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Caught Between Two Stools – or on the necessity of considering new approaches to funding culture (an unasked-for final report)

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The project series Work to do! Self-organisation in precarious working conditions was an attempt to investigate the dynamics, emancipative moments and self-empowerment potentials of concepts of self-organisation, while at the same time exposing the problems they face and teasing out the paradoxes they become entangled in. Besides various dialogical formats (cf. the respective text in the last edition of the Shedhalle Newspaper) carried out as 'public research', the prime focus was on realising artistic projects. The starting point of our considerations was to develop and realise seven extensive works in close collaboration with the participating artists and artist groups for the duration of the project series. Here the dynamics and necessities inherent to the projects were to set the tempo, with the aim of facilitating the creation of diverse (segmented) publics and ensuring a sustainability of various approaches. By presenting and discussing preliminary results, the participants and the interested public were given the opportunity to actively help shape or at the very least follow the progress of the projects. This approach of a 'productive slowness' did not result in less work for all involved, but in fact demanded considerably more time and effort. Now that some of the projects have been concluded and while others still continue, we would like to embark here on an initial résumé. A reflection on our institutional framework conditions will be of particular importance in this context. We understand these as being exemplary for the situation of small and medium-sized institutions pursuing a committed programme and with a low budget which favour close collaboration with artists and see themselves as locations for producing transdisciplinary knowledge; on the other hand, we also grasp our situation as indicative in a more general sense, namely of the conditions under which research-based, participatory, socially-relevant and context-related art production takes place today.

Whilst the art market booms and a selected few artists even manage to make money through their involvement in the market, what interests us are those practices which first and foremost do not create saleable 'products' but generate immaterial value, often in the sense of producing knowledge and topics or temporary interventions. The frequently described knowledge society, the hype surrounding artistic research (which unfortunately all too often merely means art AND research) and the funding support given to the Creative Industries as an economic location factor, by no means provide the necessary requisite conditions – rather, from our position it seems as if the aforementioned practices and the institutions making the effort to support them remain 'caught between two stools', and indeed

that the space between these stools is becoming increasingly restrictive. In many cases we have described 'in-between space' as productive and still understand it in the sense of the non-categorisable, permitting the emergence of other spaces for thought and action; in the specific case of financing such projects however, we have experienced how – to take one example – the attempt to critically question the neo-liberal exploitative absorption of moments of self-organisation has, given our own framework conditions, unfortunately also led to a re-production of precarious working conditions. We are fully aware that the Shedhalle is financially better off than smaller institutions, project spaces and self-organised initiatives as well as, and above all, the majority of artists; nonetheless, we consider it necessary to think about other approaches towards funding culture which are neither work- nor category-oriented.

While in Switzerland the British Council has ceased funding the visual arts altogether and the Federal Office of Culture is looking to replace its 'watering can' approach to funding many smaller and medium-sized institutions by awarding a prize for the 'year's best exhibition', in August 2007 the Federal Cultural Foundation in Germany launched its 'open funding' model, providing support only for projects with a minimum application volume of 50,000 euros and which can boast a secure 20% co-financing of total costs. The efforts by funding institutions to attract even greater attention and further enhance their visibility in the media-dominated public sphere has increasingly caused problems for smaller groups, initiatives and institutions seeking to realise projects outside the mainstream. Moreover, the current shift of funding policy towards greater compatibility with mainstream sensitivities is also taking place at a time when many other foundations and public sponsors continue to provide financial support primarily for the transport of completed artWORKS and the travel costs of the artists to the respective vernissage. The issue of artist fees and production costs remains unanswered and is becoming increasingly pressing.

The boom in the art market already remarked on, from which only a few global players, art dealers, auction houses, galleries and the odd 'star artist' profit, as well as the media hype surrounding mega art events, glamour and social events like international art fairs and their parties, obstruct a clear view on the fundamental structural problems facing artistic/cultural projects and the individuals involved in them who are active beyond these mainstream trends. Against this background, conferences like **Kunst Werte Gesellschaft**, organised by the Federal Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Kunstvereine (ADKV) and the Akademie der Künste in the early summer of this year in Berlin and devoted to "the current importance of non-profit art institutions", appear a little like the proverbial (non-) action of the 'rabbit hypnotised by a snake': several contributions to the discussion addressed, seemingly perforce, the 'spectre of the art market' in astounding detail. The question arises if it is not just as necessary, indeed not more important, to blend out the art market for a short time, so as to concentrate on the framework and production conditions of art projects which pursue strategies of producing socially-relevant themes and wish to be recognised and *dealt with* by publics anchored in society and not be *dealt in* by the art market.

Such a desirable focus demands from all participants of the art system – but in particular the institutions and foremost those institutions contributing to art and culture funding – an analysis of artistic working and production conditions and methodologies, while also simultaneously self-reflectively experimenting with strategies and instruments, so as to pose productive questions as to the possibilities of implementing and financing such practices. But as long as not even artist fees for new works/creative production can be applied for with many state and private funding institutions, but rather the tacit assumption generally prevails that the art market will provide the expected reward and recognition at a later point in time – which in turn presupposes at least in part a materialisation of the project as a saleable ‘project’ and excludes immaterial, temporary, intervention project formats –, then a polyphonic production of art operating with diverse formats and strategies will continue to find it difficult to assert itself and generate broader (segmented) publics.

While applying for financial support for artistic projects in the *Work to do!* project series, it soon emerged that many Swiss foundations are fully unprepared for this kind of art production or have little knowledge about the funding necessary for immaterial practices based on research, communication and context which straddle several disciplines. Narrow definitions of what constitutes a work, inflexible funding categories and fixed cycles, categorically presupposed for artistic production, inform and rigidify the selection criteria for funding projects and thus indirectly also the possibility of their realisation and public visibility. Other forms of art production which do not correspond to the predetermined rigid criteria catalogue fall through the net. Such a regulation, or rather constraint, runs contrary to projects by artists and programmes by project spaces, institutions and initiatives which do not presuppose that the public(s) is there, but strive to create it by generating controversial debates. This understanding of segmented publics as zones of conflict assumes that ‘public spaces’ (and thus also art spaces) are not to be approached as closed units but as fragmented spaces, which are relational to other social spaces and permeated by conflicts of interest between a variety of social groups. What comes to the fore in this conception is not the attempt to create consensus, but to understand artistic projects as a means to putting knowledge and concrete issues up for discussion.

It would seem at present that a knowledge and communication gap exists between artists and institutions interested in the aforementioned practices and funding organisations and institutions, resulting from a divergent understanding of ‘public space’ or, more specifically, a divergent notion of what constitutes an artistic practice ‘worthy of funding’.

In this context we would like to focus on these divergent notions and the interests behind them. By putting them up for discussion, we also hope to generate a public. Using the examples of the artistic projects developed in the framework of the series **Work to do! Self-organisation in precarious working conditions**, some of which are completed while others are still evolving, we would like to identify which possibilities these practices and their methodologies create, which difficulties arose, and from our perspective, what needs to be done in terms of cultural funding.

The work of the Swedish artist Saskia Holmkvist, *Internship in Private*, looks into the working **conditions of interns in the art system**. The artist initiated a 'therapy' which led to conversations between a psychoanalyst, former interns from recent years and the current curators of the Shedhalle. In the sessions and the video of the meetings produced parallel, the discussion participants describe how they personally deal with symbolic rewards, ambitions, fears, their understanding of collective work, and the implicit hierarchical structures in teamwork. Placed in a broader context, the project highlights the issue of remunerating interns in small art institutions and spaces which can only afford to pay meagre amounts or often enough nothing at all, although the input of these interns is indispensable for carrying out challenging and discerning programmes. There are practically no opportunities available to small and medium-sized institutions to apply for temporary intern salaries; these have to be paid from the institution's basic financial resources, which given budgetary constraints are limited in scope or not even possible, although an internship in many institutions is tantamount to gaining qualified training in the area of contemporary art. The 'therapy sessions' were conducted gratis by a committed psychoanalyst interested in this issue. The production budget was nowhere near enough to even match the reasonable remuneration rate of 20 therapy sessions. Funding provided by the IASPIS (International Artists' Studio Programme in Sweden) covered the artist's travel costs and part of the video production, while the Shedhalle contributed a small artist fee. None of this however covered the real production and fee costs, and moreover do not correspond to the costs ultimately stated in the budget. The difference is thus bridged and performed by voluntarily work (as in the other projects) which could not be remunerated. Taking the Shedhalle as an example, Saskia Holmkvist's project investigates the working conditions in small and medium-sized institutions for interns, who contribute decisively to the art system without being financially rewarded. The aim is to stimulate discussion about their predicament.

In her action *1 CHF = 1 VOICE* Andrea Kulunčić broaches the issue of the precarious living and working conditions of the *Sans-Papiers* (undocumented people). By appealing to *Sans-Papiers* to donate one Swiss franc to the 'renovation' of the federal parliament, she draws attention to their paradoxical invisible situation: they work in, with and for Swiss society and thus contribute significantly on a daily basis to the 'national economy' and the social needs of the community. Despite this, neither the *Sans-Papiers* themselves nor their efforts are perceived let alone recognised by the public. The donation appeal and the handover of the raised money to the parliament, earmarked for the renovation costs of Switzerland's representative and 'democratic building' and thus for Swiss society, are to be understood as gestures of approaching others, of seeking contact and entering dialogue. The action could only be carried through thanks to the commitment, self-organisation and unpaid work of the *Sans-Papiers* as well as initiatives joining them in solidarity (foremost the SPAZ in Zurich as co-backing organisation). The Croatian Ministry of Culture financed in part the artist's travel costs, while the Zurich-based foundation BMU (Bevölkerung, Migration und Umwelt) contributed to meeting the costs of the first flyer. The media campaign, comprising of newspaper ads, e-board presentations at the main railway station and Stadelhofen in Zurich, cinema commercials and illuminated displays, were only possible through sponsors acting in solidarity and the personal efforts of a contact person

from the Shedhalle board with good connections. Without this support, the 'normal' costs would have been vastly greater. Without the voluntary effort of everyone involved, the project would never have gotten off the ground, because there is simply no funding available for such a media campaign of a political action. Media visibility for such projects, necessary for generating publics, is thus reliant on contacts, a network of persons who share the concerns the project addresses and are willing to commitment their time and effort into organising sponsors. Besides the initiatives already involved, it was the Shedhalle team who undertook a large share of the communication work needed to establish the necessary networking. Along with the usual tasks and activities of conceiving and organising exhibitions, for over a year the Shedhalle office acted as a kind of networking, communication and distribution headquarters. Besides the curators, this work was performed, in part full-time, by staff, assistants and interns. A political action created by an artist that is based on the modus of self-organisation produces neither a work requiring transportation or saleable assets which could attract the interest of the art market, nor can it hope for support from state and/or private funding institutions due to its subject matter and open-ended structure. In the current climate, support could only come from persons moved to express, in whatever way or form, their solidarity. Moreover, this project required specific tools for generating and addressing an interested public segment. Perspectives and voices on the action by the *Sans-Papiers*, the political levels, activists, initiatives, associations and organisations, and cultural practitioners were collated in a video, produced on a zero budget. On the one hand, this action has made it abundantly clear to us that funding institutions need to recognise the necessity of also providing financial support for difficult to categorise projects and their pre- and post-production costs – in this case an one year long process-oriented campaign and action. On the other hand, it became just as obvious that establishing and maintaining communication channels – or let us call them mediating tools – demands support, for without these it is impossible to discursively reflect long-term processes and, not least, make these accessible to an art public.

The collection of materials to be recycled at the Building Material Centre in the Shedhalle – which for months acted as a storehouse, production and exhibition site in one – and later erected in the form of the Werdplatzpalais, a temporary meeting and discussion place, reveals a cycle of re-deployable materials which the citizens of Zurich had thrown away and thus defined as valueless. The artists Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser collected and sorted these 'valueless' materials for the Building Material Centre, before they were then used for constructing the Palais. Visualising the materials as well as the stories and places associated with them, which provides insight into the concrete situation in the city, and the public recycling process attracted the interest of committed individuals from the work group Kunst im öffentlichen Raum (Art in public spheres) (AG KiöR), who have subsequently ensured that the materials were re-erected in the Filiale Micafil. Working together with kids and youths from the Loogarten community centre, the artists built this 'offshoot' as a meeting place in the Micafil residential settlement in the Zurich suburb of Altstetten. For this project the city authorities provided funds, securing adequate fees for the artists. In contrast, the materials for the Building Material Centre were researched and organised to a large part by an intern, while for the construction of the Werdplatzpalais an hourly rate of just a few francs could be paid to the workers because no additional financing could be found. It is important to exactly plot the three-staged

recycling process in its dynamic and long-term trajectory, for otherwise the excellent cooperation with the Arbeitsgruppe Kunst im öffentlichen Raum at the end of the production chain threatens to overshadow the rest of the project, resulting in an askew picture that does not include preceding production and elaboration processes or even suppresses them from media and 'public' perception. Besides this problematic, the main point emerging from the project as a whole, spanning its conception, execution and the productive discussion with the commission members of Arbeitsgruppe Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, is that administrative hurdles (a considerable amount of the work on the project was taken up by authorisation procedures) need to be simplified for art projects in urban space.

Andrea Knobloch developed the project **Zurich on the Move**, a marionette play featuring figures from Zurich who created emancipative ideas of movement as physical activity in space parallel to changes in production conditions taking place in the 20th century. An artistic work bringing together and exploring questions of emancipation, urbanism and human kinetics, it is a play for Zurich citizens about Zurich citizens that is performed at places in Zurich where the protagonists were active. Currently a dramaturge, puppeteer director, marionette specialist, various research assistants as well as the artist are involved in the project. Up to this point in time however, the project has been evaluated as non-fundable by almost every institution. Sticking to their inflexible categories, they exemplify the current malaise: institutions involved in the visual arts claim that the project has nothing to do with contemporary visual art; while those supporting theatre projects found that the project was far too indebted to the visual arts. This rigid genre-based approach, characteristic of the funding landscape, makes it difficult if not impossible to finance such a project, which entails fees for participants from various disciplines, and thus ultimately to garner the support needed in its final phase and bring it to the stage in Zurich. It would seem that collective transdisciplinary practices, which attempt to learn from other practices and try to interlock these methods into a new, modified approach, fail to attract genuine interest, even though the catchword 'transdisciplinary' is in everyone's mouth and appear in certain funding criteria. Moreover, greater local interest by Zurich funding institutions would be decisive, so that Zurich on the Move can, as planned, be premiered in the city of Zurich.

The **Flash Institute** is a new self-organised initiative founded by Mirjam Wirz in Vilnius. This institute tries to find avenues of exchange and create or organise sites where encounters can occur, for example through the so-called **Flash Bars**, or 'delegation tours' with fellow institute members. In principle, this is a kind of parallel structure of exchange, one that cannot be financed by funding institutions. The first edition of the institute's newspaper, crucial for establishing its communicative presence and visibility, was produced and brought out within Work to do! While the Pro Helvetia branch in Warsaw co-financed the printing costs with a small contribution, this was only possible on the basis that Mirjam Wirz could be defined as a Swiss artist, although for years now she has actively worked in Vilnius. Further ideas for creating a parallel structure of exchange included for example a flat or flat-sharing community swap, which could be realised informally and cheaper than through similar programmes run by funding institutions. Projects like these show that consideration needs to be given to funding concepts which are not tied exclusively to nationality.

In large sections of society, and not least for those involved in the culture and art system, the rampantly diminishing resources of time and money as well as the precarious working conditions this shrinking creates are being increasingly registered as a steady, irrepressible build up of pressure. Nevertheless, from a neo-liberal perspective, by virtue of their flexible, self-organised, mobile and committed activities, the stocks of 'creative artists' and 'cultural producers' have risen to such extent that they are now seen as the role model for the 'entrepreneurial self'. Creativity is in demand as never before, most preferably when it leads to saleable products or proves useful for enhancing the image of a location. Efficiency and optimisation paradigms link into the 'creative imperative' to raise the demands made of 'human resources'. In this system 'waste' is not planned for, and so as a rule it is hitched to negative associations. The artist group RELAX (chiarenza & hauser & co) understand this concept positively: "taking your time, largesse, all kinds of superfluity, extravagance, loss of time and energy deficiencies are everyday occurrences and a part of WASTE". WASTE was a built spatial model (in) of the Shedhalle. From a distance, an empty neon advertising sign amply mounted with energy-wasting light bulbs showed that no cost was to be spared here. The space itself was empty except for a sofa and thus ideal for wasting time. Invitations to visit WASTE were sent out using a format typical for advertising vacant positions in the employment market in national Swiss dailies. A broader advertising campaign could unfortunately not be financed – what a waste.

The multi-part project **Lena's Ghosts** by the artist group bankleer revolved around reflections on the concept of utopia, the social relevance of utopias and the possibilities today – after the demise of the grand social counter models – of working on and living out alternatives beyond the mainstream. Along the first part of the project, a multi-layered video installation, created a concrete link to the social utopian movements from the turn into the twentieth century on the Monte Verità. For the second part, 'specialists' and others were invited to take part in an exchange of experience and a self-experiment. On a mountain hike together, they reflected on "their own personal utopias, forms of self-organisation and the practices needed so as to develop potential plans." Originally this workshop was to take place over a longer period on the Monte Verità itself. Once declared to be the "beginning of a counterculture", it is now home to the Centro Stefano Franscini (CSF), the international conference centre of the Federal Technical University (ETH) in Zurich. As welcome an international academic conference centre is, there is a distinct lack of locations (in Switzerland) which could be used for more informal workshops, provide greater flexibility for the allocation of participants and be affordable for smaller budgets. Overall, our experience has shown that funding institutions are frequently wary of supporting discursive events and strategies as part of an artistic project because they are understood merely as an additional framework programme and not as an inherent component of an artistic practice which does not focus on a work but revolves around discussions, exchange and the production of knowledge and new themes.

In terms of both their content as well as selected methodologies and performance, all the projects are experiments in identifying and fostering alternative dynamics and economies of social exchange, which have a lasting impact on public spheres – and precisely on their partly unexpressed conflictual marginal spaces – and seek to stimulate further discussion. As this contribution by the artists can

neither be rewarded nor recognised by the art market, it requires extensive support at an earlier stage in order for long-term projects to develop their potential and exert a lasting impact. The aforementioned projects received financial support amounting to some 10% of their actual costs through the Shedhalle (within the fixed scope of the basis budget) and other funding institutions; the remaining 90% was covered by voluntary work and various contributions from persons and groups who share the same concerns and wished to express their solidarity. This amount does not appear in the project budgets. The 'much more' work we mentioned at the beginning of our considerations also refers ultimately to financing and commitment, and is very difficult to quantify in its full dimensions. As a result, the enormous gap between the budget actually available and that which is in fact necessary can only be exemplarily made transparent through selective examples.

As for curatorial activities, there is a pressing need to further elaborate exhibition projects and formats which facilitate long-term projects and 'preliminary results' while revealing possibilities of public participation; just as necessary though is an awareness and appreciation on the part of exhibition visitors for process-oriented projects. Financial resources are also required for this kind of work, which entails questions of mediation, presentation and knowledge production. Here the concept of what constitutes an artwork develops into a notion of practice that incorporates pre- and post-production as well as reflective mediating tools and in turn entails their archiving and distribution. In this context, we would like to recall the dialogical formats (**Meetings with self-organised initiatives** in Zurich, the **Dialogical Talk Series** with activists involved in feminist theory and practice and the **Skype Meetings**) which we undertook parallel to and in part closely interlinked with the project dynamics of the Work to do! series.

This text is modelled on the kind of final report many funding institutions demand after the conclusion of a project. In this case the report was not demanded for the simple reason that funding was limited in scope – but it is precisely this circumstance which signals that there is 'more work to do!' A dialogue with funding institutions – not only but in our case above all in Switzerland – seems necessary to pass on knowledge about the conditions under which such projects are produced and the methodologies they pursue, in order to create different and varied funding options. Even if the communication channels are often long, we want to at least address and impart our experiences about production conditions. We assume that other project initiatives and institutions have gathered their own experience in these issues, both similar and different to ours, and we believe that the time has come to articulate these experiences more emphatically, so that in the mid-term the modification of funding regulations, absolutely necessary from the perspective of project-oriented initiatives, can be pressed ahead with in a constructive dialogue with the respective bodies and agencies. Concretely, we consider it imperative to address the following issues:

- Fee policy for artists
- Production costs, including pre- and post-production costs, as well as the reflection and mediating tools mentioned above
- Project dynamics oriented on generating long-term and sustainable impact

- Possibilities of collective working practices
- Transdisciplinary approaches
- Financing research
- Possibilities of transnational collaboration and exchange
- No longer defining discursive programmes as framework events, but to recognise them as being an integral part of the knowledge production and the project itself

<http://shedhalle.ch/>