

idletalk

#300

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idletalk is a publication that draws together a network of cultural organisers, activists, writers and art historians. The objective of **idletalk** is to map the aesthetic and performative forms of contemporary conversation, talking and the voice as they operate critically and precariously within formal and informal education and public assembly formats.

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Editorial Note #300

Rebecca Close

To mark the 300th issue of *idletalk* magazine— a publication which encourages critical writing about alternative pedagogies and radical conversation— we re-publish an article on the Feminist Art Program in Fresno California from the first issue in 1970. In *idletalk* #1 we also covered a meeting of members of the Street Trans Action Revolutionaries (STAR) at New York Public Library, a class of Art Theory at Coventry School of Art (the first fine art program to consist exclusively of conversation and intellectual study in the history of institutional art education in Britain) and a forum on Black Power at the London branch of the Anti-University, among others. It was forty-three years ago that the art historian Radio Pearson wrote of the Feminist Art Program; ‘in its early stages the course points to a seismic shift in the ossified relations not just between the personal and the political but between the academic institution and political radicalism— between artistic process and social transformation’.

Today we look back from beyond the horizon of a past possibility that has evidently not been realised. We look back from the ruins: a contemporary context in which access to the visual techniques of governance continues to be denied, in which the possibility to own the institutions we inherit is de-railed and in which the right to self-determine the terms in which knowledge is produced and distributed is withheld. The 300th issue frames its contributions around the question: to what extent can the questions for which the pedagogies and conversations of the Feminist Art Program, STAR, Art Theory and the Anti-University network were the answer, remain ours today?

In a text entitled ‘We Say Revolution’ philosopher Beatriz Preciado subverts and fractures the slogans of the traditional left and echoes a call for a multiplicity of micropolitical revolutions. Performance artist Camila Bastos approaches the pedagogical strategies of La Pocha Nostra of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes as part of the wave of protests against the neoliberal globalisation of capital of the early 1990s. Experimental film-maker Sumugan Sivanesan sees the Forcible Frames Summer School in London as part of the artist organisers wider strategy of ‘non-participation’, which they explain ‘is embodied in the need to participate and the simultaneous desire to withdraw, including the question as to how withdrawal can be made visible’.

Artist Luis Guerra, writing on an assembly meeting of an informal union of sex workers in Barcelona, affirms the role of the meeting space as a place in which to find the common language of ‘woman’: a political category chosen by the members of the Women of Robadores in order to assert their rights to work free

from police harassment. Writer Anyely Cisneros Marin visits an assembly meeting of La Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform for those affected by evictions), whose pedagogy rejects a humanist tactic of emotional recognition in favour of information and an emphasis on self-organising.

Despite the democratisation of information afforded by the internet, modes of interaction remain mediated and regulated by neo-liberalised social network forums. Media theorist Ybelice Briceño Linares contextualises Generatech.com as a counter-proposition; ‘an online forum that invites transfeminist and queer activists to appropriate the technologies of communication in order to transform them, to challenge technophobia and produce new discourses and social horizons’. Anthropologist and radio producer Martin Correa-Urquiza marks ten years of Radio Nikosia in Barcelona— a radio station produced by those who have been through processes of clinical psychiatrisation— with a description of an assembly meeting in which the collaborators discuss and challenge normalised notions of ‘common sense’.

For Liane Al-Ghusain— writing about the Beirut based artist-run education project Ahskal Alwan Home Workspace Program— alternative arts education in Lebanon is both an effect of a strained economy and an effective means of ‘de-centering the “source” of cultural knowledge in order to establish a canon of contemporary, original Arab thought and production’. Artist Lawrence Lek writes about a series of workshops in Hackney, London entitled Alternative Summer School: CUNY: a protest against the termination of scholarships for students attending what was the United States only remaining free art school (Cooper Union). The protest took the form of a free school for one day in which artists, writers and theorists gave workshops and classes. Lek writes of the experience: ‘Education – when stripped of its institutional overtones – is simply a system of open exchange: a conversation.’

Alternative education, then, emerges as an answer to austerity, to the rationalisation of a neo-liberal condition of debt and to the proliferation of varying states of precarity. Writer Dunya Kalantery explores the concept of precarity through an encounter with collective Precarious Workers Brigade in London while educator Emilio Reyes visits the United Migrant Workers Education Project at a moment in which the UK government’s contradictory immigration policies (where migrants and asylum seekers are subjected to an intensified xenophobic rhetoric of ‘integration’ at the same time in which funding to language education centres is being cut) has adversely produced an opportunity for English language teaching to be reconceived not as a tool of governance but as a space for political action.

While education may be rendered or positioned as ‘alternative’ for varying strategic, economic or political reasons, art historian and curator Elena Crippa traces the historical specificities of other words often paired with institutional and non-institutional art education programs. In a piece on the Open School East, an

art school which opened in September 2013 in London, she reminds that while a pedagogy may be 'experimental' it may not be 'radical', and while a mode of transmission may carry a 'radical curriculum' it may not necessarily enact a 'radical pedagogy'. Reading the festival and workshop series Steirischer Herbst as characteristic of a wider trend in which institutions outsource radicalism, researcher Sofia Lemos writes in a manifesto: 'Experimental pedagogies became a brand... Radical consciousness does not exist within the art institution.' After forty years of covering conversations and tracing the moments in meetings and classes in which new languages emerge, idletalk invites you once again to deactivate yourself— (or as Nietzsche would say) to grow a large and heavy ear on your back which dispels progress and forces your head to the ground.

We Say Revolution (1)

Beatriz Preciado

Political analysts warned that a new cycle of social unrest began in 2009 as an effect of the collapse of the financial markets, rising public debt and policies of austerity. The right, composed of a swarm of managers, technocrats, wealthy capitalists and dispossessed monotheists, moves between a futuristic logic that pushes the market towards surplus value at all cost and a repressive logic that reaffirms the borders of the family as the enclaves of sovereignty. Meanwhile, the neo-communist left (see Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou et al) talk about the emergence of an emancipatory politics on a global scale, from Wall Street to Cairo passing through Athens and Madrid... but all announced with pessimistic doubt. They talk about the incapacity of the movements to translate a plurality of demands into a unified antagonist fight. Žižek uses a line from the William Butler Yeats poem *The Second Coming* (1920) to summarise his arrogant position: 'The best lack all conviction/ while the worst are full of passionate intensity.' (2)

The gurus of the old colonial European left keep trying to explain to the activists of the Occupy, 15M, transfeminist, crip-trans-butch-queer-intersex and post-porn movements that we can't have a revolution because we have no ideology. They say 'ideology' like my mother used to say 'husband'. Transfeminists don't need a husband because we are not women. We don't need an ideology because we are not a village. We are not communism nor liberalism. Not catholic-muslim-jewish. We speak other languages.

They say representation. We say experimentation. They say identity. We say multitude. They say national languages. We say multi-code translation. They say domesticate the periphery. We say 'mestizar' the center. They say debt. We say sexual cooperation and somatic interdependence. They say evictions. We say inhabit the commons. They say human capital. We say multi-species alliances. They say clinical diagnosis. We say collective decapitation. They say disorder, syndrome, deficiency, disability, handicap. We say corporal dissidence. La Pocha Nostra, a techno-shaman, is worth more than a psycho-analysis-neo-lacanian. A fisting from Post-Op is better than a medical vaginal inspection. They say autonomy and responsibility. We say relational and distributed agency. They say social engineering. We say radical pedagogy. They say prenatal testing, genetic therapy, improve the species. We say anarcholibertarian molecular mutation. They say human rights. We say matter has rights. They say horse meat on the menu. We say ride the horses together to escape the global slaughter. They say Facebook is the new social architecture. We call ourselves, with Quimera Rosa and Pechblenda, a cybercoven of geekwhores. They say Monsanto will feed us and that nuclear power is the cheapest. We say take your radioactive hoof out of our seeds. They say the IMF and the World Bank makes the best decisions. But how many zero-positive transfeminists are there on the directorial committee of the IMF? How many migrant sex workers belong to the board of the World Bank?

They say the pill prevents pregnancy. They say go to the reproductive clinic to become a mummy and daddy. We say collectivise reproductive fluids and uteruses. They say power. We say potential. They say integrate. We say proliferation of a multiplicity of techniques of production of subjectivity. They say copyright. We say open source coding and programming: incomplete, imperfect, collectively constructed, relational. They say man/woman, black/white, human/animal, homosexual/heterosexual, able/disabled, healthy/ill, jew/muslim, Israel/Palestine. We say now you see how your truth production machine isn't working properly.

They make economic war with a digital neoliberal machete. But we're not going to mourn the welfare state, because let's not forget that the welfare state was also a monopoly on power and violence: it was accompanied by the psychiatric hospital, centers for the integration of the disabled, the prison, the patriarchal-colonial-heterocentral school. It's time to subject Foucault to a crip-queer diet and write the Death of the Clinic. It's time to invite Marx to an eco-sex workshop. We don't want the veil or the prohibition of the veil: if the problem is the hair we'll cut it short. We're not going to enter into the game of using the old disciplinary state against the neoliberal market. These two already arrived at an agreement long ago: in the New Europe the market is the only government, the state's function is limited to recreating the fiction of national identity and producing the threat of insecurity. The war on terror. The war on drugs. The war on piracy.

We need to invent new methodologies of production of knowledge and new political imaginations capable of confronting the logic of war, the hetero-colonial logic and the hegemonic market as a place in which value and truth is produced and reproduced. We're not talking simply about a change of institutional regime, of a displacement of political elites. We are talking about a transformation of 'the molecular domain of the sensible, of intelligence and of desire'. (3) This is about modifying the production of signs, syntax, subjectivity. The modes of producing and reproducing life. We are not talking about a reform of the European nation states. We're talking about decolonising the world, interrupting Integrated World Capitalism. We're talking about 'Terra-politics'. (4)

We are the black and queer jacobins, the red butches, the green evicted. We are the trans-undocumented, the laboratory animals, the informato-sex workers, the functionally diverse sexual deviants. We are the migrants, the autistic, we have attention deficit disorder, we need more serotonin, we are fat, disabled, old and precarious. We are the rabid diaspora. We are the bodies impossible to rent to the knowledge economy.

We don't want to be defined as cognitive workers nor farmacopornographic consumers. We are not facebook, nor shell nor Nestle, nor Pfizer-Weyth. We are not Renault or Peugeot. We don't want to reproduce French, Spanish or Catalan. We don't want to produce European. We don't want to produce. We are the living decentralised network. We reject a citizenship based on the capacity to produce and reproduce. We are not bio-operations producing eggs. We are not sperm inseminators. We want a total citizenship defined by the possibility to

share technologies, codes, fluids, seeds, water, knowledge. They say that the new war is clean, executed by drones. Our insurrection is peace and total affect. Our revolution is the same one as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Trubman, Jean Deroin, Rosa Parks, Harvey Milk, Virginia Prince, Jack Smith, Ocaña, Sylvia Rae Rivera, Combahee River Collective, Pedro Lemebel. We have abandoned the politics of death: we are a sexo-semiotic battalion, a cognitive guerilla movement, we are armed lovers. Anal Terror. We are the future parliament of post-porn, a new international somatic-politics made from synthetic alliances and not just links-ups between identities. They say crisis. We say revolution.

Notes

- (1) A shorter version of this text was published for the first time in the French newspaper Libération on the 13 March 2013.
- (2) Slavoj Žižek, *El año que soñamos peligrosamente*, Akal, Madrid, 2013, p. 66.
- (3) Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies*, Galilée, Paris, 1989, p. 14.
- (4) See: Donna Haraway, *SF: Speculative Fabulation and String Figures*, Documenta (13), Hantje Cantz, Kassel, 2011

Micropolitical Operations

La Pocha Nostra, Rio de Janeiro

Camila Bastos

'The goal of the art is no longer to produce an 'object' but to invent a dispositive that is capable of producing another 'subject', another consciousness, another body'(1). When philosopher Beatriz Preciado talks about an art that looks towards cognitive and somatic emancipation, she could have been talking about the transnational performance collective La Pocha Nostra. Created in 1993 through the union of performers, activists and pedagogues Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, La Pocha Nostra emerged in the context of the wave of protests against the neoliberal globalization of capitalism and the insurrection of the Zapatista movement. Although they have international acknowledgment in the performance and contemporary art worlds, the group states that their most important work and their most transgressive project is their 'radical pedagogy'. With the idea that teaching is an important form of activism, the collective give workshops in various places in the world and in varying formats: at festivals or universities and with distinct durations between three days and two weeks.

The pedagogical format proposes the body as a field of intervention and serves as an experimental tool for decolonising and liberating the body and mind. Seeking an intersection of theory, performance, politics, activism and new technologies, the pedagogy is constantly recreated and problematised by its own creators as they aim to answer the urgent questions of each historical moment and of every specific territory in which they find themselves. Although their workshops are directed at emerging artists, it is not about teaching performance skills; the goal it is not to develop the virtuosity of the artist. They emphasize that the objective is to generate one's own system of working—to appropriate methodologies and modify them. Here they adapt and sample exercises and practices from distinct traditions as well as employing new techniques. The aim is to add a political consciousness to the more mainstream practices in order to develop a form of embodied theory where issues of class, gender, race, sexuality, nationality, standardisation, identity and alterity become corporeal thoughts. They encourage reflection in one's own body and in conjunction with others.

Therefore, a large part of the methodology focuses on the creation of a common ground and an ephemeral but solid community. Varied tools are used in a process that goes from 'the interpellation of the other' to a 'self-interpellation'. This occurs in what I consider to be the main triad of the methodology: the exercises of 'the gaze', 'multisensory exploration' and 'poetic ethnography'. Through these exercises the participants gradually arrive at a moment in the learning process where everyone is enacting a form of self-interpellation and creating their own performative persons (not to be confused with performing characters or acting). This work on subjectification finds its basis in an awareness of the sense perception of the world and of the other, which they see as something that can occur easily and naturally in a 'demilitarised zone'. The construction of this zone is one of the first

things to achieve in the workshop in order for the participants to feel safe in their ephemeral community and collectively negotiate all kinds of differences: political, ethnic, racial, cultural, corporal, aesthetic, spiritual, of class, of sex, of gender and of sex.

Some conceptual tools are crucial to understanding the radical pedagogy. There's a strong commitment to collective authorship of whatever is created in the space. What is being produced in the utopian temporary space of a workshop belongs to all present and so the images or thoughts created may be appropriated by any. The specific means of forwarding these goals of collective authorship are achieved by the constant repetition of collaborative intervention exercises during the creation of artistic 'body images', which are a main focus of the workshop. Invitations to intervene in the work of other participants helps to develop the sense that every 'body image' created is only a draft. To La Pocha Nostra the body is a metaphor of the broader social-political body. The workshop is a space to create 'living metaphors that articulate the complexity of contemporary society'. (2) When inviting the participants to edit their images there is an invitation to edit the world,. This emphasis on the process of creation is what allows the participants to think about the operations of creation and 'edition' as what Sueley Rolnik would call a 'micropolitical act'.(3) The work on perception developed in such a pedagogy can also be understood as raising awareness of 'the resonant body'— another key concept in the thought of Rolnik that designates an activity of our sensibility that allows for 'the perception of the other as a living presence in me'. This translates as a vulnerability that impels us to create.

The capacity of a La Pocha's workshop to intervene in the participant's processes of subject-making is a fundamental component of a revolutionary praxis that empowers. It works with a different logic from the logic of the heteropatriarcal capitalist regime, which stimulates production at any cost and competition as the only way of finding your place in the world. This is not only a means of generating a fertile territory for the production of artistic works but for finding new ways of relating.

Notes

(1) <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/blogs/beatrizpreciado/2013/10/03/volver-a-la-womanhouse/>

(2) I have been attending workshops with La Pocha Nostra for four years. This is a quote from one of my notes. See: Guillermo Gomez Pena and Roberto Sifuentes, *Exercises for Rebel Artists, Radical Performance Pedagogies*, Routledge: New York, 2011

(3) Micropolitics has to do with the procesual, with 'a subjective that requires the presence of the other and is drawn from there.' Rolnik has used both the concept of micropolitics and resonant body since the eighties, but they still are important to think about art and its capacities. See: <http://lavaca.org/notas/entrevista-a-suely-rolnik/>

The Women of Robador

A meeting of an informal union of sex workers, Barcelona

Luis Guerra

1992 was a turning point for Barcelona. The celebration of the Olympic Games had a big impact on urbanism and the image of the city. New hotels, highways, ports and stadiums were built and Olympic zones like Montjuic, Diagonal and Vall d'Hebron were refurbished and regenerated. The internationally famous Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA) was built for that occasion: the best example of the state's scheme for changing the face of the city—a form of cleaning. It was at that moment that a deep process of gentrification started in the Raval neighborhood.

Today Carrer d'en Robador, a street just behind the recently opened Filmoteca de Catalunya, is a well-known tourist destination in Barcelona: there are almost 100 women who work here everyday as sex workers. After years of being persecuted by the Police, something which intensified with the city's 'clean up', the Women—as they call themselves— have begun to organise. They have since been developing gatherings in which they share their needs, strategies and politics.

As a group they don't recognise hierarchies, although Janet is known by the institutions as a spokeswoman for the movement. *Ambit Dona*, a space in the heart of Raval neighbourhood that informs and educates sex workers regarding health issues, constitutes a favored meeting place for the informal union. We are in the big room and almost 120 people are present.⁽¹⁾ I stand near the entrance and form part of a large circle where nobody is chairman or leader. Almost all the Women of Robador are here: Spanish, Colombians, Brazilians, Nigerians, Marroccans, Romanians, among others. This is the first time that we are convening again after an important meeting with the Mayor of Barcelona.

The Women of Robador have started a new form of organising in the neighborhood as a direct response to what appeared to be a police siege: everyday they were seeing more and more police presence in the streets and they have seen their work endangered. Last April the Women met with the Mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Triás, in order to raise the issue of the harassment that they are subjected to by the local police patrols of the Robador area, Plaça Sant Ramon and Pieyre of Mandiargues. During this meeting, the workers exposed the verbal assaults, arbitrary and unjustified fines and identification checks that have long been standard practice for agents in the area. One of the slogans of the sex workers movement says: 'You don't care if I am a prostitute when I vote'. The Women have a very plain claim: let us work legally.

They decided since the beginning to call themselves 'the Women'. This name comes from a conservative notion that they share and it is a matter of pride for them. While the notion of a fixed identity category has been theoretically critiqued in other contexts, the adoption and affirmation of the term 'women' here exposes

the very concrete situation from where this social movement has been built. They have been organising with the help of some organizations such as Genera, Lloc de la Dona, Ambit Dona. One of the resolutions that they took at the meeting was to develop a public protest, a strategy well known by the Latin American women of the group: a 'Cacerolazo'. Every Wednesday they stop working at 8 PM, gather and wearing white masks to disguise their identities they make noise with pots and pans, expressing their discomfort with the current Mayor's policy. They have also been supported by some of their clients, which has been an important step forward. For more than an hour, The Women protest, chant and walk up and down the street of Robadors. The atmosphere is uplifting and fun: as the neighbours join in, the protest seems more like a carnival or a party, with everyone smiling and sharing the instruments. The aim of the Women is not only to be seen and heard, but to continue talking with the Mayor— to look for an answer to their situation and for a change to the current regulations.

Today the Women continue to work through assembly meetings. Some of them are working with these new ways of protesting and letting the Barcelona authorities know that their demands should be taken seriously. Some of them are discussing the possibility of becoming a cooperative and what kind of economic and social benefits that could bring. The Women know what they want. They are a group that work everyday in the streets, besides the police pressure, the marginalisation and the possible violence. The task is high, but they look confident in the process of becoming 'one Woman, one Body'.

Notes

(1) I am at the meeting because I am working with Genera and the Women developing a graphic novel that will work as a diary of the situation. This work will be published next year and aims to grasp a memory of the current conditions. It is necessary to say that the project is supported by the Women who kindly have been participating by sharing their stories and visions.

A Few Words Are Enough For a Guiltless Debt

Platform for Individuals Affected by Mortgages, Barcelona

Anyely Cisneros Marín

As the economic crisis erupted in Spain towards the end of 2008, large numbers of bankrupted families emerged, dispossessed of any means to pay back their mortgages. The Spanish State responded to this situation with the fearful implementation of collection policies and evictions on behalf of the banks and financial entities. A Spanish law (unique in Europe) demands that those who have been evicted not only lose their home but have to pay the mortgage debt. In response several Spanish social movements gathered to form strategies of resistance to the enforcement of these policies.

The resilient working method of the 'Platform for Individuals Affected by Mortgage' (PAH) grounds its ethos in a collective exchange of experience. This exchange operates within a logic that effectively dismantles the banks and State's rhetorical apparatus, which finds its origins in the absolute commodification of the right to housing. In their assemblies there is a careful reversion of the State's juridical arguments and collection policies. Recent members will discover that they have been victimised by the economic, juridical and financial system; they will be given the space to analyse the terms in which they have been blamed and criminalised by the Government and the media and they will be offered the opportunity to understand how it is possible that they could have been indebted for life.

This revelation is poignant to the political and subjective transformation that occurs with the successful detachment of debt from blame. Facing this disclosure, the indebted subject is transformed and their participation in collective action becomes more active. The interruption of the guilt flow is the key of every action performed by the people that constitute the PAH. With each of their meetings the 'effected' become 'experts' in the discourse of debt; the indebted is converted into a political agent.

The assembly, besides being a school for a guiltless debt, has what psychoanalysts would call the 'therapeutic effect': a collateral gain of the work of words that provides confidence, group identity and collective enthusiasm. These effects are the solidification of a political base that renders transversal the personal dimension the group. According to Maurizio Lazzarato, there is a direct link between an indebted subjectivity and late capitalism, which he approaches as the unequivocal debt economy.(1) The indebted subject is simultaneously a subject of guilt and shame. Indeed, if we take individual moments of these assemblies, we will see a performance of gestures that corresponds to the emotions of the guilty indebted— of a subject immersed in anxiety and impotence whose body language gives away uneasiness and fear.

The emotional tension is part of the logic of the assemblies. These are not the typical political meetings steered by natural-born leaders, activists by vocation or professionals with organisational trajectories in specific political struggles

who might battle over ideological strategies. The Platform welcomes those who in most cases have not participated in any previous political initiatives.

The moderation of the assemblies is the responsibility of the most experienced 'effected' activists. The opening words set the tone through a language that operates with the collective empowerment of the 'victims'. In order to accomplish it these indebted subjects have found a particular style and developed their own vocabulary. The first step is to caution the nervous audience; 'we don't work miracles, this is a long fight', 'the best pressure you can use is yourself.' By this point the angst makes itself visible but then the discourse proceeds to demonstrate that the key to overcoming debt is to turn a personal matter into a collective political affair.

Those who have advanced in their negotiation processes with banks come forth with their testimonies. They tell stories of the banking system's sophistry in updating and enforcing their collecting methods, which naturally serve to highlight the individual and accusing character of debt. Each assembly is an emotional fight against the creditor. The angst and fear are anchored at all times in the empowering work process. Thus, the victories and battle strategies of the PAH are the only guarantees: 'We have stopped thousands of evictions, we have accomplished lowering the number of forced evictions and we are collectively negotiating thousands of mortgages at the same time. Yes we can!'

Interrupting the guilt flow and all-around angst is not the working order of one or a couple of assemblies. Rather it is the motor driving against the current of a political and cultural system, a strong juridical architecture and oppressive media discourses. Against the psychic and economic effects of being in debt, PAH's assemblies are not only a platform to articulate collective struggles but a space for the transformation of subjectivities through political, affective and creative learning. The material remainders of mortgage may endure but the fears and anxieties begin to dissipate.

Notes

(1) Maurizio Lazzarato. 'The indebted subject.' Interview by Anyely Marín Cisneros and Renato Fumero in Barcelona, October 2012 for the publication SUR/version. Caracas, Centre for Latinamerican Studies Rómulo Gallegos.

Radically Diverse

Radio Nikosa, Barcelona

Martín Correa-Urquiza

'The F Sharp doesn't really sound like an F sharp but it's nice', says Alberto. And that happens with this piano. Which is old and projects the sound well but, we could say, maintains another concept of what would be the 'common sense' of pianos. The grand piano is the first piece of furniture that greets those who are arriving this afternoon to the assembly meeting of Radio Nikosia—the first radio station in the Spanish State to transmit directly from so-called 'madness'. It sounds. In its own way. Some say it needs re-tuning. They said the same to Joao Gilberto when he started with Bossa Nova. And then later they began to understand that in reality what Gilberto was doing was making melodies with notes that were simply unthinkable at the time; he was using zig zag structures that no-one was used to; constructing a new common sense for music. The anthropologist Angel Martinez says that madness can't be seen as opposed to reason but rather to common sense; to an integrated fabric of social meaning from which we build certain structures which allow for the predictable.

Madness, in each person who suffers it, has its own story, its own reasons, its own biography. It is also an affliction. It is not only linked with the particular labyrinths of the subject but is related to the difficulties of acting from a proposition of conduct that is not necessarily directed towards 'common sense'. It is categorised by concepts such as schizophrenia that are associated with terrifying social stigmas. The conventions that make the F sharp sound 'off-key' are also established by the expectations of the respected chords, expectations that respond to a culturally and socially constructed scale. This doesn't necessarily mean that we should all incorporate a new F sharp and make it our own: but rather it implies not judging the music that sounds in other bodies with other possible tonalities. This is the proposition emitted on the radiowaves of those who produce Radio Nikosia, and what is revealed in the dynamic of its political makeup.

In the assembly meeting today there are thirty-seven people, the majority of whom have previously been diagnosed with a mental health issue, have walked the halls of mental health institutions or have lived the logic of social stigmas and have a lot to say about it. Nikosia is an association that forms part of the other association Radio Contrabanda, one of the last free and independent radio stations in Barcelona. People arrive one by one and we talk between ourselves, greet each other with embraces. Dolors presents the objective of the meeting and slowly the chaos becomes organised. There are various things to get through: every week a theme is chosen for the radio program and this week we will be discussing 'common sense'. Then there is the coordination of some workshops, student activism, congresses and the welcoming of new participants into the group: the recently diagnosed, students, those who are curious, musicians open to a new F sharp...

Galeano (1) and Maalouf (2) say that identities are sponges, moving, mutating and

shifting. However, the identity of a person who has been psychiatrically diagnosed remains absorbed by their pathology; they are nothing more than what they have been named by the clinic. They become defined by an 'absolute illness' (3). Nikosia is a space in which the participants can escape the semantics of diagnosis, in which new meanings and identities are generated. It is a territory of fracture that constitutes a habitable limit or, in the terms of Eugenio Trias (4), a threshold that exists on the margin of the official grammars of mental health. This happens precisely because the project is structured like an assembly, in which collective construction and participation is horizontal. It is an appropriated space. 'It is not possible for someone to liberate another person and yet no one liberates themselves alone', says Paulo Freire.(5)

It is common to speak of Nikosia as a 'radical' experience, which is another way of trying to de-legitimise those collectives who question things and don't fit into the mold. There is not one unifying theory about madness, there is not only one discourse possible. There are people who identify with anti-psychiatry, others who try to re-conceptualise the tradition, others who love their psychiatrists and enjoy attending mental health institutions. Perhaps it is a radical space if radicality itself materializes as a drastic opening towards the diverse.

Nikosia was initiated using the basic structure of La Colifata in Argentina: a radio station broadcast from a psychiatric hospital that has been running since 1991. La Colifata radio station was created to build an alternative space inside the mental health services, however on occasions they ended up reproducing the old logic of control, the punitive welfare system and excessive assistance. Nikosia, as an autonomous space that acts further away from clinical practices and spaces, breaks into the communal; it occurs in synch with the madness and chaos of the public plaza—its tone is human, lucid, flexible, creative and social. It reminds us that all of us carry madness inside of us covertly or not. 'Let your madness out', says a sign in the corner of the room.

In the assembly there is talking, arguing and debate. Dolores explains that the radio station is an encounter with an alternative identity, 'a means of taking off the rules of my illness and believing in my possibilities again'. She is the president of the association. Fran says that there should be a coat stand in the doorway, one that says 'hang your diagnosis here'. The assembly goes into debate for a while: other topics are closed, others remain invariably open. Another day there will be another assembly that will be as chaotic, harmonious, peaceful and anxious as the one today. Diverse, like the keys on the piano in the hall.

Notes

(1) Eduardo Galeano, *El Libro de los Abrazos*, Siglo XXI. 1993

(2) Amin Maalouf, *Identidades Asesinas*, Alianza editorial. 2005

(3) Martín Correa-Urquiza, *La rebelión de los saberes profanos. Otras prácticas otros territorios para la locura*, Phd Thesis, URV. 2010.

(4) Eugenio Trias, *La Razón Fronteriza*, Destino S.A. 1999.

(5) Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del Oprimido*, Buenos Aires: SigloXXI. 1970.

Technofeminism and Free Culture

Generattech.com, Barcelona

Ybelice Briceño Linares

Identifying who speaks and how they speak in the online platform Generattech.com involves a cartography of the conversations that have been taking place in virtual and physical spaces. It demands access to closed and open collectives and working groups. It requires traveling through diverse networks and nodes while reviewing a range of cultural production from dialogue, documents, published manifestos, videos and graphics. Speech on the web has a heterogenous life and form of its own.

Generattech.com is a technocommunicational proposition that is conceived as a tool for content sharing and the circulation of material between militant collectives. It forms part of a wider project beginning in 2007 which sought to explore and question the relations between gender, technology and the privatisation of knowledge in cognitive capitalism. Departing from the analysis that social worlds are always created through technological assemblages (that is gender relations are reproduced, the power of the economic elite is reinforced and socially produced knowledge is concentrated ect.), generattech.com encourages the revision of the construction of technological codes while inviting collectives of activists and artists to work towards their transformation. This is the objective of generattech.com: to incite feminist activists to appropriate the technologies of communication in order to transform them; to overcome technophobia and in turn produce new discourses and alternative social imaginaries; to build bridges between open software communities; to defend free culture; to disseminate and extend the fight against privatised code while introducing critical reflection with regards to the social reproduction of the already established androcentric 'codes' of the real world.

Although the project was initiated as an investigation-action within an academic field (psychology and critical sociology), generattech.com positions itself as a communicational tool for political activism. The groups that have used and are using the platform are predominantly active in political organising and anti-system militancy and the majority articulate their struggles through feminism, sexual dissidence, the appropriation of technology and the defense of open source software and coding. However, the spectrum of debates that are initiated by Generattech's collectives extend to immigration, critique of consumer society, social economy and the relationships between investigation and activism.

In generattech.com there is a space for everyday communication in the forums and panels in which dialogues and strings of comments are established. The major function is as a tool for circulating documents, books, articles, essays and documentation of events, performances and actions. Consistent with the support of the free circulation and reproduction of knowledge, these materials are all distributed under copyleft. Among the film and audio documents some of the

strongest voices of the transfeminist and queer movements emerge, especially those of the post-porn discourses. These are the users whose aesthetic is the most strident and the most disruptive of dominant representations of gender and sexuality. The visibilisation of these body politics was one of the objectives of the platform, a counter current running against the mainstream web.

The architecture of the webpage itself reflects the central tenets and objectives of the project: the users of the platform are labeled 'inhabitants' or 'dwellers' in order to avoid the reproduction of the dichotomies of the system of sex/gender and only collectives can participate so as to extend the spaces in which collective action occurs as opposed to encouraging individual use.

In the context of the consolidation and extension of cognitive capitalism and the spectacular diffusion and extensive use of technological and communicative networks and forums, the creation of spaces like generatech.com seems like an urgent task. However, the obstacles they might encounter are many: sustainability over time, the difficulty of competing with the mainstream social networks with their vast resources and powers of seduction, the task of changing habits acquired through years of socialisation within the media and technologies.

The questions raised by this project connect with a network of similar problematics highlighted by other counter propositions. Is it possible to create links between various political struggles beyond specific goals or specific situations? How stable can these connections be? How can we transgress the hegemonic codes of the web? Who do we want to challenge with our discourse and speech? How can we leave the realm of the academy or theory toward an everyday and grounded political practice? The answers to these questions will surely not be general and all encompassing but definitive, provisional and contextual. Ambiguous and unresolved enough to trouble and invite further investigation and discussion. Uncertain enough to mobilise— to push us toward taking over the network and its codes.

Notes

(1) A brief summary of the names of the collectives reveals the slogans of their struggle as much as lay bare the way in which they subvert the regimes of representation in a lucid way: "Transblog", "Madrid viral-love", "Lesbianas en potencia", "Nomepisesofreghao", "Stop Trans Pathologización", "Somos De-generando", "Mujeres públicas", "Xarxa transmarikabollo.vlc", "Donestech", "Post-op", "XYmutación", "Okupem les ones", "Radio Contrabanda", "Genderhacker", "Cultura lliure", "Guifi.net" among others.

Spellcheck

Precarious Workers Brigade, London

Dunya Kalantry

When typing 'precarity' into a Microsoft word document it stands out, highlighted in red. Un-recognised or ignored. While precarity remains indefinable as a specific type of labour, a number of very distinct professions have started to share similar characteristics: short-term or no-contract work, unsteady income, deprivation of rights and status and vulnerability to competition and stress. Activist organisers the Precarious Worker's Brigade (PWB), who aim to organise in cross-class solidarity within the education and cultural sectors, have been criticised on the basis that an alliance of cleaners, web designers and adjunct teachers is an unlikely prospect, due to the 'sizeable imbalance in social capital'. (1) Yet maintaining conventional class distinctions despite a unity in labour conditions also seems a faltering strategy at a time in which the effects of zero-hour contracts, tightening immigration laws and high un-employment rates are destabilising industries from service to education and creating shared unrest.

My first encounter with the PWB is in a pub in Bethnal Green. I sit face to face with A and over two glasses of Coke and we begin to talk. What am I interested in? What can I provide? What do I need? (Is this an interview? Am I being vetted?) I discover it is more about pursuing internal transparency, otherwise, A asserts, 'you and your interests could get lost. The meetings move very quickly.' She starts to unravel the recent history of the PWB: their origins in The People's Tribunal event at the Institute of Contemporary Art (2); their campaigns against unpaid internships; their campaigns alongside the cleaners at the Barbican Art Centre (3); their invitations from institutions; the expectation for them to critique correctly; the uncomfortable role they play at a moment when institutions are out-sourcing radicalism; the shutting down of discussion; the scrunched-up face of the curator whose position is questioned as (s)he is asked in public about her pay, the security of the institution's workforce or their interns policy. She tells me about their anti-raids campaign and shows me their migrant 'bust' cards where 'I don't give my consent to speak to an immigration officer' is translated into five languages. She tells me about arguments with fellow artists who have accused the PWB of instrumentalising them; about friendship and support; about their desire to be a movement not a cell; about sitting in a conference room dressed in donkey masks role-playing the labour exchange of an internship.

Two weeks later I meet with PWB in a space they share with other activist groups. Only two of the PWB's original members are there, A & B. Fifteen people sit around a large kitchen table with tea. Introductions are made by name, involvement with the group and profession. B, with agenda in hand, takes up the role of chair with no discussion and A minutes. Time is spent talking through an event at Goldsmiths regarding unpaid internships. Other tasks are rattled through and ticked off. Many talk about the cuts to education without much faith. The one member of the group who works on a zero-hour contract in the education sector raises his hand and asks

when the education group will re-band. This is unclear as people are pregnant or on holiday.

PWB uses the tools of its members—mainly artists, designers, educators and cultural workers—to actively give support and information to those threatened by precarity. Understanding that self-education should be enticing rather than overwhelming, they avoid the homogenising aesthetic of traditional unions as well as their modes of transmission: PWB actively engage humour, design, and the expression of personal needs. Consensus, as a mode of conversation in which decisions are arrived at through a synthesis of positions and opinions, binds the group who ‘would like to ensure that roles do not get fixed.’ For consensus to be actualised, honesty, efficacy and fairness are facilitated by a chair, a minute taker and a ‘vibes watcher’ (who keeps an eye on the mood of the meeting and the need for a beer or to turn the lights on). These roles are rotated so that no one person is forever taking notes or chairing an issue that they feel very strongly affected by. Underpinning their strategies and ethos is a pool of resources for the radical educator: Popular Education, Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and Stephen Duncombe’s notion of the ‘Ethical Spectacle’ articulated by beautifultrouble.org, where wise advice for meetings such as ‘No one wants to watch a drum circle’ are published.⁽⁴⁾

While the PWB have campaigned alongside cleaners and migrants, around the table are educated cultural workers. Yet even among this ‘class’, individuated work has rendered them not homogenous, not in the same work nor in the same situation. As such, no single issue can occupy the group, nor does it. The overriding sense is of a fractured unity: of individuals who state their personal strength whilst admitting their vulnerability. As a student, an unpaid independent curator, a writer, a waitress, precarity is apparent in my tax bracket, my minimal national insurance contributions and my barely-existent free time. I must be available to say yes to all work, but I can rely on none to be stable. PWB may not provide a transcendental cross-class collaboration, but they do fight professionalism by offering the space to speak about labour and life conditions in the first person. It is these alliances between individuals that is proving Microsoft Word semantics to be obsolete.

Notes

(1) Andrew Ross, “The New Geography of Work: Power To The Precarious” in *OnCurating Journal* Issue 16, (ed.) Zoran Erić and Stevan Vuković, 2012

(2) This was a residency at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London which was offered to another activist-artist collective Carrot Workers Collective (CW). CW invited artists and activists to map the precarious conditions of their life and work. The PWB was formed at this event.

(3) London’s foremost multi-disciplinary art institution. Ironically an architectural temple to Modernism located inside a housing block, the Barbican maintains an advertised, unpaid internship policy and does not pay its maintenance staff London Living Wage, which at the time of writing is £8.55 per hour.

(4) See Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, New Press: New York, 2007

The Paradox of Funding Cuts: Education for Migrant Workers

United Migrant Workers Education Project, London

Emilio Reyes

The UK Coalition government is transforming English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in two ways: firstly it is reducing the funding allotted to ESOL courses and secondly it is changing the conditions that are attached to the funding that remains. These new conditions enshrine a dangerously close connection between providers of English classes and the Job Centre Plus (JCP) (1). In practice this involves a pressure on teaching centers to share their student data with the JCP, new mandatory English courses created using JCP staff (who work for less and on less secure contracts), a growing obligation to concentrate on 'employability skills' instead of language acquisition and a sanction climate in which students come to class ill for fear of having their benefits cut. The change to funding conditions is arguably the more pernicious of the government's transformation to English teaching provision, for the conditions embody a perception of migrants as underserving welfare scroungers who are reluctant to learn English; a belief encapsulated by Conservative politician George Osborne's taunt that 'if you're not prepared to learn English, your benefits will be cut'.

Paradoxically, this governmental approach to ESOL has created a situation in which a project can be affected both negatively by the loss of funding and positively by the release from the conditions tied to that funding. This is exactly the situation I found when I visited the United Migrant Workers Education Project (UMWEP) in Holborn and spoke to the co-ordinator Carlos Cruz Garcia. UMWEP was initially set up by UNITE (2) and Justice For Cleaners in 2007 when they realized that the majority of cleaners recruited to the Union and the campaign had limited English. For the first three years of the project, accredited ESOL, Maths and IT classes were provided by the government funded College of North East London following the college's curriculum. However, in 2010 when Carlos went to the college with a list of eighty new learners he was told that they could no longer provide funding.

The conditions surrounding their recently imposed status as 'alternative education' provoke, as Carlos put it, a shift 'from formal to informal (provision), from paid tutors to unpaid tutors, from being facilitators to being providers with no experience'. Despite losing the power to provide accreditation, the free courses are popular and with the continued sponsorship of UNITE, who pay for the classrooms, the materials, and the facilitator's wage, the alternative education project can meet growing demand. In many ways the disassociation with government-funded colleges has brought its own benefits. Now, for example, they can provide classes to everybody whereas before they could only provide education for those in certain circumstances. An additional benefit is that the teachers have the freedom to develop their own curriculum and classes that concentrate more on catering to the student's learning and personal needs. Carlos is interested in setting up an alternative education model based in part on the ideas of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire.

Yet Carlos admits that it is hard to articulate all the elements they need to realise this alternative education model. For him, a lot of the difficulty comes from the lack of training available that is genuinely alternative. This makes perfect sense when one looks at the landscape of ESOL teacher training. An aspiring English language teacher will usually start their career with the Cambridge University accredited Certificate in English Language Teaching for Adults (CELTA); a course that is internationally accepted. The content of this training course doesn't really take into account some of the realities of being a migrant, a precarious work situation or being reliant on a punitive welfare system.

Before talking to Carlos, I sat in on an advanced ESOL class at UMWEP. It was held in a modern university classroom with a group of predominantly Latin American students of all ages. The style of the teacher was without a doubt CELTA influenced and by these standards it was a good class: the students were engaged and hardworking, vocal and confident. Yet, there was a discrepancy between the content of this class and their stated ideals for alternative education. Carlos and his team are aware of the discrepancy and they are considering their own teacher-training course that caters more to the student's situation. Regardless of what the future holds, the achievements of UMWEP are many: in a time of severe austerity and xenophobic government policies they provide free education to all migrants. In a society where free access to education is under threat, this is already a profound service.

Notes

(1) Job Centre Plus is a government funded organisation run by the Department of Work and Pensions that helps to secure employment, benefits or both.

(2) UNITE is a British and Irish trade union formed in 2007 through a merge between two unions Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union.

Non-Participation

Forcible Frames Summer School: no.w.here, London

Sumugan Sivanesan

I entered Forcible Frames as someone outside the context of funding cuts and financial crisis that confronts many UK students, though still familiar with concerns about 'course closures, corporate conformity and increasing exclusivity',⁽¹⁾ as universities the world over—particularly art schools—adapt to compete in global education markets. Being aware of the collaborative practice of no.w.here co-founders Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, I was curious about how the summer school's alternative learning culture aligned with the artists' broader strategy of 'non participation', which they recently described as a life condition 'embodied in the need to participate and the simultaneous desire to withdraw, including the question as to how withdrawal can be made visible'.⁽²⁾

In the course description the organisers raise the possibilities of artist-run education founded on egalitarian and not-for-profit values: a context of learning not beholden to 'reproducing the structures, canons and learning models currently on offer in Higher Education'⁽³⁾ conditioned by 'rampant privatisation.' The key themes of this year's summer school were issues of power and subjectivity, derived largely from arguments put forth by Judith Butler in *Frames of War* (2009).

no.w.here is located in a modest warehouse on a commercial stretch of Bethnal Green Road, Tower Hamlets, East London. An analogue film lab occupies the first floor, housing a 16mm film processing machine, darkrooms and editing tables, alongside various pieces of rare equipment. Higher up, the stairs open out into a loft, which serves as an event space for the organisation's regular program of screenings and discussions as well as a classroom for the summer school. The large moveable blackboard and pull-down projection screen, behind which Karen and Brad's living area can be glimpsed, define the space. For the eight weeks of the course our class of twenty-two effectively occupied their living room, physically contracting the boundaries between teacher/student and host/guest.

Forcible Frames comprised theoretical sessions, artist workshops, film lab sessions and forum theatre exercises, alongside no.w.here's own screenings and events program. Brad Butler's method of teaching theory with an emphasis on performativity and embodiment, I found to be particularly effective. One such class involved a close watching of the film *Here and Elsewhere* (*Ici et Ailleurs*) (1976) by Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Miéville. We watched the fifty-five minute film in roughly seven minute segments, in between which the themes, narratives and construction of this very dense, dialectical cine-essay were recalled and discussed. Brad was instrumental in directing these sessions, insisting that we describe not only what was on screen, but also what was not; paying attention to the critical positions or points of view that were missing, to issues of translation, gender, audience and representation.

The exercise that followed, 'Drawing Wavelength', was based on a recent re-enactment by academic Rachel Moore of Michael Snow's 1967 film *Wavelength*. Due to funding cuts, Moore was unable to screen Snow's seminal film in her class, and instead drew a chalk illustration based on her memory. Split into groups of four, our task was to re-interpret and communicate *Here and Elsewhere* to our peers, also using only chalk and a blackboard. Although the instructions for our task were clear, attempts to translate our impressions of the film into a drawing-based performance were perplexing. In small teams—trying to 'get inside the film'—we negotiated forces active between the film and audience, teacher and student, as well as the different methods by which we individually construct meaning. Significantly, such workshops and theory sessions required that we not only think collectively, but also with our bodies, exposing the 'cemetery of images' that we carry within us.

These exercises proposed cinematic montage as an experience embodied by the viewer, rather than as a technical feat presented on screen, implicating the role of cinema in producing contemporary subjectivities.⁽⁴⁾ A discussion with the scholars Larne Abse Gogarty and Josefine Wikström indicated how such an analysis might also extend to a consideration of how art schools ready students for the exploitative conditions of the gallery system, or equip them with alternative skill sets fit for careers in creative industries. The tension that arose between these theoretical conversations and the desire to learn the technical skills necessary to produce a film for presentation by the end of the course, contributed to a learning experience that was complex and thought-provoking.

Forcible Frames was delivered in an atmosphere that encouraged self-analysis, co-operation and collective organisation. Simultaneously a film lab, event space, classroom, community forum, artist studio and home, no.w.here puts forward a generous and complicated form of institutional critique, propelled by a desire to make withdrawal visible, communal and generative.

Notes

(1) Dean Kenning, 2012. 'Refusing conformity and Exclusion in Art Education [online].' *Mute*, 22 March. URL: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/refusing-conformity-and-exclusion-art-education#> Last accessed: 19 July 2013.

(2) Julie Caniglia, 2013. 'Art of Opposition: Karen Mirza and Brad Butler on Aesthetics and Activism [online].' *Magazine*, Walker Art Centre, 26 January. URL: <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2013/mirza-butler-museum-of-non-participation>

(3) As stated in the Forcible Frames curriculum, 14 February 2013. URL: <http://nowhereopenstudio.blogspot.be/2013/02/forcible-frames-curriculum.html>

(4) This process of collective deconstruction and re-performance of cinema, collapsing acts of production and reception, was also apparent in a workshop conducted in the second week of the summer school by the Monument Group/Four Faces of Omarska.

Critical Pedagogies Seeking Self-determination in Today's Beirut

Ashkal Alwan: Home Workspace Program, Beirut

Liane Al Ghusain

Ashkal Alwan originated as a group of friends that performed and exhibited in in the early 1990s in Beirut. Their artistic interventions helped to mark a new post civil war era— a cultural moment that was wholly theirs as a generation. Practitioners like Rabih Mroue, Lina Saneh, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, Akram Zaatari, Marwan Rechmaoui, Ghassan Salhab, Mohammad Soueid, Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, Walid Sadik and Ziad Abi Lama had all lived through fifteen years of war, spending their childhoods and adolescences as witnesses to sectarian strife. Lebanon was an amalgamation of resolved and unresolved conflicts, contradictions and misrepresentations, abandoned ruins and new skyscrapers. By the early nineties they began intervening in the debates about Lebanon, the Arab region and the artistic moment. From within the group that began performing and exhibiting in Sanayah Gardens, the Beirut Corniche and the Hamra district, Christine Tohme stepped forward as a curator and producer to give them a platform for expression. It was from this context that the Lebanese Association for the Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, was established in 1994.

In 2011 the Ashkal Alwan space added to its many functions the Home Workspace Program: a 2000m² multipurpose facility in Beirut dedicated to contemporary artistic practices, research, production and education. The space provides an array of services and educational platforms, production and editing studios, performance spaces, auditoriums and Lebanon's first multimedia library for contemporary arts. The program began with a syllabus focused around an exploration of the thematic of post-colonial history and identity with visiting professors Alfredo Jaar, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Hassan Khan and Hito Steyerl giving theoretical and practical framing for the pedagogical exercise. Funded by the Ford Foundation and Phillippe Jabre Foundation, as well as a handful of individual donors, Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace Program made it a point to open up their school programs to the general public and their call for students has become increasingly inclusive. The first two years, led by Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir and German theatre producer Matthias Lilienthal, each accepted fourteen students who were chosen through a selective application process that only accepted university graduates on the grounds that the course is composed of postgraduate work for artists, writers, curators and academics. The upcoming third year (which has been postponed for two months due to Barack Obama's threat of 'intervening' in Syria), led by Jalal Toufic and Anton Vidokle in tandem with eflux journal, will allow any and all students who register to attend the courses. The downside to this inclusive new approach is that the students participating will not receive a living stipend or accommodation in Beirut, which they received for the first two years. Almost 200 people have registered to attend Home Workspace Program courses in the next eight months.

The second year of the program running between 2012 and 2013, which I attended with a diverse group of thirteen fellow students, was organised around the theme

of 'Art, Performance and Technology'. With Lilienthal as the resident professor, the program was fast paced. With two-week long workshops taught back to back from September to February by Simon Fujiwara, Phil Collins, Natasha Sadr Haghghian and Rimini Protokoll in the fields of sound, video, dance/choreography, installation/research, performance and philosophy, there was plenty to process before we produced and presented our own work to the public in an open studio format. As a group we hosted three public presentations at the Ashkal Alwan space and also created live installations in working class neighborhoods for Lilienthal's ongoing project X-Apartments. All participants gained confidence and experience in new fields such as video editing, writing in English and public performance—for some the experience of surviving the urban chaos of Beirut was a lesson all on its own.

Institutionalised art education and fine art training has existed in Lebanon since 1937, in both public and private universities such as Académie Libanaise de Beaux-Arts (ALBA), The Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut, and Université Saint-Joseph, among others. However, with a strained economy and a desire to participate in the global art sphere, grassroots arts organisers have identified strategic ways to keep art education costs down while keeping critical modes of thought at internationally rigorous levels. Independent schools such as the Home Workspace Program or The Creative Space Beirut (another independent study program also initiated in 2011) are building intrepid, experimental and highly effective models that are serving as an example to art educators worldwide. The schools' schema also points to the shift in educational paradigms currently occurring in the Arab world. Although the cultural imperialism of the French and the Americans is still felt in the country, much is being done to de-center the 'source' of cultural knowledge in order to establish a canon of contemporary, original Arab creative production and to author an empowered narrative of our socio-political history through our artistic and discursive practices.

As a continuing participant at Ashkal Alwan's Home Workspace Program and a creative writing instructor at The Creative Space, I feel integrated into the Lebanese art scene and into larger discussions about contemporary art practice. The 'post-civil war' conversation that was initiated by Lebanese contemporary artists of the 1990s is today carried forward by critical discourse about urbanism, architecture, memory, archive, and deconstructing identity. However, a point of concern that comes up repeatedly is the language: 'International Art English' is used to discuss the current production of Arab art. Often riddled with jargon and almost always in English, the radical conversations that are being conducted across the Arab art world tend to mismatch their medium and their message. The mixing of English with Arabic and French often leads to side discussions about the technical and linguistic quality of translation at conferences, in subtitles, essays and performances. As long as these cross-lingual lines of communication stay open without settling on the easiest solution, which is to bulldoze linguistic expression with International Art English and hence cater to an elite art audience, then alternative education in Beirut will continue to offer something unique to its practitioners.

Education as a Collective Work of Art

Free Cooper Union UK, London

Lawrence Lek

If education can be considered a collective act, it is natural that institutions are formed to consolidate the shared wisdom of a group. In primitive society, learning was done in small groups (classes substitute the family unit), or one-to-one (teachers substitute the parents). The school, as we know it today, was invented in Victorian Britain, a network of institutions to train adolescents and adults in particular trades and ways of thinking. At this time, schools became a machine for standardised learning. Today many institutions of higher education are increasingly run like corporations. Like any business, they have become dependent on recruiting, marketing and branding. Institutional self-promotion may be necessary, but it has little to do with learning.

Public Assembly is a nomadic platform for art and education, created in response to this phenomenon. On Sunday 30 June 2013, we held a one-day free school based in solidarity with New York City's last free university: the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science, whose Board of Trustees voted to end its 154-year tradition of giving full scholarships to all admitted students. Cooper Union was founded by Peter Cooper in 1859 with the belief that an education should be 'Free as Air and Water' and furthermore it should be accessible to those who qualify, independent of their race, religion, gender, wealth or social status. As a self-taught industrialist and philanthropist, he started a school that was dedicated to the needs of working people in New York. Classes were held at night to enable working people to attend and the Great Hall in the basement of the building was a place of assembly where matters of democracy were debated every week.

This free spirit still runs through the school. When I was a master's student at Cooper Union in 2012, fellow students had already started social media groups to highlight the worsening tuition crisis at the institution. Their initiatives resulted in the creation of the Free Cooper Union networks on the internet. The announcement of the fees decision came in April 2013, when I had already moved back to London. In solidarity we decided to search out Cooper Alumni based in London to form FCUUK (Free Cooper Union UK).

Early on, we decided that the best way to protest the tuition fees would be to have a one-day free school— a celebration of open knowledge that would also be a critique of the commercialisation of education. Our core group drew from their own networks to invite artists, designers, and educators to host their own classes and workshops on the day. The spirit of freedom and generosity throughout the day was apparent to everybody. Education, when stripped of its institutional overtones, is simply a system of open exchange: a conversation.

The Assembly was held at the White Building in Hackney Wick, a post-industrial area of East London just across the canal from the 2012 Olympic Park. The day

began with a roundtable discussion about art education led by KIOSK Collective (Susannah Haslam & Lucy Sames), featuring Martin Dittus from the London Hackspace, Andreas Lang from Public Works and myself as a representative of FCUUK. The range of these transmissions spanned local history, technology, performance, film and installation. Historian Kevin Flude lectured on art museums on his canal boat, Matthew Plummer-Fernandez gave a live demonstration of data hacking, Rachel Hill gave kayak rides in exchange for conversations, Chris King demonstrated analogue video synthesizers, and Ben Westley-Clarke gave a spoken word performance on Ruskin and architecture. An open exhibition of works framed the events, with Pamela Parker's 'Swarm' installation, a bell tower to ring in new FCUUK classes and new media protest art drawn inside.

Whereas anti-establishment actions are pitched as us-against-them operations (witness Occupy Wall Street), the paradox of any alumni or student-driven protest is that the activist is simultaneously within the institution and against it. This privileged position to critique a system from within has its roots in the 'Institutional Critiques' of Hans Haacke— where the artist used his work to question the ethical foundations of his host galleries and museums. As a teacher at the Cooper Union from 1967 until 2002, this subversive mentality found its way into student body through gradual osmosis.

What FCUUK started as a protest action earlier this year became an experiment in how to create a platform for learning and expression through art and technology. To move forward, we must return to the principles of free education; maybe the school could be the ultimate collective work of art.

Radical, Experimental, Alternative

Open School East, London

Elena Crippa

Housed in a former library in East London, The Open School East (OSE) opened its doors in early September 2013 to thirteen associates who will collectively shape their learning and working environment while engaging with residents and neighbourhood organisations in order to develop joint projects. I join the first internal seminar in which two academics, Angus Cameron, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Organisation, and Martin Parker, Professor of Organisation and Culture (both of the University of Leicester School of Management) introduce themselves to the students and express their desire to become regular visitors in order to develop a research project around OSE. Pitching themselves as fellow travellers and collaborators, Cameron and Parker's presumption is that their intellectual project is contiguous to that of the associates: an interest in the particular kind of institution that the students are just beginning to develop. The proposition to share an investigation project in which the school itself is taken as an object of study seems to run counter to the motivations of many of the associates. While some are concerned that this kind of study may lead to an excessive degree of self-reflexivity, others speak of the more alluring factors that drew them to OSE: the lack of fees, the provision of free studios and the prospect of working with the local community.

I return a week later as one of the four invited speakers for OSE's inaugural public event: a series of presentations and debates entitled 'Art, School, Society'. The plastic chairs that scatter the room are all taken: due to the fact that OSE is part of an influential network of curators, critics and funding bodies they are already receiving plenty of attention from the art world. The four of us sit at a table facing the audience, our laptops and digital slide presentations at hand. On the side is a stage framed by faded red velvet curtains. The unfulfilled, post-war dreams of social integration through communal and cultural activities haunt the space that was the former library's community hall.

The talks aim to contextualise and interrogate OSE's activities as part of a broader range of historical and contemporary examples of community-based projects and alternative forms of education. Alistair Hudson speaks of Grizedale Arts, a curatorial initiative based in a rural area in the lake district which is focused on the organisation of events and projects with a use-value for the local community. Janna Graham talks about the Serpentine's Edgware Road Project based in the Centre for Possible Studies, which in the past few years has invited many international artists to work and exhibit in this London neighbourhood. Ahmet Ögüt speaks of The Silent University, which he initiated in 2012 during a year-long residency in London. The objective of the initiative is to enable asylum seekers and migrants, many of whom are highly educated in specific fields but unable to work, to share and make use of their knowledge and experience as professionals. All three projects share aspects of what Sebastian Olma defines as The Serendipity Machine: a learning process triggered by unexpected and accidental encounters: 'knowledge and creativity are

not resources in themselves but potentials generated by social relations'. (1)

My talk functioned as an historical introduction touching upon a number of examples of established as well as independent 'experimental' or 'radical' art education. Notions of 'experimentation' and 'radicalism', although often used interchangeably when discussing art education, are rooted in distinct histories and shape contrasting cultural objectives. For example a 'teaching experiment' known as 'the locked room', which took place at St. Martin's School of Art, London in 1969, (2) involved twelve first-year students being locked in an empty room in silence while being observed. While independent art school projects are described as being 'experimental' and are defined by unusual and fascinating projects, this experimentation is often shaped by individual authorship rather than shared engagement. Their pedagogical imprint is based on authority rather than diffused agency. A year before the Locked Room, students of Hornsey College of Art had occupied the college with radical intentions to implement a new education structure, wanting to demonstrate that it is possible for tutors and students to cooperate and progress towards the fulfilment of a diverse range of artistic and intellectual capacities.(3) It was Jim Singh Sandhu, a design student and one of the more active protagonists of the sit-in at Hornsey, who insisted that art colleges ought to be more 'radical' and inclusive, interacting with the general public and with the local community.(4)

Towards the end of the event, one of the associates observes that much has been discussed about alternative forms of learning and cooperation, but the format of the event was conservative, with a clear demarcation between knowledge-providers and listeners. This is indeed the distinction between a 'radical curriculum' and a 'radical pedagogy' that the sociologist Stephen Sweet makes when reflecting on Paulo Freire's radical pedagogy as it operates in practice. While a 'radical curriculum' involves activities that challenge those social structures that serve to reaffirm privilege and domination, a 'radical pedagogy' is rather a situation in which the teacher-student relationship is entirely restructured so that the idealised social relationships asserted by radical theory might be played out. (5) I wonder whether OSE's directors and associates will engage with the practical and theoretical exploration of radical pedagogy as much as with the programming of a radical curriculum. This is just the beginning. Time will tell how radical the ethos of OSE and its associates will be.

Notes

(1) Sebastian Olma, "The Serendipity Machine" in *Society* 3.0 Foundation, 2012, pp. 21 and 26.

(2) See Hester Westley, 'The year of the locked room', *Tate Etc.*, No. 9 (Spring 2007), <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/year-locked-room>> [Accessed 9 October 2013].

(3) See copy of a students' declaration, dated 31 May 1968, published in Lisa Tickner, *The Art School Revolution* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008), p. 11.

(4) See Claire Louise Staunton, 'Introduction' to *The Mental Furniture Industry*, ed. by C. L. Staunton (London: Flat Time House, 2013), pp. 3-13 (p. 7).

(5) Stephen Sweet, 'Practicing Radical Pedagogy: Balancing Ideals with Institutional Constraints', *Teaching Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr 1998), 100-11 (p. 101).

Alluding/Allure: Experimental Pedagogies on Display

Steirischer Herbst Academy, Graz

Sofia Lemos

Experimental pedagogies can reveal the orthodoxy of art institutions.

Radical consciousness does not exist within the art institution.

Experimental pedagogies do not exist autonomously from the institution; they are the medium and the message of the art institutions' intentions. Thus, by revealing, they reify their orthodoxy.

The art institution is imbued of agency; it has an ontological status independent from the product it exhibits.

The products that the art institution intentionally exhibits (works of art and other more intangible surveys) are rappings of a dichotomy by which the art institution seeks to procure self-perpetuation.

Self-perpetuation can be translated into economic parlance as the attainment of a desirable state of financial equilibrium or solvency. This logic is the dictum driving the capitalist venture.

According to the rational choice theory of economics the endurance of institutions is procured through the 'free-choice' of individuals to participate in them. Participation therefore depends on the institutions' capability to allure the individual with the promise of self-realisation.

The branding of a product is the means of the alluring institution's promise. The immanent qualities of a product become an intangible asset (often the most valuable one) in the institutions' repertoire of management strategies.

Experimental pedagogies became the brand of the art institution.

Knowledge in late capitalism is the product of a politics of affirmation. It is the form by which the neoliberal project both subsumes possible strategies of transformation and reifies its historical position as natural and non-negotiable.

Alluding to the neoliberal project becomes the allure of radical pedagogies.

Inasmuch the art institution possess an agency so does its product. While both the institution and its product may exist equally on an ontological plane they manifest themselves differently.

Once experimental pedagogies become classified in the art institution - branded and commodified - they gain distinctive metaphysical propensities.

A possibility for transformation can be convened when experimental pedagogies withdraw from taxonomy and from the production of prescriptive knowledge.

Experimental pedagogies should reveal the orthodoxy of art institutions, in doing so they disclose the neoliberal project as artificial, contingent and negotiable.

Self-reflection over self-perpetuation.

In a warehouse located in a small town southeast of the Alps, Steirischer Herbst is an annual encounter centred around 'new art' in which dozens of artists, theorists and cultural agents are invited to give lectures and participate in exhibitions and workshops. The 2013 edition of the festival intended to agitate the public agora by probing strategies and alliances to confront the transformations incurred by capitalism of the recent past. The 'amorphous' institution, which defines its program in line with the recent trends in 'linking-up aesthetic positions and theoretical discourse'(1), proposed to 'present autonomous artistic responses to neoliberalism'.(2)

Under the alias 'Herbst Academy', the institution offered a series of workshops that were led by artists and a philosopher, culminating in a three-day conference and debate surrounding 'emancipatory alternatives in trembling times'. The result of this conference was a richly indifferent meditation where strategic propositions were nowhere to be found. Theory served solely to proliferate obscure interests and reify angst; there is no alternative. Theory was the allure.

Although the intention was to reveal the inherent contingencies of capital, the deployment of experimental pedagogies, both in the academy and in the conference merely alluded to it. Despite the institutions bare outsourcing of radicalism, the tensions between the inside and the outside of the affirmative logic proved to be productive. In the workshop lead by Italian philosopher Giovanni Leghissa this shifting was constant and part of the pedagogy itself. When unveiling the inner intentions of institutions, one rapidly positioned oneself inside one— as a piece of its constitutive mechanics. Leghissa's proposition to find a way out of the labyrinth is to get acquainted with its form— with its rationale.

In the exhibition "Liquid Assets: in the Aftermath of the Transformation of Capital" curated by Luigi Fassi and Katerina Gregos, artists James Beckett, Zachary Formwalt, Núria Güell, and Visible Solutions among others charmed the visitor by operating what the 'brand' of experimental pedagogies failed to do: self-reflection. Formwalt's 2013 video installation, *In Light of the Ark* built a narrative that entangled the development of modernity with the complex mechanisms of capital. Visible Solutions' *Liquidik, Valuemeter an Artwork Consisting only of its Value* (2013) pondered the commodification of artwork and its taxonomical

value inside the financial system. Güell's action *Displaced Legal Application #1: Fractional Reserve* (2010-2011), perhaps the most propositional work in the entire exhibition, revealed and reversed a financial master-plan to inform the public on how they might expropriate money from banks legally. These artworks did what Herbst's classified experimental pedagogy failed to do in light of their leitmotif: they revealed the nature of the neoliberal project by disclosing the orthodoxy of its institutions and brands.

From the brackets of the affirmative logic of the festival, Leghissa's workshop derived a response to the 2013 edition of steirischer herbst: radical consciousness does not exist within the art institution. Radical consciousness can only exist independently from metaphysics.

Notes

(1) "Steirischer Herbst: Festival of New Art." Steirischerherbst.at. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2013

(2) Luigi Fassi, Katerina Gregos and steirischer herbst *Liquid Assets: in the aftermath of the transformation of Capital*, Mousse Publishing, Milan, 16. 2013

Talking Pedagogies

Feminist Art Program, Fresno State College

Radio Pearson

Every art school has its own peculiar sound. In the seventeenth century, the classes at Charles Le Brun's Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris, the first state regulated European art school, were largely silent: tradesmen tracing silhouettes of antiques in the Louvre Museum or measuring dimensions of the classical nude. The moral sciences displace physiognomy, measurement becomes calculation and the nude gets naked: as women enter the art school as artists and models in the mid-nineteenth Century, private art collections proliferate and capital envelops looking. Here there are whispers, a robe falling, a curtain drawing and oil and lacquer swirl to acquire the real hues of Olympia's skin. (1) 'We want an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast cars' (2) said Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus school. Tubular steel, light and versatile, twisted to form the objects of domestic desire; a coffee pot with a non-drip spout and a heat-resistant handle, its ebony screws exposed set the tone— linoleum and lime plaster lining the walls and the floors; ceramics meeting metalwork while the concrete was poured. The wide-open-road. Or as Jack Kerouac writes of the refrigerator and all the cities and all the girls: wow. Still rounded, monosyllabic and with a single vowel, was the sound of discovery.

1970. In a former military bunker in Fresno, California there is a hum, a little louder than whispers, individual speakers indistinguishable among the drum. Conversation. Consciousness-Raising. 'To be able to understand what feminist consciousness-raising is all about, it is important to remember that it began as a program among women who all considered themselves radicals', said Kathie Sarachild two years ago at the First National Women's Liberation Conference in Chicago.(3) What distinguishes the Feminist Art Program, a fine art course at Fresno State College initiated by artist and teacher Judy Chicago, from its predecessors is that the medium, tools and content are shared by a network of activists across the country as cells of the feminist movement take on the primary mode of operation of the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s: the voice, intellectual study, self reflection and expression, collaborative production and collective action. It is the utilisation of the consciousness-raising conversation that allows students to insert the personal and 'private' experiences of work, discrimination, money, abortion, family, domestic life, rape, maternity, lesbianism, masturbation, divorce, contraception into the shared and semi-public realm of the art school.

As I enter the warehouse, chosen for its relative autonomy from the main institution of the art college located a few miles away, I am confronted with a series of activities. A couple of students are occupying a small space at the back of the building discussing philosophy and sociology texts in a growing library managed by the students. Suzanne Lacy, the program teaching assistant who has a background in psychology, and student Nancy Youdelman emerge from the photographic darkroom with a series of re-touched photographs of breast enlargement devices

that they have been documenting for a photographic installation entitled 'I Tried Everything'. Faith Wilding, who gives classes on anarchist theory and Black and Chicano studies in a local meeting space, is plastering on the wall a poster of all the students and teachers dressed in combat boots, bikinis and sleazy makeup posing as hybrid army officer-beauty queens. Scribbled across it in red lipstick is the title: 'Miss Chicago and the California Girls'. In garish pink and red satin outfits Cay Lang, Vanalyne Green, Dori Atlantis and Sue Boud are rehearsing their act entitled 'Cunt Cheerleaders'. Judy Chicago explains that the insertion of 'cunt' into a visual art practice is a means of challenging the derogatory connotations of female sexuality and exploring alternative methodologies for representing desire and sex. Their questioning of the prescriptive powers of dominant visual cultures seems particularly pertinent in a space which used to be a burlesque theatre for the military stationed here after the Second World War and later a go-go dancing discoteque during the on-going conflict in Vietnam.

One of the first tasks for the students and teachers of the Feminist Art Program was to collectively create the curriculum for the course. Their desire to invent a radical pedagogy connects with a series of challenges made to higher education institutions from the recent campus sit-ins in Berkley and Paris to the 'art school revolution' in the provincial North London art school Hornsey College of Art in which the students and teachers six week occupation of their building effectively overturned the established binaries between personal/political, teacher/student, theory/practice and communication/work. Outside 'the academy' the Oakland Community School— a Black Panther education initiative which began last year as a free breakfast program and now maintains a sophisticated curriculum geared towards the needs of the discriminated African-American population of San Francisco (4)— and the network of separatist Anti-University schools popping up in Paris, Toronto, London and New York after the 1968 unrest, suggest a moment in which institutional and alternative education is in flux. As Martin Segal, member of the Anti-University in London wrote in the Anti-University course curriculum; 'The old notion of a course catalogue is no longer the scene. Attending a course because of a name is no longer the scene. Attending a course and not considering oneself as a giver of the course is no longer the scene, we would like to say. But we can't. Only you can talk for yourself.' (5)

Sarahchild states in her 1968 speech that the established distinctions between the personal and the political spheres upheld by the traditional left are beginning to be questioned. 'What I am trying to say is that there are things in the consciousness of "apolitical" women that are as valid as any political consciousness we think we have.' In its early stages the Feminist Art Program points to a seismic shift in the ossified relations not just between the personal and the political but between the academic institution and political radicalism, between artistic process and social transformation. Here the pedagogies of the object (the physiognomy of the male model, Olympia, the coffee pot) are beginning to be displaced by the pedagogies of the subject. As Sarahchild concludes: 'I'm not sure I can quite articulate it yet.'

Notes

(1) On Edouard Manet's 1863 painting Olympia, art historian T.J Clark writes "The masterpiece of the bourgeois century looks at the viewer in a way which obliges him to imagine a whole fabric of offers, places, payments and status which are open to negotiation" (T.J Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, London, 1984, p.133)

(2) William Curtis (1987) "Walter Gropius, German Expressionism and the Bauhaus" in *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, Prentic-Hall. pp. 309-316

(3) See: Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," in *Feminist Revolution*, New York: Random House, 1999, pp.144-150

(4) See: Daniel Perlstein, "Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Freedom Struggle" in *Black Protest Thought and Education* (ed.) William H. Watkins, Peter Lang Publishing: New York, 2005

(5) See: Martin Segal in *The Anti-Tabloid*, (ed.) Jakob Jakobsen, St. Martins: London, 2011, p. 54

Contributors

in order of appearance

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Beatriz Preciado is a philosopher and activist. A Fulbright scholar, she studied philosophy and gender studies at the New School for Social Research in New York where she was a student of Jacques Derrida and Agnes Heller. She received his doctorate in Theory of Architecture at the University of Princeton. Her first book, *Manifiesto contra-sexual*, was critically acclaimed as 'the new red book of queer theory'. She currently teaches gender theory at the University of Paris VIII, l' Ecole des Beaux Arts in Bourges and is Director of the Independent Study Program in Barcelona.

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Liane Al- Ghusain is a writer and art worker. She attended Stanford University for a degree in literature and creative writing and has completed postgraduate studies in art, technology and performance at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2012-13). Liane was director of the Contemporary Art Platform Kuwait during its inaugural year (2011-2012).

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Radio Pearson is a fictional art historian born in 2013.

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