

**FORMS**  
*of* **ACTION**

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**The Pedagogical Unconscious**

Silvia Franceschini

In the book *The Museological Unconscious*, critic and cultural theorist Victor Tupitsyn defines the title phrase as a struggle of art to achieve a certain ‘museological function’, wherein every creative act becomes a common property and assures itself a place in history.<sup>1</sup> If the museum represents an institutional desire for the construction of narratives and the preservation of art, the pedagogical unconscious seems to be a symptom of the present time, in which the crisis of globalisation and political system of representative democracies – as well as the process of precarisation of everyday life – require new forms of proximity and inclusiveness and the organisation of new forms of educational structures.

Education is both a tool and a subject at times implied within the field of art in an attempt to enact processes of ‘coscientisation’. According to the educator Paulo Freire, coscientisation – literally the mechanism of developing consciousness – is the only possible form of agency in reality from where education as an act of knowing could depart.<sup>2</sup> For Freire, social transformation and revolution are an educational task. Similarly, Gramsci wrote that every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship.<sup>3</sup> The pedagogical unconscious, therefore, lies in a limbo between learning and unlearning and it extends beyond the field of schooling. Instead, it pervades spheres of socially engaged artistic and curatorial practices active at the micro-political level and at the local and situational scale, across institutional, social and geographic boundaries. We witness the emergence of new spatial paradigms, to allow forms of consensual antagonism and to develop constellations of knowledges otherwise excluded by Western art historical and institutional canon.

In the experiments of radical pedagogy of the 1970s there was a readiness to embrace failures, for experimenting with the potentiality of testing, with the risk of leaving almost no traces behind. Recent pedagogical experiments have more solid programmatic principles, deciding on a duration instead of simply living the immateriality of gathering together. Even if the formats of pedagogical assemblies might recall the idea of situations both constructed and organic, the aim of contemporary projects seems to be closer to the modernist impulse of

“We witness the emergence of new spatial paradigms, to allow forms of consensual antagonism and to develop constellations of knowledges otherwise excluded by Western art historical and institutional canon.”

1. Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious. Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2009, p 230.

2. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin, 1974 [1968].

3. Peter Mayo, ‘Gramsci and the Politics of Education’, *Capital & Class*, Vol. 38, No. 2, June 2014, pp. 385-398.

using education as a means for change, or even the construction of a new society. The paradigm shift from the museum to the school means the consequent switch of focus to power relations of production from the task of representation of knowledge. In the modernist proposal of architect and curator Lina Bo Bardi, the opposition between the museum and the practical worlds of production was transposed: the 'museum-school' was a terrain in which craft and art would co-exist. Bo Bardi undid the elitist superiority of art in relation to the utilitarian field, and likewise, the primacy of a museum in relation to a school.<sup>4</sup>

The same idea was reiterated in a project of a very different modernity: Soviet exhibitionary models that privileged the education of society as one of the main goals of the new social apparatus. The avant-garde educator Anton Makarenko is a reference for the artist Arseniy Zhilayev, whose project *Pedagogical Poem* (2012) was an interdisciplinary educational programme conceived by the artist with the historian Ilya Budraitskis within the Presnya Historical Memorial Museum in Moscow, dedicated to the history of the Revolution of 1905.<sup>5</sup> The project bridges history, contemporary art and pedagogy and originates from a series of lectures and seminars led by Russian and international artists, historians and cultural theorists, which culminated in the re-deposition of the collection of the museum into the Archive of the Future Museum of History. The goal of *Pedagogical Poem* was to suggest creative co-exploration of the world of history and knowledge. The projection into the future made perfect use of pedagogy as a medium aiming at a transformative process.

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The concern about the future scenario was also present in the project *For Acts of Labour* by the artist Adelita Husni-Bey,<sup>6</sup> dedicated to the possible future of labour in the year 2040 and involving an heterogeneous group of people: a philosopher, a lawyer, a sociologist and a journalist, as well as a group of people of different ages and genders affected by the

4. Carla Zollinger, 'Lina Bo Bardi and the Bahian Modern Art Museum: museum-school, museum in progress', text commissioned for the exhibition 'Lina Bo Bardi Together', see [www.linabobarditogether.com/it/2012/09/02/lina-bo-bardi-and-the-bahian-modern-art-museum-museum-school-museum-in-progress/](http://www.linabobarditogether.com/it/2012/09/02/lina-bo-bardi-and-the-bahian-modern-art-museum-museum-school-museum-in-progress/) (accessed 11 November 2016).

5. The project *The Pedagogical Poem* by the Russian artist Arseniy Zhilayev and historian Ilya Budraitskis took place from April 2012 to January 2013 at the Presnya Historical Memorial Museum in Moscow and was supported by V-A-C Foundation.

6. The project *Four Acts of Labour* by the Italian-Libyan artist Adelita Husni Bey happened in the frame of 'ON, DOPO, DOMANI' in the town hall of Bologna in 2016. The event was curated by Martina Angelotti and the round tables were aided by Federico Campagna, Federico Chicchi, Federico Martelloni and Cristina Morini. See [www.onpublic.it/artists/detail/adelita-husni-bey](http://www.onpublic.it/artists/detail/adelita-husni-bey) (accessed 11 November 2016).

ubiquitous precarity of working conditions. The space of the project in the town hall of Bologna was organised around four round tables, which the public was welcome to join at any moment. The discussion at each table was moderated by one of the invited researchers in a dialogue with a group of twenty people experiencing temporary unemployment. Every half hour people divided in the four focus groups would change table, shifting the perspective on the topic and the interlocutor – from the philosopher proposing to question the foundation of our unconditional acceptance of the necessity of work, to the labour lawyer persuading us to delve into the process of formulation of an alternative to the recently adopted Jobs Act. The piece didn't have the aim of producing a final representation,<sup>7</sup> but was a *process* that tried to re-focus attention on one of the main problems affecting Europe in the present time; giving presence to a group of precarious workers, articulating their subjectivity in relation to issues of labour, delusion, alienation and troubles. The participants of the project were selected by an open call sent out through the register of the employment bureau, and they were invited to take part in the project for a minimum hourly wage. The artist acted here as a trickster, outsmarting the social system used to pay unemployment benefits but not a salary, for theorising the possible escape from the world of labour relationships where unemployment is an implicit structural feature. The project's shift of focus to the future had a therapeutic, and, at the same time, heuristic effect. Participants, moved away from the apathy that could take hold of an unemployed person during theoretical discussions on late-capitalist society, were instead invited to think in a future tense, beyond the coordinates that set the conceptual framework of the precarity of contemporary life.

The informal pedagogical situation created by Husni-Bey asserts collective and public learning, an exchange of knowledge entangling all agents of social composition revolving around four topics scrutinised in each act through various registers, from reality, to fiction and speculation. And after all, it creates a particular dimension of a space, both physical and discursive, that could accept and accommodate art cognoscenti, invited researchers, unemployed participants and spectators. The performance loosely reminds of the dynamic of the Forum Theatre of Augusto Boal, in terms of changing regimes of spectatorship and activating the audience, but also in considering the space of art as a 'rehearsal for revolution' of everyday life.<sup>8</sup>

7. Only a speculative questionnaire which was published on the advertisement pages of the main Italian newspapers the day after the performance.

8. Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge, 1992.



Adelita Husni-Bey, *Four Acts on Labour*. Farnese Chapel, Palazzo d'Accursio, town hall of Bologna, 2016. Photo by Chiara Balsamo.

In his book *The Right to Useful Unemployment*, the educator and philosopher Ivan Illich insists on the necessity of creating a new political order based on conviviality and on the sharing of resources. 'To pass from productivity to conviviality means to substitute a technical value with an ethical value, to a materialized value a realized value.'<sup>9</sup> His idea of de-schooling society called for the rediscovery of spontaneity, where the enactment of an informal and familiar situation might suggest the possibility of anyone taking a role in the educational structure, thus promoting values of horizontal exchange of knowledge and mutual learning. Given the lack of structures of care and mutual support affecting the current social sphere, the value of reciprocity and affinities has been rediscovered and became a fundamental characteristic of a returning pedagogical unconscious. As Donna Haraway puts it – a political organisation by affinities is an organism able to recognise permanently partial identities and contradictory points of view.<sup>10</sup> This makes affinity a model suitable for a pedagogy based on conscious participation and a choice of shared strategies.

The idea of institutionalising through affinities, and values of reciprocity is performed in the activity of the Puerto Rican collective Beta Local and in their project *La Iván Illich* – a free school that facilitates all sorts of knowledge exchange, from workshops to conferences, encounters and study groups connecting people of different backgrounds and disciplines. Echoing Ivan Illich's ideas of learning webs, the programme is based on mutual learning and is envisioned not only as a small group working together, but also as building bridges with other communities and other kinds of knowledge present on the island as peers. The general public intersects the structure of the institution and creates public programmes. The institution facilitates events that provoke encounters, deepen conversations and put different disciplines in dialogue, such as, for instance, writing workshops to psychoanalysis and philosophy study groups, intergenerational dialogues about history and politics, hack days and public interviews. In a reciprocal exchange of knowledge everyone is a resource for everyone. Another important idea, one of the founding principles of Beta-Local, has to do with the issue of decolonisation of knowledge – they insist on anchoring artistic practices

9. Ivan Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment: And Its Professional Enemies*, London: Maron Boyars Publishers, 1978.

10. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Routledge, 1990.

and methodologies in the context of Puerto Rico in order to make visible people, segregations and contradictions, experiences and ideas that are outside the mainstream historical narrative of the country and that are not well known or documented.

How can unconscious desires of society be mediated by pedagogy? In 2015 a team of curators led by Georg Schöllhammer and Hedwig Saxenhuber and the Visual Culture Research Centre in Kyiv tried to propose a Biennial in the format of an ongoing educational programme in order to give voice to the desires and the anxieties emerging on Maidan square, an experience that failed to articulate its emancipatory potential. The construction from scratch of a Biennial in the format of a school was itself a pedagogical process performed not only by the curators and cultural workers, but also by some of the artists who agreed to produce in a different way, considering the inclusion of a pedagogical component in the process of their work. While inscribing into the legacy of curatorial projects that took the shape of educational platforms, such as the unrealised Manifesta 6 (*Manifesta 6 School*, 2006) or the Tbilisi Triennial (*Offside Effect*, 2012), the idea was to give form to a temporary institution able to open up the display of art to the performativity of knowledge production in which the wider public could be a regular participant. The Biennial tried to establish a new role for independent intellectuals and to create a new space within the cultural institutional infrastructure, activating the agencies of many city institutions and locations and organisation among which the Biennial was diffused. The six schools (The School of Abducted Europe, The School of the Displaced, The School of Realism, The School of the Lonesome, The School of Image and Evidence and The School of Landscape) were running simultaneously in the spaces of the exhibition, which acted as a dispositive of situated knowledge. The event attempted to produce a new public, expanding the contemporary art and cultural circle widely. By attempting to use art and discursivity as a way to decolonise the discourse, it reversed the relationship between the metropolis and the province, suggesting that Kyiv could be a place where Europe could learn about its problems and failures.

A territory where the inscription of the pedagogical impulse described in the above-mentioned examples could find a consistent ground is one of 'border pedagogy' proposed by the cultural critic Henry Giroux. Giroux speaks of a pedagogy devoted not only to the creation of new objects of knowledge but also to addressing how inequalities, power, and human precarity are rooted in basic institutional structures. Border pedagogy

doesn't address only physical borders, but also cultural borders that have been historically constructed and socially organised within maps of rules and regulations that serve to either limit or enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms. Borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations and values are increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations that organise, then become destabilised and reshaped. Border pedagogy decentres as it remaps; the terrain of learning thus becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power.<sup>11</sup> In the tradition of cultural education to which Giroux, as a scholar of Paulo Freire, belongs, pedagogy is regarded as an instrument through which people locate themselves and formulate plans for the future. It is a method of reaching beyond individualism, competition and consumption and is therefore a profoundly political gesture.<sup>12</sup> Giroux claims that social antagonisms and forms of struggle must be developed as part of a wider public disclosure that is simultaneously about the discourse of an engaged plurality and the formation of critical citizenship. Public pedagogy could thus become a relevant field to expand the debate on socially engaged artistic and curatorial practices with a specific focus on education and civil society.

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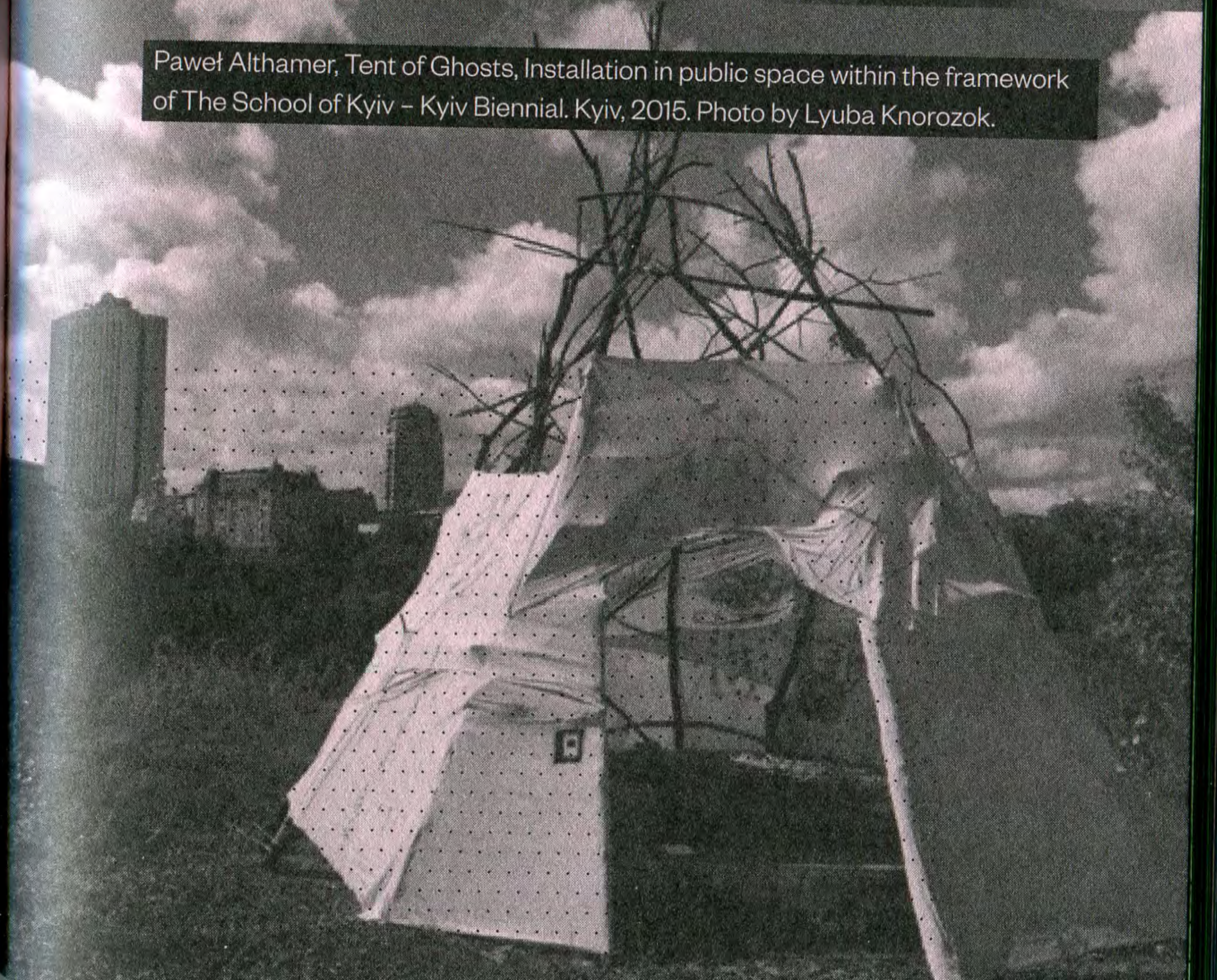
The projects mentioned in this essay are far from a utopic ideal of the architecture of relations. Certainly, they contain many contradictions, including the imbalance of power between artist, participants and spectators, and between intentions and final realisation of each project. These shortcomings truly mirror the imperfection of any social space as essentially a space of rupture and tension. But these art projects are clear evidence of the interpenetration between the fields of art and education, which fosters new formats of interdisciplinary knowledge on the verge of art and civil society. Even if the scale of participation and the reach of such initiatives remain limited, we can welcome the efforts to expand the agencies involved and to overcome hermeticism and self-referentiality of these art projects.

They attempt to turn minorities into subjects, while avoiding the pitfall of artistic representation. Instead they privilege the action and embodied experience. Artists and curators leave the scene, allowing the

11. Henry A. Giroux, 'Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism', *Boston University Journal of Education*, Vol. 170., No. 3, 1988 [appeared in October 1989].  
 12. David Trend, *Cultural Pedagogy: Art, Education, Politics*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992.



Beta-Local, coffee ceremony designed and performed by Helena Keefe and Joseph Del Pesco as part of their residency in The Harbor program at Beta-Local. San-Juan, 2015. Photo by Tony Cruz.



Paweł Althamer, *Tent of Ghosts*, Installation in public space within the framework of The School of Kyiv – Kyiv Biennial. Kyiv, 2015. Photo by Lyuba Knorozok.



voice to the people speaking and thus remain only the catalyst of these social configurations and cognitive communities. The space that is activated by such projects not only encourages the physicality of people assembling, but also proposes a new architectures of exchange – often evoking forms of parliaments, forums, or agoras, concepts that act metaphorically as spaces of encounter. Physical encounters allow for development of stronger social connections. As Judith Butler suggests, only when bodies assemble on the street, in the square or in other forms of public spaces, are they exercising a plural and performative right to appear.<sup>13</sup>

Departing from Aristotle's Rhetoric, Paolo Virno emphasises two notions to describe the contemporary public and discursive sphere, using a spatial metaphor. Common places, habitually understood as banalities, are indeed the basic structures of argumentation common to all kinds of linguistic situations or discourses. We can rely on the same common places in church or at the meeting of a political party, or on a date. On the contrary, special places are the discursive structures that belong to a specific field of discourse; for example, political discussion, religious dispute or academic argument. Analysing the contemporary public sphere, Virno notes that common places are proliferating, leaving no space for specific speech. Common places are absorbing special places so that the discursive practice of contemporary society is based on speech that helps to satisfy basic social needs, plain and simple. There is no space any more for a particular, complex and emancipatory language of politics, and as a consequence the political is withdrawn from public discourse. Art practices refusing usual concerns of representation and acting within the field of civil pedagogy or knowledge production are preserving the endangered diversity of social language, defending existing and creating new hybrid places of political discourse and knowledge.

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13. Judith Butler, *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, p 11.

### **Viviana Checchia**

Viviana Checchia is the Public Engagement Curator at CCA Glasgow. Prior to taking up her role at CCA, Viviana produced and contributed to a range of international projects, including the Young Artist of the Year Award 2014 (YAYA) in Ramallah and the 4th Athens Biennale. For the past five years, Viviana has co-directed vessel, a platform for critical discussion surrounding the cultural, social, economic and political change created through community-based work, based in Puglia, Italy. Viviana has lectured at the Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and the International Academy of Art Palestine, and was an instructor for the V-A-C Foundation's Summer Curatorial School in Moscow (2013/2014). With Anna Santomauro, she received the 2013 ICI/DEDALUS Research Award for research carried out in the United States, and in 2016 she was awarded the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory laureate's choice for her contributions to the comprehension of and international interest in Eastern European art. Viviana holds a PhD from Loughborough University School of the Arts, English and Drama – UK.

### **Stephanie Smith**

Stephanie Smith is the chief curator at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, and a graduate of Rice University in Houston, Smith has extensive leadership experience in university and contemporary art museums, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum and the Rice University Art Gallery.

### **Silvia Franceschini**

Silvia Franceschini is a curator and researcher, PhD fellow at Polytechnic University of Milan. In 2015 she was part of the curatorial team of the School of Kyiv, Kyiv Biennial 2015. Her curatorial projects include: Times of Reasonable Doubts (2016, Moscow International Biennale for Young Art); Sources Go Dark (2015, Futura Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague); Global Tools 1973-1975: Towards an Ecology of Design (2014, SALT, Istanbul.); The Way of Enthusiasts (2012, Venice, V-A-C Foundation, 13th Venice Architectural Biennale). She is co-author of Global Tools 1973-1975. When Education Coincides with Life, a monograph on the experimental program of art and design education (Archive Books, 2017). Silvia was a research fellow at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design in Moscow and she is part of Synapse – International Curators Network at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

### **Agnieszka Kilian**

Agnieszka Kilian graduated in civil law from University of Cologne (Universität zu Köln) with a master's dissertation on intellectual property; she also studied curatorial studies at The Institute of Art History at The Jagiellonian University. She is involved in projects concerning collaborative structures, especially ones that explore the relation between art and the public domain, as well as the issue of art production beyond the market framework. She is also concerned with the problem of creative freedom and its implications for copyrighting in regards to contemporary art. In 2012 she curated the exhibition Rękawiczki Jeffa Koonsa (Jeff Koons' Gloves) at CSW Kronika in Bytom and edited a publication under the same title. Recently she has co-curated the artists-in-residency program Place called Space ([www.placecalledspace](http://www.placecalledspace)) and such a projects like (...) Behind Togetherness [nGbK and transit.sk, 2014] or Text and Its Performance [Bunkier Sztuki, Kraków 2016]. She is based in Kraków and in Berlin, where she prepares in nGbK an exhibition on law as literature.

### **Haizea Barcenilla**

Haizea Barcenilla is an art critic, curator and historian. She holds a MFA in Curating from Goldsmiths College (London) and a PhD in Art History from the University of the Basque Country (Spain). Her research interests revolve around how narratives are constructed through exhibition-making, curating and history-writing, with special interest in analysis from a gender point of view and in relation to strategies for critical social organization. She lectures at the University of the Basque Country and is the mediator for the New Patrons program in Bilbao.

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Forms of Action presents new perspectives on the current development of socially engaged art practices. It aims to re-assess the current terminology used when talking about engagement in and beyond the walls of art institutions. The publication presents a range of views on socially engaged artistic practice, from freelance curators working on ground-breaking projects, to para-institutional curators working in their own context and embedded within the community, as well as that of institutional curators trying to intervene socially in the structure itself of their institution.

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