# 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[[1]](#footnote-1). 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) as well as a PDF version in a generative way directly from docx files.[[2]](#footnote-2) 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 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Download at: https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/0419-HVA\_DPT\_from\_print\_to\_ebooks\_OS\_RGB\_aanp\_lr\_totaal.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)