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Value of Art in Social Fabric

PROTOTYPE

Developed in the framework of the RESHAPE
trajectory Value of Art in Social Fabric facilitated by
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Parts of the text were translated from French by
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International.

RESHAPE was a very challenging journey for us. When the project started, the world was a very different place. Along with beautiful journeys, fruitful discussions, and collaborative work came the pains and frustrations of realising how vulnerable we are. Artists, cultural workers, small organisations, activists, we all share the same feeling of powerlessness when faced with the big questions. Even more so now that the world pandemic has made it clearer than ever how precarious our sector's survival is.

RESHAPE gave us a space to come together and take stock of the celebrations and the hardships of our ecosystem. Starting from the question of 'the value of art in the social fabric', we immersed ourselves in a complex process. We are the social fabric and we are making art. More than an object, a final product, or a sexy cultural device, we make and we value the creative process sometimes more than the result. That very activity that lights up relationships, feelings, affections, questions, knowledge, even conflict and resolution.

The way art and culture are framed in the capitalist society requires from us a constant production of final objects for consumption. This piece of work is (not) one of those. This is the record of our journey; the eight of us coming together from various corners of the world to explore some of the bigger and smaller questions.

The goal of this process was to give answers to 'the value of art in the social fabric'. It was an opportunity to understand more about our vast field of socially engaged arts, to broaden our perspective, to reflect on our practices, to exchange and to experience: projects, people, policies, ideas, and spaces.

We captured our findings using two concepts, two metaphors that can carry the fragments of knowledge we want to share with you. The first one is the *Home*, a large virtual communal space for everyone in the art world who dreams of a social change; a place of safety, fairness, and inclusion. The second one is the *Suitcase*, a minuscule piece of personal space one takes with one when one needs to leave one's home, often in order to survive.

RESHAPE was a challenging journey for us, but one of great value; for it helped us become a little wiser, a little fuller in experience, and a little more connected to one another.

The home: an introduction

My homeland is not a suitcase and I am no traveller.

– Mahmoud Darwish (1979)

Using the metaphor of home, we questioned and mapped the areas of crisis that are affecting independent cultural workers and artists. We looked to create a place where we⁰¹ can not only rest our exhausted bodies, but can also recover after interactions and work, a place where we charge our batteries, a place

01 We - The word is used throughout this piece or often substituted for 'artist'. It predominantly refers to artists, cultural

workers, small organisations, and activists, and is written from the perspective of the team who has created this work.

that provides mental and physical comfort. Each room holds provocations in the form of questions, sometimes for ourselves but mostly directed at the institutions, funders, and large-scale organisations in positions of power, to challenge the toxic and oppressive work systems that we find ourselves in.

In creating this home we were limited to our own experiences and the identity from which we experience the world. Oppressive and corrupt systems are often worse for certain people, because of but not limited to racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and classism. So as predominantly (but not exclusively) white, heteronormative, middle-class and able-bodied artists we are limited in what we understand and therefore in our knowledge of what to challenge. It is simply impossible to do the real work needed in reimagining the cultural ecosystem until we have fair and equal representation and people who are often ignored and excluded from working in the arts have a place at the table.

Introspection

The house is a physical shelter, a mental refuge, a place where the laws that regulate society are abolished or are at least mitigated. Bill Bryson stated that home is the place where history ends, but home is also the place where history begins, the small, personal histories of those who end up making history (Bryson 2010). Many revolutions began with secret meetings in the houses of revolutionaries, where sometimes not even the long arm of the law can enter without having to knock on the door. Home is the place where you let your guard down, where you can unfold, where no one judges you, where no one cares what you do (which is nice and also sad), where the latent sides of our personality can manifest themselves freely.

It's no accident that the DIY movement is rooted in repairing and improving things in the home. It became a thing in the culture world by creating bubbles of political and artistic independence. Even though it's never completely outside of the surveillance and influence of society, the private space remains a space of personal freedom.

Home is an expression of our way of life. In recent months, our homes have taken on a very different dimension and meaning, absorbing all the fields of our activity, and becoming the central space of the measures against the virus. Our homes, these main stages of the intimate and the personal, have been revealed also as spaces for the political and the collective organisation.

Our RESHAPE home is like a virtual centre for art workers and artists. The hosts are the guests at the same time. Exchanging data and experiences is the way of inhabiting the rooms of RESHAPE. You don't have to clean the dishes as long as you repair the roof. There is room for everybody who is willing to share a room when it is needed. The rooms are like the cells of an organism. The RESHAPE centre/home is a space for people who want to repair and heal and build new systems and structures to work in.

Guide

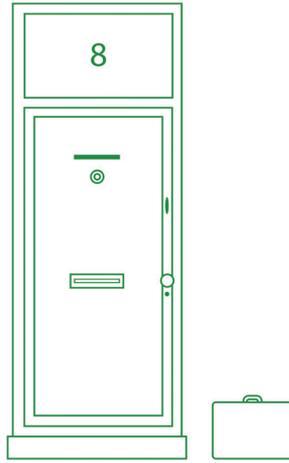
For this publication we have taken a small selection of the rooms, provocations and seeds. For the full work please see the website:

<http://artinsocialfabric.reshape.network>.

List of rooms and frames

TREEHOUSE Ethnospheres	GARDEN The Climate Crisis	TOILET What do you want to permanently get rid of?	BATHROOM Mental Health & Wellbeing	PLAYROOM Childcare	OFFICE Administration	BEDROOM Regenerative Culture	MAINTENANCE A collection of all the things we pay for as independent artists	DECORATION Media & Social Media	STAIRS Movement	ATTIC Ethics, Morals and Discrimination	ROOF Superior force
	LAND Ownership and Copyright			PLAYROOM Childcare			KITCHEN Collaboration	LIVING ROOM Language and Communication	HALLWAY What do you want to personally leave behind?	ENTRANCE Access	
	WATER Education & Learning								WINE CELLAR A History of Important Events	BASEMENT Isolation	
										HEATING Money and Funding	
								WALLS Safety		FOUNDATIONS Human Welfare	
								FLOORS Hierarchy			

Entrance - access



Provocations

Neptism: How do institutions and funders end their own nepotism and a system that rewards people with a career on the basis of their connections and the codes instead of on the basis of their ability?

Visibility: How are opportunities made public to everyone and not just to people in a privileged network?

Disability: Why do institutions/funders not make applications accessible for artists with disabilities?

Representation: How are institutions/funders held to account for fair and just representation? Until this can be achieved, should artists demand quotas or collectively boycott certain institutions/funders?

Introspection

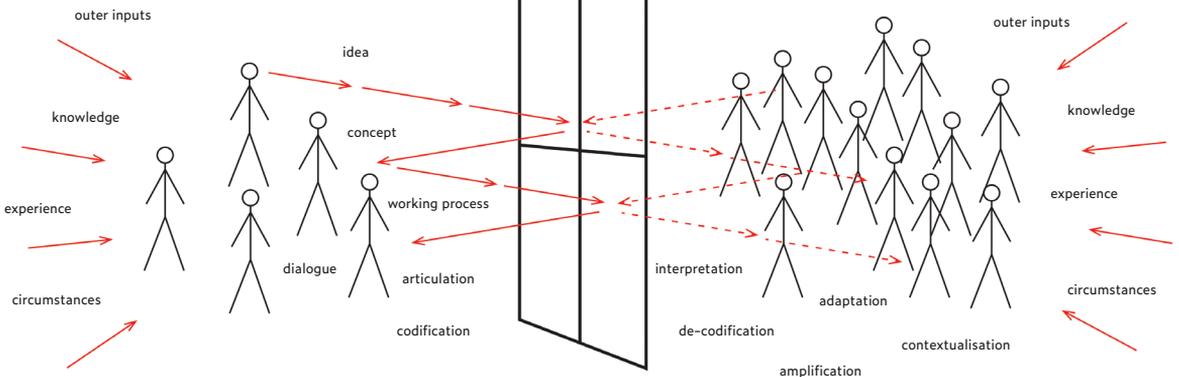
The door that opens the hardest is the open door.

Seeds

Inside the house - Production
Agreement #1

Window - The artwork
semi-permeable membrane
both translucent and reflective

Outside the house - Usage
Agreement #2



Models of agreements for producing and using collaborative work of art

Our research has shown that when concluding legal contracts on the conditions for participating in collective work, as well as regulating how the outcomes of collective work will be used, only private interests are protected, which substantially prevents social usefulness of artistic activity in the community. Recognising these limitations, models of agreements for collaboration in a collective work of art as well as its custody and usership by third parties have been developed, in such a way as to guarantee the social interests of artistic creation.

AGREEMENT GOVERNING CUSTODY AND USERSHIP OF COLLABORATIVE ART WORK

Concluded in _____ (place), on _____ (date)

Between

1) _____ (Title of the Working Community), represented by _____ (first and family name of the representative); address (hereinafter: Representative of the Working Community);

And

2) _____ (First name and family name, or title of the legal/ physical person) taking the work of art as a loan for usage and safekeeping; address, personal registration number (hereinafter: User)

Article 1

By means of the present Agreement it is confirmed that _____ (title of the Work of Art) was created as a result of a collaborative engagement of the following individuals/collaborators who are bound by the Agreement on Participating in Collaborative Work (Annex 1):

- 1) _____,
- 2) _____,
- 3) _____,
- 4) _____,
- 5) _____,
- 6) _____,

Which was undertaken within the Working Community,

At the _____ venue(s)/place(s)

performed from/to _____ (date/s),

and as such constitutes a piece of Collaborative Work of Art, i.e. holds the status of a jointly/socially-owned work, which cannot be segmented/partitioned, nor sold by a private or physical person for the purposes of further exploitation for economic or promotional purposes.

Article 2

The User _____ undertakes the right to use, and the obligation to safekeep the Collaborative Work of Art for a period of time of _____, i.e. from the moment of signing of this Agreement until _____, whereby the User undertakes to:

- use the Work of Art for the purpose of exercising public/general interests and enabling access to information, knowledge, and cultural upgrades;
- enable taking the work of art elsewhere for temporary use, at the written request of the above-mentioned collaborator/s (hereinafter: Collaborator/s) involved in this collaborative work, whenever the loan is agreed for a specific period of time. The Collaborator is obligated to return the work of art within the agreed deadline;
- ensure that the Work of Art is handled with the due attention required by its physical characteristics, i.e. (specify details) _____.

Article 3

This Agreement obligates the User to in no way use the Work of Art for profit making, or for the purpose of promoting the interests of a third party or parties (private capital, foundations, corporations, and so on).

Any income that may result from the use of the Work of Art must be carried out in agreement with all who participated in its creation. From that income, unless already disbursed, and provided there are no other arrangements, work engagement of all participants will be paid and distributed according to the Value of Work Coefficient (Annex 1), whereas _____% of the total profit will be paid into the Joint Fund, the purpose of which is to enable continuity and development of Collaborative Work.

Article 4

This Agreement may be amended or terminated in agreement with and with the consent of either Party. In the event that Users, for any unforeseen reasons, find themselves in a situation where they are unable to safekeep the Work of Art during the contract period, the Work shall be given for use to _____, or be returned to the Working Community.

The Working Community Representative

The User

The suitcase

My suitcase is my home, for without it I have none.
 - Unknown

In a damaged planet/in a global crisis, we no longer have a place to call home. We were forced to leave our homes. We need to be constantly moving in order to survive.

We filled our suitcase with the things we need for this journey.

Some are practical tools to keep us alive. To keep us safe.

Others are fragments of our identity. To always remind us of who we are, where we come from and why we had to leave.

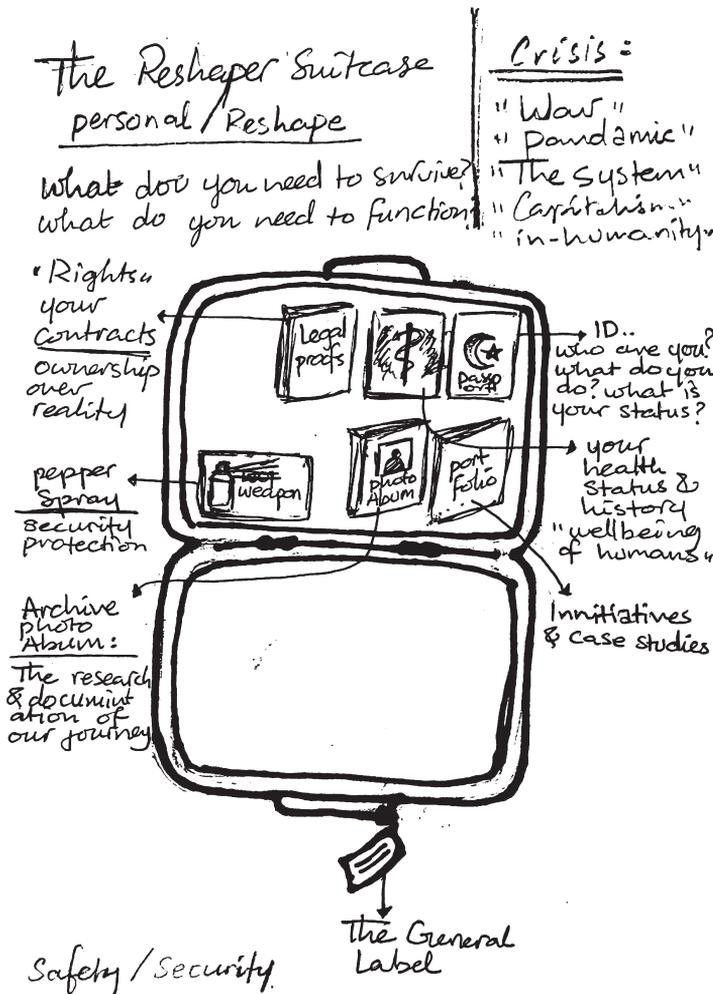
We can/should/will not forget.

Another thing is our Game. The key to it all.

Our ideas, our beliefs, our unfinished revolution plans.

The (no) place where We hold our existence.

The (no) place where 'I' exist in connection to all.



Q. Does your sanity allow you to unpack the suitcase?

Trigger alert

Once this suitcase is opened, just like Pandora's box, it unleashes beasts, ghosts, memories, traumas, and the unsolved crisis of a world that is burning; a dystopian world that even when it burns, it burns unfairly. Some just started to feel the heat of this world while others had to pack up their suitcase and escape; some of us have been on fire for too long, WAY TOO LONG.

The suitcase is always with me, I carry it everywhere.

If you find it in this home, that means I am probably no longer around.

For better or for worse. Who can tell?

Open the suitcase, take anything you need.

Your hands may burn when you unpack, but continue to dig inside.

These are the unseen scars of the never-ending wars inside your mind.

Continue, reach deep down, find the treasures you brought from that long-gone home of yours.

It was planted with explosives and landmines, do you remember?

In the rubble and the fire, there, only there, you'll find the things you need to survive.

Listen closely and listen deep.

**A game never completed, a game never (not) played
(audio piece excerpt⁰²)**

An art worker from the future is trying to survive the big storms while constantly moving from one place to the other. She is all alone and her chances of survival are getting slimmer by the day. There is one thing that keeps her going through the hardships and that is the values, the beliefs, and the choices that she carries. This is an excerpt of her reflection journal, her message to others like her that are still looking for a better future. How is our personal choice affecting this future?

Today is November 5th 2031.

I haven't seen anyone else for a while now but one can only hope. (...)

Here I am again, (un)packing my suitcase in this temporary home of ours.

Next to my toothbrush, my passport, and my phone, I keep My Game. A

game never completed, a game never (not) played.

Sometimes it lifts me up like a hot air balloon, sometimes I drag it like a ball and chain.

You need to understand this.

⁰² For the complete audio piece, please open the suitcase on the website <https://artinsocialfabric.reshape.network/>.

My Game is my unfinished revolution plan, my ongoing memoir of making a change; it is the map of my marks and my spaces in this world that is constantly shrinking. (...)

It looks like a magical realism suitcase that I carry with me everywhere. (In reality, my bag looks more like a backpack with ugly straps and used up zippers, but let's just agree on the suitcase, shall we?)

A suitcase seems like the appropriate device to carry all that I wish to convey to you today. It concentrates the conceptual, the symbolic, and the practical layers of my game in a way that I think you will like. It could be both elusive and tangible at the same time. It signifies both the ecstasy of a tourist and the transit of the displaced in its magnificent simplicity.

I haven't bought it alone and I haven't made it alone either, but as you can see, I have made it my own. Piece by piece, inch by inch, one mark at a time, one day at a time.

Sometimes they supported me.

Many times they rejected me.

Sometimes they were present.

Many times they were absent.

They've made many decisions for me, you see.

How much my work is worth, how much time I need, if and when I should be paid for it, how I should communicate my work with the world, what I should be focusing on, what format I should use, whom I should collaborate with and how much of a breakthrough I should produce.

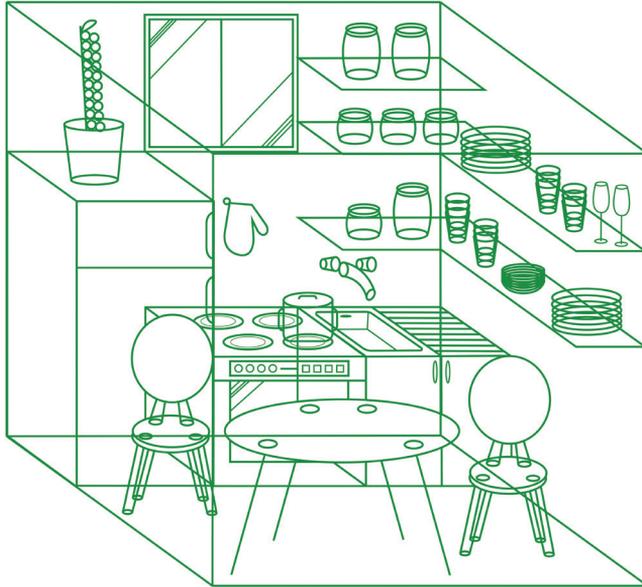
Parts of me hated them for this and parts of me were grateful for some of the storms that they faced with me.

Let's just say that we've had a rather complicated relationship, shall we?

You know what they say; we are all in the same storm.

True, but we are not all on the same boat.

Kitchen - collaboration



Provocations

Hidden Power Games: How can hidden power games be made visible so this toxic dynamic doesn't grind down and create mistrust for artists and the people⁰³ they collaborate with?

Facilitation: How can we make the complex dynamics of collaborations between artists and communities visible and make institutions/funders recognise the time, energy, and specific skills of this work?

Conflict: How can we be open and transparent about conflict and obstacles that happen throughout the process of creating? And use this to build more complex relationships instead of hiding issues out of fear that conflict is seen as failure or lack of competence?

Equality: How can we recognise the reality of hierarchy, racism, discrimination, and class struggles instead of being encouraged to hide these mechanisms, preserving a false idea of equality?

Critic: How can artists collaborate with institutions/funders while maintaining a critical position?

Introspection

Tasteful collaborative affinities. We are our collaborations. Same ratio for different minds.

⁰³ People – In this case the word people includes anyone who watches, interacts,

participates, creates and performs in culture.

Seeds

(Extracts from 3 questionnaires created within the project)

Questions for a fair contract

This work focuses on the tacit and non-verbalised contracts operating in the social fabric between its various actors: people⁰⁴/institutions/artists & independent organisations/media. The aim is to shed light on these often opaque power games in order to change them and build more equitable exchanges. The following series of questions can serve as a starting point for the conversation between new partners.

- Is the press review important in the evaluation of the work? Why is it important?
- What do you think institutions are buying when they support something?
- Do you think that the artist/independent organisation, whose work is supported by an institution, is indebted to that institution? In what way and why?
- Can an artist/independent organisation fail in their work? After a failure, is it possible to support them for a new project?
- Are you attentive to the process or do you only look at the result?
- Are independent artists/organisations completely free of content? (e.g. concerning religion). If not, explain the limits of the framework.
- As an artist/independent organisation, have you ever asked for half of the budget you needed because you were afraid to say how much the project would actually cost?
- As an artist/independent organisation, have you ever asked for twice the budget you needed because you are convinced that in principle institutions respond by offering less than what is asked for?
- As an artist/independent organisation, how do you make sure that people⁰⁵ are in a safe space and that they are respected as they need to be, in their differences?
- Are the people⁰⁶ you work with aware of how they represent themselves in the role you invite them to take on in your artistic form? Do you explain this to them precisely?
- How are the earnings from the artistic work shared between artists and people⁰⁷? How are the people involved represented in the cast of the production? Can these people change or show the play elsewhere at their own initiative?

A survey about working in art

According to the class division the birthplace of the artistic profession is the middle class – a class which in recent decades has experienced significant social and economic degradation through spontaneous surrender to the policies

04 People = citizens, residents, unpaid participants, amateurs, volunteers.
05 Ibid.

06 Ibid.
07 Ibid.

of profit interests and through the collapse of all instruments that guarantee general social interests. This questionnaire, inspired by Marx' 'Enquête ouvrière' (Marx 1880), aims to encourage artists' self-reflection on the position and function that their art work has in a changed social panorama.

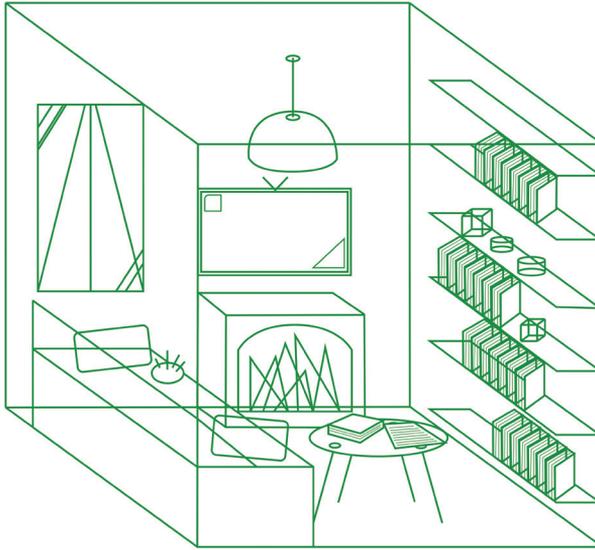
- How do you define your artistic vocation/profession? In other words, what do you say you do to people who are not in the art world?
- Are you able to ensure basic subsistence from your career in art, or do you have to take other jobs? If so, what jobs?
- To what extent does your art career require additional non-artistic work (administrative, bureaucratic, report writing, financial management, and so on)?
- What specific mental and physical efforts does your work in art require? Explain the physical and mental effort required for your art work.
- To what extent does your work in art bring you relaxation from your daily life and professional duties?
- Do you think that the social impact of your work is proportionate to your expectations and the efforts invested?
- What do you personally do to make the art world better for everyone?
- Are you able to cover the costs of your workspace and art material through your art work?
- In your opinion, how does the development of digital technology affect the dynamics and form of your work in art/the conditions of art production? To what degree does it enhance, facilitate, or complicate your work in art?
- Do you do maintenance of material and means that are necessary for your work in art yourself, or do you hire third parties/companies to do that for you?
- How and to what extent does your art career permeate your daily life?
- Are you able to take annual vacations, and for how long? What is your ideal vacation?
- Do you usually have access to the entire budget of an event/project/exhibition/art competition in which you participate? What percentage of it is allocated for your fee? Illustrate with an example.
- Do you have any health problems/illnesses due to the nature of your artistic work, and what are they?
- Are you in any way engaged in improving work conditions in the arts? In what way?
- Do you think that artists should fight for their rights on their own, or should they unite with workers in other industries? Explain why.
- What legal and formal instruments are available to artists allowing them to take an active part in formulating cultural policy (legislation, state strategies, promotion of socio-economic work conditions of artists)? And when are they needed?
- Do you tend to spend time with fellow artists and how much? Is that time dedicated only to work, or also to other things?

The value questionnaire

In the light of the pandemic and the political instability in the Euro-Mediterranean region, we are once more reminded of the value of solidarity and collaboration. With this in mind, we are looking for people from all levels of our cultural ecosystem to openly share knowledge, wisdom and resources and to renegotiate the way we work together and relate to one another. The wisdom we share can be a starting point of a conversation, a ‘negotiations game’ where we can learn to trust each other more, move forward with our differences, and expand our common ground. How many questions are you willing to answer openly knowing that all answers are for everyone at the table to know?

- What is your monthly salary?
- Do you have health insurance and a pension plan?
- Why did you choose to work in the cultural field?
- Do you feel that your work gives you the opportunity to utilise your skills to the maximum/learn new skills? If so, what part of it does?
- Please describe briefly a memorable project that your organisation was involved with, that had a personal impact on you. What was its value?
- Who makes the decisions in your organisation/department?
- How does your institution collaborate with:
 - a. young/emerging artists
 - b. experienced/well-known artists
 - c. small organisations
 - d. public bodies
- What resources does your organisation usually bring into a project? In your opinion, are there any other resources it could share to support the project-making process?
- If you were the person responsible for the evaluation process of a project that your organisation is part of, how would you go about it?
- If it were up to you, what is the one thing you would change about your organisation?
- To what extent is your position/work in your organisation opening up opportunities to effectively reach:
 - a. wide audiences
 - b. experienced/well-known artists
 - c. mass-media representatives
 - d. public bodies/municipalities/
governments

Living room – language and communication



Provocations

English: Why are we expected to work in English in cross-cultural collaborations? Who does this exclude and which voices are being silenced?

Translation costs: Why are translation costs often not budgeted and how does this cost cutting put the burden and extra work on people with English as a second language?

Elitist language: If communication is a central part of culture, why is intellectual or elitist language often preferred?

Across countries: How can institutions/funders be inclusive and open around different systems of communication of countries and cultures and learn from them rather than insist things should be done in one way?

Introspection



Mladen Stilinović:
*An Artist Who Cannot
 Speak English is No
 Artist*, 1992
 Acrylic on artificial silk,
 160 x 264 cm
 Photo: Boris
 Cvjetanović
 Courtesy of Branka
 Stipančić

Seeds

Artoteka

(excerpt)

Artoteka is a prototype for an artistic mediation project that aims to bring arts to everyday life and to promote spaces where artists and communities can meet.

Artoteka is a platform that offers loans of works of art and mediation activities with artists and various communities. It responds to some of the shortcomings and needs that we detected in our context: the need for innovation in the ways of promoting contemporary art and to create new spaces for dissemination, the lack of mediation agents in the arts, the lack of opportunities and structures to establish deeper and more stable relationships between artists and communities, or the need to generate new economies for artists.

It has been prototyped for the Basque Country context during the RESHAPE process through the collective collaboration of Sarean, Wikitoki, and Karraskan, and will be activated starting in November 2020 in Bilbao, in collaboration with ten artists and various local organisations and institutions.

It is based on the example of the French Artothèques. The project's format was created in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century and implemented in France in the 1980s, where today it is a consolidated project of promotion and diffusion of contemporary art at a regional level.

Objectives

- To promote access to contemporary art and create new forms for dissemination other than the traditional spaces for arts and culture.
- To promote and make visible the work of local artists.
- To encourage meeting spaces and collective reflection, positioning contemporary art as a tool for critical thinking and social transformation.
- To activate forms of collaboration between institutions, independent agents, artists and communities.
- To establish new ways for artists to acquire an income through loans and activities.

How does it work?

Artoteka's aim is to form a community made up of artists, users (individuals or people involved in groups – schools, hospitals, associations, and so on – that participate in Artoteka's loans and activities) and collaborators, in addition to the project's driving team. These communities are participating in the co-creation of Artoteka, through online Contrast meetings and open discussions that will continue after activating the service. Artoteka wants to promote open listening, understanding, and mutual learning at all times.

Artoteka's functioning is divided into three stages:

Artoteka's collection

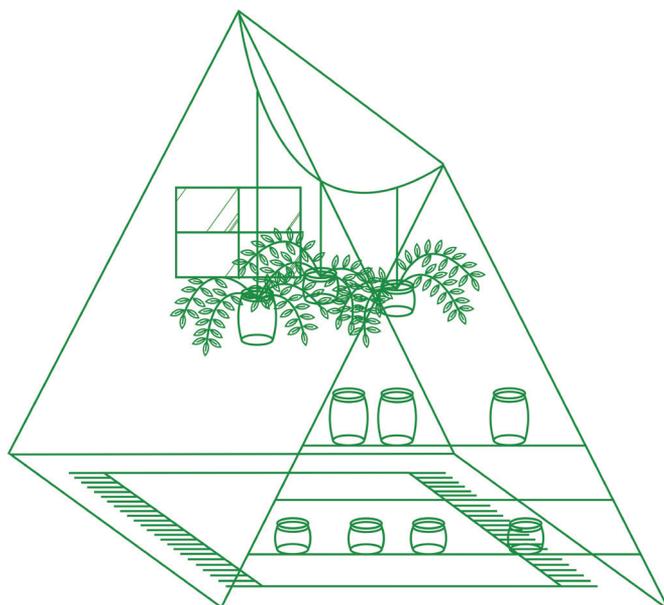
The Artothèques that we know are based on public art collections; the collection belongs to a region, in the case of the French Artothèques, or to a museum, as in the case of MUAC en tu casa, in Mexico City. In our case, not having the possibility at the moment to work with an existing public collection, we are creating our own virtual collection of works by local artists. The works will be multidisciplinary, hybrid, transversal, and linked to other areas of knowledge and they will be selected based on a curatorial criterion.

Loans

Users select one or more of these works to receive them on loan in their homes, workplaces, or schools, for at least three months. A contract will be signed stipulating the loan conditions and the conservation requirements of the work by Artoteka, artist, and user.

Mediation activities

When a user chooses a work to borrow, the possibility of complementing this loan with a mediation activity opens up. The objective of these activities is for artists and communities to meet and reflect on the works. The activity will be defined for each case specifically. The Artoteka team will put the artist and user in contact and together they will design the action, depending on the nature of the space and the interests of the two parties.



Provocations

Transparency: Why are organisations often not transparent about their connections to large corporations or government agendas, and should artists demand this transparency as a requirement?

Allies: How can artists be supported both in terms of funding and exposure when they refuse to collaborate due to boycotts or artwashing or refuse to collaborate with corrupt agendas?

No: How can vulnerable artists and people⁰⁸ have the right to say ‘no’ at any stage in the project and how can institutions/funders be flexible to this need, also after the ‘glory’ moment?

Cultural Colonialism: How can organisations such as the British Council be decolonised so they no longer push an agenda of cultural colonialism? Isn’t it time to rethink the empire mentality?

Gentrification: How can artists live and work in affordable areas without contributing to gentrification?

Introspection

Art sells but who’s buying?

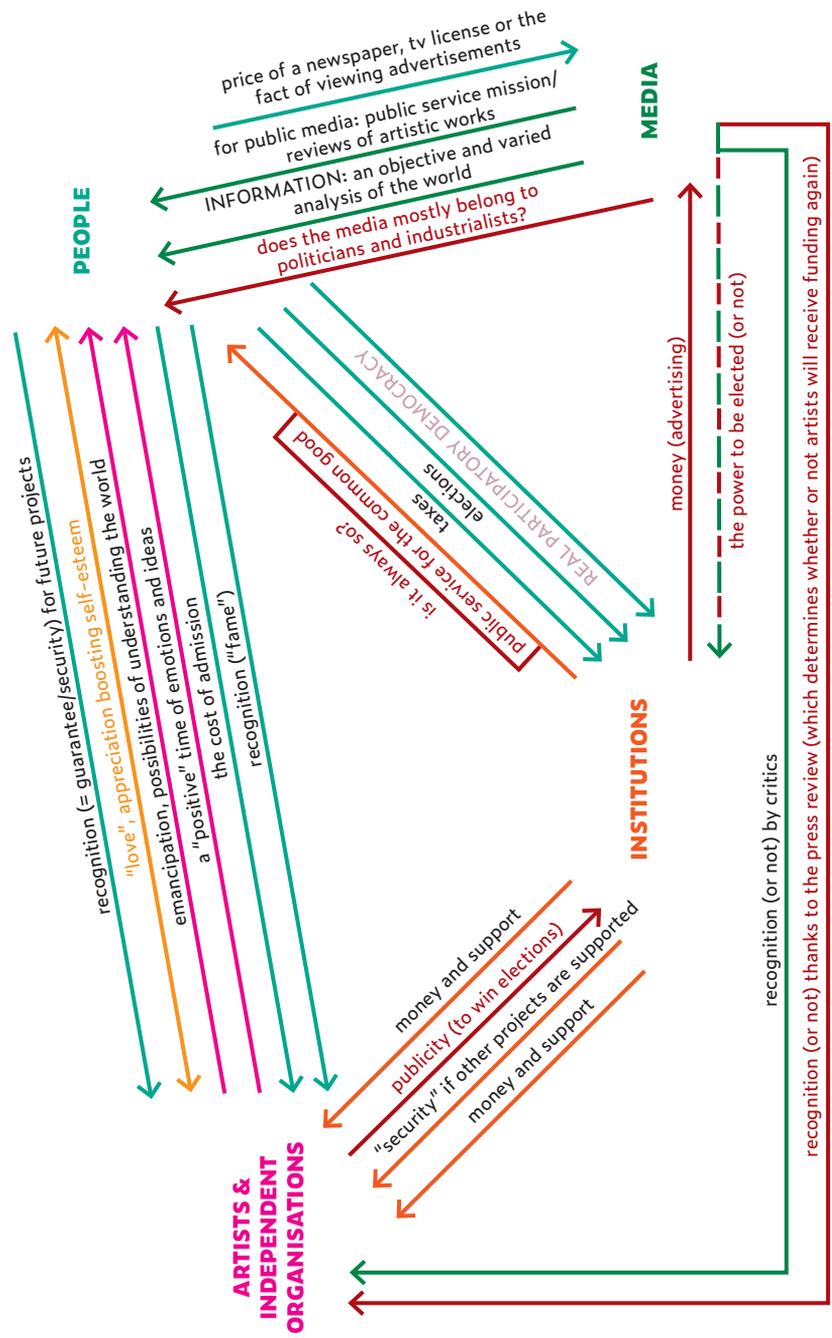
⁰⁸ People – In this case the word people includes anyone who watches, interacts, participates, creates, and performs in culture.

Seeds

The diagram of the power relations between the actors of the social fabric

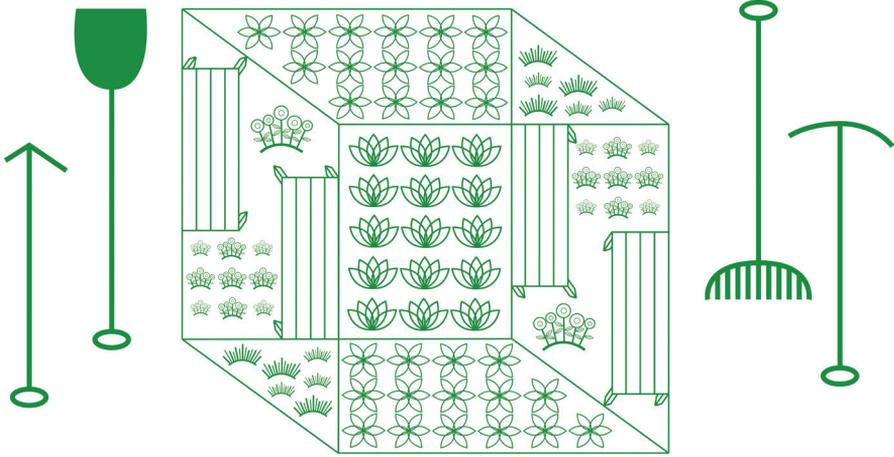
This diagram is an attempt to visualise the aims (whether stated or not) of the exchanges between certain protagonists of the social fabric. The direction of the arrow designates *what one protagonist brings to another*. It is a reflection on non-verbalised expectations and the supposed debts to which they give rise. It is also a way of highlighting how some protagonists use others, without this use being stated and consented to, as well as the toxic relationships this creates. Yet, all the actors in the field should work together because *we are all in the same boat* (and this boat is not doing so well).

What things should be like
 But are not yet (the new paradigm we dream of).
What should not count (often, when one asks what unpaid participants get out of an artistic project, the answer is "love" (or appreciation, self-esteem, etc.). In fact, the project is rewarding for everyone: artists, institutions, associations and people.
 Answering "love" is a way of stating that the participants are sufficiently remunerated in this way, and of avoiding the question of salary, earnings from the work, etc.).
What is problematic about how things are (reality)



Scheme design: Atelier Franck Tallon

Garden – the climate crisis



Provocations

Carbon zero: How can institutions/funders support artists to contribute to imagining a green, carbon-neutral future centred around equality and justice?

Lending: How can large-scale organisations lend resources and materials so that we don't all need to buy new materials and stop the burden being solely on the individual artist to reduce carbon footprint?

Toxic system: How can artists and their work be a catalyst for change when our own working dynamics often sit in such oppressive and toxic systems? How can institutions/funders be part of a positive change that takes place across all levels?

Crisis: How can unique ethnospheres help us to understand the climate crisis and how can artists who have specific knowledge of these understandings be supported?

Introspection

If the climate crisis is also a crisis of the imagination, can the arts be our air purifier...

Seeds

Instrument for measuring the value of art

This is an attempt to materialise/visually present exactly how much effort/resources must be invested in the art work/project in order to reach an equilibrium, that is to say a more just society where institutions are solving problems within the 'social fabric'.

There could be twelve points of measurement, twelve topics to address and to define how they are affecting society and the development of the given artwork: Ecology; Migration; Labour; Economy; Bureaucratisation; Health; Housing; Community; Love; Belief; Communication; Death.

Each topic is regarded through the lens of institutions: what are the measures they are conducting in order to deal with the problem/topic (right side of the scale) and through the lens of the participants/people: how are they affected by the problem/topic (left side of the scale)?

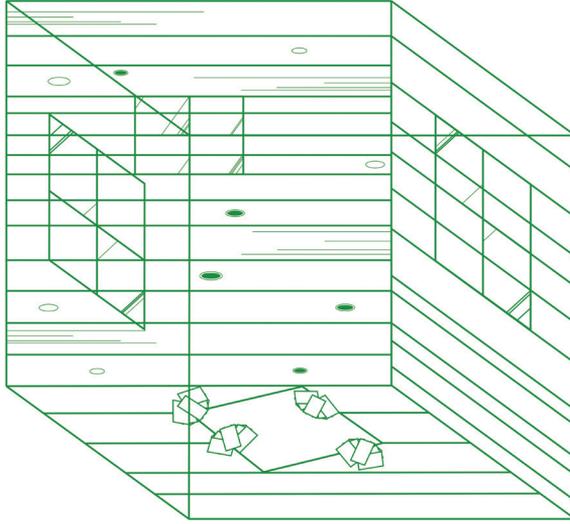
The rope in the middle/equilibrium point of the scale is the artist/art work.



Value of Art in Social Fabric

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PROTOTYPE



Provocations

Understanding: How can artists be supported in their specific understanding of languages, ethnospheres, dialects and beliefs instead of being forced to work in a monolithic culture?

Critiquing: How can artists be supported in critiquing this monolithic culture instead of being expected to support it?

Exploitation: How can lesser-known practices not be fetishised, exotified, and infantilised and how to give artists that use them equal platforms under their own conditions?

Introspection

Art shouldn't ever wind up as an exhibit in the history museum.

Seeds

A Eurocentric card game with international friends

(excerpt)

In the last few years, we are witnessing a grand effort from many cultural players in Europe to be more inclusive in their programmes and to invite more artists and cultural workers from countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Although this is extremely valuable and it enriches greatly the content of such programmes, the design of most projects remains still very Eurocentric, making it hard for anyone outside the European context to work in these programmes and fully utilise their professional capacity. Acknowledging the challenges of designing a project

⁰⁹ Ethnospheres – The sum total of all thoughts and intuitions, myths and beliefs, ideas and inspirations brought into being

by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness.

that can accommodate such a variety of contexts, we were surprised by how often one stumbles upon this Eurocentric approach when designing a collaborative international project.

Utilising the resource pack *(Re)framing the international*¹⁰ kindly offered to us by the Flanders Arts Institute, four of us Reshapers met at a beautiful small cafe in Ghent and put our heads together to design a project that would take place in Tripoli, Libya, the hometown of one of the four people in the group. The other three hometowns were Athens, Bilbao, and Zagreb. We wanted to explore the validity of applying our Eurocentric knowledge device in an area the context of which is totally different than anything we have known. We put our card game tool to the test and here is what happened.

Inspired by the work of the Chilean collective Mil M2, we decided to design our version of the Question Project¹¹ (Proyecto Pregunta) in one of Tripoli's most central roads. The Question Project is a tool developed for collective reflection and community conversation in the public space. It is a large but simple installation where letters are hung high on wires, forming questions for everyone to see. The questions are sourced by the community and they are used to spark conversations around difficult topics. The conversation we wanted to pursue in Tripoli was about the juxtaposition of the consumerist approach of Ramadan – especially the excessive food consumption – with the poverty and hunger rates in the exact same area. Initial question: What would you ask the city of Tripoli today?

A quick game review: As a tool, the card game can provide some interesting concepts to think about when planning a project, at times offering valuable input for potential threats and solutions. In this particular case, it was abundantly clear that if we wanted to make it relevant for our Tripoli-based project, we would have to try hard. Most of the threats were not directly applicable to the Libyan context. We decided to change them as little as necessary in order to make them applicable and even then the differences were bigger than expected. Even the concept of censorship is totally different when applied in the Libyan context and the potential solutions that we could apply in an equivalent Europe-based project can be highly dangerous when applied in Libya. Similarly, the suggestion cards referring to the various types of resources we can explore as potential solutions, were in most cases of little relevance. They required us to make a genuine effort to draw parallel lines that could apply in the Libyan context, as well as a lot of thinking outside the box. Overall, the game's goal to help in the design process of the project was not particularly successful. But it did function as a starting point for many conversations around the project-making process in a totally different context than the European. As such, it proved an interesting experience and it gave us food for thought on a number of topics, including the vastly different notions in our work depending on the context, for example censorship, DIY, funding, network, safety.

10 For more information on '(Re)framing the international card game', please visit <https://www.kunsten.be>.

11 For more information on 'Proyecto Pregunta', please visit <https://www.milm2.com>.

Additional seeds

(more details at <http://artinsocialfabric.reshape.network>.)

- ***The Artists of the Smallest Screen (29 min., documentary)*** – How Zoom changed and challenged performing artists during the quarantine. Case: Homefest festival 2020.
- **Homemade Culture** – When art meets home: a map of the most important art projects related to home.
- **The Parables** – The Parables are stories, anecdotes that illustrate the power relationships in the cultural field.
- **Recommendations for the status of the artists** issued at UNESCO Conference 21 session held in Belgrade, 1980 – PDF.
- **What's the Value of Art? (fun approach/spontaneous rap edition)** – A playful approach to the theme of the value of art through a spontaneous rap song. Three neighbour artists in Athens talk about a French community project in verses and beats. Who said the artistic process can't be fun?
- **Care networks in a global pandemic**
Reflection about the experience taking part in a solidarity network during the lockdown, and on the need of building collective spaces of care and affection as a strategy for resistance and resilience.

References

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