
AFTER LENIN, LITTLE FRANKFURT

History and self-organised styles in the work of Nomedá and Gediminas Urbonas

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Nation as symptom

Since they started their collaboration in the early 1990s, the work of Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas has revolved around meetings between art and historical space. By articulating the cultural traumas, predicaments and new possibilities that have been laid bare after Lithuania's independence from Soviet rule in 1991, their work stages collective searches for new forms of belonging. Rather than just picturing or interpreting these struggles, these investigations are implemented as self-organised processes, such as the independent exhibition space Jutempus (1993-1997) or the tvvv. plotas (1998-1999), a TV programme initiated and run by the Urbonas. As little pieces of social fabric that expand in unexpected ways, projects such as these encourage a collective response rather than an individual one.

Most sociologists and political scientists agree that there is no uniform and persistent *Leninist legacy* detectable among the numerous communist successor governments.¹ That is, there is no particular common trend between the subsequent democratic developments of the former Soviet polities and in fact they are all likely to display diverse regime properties that depend on different factors (proximity to the Western countries, for example). These volatile political trajectories have a strong resonance in Lithuania, a nation which itself has been caught up in irregular historical patterns: not counting its post-Soviet independence, the small Baltic state has only experienced 22 years of autonomy since the late 18th century.

In the work of the Urbonas the idea of the national is addressed not just on an institutional scale, but as a social symptom that pervades imaginaries on subjective and collective levels.² As Freud pointed out, the symptom occurs as one part of a trinity where the two other elements are fear and inhibition. In this psychic economy the symptom represents the elusive trace of an "ultimate cause" of inhibited pathology, which will remain displaced, usually because of fear of punishment if it is revealed. In psychoanalysis the symptom is a sign and surrogate for what is known of old and long familiar. This becomes a perfect analogy for the idea of the nation as a repressed sign that is compulsively revisited in disguised forms under the threat of punishment of a Soviet father figure, or associated with the post-Soviet dementia of nationalism.

The question of historical belonging being in this way couched in terms of subjectivity, the fundamental entities that make up a societal ontology – population, institutions, borders, geography – are shown to share properties with symbolic structures that hold communities together; structures of feeling that define our sense of individual and collective belonging. This was most explicit in the project *Transaction* (2000-2004), in which the notion of the victim as woman was applied to the representation of Lithuania in Lithuanian film from the Soviet era. To work with such *idea-scenarios*, to use the Urbonas' own term, amounts to establishing "a model that is never real, but true at the same time."³ In this case a psychoanalytic working-through of the

imaginary of the nation. Such an approach bypasses the nationalist model, which is an ideological causal explanation intent on fixing territories and behaviours once and for all. Instead, in the idea-scenario, belonging is a question of becoming through a desire to push existing limits of historical being. In this way the question of the national is opened up through concepts that may counteract exclusionary nostalgia as an aftermath of imperialism or globalisation.

Simulatory regimes

A chapter of Jonathan Franzen's bestseller, *The Corrections* (2001) – a saga of the disintegration of the North-American nuclear family – takes place in contemporary Vilnius. Lithuania is portrayed as a rogue state; not a threat to international peace, perhaps, but one whose role as a global player has “been fading since the death of Vytautas the Great in 1430” and which is now “rattling down the road toward anarchy.”⁴ Ruled by gangster entrepreneurs, drive-by shootings in the Lithuanian capital are the order of the day, while pop hits of yesteryear are heard on the radios of prostitutes through the low-hanging clouds of high-sulphur smoke that envelop the streets.

Perhaps this portrait of societal collapse is inspired by the attempted Red Army takeover of the national TV broadcast station in 1991, and employed by the author with freewheeling artistic licence; or it has grown out of hazy stereotypes called forth in the Westerner's mind when he imagines what life is like on the – as we all know – invariably crisis-driven flipside of Europe. Whatever the author's reasons, or however shoddy his research, it is significant that even though the representations of Lithuania and *homo sovieticus* skid off the actual reality of 1990s Vilnius, crime-ridden and politically unstable as it may have been, these representations are powerful enough to appear in the book's fictional economy as a distorted imaginary that mirrors the institutionalised, yet “ultimately no less brutal,” capitalism of America.

The book's Lithuanian chapter – which was quoted with some resentment in newspapers here when it appeared – seems to be the author's intended chal-

lenge to the claim to “the end of history” (the well-known pseudo-philosophical backup to the New World Order declared by George Bush Sr. in 1991).⁵ Ironically, by the author's use of Lithuania as a mere counter-image to life in the US, the novel repeats, and thereby itself fails to resolve, what approaches can be taken to address the relation between history and nation. One of the novel's Lithuanian characters muses how resistance to the *free* market offers no gratification similar to the Lithuanians' legendary resistance to Soviet imperialism: “What *positive* thing do I stand for? What is the *positive* definition of my country?”⁶ In other words: nobody knows what Lithuania is. *The Corrections* sheds no light on the question because the novel basically repeats an imperial narrative: just as Lithuania in Soviet times was (not) the Soviet Union what defines it in the novel is that in post-Soviet times it is (not) the United States of America.

The use of Lithuania as not-America in *The Corrections* is an example of an idea-scenario that is overdetermined and articulated from the outside. The very real and urgent struggles over the imaginaries of historical space and cultural subjectivity is reflected in the Urbanas' *Pro-test Lab* (2005 – ongoing). The project consisted of a squat in the Lietuva cinema, a piece of landmark architecture built during the Soviet era and, after 1991, functioning as Vilnius' only independent cinema. In 2002 the building was privatised by a corporation, which announced that it was to be razed and an apartment block with a commercial centre built in its place. In opposition to the privatisation of public space, the *Pro-test Lab* provided an open framework, which could be used by groups and individuals as a space for civic protest, with an agenda to controvert the Lietuva's demolition. *Lietuva* means Lithuania, and hence *Pro-test Lab* metonymically involved Lithuania's entire Leninist legacy with specific reference to the redevelopment of the city of Vilnius under the aegis of an accelerated capitalism.

In order to sketch out a context for the *Pro-test Lab*, let's have a very quick look at the urban fabric of Vilnius. The historical centre, with its sturdy and well-preserved volumes of Vilnius Baroque, re-emerged during the 1990s via a kind of Disneyfied folklorism. Hence, the city council is encouraging artisans to set up shop here and sell token national arts and crafts; they are



provided with a commercial space for half the rent that other professions have to pay in the district. Unsurprisingly rustic styles are dominating here, creating a strange historical glitch in their coexistence with the corporate facades of Scandinavian banks.

Adjacent to the historical centre is a large building site, where the Castle of the Lithuanian Kings is currently under construction. Expected to be finished in 2009, the Castle will be a museum and a tribute to the historical rulers and heydays of the nation when, during the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, it was Europe's biggest country, with an empire stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Even though officially a reconstruction of a castle razed by Russian invaders in 1801, the project is based more on revisionist desire than on historical fact, as almost no documents of the original castle remain. Nobody really knows what it looked like.

The River Neris' right bank was developed immediately after 1991, most visibly in the form of the high-rises that host the city's new financial and governmental centre. These have inspired the district's nickname Little Frankfurt, after the similarly stark verticality of Germany's banking city. Exclusive condominiums in the area are home to, among others, wealthy Russians who have preferred to invest in property inside the European Union zone. Beyond Little Frankfurt, and next to the 1970s-style social housing and an area with Klondike-style old and decrepit wooden houses, are located two new shopping malls, the Acropolis and the Hermitage,

as big and sophisticated as any you will see in Europe or the US, and favourite hangouts for the city's teenagers.

To top it all off in a way that answers *The Corrections* back in a voice the city is borrowing from North America, the Guggenheim emporium is preparing its arrival on the scene. A media campaign is currently preparing public opinion for a Guggenheim Vilnius and the substantial costs such a project implies for the public budgets. However, the global museum chain has already won the art-historical battle, as it has ensured that the archives of Jonas Mekas and George Maciunas will be deposited here (rather than in the national collection).

In this way Vilnius, like so many other of the world's cities, is an assemblage shot through with social and spatial effects of calculability, control and representation. The contrasts in this newly developed city reveal the irrationality of the postulated rationality of such strategies, as it is expressed in the near-fictitious engineering of historical continuity and the ideological effects of exemplary and recognisable *local values*. Both aspects are based in hostility towards the survival of public cultures.

It was against such simulatory regimes that the Urbonas organised *Pro-test Lab*. Originally launched as a quasi-autonomous project within the framework of the international group show *Populism* at the nearby Centre for Contemporary Art (CAC), it quickly took on a life of its own that expanded beyond the temporal and spatial lim-



itations of the exhibition.⁷ The same is true for the cultural location of the *Lab*. As Gediminas Urbonas stated in a conversation with me, “It started as an art project, but we don’t know if it is one anymore.” This was indicative of the project’s dynamics but also of a loss of control: as things developed, and people started frequenting the *Lab*, not all groups and users of the space would be known to the artists, who had to go with the flow of events. This is significant for the ideological underpinnings of *Pro-test Lab*, and symptomatic for arguments related to art activism’s location *outside* the art system, as well as to its notions of authorship. Let’s take a closer look at these theoretical issues, in order to find out about *Pro-test Lab*’s status as an activist idea-scenario.

Authorship and meeting in art activism

It is a staple of art activism’s self-understanding that it is predicated on the political rather than the critical. Hence its slant towards the production of space (which is so clear in *Pro-test Lab*).⁸ In politics, the stakes are bigger, *for real*, unlike the more specialised vocabulary of criticality that is internal to the art system (such as institutional critique). One argument that is typically used to support art activism’s claim to political agency is its collective authorship, and the claim that activism lies *at the heart* of collaborative practices is an almost conditioned response to current discussions about them.⁹ While this is undoubtedly true about the intentionality of many artistic collectives, it seems like an all

too hasty coding of the premises and possibilities of the collaborative when one considers historical practitioners like, for example, Gilbert & George, Medical Hermeneutics or Art & Language.

After modernism, the issue of collective authorship was raised again in the way artists of the 1990s revisited collaborative strategies. Implicitly or explicitly, they evoked retrospective discourses about the idealised collectivism of the modern era, while at the same time producing some surprising – and perhaps inadvertent – overlaps between artistic practice and vanguard managerial ideologies. If the art market and a traditionalist understanding of authorship have often excluded collective authorship from art history, it is now important for these practices to confront their own historical exclusion *at the same time* as deconstructing such heroic collectivist referents as the Paris Commune or the October Revolution. Of course, these examples of strong collectivism – or what, with Marx, we might call free association – go some way towards explaining a genealogy of collective authorship and agency, inasmuch as they clearly have informed historical avant-gardes such as the Russian Constructivists and the Situationist International. But they also contain the germs of nostalgia and overdetermination, because the Paris Commune and the October Revolution are precisely examples from militant politics.

Militancy is a referent which flatters art activism’s utilitarian presuppositions, at the same time as art activ-

ism often fails, or refuses, to articulate the difference between a socio-political community and an artistic one. Moreover, today's networked artistic collectives try to wring engagement from quite different types of oppression than those which in other eras called for insurrection: ours is a privatised, post-political, mass-mediated, de-institutionalised, and usually middle-class, existence. Inside this regime, one is often hard put to figure out what are authentic hybrid identities, and what makes for violent or oppressive hegemonies. Moreover – and hence the need for encouraging collaboration in the first place – it is *one's own problem*, because bureaucratic, spectacular capitalism has managed to dismantle the structures that held notions of solidarity in place.

Collaboration is obviously a highly important moment in the organisation of the production of art, and our reading of it. But it is its pulse, dynamics, contexts and effects that should be articulated, rather than its authorial form. That is, if we want to proceed in the question of art's proximity to activism or militancy, by collaboration we must understand self-organisation. Focusing on collaboration as such then appears to be a continuation of older discussions of authorship ('What is an author?' as Michel Foucault put it at the end of modernity), now projected onto a new authorial body that appears to have certain given qualities – almost as in modernist preoccupations with the inherent properties of artistic media.

As suggested above, I would argue that the artistic collective's authorial logic could have any number of different characteristics; it does not necessarily follow from collaboration that it is activist or political (in the sense that it manifests itself as an organised process). However, it is true that self-organised art and the political share one crucial aspect – the meeting. But the meeting in collaborative art is vastly different from the political nature of the meeting. The latter has a universal character or, in the words of Alain Badiou, it is *topologically collective*; there is no place where it is not valid.¹⁰ The artistic collective, on the other hand, is usually self-sufficient, at least in part. The artists' group can be its own audience, something which was not uncommon for the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements, which had no or little public reach outside of their inner circle – and sometimes claimed it did not desire any. The meeting in collaborative art is hence different from the

political meeting, for the simple reason that the artistic collective does not admit new members. If there was an artistic collective which ever existed that ended up with more members than it started out with, it would be the exception rather than the rule. The Situationists were decimated by Guy Debord's notorious proclivity for expelling its members ('It was really about keeping oneself in a pure state, like a crystal,' as Henri Lefebvre recalls about his brief time in the movement).¹¹ In this way, while the artistic collective can undermine various inherited cultural hierarchies, it is in itself not topologically inclusive. What is fascinating about artistic collectives is not their authorial transparency – because that is illusory in itself. Every authorial subject is a hypothetical subject, if we accept that authorial identity is something other than the psychosocial subject who *conveys* it. The collective author represents no less of a hypothetical subjectivity, but now in the form of a previously undeclared or non-existing singularity's agreement to proceed as a author.

Artistic collectives are characterised by a paradox, then, namely the fact that their circle can be more hermetic than the salon, while the particular kind of authority they convey can be more open and unfinished than the solitary author. Their operations thus have the potential to be both more opaque and more dynamic than the traditional artist's: where different nervous systems are hooked up to each other, art is integrated into surrounding culture. This is to say that self-organised artists' groups on one level are better equipped than the solitary author to address and discuss the foundations of art production. Where there will inevitably exist a correspondence between the individual signature and the work (if not in terms of old-fashioned, private prestige, then in terms of interest, biographical text and so on), the group literally operates at a different scale. Collective authorship is a measure of power relations, a subjectivity that is capable of sizing up institutions.

Before we return to the work of the Urbonas, just a couple of brief points to probe this hypothesis. One aspect of the idea of sizing up institutions from the outside is the politics of the alternative space, which, as in many other discussions about collective art production, harks back to the 1960s and 70s. In 1974 the North-American artist Michael Asher criticised this organisational principle in the following way:

“Another phenomenon of the early seventies, deriving from artists’ anticommmercialism and concern with the problem of commodification, was the development of the alternative space system for exhibition, although not necessarily for distribution. The alternative space relied for its funding on outside sources rather than the market for which the work was primarily produced. Alternative space made more works more frequently accessible than the commercial galleries, yet they falsified the work’s commodity status, assuming that visibility alone would complete the reception process and that exchange value was not one of the work’s features. The alternative space system provided visibility for the work regardless of specific interest, but it did not necessarily stand behind the work, with the full support necessary for reception within the culture. Paradoxically, the only way for a work to be fully received is through its initial abstraction for exchange value. To resolve these contradictions between the artist’s interests and the functions and capacities of the alternative space, these institutions finally had to assume the role of being either a commercial gallery or a museum.”¹²

On this note, Asher concludes that “the gallery is one essential context for the cultural reception” of his work, in which his interventionist brand of minimalist sculpture can “serve as a model of how the gallery is operating, but also “as a model for its own economic reproduction.”¹³ In a somewhat surprising manner this is a Marxist analysis that plays into the hands of the market by insisting on the work’s essential, inescapable, commodity status. This forms the basis of the assumption that only the work’s exchange in the marketplace is a real reception process (as opposed to “visibility alone”); and that this exchange process can be made transparent by the work itself. This postulate bypasses the public art institution, or any space defined as the public realm, as a legitimate destination for the work, inasmuch as *culture* is predicated on commercial transactions.

Of course, Asher may be perfectly right with regard to the shortcomings of the alternative space system; however, from a structural point of view his argument seems to support business as usual. The simple points I want to make by bringing this up are, firstly, that in the

process of sizing up institutions (public and market), it is possible – for the individual but perhaps especially for the collective author, as is also demonstrated in *Pro-test Lab* – to produce a distance from the commodity status of the work.¹⁴ Secondly, any such sizing up confronts us with the social imaginaries of the transactions and exchange processes that are considered to be real. Here, Asher is definitely right about one thing: the aim of the project, even if it originates outside the institution, should be a “reception within the culture” – whether that culture is taken to be a public or a privatised one.

Because it is typically located outside the gallery space, the studio and the museum, an art activist project is seen to belong neither to the art sphere nor to political institutions. It cannot be measured with conventional critical yardsticks because of the way its utopian gauge breaks open existing categories: the language for its evaluation does not exist yet, it is claimed, also because art activism’s target groups are usually marginalised communities who don’t yet have a voice in society. Hence art activism’s indignation and drive to intervene, organise, educate, empower, and counteract art’s potential for stagnation or reaction. As a testimony to a desire for change and experimentation, this is of course a perfectly legitimate argument (even if it may contradict the way art activists often pride themselves on working as a continuation of the historical avant-gardes).¹⁵

However, the argument of art activism as a free-floating category belonging neither to art nor to institutions loses its validity when it becomes a pretext for shelving discussions about the problems in equating artistic, cultural and political empowerment. Inherently hostile to art and authorship, this position erases the given limit between political and artistic representation as it tries to transcend art by re-naming it *cultural democracy* (in Lucy Lippard’s term), or by evading definition altogether.¹⁶ In other words, the claim to art activism’s political instrumentality tends to remain in a theory/practice schema that evades language and conceptual work at the risk of separating politics from thought. Connections between cultural forms and social processes that interpretative, artistic agency may locate and articulate are thus bypassed.¹⁷

Scripting, thought, games and styles

If one wants to attempt to articulate the act of abstraction that founds the group author, it is rewarding to go through Badiou's discussion of "thought that acts through and towards a collective seized by its truth." This is of special relevance in relation the Urbonas' work, as Badiou asserts that "the collapse of the socialist States teaches us that the path of egalitarian politics do not pass through State power, that politics is a matter of immanent subjective determination, an axiom of the collective."¹⁸ In other words, if we want to insist on the legitimacy of art and of relevant models of cultural agency other than the militant one, we will need to counter the functionalist tendency of art activism. We must ask, then, what else – which thoughts, which methods and which forms – can be produced apart from space? In the Urbonas' own words,

"As Lithuania doesn't have a cultural history of resistance, the *Pro-test Lab* created an important space within the public sphere, the fabric of the city, the media and the existing political and cultural constellations. We were concerned with producing a new *aesthetic* language that could empower future protests."¹⁹

It is thus significant that the protests at the Lietuva embodied a political struggle at the same time as they made for a sort of living archive based on the instant reception of protest forms. Prompted by the historical delay of social and political repression, self-organisation became aesthetically self-aware.

A good example of this was when students from the school of architecture rigged up a giant, open-air Monopoly game outside the Lietuva, in which they played with meticulously constructed cardboard models of landmark architecture in Vilnius. The stakes were for the domination of the city's public space. This makes for an updated version of the opening scene of Öyvind Fahlström's film *Du gamla, du fria* (1971), in which a street theatre group unfold an open-air Monopoly game of life-size proportions and try to mobilise the people against capital by showing how the nation and its citizens are nothing more than pawns in a game to the large Swedish corporations. If the Lithuanian ar-

chitecture students were aware of Fahlström's film, their Monopoly game is a great piece of appropriation; if they did not know it, then maybe we are dealing with something like an activist archetype! Art activist discussions aside, the point made by the students is a highly valid one: due to the absence of preservation strategies for Soviet era architecture, a significant cultural heritage in former Soviet republics is at risk of disappearing. One could argue that they were built during an era of political repression and hence are testimonies to totalitarianism, but that in itself hardly justifies neglect. After all, renowned architects like Oscar Niemeyer – to take but one example from the modern era – have participated in the realisation of no less totalitarian projects.

Pro-test Lab, like other Urbonas projects and idea-scenarios, conveys a particular vision of moving around between different plateaux; different types of vocabularies, agencies and forms of organisation, never resting in one particular register but deferring conclusions and including many new beginnings. Their work fans out in a wide range of symbolic production (including music, fashion, filmmaking, archives, and of course visual displays) to do with the production of space (which includes the distribution of information as well as concerts, fashion parades, collaborations with lobbies, interest groups and people from other professional domains).

If an idea-scenario is the production of signification and space, the Urbonas call their methodology *scripting*. This sets the stage for the redistribution of roles and competences within reproduction processes.²⁰ With their agenda of artistic protest in mind, we may elaborate this process of scripting with a quote from the historian Benedict Anderson,

"[The community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."²¹

In the process of scripting idea-scenarios, forms or styles are generated by or through which the commu-

nity can be re-imagined. In these operations, the notion and practice of self-organisation is continuously transformed: there is obviously a big a difference between working within a self-defined framework such as *Pro-test Lab*, the Jutempus Space or the tvvv.plotas, and making a museum show or contributing to the Venice Biennial. From the point of view of the Urbonas' involvement in these various processes, self-organisation pulsates between inclusive gestures where authorship tends to be erased in participatory and even insurrectionist sequences, and periods of receding into research and production where their collaboration is reinforced.

A rare example of a collective that works with fiction is the five-member-strong Italian writer's group Wu Ming (formerly Luther Blissett). In their latest book, the Cold War thriller *54*, the pigeon-fancier Fanti appears, somewhat along the lines of the Urbonas' contribution for the Venice Biennial 2007. Fanti is:

"... one of 3,000 [pigeon-fanciers] in Emilia Romagna [who] had become an important member of the International Federation of Homing Pigeon Fanciers, founded in 1881. At the last fair in Bologna he had gone mad and spent 300,000 lire on a slender female, with a bright-grey back tending to indigo, sgurafosso. Very elegant. Her name was Eloisa, and she had made the journey from Indochina to Italy in two months. Two hundred kilometres a day, 'a remarkable accomplishment.'"²²

"Two hundred kilometres a day," through Asia... If we are to invent new styles and idea-scenarios through which we can re-imagine our communities across geopolitical terrains and simulatory everyday spaces, we will have to perform just as remarkably as Eloisa and cover large distances; if not geographically, then certainly in response to the challenges history poses to our thinking and doing.

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NOTES

1. Herbert Kitschelt: "Accounting for Postcommunist Regime Diversity. What Counts as a Good Cause?" in Grzegorz Ekiert and Stephen E. Hanson (eds.): *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 50.

2. By the term *imaginaries* the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis understood the impact that the *magmas* of language, as well as cultural symbols and narratives, have on material social reality and subjectivity. See for example his essay "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain," in *World in Fragments. Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

3. Interview with Jean-Charles Massera. In Lars Bang Larsen, Charlotte Brandt, Cristina Ricupero (eds.): *Fundamentalisms of the New Order* (exh. cat.). Berlin: Nifca/Lukas & Sternberg, 2003, p. 93.

4. Jonathan Franzen: *The Corrections*. London: Fourth Estate, 2001, pp. 510, 512.

5. I am, of course, referring to Francis Fukuyama's 1989 essay "The End of History", in which the author asserts that history is directional, and its endpoint is capitalist liberal democracy.

6. Jonathan Franzen: op. cit., p. 515.

7. The *Populism* exhibition was curated by Cristina Ricupero, Nicolaus Schafhausen and myself, and took place in the CAC in Vilnius from 8 April through 4 August 2005. *Pro-test Lab* existed for almost two years, and the popular mobilisation initiated by the Urbonas was finally successful in its aims of putting off the demolition of Lietuva.

8. To my knowledge, Okwui Enwezor is the first to make this point explicit, in his essay "The Production of Social Space as Artwork. Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes", in Blacke Stimson & Gregory Sholette (eds.): *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*. Minnesota: University Press, 2007. We should make one addition to activism's production of space. That is, there is also a modernist tradition for negotiating collaboration through medium and material. In Denmark, the neo-avant-garde group Den Eksperimenterende Kunstskole ("The Experimental Art School"), which existed from 1961 till 1965 and counted members such as Per Kirkeby and Poul Gernes, primarily worked with deconstructing painting, sculpture and graphics by reorganising artistic matter through happenings as a form of temporal involvement.

9. See for example Johanna Billing, Maria Lind & Lars Nilsson (eds.): *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007.

10. Alain Badiou: *Metapolitics*. London: Verso, 2005 (1998), p. 142.
11. "Henri Lefebvre on the Situationist International!" A 1983 interview conducted and translated by Kristin Ross, published in *October*, no. 79 (Winter 1997).
12. Michael Asher: "September 21 – October 12, 1974. Claire Copley Gallery, Inc. Los Angeles, California", in Michael Asher & Benjamin Buchloh (eds): *Writings 1973-1983 On Works 1969-1979*. Los Angeles: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design / The Museum of Contemporary Art, n.d., p. 100.
13. Ibid.
14. Another example of bypassing the work's commodity status is the early work of the Copenhagen-based artists' group N55 (Ingvil Aarbakke, Rikke Luther, Jon Sorvin and Cecilia Wendt), who during the late 1990s produced a sculptural vocabulary of everyday functions (chair, table, bed etc., including a Buckminster Fuller-like *Spaceframe*, a living unit). These objects were accompanied by open source information, on the internet and in the form of manuals that explained step by step how to do them yourself. www.n55.dk.
15. For example, contemporary community-based art and the way this often departs from an imperative that the art work or action should heal and confirm, and not disturb, the identity and self-understanding of the beholder. As Miwon Kwon has described, the production of such "empowered" subjects is a reversal of the aesthetically politicised subjects of the historical avant-garde, because the avant-gardes didn't work on the basis of organicity but of antagonism and what is explicitly produced. In this context, the question is: can one bring about social healing and social change at the same time? (See Miwon Kwon: *One Place After Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press, 2004).
16. Nina Felshin: "[Activist artists] are creatively expanding art's boundaries and audience and are redefining the role of the artist. In the process, they seem to suggest that the proper answer to the question '...But is it Art?' is: 'But does it matter?'" Nina Felshin in her introduction to Nina Felshin (ed.): *But Is It Art? The Spirit Of Art As Activism*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p.13.
17. See also my essay "True Rulers of Their Own Realm. Political Subjectivation in Palle Nielsen's *The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society*", in: *Afterall*, no. 16. London: Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London, (Autumn / Winter 2007).
18. Alain Badiou. op. cit.
19. "Flying High". Interview by Cristina Ricupero with Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas in *CAC Interviu*, Issue nos. 7-8, Vilnius, 2007, p. 60.
20. To paraphrase Jacques Rancière, as quoted by the Urbonas: "precincts of art lend themselves more readily today than other fields to the redistribution of roles and competences." Or, as they have also put it: "What we believe in is modelling and creating organisation structures that support new modes of production as a part of artistic practice." (Interview by Jean-Charles Massera with Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas, p. 91). Here, the collaboration with individuals and groups was articulated along linguistic lines: "The main point for us [in the work with *tvvv.plotas*] was to find out how ideas were articulated in different contexts, rather than to force any final outcome. We said: we are your syntax, you are our language. Each of the topics that were suggested for open discussion included some proposals from the collaborating participants that shaped that particular program in a different way. For instance, Modernism in contemporary art and how it was understood by a Lithuanian and by foreign experts." (Ibid.).
21. Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2003 (1983), p. 6.
22. Wu Ming: 54. London: Arrow Books, 2006 (2002), p. 178.



KARAOKE (2001)

The karaoke of ABBA's *Money, Money, Money* is performed by employees of LTB (The Lithuanian Savings Bank) the last state-owned bank, which was privatised and sold to foreign investors the day after the performance.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY (ABBA, 1976)

I work all night, I work all day,
to pay the bills I have to pay
Ain't it sad
And still there never seems to be
a single penny left for me
That's too bad
In my dreams I have a plan
If I got me a wealthy man
I wouldn't have to work at all,
I'd fool around and have a ball...

Money, money, money
Must be funny
In the rich man's world
Money, money, money
Always sunny
In the rich man's world
Aha-ahaaa
All the things I could do
If I had a little money
It's a rich man's world

A man like that is hard to find but
I can't get him off my mind
Ain't it sad
And if he happens to be free I bet he
wouldn't fancy me
That's too bad
So I must leave, I'll have to go
To Las Vegas or Monaco
And win a fortune in a game,
My life will never be the same...

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