record' of actions and processes, the politics in documentation takes into consideration the production methods, economy, authorship, and to which 'public' or knowledge circuits it aims to reach.<sup>11</sup>

### **'Reclaiming Workshop', 2016, public intervention**

The 'Reclaiming Workshop' is an exchange of models and strategies on the relations between places, materials, and performative actions produced in the context of reclaiming. During the workshop, participants publicly read selections of published and unpublished material generated from their political struggles. Participants joining the workshop represent grassroots initiatives and affinity groups connected by the fight for the right to the city. The workshop uses manuals, manifestos, open letters, pamphlets, and other materials brought by the participants to the workshop in a collective reading performance. The event proposes the public reading and exchange of these materials as a bridge for dialogue and collective knowledge, building up a public archive through the circulation of instructions and recipes for living.

The workshop was developed for the Neighbourhood Academy 2016 program, which focused on forms of collective learning. Located in the Prinzessinnengarten—an urban garden located in Kreuzberg—the Neighbourhood Academy is a self-organized, community, and future-oriented education facility. The protest banners used by each of the participating groups were hung around the facade of 'Die Laube' and launched the event, designating it a space for collective learning.



## Conclusion

The practices instituted by the PAH are valuable methods for assembling publicly voiced narratives, bringing individuals together in a collective struggle. It is no small feat what the PAH have managed to achieve. What began as a small, marginal experiment in Barcelona turned into a widespread movement where housing became a mainstream issue that was spoken about on all levels of society. Their achievements influenced the formations of new political platforms, like the progressive municipalist forms of governance in major cities throughout the country. Ada Colau, one of the founders of the PAH, is currently running her second term as mayor of Barcelona. It also gave many people the strength to take back control of their lives and to cultivate a critical and ethical practice of care towards others.

What can educational institutions learn from flexible, situated, radical, and DIY learning structures emerging within the social realm? What are the developing forms of education and pedagogical strategies connected to civic urgencies, political struggles, and spaces of resistance?<sup>12</sup>

Social movements practice social pedagogy. It is a social practice of pedagogy in action. Social pedagogy is not merely the transference of information or preparation for a future role based on how well you perform, nor is it a form of educational training that gives promise of a bright future. It is an ongoing, active reflection, revision, and emergence of processes and trajectories that respond to the *here and now* (Trogal 239–52). It considers how processes develop, how they are manifested, archived, and distributed. Social pedagogy is a practice of immanent unfolding; collective, socially-engaged and open to dynamic shifts and adaptations with experience. It considers which bodies are representative in a space, and how does a space impact the bodies present. It is a situated, embodied form of knowledge production, building networks of alliances around socio-political aims and for projecting alternatives. Approaches to skill sharing and co-creating knowledge encompass an integral part of what is considered as social practice in the cultural realm. Together you learn what you need to learn, because it is important to learn what you need to learn at that moment.

This is not a trivial statement, nor does it imply forever staying in the present without any insight nor projections of future impact. What is does allow for is a learning process, *attuned* and *attentive* that stays deep within a complexity of the trouble by maintaining proximity to the problem. Practice, thoughts, ideas and desires in action generate methods for thinking through the troubles; research which occurs from the ground up. This process develops theory; produces new ecologies whose initial effects might be perceived but whose long-term impacts might not be immediately evident. Social pedagogy builds up on experiences, ideas and skills; it forms a collective learning process that arises from the urgency of the context and terrain. It has a different agency and immediacy to what is currently

practiced within ‘traditional’ educational institutions, who, by their very institutional make-up are unable to react, act and adapt at a similar speed.

How can academic institutions maintain their relevance within a present-day climate that requires more urgent, immediate and informal forms of education and organizing? How can we, as researchers and educators, start to address both the needs for more responsive, ‘response-able’ (Haraway) and ‘attuned’ (Tronto) forms of learning, that evoke competencies of deep listening, (Bloom) sensing, observing, responding, collaborating and sharing?

Creating a learning environment based on a deep attitude of caring (for people and the world) requires new approaches. They will require forms of sociality based on notions of the commons, that enlist highly inefficient practices (at least to the capitalist) of radical formations of communal, non-commodified spaces and communities. They will engage a method of ‘deep hanging’; embodied, embedded long-term engagement with contexts and spaces outside of the classroom. Educational approaches that challenge and disrupt power relations, power inequalities, and systems of oppression will be required as a fundamental baseline to move forward. Participating and immersing oneself in the form of sociality—where enough space must be given to discuss, share, and negotiate—is essential. It will place value on forms of knowledge production that is multigenerational and across cultures; ethical, interdependent practices between people, land, and natural resources.

The organisational structures ingrained in non-institutional learning spaces and political practices—economy, decision making, space, forms of learning, etc. —could provide useful models and guidelines for future learning, for long-term ecological pedagogical practices to meet present and future challenges. Within the essay I have focused on the PAH, offering several examples of methods developed and emerging from their political work. Other examples, such as recent climate camps by climate justice protesters like Fridays for Future<sup>13</sup> or Extinction Rebellion<sup>14</sup> , manifest forms of educational exchange

combining both practical skills sharing and knowledge exchange to help broaden the influence and impact of developing political struggles. Together these, and many other, examples of non-institutional educational practices, can provide useful role models for how we might want to learn, to live, or *live with and be in* the world. Practices that take into account more sustainable and flourishing relations, forms of situated knowledge building, to develop 'sweaty concepts' that foster relationships and alliances that are collaborative, rather than competitive and alienating.

## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Bloom, Brett, and Nuno Sacramento. *Deep Mapping*. Breakdown Break Down Press, 2017.
- Colau, Ada, and Alemany, Adriá. 'Mortgaged Lives'. Translated by Michelle Teran. *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, 2014.
- 'Fridays for Future.' Fridays for Future, <https://fridaysforfuture.de/>. Accessed 28.08.2019.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- 'Home'. *Extinction Rebellion*, 2019, rebellion.earth/. Accessed 28.08.2019.
- PAH. 'The Obra Social Manual'. Translated by Michelle Teran. Original Spanish version by the PAH. *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, 2016
- Perec, Georges. *Life, a User's Manual*. Boston: D.R. Godine, 1987.
- Sampson, Tony D. *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
- Trogal, Kim, 'Feminist Pedagogies: Making Transversal and Mutual Connections Across Difference'. In: *Feminist futures of spatial practice: materialisms, activisms, dialogues, pedagogies, projections*. Art Architecture Design Research, Spurbuchverlag, 2017, pp. 239–52.

Tronto, Joan. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 2015.

## List of Images

1. *Tweet from the PrePAHrate campaign: “This bank cheats, scams and throws people out of your house.”* “@loansepuede. “#QueTiembleBankia. (Bankia trembles) PrePAHrateBANKIA. (prepare yourselves Bankia) #BancaCriminal” (criminal banking). PrePAHRate Bankia action. Twitter, 22 April 2015. <https://twitter.com/loansepuede>
2. Tweet from the PrePAHrate campaign: “León eats Bankias. You are going to swell up!!!!” @PAHSantaPola. @MENU PARA HOY: León come Bankias. OS Vais a hinchar!!!! (León eats Bankias. You are going to swell up!!!!) #PrePAHrateBankia.” PrePAHRate Bankia action. Twitter, 22 April 2015. <https://twitter.com/PAHSantaPola>
3. Image from The Obra Social Manual. Collective Recuperations. Translated by Michelle Teran. Original Spanish version by the PAH. *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, 2016, pg. 10.
4. No Somos Números. ction by Enmedio. 11 January 2013. Photo by: Oriana Eliçabe, [Fotomovimiento.org](http://Fotomovimiento.org) y Consuelo Bautista.

- 
1. From 2013 until today, there have been more than 700,000 evictions in Spain due to non-payment of mortgages and, in recent years, this figure has been increased by rent evictions. See: PAH, ‘Reunión de la PAH y la La Coalición Europea’, June 6–10, 2019, <https://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/category/propuestas-pah/internacional/>.
  2. Irene Montero is a psychologist and member of the Podemos party since 2014. Montero left the PAH and joined Podemos one year after the pilot research. Since February 2017, she has been the Spokesperson for the Parliamentary Group Unidos Podemos-En Comú Podem-Galicia en Común in Congress.
  3. The PAH uses first names and specific cases of people affected not because they want to abuse their personal stories, but to investigate the structural causes through individual experiences. I am using the first names of people within the text and artistic research with the same intent.

4. Interview with Carlo Ginzburg recorded in his apartment between 24–25.10.2014, Bologna. The conversation took place between Carlo Ginzburg, Magnus Bärtås, Andrej Slávik, and Michelle Teran under the auspices of the artistic research project Microhistories. Funded by the Swedish Research Council.
5. There are still approximately 3.5 million empty residential properties throughout Spain. Juan Carlos Arias, 'Marga Rivas, portavoz de la PAH: "hemos visto 4 o 5 desahucios diarios durante el mandato de Carmena"', *Disquierdadiario.es*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.izquierdadiario.es/Marga-Rivas-portavoz-de-la-PAH-hemos-visto-4-o-5-desahucios-diarios-durante-el-mandato-de-Manuela>.
6. There have been more than 4,000 people rehoused since 2011, and more than fifty buildings recovered from the banks. See 'Hoy presentamos nuestra nueva campaña contra la criminalización de la ocupación', @ObraSocial\_PAH, *Twitter*, 3 April 2009, 1.03 a.m., [twitter.com/ObraSocial\\_PAH/](https://twitter.com/ObraSocial_PAH/).
7. Gutiérrez, Bernardo. 'Diez Claves Sobre La Innovación De La #ManuelaManía.' *Yorokobu*, 22 May 2015, [www.yorokobu.es/diez-claves-manuelamania/](http://www.yorokobu.es/diez-claves-manuelamania/).
8. BBC, 'Ex-IMF chief Rodrigo Rato's home and office searched in Spain', April 16, 2015, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32335842](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32335842).
9. 'Habrá Más Desahucios Sin Alternativa Habitacional Si Bankia No Cede Pisos.' *Plataforma De Afectados Por La Hipoteca (PAH)*, 11 February 2016, [afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2016/02/11/habrá-más-desahucios-sin-alternativa-habitacional-si-bankia-no-cede-pisos-2/](http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2016/02/11/habrá-más-desahucios-sin-alternativa-habitacional-si-bankia-no-cede-pisos-2/).
10. 'No Somos Números', Enmedio, 11 January 2013, <http://www.enmedio.info/postales-y-retratos-fotograficos-contra-los-desahucios-de-calatunya-caixa/>.
11. This formulation was developed in collaboration and after long conversations with Clara Balaguer, coordinator Social Practices, Willem de Kooning Academy. It is one of the working principles to Social Practices and areas addressed in the minor Performative Action.
12. This question emerges from conversations around The Neighbourhood Academy, a project of self-organized participatory education outside of the academy structured around notions of deep time learning ninety-nine years. It is being developed together with Marc Herbst, Marco Clausen and Asa Sonjasdotter, and taking place in the Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin.
13. 'Fridays for Future.' *Fridays for Future*, [fridaysforfuture.de/](http://fridaysforfuture.de/).
14. 'Home.' *Extinction Rebellion*, 2019, [rebellion.earth/](http://rebellion.earth/).

# Biographies

## Clara Balaguer

*A cultural worker, grey literature publisher, and undisciplined researcher.* From 2010 to 2018, she articulated cultural programming with rural, peri-urban, and diasporic communities from the Philippines through the Office of Culture and Design, a residency space and social practice platform. In 2015, she co-founded Hardworking Goodlooking, a cottage industry publishing hauz interested in the material vernacular, collectivizing authorship, and the value of the error. Currently, she coordinates the Social Practices department at Willem de Kooning Academy and teaches in the Experimental Publishing Master programme of the Piet Zwart Institute.

### Florian Cramer

Florian Cramer, reader in 21st Century Visual Culture/Autonomous Practices at Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam, Netherlands. Recent publications include: “Crapularity Aesthetics,” in *Making & Breaking*, vol. 1, 2019; and *Pattern Discrimination*, with Clemens Apprich, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Hito Steyerl, published by University of Minnesota Press and Meson Press, 2018.

### Rolf Engelen

Rolf Engelen is a conceptual artist. His practice is multidisciplinary. He is a tutor at the Fine Art department of Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam.

### Deanna Herst

Deanna Herst is senior research lecturer at Willem de Kooning Academy. After graduating as an art historian with a thesis on photography (MA, Utrecht University), she is focused on art and design in the context of technology and participatory practices. In

the last years, she has been developing her PhD research on authorship in open and participatory design, a topic on which she has published and lectured internationally. Within this context she currently works on a project that involves collaborations between “critical users,” artists, and designers in the field of care.

## **Aldje van Meer**

Aldje van Meer currently works as a senior lecturer at the Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. She is teaching, researching and exploring technical innovations relevant for artistic professions. She advises, inspires and implements the use of technology in the curricula of the Willem de Kooning Academy. Within the stations she is coordinating professional development and supervising research (through making). Aldje researched and published about the role that ICT and media technology play within the current (bachelor) art education and organises network meetings, lectures and events in which relevant developments in the field of art & technology are addressed.

## **Michelle Teran**

Born in Canada, Michelle Teran has a transdisciplinary practice and operates within the domains of contemporary art, community-based initiatives, academic research and activism. Her research areas encompass socially engaged and site-specific art, transmedia storytelling, counter-cartographies, social movements, urbanism, feminist practices, critical and radical pedagogies. She is the practice-oriented Research Professor of Social Practices at Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. She lives and works between Rotterdam and Berlin.

## **Sjoerd Westbroek**

Sjoerd Westbroek is an artist living and working in Rotterdam, with a practice that involves drawing, teaching, collaborating and studying. He is a tutor at the Fine Art & Design Teacher Training programme of

the Willem de Kooning Academy and the Master Education in Arts programme at Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam.

# Colophon

WdKA Research © 2020

at.wdka.nl/researchpublicationelia

**Texts:** All rights reserved

**Images:** Credits are listed at the end of each article

## WdKA Hybrid Publishing

This publication was developed by Hybrid Publishing, founded by the Willem de Kooning Academy as a means of profiling and disseminating outstanding research conducted by its students and teaching staff, whether independently or in collaboration with external partners. Researching and experimenting across a broad range of processes native to digital and analog media, WdKA Hybrid Publishing fosters novel approaches to design, authoring, reading and dissemination made possible through ongoing developments from the legacies of Gutenberg's press to present-day technologies. (hybridpublishing.wdka.nl)

**Authors:** Clara Balaguer, Florian Cramer, Rolf Engelen, Deanna Herst, Aldje van Meer, Vanessa Jane Phaff, Michelle Teran, and Sjoerd Westbroek.

**Design and web development:** Myrna de Bruijn

**Copy editor:** Liz Allan

**Coordination:** Kimmy Spreeuwenberg

A special thanks to the publication station and specifically Andre Castro for helping to set up the workflow for this publication and solving challenges in the web development. Thank you to Gijs de Heij for continuing to guide us through these challenges and making sure that we could finish the publication. And a big thank you to Renée Turner for the editorial support and guidance.

