

## **WHW**

### **New outlines of the possible**

“The individual and the group cannot avoid a certain existential plunge into chaos. This is already what we do every night when we abandon ourselves to the world of dreams. The main question is what we gain from this plunge: a sense of disaster, or the revelation of new outlines of the possible?” (1)

Félix Guattari

### **I. Collectivity and creativity**

*Collective Creativity* deals with different forms of collective artistic creativity whose protagonists share common programs, ways of life, methodologies or political standpoints. It is focused on specific kinds of social tensions that serve as a common axis around which various group activities are being organized. It is interested in the different emancipatory aspects of collective work where collaborative creativity is not only a form of resisting the dominant art system and capitalist call for specialization, but also a productive and performative criticism of social institutions and politics. Which strategies are taken by collectives in public space, which alternative forms of “sociability” are generated, in which ways do they occupy and change the system and the conditions of production and representation, how do they affect the social order? *Collective Creativity* does not see group activity solely in terms of the scope and efficiency of tools used in attempts to change the sociopolitical situation; it also traces the paradox of self-sufficient enjoyment in group work, which inevitably overcomes and betrays its own instrumentality and use value.

*Collective Creativity* is focused on the artists’ group as a paradigmatic mode of collective artistic creativity. The artists’ group includes a certain continuity and duration in time, as well as the decision to stay and work together, a decision which cancels all other potentialities, no matter how temporary. At the same time, there is almost always present an awareness of the clock of self-destruction ticking in every group endeavor. Intensification of collective cooperation and interchange is more or less inevitably followed by a retreat from group life, and from the fringes of commodity culture to its center. A certain level of institutional ordering, operational structure, and organizational mission is also inescapable in every non-hierarchical

and autonomous artistic activity, and no level of the often mystified non-formality of a group can cancel it.

By moving away from visions of the collective understood as a homogenous, unified body in which singularities are irrevocably drawn into an anonymous mass, collective creativity is inscribed in a field of exciting, creative interactions and multidirectional and unpredictable group dynamics. Through collective and group ways of operating and their relating to each other and toward the world at large, a complex terrain is being shaped in which projects of concrete social transformations are fused with ideas of radical individuation. These overlappings and intersections are exactly what make the unique spaces of collectivism so attractive – it seems that only within them we can imagine the realization of our potentialities. As Paolo Virno writes in relation to Gilbert Simondon's book *L'individuation psychique et collective*, "only within the collective, certainly not within the isolated subject, can perception, language, and productive forces take on the shape of an individuated experience" (2). Formed in the background of accomplishing tasks which are not possible to accomplish individually, experiences of collectivity are imposed as crucial transformational forces of individuals and society.

What is the role of an act of creativity within the processes of reterritorialization of collectivity? *Collective Creativity* is interested in those instances of collective artistic creativity which is not turned towards itself, nor is it engaged with the production of an autonomous object. Instead, groups and collectives are concerned with the creation of autonomous social fields, 'microcosms' that are self-governed and which impose a set of their own self-regulations on the dominant system of power. These physical but also symbolic, intellectual and political 'sub fields', created by collective efforts, strive for the constitution of an open, free space, a space for play and creation but also a territory of social struggle and conflicts.

As Đjuro Seder, member of the Croatian group Gorgona said in 1963, "The Collective Work cannot be foreseen as a form, only as an effort. The final appearance of the Collective Work is of no consequence at all." (3) In other words, collective creativity exists only as a never finalized process in which creativity functions as a side-effect of the emancipatory powers of a collective.

## **II. The group and figures of resistance**

Cultural production, in its broadest sense, assumes collective working situations and more or less cooperative and self-organized models. There is a consensus regarding the fundamental collectiveness of art, both in terms of the social agents it engages, from critics to curators, from producers to spectators, and in the socio-cultural histories and values it represents. It seems necessary to resist the lure of “sociologism” and the self-absorbed generalization that hangs over the attempt to think of artistic collectivity. To avoid sociologism seems especially important in attempts at interpretation which must resist the seeing-in of collectivity in the artwork, but also avoid any aesthetization of practices that otherwise have to be considered as firstly social and political.

There are a number of figures of resistance which are often considered immanent to the collective artistic practice – autonomy from the art system, critique of the bourgeois concept of public space and separation of the public and private spheres through processes of self-institutionalizing which appropriate political functions normally assigned to public space, non-hierarchical processes of building a politics of the collective, self-regulation and self-valorization of the actions – in short, resistance to the dominant market mechanism for which a value is still based on the authorship of artistic genius.

But these do not necessarily belong to collective artistic endeavors, as is testified by the series of collaborative and cooperative projects abounding on the art scene, and which do not differ in any way from the corporative praising of team work and team creativity, nor from the marketing-driven fashionable and politically contradictory nostalgia for times of innocent collectivism of the leftist avant-garde. It takes the consequence of the choice, however temporal, to realize the capacity of the self-regulation of one’s own artistic production and distribution, to make these figures of resistance functional and operative. They are more than just an outcome of the usefulness of joint work, rather a surplus which never can be subsumed under the common denominator of a group, the surplus generated by the belief, or hope, that it is possible to realize them collectively – and to enjoy them collectively.

### **III. The group and geography**

The interest in a specific politicality of collective creativity is not restricted geographically, but it does seem to be especially interesting from the perspective of the “New Europe” and in the context of other geographical points with similar ‘troubles with modernism’ and a tradition of artists’ self-organizing. In that respect, the mapping of various trans-generational and international links and connections is based on the perspectives of cultural zones which render the reading of modernity as a unique and homogenous cultural capital of the West problematic.

The traditional categories of imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism seem too simple to explain the geopolitical complexity that has emerged from the reterritorialization and respatialization of capitalism in the last decades. In the conditions of “uneven spatio-temporal developments” (4), the forms of resistance to neo-liberal capitalism and the dynamics of the class struggle treat geographical reorganization and restructuring, spatial strategies and geopolitical elements as a polygon for the realization of rights to a new production of space and geographical alliance. In that sense the exhibition starts from Eastern Europe, but Eastern Europe as a starting point is not meant as support of the thesis of cultural assimilation nor of ‘essential’ differences simplified to consequences of communist regimes. Rather, it attempts to relate developments in societies and situations characterized by recent ruptures which came about as consequences of specific relations to interests of global capitalism, such as post-communist transition in Eastern Europe (& beyond), war and post-war normalization in ex-Yugoslavia, insurrection in Argentina following the financial collapse in December 2001, social experiments in Brazil, etc.

### **IV. The group is a spatial phenomenon**

In general, spatial strategy is immanent to group artistic production. It implies a spatial constitution (where it is often about physical space, but not exclusively) and the development of spatial metaphors. The group is a spatial phenomenon which acts in the direction of contraction or in the direction of expansion, changing the spatial qualities with a strategy of multidirectional isolation or the conquering, appropriating of a space which has political qualities. While reflecting on the different strategies and procedures by which the creation of an autonomous field is enabled, the inner structure of the exhibition oscillates between the two

dynamics of isolation and of occupation. Both working procedures aim for the same goal, to create a space of autonomy as a field of intense human and social interaction.

While acts of collective occupation present a set of collective strategies for the direct occupying, appropriating and conquering of public and ideological space, the isolation works as a process of separation from others, in which case the group represents a safe place which enables 'excursions' into the outer world. This 'escapism' is not born out of the need for exclusion as such, but as an answer to political repression and control, a search for a space not contaminated by ideology and capital. The strategies of isolation and occupation, of contemplation and action, do not function separately, but rather dialectically, thus reflecting the very dynamic of collective creativity.

The group's spatial strategy has various areas of activity, from the physical space of the city as a place in which we are "condemned to live" (5), the geo-political spatial constructs of a false homogeneity, the micro-politics of the space of communities, to the space of physical, historical and ideological visibility and/or seclusion. The production of space is realized as a struggle and practice of rights to reconstruct the assigned spatial relations (territorial forms, communicational capacities and regulations) in ways in which they transform space from an absolute framework of activity into more adaptable, relative and relational aspects of social life. Although the context of the exhibition is defined by the complex intersections of contemporary and historical perspectives, as well as by the cultural and geo-political parallels and divergences of different localities, the exhibition does not make an attempt towards a homogenous and finished 'history' of collective artistic creativity. Rather, it offers a certain 'collectively subjective' vision which encompasses several prominent group positions as referential points and investigates operative modes and strategies that are actively resonant in the present, with an emphasis on parallels, 'substantial repetitions' and diverse forms of artistic archives. In this respect the exhibition does not enter into the historical taxonomy of the long tradition of collectivity in art, but by using historical examples as referential points it tries to juxtapose the past and present and outline possible future strategies.

## **V. Why the exhibition?**

Today when it seems that the institution of the museum has the cultivation of nostalgia as its goal, the production of sanitized collective memories, the nurturing of uncritical aesthetic sensibilities, and the absorption of future possibilities into a non-conflictual arena that is

eternally present, the museum exhibition is not just a self-explanatory medium for the gathering of group artistic practice. But the control of the production and distribution of autonomous activist artistic engagement does not exclude the use of institutional structures and resources, in which political activism does not have to result in the exclusive reducing to subversions within the institutional framework or symbolic transgression. The critical autonomy in which collective artistic practices invest in the misalliance with artistic institutions is not just an expression of nostalgia for the symbolic function of the museum which continues to be inseparable from the notion of public space and democratic culture, but also the temporal and temporary arena which orders the setting up of the politics of self-representation of the group. Here it is not about the “representation” or “illustration” of the group’s activities in the process of creating art, but about the vital functions of visualizing the communities and coalitions. The group also emerges through efforts at self-representation and communal processes, with all the struggles and negotiations included in that process which is essential for the existence of collectivity.

(1) Félix Guattari, “Pour une refondation des pratiques sociales”, in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1992, p. 1.

(2) Paolo Virno referring to Gilbert Simondon’s book *L’individuation psychique et collective*, Paris 1989, in Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, New York 2004, p. 79.

(3) From Đjuro Seder’s answer to the question whether it is possible to produce a collective work, 1963, in Marija Gattin, *Gorgona/Protocol of Submitting Thoughts*, Zagreb 2002, p. 13.

(4) Cf. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Los Angeles 2000.

(5) Robert Park, *On Social Control and Collective Behavior*, Chicago 1967, p. 3.