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DARK MATTER GAMES
Field Notes

**Exploring hybrid and socially
embedded art practices ***

A project by S.a.L.E. Docks & Workspacebrussels

Peter Aers
Arquitecturas colectivas
Christian Bakalov
Filip Berte
Federico Bonelli
Emanuele Braga
Ilaria Bussoni
Ilenia Caleo
Alessandro Carboni
Stijn Demeulenaere
Charles Esche
Noah Fisher
Niko Hafkensheid & Valentina Stepanova
Roel Heremans
Philip Janssens
Melih Kiraç
Macao
Melissa Mabesoone
Tuur Marinus & Flup Marinus
Johann Merrich
Minh Duc Nguyen
Quentin Palmaerts
Fabrizio Panozzo
Lemuel Quiroga
Hans Andreas R.
Diane Rabreau
Marnix Rummens
Robbert & Frank / Frank & Robbert
Gregory Sholette
Annalisa Sacchi
Kuba Szreder
S.a.L.E. Docks
Mauro Sommavilla
Einat Tuchman
Hans Van Wambeke
Karl Van Welden
Gosie Vervloessem
Müge Yilmaz

** "If creativity seeks companionship with the universe,
then it begins in the process of collaboration"*

John Berger

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DARK MATTER GAMES WERE PLAYED by

Peter Aers (artist, BE)
Arquitecturas colectivas (architects/activists, ES)
Christian Bakalov (artist/choreographer, BG)
Filip Berte (artist, BE)
Federico Bonelli (artist, IT)
Emanuele Braga (artist, IT)
Ilaria Bussoni (theorist, IT)
Ilenia Caleo (performer/theorist, IT)
Alessandro Carboni (artist, IT)
Stijn Demeulenaere (artist, BE)
Charles Esche (curator, NL)
Noah Fisher (artist, US)
Niko Hafkenscheid & Valentina Stepanova (artists, BE)
Roel Heremans (artist, BE)
Philip Janssens (visual artist, BE)
Melih Kiraç (choreographer/performer, TR)
Macao (art/activist collective, IT)
Melissa Mabesoone (artist, BE)
Tuur Marinus & Flup Marinus (artist, BE)
Johann Merrich (musician/artist, IT)
Minh Duc Nguyen (artist, DE)
Quentin Palmaerts (art manager, BE)
Fabrizio Panozzo (scholar, IT)
Lemuel Quiroga (visual artist, ES)
Hans Andreas R. (artist, BE)
Diane Rabreau (artist, BE)

Marnix Rummens (dramaturg, BE)
Robbert & Frank / Frank & Robbert (artists, BE)
Gregory Sholette (artist, US)
Annalisa Sacchi (theorist/scholar IT)
Kuba Szreder (curator/theorist, PL)
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Mauro Sommovilla (artist, IT)
Einat Tuchman (dancer/performer, BE/IL)
Hans Van Wambeke (artist, BE)
Karl Van Welden (artist, BE)
Gosie Vervloessem (artist, BE)
Müge Yilmaz (artist, TR)

... and you?



THE PROJECT

Dark Matter Games is an ongoing art project that aims to develop and present innovative and socially engaged art practices that often fall out of the scope of more classic art institutions. Inspired by the essay *Dark Matter* by Gregory Sholette, the project gathers, shares, develops and presents art practices that take social interaction and transdisciplinarity as their starting point.

A workweek in April gave the participating artists and artworkers the opportunity to share their practice and articulate possible urban interventions. In the context of the Venice Biennale's opening weekend in May, we presented these interventions with an urban festival: *Dark Matter Games*!

Hidden potential

Dark Matter is a concept borrowed from astronomy: it's the invisible subatomic matter that constitutes all reality. New-York based theoretician Gregory Sholette borrowed this term to designate a counter-hegemonic tendency in the art field. Although horizontal, experimental and hybrid artistic production rooted in social processes is essential to the art world in general, it stays highly invisible in the current system due to the latter's object- and market-oriented drive: it is a dark matter. The art market, institutions and official art history represent merely a few of the most visible artists. At the same time, every one of these practices taps into this dark sea, this liquid matter, the telluric movement that ceaselessly experiments and produces signs, symbols, practices and social action.

New ways of relating to art, society and creation

In the current polarisation between public scepticism towards the arts and an almost reactionary defensiveness from the sector, we believe that these innovative and hybrid formats are even more relevant than they have ever been: they can generate new ways for diverse audiences to relate to art, rediscover it and be inspired by it. At the same time, these formats allow artists to relate very differently to society and generate public reflection in new ways. But above all, these practices referred to as Dark Matter represent another way of working and sharing knowledge. Dark Matter represents another mode of production, and what interests us is how Dark Matter, as a common source of knowledge, can organize itself. How it can generate new forms of relating to one environment, of social recomposition and even political representation. How can Dark Matter organize, share its resources and manage collective knowledge and capital?

Let's set Dark Matter free!

Collective and action-based research

The method of Dark Matter Games combines two interwoven strands of action-based research. On the one hand, we invite and explore existing movements of Dark Matter - telluric forces of creativity and resistance, which sustain the official artistic circuit while affecting it. Simply by coming together and combining our experiences and resources, our individual potential grows. On the other hand, we initiate Dark Matter manoeuvres and methodologies - urban games, collective actions and performances - that aim at politicizing Dark Matter while harnessing its potential for collective engagement and creative development. In this way, the Dark Matter Games aim to activate artistic competences and creative imagination, releasing the hidden wealth of Dark Matter, often ignored or even suppressed by classic modes of production. This joining of movements and methods is not an exercise in establishing an overview. Instead, it furthers collective affinity and expands connections, while being rooted in common initiatives across different locations.

Why Venice?

Venice is home to the first and most famous Biennale, and during the opening days the city becomes a pole of attraction for the global Art Market. But the city, providing the unique backdrop to the event, becomes itself paradoxically invisible. In that sense, the Biennale often contributes to the reduction of the complexity of the city to its branded image, blurring the distinction between contemporary art and mass tourism. At the same time, the Biennale and the sea of collateral official and unofficial events around it are largely based on a huge amount of invisible work. It is as if the visible tip of the iceberg and the invisible backdrop literally touch each other in Venice. These dialectics between the visible and the invisible are addressed by the participants through different practices and different perspectives: by intervening in a city in a context of high visibility, while formally being outside of the official program. This position grants an ideal starting point to freely integrate and affect the context and remain independent at the same time.



Why Games?

We don't mean the term literally, but some of the works will actually be games: role-plays, group explorations or kits for participatory performances, for example. And some projects are based on public calls for (inter)action in which we invite people to play with us and to join the platform. There is nothing more engaging and stimulating for the imagination than playful game structures. The direct contact between the host and the audience also generates informal platforms for feedback, questions, dialogue and new ideas. So the organisation of these games responds to various needs: to collectively experiment with new engagement practices both in theory and practice, to create an appealing public arena that gives visibility to this research and to share our experiences within an open, international network.

POSTCARDS from VENICE

S.a.L.E. Docks is the heart of Dark Matter Games, Venice. It hosts an ongoing presentation of interactive installations, performances and concerts that explore the boundaries of classic disciplines, while engaging with the socio-political context of Venice. From the spread out over the city, from the occupied park Ca' Bemba to the island of Giudecca with its self-organized social-housing program, and various touristic or hidden places in the city



01_ Kuba Szreder, Gregory Sholette & S.a.L.E Docks
Dark Matter Super Collider (open archive)

An open-source and ever-growing collection of good practices and inspiration sources that shows the diversity and potential of Dark Matter creativity in and outside the arts.



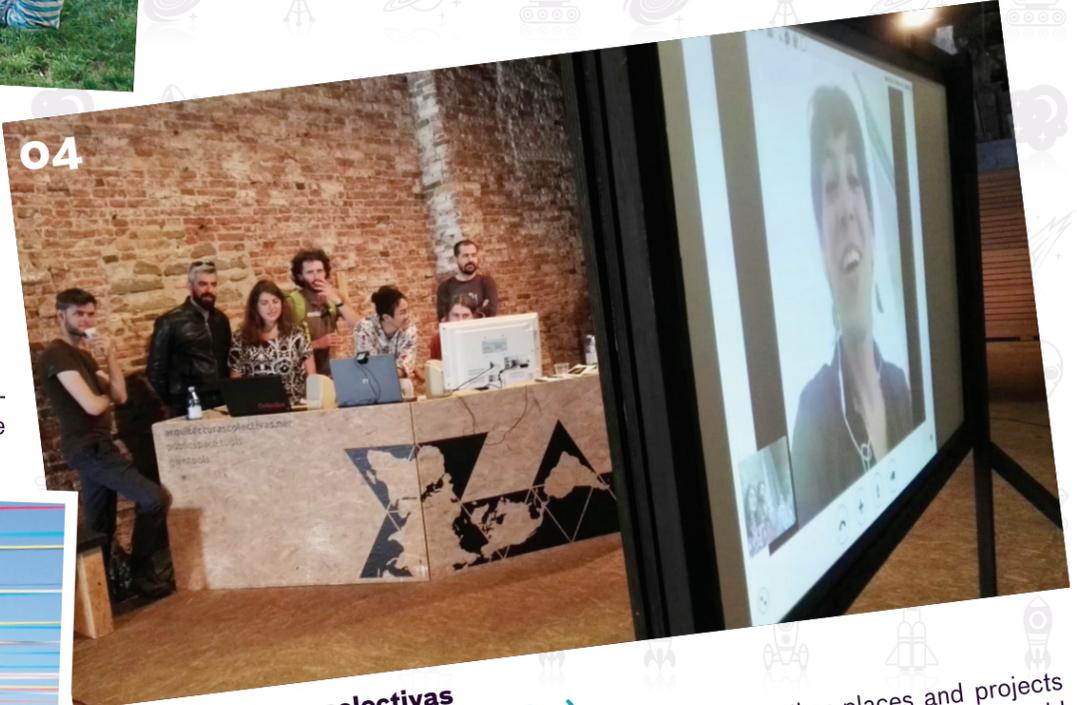
02_ Peter Aers
Crime & Punishment @ Ca' Bembo (performative conversation)

A conversational performance, inspired by Hannah Arendt, that questions the judgments, values and limits of a temporary community. With a group of people from the movement Non Una di Meno, Peter deconstructed how we organize ourselves to judge as a group and leaves us puzzled by our own judgments and beliefs.



03_ Peter Aers
Crime & Punishment @ Ca' Bembo (performative conversation)

Open workshop to collectively build the action figures to be used during the performance.



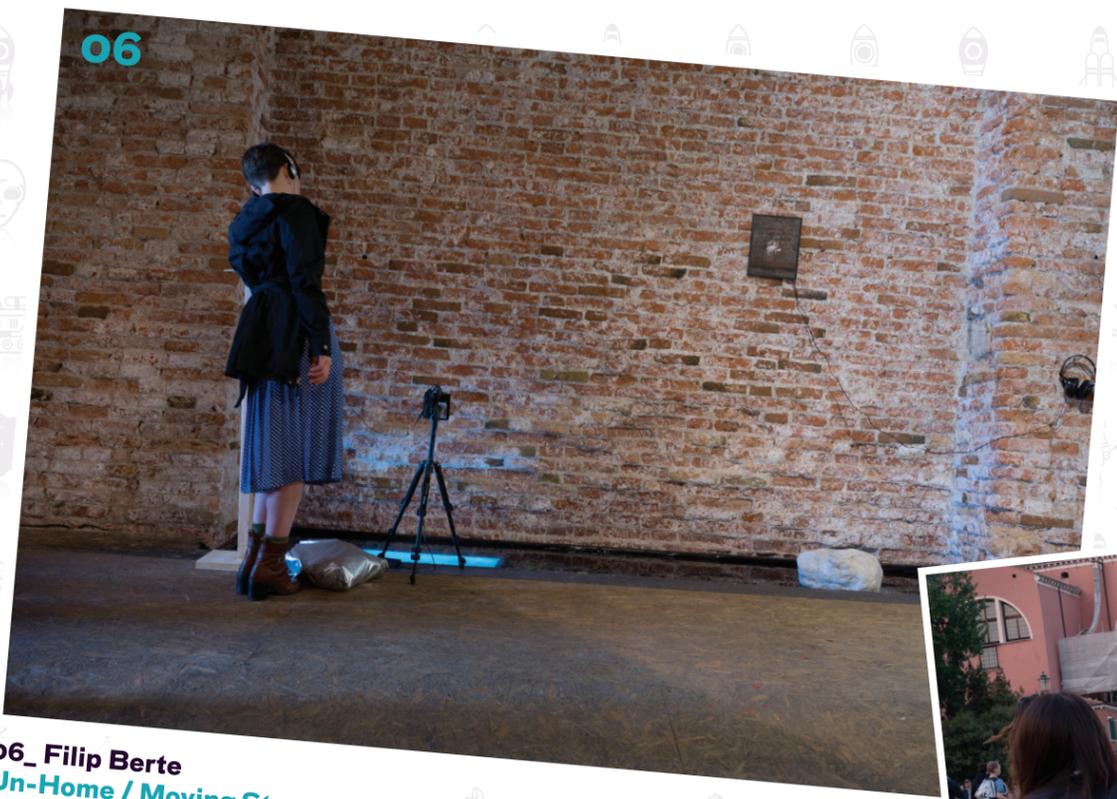
04_ Arquitecturas colectivas
Inter-action room (spatial installation)

An interactive installation that connects S.a.L.E. Docks with other places and projects that generate social cohesion and urban activism. Between 11:00 and 13:00 you could Skype with socio-artistic initiatives in Brussels and Istanbul to exchange ideas and share inspiration.



05

05_ Christian Bakalov
PURE / Pavillion of Social Interaction @ Giudecca
 Christian Bakalov, the inhabitants of Giudecca Island and the local cultural center CZ95 developed an interactive Pavilion where tactile exchange radically shifted your experience of the neighborhood.

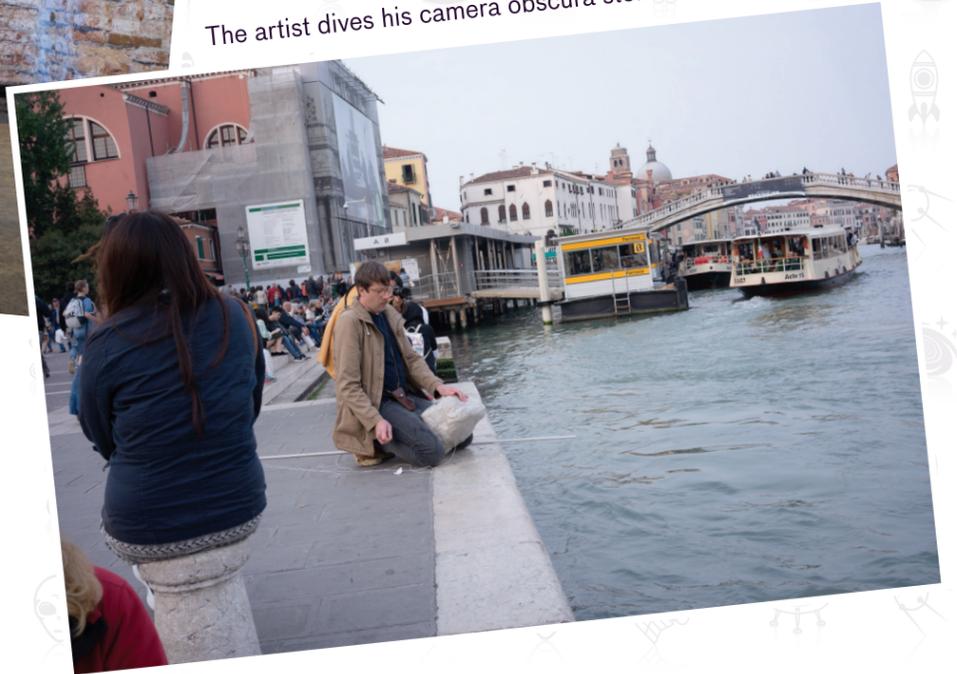


06_ Filip Berte

Un-Home / Moving Stones, Momentum IV (multimedia installation)

A photographic intervention with a camera obscura stone installing a "Moment of Reflection" at the banks of the Grand Canal, exactly where Pateh Sabally, a young Gambian man who was seeking asylum, tragically drowned while being watched, filmed and aggressively yelled at by onlookers.

07_ Filip Berte
Un-Home / Moving Stones, Momentum IV (multimedia installation)
 The artist dives his camera obscura stone in the Grand Canal.



08_ Federico Bonelli

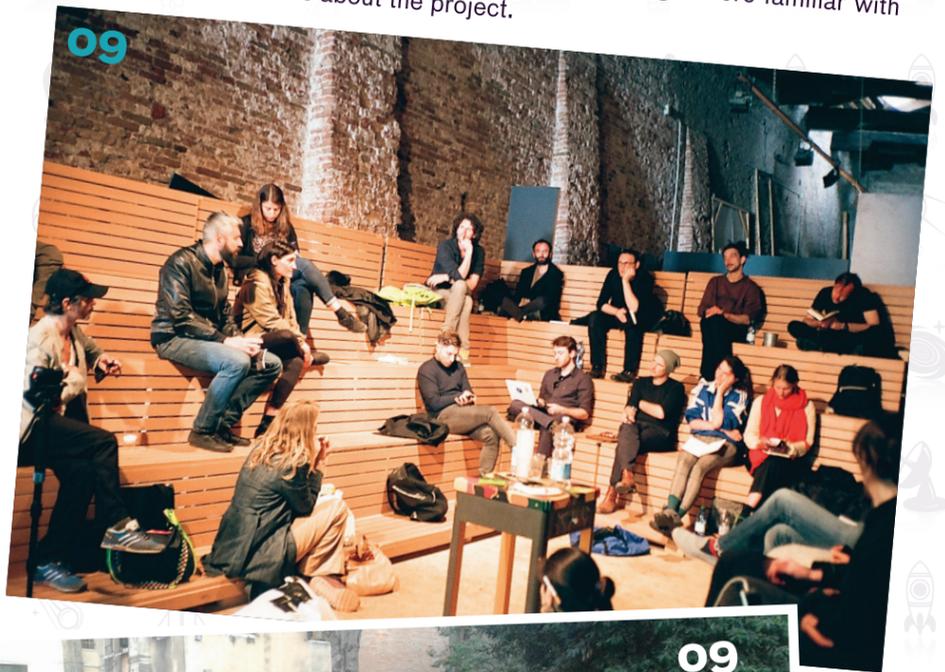
Le Grand Jeu (interactive game)

A table game that creates a situation where new narratives about the future of our society can be told, crafted, simulated and discussed in a positive and playful way.

09_ Dark Matter Games

Preliminary residency, 10-14 April 2017

Participating artists attended a four day residency to get more familiar with Venice and share ideas about the project.

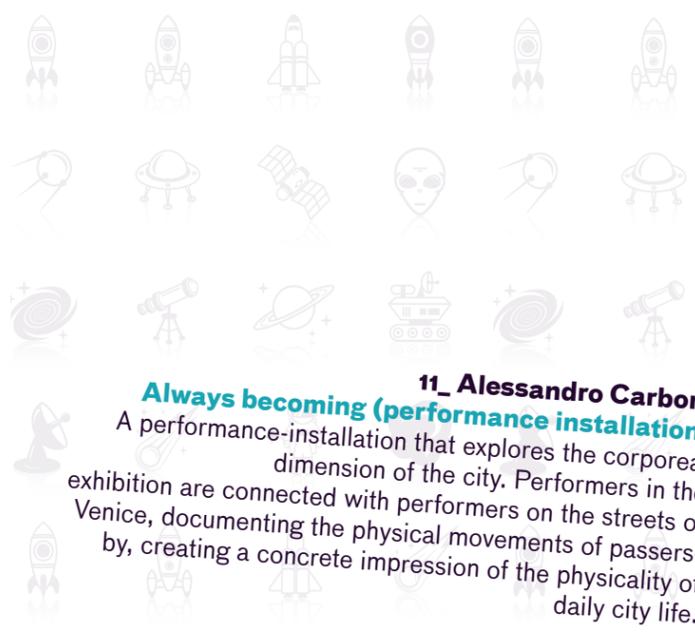


10_ Philip Janssens

White light, white heat (textile installation)

An installation piece made of woven pieces of reflective textile. In relation to the movement of its audience, the piece lights up, dims and reflects on the (in)visibility of social cohesion and relationalism.





11_ Alessandro Carboni

Always becoming (performance installation)

A performance-installation that explores the corporeal dimension of the city. Performers in the exhibition are connected with performers on the streets of Venice, documenting the physical movements of passers-by, creating a concrete impression of the physicality of daily city life.

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13_ Noah Fischer
DebtFair (wall sticker)

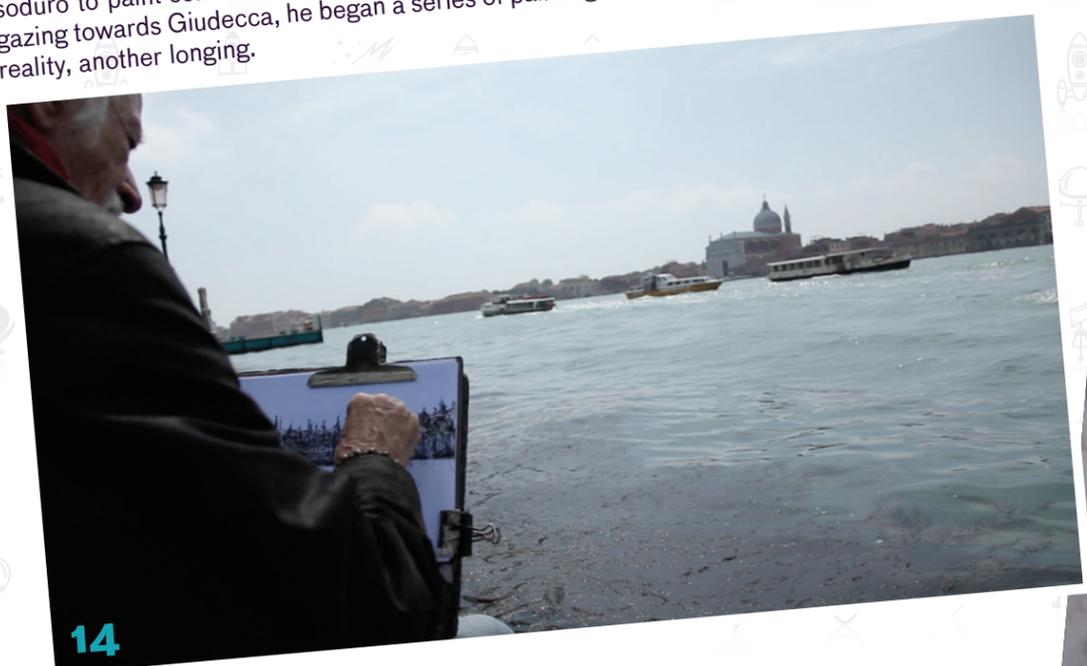
Debtfair is an ongoing artistic campaign to expose the relationship between economic inequality in the art market and artists' growing debt burdens. www.debtfair.org



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14_ Niko Hafkenschied & Valentina Stepanova
Untitled (public intervention)

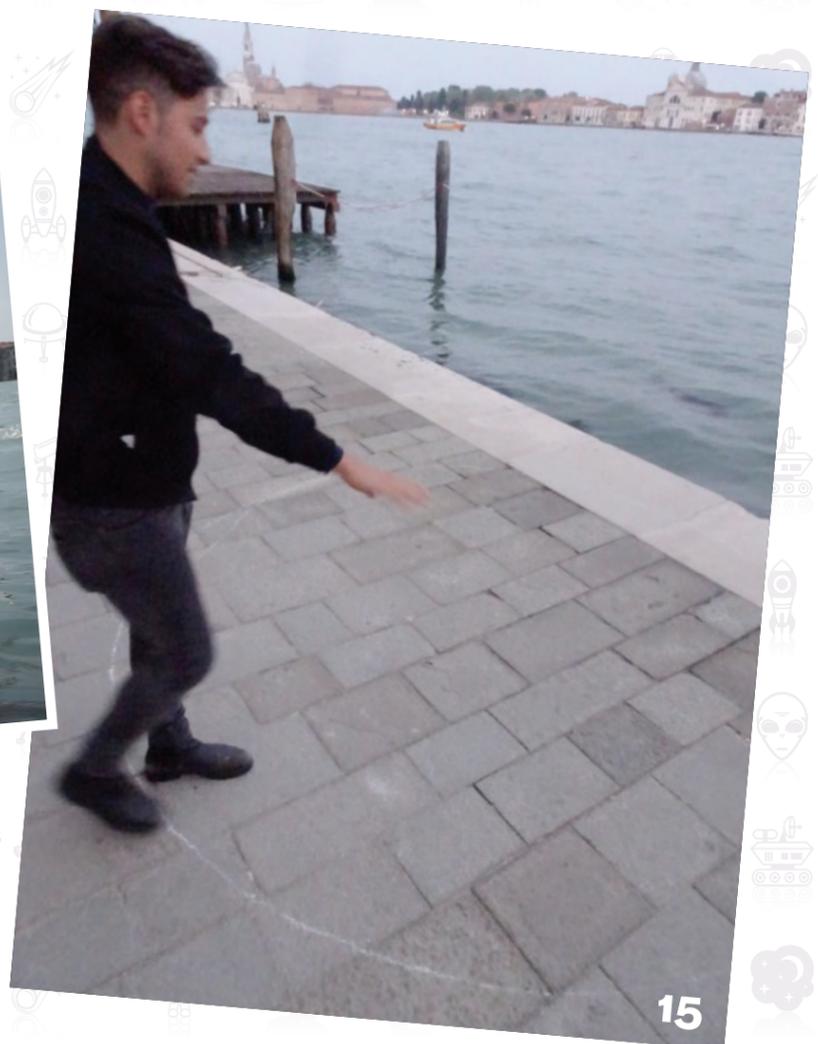
An old Venetian painter from San Marco Square, one of the many, came to the edge of Dorsoduro to paint something different for once. Looking out over the landmarks of the old town, gazing towards Giudecca, he began a series of paintings that reflected another horizon, another reality, another longing.



14

15_ Roel Heremans
Circle of Venice (public intervention)

A subtle public intervention where local people were invited to walk an imaginary circle in public space, creating an alternative and cyclical trajectory of our daily movement in the city.



15

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16_ Melih Kiraç
HAL (dance performance)

Melih performed a silent dance with a blank protest sign. A suggestive choreography that resonated the many contexts of social revolution in the world today.

17_ Tuur & Flup Marinus

How to... (posters & toad bag)

Tuur & Flup designed a series of cartoons that give the visitors of Venice tips on how to successfully survive the Biennale. These drawings invade the city in the form of a toad bag and a series of posters in public places.

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18_ Dark Matter Super Collider

Picture and poster sent by **artists/activists collective Macao** based in Milan.

19_ Diane Rabreau

Collaborative Tourist Office @ Ca' Bembo

The Collaborative Tourist Office uses the particularities of Google maps as the starting point for an alternative way of exploring the city and its lagoon, creating an alternative form of (fu)tourism, based on personal experiences related to unknown locations in Venice, news anecdotes and plural points of view.



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20_ Diane Rabreau

Collaborative Tourist Office @ Ca' Bembo

Departure of a boat trip to discover the southern part of the Venetian lagoon.



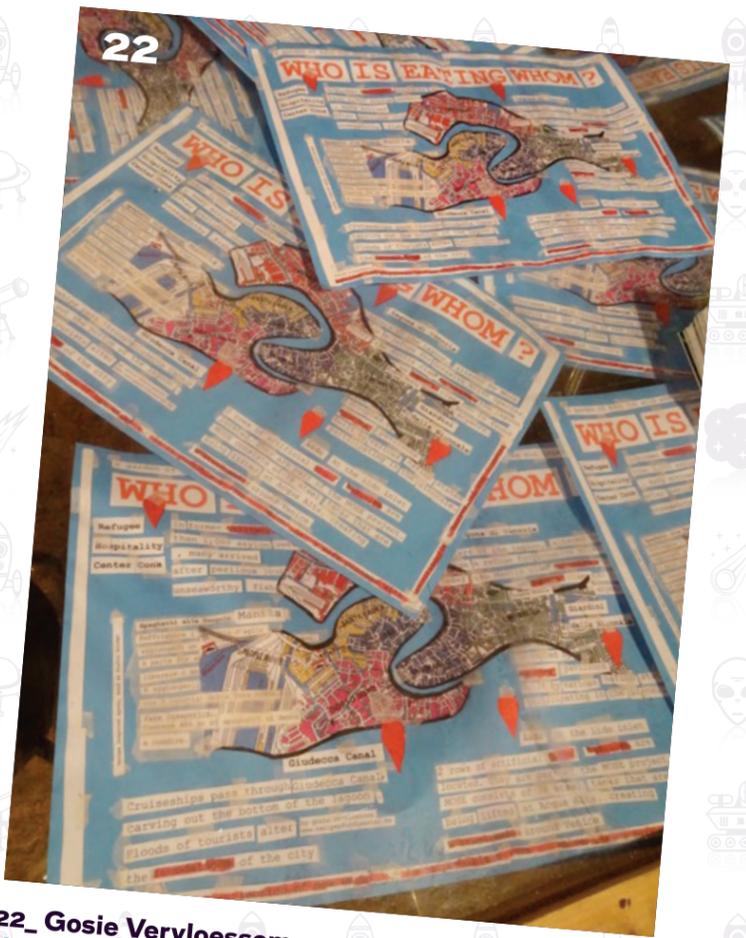
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21_ Dark Matter Games participants meet local activists at Le Casette, a social housing complex, where most of the buildings have been abandoned by the public authority organized as ASC - Assemblea Sociale per la Casa. They are now occupied by locals and students, autonomously organized as ASC - Assemblea Sociale per la Casa.

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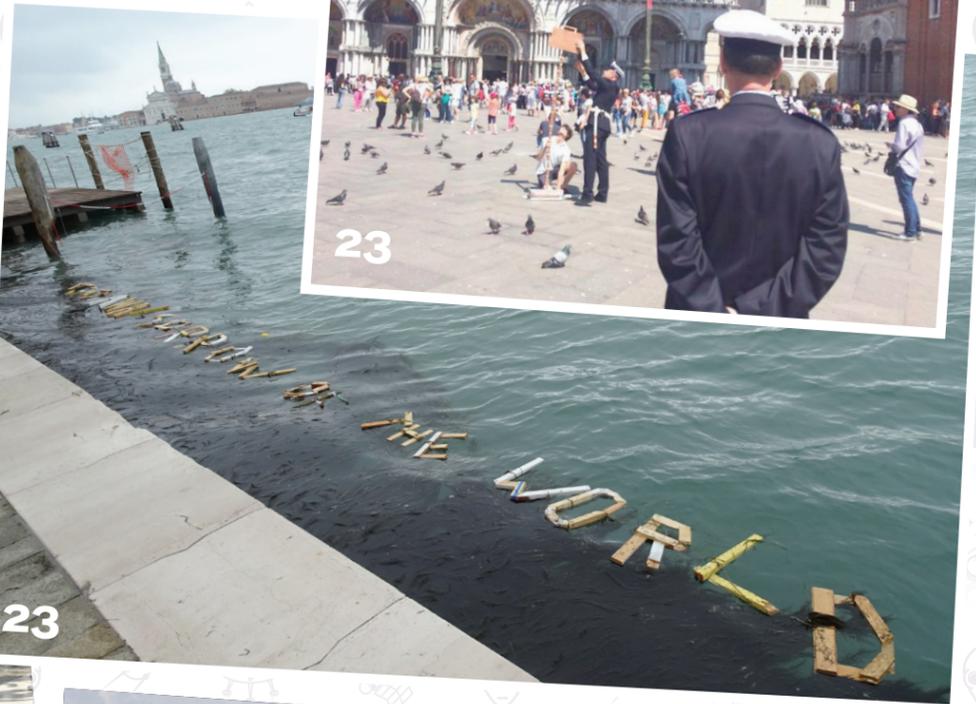


22_ Gosie Vervloessem
Who is eating whom (placemat)

The currents of worldwide migration come together in Venice, including millions of tourists and thousands of immigrants. Due to human intervention, the Venetian lagoon has become a garden of Eden for Invasive Alien Species. How do we deal with these and other invasive aliens that are currently invading "our native" habitats? This work is a place mat for restaurants and a handy map, suggesting a way of digesting Venice.

23_ Robbert & Frank
Go Away Sorrow of the World (floating sculpture)

Robbert & Frank developed a floating sculpture especially for the canals of Venice. "Go Away Sorrow Of The World" evokes the perhaps naive but shared hope of activists, artists and politicians worldwide.



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24_ Hans Andreas R.
Walk with Me (installation and intervention)

Hans showed a historical device that was used to frame and improve reality, a simple tool that came to be regarded as a kind of "artistic" eye. During his intervention, you were invited on a short walk outside to experiment with this way of seeing differently.

25_ Müge Yilmaz
The Water (performance intervention)

An intervention where unidentifiable creatures wandered the city through canals and on land. It evoked a reflection on visibility, invisibility and how we relate to the unknown - the other.



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**26_ Karl Van Welden
Homo Bulla (video)**

At several locations in Venice, a bubble filled with smoke appeared at irregular moments. A small, fragile and elusive event that offered a glimpse of poetry during daily life.

**28_ Melissa Mabesoone
Sticker game**

Melissa was inspired by Non Una di Meno, a local women's rights movement, during the workweek in April. She developed a small interactive game in the form of a series of stickers that invited the public to reflect on machismo.



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**27_ Mauro Sommavilla
B78 (sound installation)**

A sound-installation that reflects on the impact of the Biennale on the city of Venice, by cutting all the spoken text out of the film "Le vacanze intelligenti" by Alberto Sordi, generating a kind of room tone of its overall presence.

**29_ Einat Tuchman
Neighborhood performance**

While Dark Matter Games was happening in Venice, Einat organized a neighborhood party in Molenbeek, Brussels. More than 30 people from the neighborhood helped her organize the event by building the different spaces and initiating games, workshops, concerts, collective cooking. The visitors in S.a.L.E. Docks could Skype with her during the day.



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**30_ Stijn Demeulenaere
Latitudes (live soundscape)**

Stijn performed a live soundscape that merged field recordings from all over the world with various sounds of Venice. Sounds were juxtaposed, layered and confronted with one another. Out of this intermingling of sounds, Latitudes researched the sonic being of the world. An imaginative trip.

DARK MATTER GAMES

An Interview with Gregory Sholette, Kuba Szreder & Noah Fischer.

by Marco Baravalle (S.a.L.E. Docks)

From the 11th of May until the 15th, S.a.L.E. Docks, an independent and activist art centre in Venice, will host the Dark Matter Games.

The project is co-curated by S.a.L.E. Docks and Workspacebrussels.

Artists, activists and researchers animated a program of interventions in the public space, round-tables and activities that to respond to the urgency of focusing on the political economy of the contemporary art system, on the gender issues linked to it (issues of discrimination on one side, but also the emerging of powerful practices against any normativity on the other), on the effect of big art events on the urban space and, last but not least, on the need for creation of new models of cultural production that are autonomous from the neoliberal reason.

Here we publish three answers by three Dark Matter Games participants: Gregory Sholette, Kuba Szreder and Noah Fischer.

Gregory Sholette and Noah Fischer are New York based artists, the former suggested the metaphorical use of the term Dark Matter to describe the functioning of the art world, the latter will present DebtFair, a collective project by Occupy Museums that addresses the effects, the nature and the consequences of debt on the life and work of thousands of U.S. and Puerto Rican artists. The third interviewed is Kuba Szreder, Polish curator and researcher that co-curated the project of the Dark Matter Super Collider, an open call for the construction of a permanent collection of expressions of dark matter (activist, queer, unconventional...) creativity. Marco Baravalle, the interviewer, is a member of S.a.L.E.-Docks.

Marco Baravalle for Gregory Sholette: On May 12, in the context of Dark Matter Games you will launch your new book titled "Delirium and Resistance". Here you affirm that a new cultural economy emerged parallel to a new global political phase within these times of crisis, a phase marked by an apparent rupture with the neoliberal order (you mention both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as examples). You call this cultural economy the "bare art world". What do you mean and in what way this definition develops your previous reflection about dark matter?

Gregory Sholette: In my 2010 book *Dark Matter* I addressed the fascination that the arts held for neoliberal enterprise culture, arguing that this attraction was not entirely based on the "imaginative out-of-the-box thinking" or "restless flexibility" of cultural workers, qualities cited by most analysts for capitalism's cultural turn, but it also involved:

the way the art world as an aggregate economy successfully manages its own excessively surplus labor force, extracting value from a redundant majority of "failed" artists who in turn apparently

acquiesce to this disciplinary arrangement. There could be no better formula imaginable for capitalism 2.0 as it moves into the new century. **1**

Thus extrapolating from, but also not completely agreeing with Boltanski and Chiapello's "artistic critique" argument, in which capital appears to assimilate the social and affective aspects of art's Bohemian-inspired refutation of capital itself, I argued instead it was the extraction of value from a large surplus population that drew neoliberalism towards artistic production as much as, or more than any other social factor. **2**

This integration of art and capitalism is more than a new and inverted work ethic in other words. It brazenly illustrates capital's fundamental need for *constant expansion*, a process analogous to the unfettered compound growth that is inherent to all capitalist forms of economic organization. Simply put, capital, David Harvey writes, requires an ever-expanding output of social labor, "a zero-growth capitalist economy is a logical and exclusionary contradiction. It simply cannot exist. This is why zero growth defines a condition of crisis for capital." **3** But this process also means attempting to integrate the so-called dark matter or archival surplus agency marginalized by the mainstream art world system.

The concept of dark matter creativity focuses on three type of cultural producers with differing relationships to the disciplinary regulation of high art, including: **4** 1.) Professionally trained "pre-failed" art students whose academic education most likely emphasized subversive "avant-garde practices" while in reality preparing them to be part of an apparatus of reproduction in which the majority of artists serve the multi-billion dollar industry as museum-goers, magazine subscribers, art supply consumers, part-time art instructors or as poorly paid gallery assistants, art handlers, fabricators and so forth.

2.) Informal, amateur, "non-professional" zinesters, live action fantasy role-play gamers (LARP), "craftavists" knitters, devotees of Goth, Punk, and Do It Yourself (DIY) sub-cultures, fan filmmakers and cyber-geeks who are engaged with creative practices focused on pleasure, fantasy and networked communalism, and therefore seemingly in conflict with both the career artist as well as the work ethic of capitalism and its markets.

3.) A smaller number of artists and artist groups, both professional and also informal, who explicitly link their artistic practices to radical social or political transformation and therefore have traditionally been positioned at the outermost *margins* of the mainstream art world, its history and discourse, and most of all its political economy.

These three marginal forces resemble what astrophysicists describe as *dark matter* (and also *dark energy*): an gravitational force of unknown makeup that makes up as much as ninety-five per-

cent of the known universe. Without the weight of this missing mass" the visible cosmos would have dispersed into space long ago. Like its astronomical namesake, *creative dark matter* can be said to makes up the bulk of the artistic activity that is produced in contemporary societies.

However, this type of dark matter is invisible primarily to those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture – the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators and arts administrators. It includes makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices – all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world.

Yet, just as the astrophysical universe is dependent on its dark matter, so too is the art world dependent on its dark energy. This is a phenomenon sometimes called the "missing mass problem." **5**

The question my thesis asks therefore is this: if celestial dark matter is the principal anchor that slows down cosmic expansion, what role then do redundant artistic producers play in stabilizing the art world? All of these questions are compounded by the current state of the multi-billion dollar art world industry.

As the American based artist Caroline Woolard and member of the group bfa.mfa.phd asks with incredulity "What is a work of art in the age of \$120,000 art degrees?" **6**

Whether or not today post-Fordist capitalism now resembles art, or visa versa, virtually everything we thought we knew about "serious" culture has been peeled away with astonishing force, leaving behind a raw, and in some ways vulnerable thing. Today artists are simply another worker, no more or less. Following Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life we might best describe this new *mise en scène* as simply "bare art." It is a new cultural reality in which art's celebrated autonomy and exceptionality have vanished, and in which artistic production has become fully congruent with the political and economic emergency that marks our contemporaneous present. Claustrophobic, tautological, our bare art world is our bare art world is our bare art world. It emerges in successive and accelerating predicaments that keep pace with capital's ever-quickening swerves from crisis to crisis. But this does not mean all artists like it, or that all are willing to yield to the harsh realities bare art imposes on their practice or their lives.

What I believe we are witnessing under these conditions of bare art is also happening within the ongoing capitalist crises more broadly.

It is capital's aggregating compulsion in overdrive. Our world – both art and everyday world- is evolving into an accelerating demand-machine that seeks to extricate ever more marginal and dispersed gains from an expanding pool of widely distributed participants including indebted art students, underpaid cultural workers, unpaid artists and interns,

as well as the innumerable networked contributors, with or without credentials, who assist in reproducing an increasingly bare art world.

Yet it is here that we glimpse the danger capital brings onto itself by subsuming such non-productive, creative labor.

For if the latest iteration of system failure has left art naked, with no clear way of restarting the old narrative about art as an autonomous sphere of ideas and creativity no matter how entangled its system is with the marketplace, then this rupture also reveals a significant negation at work for all to see. Because once art's mimetic non-productivity is subsumed within capital its real threat materializes: *art becomes the single most conspicuous demonstration of capital's delirious con game.*

And clearly a growing number of previously invisible cultural producers have begun to see themselves as a hazardous category that is capable of operating in and for itself as the social nature of art is unavoidably made visible. Like some weird redundant agency, this no-longer dark matter creativity is at once commonplace – the art fabricators, handlers, installers whose own art practice always takes a back seat – and simultaneously bristling with a profound potential for positive change as well as an unpredictable and deep-seated sense of resentment.

Therefore as much as the condition of bare art yields predatory behavior and panic, so too does it give birth to "bad deeds" in the form of boycotts, strikes, occupations and demands for equality. And here, in a nutshell, sits the delirious potential of dark matter in a bare art world. A fully cognizant and ultra-accelerated dark matter agency inevitably questions who is supposed to fabricate the art projects of the art world's successful 1%? Who will be disciplined into subsidizing museums and conferences and industry journals? Who would be expected to teach the next generation of dark matter surplus artists? *It will not be us* this shadow agency responds, not under current conditions of the art world's hierarchies and its system of value extraction.

In the world in which we live what was previously (and perhaps in some instances thankfully) hidden from sight now becomes painfully manifest in the bare art world, for both better, and for worse.

Marco Baravalle for Kuba Szreder: You recently focused your attention on the existence of different art worlds beyond the one characterized by the gallery-exhibition nexus.

I'm particularly interested in knowing on what premises these other art worlds are based. Do you think that ontologically is really possible to define a zone completely outside the

1 Sholette, *Dark Matter*, 134.

2 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, 2007. However, not all observers agree. For example, Art historian Karen Van Den Berg stresses post-Fordism misappropriates the concept of artistic labor production by denying any difference between autonomous art practices and capitalist labor, an argument she and Ursula Pasero explore in *Art Production Beyond the Art Market?* California: Ram Publications, 2014.

3 David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, 2014, 232.

4 See Chapter 3.2 "Dark Matter: Activist Art and the Counter-public Sphere," as well as the book *Dark Matter*, 2010, op cite.

5 The term used by some scientists to describe the solution dark matter and dark energy brings to the standard model of cosmic formation. See "The Mystery Of The Missing Mass," National Aeronautics and Space Administration website, USA: <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-466/ch22.htm>

6 BFAMFAPhd/Caroline Woolard, "Pedagogies of Payment", *The Enemy*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014: <http://theenemyreader.org/pedagogies-of-payment>

neoliberal devices of valorization? Especially when these devices have proven to be various and not limited to the aforementioned nexus. And finally, is the dark matter super collider an attempt to create a space of visibility for the creative power of the dark matter? How should this accelerator work? And at the end, what is it and how does the Dark Matter Super Collider works?

I will respond with a question - how would you locate activities of such groups like S.a.L.E. Docks, Macao, Isola or countless other independent art centres in relation to the institutions composing art market and their business models?

The theory of art worlds, first coined by an American sociologist Howard Becker in 1984, and recently picked up by such action research projects like Plausible Art Worlds (Basekamp & friends), provides a viable intellectual framework for understanding the ground operations of such alternative, artistic systems.

To explain this in a language of operaismo, one can hark back to Antonio Negri and his concepts of art of the multitudes as a form of action/imagination aimed at rebuilding our social world and building new ones. Another useful concept is self-valorisation of artistic labour.

This is really at stake here - do you really need apparatuses of evaluation embedded in emptied out, speculative biennale-fairs circuit, in order to feel positively valorised as a creative labourer? Obviously, these apparatuses do have their pull, and also are exploitative by nature. Coming back to our question, the term "world", especially in plural, sounds controversial. People tend to deride this term as an idealistic theory of alternative universes, supposedly located both outside capitalism and separated from the dominant sectors of art industry (which is far too often simply conflated with neoliberal capitalism per se).

But "art worlds", sociologically speaking, are defined as networks of social cooperation, with their own division of labour and value systems, which enable creation and distribution of what people call "art". So for example, when S.a.L.E. organizes a protest in which you make use of radical creativity, which have a mixed status of art and action, you do it by mobilizing labour, attention and resources in way differing from what happens in the gallery-exhibition nexus. If such activities are not a one off event, they tend to build up into a social pattern, which Becker proposes to call an art world.

In this way, S.a.L.E., Isola or Macao constitute what Stephen Wright calls as "art sustaining environment". Basically, these art worlds are not separated and localized, but also intersect globally, in a network of affinities and alliances.

They constitute value-systems with their own distinctive aesthetic concepts and even ontologies, alternative or even conflicting to the value-systems operational for the gallery-exhibition nexus. Just think about it - people tend to make use of the word "art" to denote many differing things - on the one hand we call as art twenty meters high bronze sculpture which look like a tacky B-movie set design, like the recent line of Hirst-labeled- commodities, on the other we have such actions like Precarious Workers Pageant, which harks back to politicized aesthetics of avantgardes. The problem is that far too often we decry some of the hybrid activities (which happen on the one to one scale of artistic performance as social action) as "just art", using blanket definition of blue chip art as the only possible and imaginable art.

The theory of art sustaining environments (art worlds) tries to deal with this slippage. To repeat - it is about modes of self-valorisation, imagined as an expression of living labour, as art of the multitudes, as a creative surplus, which exceeds exponentially what is defined as an artistic commodity by the market-related art world. Interestingly, the speculative and self-referential tendencies of the blue chip gallery nexus undermine its own systems of valorisation.

In what Greg Sholette calls as "bare art world", one does not need to pretend that art differs from a luxury commodity. Not surprising that art thus defined and peddled is so repetitive and utterly degraded. One needs to remember that markets mark the things marketed through them, like Neil Cummings like to say.

In other words, art worlds do have some ontological effects.

Things produced as art in different economic systems are tainted by the systems by which they are produced and distributed. They are coloured by political intentions and radical economies of S.a.L.E. or Macao, or flattened by price tags attached to them in blue chip systems (as the market marks the minds of people thus marketed). There is another element in your question - about the general, totalizing framework of neoliberal capitalism. Just to make it clear.

Every social world, including every art world down there, is currently located inside and framed by the global, capitalist world-system. Dominating art worlds are dominating because they ride capital flows and maintain social hierarchies based on huge disparities of wealth and status. That's why they are dominating. The members of radically politicized art worlds do struggle precisely against these tendencies, with which the gallery-exhibition nexus is integrated. Art labourers populating these art worlds might be exploited by various sectors of capitalist economy (from housing to labour to educational markets), depending very much on their positions in the global system (f.e. for people in mainland Europe student debt is not such an issue as it clearly is for our American colleagues). One also needs to take into account global disparities in wealth, and North-South divide. It is much easier to make art and mobilize free labour and resources when one lives in Brussels than when one lives in Kinshasa, in New York and not in Kabul - and this disparity is a defining element in the emergence of art worlds.

The concepts such as bare art world, art incorporated or art factory, are well tuned to emphasize links between art worlds and global capitalism.

The problem is that - in my opinion - they tend to be too generalist and might for example conflate a particular, localized iteration of dominant art worlds with the art world in general. I do not think that our art worlds look, operate or exploit in a precisely same manner nevertheless if we are in London, New York, Warsaw or Milano.

Even in Venice, there are huge differences between what happens in Giardini, in Hirst exhibition, and in S.a.L.E..

It does not mean that there is no exploitation or inequality or wars for dominance. On the contrary. But we need much more grounded theory of apparatuses and mechanisms of exploitation, struggles for distinction and emancipation - in order to deal with them appropriately. These apparatuses and nexuses are transversal, they run across differing social worlds, enabling exploitation of many by the few. We need a kind of string theory of artistic universe, which would support both our understanding

and our struggles against the dominance of capital both in economy, politics, and arts. And the Dark Matter Collider is such an exercise in struggle for self-valorisation of artistic, of living labour, of art of the multitudes, which always flows underneath, through and beyond a white box called "just art".

Marco Baravalle for Noah Fischer: Together with the Occupy Museums collective you recently presented the DebtFair project at the Whitney Biennial in New York City.

Could you briefly explain what is DebtFair and could you please tell us how do you evaluate its impact within such an institutional framework and major artevent?

The impression was that in the aftermath of Trump's election even some very institutional parts of the art world were mobilized, taking part in demonstrations and protests. After 100 days what is the state of the art? Beyond the initial shock, what about important issues such as debt, race and gender? Are they gaining visibility within the art debate? Are they fuelling cases of self-organizing? In 2011 and soon after, Occupy Museums's direct actions continually clashed with museums from a movement-oriented position that primarily saw them as leverage-points onto a larger undemocratic system ruled by capital. Since this system needed to be called out, and its spaces democratized and revolutionized museums looked like accessible 1% sites that were more penetrable than Goldman Sachs. For years we operated outside rather than from a critical position inside the Art World. However, when the movement wound down, both our community and our practice became more narrowly art-focused. Our project Debtfair at the Whitney Biennial is an outcome of this transformation of our group and of history.

It also begins to address the question of how to politicize the atomized community of artists rather than simply hitting the big art institutions. Debtfair was also quite a personal project for me. During years of planning direct actions with Occupy Museums, I would continually return to my studio and here was a conundrum.

I knew that studio art practice and art objects hold value but the actions against art institutions had radically altered how I understood this economy.

On one hand there is therapeutic, intuitive value in art practice; its an activity in which the end- result- the artwork- may even embody a personal way of seeing, even a personal political understanding—as any other format cannot, clearly that is valuable. But can you square this with a fully transactional system? It seemed that objects when installed in most white box art spaces were fully captured by the game of capital.

Most people know this and think its only about the art market-- the speculative potential for sales and the creation of an art asset class as common measure of success (or more likely measure of failure). However the capture of art into financialization—runs much deeper—most artist's time is literally under a kind of financial control via personal debts paid as price of entry into the art world. Occupy Museums did a study of this year's Whitney Biennial for example—As far as we know, 100% of the artists went to college and most went to grad school and a large portion went to the best art schools. Most top art schools have the highest tuition of all colleges in the US, so all this education means debt but artists don't pay debt back very effectively, so we stay in debt permanently and this is one way art itself becomes a subject of financial control.

This isn't a conundrum that one could easily avoid. It doesn't solve it to run away from the studio.

I was always thinking that for the Left to give up the whole idea of art object creation to the hyper-capitalists in favor of political direct actions or community projects would be the definition of true defeat as if we have no right to the value of making (or enjoying) artworks.

So Debtfair came out of this sort of personal conundrum as an artist who had largely left the studio for the park.

I tried to model a system for artists to shift the potential value of art from speculative to sustainable, proposing a kind of art-currency to trade art objects directly against personal debts. Then I realized this has to be a community project and brought the idea to Occupy Museums members and we decided to bundle artists together and do the whole system collectively just as debts themselves as bundled. Just before this, an OWS group called Strike Debt had initiated their Rolling Jubilee project which seemed to create a mini debt-bailout economy.

We developed the Debtfair exchange system for a few years-at first it was based on trying to rethink how an art sale could work. Then we realized we needed to first create a new way to see the artworks—how can you see the invisible debt behind artwork? We would issue an open call for artists in debt, and then organize the participating artists based on their banks.

So you have for example a bundle of JP Morgan Chase artists with a debt of ten million and so on. We decided to install these bundles inside of the gallery or museum walls rather than on top of the walls.

We were invited to stage a Debtfair exhibition in Art League Houston and this led to public debates about debt and responsibility. That seemed like a necessary first level of consciousness toward organizing around debt resistance in the art world.

Then, last Spring, the Whitney Museum got interested in Debtfair. Most often in the US, Occupy Museums prefers to work with museums from an uninvited position- that is how we retain full agency for our actions and push campaigns as far as needed.

However, exhibiting in a museum like the Whitney which is intimately tied into hedge funds and real estate mega-companies through their trustees and corporate sponsors wasn't a problem for us in this case. We had in fact designed Debtfair as a kind of Trojan Horse—a machine to reflect back on the visibility system of the museum itself. Debtfair meant bringing "Dark Matter artists" into a bright space as a lens to reflect on the overall value and selection system. The museum accommodated our project and we felt that they understood it.

In the middle of the process, Trump was elected. Perhaps the least among the many painful outcomes, it changed the political calculation of Debtfair because the project

was aimed more at a Clinton Presidency where Neoliberalism could be on full view and targeted. In fact, we had found a specific target: a corporation called BlackRock which is an asset manager at a scale of 5.1 trillion. Much bigger than any bank, BlackRock was like the death star that connected all the types of debt situations American artists might find themselves in: from the colonial debts of Puerto Rico to student debt and credit card or medical debt.

All this debt was traded by Blackrock and its CEO, Larry Fink (who is a trustee of MoMA) was talked about as Clinton's treasure secretary. But then the Trump bomb fell and all of a sudden the neoliberals

rals became the protectors of the “sanctuary cities” rather than our corporate enemies from 2011.

As the inauguration approached in a form that looked Fascist it appeared politically strategic to create a large coalition in the arts—a blend of all the left groups and even neoliberal institutions that were willing.

Many museums in New York such as MoMA and Met were officially silent. Some others such as Queens Museum, which serves a large immigrant population, were mobilizing very directly to protect their workforce and take on a resistance role. I called up the Whitney curators and discussed Occupy Museums hosting a Counter-Inauguration centering the voices of radical arts activist community at the museum. This was quickly organized as part of the #J20 art strike (or resistance events) around the country. The overall mobilizing against the inauguration as well as the successful Airport protests that pushed back Trump’s anti-immigrant legislation created a feeling that the culture was shifting to one of sustained resistance. Currently however, we seem to be in a lull but in any case we have a long-term problem and need long term solutions.

When Trump was elected networks began to form. Now there are networks

between institutions based on defining and supporting sanctuary spaces. There are networks of academics like “Art Professors of America” preparing to defend both their students and themselves from right wing attacks.

Most of the work I have carried out in the last years—in New York and in Europe (for example the occupation of Guggenheim Venice in 2015) came as a result of the 2011 Occupy/Arab Spring/M15 networks. Effective resistance completely depends on them. But online networks provide structure, not content and here is where the challenge for the Left lies. Occupy Museums experience trying to highlight the politics of debt at the Whitney Biennial so far shows that organizing around debt and class is much more difficult in the art world of the Trump Era. Or at least, it’s more difficult to make such politics go viral. As everyone knows, the race debate around “Open Casket” achieved historic levels of traction. Before that, the event we organized for J20 seemed to resonate as well and people can and do rally against some of Trump’s more violent policies.

We don’t seem to have a very effective language, attention, or energy reserve currently to respond to the takeover of all levers of power by a group of billio-

naires and the system that continues to concentrate their capital. However, part of the problem I think has to do with the way that art activism has over-aligned itself with the feedback loops of news media which are so highly influenced by the algorithms of Facebook and Twitter: a problem which was laid bare in the US election. This makes it incredibly hard to parse what kind of organizing is truly effective in the long run from what is simply sparking people’s momentary

need for outrage. We are trying to take a long term view with DebtFair. Occupy Museums is focused a platform to expose the transfiguration of art by financial power in the arts because its grip keeps tightening. We see sharply increasing debts and the boom of luxury real estate and rent prices in “sanctuary cities.” This means that such spaces to be continually less safe, there’s really nowhere to run. Now and in the future we have to organize and fight.



Venice Biennale – meet the activists repurposing the global art show * Italy’s prime tourist destination is home to a surprisingly active autonomous cultural network working to subvert the neoliberal forces that have ravaged the city.

by **Gregory Sholette**

Venice, Italy is not the first place that comes to mind when the phrase rebel cities is invoked. More likely associations include vacation capital of Europe, or home of the world’s oldest global art biennial. Nonetheless, a flourishing, independent cultural scene exists around the margins of the tourist-choked city, its network operating in locations that most visitors and art world audiences never visit, or simply overlook. Chief among these self-organized cultural spaces is S.a.L.E Docks on the Fondamenta delle Zattere at the tip of Dorsoduro. Not far away is the Garden of Ca’ Bembo, a small, verdant park that students from the University of Venice have occupied since 2014.

Across the canal, a block called “Casette”, on the island of Giudecca, hosts the ASC, a Social Assembly For Housing that organizes the occupation of empty public apartments in a city where real estate price is out of control, and where the flight of inhabitants is a plague.

Another popular neighborhood, Castello, is home to Morion, the oldest autonomous squat in town, participants trade shifts making pizza and serving drinks while the space hosts live music and is one of the activist engines of the struggle against big cruise ships (more about this below). S.a.L.E Docks’ network expands beyond Venice too, the Milan based art-activist collective of Macao, for example, appears as one of its regular collaborators.

As Marco Baravalle, a co-founder of S.a.L.E Docks puts it, these spaces were founded through the squatted occupation of unused buildings, often by the very same “creatives” that Venice seeks to attract as its entrepreneurial workforce. As

we know from other global cities, armies of artists, designers, architects and university students serve to reproduce the creative city paradigm through precarious labor including unpaid internships. But in 2007 a group of far more politicized cultural workers gathered together, determined to rebel. They decided to squat one of the city’s nine large and unused salt warehouses. As Baravalle explains: “the idea of occupying a space in town came after a collective analysis of a transition of the productive model that affected the city and became quite visible at the half of the first decade of the millennium. We described it as a shift from the ‘museum city’ or the ‘città d’arte’ to the ‘creative city’ or the ‘city of the contemporary.’”

“A shift from the ‘museum city’ or the ‘città d’arte’ to the ‘creative city’ or the ‘city of the contemporary.’”

Baravalle points out that Venice, unlike London or Berlin, is not fully running off of its creative economy. Instead, what local creatives generate is symbolic capital necessary for a city that primarily profits from its fabled association with Western high-culture. Perhaps the most conspicuous and unsettling evidence of this link between capitalizing one’s historical treasures and modern municipal financial interests is the startling presence of 96,000 ton cruise ships navigating through the city’s Giudecca Canal and crammed full of tourists.

Not only do these bloated party boats damage the fragile ecosystem of canals and lagoon, they amplify the human presence in this relatively small city so that while Venice now has only 54,000 actual



“Gregory Sholette, Eyeball Project, 2017”

residents, the annual tourist population explodes to 30 million, a number that is more than 500 times larger. The S.a.L.E Docks collective and its network of participants have engaged in direct protest action against these ships, even on one occasion attempting to block their passage with a rag-tag flotilla of small craft, inflatables and home-made rafts.

Significantly, S.a.L.E Docks does not delude itself regarding the interwoven cultural economy of the city. On the contrary,

inside the cave-like 14th Century warehouse the group has constructed a series of temporary exhibitions, a woodshop, bar and meeting space by imaginatively repurposing left-over materials recycled from the Venice Biennial itself. Indeed, in a city such as Venice, it would be virtually impossible for a culturally oriented project to imagine itself fully autonomous from the art world: what matters is the nature of that relationship. As Baravalle comments, “these very contradictions represent S.a.L.E Docks field of intervention.”



**“Gregory Sholette,
\$rump Ahab, 2017”**

“What matters is the nature of the relationship between culturally oriented project and the art world.”

S.a.L.E is only a short stroll from such mainstream Venetian art attractions as Gallerie dell'Accademia and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Still, S.a.L.E's very presence defies neoliberal models of the so-called creative city in so far as the space and its supporters maintain a critical distance from the city's cultural tourism. But when the global art world descends on Venice every two years it simply represents too big a target to ignore.

At the opening of the 56th Biennale in May of 2015 S.a.L.E joined forces with a faction of the Gulf Labor group in order to stage a marine landing and occupation of the Guggenheim facility.

The allied operation aimed to pressure the museum's corporate board of directors in New York to guarantee decent working conditions and fair wages for immigrant laborers building the new Guggenheim on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

This spring S.a.L.E worked in collaboration with Warsaw-based theorist Kuba Szreder to launch a different type of art world critique to coincide with the 57th Biennale.

The project known as Dark Matter Games (DMG) is “a living collection of creative surplus flourishing beyond, across, and underneath the art industry.”

That “surplus” consisted of “antifascist struggles, gender rights demos, anti-gentrification occupations, fair labor campaigns, environmental justice projects, racial, sexual and indigenous peoples' interventions and all such strategies for equality.” In other words, DMG seeks to map just about everything that the official Biennale does not, and likely never will.

“The multi-million Euro operation would have to fundamentally invert itself in order to truly confront the inherent 1% aesthetic.”

Yes, it is true that curator Okui Enwezor pushed the envelope as far as possible these days with his 56th Venice Biennial “All the World's Futures,” even inviting Gulf Labor to his program.

And yes, this year the 57th Biennale presents works Rashed Araeen, Bonnie Ora Sherk, and The Play amongst other previously overlooked artists and artists' groups.

Ultimately, however, the multi-million Euro operation that attracts the world's top gallerists, collectors, curators, auctioneers and museum directors along with representatives of the global super-wealth would have to fundamentally invert itself

in order to truly confront the inherent 1% aesthetic that grounds the very logic of the Venice Biennial and similar high-cultural extravaganzas.

Now, in full disclosure, S.a.L.E Docks' DMG project draws directly upon my own writings (and I was also compensated as a consultant on the project).

Still, my involvement is not what is key to this report, which focuses on the remarkable survival of culturally critical practices within the very heart of the “city of the contemporary.”

Nor is S.a.L.E alone in this campaign.

At the nearby Garden of Ca'Bembo several artists organized a sort of mock art pavilion that honors Native Americans, a group, or perhaps nation with no official presence in the official Biennale. Zuecca Projects, a local non-profit, artists Oscar Tuazon and Nicholas Galanin constructed a Longhouse of the type indigenous tribes have built for centuries in the Pacific Northwest region of America.

Built from oak posts salvaged out of the lagoon the work also pays tribute to the Standing Rock Water Protectors in North Dakota who have so far successfully prevented an oil pipeline from being located on their land.

Artist Tuazon even participated in these pro-environmental protests across the pond.

The link is obvious between the Native American struggle over land and water rights, and the battle to save Venice from its own creative economy imaginary, with the processes of repurposing material at the center of that endeavor.

And the goal? As Baravalle asserts, we need to build “a critical participation, a model of working collectively that [is] free and horizontal and at the same time not neutral, concretely in contrast and alternative to the neoliberal model of the art institutions of the city.”

For at the end of the day, it's not capital's idea of a creative city that we are in desperate need to establish. And yet the components needed for our counter-paradigm will need to be actively recycled out of existing realities. S.a.L.E Docks and its network of independent Venetian cultural spaces embody a powerful and expandable prototype for this urgent project.

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The potential of difference co-existing

an interview with Marnix Rummens by Jasper Delbeque

WHAT IS WORKSPACE BRUSSELS AND WHAT DIRECTION HAVE YOU BEEN PURSUING IN RECENT YEARS?

When I started working three years ago at Workspacebrussels (WSB), it was mainly a disciplinary workspace that operated within the classical network of performing arts centres and festivals. Founded by some large production houses such as Kaaitheater and Rosas, the focus was on the creation of individual, autonomous works for the black box. Today, WSB is an outspoken multidisciplinary workspace, with a wide transversal network.

We examine how the meeting of various disciplines such as performance, dance, visual arts, video, music, body practices, architecture and so on, can lead to new artistic formats that complement existing practices and involve diverse audiences in other contexts.

Artists' practices are so much more diverse than the work that eventually finds its way into regular arts centres. In the lead-up to making a work for the black box, many artists are doing research which shows very interesting alternative formats, such as mobile viewing boxes, one-on-one parcours, interactive installations, video work, city explorations, audio installations, body practices, publications, visual art works, etc. Artists have a lot of ideas around these things, but it is difficult to pursue them within the current sector, because the know-how is not always present. At the same time, the market for classical black box work is under a lot of pressure. Audience growth is stagnating, there is a certain feeling of overproduction, and international networks are certainly decreasing. But with these alternative formats you can create other ways of engagement, reach very different audiences, in very different contexts. This way, you can address complementary networks, and so the artist will receive feedback from very different audiences during the conception process, not just from insiders. This approach can really contribute to the exchange and involvement of the public at the level of both creation and presentation.

SO FROM HERE WORKSPACEBRUSSELS HAS BEEN TRANSFORMING ITSELF?

This happened very organically. By increasing the diversity within artistic practices, you generate automatically a more diverse group of artists. This creates an important dynamic because the exchange between people with different backgrounds is so much more rich.

At the same time, we are focusing more on contextual residencies next to the conventional infrastructural residencies. Much of the new work is participatory in one way or another, and can only be developed in exchange with a public, rather than in an isolated dance studio. Gradually we started to develop a transversal partner network where artists could test their work, ranging from parks like

Parckfarm, urban meeting places like Recyclart and Halles St-Géry, museums such as M HKA, and SMAK, as well as bars, schools, retirement homes, refugee centres, or even in the streets. And that has brought about a tremendous dynamism, which is an added value for both the artist and the public, I think. People in the arts field sometimes complain about the disinterest of the public. But this has to do with the monotony of what we are offering. Many people do not come to the theatre not only because of what is being offered, but also because of the intrinsic format and the codes, the fact that you sit in the dark for an hour and then applaud, etc. I really believe that you can greatly strengthen the social embedding of art by broadening the diversity of forms and contexts.

IS THAT THE PHILOSOPHY THAT LIES AT THE ROOT OF DARK MATTER GAMES?

It never starts with a philosophy, that always comes afterwards. That's the beauty of WSB. **We're not delimited by a building, a calibrated infrastructure, or a certain philosophy. It is an enormous privilege to be able to follow artists purely based on their trajectory, without the precondition that the work must fit within a calibrated scheme.** You start working with a number of people where you feel that it is not only meaningful to the artist, but also a positive addition to the sector and to society in general. And from their practice, you start to see what makes sense. If a tactile body practice like Christian Bakalov's Pure seems suitable for the elderly or for children, then you find some contacts to try it out. If during a brainstorming you suddenly see the work of Gosie Vervloessem in a park, you look for one and try it out. The conception of Dark Matter Games (DMG) is very similar. The project was created very organically, through a collaboration with Roberta Da Soller, an Italian artist who first applied three years ago for a residency with WSB and who eventually did three residencies with us. Through this trajectory, she came into contact with many other WSB artists. She was charmed by the varied mixture of alternative formats, and suggested we do something together in S.a.L.E. docks, a space for art and activism in Venice. Soon, we had the idea to work in dialogue with the Venice Biennale, which generated not only a good visibility, but also an interesting contrast between our way of working and that one of the biggest art events in the world. She then came up with the wonderful title Dark Matter Games, which comes from the book by the same name of Gregory Sholette, an artist and activist from New York, who is also involved in the project, and has a keen vision of the distribution of power and visibility within the art world. Let's say that in Venice, the tip of the iceberg is shown: the most successful artists, the most lucrative art objects in predominantly recognizable disciplines. But below this tip floats a broad base of young, hybrid, research-based artist practices who are hidden

deep beneath the waterline. Although this hidden and unbridled creativity is essential to the top -it inspires the most visible practices- at the same time it often remains underexposed. The idea of DMG was: what if we bring the diversity of that base into the light, sprinkling it like coloured sprinkles on top of the iceberg? In the conventional circuit, we have a very specific way of conceiving art. It is seen as an object, a commodity, must be mobile, and often ignores its immediate surroundings. Many of the practices by Dark Matter artists are created by exchange between disciplines, between the artist and the environment, and deliver an artistic product that is completely unsellable, but which can generate a different value. They propose other ways to formulate themes and content. But also those more direct forms of engagement are an important part of that.

HOW DID THE WORK PROCEED IN PRACTICE?

Both S.a.L.E. Docks and WSB invited a group of some 20 artists and art workers to Venice for a work week in April, followed by a festival week in May. There, we were able to learn about each other and the context. Thanks to S.a.L.E. Docks, we were really able to connect with the local, socio-political fabric of the city. Venice is a very special urban context. Today, there are only 30,000 locals versus 30 million tourists per year. That creates a very strange situation where there is no longer attention going to affordable housing, education, green space, etc. A large part of the locals have become activists and are working to formulate alternatives on different fronts. They have taken over a large empty property in the centre of the city as a space for art and activism. They have permanently occupied a park, because the mayor wanted to build a hotel there. They have launched a women's rights organization and a grassroots housing project in vacant apartments to provide more affordable homes. Every day we were introduced to one of these contexts, and the fact that both the collective dimension and the embedded dimension were really active was an enormous added value.

As an artists, you could freely decide based on your own trajectory (1) if you were going to work individually or collectively, and (2) if you were going to make an autonomous work or a more applied co-creation relating to one context or another. And so DMG generated a wide range of interventions that discovered varied possibilities throughout the city. The result was a 4-day urban festival with an exhibition, performances, installations and talks in S.a.L.E. Docks, as well as 15 interventions scattered throughout the city.

WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ARTISTS LIKE?

There was a really special atmosphere around the entire project. The secret, and the immediate difference from previous Working Title Festivals, was the prior collective work week and the more pronounced embedding, so that you can lose the production stress and really have time to get to know each other, to connect yourself to the context and see how this can link to your personal trajectory. How do the city and the group inspire me and what can I contribute from my practice to this situation? We were able to explore an alternative way of working collectively, and I think this was really stimulating for many of the people involved, sometimes just by seeing that many of the questions you have as an artist are shared by other artists and that you can develop answers together. With that shared experience and knowledge comes great potential. Along with this, the purely social dimension has been enormously important, with very intense and durable contacts being made. In many artists' practices there is a really major shift going on, sometimes conscious but often still very unconscious. In the art field, we often still think very romantically. When we think about art, we think directly of autonomous, individual art. That's a very important form, but of course there are many other possible views. We live with the image that art is autonomous or applied. What intrigues me tremendously are these new forms of co-creation and embedded working where an artist can work autonomously within an applied context. You see artists really looking for this and we have had some very nice examples in Venice, like Peter Aers, who recreated his conversational performance Crime and Punishment in the occupied park of Ca'bemba with a local women's rights organization. Purely with this change in context, his work became a platform to map sexism along very different perspectives through role-playing. Christian Bakalov has worked on the Island of Giudecca with local residents, and in that forgotten place he built a pavilion where social interaction rather than art objects was central. Diane Rabreau developed an alternative and participatory tourist office, where visitors could explore unknown parts of Venice via strange satellite images and together you would do an imaginary brainstorm around those places. But also the more autonomous interventions related strongly to the city. For example, Karl Van Welden produced large bubbles filled with smoke in the streets, while himself remaining invisible, which hung in the air for a few seconds before popping, leaving only the smoke behind, creating a unique moment for the casual passerby.

Müge Yilmaz made a boat trip through the canals with a performer wrapped in white camouflage material standing silently on board, a very poetic intervention that offers a timeless image, as if from a painting. And Niko Hafkenscheid positioned a landscape painter looking over the canals, working on a winter forest scene linked to his project Gorodets. These are very diverse forms that activate their environment, striving for interaction and integration, while being much less object-oriented.

HOW WAS THE COLLABORATION WITH THE ITALIAN ARTISTS?

It was tremendously stimulating not only to exchange substantive ideas, but also to talk about ways of self-organization. The artistic climate in Italy is particularly challenging at the moment and it was inspiring to feel the enthusiasm of the Italian artists and the international guests they invited. At the same time, they tend to be more explicit and discursive. Art is much more closely linked to social activism there, and strongly attaches itself to political theory. That was an interesting tension, which again reinforced the diversity of Dark Matter. At the same time, we share a fascination with alternative formats and more direct engagement. They translated this for example in the interactive street performance of Alessandro Carboni and the requiem for Venice by Johann Merrich. Also the Dark Matter Collider is a beautiful example: an open source archive/exhibition of traces of dark matter practices. At one moment, I looked at the hive around me and realized, we may be a group of independent artists, but by coming together we have so much. Only by seeing that potential and being creative with it. For example, with this particular group, we already have an international network of workspaces for small research-based work. Müge has a space in Amsterdam, Melih in Istanbul, Niko in Spain, Gregory in New York, Christian in Sofia, and Valentina in Gorodets, along with our bases in Venice and Brussels. All of these (often personally owned) places are accessible for small residencies and research presentations. That is really huge, the mobility that we can create just among ourselves. The same applies in terms of technical know-how, networks, and content feedback. That was really the

discovery; that purely by bringing people together in an integrated way, you can create tremendous potential on so many levels. Instead of focusing on what we do not have or what the institutions should do, I find it more interesting to consider what is possible, purely from that ability to come together. Based on personal commitments, you get a completely different form of engagement and shareholdership. Classical institutions have that ability much less, because they are more about hegemonic top-down work with a clear chain of command. Working as a group is much different, more of a two-way street. People feed on the system, but they also contribute. That is exhilarating for me and has a lot of potential for the future. Not that I am thinking of an either-or situation. I am have always been for a workspace with one leg in the institution and one leg outside, because you can then create the most interesting space that can respond to every stage and need in an artist's trajectory. I just believe there is still so much to be discovered and developed outside the existing structures, in addition to the existing system.

THE AIM IS THAT THESE PRACTICES SEEP THROUGH INTO THE SECTOR

Exactly. Our sector was also based on this kind of dynamism once. 40 years ago, it also started with a group of dedicated artists, organizers and writers who did not fit into what was then the theatre system and decided to organize themselves based around their own work. But through the process of institutionalization, certain ways of producing, presenting and spreading have been so pinned down, that some organisations now have difficulty responding to the new dynamics. We developed an international network of black boxes and white cubes, which makes our industry very dependent on those dominant presentation forms. And then it becomes difficult to deal with art forms that do not fit this mould, those that have a very different duration time, scale, size of public, etc. Society today has become so extremely diverse through the Internet and migration. But this has not yet translated into greater diversity in the area of our institutions. And I don't mean solely in the programming, but also in the dis-



positive itself. The word alone, 'sector', implies a homogenous whole, a circle divided into segments like pieces of cake. We talk about the performing sector, the visual arts sector, the social sector. That's of course an illusion. You have so many visible and invisible particles, interacting and changing the landscape. The most visible are in the institutions. The more invisible are in the independent practices and the amateur arts, new urban practices, etc. And there is a very large captivating grey zone in between all of that. I no longer believe in a single arts sector. **There are many different creative fields, including those outside the arts sector. The more you can navigate as an artist in between these fields, the better your chances of developing a sustainable trajectory.** Take for example the work of Diane Rabreau. She can do layout work, workshops with children, guided tours, radio programmes, visual arts installation, and publications, purely based on one rich artistic practice that has many different sides. The same with Christian Bakalov, who has worked with the elderly, with children, with refugees, with cancer patients, but also in pure autonomous visual art contexts like the M HKA, or in Venice. I get a kick out of those kinds of branched creative developments.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN ALL OF THIS?

To me, everything I do comes down to dramaturgy: the meaningful linking and integration of elements. **Whether it is scenes in a performance, people in a group, or the relationship between artistic formats and target groups in society, it is always about integrating things, and finding mutual reconciliation, not of one dominant perspective, but of a whole range of different perspectives.** You have to be able to mediate. You have to understand the different parties in order to enable or strengthen a kind of mutual compatibility. I strongly believe that. That's also my background. I started as a dramaturge of purely autonomous projects, such as per-

formances with Benjamin Vandewalle and Thomas Ryckewaert. From there, I became also an audience worker, so you start to think about the link with society, and how you can embed certain work. Later the financial and technical components also come up, as well as the link with the political level. All of these things must be aligned, because they all influence the ultimate expression of an art project. The only thing I do is dramaturgy, expanding from the artist, to the public, to the technical aspects, the financials, society, politics, etc. A clear consequence of this is that we started working more and more on a smaller scale in WSB. Like that you can reconnect artists with these things, as an exercise of integration. In the last 40 years, the arts sector has shifted to a Fordist model of specialization. Much of the labour is now separated. The artist creates, the communication officer communicates, the producer produces, the agent distributes, etc. Those different parts are often no longer aware of each other. But the power of integrated working comes from bringing them together, working with forms that are adaptable and flexible in today's world. And the more you as an artist are involved in the different facets of your practice, the more self-reliant you can be, and less independent on structures that take a long time to approach sometimes.

THEREFORE ALSO THIS COLLECTIVE WAY OF WORKING IS IMPORTANT.

Yes, because everyone approaches this process differently. Everyone is unique in some way. Take the work of Gosie, Kosi, Karl, Niko, Peter, Emi, Lemuel, or Christian. Your style. My style. Anis as a volunteer. All those people are basically unique in what they do. **I think this is the art of working together or co-creating today; to be able to speak from that self-awareness. As an artist (but also a manager or a volunteer) you need to be aware of that skill, which is already a daunting challenge, as well as what you cannot do,**

which is even harder for the ego. At the same time, you have to be able to see this in other people, and only then you can start working as a group. But then everyone has to have the space to work from their skill, and at the same time leave certain matters more to someone else, to give someone else more agency. That doesn't mean saying something like, "I'm not good at administration, so you do it". You should be involved, integrated. You just don't need to control everything. You need to leave room for that input of others, in every part of the process. This prevents it from being an authoritarian way of working, where one person determines everything, or a collective way of working where everyone has the same level of control over everything. Instead, everyone speaks from their own authority/authorship, their unique ability to shape. **But this starts with confidence in each other, which is why it's so important to work with each other for a long time.** In fact, today I dare say it is madness to work with artists for less than two or three years minimum. That balance between openness and sustainability is very important if you really want to change something. This does not work in a work space that operates like a factory, exclusively focused on getting the newest, youngest makers all the time.

DO YOU SEE PARALLELS WITH OTHER DOMAINS IN THESE SHIFTS?

We need move away from that hegemonic approach that pretends the existence of monolithic sectors. **We need to move towards a new approach, Rudi Laermans calls this the multipolar, an approach where there is no longer one arts field, but a lot of different fields, with different merits, parameters, reference frames, audiences, mixing, exchanging, migrating, etc.** That is a real social shift. We are framing ourselves as people today in a very different way than before. Take the architecture of courthouses for example. If you go to the courthouse of Brussels, you really feel like a subject in those gigantic colonnades under that golden dome, with the crown is on top. This is that pure hierarchy, the hegemony of Leopold II as the absolute monarch. If you look at the new courthouses of Antwerp or Ghent, you will see an almost pure transparency. We have evolved from a society where we are subjects, to a capitalistic globalised society where we are customers and outsource services. I pay tax so I want efficient services. This is the paradigm of the customer that was domi-

nant for the last 50 years. That paradigm shifts more in the 21st century to that of the user, mainly based on technological revolution and the Internet. In the 20th century, we built up a Fordist industry, in which we have become completely alienated from most of the products we use daily. This has reached such a high point that it has led to a reaction, a new idiom. Today you feel that renewed engagement very clearly, in all areas, not only art but also industry, education, and the social sector. In the past, a teacher told you how it was and how you had to do it, while you had to reproduce. **Now people search for very different ways of working, through new engagements. You see that clearly in all those hip buzzwords: DIY, local, bottom-up, open source, etc.** There are new ways of working that are looking to manifest themselves. If the classical arts sector relates only superficial to these shifts, in order to be able to retain its hegemonic approach, we are creating the problem ourselves. **Most artist practices have anticipated these shifts for a long time, but the overhead must go along with this.** If we look at the last 40 years, at the Flemish Wave as they say, you see artists who constantly have their finger on the pulse, continually delivering innovative, quality work. This is also constantly expected of them. But if we now look at the managers and their management of the overhead, there has actually been no significant change in last 30 years. We've all created a Facebook account and built a website, but we basically make, show and communicate in the same way, within the same model, because we think from our own perspective too much -the system we created- and fail to fundamentally question it. In a sense, we are too self-contained and still impose a very specific conception of art on our audiences. **We think we know as specialists what art is and how it should be shown to the public. But for many audiences that just doesn't work anymore. We must not only explore new forms and contexts, but also learn to be creative with the overhead. We need the same creativity that we put into the creation of performances in the development of our institutions. And this is where projects like DMG or the Working Title Festivals are really important. These are exercises in re-organization, sketches of possible workspaces:** always in other buildings, within other contexts, with a shifting group of artists, new partners and various audiences. This allows us to respond to what occurs both inside and outside the arts. And yet we always do what a workspace should do: generate a space for research to make something, to try it out, to get feedback, to provide visibility, to connect networks, to address different audiences, to bring people together and inspire each other.



What happens at the Biennale is that 98% of the projects that are presented there actually have no reference to Venice. The world comes here and represents itself without touching the city at all. So the histories that are being told at the Biennale are the histories of art in this completely abstract, dislocated sense. A history of art as a comprehensive overview of formal changes through the ages. And of course there are exceptions, but let's generalize for a moment.

The importance of Gregory's book and the importance of the struggles we are involved in are partially, of course, related to the question what happens when Dark Matter becomes light. But if these histories are the histories we're consuming, almost unconsciously, we're judging the exhibitions we see in the Giardini and the Biennale in terms of these histories. So maybe in order to change them, we need to change the history of art. Because if you can change the root, you might end up with a different flower. This idea of changing the history of art begins with understanding that the kinds of practices - socially engaged practices - have not necessarily only popped up in the last few years. There is a history that goes a long way back.

Charles Esche,
May 12, 2017

From the slit of this narrow door. An affective polyphony of the submerged [to Patrizia Vicinelli].

by Annalisa Sacchi e Ilenia Caleo

When we start working on Patricia Vicinelli's poetic and artistic biography - which has become, in the folds of time, an obscure and submerged matter to be brought to the surface - Annalisa is in London, I am in Utrecht.

I cannot be in Venice for Dark Matter Games, so we decide that I work on audio tracks, intertwining with Annalisa's reconstruction with a look at the relationship between artistic practices and feminist thinking.

Vocality is already a first connection: Vicinelli's sonority and voice reminds me of the use that Carla Lonzi - Italian art historian and radical feminist - makes of her magnetophone, to make interviews, take notes, and then build lyrics through the assemblage.

Lonzi's audio recordings and Vicinelli's poetry are experimental techniques that transform reflection and composition into oral activity, an attempt to write down one's thoughts while letting the movement free.

The body is in action, materially involved. There can be no body unless there is a space around it, the body is always positioned, it is never absolute/ab-solutum, i.e. untied from its spatial and material connotations.

To situate, to position: other elements performative practices and feminist politics have in common.

I record the tracks in Muntstraat 2, at 10:35 am. In Jankerk, the church where poetess and feminist philosopher Adrienne Rich kept his historical speech Notes on the Politics of Location in June 1984. I am walking along the Utrecht canals, which resonate with those in Venice. Every step I make I stumble upon new questions, falls, open issues.

Certainly, Italian feminism interlaces an inaugural relationship with art, but it is also a conflictual, not pacified relationship and, together, it is full of suggestions. In this sense, every time we will look at art practices from a feminist perspective, we won't be making a list of the excluded, rather we will question canons and genres, the same way we question sexual genres; we will destabilize the function of the Author as a principle of authority and recognize the materiality of bodies and thoughts by putting practices at the center of knowledge. And so on. (Ilenia Caleo)

THE VIDEO

1_intro

What we have tried to organize is an imaginary polyphony, an ideal dialogue among Ilenia, me and Vicinelli.

Initially it was imagined as a dialogue between our presences and Patrizia's absence. It has now become a double displacement and a double de-location: Patrizia is de-located in time, Ilenia in space, as she didn't make it to Venice from Utrecht.

We will be switching from Italian to English. You will listen at Vicinelli's voice in Italian, with no translation (it would have been a useless effort and, after all, it is rather a matter of voice and sound with her poetry, more than of language). Ilenia's recorded voice is in Italian, and we have provided you with handouts, while my remarks will be in English.

2_bio

Patrizia Vicinelli was born in Bologna in 1943 and died in Bologna in 1991.

Over the course of her life, she played little or no part in the literary canon, but a crucial part in the artistic life around her. Her work in theatre, performance, vocal and visual poetry - changed the sense of literature and the sense of what literature can be for a whole bunch of her fellow artists.

She was the vibrant beginner of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another.

A partner for theatre makers as Aldo Braibanti, video artists as Alberto Grifi, and poets like Adriano Spatola, she stood on the side of the "black matter", never really entering the "majority" of the canon. For critics and scholars in general, it seemed as if her artistic work had come from nowhere, because it stood so radically outside the norm.

Vicinelli struggled with drug addiction and also endured imprisonment, for almost 10 years she was a fugitive in Morocco, and she died aged 48 from HIV. Alberto Grifi called her "a kamikaze of experience;" in her life and work, "everything is friction."

In Rebibbia prison in Rome Vicinelli spent nine months (1977-1978): she was arrested for possession of hashish (a ridiculous amount indeed 3-4 grams I don't

quite remember), but many believed the charges were a reprisal for her public opposition (along with Pasolini, Eco, and Moravia) to the long imprisonment on false charges of the writer Aldo Braibanti. While in prison, she also wrote a theatre reinterpretation of Cinderella (quite bad to be honest) featuring dialogues with the character of Cassiopeia and staged the work with her fellow prisoners.

In 1967 Lerici published one of her most famous work, à a A both as a book and a vinyl record in 1967.

Audio http://www.archiviomauriziospatola.com/prod/pdf_videopoesia/V00219.mp3

3_à a A

Listening at her voice doesn't mean indulge to the sonorous expression of her writing, but, above all, hearing from its very source the vocalized rhythm and corporeal drives that encapsulates the memory and renders the embodiment of Vicinelli's existence.

Her voice, coming back from the 1960s marks the ghostly uniqueness of her "being-there" [esserci] in its radical finitude. So to say, Vicinelli is here summoned up in her vocal expression, in the musical and relational interference of the acoustic sphere.

Her vocal and poetic practice was an exploration and a discovery of the possibilities of the voice and of the language, an activity that was meant to freed her from a number of linguistic, psychic and social obligations of the patriarchal system, as a dynamism that broke up the inertia of language and art habits.

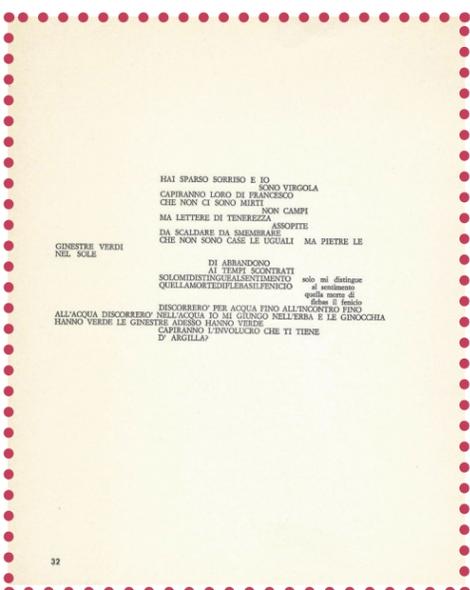
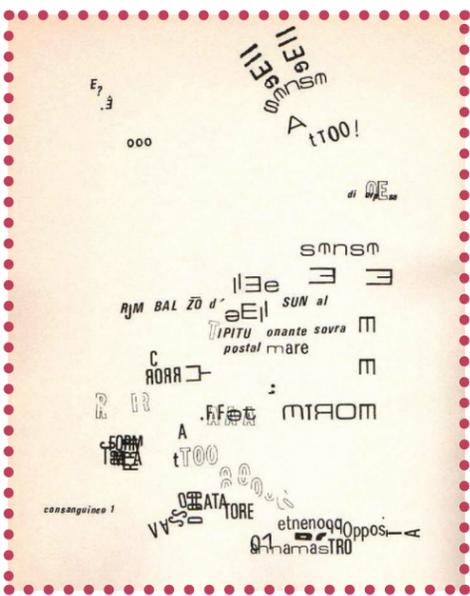
As Adriana Cavarero points out, in phonic emission, there is a musical pleasure that the semantic order both exploits and limits, and yet still fails to control.

More archaic than verbal communication, the drive substrata of the phonemes works in the oral cavity, and it does not easily forget its pleasure.

Unlike thought, which tends to rest in the material otherworld of ideas, speech is always a matter of bodies, filled with drives, desires, and blood.

The voice vibrates, the tongue moves. Pleasure rooted in the acoustic sphere has above all a subversive function, that is, it destabilizes language as a system that produces the phallogocentric sub-

ject. Vicinelli's voice makes the journey that finds some fissures through which to invade the (mostly male) poetic language and disturb it with the agitation of rhythms.



4. THE APEX OF BABBLE

Daniel Heller-Roazen has written: "As infants approach the point at which they will begin to form their first recognizable words, they have at their disposal capacities for articulation that not even the most gifted polyglot adults could hope to rival" Roman Jakobson coined the phrase "the apex, the pick of babble" and observes that it does not last and does not recur in later phases of life.

For Jakobson, the "atrophy of the phonic abilities" of the infant is not surprising from a functional perspective: the child needs to focus only on the useful sounds of the tongue he is acquiring, and therefore he may forget the rest. Language, in short, exploits, reduces and regulates the magnificent exercises of the infantile voice.

So the "phonic amnesia" that we all experience is a perplexing foundation in our linguistic ontogenesis.

Acquiring a language (which seems to be achieved mostly through acts of memory) cannot occur without an act of forgetfulness. At the very least, two things are produced in the voice left empty by the retreat of the sounds the speaking child can no longer make, for a language and a speaking subject now emerge from the disappearance of babble.

Therefore, we should trace a distinction between Language, as a system shared by a number of users and language as the

propriety of a subject come into existence after a first erasure of a proto-linguistic form, the infant babble. The remnant, trace or echo of this erasure in language voice and its graphic representation is the point in Vicinelli's work.

Perhaps the infant must forget the infinite series of sounds he once produced at the "apex of babble" to obtain mastery in the finite system of consonants and vowels that characterizes a single language.

Perhaps the loss of a limitless phonetic arsenal is the price a child must pay for the papers that grant him citizenship in the community of a single tongue.

The effort in Vicinelli research into language is to retain a trace, an echo of the infinitely varied babble from which her, and our language, Italian, has emerged.

The echolalia, the memory of the immemorial babble that, in being lost, allowed Italian as well as any other language to be. Self-conscious experimentation is for Vicinelli the result of a real longing to break down the barriers of literary convention, in order to dissolve the stability of signified into a soundtrack, written in words where vocal rhythms produce the movement of the text, where words are combined according to the laws of echo, affection, and resonance.

In some ways, the text of a A is not readable by anyone but by Vicinelli, for only her voice can flow from the cracks between the letters, or from the breaks that arise from its sonorous drives.

Art, Activism and Political Theory: a complicated love story.

By Roberta Da Soller (S.a.L.E. Docks)

Warning! This is not an essay.

This short text, which is not philosophically grounded, simply consists in a collection of notes taken during several meetings and readings and stemming from different influences and feelings of restlessness. These notes are nothing but the leftovers of things that have already been told; they are back steps taken in quest for new answers.

We started thinking up DMG about a year ago. We often try to work on projects inspired to meetings, books and conversations that can be used as instruments to rethink the relationship between Art and Activism; we exploit this relationship in order to question the institutional mechanisms of subsumption and to lay groundwork for new research projects and activities.

The idea of Dark Matter Games was inspired by a meeting with Gregory Sholette and Kuba Szreder, as well as by the reading of Gregory Sholette's book *Dark Matter* (2010). This breakthrough meeting triggered crucial questions and reflections dear to activists like us and still open to debate.

Using an astronomical metaphor, Gregory says that "Dark Matter" has always been an ill-lighted yet creative dimension generally excluded from the economic and narrative structures of established art; an informal melting pot of new, residual, and politicized artistic practices. Gregory also argues that, thanks to new technologies enabling artists and activists to stay connected, institutions are getting more and more interested in the obscure world of dark matter, which is now less dark than it had been before.

This somehow endangers that feeling of invisibility that allows artists to create and work avoiding capitalist accumulation logics and entails, for a part of this dark matter, the necessity to avoid the capture of the value it makes.

There is much talk about the existence of a sort of economy of immateriality, in which symbolic value is produced and fed by its unaware maker.

For instance, consider a student intern. Internship and unpaid work generally depend upon three elements: an idea, a promise and a desire. Those who work for free, most of the times artists and art university students, are constantly provided with promises of an employment in tune with their own desires and with projections of what they may become if they work at certain museums, institutions or other art organizations.

As Toni Negri says, the capital rests upon the relationship between the one who works and the one who exploits, between a society of workers and financial capitalism. **7** When people work, they pour all their energy, cooperation skills, intelligence, ideas and desires in relationships related to their work.

Generally speaking, patronage – in all its forms – hinges upon interest, that is to say that desire or impulse that makes us do things. Quite strikingly, when one becomes an "independent" capital maker, s/

he also arranges mobilizations for others. Although this may look like a contradiction, actually it is not, since independent capital makers are involved in self-exploitation. The idea of subsumption entails that someone moves at the services of someone else; here is why we can speak of "mobilization for others". **8**

Another issue stemming from the gradual illumination of dark matter is the growing aestheticization of revolt, which also entails an increased fascination with opposition.

Over the last few years, we have been witnessing a large increase in theoretical reflections, exhibitions and workshops dealing with the relationships between art and activism, art and politics, performance and public sphere ect.

I am pointing to the fields currently explored by artists, researchers and curators, rather than to political theories related to the history of activist movements.

More often than not, such artistic production draws from and refers to that large part of Dark Matter consisting in movements, experiences of occupations, direct actions and local demonstrations, as well as of social conflicts occurring in countries at war, financially distressed, etc.

These works are crucial in order to elaborate the present. When one thinks of the many discussions connecting art and activism, it seems quite hard to believe that political activism, disobedience, and illegality are extolled by theory but rarely actualized, triggering ongoing debates and, at same time, being kept at arm's length.

Quite strikingly, this highlights an anomaly, like a machine in which some parts work and others do not and that is likely to contain a seed of a response to the capitalist capture.

Our way of perceiving and desiring is affected by our being "independent" capital makers and can be used as a useful instrument in order to better understand the present.

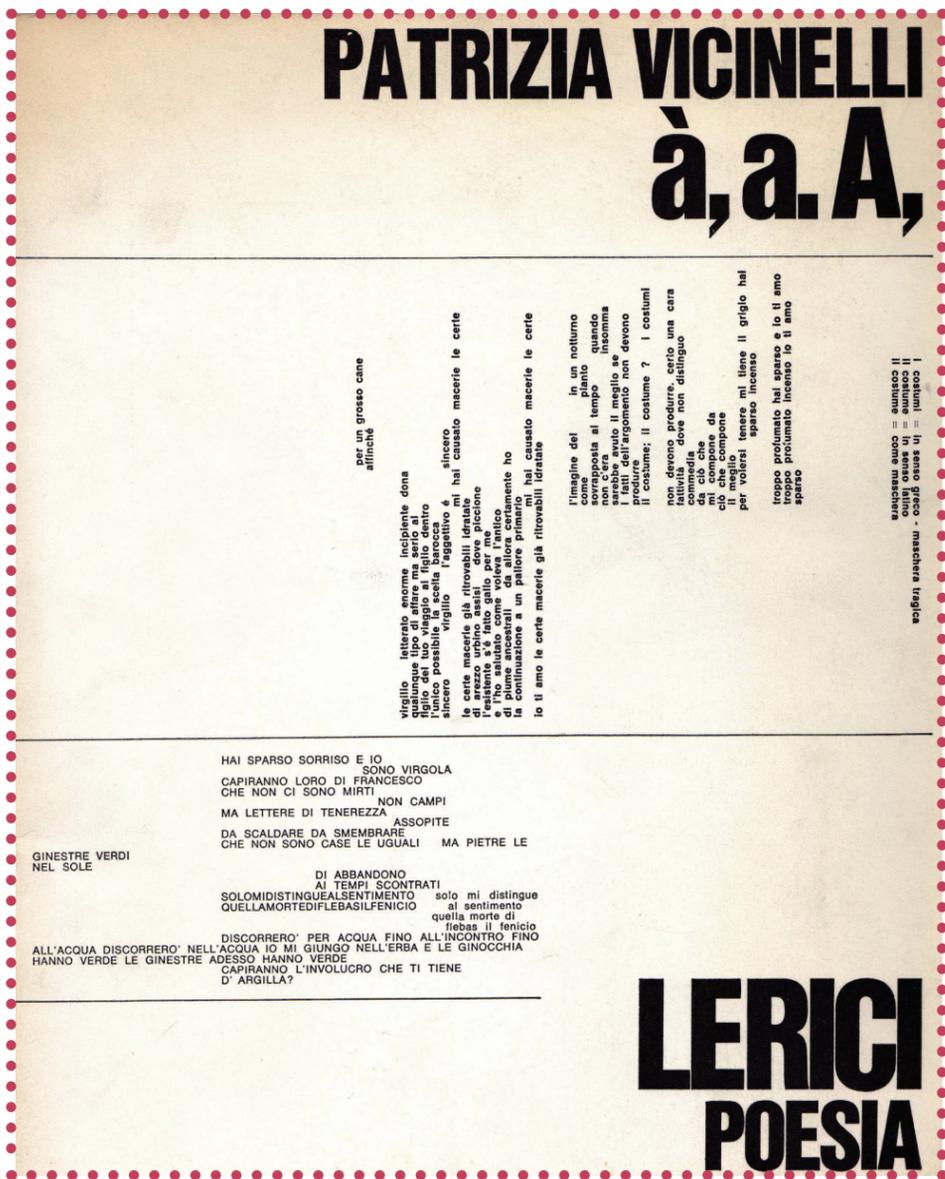
The Western neo-liberal system has the remarkable power of affecting people's freedom, by moving differentials of freedom **9**, allowing the creation of really radical contents conveyed in texts, works of art and performances, and at the same time revealing its conceit when we try to politicize the system in which that work is born.

Everything that triggers interest, desire, and, therefore, movement - meaning motion towards the making of value - is welcome.

But, then, what is that dark zone unable to arouse the same degree of interest? What prevents us from politicizing, say, a creative or exhibiting process?

As already noted, activism is like a machine in which some parts work and others do not, a collection of charming and yet repulsive practices. Therefore, I wondered what features of activism and direct political practices preserved this repulsive quality and I identified two key issues. The former is illegality.

Illegality is highly attractive and suc-



Annalisa Sacchi: performing arts and aesthetic scholar, formed between Bologna, London and New York. She teaches at IUAV in Venice and leads a project funded by the European Research Council regarding performance and counterculture in Italy in the Sixties and Seventies.

From 2012 to 2014 she taught and researched at Harvard. From 2004 to 2012 she was editor of the independent magazine "art'O_cultura e politica delle arti sceniche". She has also worked for several festivals, including Santarcangelo and the Venice Biennale during the edition conducted by Romeo Castellucci from the Societas Raffaello Sanzio, on whose work she has produced several essays and volumes. Among her most recent publications: *Il posto del re. Estetiche del teatro di regia nel modernismo e nel contemporaneo* (Bulzoni, 2012), and the Italian translation and editing of *Philosophers and Thespians* by Freddie Rokem (Mimesis, 2013).

Ilenia Caleo is an independent performer, activist, and researcher. Since 2000 she has been working as an actress and performer in the contemporary art scene. Trained in philosophy, she is conducting a Ph.D. on the performative body, at the intersection between performance studies and political philosophy at La Sapienza University.

She deals with physicality, feminist epistemology, experimentation in performing arts, new institutions and models of cultural work, relationship between art and activism. As an activist of the Teatro Valle Occupato and in the commons and queer-feminist movements, she grew politically and artistically within underground counter-cultures.

7 AB-Strike, *Lo sciopero nell'era dell'astrazione finanziaria*, Sale Docks, Venezia, 2015.

8 F. Lordon, *Capitalismo, desiderio e servitù. Antropologia delle passioni nel lavoro contemporaneo*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2010.

9 Raunig, *Fabbriche del sapere, industrie della creatività*, Ombre corte, 2012.

cessful if considered, from an aesthetic/ethical viewpoint, as the infringement of wrong rules, bodies defending other bodies.

It suggests ideas of courage and strength, like the characters in Tarantino's movies. But when it comes to practice, things get problematical.

In common thinking, revolution is completely misrepresented by that avant-garde idea representing it as made by outsiders, a concept activists often carry on reluctantly.

This naive thought does not take into account the history of activism in Italy, a still existent and charming tradition.

So, what does "outsider" mean? Outside what? A system? What system?

And so on and so forth. A series of questions that, if dealt with this way, are quite senseless. Anyway, the quite old-fashioned phrase "to keep out of sth" makes me think of the possibility of keeping out of something that exists, to explore an exterior dimension that has not been mentioned yet.

So, how can we conceive new systems of organization of politics, art institutions, and social practices, if we keep out of given conditions?

In the first place, people tend to consider institutions and laws as though they were something created by nature, rather than the results of power relations. **10**

Secondly, this "as though" forces our imagination to atrophy.

Illegality is generally associated with adolescents whose desire to go against the rules immediately raises ideas of lack of control and balance.

How boring are these teenagers, so out of their times and so unresolved!

But this fear conceals the Jacobin illusion according to which abstract desires can win avoiding real strives (Tronti).

Why should we run the risk of having unpleasant encounters when everything can be done in our backyards? **11**

The backyard has its looks, institutions, laws and times of life.

The other key issue is the aesthetics of activist movements in politics.

Often we have to deal with sort of DIY aesthetics: choirs, hand-written coloured signs, flags, 60s-style theatrical street parades, catchwords, and so on and so forth.

These aesthetic practices are completely outdated and definitely unappealing.

And what if these aesthetic choices mirrored a specific approach to the present, a bewildered perspective necessary in order to better understand the present? Systems of organization of political activism, too, are not in tune with their time; let us think of the long hours spent in gatherings and discussions aimed at reaching a balance between needs, desires and possibilities.

Maybe, the question is how to employ this "out of times" feature as an instrument at the service of Dark Matter.

How can one become unappealing and outdated creating black holes hard to integrate in a present society informed by financial capitalism?

In What is the Contemporary?

Giorgio Agamben writes:

"Those who are truly contemporary, truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant.

But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. Contemporariness, then,

is that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disconnection."

I can think of other, less philosophical references to obsolescence; one is "FOMO", a neologism now become an official English word; "FOMO" is the acronym of "Fear Of Missing Out" and describes the fear of missing an exciting event seen on social media.

FOMO means being afraid of being left out, but the real fear is that of being left behind.

Behind what? An indescribable experience, something beyond words.

Contemporary marketing strategies include planned obsolescence, a policy of planning products that stop being functional after a short time in order to be replaced by newer items, continuously increasing the consumer's desire.

So, what expectations does political activism escape from? If we understand actualism as a compulsive adherence to an apparently endless present, in which people conform to the contemporary and to its rules and their identity is forged through the consumption of experiences, then activism resists to the indifference of this alleged constant happiness by creating a time that might not be valid anymore, namely an "OUT OF ..."

This kind of time is a form of resistance hinging upon two features: observation and conspiracy.

Long-lasting, uninterrupted practice dilates time, turning it into a sort of "out of time"; this can be easily understood by considering the post-70s approach to distance and space in city planning, according to which distance is a gap that must be bridged.

Empty spaces, *terrein vague*, and everything that is distance and separation or that is left behind by the progressive urbanization of territories, are likely to trigger anti-utilitarian activities or to help reestablish social relationships. **12**

Thus, outdated time is stolen time; this discordance may be at the heart of the ability to foresee other people's actions, resulting into a sort of "perspective" machine.

Nevertheless, this time is undoubtedly distanced from popularity ratings.

I would like to conclude by quoting Angela Melitopoulos's extraordinary documentary dedicated to Toni Negri, *The Cell*, which makes me think that, after all, theory and political practice end up losing their essence when driven apart from one another. According to Toni Negri, today there are no prophets anymore, but only militants, that is to say people able to live the wretchedness in the world to the fullest and to draw from their experiences in order to develop certain instruments of subversion and liberation as "disrupted devices" or, as the Italians say, "marchingegni" (i.e. something of uncertain functioning and usefulness); it is exactly thanks to their little visibility that these tools show the unexpected ability to alter the balance of established power, diverting it and stepping towards new, unimaginable systems of rights.

Jump Into Belief - 12 Steps

by Peter Aers

1. Bart Capelle and I report to the front desk of the Ghent Prison to read a short story with some prisoners. We will discuss the content of the story together in preparation for the conversational performance Against Interpretation. Before we are admitted as visitors to the prison, we have to turn over our ID cards at the desk. Our mobile phones and laptops will be locked in a vault, but the stories that have been copied are allowed to enter with us. As we pass from one guard to the next, they turn keys, open doors, and close them behind us.

I know the door in front of me is closed. Yet my hand reaches out to push the handle down, to no avail. I look a little helpless to the guard. This will happen to me a few times. We fall under the control of others, and through a precise system, we are gradually brought to the right location in the prison. In this system, the guard's footsteps are counted in order to calculate whether the number of steps he or she is doing is feasible in the available time.

2. "It's raining," says a friend, during a walk in the mountains of Jura. He looks at the clouds gathering over above us. He has a book by a natural scientist, describing different cloud formations and the chances of rain associated with each. I don't really think it will rain, so I say we can walk further. But the book makes me doubt myself, and I decide to join in the search for a shelter. Does it matter whether or not it rains later today? My friend wants to be in control of situations, of conversations, and he uses the book as a way to convince me he's right. I've forgotten the name of the book. And the natural scientist.

3.a. Power is exercised on everyone, not only in prison but also outside, like a hand pushing our backs to guide us. The hand can take several forms. A coercive thought, our upbringing, education, ideologies, social pressures, political and media framing, GAS fines, thought patterns, morals, institutional organization, one-way traffic. What they have in common is that they are expressed in words or letters.

Stop
No
You might want to
Had you only

You must
It is forbidden to
You are required to

Be on time
One knows that

In this way, we direct each other, our words acting as small instruments of power. We use them emotionally, as a fait accompli or a threat to persuade each other and regulate our behavior. We negotiate their value and meaning, again and again, like children resisting an assignment or negotiating an order. We are also easily able to estimate how far this power reaches. As a father, I can put my son to bed. But I can't make him sleep.

3.b. I doubt my generalizations.

4. Alfred Korzybski, creator of the field

known as general semantics, interrupted one of his lessons to get a packet of cookies wrapped in white paper out of his bag. He ate one of them and then gave some to his students in the first row, which they enjoyed. Then, he tore the white paper off the package and the students saw a drawing of a dog and the caption: DOG COOKIES. Some students were angry. Others ran to the toilet to throw up. "You see," Korzybski said, "I have just demonstrated that people don't just eat food, but also words, and that the taste of the former is often outdone by the taste of the latter."

5. "It's incredible what you can do with words. It's only words, they always say. And that's true. But because words are only words, you can get into areas where you never could otherwise and first and foremost never would want to be." (Frank Vande Veire)

6. One of the prisoners told us an anecdote about kiwis. We didn't have permission to record, so I have to reconstruct the story from memory. She told us how important it is to her to eat fruit, and that it is not always present in the prison. She loves fruit, but not kiwis. And for some reason, there was a surplus of kiwis in the prison and they were giving them a kiwi every day for a week. Because of this, she found something. "If I say 'Hooray! A kiwi!' five times, I'll believe I'm happy with a kiwi after the third time and after the fifth time, I'm happy to eat it."

7.a. We play with words like children play with blocks. In doing so, we create worlds: financial, cultural, sporting, and so forth. And naturally, the games we play can also cause pain, be deadly serious, or just make us happy. Words have no meaning. They make meaning, over and over again. With other words, we can allow ourselves to do certain things, to break new ground or go down new roads. Language is a strange beast. It weaves a world.

7.b. During the conversational performance we are organizing, we make jokes, we insinuate, imitate, repeat, translate and quote. We make it clear that it is a performance, using codes like beginning and end, which form part of the structure. The difference with an open-ended conversation cannot be clearer. We distribute the power between the speakers, point out certain mechanisms, and reveal new ways into the conversation. But it is not to reach a compromise with like-minded people or to take a moral standpoint with rational arguments. It's an event that accepts polyphony.

8.a. Kierkegaard wrote: "What an extraordinary change takes place ... when for the first time the fact that everything depends upon how a thing is thought first enters the consciousness, when, inconsequence, thought in its absoluteness replaces an apparent reality."

8.b. According to Wittgenstein, in his Philosophical Investigations, the existence of language, and consequently of thinking, depends on a communicative community. Speaking and thinking are not a pri-

10 Bifo e Gomma, *Alice è il diavolo. Storia di una radio sovversiva*, A/Traverso, 2007.

11 M. Iardi, *In nome della strada. Libertà e violenza*. Molteni, Roma 2002.

12 L. Lippolis, *Viaggio al termine della città. La Metropoli e le arti nell'autunno postmoderno (1972-2001)*, Elèuthera, 2009.

vate matter, but can only exist because of a community that initially shapes them. Such a community can consist of 12 people for 2 hours.

9.
“The essence of play is not representation but a creative exercise.”

10.
In Kieslowski’s Dekalog 1, 12-year-old Paweł falls through the ice and dies. I cannot watch this episode from the series without crying. I know the child doesn’t really die, that it is “performed”. And yet when watching it, I feel destroyed.

11.
In 1817 Coleridge wrote “... It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us ...”

12.a.
Andy Kaufman: You don’t know the real me.
Lynne Margulies: There isn’t a real you.
Andy Kaufman: Oh yeah, I forgot.

12.b.
We are performers, but that is not always clear. This is not a sign of falsehood though. There are just many variations of ourselves. In theatre terms, maybe there is no backstage at all. And if we want to keep that term for something that we would call the core of ourselves, it has become a very tiny space in the last few decades.

12.c.
I know that the deceased child is “performed” and yet I feel destroyed. I know the prisoner doesn’t like the kiwi, but does she ignore her tastes to eat it anyway? The more I think about it, the more I think we should speak of a jump into belief. We give ourselves over to the happening and are willing to be changed through the process. The term suspension creates a gap between fiction and reality, while jump into belief makes no distinction. The choice lies in what jump you make.



ALWAYS BECOMING

Unleashing ghosts from urban darkness

By Alessandro Carboni

The ongoing Always Becoming project is an itinerant research platform initiated by Alessandro Carboni that reflects on urban mapping practices and embodiment processes combining performance art practices, experimental cartography and visual art. The already completed stages that were carried in Hong Kong, Aarhus, Copenhagen, Malmö and Bologna have been used to develop a sophisticated collaborative work method, EM Tools, based on the interdependence between science, practice and production.

This method can be used to bring together performers, artists, theorists and curators who share research materials, thoughts and ideas around the body, with the body understood as a vector and carrier of the analysis of the urban space.

BLOCK 1_

Recent research on habitat, conducted by the United Nations, emphasizes how - in the past thirty years, and with a speed unknown before - the historical ratio between populations living in urban areas and those residing in rural areas has been almost completely upset in terms of numbers.

People migrations, and the subsequent variegated and often uncontrolled urban sprawl across the metropolis are the result of a continuous change and of a social, anthropological and cultural transformation that results in a rich mosaic of people, cultures and communication paradigms that make up the textures of contemporary cities.

Citizens, bodies themselves, live in and interact with these cities, shaping them, defining their identity, being themselves the agents of change.

Over the past few decades, cities have significantly changed with regards to people mobility and the incessant migration at a global scale. Some have noted a progressive dissolving of the place (Helie, 2009) that has generated a new form of disorder of space, that is urban chaotic turbulence. In this scenario, cities are no longer fixed, but are rather entities in constant motion, crossed by a complex and dynamic fluid of bodies.

In Venice urban area, today capitalism has created a striking contrast between an informal, peripheral urban condition and one that is more formalized, polarized, idealistic and planned.

The deconstruction of the urban context, as material and social form, and the subsequent variegated urban sprawl, are the results of continuous changes in the socio-economical and political transformations of paradigms.

It has generated new configurations of urban textures (Batty, 2013), immaterial spaces of control and other forms of incursion and settlement of the body, which, over time, has led to the generation of different cultural identities and new body landscapes.

Uncontrolled urban sprawl across the metropolis are the result of a continuous change, and of a social, anthropological and cultural transformation of that incredible mosaic of people, cultures and communication paradigms that make up the textures of the Venice Area. The transformation of cities, due to the increasing number of tourists, the form of gentrification related to big cultural events, unavoidably generated new types of urban spaces, that, over time, have formed new cultural identities, a new “human landscape” inhabiting the city.

A real map made out of bodies, which the human landscape is based on, where each single element - like the elements of a circular chain - is both the first and last ring of the transformation process. The

ongoing change is undoubtedly a historical phenomenon of global scope, with the Venice urban area an ideal place to observe this phenomena.

How can we map such spaces? Can we reconfigure the artistic practice so that it is able to map urban space tensions and complexities? Can we adapt cartography’s methodology for the performance artists’ practices? What are the most suitable tactics and strategies for such mapping practices in, and representative of, the contemporary city? How do the bodies relate to temporal occurrences invoking wandering, rambling, or roaming? How can embodiment and subjectivation practices be synchronization and de-synchronization vectors concerning vital processes in living organisms and complex political and aesthetic dynamics alike? How to record and represent the political and ethical conditions that structure “nomadic subjectivity” and its multiple forms of mobility?

BLOCK 2_

Always Becoming project attempts to investigate these questions by observing the city of Venice from a different point of view, coming from the body.

The body is that of a traveler, an “atypical topography” able to relate to places, describe their changes and reveal their most interesting and hidden aspects.

As a performance artist and researcher interested in the “human landscape”, particularly in the body and its relationship with the urban space, I propose a new stage of my Always Becoming project in Venice, to unveil the unleashing ghosts from urban darkness, by studying closely the changes in some neighborhoods and their inhabitants around the Venice urban area. In particular, by building from my artistic research, I explore a ‘subjective mapping’ process of map-making by embodying the spatial transformations complexities, organization of the urban space, knowledge production and geo-political tensions of Venice. As a result of this process, I propose a map, a corporeal-map made out of bodies, in which the performer is the ineradicable display of a “subjectified” cartographic experience in which someone can read the interference, dissonance, continuity and discontinuity of urban space, and critically reveal its conflicts and ambiguities.

The research period is envisioned as oscillating between a series of documented urban explorations, performances and workshops practice sessions that took place in Venice, in particular nearby Sale Docks.

A physical journey, in which I bring together 4 performers to reflect on the

body as a vector, as a tool and not as a condition, to analyze the embedded forces that regulate the contemporary life, collaborative and collective dynamics of art production.

The research explores the different stages of urban corporeal mapping and choreographic reconstruction process, performed through the EM Tools for urban mapping and performance art practice (<https://emtoolsblog.wordpress.com/>)- designed by myself. Sale Docks, as a research base, is the starting and the ending point of the journey. At the end of the research period, the project is presented in the form of performance named Corporeal-Maps in which all research process was/is displayed.

BLOCK 3_

EM Tools is a system that I conceived in order to use the body as device to capture, to extract urban events and to map what happens in a place in its geometrical and temporal extensions. EM Tools’s name is derived from combining two letters to form an acronym that is open to different interpretation:

E is related to the words embody, embodiment, exploration, extraction, extended; M is for map, mapping, modality, mode, and measurement.

The name is deliberately playful in terms of meaning, underlining that the toolkit itself has multiple possibilities and applications.

The system allows to deal with those events, embody and reconfigure them with a choreographic thinking.

The result is a series of corporeal-maps made out of postures, forms and body gestures. It is presented as a guide that explains four applicative principles:

1. observation, 2. capture (urban space mapping through corporal actions), 3. extraction (selective re-enactment of the actions in the studio), 4. transmission-corporeal map (choreographic score).

The toolkit explores a ‘subjective mapping’ process, using embodiment and performance practice as a strategy for reflection on, and representation of the urban space and takes account of ways in which cities are defined as complex systems of urban events. EM Tools also considers mapping process as embodied experience, as an antithesis to the traditional map which is commonly a disembodied visual representation. The toolkit equips performers to develop a greater awareness of, and to be better able to observe and interpret,

Project by Alessandro Carboni
Performers: Chiara Castaldini, Alice Mazzetti, Giulia Morini, Martina Piazzi
Production Formati Sensibili 2017.
<https://alwaysbecomingproject.wordpress.com/>

the hidden, invisible and dark events that occur in real-time in the urban space and re-process them as corporeal-map with a choreographic thinking.

The toolkit reveals those events that already exist in urban space, but that we are not fully aware of because they are at the periphery of our attention. More info about EM tools:

<https://emtoolsblog.wordpress.com/>

BLOCK 4.

The performance takes place simultaneously on stage and in the urban surroundings. In the first stage, the performer explores the urban space with the aid of EM Toolkit, capturing portions of space, shapes, geometries and objects. Following her, a second performer films, through a mobile phone, the capturing process of the first performer.

The state of alert and the perceptual selection dynamics, individually practiced/experienced by the performer, are broadcasted live and displayed in real time on a screen on stage.

Subsequently, the performer, after the capturing process, goes on stage and begins the extraction process of the postural sets she previously collected.

Reprocessed in the stage dimension, in another temporal and spacial scale, the postural sets (combined by similarities or differences) are relocated in the stage space through a process of re-memorization with which the performer remaps herself and her own perception of the space as lived in the urban experience. Meanwhile, a second capturing process begins.

The second performer who was previously filming, in turn begins the capturing process in the urban space.

A third performer films the capture and actions of the second performer.

The footage is again broadcasted in real time on stage where a screen is located near a square on the floor.

After the outdoor capture, the performers go back on stage.

A new process of extraction of the collected postural sets begins.

The performer enters the square situated at the centre of the stage and again reprocesses the postural sets she previously collected. The different capturing processes and the different corporeal sets recombined on stage, in a three-hour long temporal frame, are composed by subjective permutations that spread an unprecedented proxemics between bodies and objects, where the point of view of the observer is now also incorporated. The audience can freely decide to observe part of the performance and follow a performer through her actions and move outside to follow the steps of capturing the urban space.

Simultaneously, another part of the audience can observe the on stage performer's re-elaboration of the urban space captures.

The non-linear viewing of the show, in which the actions of the performers occur simultaneously in the urban space and on stage, enables the audience to overlap reality.

In this framework, the city is not a stage for dance, nor the body is setup to a site-specific mode. It is rather a situated work, in which the perception of the urban space is no longer information data but a practiced place.

Moving Projections

an interview with Niko Hafkenschied & Valentina Stepanova on 'Gorodets'

How did your new project Gorodets begin?

That's partly a personal story. Valentina's lineage comes from central Russia and Armenia. **The fascination with this region started with a curiosity about ancestors, how they lived and what you carry on from them. A search for your own roots.**

At the same time, you have the broader phenomenon of massive rural flight to megacities like Moscow and St. Petersburg. So we were interested to know, what the basis for this was, how life has changed, what we can find out about it, and how that forms part of our history as Western Europeans. In this sense, Russia is fascinating. It is the largest country in the world, always closely linked to Europe, and yet often strongly demonized, which shows us many blind spots. At the same time, there is a strong curiosity in it, even the climate alone, for example. I have long been dreaming to experience a deep winter at -40 °C, to understand how that physical condition affects you.

You went to stay in Gorodets to find that out?

We went to live for three periods (January, April, and September) in the Russian village of Gorodets, in the house of Valentina's grandfather. Each season was very different, so each time the experience was totally different. Gorodets is a small village from the 18th century, in a region that is now almost completely abandoned. There are still nine people living there. On weekends or during vacations, you will have a few extra visitors. **There are over 20,000 of these abandoned villages in Russia, which have a very special atmosphere. They have something aesthetically pleasing, because even though they have been empty for decades, the decay is still incomplete. Sometimes it seems like someone could live there. Yet, it stands empty.** The plants are too high, and the onset of decay is visible. In the winter, these villages are inaccessible without a tractor, because you cannot get through the snow. At this time, you are completely enclosed by frozen lakes, snowy fields and forests. The silence there is crazy. Yet, we have become intrigued by the picturesque scenery. At the same time, everything is primitive and unpredictable. You can plan nothing and spend the entire day just dealing with your basic needs. Sometimes we even had to change to a different home, because we had no heating. Those temperatures are simply lethal. You become extremely dependant on yourself, in the here and now.

Beauty in the midst of a hard, inescapable reality. How was this experience for you?

Something that we really wanted to understand was the idea of rural life as held by the generation who grew up there, but now live in cities. Valentina's grandfather was born in Gorodets in 1930, not so long after the revolution, during the time of Stalin. At the time, 80 percent of the Russian population lived in the countryside. Today, it is less than 20 percent. This is of course a global phenomenon, but in Russia this rural exodus was extreme. **What you see today, is an idealization of rural life by a generation that grew up there. You get a friction between an increasingly modern city life and the desire to escape from it.** Valentina's grandfather was almost constantly busy with trying to keep this idea of utopia alive, by reconstructing the home of his youth in Gorodets. On the other hand they used to cherish a utopia about the big city and life there, since they were attracted to it. **We find this tremendously fascinating, the fantasy of places where we think we can find our happiness.** And how different that often is in reality. In practice, it is often impossible to disconnect that beauty from that hardship.

How did you get started with the process?

We mainly started with recording, free documentary and video recordings of some romantic clichés that appealed to us. We are building an installation with some picturesque images that have some subtle movement, like a moving photograph, which are projected on tables made of sand. Through this, the audience can literally dig into the image, discover the image itself, its details, and also its history. **So we want to explore this themes of projections literally and figuratively, and find a new way to deal with documentary material. How can so-called 'objective images' trigger a layered experience and perhaps even get a kind of live quality, allowing an active exchange with their audience?** The installation is still in development, but the idea is that you visit a ghost town, where local stories and small talk are projected. Sound is also very important. The question is how we can integrate that banality and that beauty, that past and that present, that utopia and that reality. We are even thinking of using headsets with instructions to put people in contact with these things. It is a question of creating a space for a real experience.

How does your intervention in Venice relate to Gorodets?

In Venice, we delved deeper into this idea of the picturesque, and we explored media that are not usually associated with documentary: painting and drawing. We wanted to see how a documentary image could be translated through painting. We asked a number of local touristic landscape painters to paint images from Gorodets instead of summer Venetian cityscapes, while they sat in the city and looked out over the canals. This resulted in a small rupture in the expectations of tourists and passersby. Even in Venice, you have those two components: the tourist illusion and the contemporary life in an urban context. By bringing those two images together, a sunny Venice and a snowy Russian forest, you got an interesting survey of both. I believe strongly in the stratification of reality, even the most banal things such as a touristy city view or conversation in the queue of a post office. **I feel a lot of respect for that pure life, the honesty of that banality. We are always looking for something different, something that differs from the reality in which we live, but often you can find it where we already are.**

In the very reality we are trying to escape, we can already find the utopia we are seeking.

Yes, there is a kind of tipping point between cliché and authenticity. In Gorodets, we have also included many banal conversations, in queues, in shops, in cafes, or on the street. Gossip, talk about the weather, everyday conversations. When people don't know you are observing them, they are more spontaneous. But when you are going into a formal interview, it immediately breaks the atmosphere. This method really questions the need for artistic intervention, because you do not want to intervene in that kind of purity. We just lift these moments out of context, and that produces a small shift. **We all have a lot of clichés in our minds; the demonized image of Russia in Europe, for example. And we are closing each other in all the time, through these clichés or fixed images. In Gorodets, we try very gently to put these fixed images into motion again, allowing you to reconsider them.**



Venice interventions

a DIY interview with Roel Heremans, Stijn De Meulenaere, Philip Janssens & Marnix Rummens

RH: You have made a soundscape of Venice mixed with field recordings that you made from other locations around the world. Are the locations audible in the composition?

SD: Perhaps to the trained ear (laughs), but that is not the intention at all. It is only the intention to provide a sonorously interesting experience. It's about the structure, not the parts. By the way, the most beautiful sounds are always in the small details at locations you do not expect.

PJ: I really liked it very much, definitely towards the end (laughs).

SD: Always leave them wanting more.

PJ: It was good that it was not too anecdotal. It was not necessarily about the texture of the sound, although there was some structure in it. At the end it was really quite musical.

MR: I liked the soundscape as a concert in the darkness. This way you were invited by sound to re-imagine the city you were in real-time, in relation to your own memory, and places you've never been.

SD: I wanted to play only with the light from outside, so we kept the door open. With a bit of luck, we would also have some boats from the canal just outside. Serendipity and the like.

RH: Philip, how does your work compare to that of Stijn's?

PJ: It has a link somewhere since I think light and sound are inherently linked to each other. I hung a reflective cloth on the front of SaLE Docks, at least that was the plan. The police finally banned us and I was given a place inside the exhibition room.

MR: Yes, the wonderful thing about that canvas is that it lights up depending on the position and displacement of the public. Outside it would have functioned like a kind of lighthouse that sheds light on the city. But inside it worked very well. It was literally an eye-catcher that opened the space completely from the backside, and then disappeared again. An ephemeral object that appeared purely through its relationality and disappeared.

PJ: What did you do in Venice, Roel?

RH: I have made a lot of participatory listening and imagining choreographies over the last three years, inviting people to mentally simulate and project in a group. I used to use a lot of headphones, pre-programmed audio tracks and rectangular structures on the ground. In Venice, I wanted to create an imagine piece, but without the mentioned props, to allow more of the environment to come through.

SD: How did that work out?

RH: I just drew a circle in chalk on Punta Della Dogana and worked with my voice. It

soon escalated to an imagination session in which casual passengers gave each other instructions, creating a self-perpetuating imagination circle.

PJ: If you knew there was a circle, you saw the circle very clearly, but if you did not pay attention then you just walked through it without noticing. I found those parallel lines very interesting.

RH: That's indeed something I also noticed. If you wanted to see it, you saw it, otherwise it stayed hidden. Next to the entrance of Damien Hirst's extravagant exhibition, the contrast couldn't be bigger.

SD: What was the connection with the rest of the DMG group?

PJ: I see a connection in Roel's work. If I hear him talk about the individual components that are subordinate to those of the structure, it's more about connecting structures and topology, like in my work.

SD: Just like in any good soundscape. How was working in Venice for you guys?

RH: That was really super, especially SaLE Docks and what it represented, especially during the opening of the Venice Biennale. On the one hand, it was a good time to do activist work, but on the other hand, it was also sobering. For me, it was a fun task to warm up as

many locals as possible for my participatory performance work. How was it for you, Phillip?

PJ: VERY pleasant, what can I say? I learned a lot in Italy. Next time another hot country but then less expensive! (laughs)

MR: For me the diversity of locations and situations that Venice had to offer was just impressive. Thanks to the fact that SaLE Docks introduced us to different neighbourhood initiatives such as the occupied park Ca'bamba, their bottom-up housing project on Giudecca, etc. It has been amazing to see how these contexts – but also the city in general – inspired artists to engage, interact, develop their work in new ways.

SD: Yes, Venice has a strange atmosphere, full of tourists, plus the Biennale crowd. But the city is quite mesmerizing. You have the touristy hotspots, but some more residential corners as well. Suddenly you can be all alone in a street. Sometimes a microphone makes you a bit invisible. You don't move, focus your attention on the sound of a corner. And you see all these people passing by. See them take in the beauty and the chaos. See how they react to that, in all ranges of bewilderment. It has been quite informative, and beautiful as well.

Tactile reimagination

an interview with Christian Bakalov on PURE by Marnix Rummens

What is Pure?

PURE is the second part of a trilogy I'm developing around the concept of eternity by Spinoza. It's a one-on-one tour that aims to deconstruct the relationships that compose us and the things around us. Where the first part BRIGHT was a tour in the dark through a forest of phosphorescent signs, PURE opens up to its direct environment – inside or outside – and proposes different ways to relate to it, rediscover it, by the use of special goggles, blindfolds, an in-ear soundtrack. **The quest is to become aware of how our environment affects us, and how this impact changes the things we are in relation to.**

How do you do that, to become aware of your environment?

Well, first of all we involve all the senses: vision, touch, hearing, and smell or taste. During the tour your normal relationship with your surroundings is modified by depriving or enhancing these senses: you experience the world through touch or blurry vision, with an immersive soundtrack, etc. Secondly, we break the classical passive position of sitting in the dark. You are in constant movement, free or guided, and through that we try to appeal to your basic senses of curiosity and desire. We guide you gently out of your comfort zone and leave a lot of space to interact. In the end, we investigate not only how the performance can affect the audience but also how the audience can affect the performance.

What is the importance of this tactile approach?

We are estranged so much from touching each other that its impact can be very strong and profound, but it needs to be set and introduced gently. Somehow this tactile connection is maybe more pure than vision. It can be a strong, generous and even universal ges-

ture that transgresses spoken language. And blindfolded, without any visual information or control, it's even more focused, and very connective. **Touch somehow mirrors yourself and maps out your tensions, desires or blockades. It relaxes and activates at the same time, and engages you on a very concrete, emotional level.**

What role does the environment play in PURE?

PURE is a site specific intervention, so for a huge part it is influenced by its context. We've developed early try-outs in the city center of Brussels, on Giudecca Island in Venice, in a retirement home, a refugee center and in a museum for visual arts. Not only the images or situations one can create in any of these contexts are very different. The thematic associations also shift and the audiences are very diverse. That's the nice thing about it: we gently alter your experience of the space, looking for different ways to co-exist in the space, but it's always your own surroundings. As if you see your own life in a movie.

How did that work in Venice?

Well, of course PURE is a hybrid format that aims to activate the audience in re-imagining their relationship to their environment. So it suited the program very well. On the other hand, **it was amazing how quickly local social issues got thematized in this kind of public intervention. Just by installing Pure as a pavillion, but then on the more deserted island of Giudecca, the intervention related itself to the Biennale and its more unilateral and pragmatic way of dealing with the city.** There we had our own pavilion for the island, where the island was central. By setting up an installation publicly, you connect to the inhabitants and passers-by very organically. You talk about the work, they come and try it out. They even adopted a part of the installation after we left.

What does the future hold for PURE?

Because PURE is a contextual creation, you cannot rehearse in an isolated studio. Now that we have done a first series of try-outs, the project is ready for more extensive presentation. We have a series of basic figures and constructions that we can modify, but every space triggers the imagination differently of course. Now the time is right to focus on different audiences where the experience of touch and (re-)imagination can be particularly valuable. With KAAP in Ostend we plan to work further with refugees, a continuation of a first try-out in Klein Kasteeltje in Brussels. But this

really requires a different approach. For many of them being blindfolded has negative connotations, while the exercises in touch and trust are even more crucial than with a general audience. And there is an upcoming collaboration with patients in a hospital in Kortrijk. Kids and seniors will also be a focus, a bit later on. First experiments in a retirement home in Brussels really showed the value of that. **And it would be great to develop a way to include visitors and non-professionals as performers. In this way, PURE becomes a performance by and for a neighbourhood even more.**



Guerilla Postering in Venice

Tuur Marinus interviews Flup Marinus

(Tuur): Flup, can you explain something about your guerrilla postering in Venice? Where did the idea come from?

(Flup): Well, we left to Venice with another idea actually. We were thinking of doing a project with stereoscopes. But then on the plane we already realized that this project idea might be too ambitious for the time period we had, so we started to do some more brainstorming together. I was wearing a T-shirt that I had just received as a present from my god-daughter. It was a T-shirt with a print of a pigeon on it. That set us going on the theme of pigeons, and people dressing up as pigeons, because that's the kind of image I usually draw in my cartoons. We thought that there was also an obvious link between pigeons and Venice... Upon arriving and getting to know the place and the people, we were convinced that our stereoscope project wasn't gonna work. Also, during the presentation of the space at SaLE Docks and their goals and motivation, we thought we should at least try to come up with an idea for a project that would somewhat relate to the "Dark Matter" theme and the vision of SaLE Docks in general. So when we woke up after the first night there, you came up with the idea of printing a comic of two men dressed up as pigeons queuing at the Biennale on a shopping bag, combined with the text, "I queued at the Venice Biennale." It was the first time we worked together so intensely on a comic of mine. Normally I only send you my comics once they are made, and then maybe I'll make a few small changes after your feedback, but this time the idea started with you.

(Tuur): So that is the idea of the shopping bag, but do you remember how the idea of the guerrilla postering came about?

(Flup): If I remember correctly, when we presented the idea of a comic on a shopping bag at the first group meeting on day two, we got a lot of enthusiastic feedback, and people started to throw in ideas for more comics. I think it was actually Marnix who came up with the idea of a how-to guide, a kind of booklet that we could make to help people deal with Venice and it's hectic art tourism.

(Tuur): So, when did you draw the comics for the how-to guide?

(Flup): I drew them at home, between the first and the second week. It takes me about two or three days per comic, to get the drawing and the coloring right. And the process of getting the comic printed – ecologically – on the shopping bags was also quite laborious, and another one of our just-in-time experiences.

(Tuur): So, you had the ideas for the comics ready after the first week?

(Flup): Yes, we had a lot of ideas. We really had ideas for an entire booklet. Marnix suggested, for example, a nice one where you see a pigeon-man cat-

ching a free ride (as a pigeon) on the rooftop of a public bus-boat. Still needs to be drawn!

So I printed the comics – partially at home, partially at Workspacebrussels – and I took about 300 prints with me in my suitcase, together with the 250 shopping bags.

(Tuur): About those shopping bags, how did you spread them?

(Flup): First we thought of handing them out for free, but then we thought people would probably treat them as garbage... So in the end, we sold them at SaLE Docks for two euros each. We split the money we got for them with SaLE Docks, as a symbolic gesture to thank them for having us there...

(Tuur): Back to the comics, how did you go about hanging them?

(Flup): First I thought of hanging them all over town, but then I realized we didn't want to bother the locals with more tourist/art crap, So I decided to mainly do my postering on the big touristy passageways. First I still tried to remain out of sight while taping them on the walls, but then later I just did it in plain sight and didn't really experience any trouble.

It was funny that in the less visible spots the comics seemed to disappear quite quickly, but in the very busy areas, like around San Marco, they mostly hung there for the entire week.

(Tuur): How do you look back on the project now? What could have gone better? What went well?

(Flup): In general I think we both look back on the project with a very nice feeling. Maybe the comics aren't the sharpest ones I've ever drawn... I guess I always want to challenge myself to come up with better comics. But then again, all elements of this particular context considered, the project was an adequate answer to the challenge or invitation of SaLE Docks and Workspacebrussels. It should also be said that the entire period in Venice really felt like an exceptional experience. Very often we meet fellow artists at a festival over a quick dinner just before having to perform or build up a show, so you never get much farther than some social niceties. These two weeks were really an exceptional experience, in the sense that not only did we have time to really chat and discuss over many evening dinners, but we could also get a real view and sense of how our colleagues work on a project. For example, I was quite struck to see the way Niko and Valentina worked. Every night the idea for their project looked completely different! And this until the very last moment! And I (we) think all the ideas were pretty brilliant, and their final project was really amazing! And that basically goes for all the artists that were there. I feel that now we really formed a network among ourselves that is a combination of a sense of friendship and respect for each other's work!

What is that dirty, ugly thing under my plate?

an interview with Gosie Vervloessem by Filip Berte

Hi Gosie,

Four months ago we were in Venice; a city we entered from a kind of double perspective; a mainstream or outer perspective and a perspective coming from the research we 'inhabit' through our own daily artistic practice; let's call it an alternative and inner perspective; a perspective as from an outsider's position.

Within the context of the DMG festival, you made a very intriguing placemat that was spread out in different restaurants in Venice. At least it could be considered as an unexpected alternative to the mainstream glossy placemats we normally find in restaurants. By this intervention, you offered the restaurants' guests a big question on 'Otherness', simply put on the table they are sitting at.

Do you consider this intervention as an invitation for a dialogue or do you see it more like a superimposed monologue - a statement by which you communicate your inner concerns in a mass tourist city?

With my work I always seek for a dialogue because that's actually the way my work grows and evolves. But, when I look at the placemat I made - and I have it here in front of me - it looks more like a statement. Also the esthetics I used is more that one of a pamphlet. So it looks like a statement. But this question I raise - and that is also the heading of the placemat - namely 'Who is eating Whom?', is more like an open question. I don't have a definite answer for it either. It's an opening for a kind of a dialogue, I guess.

While I was making it, I was also inspired by the book of Michel Pollan, called 'The botany of desire'. This book describes and states that is not only us who use plants but that also plants are using us to spread. So, the relation between man and the plants is not all the time unidirectional. It is therefore not like we normally see it; that we are the only ones who can manipulate the plants. No, he describes that it is also the plants who are seducing and manipulating us in a certain way. And probably it's in both ways. It is always very multi-layered and complex so I don't have an answer on the question of 'Who is eating Whom?'. So, in this way it is a question that is opening up for a dialogue. But the esthetics is very pamphleteering!

Yes, it is. That's why I was asking for it. Did you have the idea also to go and visit the restaurants where your placemat was installed, in order to see and hear about the reactions on it? Did you want to follow it up and if so, in which way would you have done that?

Well, for me it was also an exercise in not following it up. Because I couldn't be in Venice at that that when the placemats were installed. Of course I would have liked to have delivered the placemats to the restaurants myself, and to have explained and to see how people would react. But I wouldn't have sit at the tables and talk to the tourists about it, no.

Well, I am asking for it because I think there was and is still a big potential in

the work you made. Because of the fact that the 'style' of it and the way you were putting your question quite in the face of the people who would see it lying on their table, I think it would be very interesting to follow it up and have at least a conversation about it.

Well yes, I understand what you mean, but - and sorry to interrupt you here - it is also about attacking the hygienic esthetics. And I found it therefore also an interesting thing to do in a restaurant. For instance; I used a lot of red on the placemat and the points, referring to those you can find on Google maps, I made red as well. I made them more like blood tears. Red tears of blood. In this way, the eating becomes more fleshy and carnal. It refers to the carnal pleasures. And my work is also a commentary on that;

On cleanliness. you are attacking it, like you say; in fact you want to intrude in the clean comfort zone of both kitchen and guest room of the restaurant. Is it then also because of this reason that you have put the recipe for the famous spaghetti alla vongole on the placemat? It is a very traditional Italian recipe. As you were doing the research on the Filipino clam, which is very present in the Lagune of Venice; did you therefore want also want to intrude in the traditional recipe and the cookbook?

Yes. But they are already doing it themselves. I am not inventing this spaghetti alla vongole 'Manila'. It's just the fact that they don't call it 'Manila'. But it's anyway with Manila clamps, because these are the only kind of clamps they are selling in Venice! There is no native clamps anymore. At least, that is what I have understood.

So, in fact the people in the restaurants are not eating the local, native clam anymore?

Yes. But there is a very big difference between what is local and what is native. So, it is local I believe. But it is not native. There is always a confusion between these two terms. In fact these are really difficult questions; because for instance there is also this advise of 'eat them to beat them', meaning that we should eat all of the invasive species, so we could get rid of them. Thus, the advise to eat more vongole 'Manila'.

And listen: in fact it all started for me with the tourist map of Venice on which I somehow saw these two creatures eating each other. And in general I am very much interested in anthropomorphism. So, I saw like two mouths and two creatures that were eating each other. although the map refers to the city as one entity.

Did you then consider your recipe for the invasive kind of spaghetti alla vongole then as a meta narrative? or maybe as a potential vehicle for change, on the discourse of fear that exists, regarding this invasive 'Manila' clamp? Because with this conversation I wanted us to focus a bit more on the idea of 'Otherness' that is very present in your work in general as well. So, would it be right if I would say that this recipe in spe-

Dark Matter Games is a project by:

S.a.L.E. Docks is an independent space for art and politics initiated in 2007 by a group of activists who decided to occupy abandoned salt-storage docks in the heart of Venice. It is run by cultural workers, artists and students. S.a.L.E. Docks aims to reverse the processes that privatize the art commons, mainly by addressing a series of open problems: the relationship between cultural capital and endemic precariousness, the neoliberal use of art as a device to capture critical imagination and thinking, and the link between art, finance and real estate. They maintain two different dynamics: facilitating collaboration between local artists, citizens and young students, and developing projects with international art agents and artists. S.a.L.E. organizes seminars, exhibitions, workshops and public actions to create a physical space, a cutting-edge perspective and a solid practice in which the central focus is culture – culture as an element of collective work and common good, rather than a form to be exploited.

www.saledocks.org

Workspacebrussels is a workspace for live arts and performance in their most diverse forms. Together with a diverse group of independent artists, we explore how the encounter of various disciplines such as performance, installation art, music, architecture, visual art and graphic design can lead to new art forms and new ways to exchange with various audiences. First and foremost, we are a creative breeding ground that connects with very different parts of Brussels and the world that surrounds it.

www.workspacebrussels.be

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Dark Matter Games is a project initiated by S.a.L.E. Docks & workspacebrussels, developed by all the participating artists, artworkers and participants. www.darkmattergames.org

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