

## MIGRATION OF ART IN OTHER PLACES/SPACES

What happens when art leaves its 'own' territory? When it moves into situations of collaboration in other territories? (Wright, 2013, p. 29) wonders the theoretician, critic and curator Stephen Wright who names this process as *exterritorial reciprocity*, trying to explain what happens with the 'vacuum' space that art leaves behind when migrating to another place. According to the norm of reciprocity 1:1, the abandoned space, *formerly reserved for art but suddenly made available to other forms of endeavor* (Wright, 2013, стр. 29), a resource for practitioners from other domains where art has migrated, and which they now utilize for their own use.

What are those new places where contemporary art has headed to, the territories that it occupies? Today, by breaking the limits of the representative, the formal, the visual, the contemporary art enters the domain of social living, however, not symbolically like in the Modernism but actually engaging in its shaping, changing and creating.

*Socially engaged art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines, moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity.* (Helguera, 2011, p. 5)

In his *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (2011), the artist Pablo Helguera discusses that gap, that is, the thin line between the two disciplines, social work and socially engaged art, that neither fit in the traditional expectations of the artwork nor keep to the established methods of social working. The contemporary art stretches out and moves out from the closed circle art, imposing a wider, more open approach. The more ambitious art project succeeds to abandon the regular, expected frame and to directly work with people from the streets, individuals from marginalized groups in open public spaces that are untypical for creating and presenting art works. The participants in these projects are not only followers and performers of someone's idea but also, creators and co-authors who can claim their contribution in the creation of an art project.

In the further text, I will present few socially engaged participative projects which skillfully intertwine the art space with many other domains from the social living, combining experiences and methods from other disciplines. These socially engaged projects are often differently named, but recently, the theoreticians, the critics, and the artists unite them under the term *social practice*. "*Social practice*" avoids evocations of both the modern role of the artist (as an illuminated visionary) and the postmodern version of the artist (as a self-conscious critical being). Instead, the term democratizes the construct, making the artist into an individual whose specialty includes working with society in a professional capacity." (Helguera, 2011, p. 3)

The indicated examples note that this type of art projects can be diametrically opposed, some of them even discordant, but the main common element of all the artworks of the social practice, is the re-establishment of the relations with the collective, having the members of a specific social group as active participants and creators of the project, escaping production of a formal artwork as a main objective. Tom Finkelpearl, the American arts promoter and former museum director of the Queens Museum of Art in New York and the author of *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (2012), defines the social practice as *art that's socially engaged, where the social interaction is at some level the art.*" (Miranda, 2014)

The art historian Kristina Marek in her text *Aesthetics as interactive concept* tries to answer the questions referring artists' need for direct impact in the sociopolitical domain. *So an artist, who, in times of extensive economization and social indifference, now gets involved, intervenes and acts within the social infrastructure, and that not merely to demonstrate, reflect, or create something in the field of the aesthetic using aesthetic means, but to actually change an aspect of the social conditions of life.* (Marek, 2011, p. 262)

Apart from the utopian undertone present in the collaboration between the artists and the communities, in many instances, it has resulted in successful transformation/improvement of the life quality of a group of individuals. The Austrian artist collective *WochenKlausur* perfectly illustrates how artists can contribute to the improvement of the actual sociopolitical circumstances by directly intervening in the social structures of everyday life. This collective has been actively working since 1993 and by now has completed more than various 30 projects- from recycling projects, home construction for vulnerable social groups, shelter centers, community kitchens, organizing medical care for homeless people to retirement homes for drug-addicted women in Zurich. According to them, *Artists' competence in finding creative solutions, traditionally utilized in shaping materials, can just as well be applied in all areas of society: in ecology, education and city planning. There are problems everywhere that cannot be solved using conventional approaches and are thus suitable subjects for artistic projects.* (WochenKlausur, 2016) The *WochenKlausur* team counts eight artists, however, depending on the project, many other local artists take participation. Invited by an art institution that deals with a particular issue, these artists gather in the museum/institution and perform a thorough research in a certain time frame which lasts eight weeks regarding solution finding, while the realization emerges in a shorter time frame. The artists must inform themselves about the local sociopolitical context and assign the possible objectives. *WochenKlausur* point out the fact that many people are deprived of any choices concerning their current living circumstances, feeling powerless to fight for any better conditions, having neither a lobby group nor a voice that would be heard despite the public institutions that are authorized to provide such conditions but are not always capable of achieving that conventionally in this bureaucratized world. Operating with un-Orthodox approaches, the artists project a long-term plan and simultaneously hand down the project to the local participants to continue the initiative while they just keep on following the improvement of the project. These artists have made numerous projects that had a direct impact on the living conditions and contributed to social changes including the project of a mobile clinic in Vienna that enabled medical care for more than 600 homeless people and the assistance for migrants during visa application procedures.

#### Socio-cultural interference with art practices

The alertness of the contemporary artists and their awareness of the sociopolitical contexts in which they act, enables them to recognize and detect the issues and later engage in their solving. This kind of art actions are not public only because they proceed in public spaces but for they are genuinely public, opened and social. According to Mouffe's statement over the distinctive art activist interventions and practices, *we need to see them as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character.* (Mouffe, 2007)

Correspondingly to Mouffe's statement over the art practices in public spaces where they insist to reveal the subjects which are suppressed by the dominant consensus and dismantle what is obscure and swept under the carpet in order to "give voice to the voiceless in favor of the omnipresent hegemony" I distinguish the art projects of the Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko. In 1996, he launched a collaboration with communities and through his projects which contain sound and motion gives voice to the quiet, marginalized citizens who live overshadowed by the monuments. Over architectural facades, he projects pictures of hands, portraits or entire bodies which belong to distinctive groups of citizens who stand as witnesses of their own experiences (which they went through). One such project is the *War Veteran Project* where the artist interviews fourteen American war veterans who talk about war experiences, the difficulties they encounter upon their return to the normal, civil living, as well as the

feelings of loss and guilt. Wodiczko edits these conversations and translates them in a video which he projects over the statue of Abraham Lincoln on the Union Square in New York in 2012. The establishment of relations between the artist and the community, regardless the proportion of the social group, is conclusive for artwork in the domain of the social practice. However, the flux of relating and its final outcome varies from one artwork to another. The collaboration itself is a significant component of this practice, and it is estimated by the artist, the creator of the project. When stepping into the role of a creator, collaborating with the community in a project, the artist must be aware of the main qualities of successful collaboration- responsibility and expertise, according to Helguera. In order to depict the notion of successful collaboration, Helguera refers to the experiences of the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire who states that the artists mustn't stand in a superior position, rather stand unpretentiously have in mind that his/hers and the knowledge of the community which he/she works with are not more significant or substantial, but different.

When the individuals are mutually engaged in equality and intelligence, they are stimulated to exchange their intellectual undertakings, still keeping them apart and feeling equally capable of using the power of the others to pave their own path. When we participate in performance, painting, a text, a game or any other art form, the power that emerges is not triggered by the collective but by the capability of the anonymous, the one that unifies us. That capability can be practiced by *unpredictable games of associations and dissociations... The position of a spectator doesn't impose passivity that should be turned into an activity. That is our regular condition. We learn and teach, act and recognize as spectators, someone who, at any given moment, associate what they see with what they've seen, told, done or dreamt about.* (Ransijer, 2010, p. 26)

In the last few years, in the museums and art universities, there is a high actualization of the question concerning the intersection of art, education and the performance and re-examination of the potentials and the roles of the institutions. Perhaps, to us, the most popular exemplar of consolidation between contemporary art and pedagogy is Joseph Boys who during the 1970s fought against the limitations of academic enrollment and for the establishment of a free, untraditional, open-access academy. "A free international university for creativity and interdisciplinary research" where any person can use its potentials as a creative being and where the economic studies wouldn't rely strictly on money issues but rather on inventing alternative and creative forms of capital. Luis Camnitzer, Tim Rollins, Paul Chan, Tania Bruguera, are just a few of the artists whose main focus, for at least one period of their art practice, was on education. The alternative schools, like the one of Burguera from 2002-2009, aim not only to teach students how to make art but also how to *experience and form a civil society*. (Bishop, 2012, p. 237) Numerous museums follow/create these tendencies which contribute to the internal re-inventing and re-organizing of the institutions, making them open and active doers in the civil living. One such example in the Queens Museum in New York, where the artist Tania Burguera commences the experimental project, (which successfully functions for some time) *The Immigrant Movement International* through which she offers legal and other kinds of services to the migrants, including free professional consulting in various domains, legal advice, children workshops, practical skills courses, etc.

The curator Nato Thompson claims that *Just like the video, the picture and the clay take form, so do people who gather*. (Thompson, 2012, p. 22) Thompson supports his idea by adding that the civil actions, the spontaneous civil gatherings, and assemblies, the guerilla actions share the same attributes with the contemporary art and can be perceived in that way. The establishment of relations between the artist and the community, regardless the proportion of the social group, is conclusive for artwork in the domain of the social practice. However, the flux of relating and its outcome varies from

one artwork to another. The activism and the political action are among the forms which we can use to fight

against the "spectacle" as a product of the capitalistic machinery. The social practices in the contemporary art are some form of an antithesis of that spectacle and a critic against the spectacle mentioned by Guy Debord. *Participatory art in the strictest sense forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer.* (Bishop, 2012, p. 36)

The artist, leaving its own comfort zone and entering the realm of the public, nowadays, intensely conducts his/her art practice towards creating with and inside the collective/community. Concerning the social practice, the entering the realm of the public doesn't imply installation of artworks, for example, monumental sculptures in a public space which are genuinely autonomous Modernistic artworks but artworks that communicate with the community/ audience. Miwon Kwon in *Public art and urban identities* writes about public art which researches the issues of gender, race, cultural identity and other sociological topics that characterize a certain place. *That is the only way for the artist to create a work that is unique and exclusive to any other space and location.* (Kwon, 1997) Art may be considered as engaged if it is authentic and derives from the present moment. The form and the structure of the art act should directly correspond to the time and place, that is, the contextual performance of the work. I will illustrate this statement with the series of "sculptures" by Thomas Hirschhorn: Bijlmer Spinoza Festival (2009), 24h Foucault (2004), Deleuze Monument (2000) and others which are temporary object installations (in a residential area, far from museums and galleries) that can be used as an open platform for art, talks, and discussions with the residents.



**Bijlmer Spinoza Festival (2009)**

### **From art to subversive sociopolitical actions**

Núria Güell, an artist from Barcelona, Spain is also quite radical in her actions and art engagements, using all the possible media that she has at hand for subversive sociopolitical actions. She redefines and breaks the limits of the "legal," analyzing and

detecting the abuse of power owned by the institutions/ ruling systems. Her artworks challenge the established systems of power, meanwhile, using her "privileged" status of an artist, she teases the hegemonistic, enforced principles, finding their weak spots in order to avoid them. Part of her contributions as an activist is her book where she has described the process of withdrawing money from a bank, instructions for

getting a legal visa, stay and residence in asylum, etc. One of her more radical operations is the hiring of a company which supposed to eject the front doors of houses which, due to unpaid principle balance, were taken into possession from the owners and repossessed by CAM (Caja de Ahorros del Mediterraneo) which, by means of various political frauds, corruption and legal manipulations, succeeded to increase its value through real-estates in the course of a few years. After the ejection of the front door, the families who were kicked out could return in their homes while the bank had no legal basis to prosecute the company responsible for the door ejection nor the harmed families.

Collaborating with the experts of economy Lucio Urtubia, Enric Duran and Qmunty, Guel publishes a handbook with explications of many strategies that can help one to escape some of the bank charges or draw money from the banks. This handbook is her media that aims to educate the citizens about the banking principles, analyze the banking systems and offer alternative options that could be used reversibly. Moreover, she has developed the concept of *Displaced Legal/Moral Application* that ought to define the methodology of her work. She analyzes the legal and moral principles and applies them on the opposite side, moving the relations of power, thus posing questions and opening discussions about the established system.

The duo of Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos under the name of *The Yes Men* is also quite radical and creatively fights against the corporations and other capitalistic power centers. Using the symbols and products of capitalism, appearing in some media, on TV or by the hacking of the corporation web sites, the duo illustrates a possible form of resistance by manipulating with the same media which is used by the capitalistic power centers.

A particularly significant project which derives from a community of unprivileged, marginalized groups is the one of the Afro-American artist Rick Lowe, *Project Row Houses* (1990) in Houston, Texas which surpasses the limitations of a public art project and turns into a community service, educational, revitalizing project in which artists, activists and administrators restore twenty-two houses. The artist's purpose in this project is to *use art as an apparatus that enriches people's life aside from the power of the establishment*. (Finkelpearl, 2000, p. 237) The residents of these houses are impoverished families, mainly single mothers who in this project see an opportunity to leave their financial crisis as well as to acquire skills and knowledge that could help us in future. In addition to the housing spaces and the educational centers, some of the houses have been turned into art galleries with regular exhibitions and discussions that are relevant contextual meaning to the community.



### **Project Row Houses 1**

By aligning individuals of different professional expertise, the art projects look forward to creating hybridous, experimental communities instead of taking over the postponed duties of the national social institutions. The contemporary art practices outweigh the modernistic concepts of the ready-made and the appropriation, entering the domain of cultural production which emphasizes collaboration, sharing, exchanging and interhuman relations. There are no more artworks which are concluded entities, but they rather divergently exhibit and present themselves, being multipresent and intervolved in the public sphere of cultural exchanges.

The social art practice challenges the art market, offering inventive forms of authorship. The critic and curator Andy Horwitz discusses the "re-invention" of this form in his essay about social practice. He claims that the trend of this art form *speaks to two fundamental shifts in American culture: one, a broad re-thinking of the role of the arts in society and two, a rejection of corporate capitalism's demand that citizenship is predicated on being a consumer, not a creator or empowered participant in civic life.* (Horwitz, 2012)

Apart from art itself, the social and political theories also fail to offer solutions or projections concerning the future. Standing in such uncertainty regarding the future, the citizen revises the offered possibilities to act in the social reality and tests the methods of impact in the sociopolitical discourse and inside the institutional system. The citizen-artist uses his/her creative capacities to find a model through which he/she will utilize the methods of the system for her/his own cause. The question over art's social role in the society, according to Shannon Jackson, names the Russian artist group *Chto Delat* (What is to be done?), discussing what should be done in the 21st century, what art can do, *what would that "doing" globally refer to in the 21st century?* (Jackson, 2012, p. 89)

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