

Anthony Davies, Stephan Dilemuth, Jakob Jakobsen
There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized//2005

As workers in the cultural field we offer the following contribution to the debate on the impact of neoliberalism on institutional relations:

Cultural and educational institutions as they appear today are nothing more than legal and administrative organs of the dominant system. As with all institutions, they live in and through us: we participate in their structures and programmes, internalize their values, transmit their ideologies and act as their audience/public/social body.

Our view:

These institutions may present themselves to us as socially accepted bodies, as somehow representative of the society we live in, but they are nothing more than dysfunctional relics of the bourgeois project. Once upon a time, they were charged with the role of promoting democracy, breathing life into the myth that institutions are built on an exchange between free, equal and committed citizens. Not only have they failed in this task, but within the context of neoliberalism, have become even more obscure, more unreliable and more exclusive.

The state and its institutional bodies now share aims and objectives so closely intertwined with corporate and neoliberal agendas that they have been rendered indivisible. This intensification and expansion of free market ideology into all aspects of our lives has been accompanied by a systematic dismantling of all forms of social organization and imagination antithetical to the demands of capitalism.

As part of this process it's clear that many institutions and their newly installed managerial elites are now looking for escape routes out of their inevitable demise and that, at this juncture, this moment of crisis, they're looking at 'alternative' structures and what's left of the Left to model their horizons, sanction their role in society and reanimate their tired relations. Which of course we despise!

In their scramble for survival, cultural and educational institutions have shown how easily they can betray one set of values in favour of another and that's why our task now is to demand and adhere to the foundational and social principles they have jettisoned, by which we mean: transparency, accountability, equality and open participation.

By transparency we mean an opening up of the administrative and financial functions/decision-making processes to public scrutiny. By accountability we mean that these functions and processes are clearly presented and monitored, and that they can, in turn, be measured and contested by 'participants' at any

time. Equality and open participation is exactly what it says – that men and women of all nationalities, race, colour and social status can participate in any of these processes at any time.

Institutions as they appear today, locked in a confused space between public and private, baying to the demands of neoliberal hype with their new management structures, are not in a position to negotiate the principles of transparency, accountability and equality, let alone implement them. We realize that responding to these demands might extend and/or guarantee institutions' survival but, thankfully, their deeply ingrained practices prevent them from even entertaining the idea on a serious level.

In our capacity as workers with a political commitment to self-organization we feel that any further critical contribution to institutional programmes will further reinforce the relations that keep these obsolete structures in place. We are fully aware that 'our' critiques, alternatives and forms of organization are not just factored into institutional structures but increasingly utilized to legitimize their existence.

The relationship between corporations, the state and its institutions is now so unbearable that we see no space for negotiation – we offer no contribution, no critique, no pathway to reform, no way in or out. We choose to define ourselves in relation to the social forms that we participate in and not the leaden institutional programmes laid out before us – our deregulation is determined by social, not market relations. There is no need for us to storm the Winter Palace, because most institutions are melting away in the heat of global capital anyway. We will provide no alternative. So let go!

The only question that remains is how to get rid of the carcass and deal with the stench:

We are not interested in their so-called assets: their personnel, buildings, archives, programmes, shops, clubs, bars, facilities and spaces will all end up at the pawnbroker anyway ...

All we need is their cash in order to pay our way out of capitalism and take this opportunity to make clear our intention to supervise and mediate our own social capital, knowledge and networks.

As a first step we suggest an immediate redistribution of their funds to already existing, self-organized bodies with a clear commitment to workers' and immigrants' rights, social (anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic) struggle and representation.

There is no alternative! The future is self-organized.

In the early 1970s corporate analysts developed a strategy aimed at reducing uncertainty called 'there is no alternative' (tina). Somewhat ironically we now find ourselves in agreement, but this time round we're the scenario planners and

executors of our own future, though we are, if nothing else, the very embodiment of uncertainty.

In the absence of clearly stated opposition to the neoliberal system, most forms of collective and collaborative practice can be read as 'self-enterprise'. By which we mean, groupings or clusters of individuals set up to feed into the corporate controlled markets, take their seats at the table, cater to and promote the dominant ideology.

Self-organization should not be confused with self-enterprise or self-help, it is not an alternative, or conduit into the market. It isn't a label, logo, brand or flag under which to sail in the waters of neoliberalism (even as a pirate ship – as suggested by MTV)! It has no relationship to entrepreneurship, or bogus 'career collectives'.

In our view self-organization is a byword for the productive energy of those who have nothing left to lose. It offers up a space for a radical repoliticization of social relations – the first tentative steps towards realizable freedoms.

Self-organization is:
Something which predated representational institutions. To be more precise: institutions are built on (and often paralyse) the predicates and social forms generated by self-organization.

Mutually reinforcing, self-valorizing, self-empowering, self-historicizing and, as a result, not compatible with fixed institutional structures.

A social and productive force, a process of becoming which, like capitalism, can be both flexible and opaque, therefore more than agile enough to tackle (or circumvent) it.

A social process of communication and commonality based on exchange; sharing of similar problems, knowledge and available resources.

A fluid, temporal set of negotiations and social relations which can be emancipatory – a process of empowerment.

Something which situates itself in opposition to existing, repressive forms of organization and concentrations of power.

Always challenging power both inside the organization and outside the organization; this produces a society of resonance and conflict, but not based on fake dualities as at present.

An organization of deregulated selves. It is at its core a non-identity.

A tool that doesn't require a cohesive identity or voice to enter into negotiation with others. It may reside within social forms but doesn't need take on an identifiable social form itself.

Contagious and inclusive, it disseminates and multiplies.

The only way to relate to self-organization is to take part, self-organize,

connect with other self-organizing initiatives and challenge the legitimacy of institutional representation.

We put a lid on the bourgeois project, the national museums will be stored in their very own archive, the institutes of contemporary art will be handed over to the artists' unions, the universities and academies will be handed over to the students, Siemens and all the other global players will be handed over to their workers. The state now acts as an administrative unit – just as neoliberalism has suggested it – but with mechanisms of control, transparency accountability and equal rights for all.

There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized. *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader*. Postscript. April 2008. This text can be freely distributed and printed in non-commercial, no-money contexts without the permission of the authors. It was originally conceived as a pamphlet with the aim of disrupting the so-called critical paths and careers being carved out by those working the base structure of the political-art fields. We're aware of contradictions, limits and problems with this text and invite all to measure the content in direct relation to the context in which it may appear. In fact, it has come as no surprise to us that its dodgy legitimizing potential has been most keenly exploited by those it originally set out to challenge. Having let it fly we now invite you, the reader, to consider why it's in this publication/exhibition, whose interests it serves and the power relations it helps to maintain.

There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized. Exhibition Reader (*Microhistorias y Macromundos III – Abstract Possible*) Postscript. December 2010: Given the situation, the global social crisis that we confront on a daily basis, the struggle of comrades everywhere and at all times – we welcome and support the actual self-organization taking place on the streets, in the non/workplace, the school, the home. In the same breath, if we can be bothered to even draw it, we hold in utter contempt the sad farce, the vacant charade that passes for political action and engagement in the art system. Destroy the museum ...

There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized. *Abstraction*. Postscript. October 2012: In addition to the three strands of abstraction proposed by the editor of this publication – formal economic and social – we would like to add institutional. Which is to say we would like to note the dismal and frustrating 'negotiation' between us, the authors of this text, and the various institutional representatives charged with securing its republication. *There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized* has been freely available online and distributed in various forms since it was first published in late 2005. It has passed through many and varied institutional contexts, some less problematic than others, and yet, here in late 2012, within a publishing framework which claims to be 'not profit making', and primarily aimed at a 'student market' it has found its absolute negation. When, as happened here, institutional representatives present their own reprehensible and exploitative working conditions not as a basis for struggle, opposition and solidarity but as an invitation to join the race to the bottom – the game is over.

Anthony Davies, Stepan Dillemtuth, Jakob Jakobsen, 'There is No Alternative: The Future is Self-Organized' (Copenhagen, 12 June 2005), in *Art and Its Institutions*, ed. Nina Möntrmann (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), reprinted in *Microhistorias y macromundos*, vol. 3 - *Abstract Possible*, ed. Maria Lind (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2011) 216-22.

Nina Möntrmann *Opacity//2006*

The project *Opacity* has been realized as a series of different formats and collaborations, exploring in what way today's art institutions are used and challenged within contemporary artistic processes. The artists Kajsa Dahlberg, Danger Museum (Øyvind Renberg and Miho Shimizu), Markus Degerman, Stephan Dillemtuth, Gardar Eide Einarsson, and Sofie Thorsen, and the participating institutions NIFCA in Helsinki, UKS/Unge Kunsternes Samfund in Oslo, Index in Stockholm, and the Secession in Vienna, made close exchanges in several workshops, an exhibition, panel discussions, a screening and the production of a fanzine. The starting point of the discussions was the observation that institutions underwent several constitutive changes in the aftermaths of the 'institutional critique' of the 1970s, as well as in the 1990s. This becomes apparent in the process of turning the critique initially made against an institution into an institution's auto-critique, as well as in the education of curators, art historians and artists, to which it became an integral part. By this, institutional critique proved to be a method rather than a genre. Today a critique is no longer put up against the institution in order to deconstruct it. Instead, a certain opacity, which has been criticized in the work of powerful institutions, can however be useful on the part of smaller institutions and groups, in order to try out new forms of collaboration between different positions in the art field (artists, curators, academics or activists), and also employ links to other fields, creating an alternative agenda for institutional work. Brian Holmes has talked of a 'tactical necessity of disappearance', practised by groups working on a process-related basis - a strategy that institutions could learn in order to redefine themselves.

The project *Opacity* has been developed in close collaboration between curators and artists. Therefore several workshops have been scheduled. Concepts of autonomy, freedom, internal process and uncertainty have been discussed in relation to opacity, as well as the history of critical and affirmative work, respectively, within institutions.

Regarding the internal perspective of the artist as an involved team mate in cultural production, the question arises: how can an art institution be used from within as an arena or a tool for re-politicization, taking into consideration both the necessary factors of decision and desire? Where do the possibilities lie, and what do the presumed failures tell us about the societal role and reach of the various art institutions?

The project *Opacity* proposed and discussed a collaborative and productive model, which researched current conditions of institutional work and proposed and analysed alternative strategies, be they activist, appropriative, mocking, actual or purely utopian. We wanted to initiate a discussion, trying to imagine an institution as a place for temporary withdrawal, for working in an opaque space behind the scene, as one critical strategy among others within the field of institutional work. With the presumption that the participation of artists in institutional systems shouldn't exclusively be aimed towards the show or display, we instead turned software into hardware and set up a temporary model that includes artistic practice as an operation mode for institutions.

Gallery Tour

Markus Degerman

I have been involved in designing spaces for art institutions for the last couple of years. For *Opacity* I have been working with the interior of UKS and made subtle changes in order to give it a new setting with references which, at least for a while, could function as a resistance to the aestheticization of the art institution. I installed pre-painted white baseboards around the walls of the gallery, a suspended ceiling in the reception room and green dot-shaped marks on the glass doors of the entrance. These are materials which, perhaps because of their everyday connotations, are at the same time both commonly used and paradoxically rarely noticed. They are also interior elements, which have often been disregarded by designers as objects to design and instead left for engineers and technicians to model. Maybe this is also why they are usually among the first elements to be removed when spaces are re-shaped to be more 'designed' and aesthetic.

Danger Museum

For *Opacity* we combined a collage series started during a residency at Sparwasser HQ in Berlin, with pieces that relate to the UKS exhibition space and ideas of public image and credibility. The collages, or so-called concept illustrations, show an imagined opening at Sparwasser HQ. The gallery is presented as a shabby, underground hang-out. Yet in photographs that reconstruct the scenes in the collages, those hip and laidback social moments freeze in clichéd poses.