New Open Working process for the performing arts (N.O.W)
Reports LAB #1 & #2

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In place of an entrance

In January '15, Carine Meulders, one of the project partners of N.O.W., invited me to give a lecture on artistic research and its processes, during the first official meeting of the group. A year later, Agnès Henry, the director of Extrapole, which initiated and led N.O.W., asked me to join the working group in Antwerp (BE) in April '16 in order to lead a workshop that would contribute to the clarification and elaboration of the group's research process and aims. Following that workshop, I was invited to accompany the project for the rest of its duration in order to curate and lead a series of workshops in the frame of LABS #1 and #2, as these were defined in the project's description.[1] In other words, what was asked from me was to design a research path for the group, through which it would explore its main concerns, questions and interests by co-creating a ground on which these could be further worked.

From August 2016 to May 2017, both laboratories were worked in different ways during four more meetings that took place in Reykjavik and Rif (IS), Cagliari (IT), Saint-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt (FR) and Florence (IT) with the participation of workers active in the arts from a variety of positions, ranging from artistic creation to working in residency centres, art festivals, production venues, production organisations etc. These were the following project partners and invited artists:

Project partners (participants in LABS #1 and #2): Agnès Henry and Hélène Billy (EXTRAPOLE - France); Maurizia Settembri and Silvia Giordano (FABBRICA EUROPA - Italy); Chiara Organtini (INDISCIPLINARTE - Italy); Maria Carmela Mini (LATITUDES CONTEMPORAINES - France); Ragnheiður Skúladóttir (LOKAL - Iceland); Marta Oliveres Tortosa (MOM/EL VIVERO - Spain); György Szabó (TRAFO - Hungary); Carine Meulders (WP ZIMMER - Belgium);
Invited artists (co-participants in LAB #2, together with the project partners): Brogan Davison and Pétur Ármannsson (IS); Leonardo Delogu (IT); Sonia Gómez Vicente (ES) and Gosie Vervloessem (BE).

As expected and wished for in all research processes, during our work the two laboratories developed in diverse and unexpected ways. LAB #1 proceeded through a step-by-step development of an on-going workshop that continued its research from one meeting to the next. LAB #2 early on focused on the co-curation of a weeklong event, designed as a cohabitation project to take place in May 2017, in the frame of Fabbrica Europa Festival in Florence. All artists and art workers involved in the project took part in the process of co-curating and producing this event during the abovementioned meetings. Following these developments, my role has eventually been a different one for each of the two laboratories. Whereas in LAB #1 I acted as the workshop leader and facilitator of the research process, in LAB #2 I became a dramaturgical, artistic and research advisor for the curation process and

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[1] In the initial project description, the two laboratories are described as follows: '**Lab #1 A forward looking collaborative space:** Our partnership is a solid, experientially rich group of different practice areas. We will run a cross-analysis of our working methods. We will draw up a survey and then analyse our practices to identify the new needs and strengthen skills skills among support structures and artists facing sectoral change.' '**Lab #2 A toolkit for network support:** Confronted by resource diversification and the variety of artist journeys, we need to think up and test new methods of support. We want to point this workshop towards practical case studies and focus on the strategic development of projects and artist journeys. A territorial analysis of aesthetics, an estimation of market potential and possible cooperative tools will allow us to study and put in place project strategies linked to artistic formats and precise geographical areas. In this context it is essential to network the support systems and actors and that they, in turn, mobilise their own networks.'

eventually also a participant of the weeklong event, acting more as an outside observer. Subsequently, during the writing process of reporting on the two laboratories below, I found myself writing from two distinct perspectives too: as an inside voice that traces back the research process, its materials and outcomes, in the case of LAB #1, and as an external voice that addresses curatorial, research and artistic processes that took place before, during and after the cohabitation event in Florence, in order to elaborate on shared concerns and ideas, in the case of LAB #2.

Despite the different methods used in each of the two laboratories, my core methodology has been a very similar one for both of them: to balance individual voices with the group voice and make sure that there is sufficient space given to both of them; to create a *common* ground and the shared conditions that would encourage all involved agents to circulate ideas and materials with which to work further; to work *among* many, instead of accumulating disparate inputs that would stay disconnected and unable to move the research process forward; to reveal possible tensions and differences present in the group and work with them as potentialities that assist the elaboration of the research process. It is such aims that informed the tasks and processes involved in both cases. And it is similar aims that also inform the writing process that follows, in an attempt for this text to act less as a 'report' and more as a 're-enactment' of what took place in all the spaces we met in the course of two years in different countries in Europe.

With the hope that it will manage to share with its readers some of the energy involved in N.O.W., ranging from insightfulness and generosity to frustration, tension and despair, as is often the case in research processes; and most importantly, with the hope that it will provide a useful document for the rest of the artistic sector and its current concerns and questions on a European level, I welcome you to this text. As is the case for all research projects I appreciate, my biggest wish for both N.O.W. and this report is for them to be seen less as 'closed', 'fix', 'finished' objects and more as triggers and starting points for yet more research processes to come.

June-July 2017,
D.T.

LAB #1 – Reporting in Actions

For LAB #1 I designed an on-going workshop that continued from one meeting to the next and proceeded through a careful examination of the needs of the group and the research itself at that specific point, always taking into consideration the laboratory's overall scope too (see footnote 1). In this frame, both the overall workshop but also each specific instance of it, were planned in three phases:

Phase 1: where do we start from, what are our starting points and materials? – this phase involved gathering and discussing the materials already in hand and the issues related to them.
Phase 2: how can we continue? – this phase involved further development of the research and the production of new materials.
Phase 3: where do we leave the work? – this phase involved the results and closing conversations of our work.

The entrance and exit of the group in each of the sessions has been a particularly important one, as well as the interconnection between the different sessions. This means that the participants of LAB #1 were often asked to prepare, read or write something in advance and also take something with them to elaborate on after our meetings. During the meetings the tasks proposed involved reading, writing, discussing and following performative tasks, individually, in pairs or as a whole group, in order to challenge ourselves and our colleagues, shift established modes of thinking and working, and delve deeper into our working materials and questions.

The report below follows the three abovementioned phases. The views it depicts constitute views offered by the different project partners that took place in LAB #1 and were often quite contradictory to each other. Wishing to maintain the agonisms, tensions and plurality of these voices, they may be represented in different colours where needed.

In order to approach in writing the work done in the frame of LAB #1, I was inspired by the ideas of Bojana Kunst as these are expressed in her book *Artist At Work*. There, the Slovenian philosopher and performance theorist argues that especially in today's post-Fordist paradigm, artistic work is not understood as the production of 'material goods', but rather includes immaterial activities and the making visible of such production mechanisms. And she claims that the visibility of artistic work today relates more to the production of communication, relationships, networks, affects and non-material goods. In this sense, Kunst urges art workers to 'return back to the *material* aspect of work, to the sensuous and material base of any activity' (p.146, emphasis mine), discussing also the political nuances involved in such action. Following her suggestion, this report is structured around the practical activities involved in our research process, through a number of verbs and the subsequent actions they suggest. These activities are often followed by core questions that mobilized our thought and work within the frame of the LAB.

1. COMMENCE

This part includes fragments of the starting aims and context of LAB #1, as described in the initial project's description, which also constituted departure points of our research trajectory. During our work, I have asked participants to return to those points and rework them according to the new perspectives that emerged within our research process. Their changes are marked in blue and are characteristic of the shifts and developments that took place in the frame of the LAB, as the research work continued. They are also indicative of the alternative vocabularies and thinking modes that emerged during our work. It is also important to mention from the very start that different parts of this report are written using a 'we'. This does not mean to suggest any type of flattening homogeneity. On the contrary, 'we' expresses the voice of a working group that struggles to build a common ground for a research that proceeds through diversities, negotiations and often also conflicts.

RETURN
REFLECT
AIM
PLAN
SHIFT
CONNECT
DEPART

LAB #1
    "We will analyse our practices to identify the new needs and strengthen ~~skills~~ abilities
     among ~~support~~ accompanying structures for the arts"

    "[We will] Formulate and share an analysis of current changes and their impact on artistic
    practice and its social roots."

LAB #1   ~~NEW RELEVANT~~ CURRENT ISSUES
    "Europe is living through a major shift. The way that art is made, the conditions for its
     creation and diffusion, as for its economy and regulation, are all being shaken up.
     National and local financing and organisations are deeply affected and the impact on the
     cultural sector is particularly heavy."

    "Creative processes take place in very varied contexts – regional, national, international.
     They require imagination, strategic reactions and a flexibility to initiate that can be
     difficult to sustain […] This new map, with its combinations of local, national
     and international interactions, is increasingly difficult to read."

    "In parallel, the geography of action is diversifying, and the connections between the
     players, is shifting, which is a challenge for national institutional frameworks.
     Many artistic journeys no longer fall under the neat definitions of national cultural
     policies."

    "The regulation of the arts market (until now the job of public authorities) is weakening
     and is increasingly happening in a language of productivity and quantitative evaluation.
     Risk is the starting point for art - but who will take and who will share the risk?"

"The conditions for existence of artistic practice are rendered precarious and often reduced to the mere production and circulation of works. All that matters is being seen, not the journey that brings you there. The working process and the experience that lies behind the practice are no longer valued. And the public is destined to simply consume a product, far from the cultural player, who sees art as experience. This experience is however key in becoming an individual, in educating, in understanding and living "otherness", in sharing knowledge. It is necessary for individual self-realisation and essential for building our social foundations."

"For our accompanying ~~and support~~ structures, our ~~future~~ present is being played out right now. It is ~~unavoidable strategical~~ fruitful to ~~federate~~ create synergy ~~think ahead map the present~~ and ~~equip ourselves~~ develop different attitudes so as to ~~open up new perspectives~~ envision different approaches. All of our models of creation, production, and mediation – such as our critical spaces – are there to be redefined, reshaped and call question for us to adapt our institutions to ~~become~~ be contemporary, fit-for-purpose organisations.

All of our reference points (local/global, public/private, evaluation and presentation) need to be ~~renewed~~ refocused. Thus we need to ~~develop new tools~~ imagine in order to adapt to this ~~new~~ different and constantly changing environment via a dialogue between everyone concerned."

"How to adapt the artistic journey to these new models? How to give value to the positive externalities of each project as regards place and specific contexts? How to invent new economic models around these personal and professional journeys? How, in particular, do we move from a system of support for production and dissemination as the only model, towards an economy that is multi-faceted (market, subsidy, social economy), one which might rely on other logics and other partnership approaches?

How to structure our networks around a vision of creation and its economy, which respects diversity and cultural rights? How can we defend our diversity given our professional and artistic constraints? How to best use the positive public results of creativity?

How to get the concerned public involved, amateur and professional and build a more receptive, more open public? How do we mediate better and how do we feed and renew the critical spaces within this mediation? How to create new tools for public debate, which will extend the circle of publics and lead to a better and richer understanding of artistic and cultural practices?"

LAB #1   "This experiment is founded on our ability to:
- BUILD a ~~flexible~~ moving committed ~~open~~ community of ~~mobile~~ peripatetic skills centred on a certain idea of how we ~~support~~ navigate with artists.

- CONTRIBUTE to ~~innovation around~~ interventions and tools that are permanently adapted to on-the-ground needs and new narratives.

- DIALOGUE with everyone involved in the ~~value chain~~ working process in order to rethink the frameworks and ~~the~~ mutual support mechanisms in a collective manner.

- CREATE mediation spaces with professionals and the public, in cooperation with other professional sectors, ~~in order to break the isolation of the cultural actor~~ in order to break the walls of separation between the different sectors of activity and to invent new dialogues, a collaborative economy in the service of all, education, social workers and public.

- ~~CREATE~~ RETHINK mediation ~~spaces~~ in order to open spaces for ~~with~~ professionals and the public to meet at various stages of the artistic process and in cooperation with other professional sectors, in order to break the isolation of the cultural actor".

LAB #1   ~~EXPECTATIONS~~ DREAMS
- ~~Clarity~~ Certainty about the role ~~played by the value chain~~ of performance linking to our activities and our vision of art.

- Building ~~sustainable~~ suitable methodological tools useful for cooperation and to be made ~~available~~ renegotiable anew by artists and professionals.

- Drawing up an illustrated lexicon for cooperation, allowing us to create ~~a common~~ collective languages for our professions and artistic practice.

- ~~A diagram tool that maps~~ Discuss each participant's activities allowing us to visualise the various flows (partnerships, ~~skills~~ abilities and ~~money~~ capitals)."

LAB#1
   "KEY WORDS: ~~MOVEMENT, FUTURE FACING, STRENGTHENING, OPENNESS, SKILLS~~
   OBSERVING, COMPARING, UNDERSTANDING, SHARING, DEALING WITH CHANGE"

   "KEY WORDS: VERTICAL MOVEMENT, STILLNESS, ~~FUTURE FACING~~ ATTENTIVENESS, STRENGTHENING, ~~OPENNESS~~ PRECENCE, ~~SKILLS~~ POSSIBILITIES"

This part includes materials of the research work and analysis that took place in the frame of LAB #1. The different colours used at certain points represent the diversity of the heterogeneous voices of the project partners that took part in the lab.

MEET
ASK
DISCUSS
INITIATE
DETECT
WORRY
PROBLEMATIZE
NEED
READ
SELF-REFLECT
CONFRONT
TRY
ATTEMPT
REINVENT
EXPERIMENT

LAB#1   LIST CURRENT PRACTICES – What activities are involved in the work of an art worker today?
    Assist in artistic projects and career developments
    Be emotional
    Be open
    Be patient
    Care
    Coach
    Connect with the global project
    Connect with other sectors
    Connect with other organisations
    Coordinate teamwork
    Curate
    Develop brands
    Develop critical friendships with artists
    Diffuse artworks
    Find new economical models due to a crisis of sustainability
    Find new paradigms
    Find new partnerships
    Find out what is relevant in distinct contexts
    Handle social media
    Handle communication techniques
    Have visions
    Initiate inter-sectorial collaborations
    Know and exchange with local organisations
    Know new policies and administrational changes
    Know and understand (sub)cultural references

Manage crises
Network
Persist
Practice cooperation
Produce
Programme
Self-reflect
Supervise projects
Take risks
Think in long-terms
Think positively
Write creatively

LAB#1   DETECT NEW CONDITIONS – What are the new conditions within which
the abovementioned activities take place in today's diverse socio-political contexts in
Europe?

As art workers, we often find ourselves obliged to:
Be in constant risk because of financial insecurity.
Find new economic models due to the serious crisis of sustainability.
Confront a constant loss of value of arts and culture in society, which results in
significant cuts in state funding and stricter labor laws for art workers.

Be much more flexible and alert because of fast changes in social and political
contexts.
Develop much faster and quicker reflexives for self-reflection.
Develop short-term reactions due to lack of long-term planning conditions.
Do things fast with no means.
Deal with growing precariousness.

Learn how to overgrow existing policies and systems that do not follow or respond to
current needs of artistic production.
Connect to other sectors, find new partnerships and understand their systems.
Respond to new modes of artistic production, which often emerge due to current
economic and social conditions. For example, it is often the case that artists
join forces in collectives or associations in order to support each other and their work. This
also results in very different, new forms of artistic creation. What is the role of
our work and ours institutions when artists decide to also take over this role? What are the
new needs that emerge? What skills are required to support artistic production in this case?
Deal with growing competition and overproduction within the artistic landscape.
at the same time when the number of places that present work declines.

LAB#1   DETECT NEW NEEDS – What are the needs that emerge from the
abovementioned conditions?

Working in accompanying structures for the arts in Europe today, often means facing new,
urgent needs that connect to individual qualities and processes involved in our work, such as
being in need of:
a better ability to look forward and envision the future

less doubts
more attention when consulting others
more inspiration
more questions
more sensibility in expressing ourselves
more study time
more time
more trust among us and among the different agents involved in artistic production and support

As well as to skills and processes related to the broader institutional context, where there is important need for:
a long-term political dialogue
a group of co-workers instead of the power of individual decisions
better knowledge of digital environments
better knowledge of other sectors
more connections
more management skills
more support for communication strategies
more techniques for fundraising

LAB#1 (SELF)-REFLECT – How can contemporary performance discourse and analysis connect and offer insights to the actual work and needs of art workers today? What kind of personal questions, observations, concerns can emerge from its close reading?	LAB#1 READ – How can contemporary performance discourse and analysis of current modes of artistic production inform the work of art workers?
	The excerpt below was read and analysed in the frame of LAB #1. It comes from Bojana Kunst's 'The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making', published in *Maska, Performing Arts Journal,* No. 149–150, vol. XXVII, Autumn 2012
What strategies do we create to escape from production activities that alienates us?	"…the time of the present is somehow disappearing. This not only means that we have less and less time for work because we are so occupied with what has yet to come, but also that, with projective time, artists and other cultural workers are actually more and more abstracted from the current context of work. All contexts of work seem to be the same (they are more and more managed in the same managerial way), the differences between communities and collaborative complexities have become invisible and, with that, their political power is disempowered as well. Subjectivity is, with the projective mode of working, abstracted from the present social, cultural and political contexts of work, from their antagonistic and multiple complexity. At the same time, there is a real deprivation of time in contemporary
How to discover what is there in the present?	
How can we navigate among our different roles (women, cultural workers, activists etc) in order to create a perspective from which to define and approach our time?	

Does one create time or does one *discover* time?

How to connect space to time?

How to endure the present tense?

What stands between the blank page at the very start of a project and the final deadline?

Why am I late all the time?

What can I do to fight the rush I am always in?

modes of working – an actual one, not only a theoretical one: we actually never have time. What is lacking is the actual time of the present; we don't have a present (only the future), there is a constant dispossession of duration at work in our society. Such a lack of time can also be detected in the current discussions about crisis and austerity measures, where austerity acts as a process of purification of the present, the present should be squeezed out (the belt should be tightened). Only when we reduce the present of life will it be possible to blossom again.

Constant lack of time is a kind of paradox, especially when concerning the possibilities a project ought to imply for the future. It seems that the more there is to a project in the future and the more possibilities there are to be completed, the less time there is at our disposal to maintain and endure, to endure in the present (or in many different presents) and, with that, also less time to enable social, collaborative, political or intimate relations. The only way in which we can have a relation to our present is through its administrative and managerial regulation, which is combined with the constant evaluation and re- evaluation of what we have done, with the goal of reaching something that is on the horizon of the project. In that sense, the project becomes the ultimate horizon of our experience. Ironically, one of the words most used in cultural production to complete the project (especially in the academic sphere, but also more and more in the arts) is deadline. At the end of the project, there seems to stand a mortal limit, a pure completion, a consummation of creative life, with no after experience. At the same time, an illusory feeling that everything continues on into eternity is lightening this tension a bit, because there are so many projects to complete. In this projective endlessness, there are many mortal limits to be crossed, and at the same time the future is radically closed off. Time-deprivation is therefore cancelling the imagination and creation of radical gestures and disabling all experimentation with an enduring present. In that sense, it is directly related with artistic and aesthetic practice: because it is diminishing complexity, perceptual manifoldness, availability towards nothingness and sustainability of antagonisms. Temporality of the project is closely related to the role of time as one of the primary objects of capitalistic production of value and privatisation. Temporality is at the core of producing difference, it is the material of social and aesthetic change. It is precisely this

How can we create new tools to distribute artwork avoiding the clichés (for example: the 'left' concernsintellectual, conceptual work, whereas the 'right' and 'bourgeois' includes opera etc)?

How to address people?

How to construct a community?

How can we build a new common space between art and society?

How to deal with the main issue of arts today: the erosion of audience, the loss of the value of arts society?

Could more work in the public space be a way to reach and reactivate the social space?

Politics today focuses on society instead of art, therefore when politics looks at art, it looks mainly in populist ways. Artists adapt fast to such populist demands (everybody now makes participatory projects, does social work etc., for example) in order to be able to sustain their work: how to resist this appropriation of the social?

potentiality that is today diminished, due to the administrative accomplishment of possibilities and as projective speculation of that which has yet to come, in, however, equilibrium with the present.
In that sense, art production and creation has to rethink exactly the relation between temporality and its production and find new ways in which to push the time out of joint, out of the speculative balance between that which is and that which has yet to come.

To end, I would like to propose several ways of how to reflect on the possible time out of joint, how to transform the temporality of the project and open it to the present.

1. No to economic speculation about the future value of art.
At a time when the position on contemporary art and theatre is being radicalized in numerous European states, especially in terms of the negative attitude towards its value and role in the public sphere, at a time of the growing opinion that art should not be supported by the state because it has no effect on the public, it is all the more intriguing to think about the possible "politicisations" of art. Interestingly, after two decades of "political art" and the constant transgression of the border between art and life, art has found itself facing a deep crisis in terms of articulating its value and social role. Although we have been confronted with numerous engaged, political and critical artistic projects over the last two decades, these projects remain without effect because of their pseudo-activity. They have not broken through and intervened in the public sphere in terms of shaping and demanding their own language therein. In this case, contemporary art has been subject to populist reproaches denoting it as "leftist elitism" and an activity that has no public interest, role or influence to speak of, with artists supported by the state and comfortably protected in their alleged "laziness" from the self-regulating and dynamic market. Although one can recognise some classic arguments resurfacing that belong to the moral register (especially the one about artists not working), they need to be re-thought more carefully. It is important to recognise that the arguments against subsidizing art are part of the populist and neoliberal rhetoric aiming to profoundly re-evaluate and even erase any articulation of the communal and community in contemporary society.
In this populist corporate language, art should be left to the decisions of "free" individuals on the market

Art should not be all the time present in the social space. The blurring of art and life weakens its power because audiences are not surprised by art anymore. Art is dead because society does not recognize its value.

It is important to maintain the distinction between the public space (squares etc.) and the social space (social interaction). Are they the same? Where do people meet today? How are communities created? Are they?

What if we don't face a loss of social space today but the question is more how to follow the transformation of newly formed social grounds (for example, the digital space)?

What if art would borrow from models such as TEDx, in order to reach audiences? How could we use and work with such models in order to take advantage of their dynamics, and then possibly turn people to another direction?

Research as a circular movement that disrupts the value of measurement and quantification.

who will choose (buy) what they like or what suits them best, making connections in accordance with their own individual desires (in which the seeming rationality of choice is never questioned). In this way, art is reduced to being the result of individual choice rather than being something in the common good. Even beyond this, in the light of populist rhetoric, any support and cultivation of the good is viewed as political elitism by an engaged leftist circle. The problem is complex; on the one hand, this populist argument demands a radical re- evaluation of the public and, on the other, points out the essence of the problematic politicisation of art over the last two decades. Although the art of this period has been interested in political activity all along, it has been radically detached from the political public sphere despite this interest. Many people active in the art field who nowadays face political pressures and radical financial cuts to art-related subsidies and support on all fronts often see common interest as equating economic value. Part of the arguments for the support of art is often that art forms an important part of the economy and contemporary creative industries. Although it is possible up to a point to use the opponent's language wisely in political argumentation, this argument is entirely wrong and does not affirm the value of artistic activity as such. Art does not have an economic value precisely because we can never evaluate the suggestions for modes of being together, which are generated regardless of the existing web of power. Affirming art by using the language of the economy is another unfortunate consequence of its projective temporality: perhaps the time is coming when the most radical politicisation of art will be that of radical detachment from any economic value so that new articulations of the human imagination and creativeness can be revealed. This detachment also brings invisibility, but also a potential power whose visibility cannot be seen as of yet. To put it more precisely: the very politicisation of art over the last two decades can be read as a sort of symptom of the disappearing public sphere or, according to Boris Buden, the fact that society is disappearing. Art deals with social problems and is constantly pseudo-active because the social is disappearing and we live in a time of radical powerlessness in terms of establishing the kind of realities in which people's communities would be articulated. Through this perspective, we also need to rethink the social and political value of art, which is closely connected to the perception, recognition and establishment of the visibility of what we now have and

will have in common.

2. Yes to appropriation of the present time.

Yes to persistence in the present, to duration and endurance. Of primary importance for art and workers in the artistic field is to demand endurance, continuity and to occupy spaces of the present as much as possible. What is common is namely what is now, and not what will be in the future. Among the important questions then are: How to create modes with which to support the present, how to give it back its temporal value, its complexity and complicity with others? What would be the structures that would open this perceptual complexity of the present? How to think about political structures, aesthetic modes and cultural movements that resist the need to constantly start from the new, which resist the temptation to constantly abandon what they have already achieved? The practice of art has to unfold the "commonality of the present and not what has yet to come." How do we maintain ourselves and our positions in the present? What has to be enriched when practice unfolds is namely exactly the commonality in the present and not what has yet to come. With that, the public dimension of the present can also be enclosed: its conflictual, complex and antagonistic dimension that is, through projective culture, under strong attack. The acceleration of production is separating art from being public, because that's something art should actually not be in neoliberal and populistic politic.
Yet art should be precisely a part of the public interest.

3. No to "excellent" labour and the completion of projects.

This proposal concerns different modes of working that are heavily under attack in contemporary society on one side and difficult to be reused again, because they seem to be so privileged: laziness, inefficiency, taking time, being late, being stuck, lost in complexity, risking visibility, resistance to being global, resistance to doing and being everywhere. This should not be so much thought of as the restoration of the "lazy and non-working" potentiality of the artist, but more as an awareness of the Bartlebyian moment going together with artistic work and labour. There is namely a specific potentiality that is at the core of "I would prefer not to". I can conclude with a short reference to the work of Mladen Stilinović, who, at the beginning of the 90s, published his text *The Praise of Laziness*.
In this manifesto, he explains that artists from the east of Europe can work as artists because they can be lazy,

Starting from a concrete project, what kind of evaluation could we propose? How can we combine the outside level (the quantified criteria of funding bodies) and the inside level (the criteria that relate to the specificities of each particular project)?

How can we continue to experiment when receiving more permanent frames (for example: a permanent house/infrastructure, a structural subsidy etc.)?

Find new ways of how a production house could be organised today (use international input on a local level).

How can we investigate the possibilities of other models and subvert the expected: for example could a house exist without a permanent company?

How can we follow the dynamic way things move today beyond distinctions between 'young' versus 'old' generation, 'new' versus 'old' models etc.?

The lack of finances sometimes helps new modes of work to emerge, which are placed outside the project horizon.

What can be the value and the potential of working still within the frame of a project?

How to navigate among the different economies (of time, money, knowledge) we take part in?

How can we be attentive towards the different contexts and languages we take part in and not be lost in translation when working in (international) projects?

How to not be guilty of laziness?

How to resist the antagonism that says that everyone is replaceable?

Speaking from the perspective of a citizen of an ex-socialist country: what if instead of 'laziness' we would talk about slowing down and the relational quality of art as more relevant notions when considering art against productivity?

Instead of slowing down could super speedy, extreme acceleration also be a tactic?

and artists in the West have to all the time be busy with organising, distributing and disseminating their work, they have to constantly deal with institutions in such a way that they cannot afford to be lazy. It is interesting to read this manifesto again from today's perspective and to draw some conclusions from it. Stilinović is actually showing that under communism there were different production modes of doing art, which were not connected to the market. But at the same time, artists could be lazy because they were aware that what they produce is actually nothing, it has no value. Today, we can also read this text as an attempt to put the brakes on the capitalistic experimentation with temporality of work. Maybe because artists today are working so much, they don't have time anymore to expose the real lazy people at the core of the capitalist mode of production. Lazy artists namely could, in socialism, show the hypocrisy at the core of the system that was glorifying work: if the artists in socialism wanted to stay artists, they actually had to stay without work. Today, artists cannot stay without work if they want to be artists but have to work continuously. Not only that, they have to be continuously critical towards their work. Artists must actually constantly banish every unsuccessful and lazy gesture from their work; however, with that, they no longer have the potentiality of showing the mirror to the real lazy people at the core of capitalism. The problem is namely, as Aaron Schuster said, that neoliberalism actually finally appropriated laziness for itself: post-modern ethics is tolerated guided laziness. Laziness is actually the new working ethics for the ones who are speculating and projecting about the value of the future. We have a paradoxical situation here: the artist is working continuously and without a break, and at the same time, he is, from the populist, neoliberal perspective, perceived as one of the main parasites of society, his work is again without value, as it was in socialism. However, this time it is without value not because work is so cherished, but because actually laziness and speculation are at the core of contemporary neoliberal ideology. With that paradox, we are again back to the very serious fact that there is today a tendency in our society to expel the artist from the public sphere. Lazy speculation and projection of the future is namely possible only when, at the same time, the public good is erased, when, at the same time, the antagonistic and complex public sphere is diminished and there is place given to the financial power of projection. Art is expelled from the public sphere because there is an interest in it not being part of the

What is the place for the common good in our actions? Can we practice a collective way of curating instead of individual power decisions? How can we create agonistic frames of work that combine different, seemingly incompatible modes?	public. It is structured, managed and framed in the temporality of the project so that it cannot any longer endure in the present or articulate any other moment of the common. The devaluation of art is actually part of the general capitalistic interest that we all work only for our own private interest, which is, of course, the greatest laziness of all."

LAB#1　　CONFONT (PERSONAL) CHALLENGES – How can one resist today's extremely fast speed of appropriation and continue to provoke one's self and work both on a general and more personal level?
- Is it possible to find news ways of working (together) without changing the system?
- What do we expect from a project (such as N.O.W) or an institution that would help us to work in new ways?
- What is needed in order to support artistic development today? Does support have to do with responding to artistic needs? With providing infrastructure? With securing artists' complicity so that we fulfil our responsibilities as art organisations?
- Are we (the partners of N.O.W.) the right people to find new ways and models?
- How do the encounters that take place in the frame of N.O.W. affect our everyday work? Do they?

When trying to approach such provocations, we come across different levels of affect. The practical fact that we are regularly away from our work base attending N.O.W, creates a distance from our usual context (and its habits) that allows us to re-approach it anew; this results in a more sensitive attentiveness that may not always be visible but is definitely stronger, especially on certain issues.

Departing from this fact, we wonder how is it possible to turn this distance into a strategy that will allow for the emergence of yet more diverse perspectives. How can one reinvent the discourses one takes part in and propose alternative vocabularies, especially in the place of terms such as 'groundbreaking', 'effective', 'visible', 'original' 'innovative' or 'radical', which are overused and exhausted in today's neoliberal discourses? How can one emphasize on the attentiveness and responsiveness needed to realize the qualities and nuances included in each distinct situation or context? How can one rephrase, reposition lines and boundaries in retelling the particularities of diverse perspectives, without being the one who 'knows' or have 'radical' solutions?

By creating a group that is not based on affinities, within the framework of N.O.W. we attempted to re-intensify our individual and communal relationships, both among us and among us and the artists we collaborate with, via shifting the perspectives and modes through which we approach our work. Through our diversity we aimed to take time in order to shape an agonistic environment open to negotiations, tensions and differences, as a response to the neoliberal insistence on newness, fast delivery and effectiveness that distracts us from present time and from carefully reading the situations we are involved in and their different phrases.

We are part of many systems at the same time, the dominant system of neoliberalism,

the system of each one's organisation, the system of each one's specific practice, the system of the particular way each one of us practices his/her practice. We are interested in finding other terms to use for naming our institutions, for communicating with the audience. We are interested in questioning terms and their materiality; in naming things again like children do; or, maybe, in leaving naming/categorizing behind and go instead for a description/initiation of each distinct thing we encounter anew.

Central questions for us then become: how can we work towards an ecology of practices, perspectives and different positions? How can we create (re) adjustable environments from within our own working positions taking into consideration also the particularities of the organisations we are part of? How can we create an emptiness of space, time but also mind, when even our bodies are not used in taking time?

LAB#1   SETTING NEW AIMS – How to shift grounds?

PART 1. SHIFTING VOCABULARIES: Confronted with the abovementioned challenges and the way certain established vocabularies drastically affect the way we think and act in our work, we arrived to the following directives, articulated as a list of constant reminders:
- don't discuss what accompanying organisations for arts do as separated, supporting or secondary in relation to the artistic work.
- don't utilize result-orientated vocabulary but invent open spaces to think and act through the way we articulate things.
- avoid vocabularies that give the impression of fixed, established schemas; instead detect ways to create unfixed terminologies.
- avoid vocabularies that suggest the application of one and the same model for different modes of artistic work.
- be more sensitive towards the different answers that can be given to possible common questions.
- avoid neoliberal terminology (such as 'authentic', 'innovative', 'effective' etc.).
- avoid a discourse based on economic perspectives and terms (such as the 'value chain'). Avoid reducing systems to selling environments in general.
- be aware of the way official vocabularies of EU programmes shift (for example from economic to ecological etc.) and certain terms become a trend for a while.
- notice how it might be possible to reinvest in certain vocabularies and overturn their usual use (for example, how could we use economic terms differently, in a constructive way?)
- be aware of the difficulty to express certain concerns in a foreign language (such as English, which is broadly used, for example), but also of the potentiality that this strictness and restrictions may entail.

PART 2. SHIFTING ENCOUNTERS: Confronted with the abovementioned challenges and the way these affect our encounters, we set concrete, small aims in each of the encounters that took place in the frame of LAB #1 and tried to achieve them via the tasks of each workshop, in order to gradually shift things from the inside on a practical level. Indicatively, some of those aims were the following:
- deepen into at least one question/topic in our discussion and give more time to it.
- get rid of our existing knowledge and reimagine our work for a while.
- shift our focus and see the same thing in a different way for a while.
- find tools to change perspective for a while.
- manage to balance between flexibility and rigid professionalism, between
  institutionalization, risk and experimentation.

3. CONCLUDE

The third and final part of the report concerns the outcomes of the work done in LAB #1 and possible ideas or suggestions its participants would like to share with the broader arts sector. These are articulated around five main issues that art workers and accompany organizations for the arts are faced with today.

IDENTIFY
MAP
SHARE
DREAM
CONFLICT

LAB#1   IDENTIFY MAIN PROBLEMS – How to think and work around established, closely interconnected points of tension? How to move on from them?

  1. New balances between international and local contexts
After several decades of intense focus on internationalization, the issue of locality returns today probably more intensely than ever.[1] If modernity's motto has been to move, today one may instead wonder how to stay while being attentive to the global project.

On the one hand, we recognize the need of younger artists to move, exchange culturally and interact with diverse contexts, as well as the fact that international exchange is often necessary in order for artists to survive financially. On the other hand, we wish to react to artistic nomadism and the ecological effects caused by the travels of a sector that seems to be constantly on the move. Subsequently, we seek for new modes of internationalism or, else, alternative understandings of locality. At the same time, artists such as Vera Mantero in Portugal and Kári Viðarsson in Iceland invest on locality for the creation of their work, whereas *the program of venues in different countries becomes more and more local than international too.* In this fame, good awareness of artistic and cultural diversity becomes even more necessary in today's context.

As we find ourselves in need to approach and understand better cultural differences, local scenes and subcultural particularities, we attempt to create more 'local' environments in two ways:

a. by supporting local artists and their needs in more sustainable ways (in terms of infrastructure, time and money).
b. by offering more 'exchange' residencies rather than 'production' ones, bringing international artists in contact with the city and the actual socio-political context they come to work in, instead of merely supporting their production needs. What can the visiting artist get from the city and how can s/he exchange with it?

In this frame, we are also highly aware of the new skills required by this change: instead of dealing with production (accommodation of artists, technical support etc.), we have to *deal more with a locality that relates to careful artistic advise, sharing contexts, thinking together, connecting to other partners in the city, establishing modes of exchange* etc.,

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[1] Emphasis in all cases in this part is given by the author, in an attempt to highlight the main parts of interest and concrete suggestions offered in each of the five points discussed.

processes that involve different management, research and educational skills to practice solidarity and cooperation in this case.

    2. Precarious conditions of financial insecurity

Precariousness is probably the word that characterises more accurately than any other today's economic conditions of work and life, both inside and outside arts. *More often than not we are now obliged to work without long-term planning or space for risk and experimentation.* How can we resist short-term engagements (project based working) and their imposed fragmentation? New models for sustainability seem now utterly significant, models that will allow us to face precariousness without having to succumb to populist demands, while securing space for experimentation,.

Our main questions become: how can we embrace failure and risk in our work today? How can we deal with our finances in creative, flexible ways that will allow us to move money from other sources and risk part of our budget for experimentation? At the same time, *how can we protect our precarious work by sharing this risk with other partners, isolating it in specific areas only (for example the income of the box office), and not falling totally into the competitive logic of the 'low-cost'?*

Although we recognize that co-producing and sharing risk in this sense constitutes common institutional strategy today, our concerns have to do more with how can we, in these precarious conditions, be able to offer substantial financial support to projects instead of small amounts of money that will simply put an organisation in the list of supporters of specific established artists without producing any significant shift? *How can one really risk today by supporting young, emerging, more experimental artists and not only sit comfortably behind the safety of big networks of support for established artists?* Above all, though, our largest concern remains *how can we protect and support each other, creating a solidarity chain* wherein all involved agents share a common responsibility against the devastating conditions of precariousness?

    3. Constant lack of time

The constant need for more time, better time-management and clearer distinctions between professional and personal life is definitely not only art-related but has become a dominant characteristic of our accelerated post-fordist condition, as Paolo Virno has argued in his insightful analysis on the way the separation between working, networking and living is disappearing today. It is more and more often the case that we find ourselves obliged to jump on opportunities that may otherwise vanish and have quick reactions with no time for reflection. At the same time, we often see both colleagues and ourselves suffering from burn-outs, which put our mental and physical health at risk.

Looking for ways to resist a dead-end that puts both ourselves and our work at risk, we consider it necessary to *look for better time-management tactics, resist market pressures currently imposed on all levels of life, and find ways for saving time and diminishing administration work.* We need time to reinvent routines and practices, time for research and reflection, time to set up production processes, which now take longer than before. This can be achieved, for example, through the use of online tools such as dropbox, and by distinguishing the different temporalities required for different tasks (clarifying who does what and how, what can be done more quickly with less concentration, from a distance or via meeting in-person etc.) instead of maintaining a blurriness among them. *Delays, confusions or misunderstandings in communication caused by large amount of emails could also be avoided through a wider use of the phone or in-person meetings. Diminishing the*

anxiety created by too many references and the unlimited flow of information will also significantly benefit our work. *Securing and organising time for in-person encounters with our colleagues,* especially for practice-based research projects that should be conducted in more relaxed temporalities, will also advance the time quality of our work.

    4. Quick changes in art contexts and policies

Current European politics demand more and more deep cuts in culture and the arts, by imposing exclusively market-oriented policies or by undermining art's value as independent, distinct pillar of society, incorporating its (limited) funding in broader social frames related to the city, the region, culture etc. These policies are implemented either via violent clear-cut moves or via slower but constant shifts, and *oblige art organisations to react fast and effectively. Smaller organisations need to be more flexible to adjust to this situation, whereas bigger ones may face more serious problems of reorganisation.*

Moreover, we agree with Lois Keidan[2] that *the supposed 'democratization of art' and the promise of the 'great art and culture for everyone',* extensively used as core vocabulary in most European artistic policies today, *constitute one of the biggest dangers for arts and its audience*, since they eventually flatten arts' role and potential, while undermining audience's capacities, since they assume that audience is under-qualified to follow certain artistic developments, therefore these should become more 'accessible' to them. We remain highly interested in reconsidering public development and mediation in the way we organise, curate and create work; in encountering the audience in modes that we are not used to witness; in bringing more general audience in contact with contemporary art; in emphasizing on the role of communication and the way artistic works should address their audience in a society overloaded by information; in recognizing the particularities of each specific audience group and, if needed, in adjusting marketing or communication tools accordingly; in cultivating diversity; in approaching different social groups; in insightful (instead of 'proper', imposed and profitable) ways to exchange with different sectors (such as social workers); in shaping diverse communities and distancing ourselves from our own cultural milieu, avoiding segregated sectors or individualist egos.

At the same time, though, we would like to turn our attention away from a subverted logic that presents as 'elitism' the way some people (artists, art workers etc.) think and work, asking them to shift their discourse in order to reach other people (audience members) who are preconceived as people with a 'lower' educational or intellectual level. We are surprised by the fact that what presents itself as accessible is in fact the biggest elitism and populism of all. In its place we wish to create diverse contexts and invite people in them, following the particularities among different public layers of audience and responding to them, for example, by acknowledging that there are works that could be better communicated online instead of in the newspapers, since they address mainly younger audiences etc. We look for a balance between what the public wants and expects and the attempt to introduce alternatives to this public without assumptions about who will come to see or like what. We would like to resist policies that act against diversity and contrasts, producing a flattened arts field that has to be defined via general, oversimplified rules.

We detect problems in the current official indicators of value at work, which relate mostly to a lack of self-assessment or self-evaluation that depend on the characteristics and needs of

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[2] available online:
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/jan/17/underground-art-mainstream-culture-outrage-sex-morality, accessed 04/03/2017.

particular projects, and are instead based on generalized quantitative criteria. We realize that we are asked to act 'rationally' but the rationality we are imposed with is a false one. Being rational means having to look into the specificity of each distinct case and decide on the criteria of its evaluation according to its particularities, instead of applying general criteria everywhere. In this sense we feel colonized and manipulated by an evaluation system that is problematic in many ways because of its quantitative nature.

We believe that art has to find strategies and attitudes to respond to these drastic changes. *We have to re-discuss the role of public money, what we protect as common and how we defend it.* More particularly, we have to re-discuss the value of contemporary art, since current cuts regard mostly arts, culture and heritance. In this frame, contemporary art may have to disconnect from the social so that it can radically re-take its distinct position in society today. Without suggesting a return to the argument of 'art for art's shake' and while remaining extremely sensitive towards the relation of art to its social context, we defend art's role to produce *social and political alternatives* instead of being considered as responsible for solving social problems, which definitely constitutes the work of the state.

We try to think of ways that could make the real impact of art projects visible today, could *extensive documentation* be one of them for example? On a national level, *current policies emphasize mainly on a project's tour dates and on audience's fulfilment and quantity, instead of the creation processes and research formats involved in it. Could a better balance between the two assist the visibility of the real impact of art projects, opening also space for an on-going dialogue with politicians?*

We believe that solutions are to be found mainly on a political level and this why we are highly concerned about the position art workers should take in the public discourse. How should we debate publicly, for example, with politicians and participate in the way cultural and art policies are being formed?

> 5. Loss of the value of arts in society

Social and financial crisis puts the life of thousands of citizens who cannot secure the necessary for their survival at risk, while, at the same time, dominant *cultural policies publicly underestimate the role of arts in society in a way that clearly resembles a propaganda that aims to destroy all pillars of social care and incorporate everything as fast as possible into business models orientated only towards financial profit*. This makes it utterly urgent to defend arts role to the public and suggest new modes for approaching it, while *resisting the principle of quantification* that attempts to measure only in numbers the value of arts, a value that is and should stay profoundly speculative. How can art re-identify its role, potential and production modes in a society that changes radically? How much does art still constitute the mirror of society and has to provide answers to social changes?

At the same time, departing from ideas such as those of Claire Bishop (see: https://vimeo.com/24193060) and Harry Thorne (see: https://frieze.com/article/giver-guest-and-ghost), *we observe the paradoxical popular turn to the 'social' in arts. While governments underestimate the value of arts, arts try to defend themselves via justifying there value on another ground (the social) and not on their own artistic ground.* Could this be a symptom, as Bojana Kunst has argued, of the fact that the social and the common are today more and more absent in our societies? *Art's affect cannot be measured (neither in 'social' nor 'economical' terms) nor can the complexity of the questions it deals with. Art's value and support should be defended as the human right to speculation, imagination and*

complexity. We depart from the premise that arts, especially the performing arts, are in all cases social since they involve the gathering of people in live events. In an attempt to clarify what can then be particularly 'social' in today's emphasized social turn, we observe the following:

- *the duration of projects that engage with community matters:* social work (in and outside the frame of the arts) is not something to go easily in and out of. Artistic projects that manage to have a real social impact are usually durational ones and also include activist elements.

- *attracting and inviting within artistic frames, arts adversaries*, those who don't usually come to theatre: how can we create agonistic contexts for exchange today and not only meet with people who have a similar way of thinking, confirming our own 'shared' views?

- *defending art in terms of itself and its own value and not in terms of economics*: against the misleading (re)presentation of 'facts' according to which arts' impact is proved in terms of numbers (of show nights, numbers of audience numbers etc.), how can we avoid using the tools that kill us and discuss arts in different terms?

- aiming for challenging audiences and ourselves, while surviving financially in current conditions: how can we focus on the frames we propose for artists, audiences and ourselves, while overgrowing quantification processes to secure our work financially?

- approaching art as a democratic space par excellence and work from within on what Jacques Rancière has called 'the redistribution of the sensible'.

LAB#1   DREAM (of)
    Internal solidarity (sharing resources, networks etc.)
    Being more brave by being marginal, instead of aiming for unconditional standardized international visibility.
    Seducing systems that aim to calculate artistic modes of being together plainly in terms of numbers and economics.
    Connecting to other sectors.
    Borrowing models that can assist our work.
    Investing on an interdisciplinary ecology of practices.

LAB#1   CONFLICT (in dialogue) – Where do we find ourselves at the end of LAB #1 and how can the diversity of our voices become visible at this point?

- We stayed too much in our own field and did not open to broader humanitarian concerns, we did not talk enough about the cultural and humans rights, for example. Moreover, we did not question the cultural diversity from a white perspective.

- The departure of our concerns is very complex. If we want concrete results and solutions we have to simplify things and make specific suggestions.

- A big shift in our thinking that happened through the LAB: the idea of suggesting a concrete model, which was our starting point, does not exist anymore. It is not possible to produce one toolkit that goes for everything, exactly because of the complexity involved in what we discuss. The effort now has to do exactly with how to shift from result- and tool-oriented thinking to the emergence of working principles that we can implicate in different ways in our own organisations.

- Nevertheless, the five final points that came out from the LAB are only symptoms, they simply describe the conditions but offer no way out. How can we move on from them? And also: given the fact that we received a EU grant to conduct this research, what is our responsibility in terms of the concrete outcomes this should offer?

- The mere fact that we, as a group and individually, took time to question things, work with them, negotiate, shows our responsibility in this sense, especially in today's accelerated

conditions. The report includes this common group effort. This is exactly what constitutes the value of this project too.

- What if we would try to suggest specific strategies to deal with those five points too? Or maybe emphasize parts in them that could act as such?

- There is a question as to whether a report should follow the movement of the actual process, in this case be characteristic of the back and forth of the research process, of its polyphony etc., or aim to become a text that is 'efficient', attractive, possibly also sellable etc. Some of us think that the former can be problematic as a reading experience, whereas others believe that if we follow the latter way, everything will be flattened in terms of the way our process unfolded.

- I agree that one often has to seduce the system, play its game, use its vocabulary in order to survive and secure money for his/her artistic development; but if this means adjusting our activities to market demands, then I don't follow anymore… because this lowers our aims significantly…

- Anyway, we could not offer suggestions or solutions for 'institutions' in general today. Because 'the institution' is not one… every region, every organisation acts differently and has distinct needs… Maybe earlier distinctions between institutions and independent sectors were more clearly marked and separated. Now things are more complex, though, and we need to find other ways of exchange and communication. Every institution and each one of its workers separately, they have to question the way they collaborate and work in less hierarchical or patronizing relationships both among them and with artists…

LAB#1   IN VERBS – How can we build actions in our work?

COMMENCE	PROBLEMATIZE
RETURN	NEED
REFLECT	READ
AIM	SELF-REFLECT
PLAN	CONFRONT
SHIFT	TRY
CONNECT	ATTEMPT
DEPART	REINVENT
CONTINUE	EXPERIMENT
MEET	CONCLUDE
ASK	IDENTIFY
DISCUSS	MAP
INITIATE	SHARE
DETECT	DREAM
WORRY	CONFLICT

LAB #2 – Reporting in Questions

LAB #2 focused on the way art workers in accompanying organisations for the arts (programmers, producers, artistic directors etc.) can cooperate with artists in order to assist each other's work within the given conditions and new needs of contemporary artistic production. For this reason, the project partners of N.O.W invited five artists, coming from different artistic and socio-political backgrounds, to join the LAB, take part in its research process and explore in practice alternative modes of cooperation together. The invited artists have been: Brogan Davison and Pétur Ármannsson (IS, Dance for Me theatre company); Leonardo Delogu (IT, performance artist); Sonia Gómez Vicente (ES, choreographer) and Gosie Vervloessem (BE, performance artist).

For the meetings that took place in Antwerp (April '16) and Iceland (August '16), I designed workshops wherein participants worked both as one group and in two separate teams (artists and project partners) on the laboratory's themes. This was done in an attempt to delve deeper into each group's distinct operational modes and into ways of bringing these two modes together on a common ground. The workshops followed once more the three abovementioned phases and working principles of LAB#1, with additional attention given to the fact that, in this case, I would have to carefully work against certain hierarchical and power relations of the art market in order for the group to meet, think and work on equal terms.[2] Therefore, all tasks suggested in the first two meetings of LAB#2 were designed with the aim to initially offer space for personal self- reflection on each one's distinct practices and work habits and then mix people up beyond professional distinctions offering them performative tools in order to delve deeper on common concerns and questions, and practice alternative modes of co-working. This exchange led towards the end of the second workshop to a proposal by the five artists to close LAB#2 with a five-day-long event that would be co-curated by the whole group. In their initial proposition, the event, called *Half a House*, was described as follows:

'a cohabitation project for a period of five days, wherein twenty artists and curators from N.O.W. network and beyond, live and work together, merging daily tasks and more abstract reflections in workshops, experiences, lectures and performances. The cohabitation will be a framework but also a methodology to intensively explore shared questions and challenges linked to artistic processes and beyond. *Half A House* focuses on the exploration of different relations within and outside of arts field that are currently under pressure.'[3]

In other words, the suggestion was to include in LAB#2 an event that would pass from reflection to practical work and would test the laboratory's concerns both through the process of its co-curation by the artists and the project's partners, but also through the ways these two groups would inhabit a space and share their practices for the course of the five days. Subsequently, the main question of interest during our next two meetings in Cagliari and Saint-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt has been how can we all work together to co-curate an event?

Following closely the process of co-curation from thereon, I acted more as an external advisor and observer for the LAB as well as a participant of the final project of co-habitation that took place from 10 to 14 May 2017 in Palazzina Ex Fabbri Firenze in Florence, within the frame of Fabbrica Europa Festival. The report that follows maintains the tone of the external observer while wandering in the (memory) space of the LAB and its closing event. The text is structured through a series of questions as they emerged from the LAB's concerns and processes before, during and after *Half a House*. These questions are followed by images from the same event, fragments of the different written materials of the LAB and a series of personal thoughts that derives from them.

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[2] Here I refer to the fact that programmers often have the power to make choices and decisions in their own way and time, whereas artists have to continuously explain the value of their work and then wait to be chosen and supported.
[3] Fragment for the initial project description submitted by the five artists to the group in December '16.

HOW TO BUILD (HALF) A HOUSE?

Half a House was inspired by the work of the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena, who after the earthquake and tsunami in 2010 in Chile, built half houses that could be finished by its' inhabitants according to their own needs and in their own taste. *Half a House* aimed to explore this co-creation of a space not completely shaped and closed, and subvert the negative value often associated with notions such as 'unfinished' or 'incomplete' in neoliberal paradigms that strive for 'efficiency' and 'productivity' giving more and more emphasis on quantifiable outcomes rather than on research, risk and experimentation, putting under severe pressure the relations between artists and programmers, curators and art workers, artists and audience, art and society.

Similarly to the disasters in Chile that led to new, adaptive domestic models, *Half a House* constituted an artistic reaction to the worrying transitions that take place in the art sector today, replacing existing hierarchies with an experimental space that attempted to create alternative conditions for purposeful encounters. In contrast to Aravena's houses, though, the residents of *Half a House* did not wish to 'finish' it according to their own needs, but to approach incompleteness itself as potentiality, test the borders between creativity, productivity, openness and fragility, between the known, the planned, and what comes unknown and unexpected. *Half a House*, therefore, became more a space of becoming than a space to be built. In this sense, it experienced its state of imperfection and incompleteness similarly to the way Bojana Kunst has described potentiality, as 'a rupture between something which has not happened and something which has yet to happen.'[4] Kunst

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[4] Kunst's article 'On Potentiality and the Future of Performance' can be found here:
https://kunstbody.wordpress.com/2009/03/13/on-potentiality-and-the-future-of-performance/

talks about potentiality as what can come to light only when *not* being actualised, when the potential of a thing or a person is not realised. Anything else constitutes only a possible realization of that potential. In this sense, potentiality relates always to the speculative, imaginative and incomplete, and never to what can be defined, realised, measured and then exploited accordingly, as neoliberalism commands. It is exactly for this reason that the future of performance, according to Kunst, relies on such potentiality. As she has concluded in her text:

> In the core of a performance there is a resistance to actualisation […] A performance is a result of a creative process that is interrelated around what it could be and tracing what has yet to come. A performance deals with the rupture between that which has yet to come and that which has not yet happened, a kind of exposure of time of another becoming. I imagine a performance then as a kind of experiential and inventive field of working together, which paradoxically can come to light with all its transformative power when it is not actualised. [...] A performance that would enable a bodily state of intensities, but would also give us the licence to daydream. A performance which could be an experiential field of affective and perceptive modes of becoming. An event which would also allow itself not to happen, which would be always, interrupted in mid-sentence.

The participants of *Half a House* wished to practice such understanding of potentiality in an attempt to approach performance and its relation to the social in different ways. Inspired by the 'in-between', informal spaces of exchange that occurred around N.O.W. sessions, by the unplanned, uncurated moments (breaks, breakfasts, dinners, walks etc.) when the group was able to pause given structures and disclose alternative conversations and unexpected connections that took place among project partners and artists, they aimed for an extension and re-creation of such a space that would allow them to break up boundaries, create openings to accidental encounters, negotiate new ways of working and living while challenging established modes of artistic creation and of inhabiting a space.

And this is exactly what *Half a House* did. If it then indeed managed to build something that was only, as the image above shows or as Eugenio Barba has wonderfully put it: 'Staircases of shadows. Techniques of an ephemeral art against that which is ephemeral. Empty rituals.'[5]

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[5] Barba, Eugenio. *On Directing and Dramaturgy, Burning the House.* Oxon: Routledge, 2010, p.14.

HOW TO ASK A QUESTION?

In the workshops I conducted with the group within the frame of LAB#2, asking questions has been central for the research process. More particularly, I insisted not merely on asking questions that seek for (correct) replies but rather on looking for ways one can actually engage with questions and use them as working materials in order to mobilize research investigations. One of the tasks we did in this frame was called 're-articulation of questions' and involved a writing exercise conducted in pairs where participants (usually an artist and a project partner) would write on a piece of paper an urgent question they would like to pose to the other and then take time to produce different versions of this same question in the following way: One of the two proposed a question by giving his/her paper to the other. The other took time (in silence) to think about what that question really wanted to ask and write it as a new question under the initial one. The first one took time to think about what the new question really wanted to ask and write that as a third question under the second one etc. In this way, more and more unexpected versions of the same question, which of course did not stay the same but expanded to even more directions through a vertical digging process, emerged, while at the same time the two participants were engaging deeper and deeper with each other's thought. The task resulted in exchanges such as the following, which have significantly informed both LAB#2 and *Half a House*:

    A: What is important for an artist in order to have a sustainable artistic practice?
    B: What should an artist do to make his/her practice sustainable?
    A: What are the actions that an artist can do to develop?
    B: Does one need to 'develop' or 'improve' one's career with actions?
    A: Is there a specific pattern/formula that can guarantee development?

B: Is it necessary to follow a concrete formula in order to develop or…?
***
A: Have you ever felt unsafe during the research and with what impact?
B: What can hinder a creative process?
A: How can we help and facilitate creativity in a research process?
B: What can an accompanying organisation for the arts do to support creative research?
A: Is it enough to respond to artistic production needs in order to enrich research?
B: Should the responsibility to create infrastructure that supports artistic research be in the hands of artists?
A: Does one need artists' ideas and complicity in order to fulfil the responsibility to create cultural infrastructures?
***
A: Which vision drives you to seek the right support for artists in your work?
B: How do you know what is the right support that the artists you work with need?
A: What is the relation you look for with the artists you support?
B: Does the relation you look for depend on the needs of the specific artist in the specific moment or do you have a set structure where artists are invited into?
A: What support is supportive for you at this specific moment?
B: Can you define/articulate your sources of support?
***
A: When nothing is particularly different or new, how do you consider a process in terms of your own experience in it?
B: Why are we looking for something 'new' every time? What if new has to do with reacting according to a project's needs and not through your established habits and knowledge?
A: Could it be that in some projects nothing 'new' is actually needed or necessary by the side of their creators?
B: What do you expect from an artistic project that helps you work in new ways?
***
A: How do you think this LAB can enable us to find new ways for accompanying artists?
B: In which way can we work together in the framework of this LAB so that we can find new ideas and new ways?
A: Do you think that in our respective structures we are ready to find new ideas/ways? Or maybe we need to restart the whole structure itself in order to arrive to new models?
B: How can we (re)move habits that are too stable and established?
***
A: What do you expect as a result from this experience? Do you believe we should reach a result?
B: Does this experiment take us to a new track of working with artists?
A: Do you think that a new track of work between artists and workers of accompanying organisations for the arts could be realizable in five days in Florence?
B: What should we do differently in those five days order to secure that we achieve our original goals?

The task suggested that the way we ask questions, both in arts and beyond, shapes the way we enter both ours and each other's minds, but also places and spaces. Aligning with this suggestion, 'What is the house telling you?', one of the first questions one encountered when entering Palazzina Ex Fabbri Firenze, was articulated in a way that allowed us to enter it through people's stories and experiences and observe the space they created. And it allowed my personal guide to introduce me to the house through her fears that the specific building provoked. Blind spots, weak points, personal exposures transformed into alternative doors through which to enter a house. Questions able to initiate and mobilize unexpected encounters instead of 'guaranteeing' correct, successful replies. That's how one was welcomed to *Half a House*.

HOW TO START?
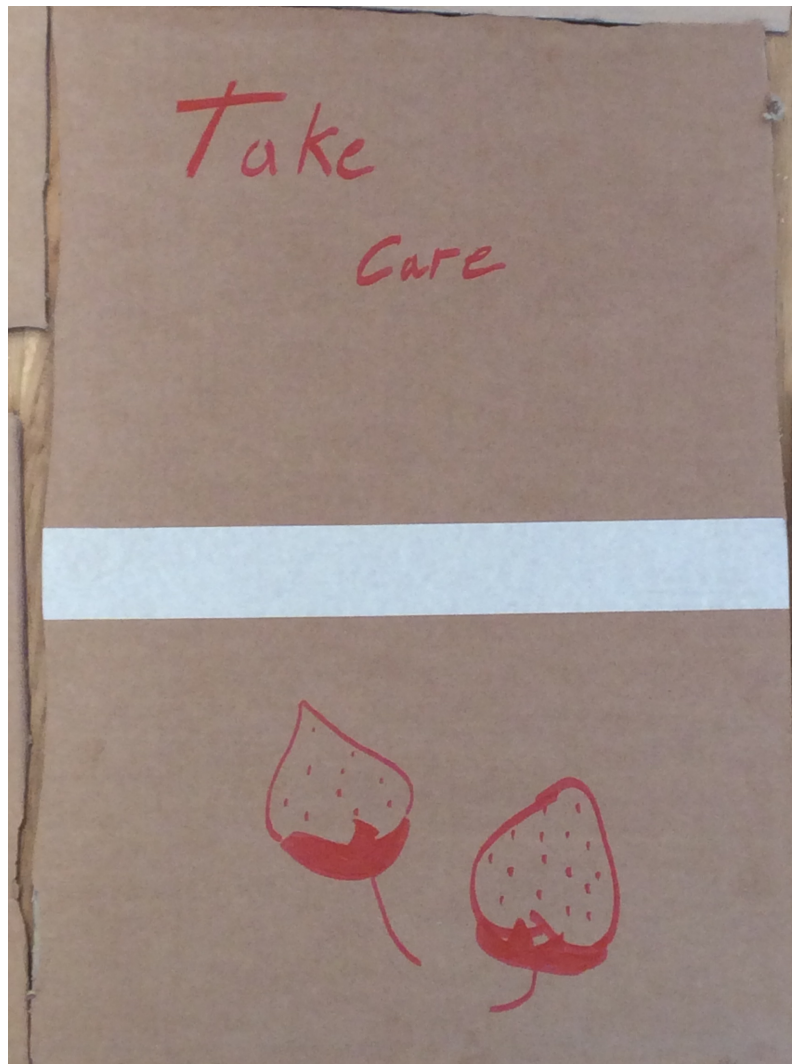
Imagine a huge building with brick walls opposite a park placed at the edges of an unknown city you visit for the first time. You hear that the neighbourhood belongs to a less developed part of the town and that it can be dodgy especially at night. But now it is morning and the day is sunny and warm. You head towards that building in order to meet more unknown people with whom you are supposed to spend five intensive days of work. Nothing more to know for the moment, except from the fact that you will enter the building one by one and that your exact entrance time is 10.10am. You are crossing the road that stands between the park and the building at 10am and see a long table with several small chairs standing in front of the building's entrance. Other people are already seated around that table talking to each other. The only thing on the table is a bowl of strawberries that circles around among introductions, discussions, new names and faces. These strawberries somehow become a familiar companion, a symbol of sociability during the first uncomfortable moments that accompany every coming together of people who are about to get to know each other and enter a common creative journey. You are invited to sit at the table too and enjoy the strawberries and the talks until your personal guide (who is now inside on tour by his/her own guide) picks you up for a tour to the interior of the building. You are also told that as soon as your tour ends, you will also have to act as a guide for the next person. You then spend some time with people named after different Italian names that you cannot recall for the moment, people who are now strangers but will very soon become familiar faces…

Within the next twenty minutes your guide calls you to the front door and welcomes you to *Half a House*. When entering the building you see a huge, empty space with wooden floors and high windows. Only a big cooking arrangement is already settled towards the right wall of the space, whereas at its left side corner someone is deep into the construction of a series of furniture. You assume that these are probably aimed for the house, as you are already able to recognise in his work the style of the table and chairs that have just hosted you and the strawberries outside. From a little radio placed right next to the man, there's music coming at low volume. You are not sure about the tune exactly, but you imagine that it plays something like this:

> Let me take you down, 'cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields
> Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about
> Strawberry Fields forever
>
> Living is easy with eyes closed
> Misunderstanding all you see
> It's getting hard to be someone but it all works out
> It doesn't matter much to me
> Let me take you down, cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields
> Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about
> Strawberry Fields forever
>
> No one I think is in my tree
> I mean it must be high or low
> That is you can't you know tune in but it's all right
> That is I think it's not too bad
> Let me take you down, cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields
> Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about
> Strawberry Fields forever
>
> Always, no sometimes, think it's me
> But you know I know when it's a dream
> I think I know I mean a "Yes" but it's all wrong
> That is I think I disagree
>
> Let me take you down, cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields
> Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about
> Strawberry Fields forever
> Strawberry Fields forever
> Strawberry Fields forever[6]

Everything points to a nice start and your guide's voice is as calm and fragile as it should be. She talks to you about what scares her in that building and leads you to the lift that will take you to the rest of its floors. By the time your eyes start getting familiar with the new space, they encounter its first paradox:

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[6] Lyrics of Beatles' song 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (1967)

WHY IS A CHAIR PLACED BY THE CEILING?
Or: HOW TO OCCUPY SPACE?

Palazzina Ex Fabbri Firenze, where *Half a House* took place, is a three floor multi-purpose building owned by the city of Florence. It is located twenty minutes away on foot from Stazione Leopolda, the centre of Fabbrica Europa Festival. The building currently remains unfinished and unused. Its emptiness provided the perfect location for the potentiality that the project aimed to explore; a literally unfinished site offered as a space to reflect metaphorically on the notion of the 'unfinished' and explore processes of spatial and temporal co-creation.

The ground floor of the building was used as the main working and eating space of the venue. It also became the most visible space for the audience, since most lectures and performances of the event took place there. First floor was used as storage space for food and materials, whereas the attic hosted the *Cardboard Community*, a hand-made collective construction, a temporary settlement for the twenty participants of the project, including private living, resting and sleeping spaces, and communal, shared spaces, using cardboard as material. Notions such as home, inclusiveness, community, private, public, intimacy and sharing were continuously negotiated through the creation of this space. The Belgian artist Naomi Kerkhove curated and assisted the creation of the cardboard settlements, whereas the French architect Maël Veisse designed and built the rest of the space,

making sure that participants' needs in terms of working and living (chairs, tables, ladders, kitchen counters etc.) were met as accurately as possible.

Following the metaphor of *Half a House* to its end, particular importance was also given to the edges of the building and the elements of connection with the outside: from windows and doors to tubes and electric circuits, participants were interested in literal and metaphorical thresholds to communicate and transfer in and out messages and inputs. In the speech she gave during Theatre Festival 1994, the Belgian dramaturge, Marianne Van Kerkhoven has argued that one should be particularly attentive towards what she has called 'major dramaturgy' and defined as what lies around artistic production, including 'the city and around the city, as far as we can see, the whole world and even the sky and all its stars. The walls that link all these circles together are made of skin, they have pores, they breathe' she has argued, and one needs to pay special attention to those pores because 'today it is extremely necessary'.[7] Following such views, in *Half a House* the physicality of the space contributed as well to a process of exploring and sharing. A chair that strives for light is to be found close to the ceiling, a ladder that reaches infinity (or an invisible somewhere) is to be found against the outside wall, etc. Other mobile, flexible modules were similarly used and organized by the participants in a DIY mode that (re-)created an ephemeral, more or less imaginary, house shelter ready to react and change according to needs and functions emerging in real time.

In all instances, central question of interest was how to create spaces for accidental encounters and how to shape such spaces within an artistic process that curates the non-curatable. For this reason, next to the abovementioned literal preoccupation with space, another important concern has been the way space would be shaped through time and the activities that take place in it. Curated through a co-living format that merged concrete daily tasks with abstract topics, workshops and performative experiences with intimate encounters, lectures and performances, the event moved between the private and public, fragility, the known and the unknown, in order to further explore artistic cohabitation, maintain 'unfinished' practices and keep the winds blowing.

The event's space was further shaped by different daily themes and questions. More specifically, the five days were respectively focused on one of the following themes: hospitality, fragility, permeability, agency and intimacy. Following these themes, the morning sessions were dedicated to the *Domino*, a sharing of artistic practices of the participants in the form of workshops. Similarly to the famous game, one participant would initiate and lead the first workshop of a day, which would then be used as a source of inspiration for the next workshop idea that was somehow connected to it and was suggested by another participant. This second workshop would then give rise to a third one etc. This process aimed to connect knowledge, cross-fertilise participants but also inform the public afternoons sessions, which addressed broader audiences in different ways. Between 14:30-16:00 a co-curatorial moment would take place where participants would decide on the activities they would like to propose to their audience, attempting to curate the 'void' of space and time they daily had at their disposal between 16:00-17:30.

From 16:00 onwards each day, *Half a House* opened its doors to the city and interacted with it via games, performative encounters, lectures, and finally performances by the five artists who initiated the project. Invited speakers coming outside arts field from disciplines such as architecture, anthropology, geobiology etc. gave the lectures. With the apt title *Knocking at the Door,* those lectures aimed to bring in new, unexpected knowledge from the outside and welcome the 'foreigner' to the house. Through these invitations, *Half a House* wished to approach in practical terms Jacques Derrida's ideas on hospitality. In the book *Of Hospitality*, Derrida has declared that for pure hospitality to occur there must be absolute surprise, an opening without horizon of expectation to the newcomer *whoever that may be*. To truly embrace the other as stranger, Derrida continues, means to

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[7] Van Kerkhoven, Marriane. 'Anthology'. Available online:
http://sarma.be/pages/Marianne_Van_Kerkhoven, accessed 9 July 2017.

accept a certain decentring of the ego, opening one's self to the novel, the incongruous, and the unexpected.[8] And this is exactly what *Knowing at the Door* aimed to do.

More concretely the public five-day programme of *Half a House* was eventually formed as follows:

Wed 10 May DAY ONE: HOSPITALITY On the idea of threshold, on welcoming, on the boundaries in and out.
17:00 – Vernissage and aperitivo
18:00 – Collective walking to Stazione Leopolda

Thu 11 May DAY TWO: FRAGILITY on invisible forces, contamination and collective movements that affect our actions, on the fragility of the self and the illusion of control.
16:00 – Open House (games, explorations, experiences): *How can you separate a space without dividing it?*
17:30 – Knocking at the door: Renaud Loda, artist and geobiologist
18:30 – Aperitivo
19:00 – Presentation: Sonia Gomez, Bailarina

Fri 12 May DAY THREE: PERMEABILITY on domestic spaces and the cultural idea of 'home' connected to the *domus* conception and to safeness: from intimacy in a wide sense, from physical matter to emotional proximity, matching nomadism and settlement.
16:00 – Open House (games, explorations, experiences): *How can we make our home permeable to the forces of the surrounding landscape?*
17:30 – Knocking at the door: Matteo Meschiari, anthropologist
18:30 – Aperitivo
19:00 – Presentation: Leonardo Delogu, Walk

Sat 13 May DAY FOUR: AGENCY
On diving into the micro world of denied forces, on bacteria, plants and organisms from whom to learn different interconnections, different models of relationships beyond hierarchies.
16:00 – Open House (cardboard workshop per bambini): *How can you be productive and fragile at the same time?*
17:30 – Knocking at the door: Richard Ingersoll, architectural historian
18:30 – Aperitivo
19:00 – Presentation: Gosie Vervloessem, Recipes for disaster

Sun 14 May   DAY FIVE: INTIMACY   On vulnerability, from body membrane to emotional exposure, on how edgy the boundary between public and private is nowadays.
16:00 – Open House (games, explorations, experiences): *Can openness be a force for navigating in a moment of drastic changes?*
17:30 – Knocking at the door: Andrea Staid, anthropologist
18:30 – Aperitivo
19:00 – Presentation: Brogan Davison & Pétur Ármannsson, The Brogan Davison Show

Instead of building more walls, through its programme *Half a House* attempted to build more bridges among different agents inside and outside arts field and connect via shared practices with curators, artists, programmers, theoreticians, scientists, activists, social workers, researching questions related to the way openness can be seen as a force and possibility for navigating in moments of drastic change, and cooperation can act as a new method and model for our working relationships.

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[8] Derrida, Jacques and Dufourmantelle, Anne. *Of Hospitality*. Standford California: Standford University Press, 2000.

HOW TO MEET?

Following an open call, ten Italy-based artists with different backgrounds were selected to join the LAB, share the space of Palazzina Ex Fabbri Firenze and work together with the project's partners and its five associate artists in order to further elaborate on the concepts of *Half a House*. The selected artists were: Anna Marocco, Chiara Orefice, Claudio Beorchia, Elisa Decet, Fabio Ciararvella, Giulla Dellavalle, Greta Francolini, Justin Randolph Thompson, Laura Perrone and Margherita Isola.

From its very start LAB#2 invested strongly on the exploration of on-going, non-result orientated dialogues and exchange, outside the frame of specific projects and productions needs. For this reason, a particular coaching process has been designed early on, in which one or more project partners coupled with one of the five associate artists with the condition that s/he comes from a different socio-political context to their own, and explored together alternative modes of cooperation. Central to this peculiar experiment has been the aim for all participants to exit their comfort zones and act within territories that were unexplored, possibly also unsafe, where neither work nor social habits and established protocols would help and where everything had to be discovered anew.

Half a House aimed to expand this circle of uneasiness and rediscovery and investigate further interactions between distinct local and international communities not only though the ten new residents of the House and the LAB but also through the audience who would daily join and contribute to its activities in different ways, attempting to test more or less intimate encounter frames.

HOW TO LIVE (TOGETHER)?

When one is asked to go up to the last floor of a building s/he hardly knows, in order to be introduced to a 'Cardboard Community' and build the 'house' that will host him/her for the next five days, one is confronted with some fundamental, yet quite unusual, questions: What are the precise dimensions of my body? How could I use a sleeping mattress as a measure for the space I actually need? How can I work in practical terms with the notion of property? Where should I build my house? What makes a house (the location, the neighbours, the light, the shadow, the air)? How big do I need my walls to be? How do I want to communicate with the outside?

In the lecture that took place on the fifth day inside the cardboard community, Andrea Staid talked to us about his ethnographic research on marginal, informal living settlements of the East. Drawing on the particularity of those settlements and their immediate connection with the human body and nature, Staid argued that there are three skins we inhabit, our bodies, our clothes and our homes, and that we should take care of all these three and radically resist today's homogeneousness of individual living in the West.

In the book *How to Live Together*, Roland Barthes introduces the notion of 'idiorhythmy'. Coming from the Greek 'idios' (individual, singular) and 'rhythmos', which is rhythm understood not as a regular movement, as is often the case, but as flowing and a distinctive form of arrangement, 'idiorhythmos' reveals the individual manner in which small groups insert themselves into the social. Instead of flattening social interactions through established norms and their specific rules, Barthes wonderfully refers to a socialism of distance, wherein diversity is cultivated in closeness and

distances are brought together through the particularities of distinct singularities (instead of individualisms).[9]

What if we would then create idiorhythmic instead of normalized social communities? Communities that represent the particularity of their inhabitants instead of confirming 'proper' uses of social spaces? With such aporias in mind we tried to live (together) in the cardboard community. Negotiations that related to questions such as what are the goals of this community, where does it head to, what does it want to build for itself and how, what activities, other than sleeping, could/should be placed there, what dimension of public life could happen there apart from private moments, took place daily in *Half a House* and were approached in different ways and through different suggestions: What if we would revert social expectations and overturn audience's relation to the building by emptying its ground floor (which was usually the overloaded action space of the event) and letting them gradually discover the rest of the building and what is happening elsewhere? What if we would place some of the lectures or performances on the top floor? What if people could exchange houses for a while? How can we be constantly aware of the distinct needs present in space and how can we research the specific cohabitation through our bodies and their limits?

Two days before Staid, in his own lecture, the Italian anthropologist Matteo Meschiari, referred to the first building constructions made by humans, which aimed to store and secure food and objects rather than people; and to the fact that since then people live in those buildings *in the place of* or *as* those objects. He then asked us to conduct a short survey that would reply to three questions:
1. Why did we choose the specific location for our house in the cardboard community?
2. Why did we build our house in the specific way?
3. What are our thoughts and reactions to the concept of idiorhythmy?

Before he finished, he asked us to stand on a line and literally slow down, by walking a small distance as slowly as possible observing our bodily reactions in this state. It looked something like this:

He then joined our idiorhythmic community and spend his night with us.

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[9] Barthes, Roland. How to Live Together. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

HOW TO CO-WORK?

In one of our first discussions in *Half a House* the five artists who initiated the project referred to their curatorial suggestion to not close LAB#2 with a presentation event with different performances of their own or others' but work instead with the qualities that characterise their artistic work and the work of the project partners, as well as the work of the selected local artists in Italy. In other words, the suggestion was to work *among* individual works and practices instead with or for them. In this sense, each one's work was seen not as a product to be promoted and sold but as a territory that can bring certain qualities to an encounter and act as starting point for other things to emerge. This very choice of not simply presenting their works but curating a much more complex, fluid event with the participation of additional guests, has been decisive for the way *Half a House* evolved. Moreover, it constituted a rigorous suggestion in terms of what an artistic event can be and how it could bring people together, away from established market-orientated events that strive for competition, visibility and measurable profit.

One of the biggest dangers of our work today (in arts and beyond) has to do with the fact that we live and work in an economic system that has the ability to appropriate in a speed faster than the light's everything one is able to produce, and then turn it into an 'innovative', 'groundbreaking', exploitable product. As the choreographer Mårten Spångberg has argued: 'Slow is the new fast, as much as left is

the new right, occupy is the new letting go, queer is the new mainstream. Contemporary capitalism knows how to co-opt and has financialised any creative strategy. Work in whatever way you want just don't be proud of it.'[10] This fact leaves us little, if not no space at all, for resistance and should keep us constantly alert while we continue to work but without suggesting this work as any kind of solution to anything.

At the same time, Bojana Kunst has argued that art, the space par excellence to practice imagination, suffers as well today from the drain of the imaginary that characterises all aspects of social life. Following dominant modes of neoliberal production, artists today are asked to fully pre-plan their projects, project them always to the future, present the results of projects that haven't even started yet and prove the full value of them, preferably money value, in advance, only to then be given permission and support to simply execute them. This leaves no space for experimentation, risk or imagination. This is why art loses its constitutive role in society, which is to offer social and political alternatives, and resembles the treadmill of a gym, where artists always run among several projects, without reaching somewhere; always project to a horizon that, as we all know well, can never be reached.

Interestingly enough, as Kunst continues, this deep crisis of art happens after two decades of 'political art' and the constant transgression of the border between art and life. Although we have been confronted with numerous engaged, political and critical artistic projects over the last two decades, these projects remain without effect because of their pseudo-activity. The very politicisation of art over the last two decades can be read, according to Kunst, as a symptom of the disappearing public sphere. Art deals with social problems and is constantly pseudo active because the social is disappearing and we live in a time of radical powerlessness in terms of establishing the kind of realities in which people's communities would be articulated. Through this perspective we also need to rethink the social and political value of art, Kunst concludes, which is closely connected to the perception, recognition and establishment of the visibility of what we now have and will have in common.[11]

Through the tasks, exercises and other working processes that took place in *Half a House* participants were guided to a shared responsibility, engagement, and reconfiguration of one another's works, while these remained in a state of transformation. By practicing an on-going process of exchange between many parties, a state of unbelonging of projects or ideas emerged, facilitating an articulation of what may be considered as 'commons' among everyone participating in the event. This is not to say that *Half a House* aimed towards isomorphism of projects and ideas. Rather, it strived for a pluralized and differential process of communicating, working, imagining, and experimenting that makes possible the production of common practices, imaginings, and actions. It is this searching that may be able to produce what is 'in common'.

Discussing 'commons' mainly from a social and political perspective, theorist Isabell Lorey has proposed to search for the commons in the various forms that humans share in the ways they work and relate with one another today. Interestingly enough, Lorey has also remarked that in the last decades this search for commons has taken place more often in art institutions than in social, political, or even academic contexts.[12] Searching for commons in the arts means exploring the apparatuses that aim to draw attention to and to create relations during artistic processes. Allowing these apparatuses to emerge and be articulated between many also points to a practice that engages

[10] Spångberg, Mårten. 'Motivation at the End of Time, Upgrade'. *Bâtard Festival Reader*, 2014, pp.85- Available online: https://issuu.com/batardfestival/docs/batard_reader_def_online, accessed 08 July 2017.

[11] Kunst, Bojana. 'The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making'. *Maska* 'Projected Temporality' XXVII, 149–150 (2012), pp. 64–71.

[12] Lorey, Isabell. 'Becoming Common: Precarization as Political Constituting', trans. A. Derieg. In *e-flux*, Journal #17, 06: 2010, Available online: http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67385/becoming-common-precarization-as-political-constituting/, accessed: 9 July 2017.

with the search for commons on several grounds stemming from the artistic while incorporating the ethical, the infrastructural, and the social too.

The tasks that took place in the frame of *Half a House*, especially during the Domino sessions and the afternoon sessions designed for the audience, exposed individual fragile processes to others and in this way opened them up to potential interventions, interruptions, and possibly transformations by others. Therefore, they could be considered as an active search for 'commons' as these emerge *between* individuals that are intra-related and intra-dependent. Against the increasing individuality and capitalization of human language and subjectivity in arts (and not only), where artists are expected to constantly produce and communicate their 'selves' and their innovative ideas, *Half a House* proposed and practiced an attentive engagement that was distributed among everyone who took part in a process, including the audience too.

HOW TO CARE / HOW TO SHARE?

Soon after their initial proposal for the co-creation of *Half a House*, the five associate artists of
N.O.W. sent to the rest of the group Elke Van Campenhout's text 'Curating as environmentalism', to
act as food for thought for our later discussions.[13] In this text, Van Campenhout focuses, as she says,
on a particular form of curatorship: 'An attitude in thinking about curating in which the role of the
programmer and the role of the artist start to intertwine.' In this sense, she is interested in a
curatorship that tries to redefine the boundaries put up by institutions and in rethinking the role of the
institution itself, through reintroducing notions such as those of vulnerability, risk and imperfection
into the programming idiom.

In the same text, Van Campenhout discusses curatorship not so much as the creation of agendas but
as the process of negotiating the format of an agenda itself, by blurring 'boundaries between
"performance" and "daily life", between social rituals and performative work, between production
time and performance time, reevaluating the value of the moment, of the difference between "full"
and "empty" time', as she describes. Such understanding of curatorship takes, according to the writer,
a clear distance from established power and control strategies in the arts field, putting into question
notions of authorship and also of the market value of an artistic product.

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[13] Van Campenhout, Elke. 'Curating as Environ-mentalism', 2011. Available online:
http://nowperformingarts.eu/index.php/2016/11/25/curating-as-environmentalism/, accessed 8
July 2017.

Instead of curating either artists or art works, Van Campenhout argues for a curation of space and social bodies, shared by artists, audience members, and possibly 'art objects' too. It is this type of curation that she calls 'environmentalist'; a curation that carefully balances given elements, creates frames for the formation of a social body in constant transformation, and channels the flow of knowledge to find its way to the different sub-groups of interests involved in an event.

Such shared curation that puts into question authorial roles and introduces new potentials for exchange and sharing of (artistic) material, becomes an invitation to 'rethink the ecology of the arts system from within, without introducing definite new ideological standpoints or stubborn critical certainties'. Without becoming yet another statement, thus, 'environmentalist' curation focuses on the 'now' and the actual moment of the unfolding of the event and attempts a redistribution of power that makes us rethink the fabric of our social bodies and belonging. Once such curation invites the audience too to be affected by the circumstances, to open up to a potential change not necessarily by literally getting out there, but by opening up their perspectives on what might happen. The radical change in the position of the spectator, in this case, is that s/he leaves behind his/her position as a distant observer and starts looking for connections that s/he inscribes in the bigger story that is being written, not so much *for* him/her, but *with* him/her. Curating in this sense, Van Campenhout concludes, no longer has to do with fixed points in space or performances in venues. On the contrary, it concerns more the non-curated part of the interstices, the places in-between, the potential of a situation for changing one's attitude, one's mind or one's sense of belonging. Curatorial practice in that sense should aim opening up cracks in systems for unplanned, unforeseeable things to happen. Only then does it regain its initial meaning, which is to 'take care' of a community.

During LAB#2, before and during *Half a House*, we tried to approach curation in a similar way. Our real concern was indeed how can we (artists and other workers in arts sector) care for each other, our audience and the encounters we create. In this frame, during our workshop in Iceland, I asked the group to practice conversation in different formats and discuss themes that emerged as shared interests. Through diverse talks on creating a community of practices and multiplicity of voices, on wandering and moving forward in art projects, on taking risk and the role of audacity or of feeling uncomfortable in them, as well as on immersion and the way this may relate to opacity as important quality in artistic creation, the group arrived to insightful questions and observations that proved utterly significant for the research aims of LAB#2 and quite informative for the co-creation of *Half a House* and the way the whole experiment has been later designed.

Some of those questions were how can we define community, what is the role of diversity in it, how can we be attentive towards a community's ecosystem, how can we understand belonging (to a community) and how can we really share a (cultural or artistic) practice, and they were central in our discussions. We referred also to Chrysa Parkinson's ideas on practice as a term that usually comes with three different definitions, meaning either an 'active thought' or a 'filter', a 'habitual' or 'regular activity', or 'to try', 'to attempt something repeatedly' (until you get it right).[14] Parkinson understands the term mainly through its first definition and sees it as the (mental, intellectual) systems one creates in order to navigate among different artistic or training processes. It is here that an interesting paradox emerges: When practice is mainly understood as something that one does regularly, i.e. as a summation of habits and norms (as is often the case), then it can no longer constitute real active thought, which doesn't repeat and carries its own diversity. Developing a practice could, therefore, be defined as finding ways to produce one's own multiplicity, one's personal compass, within a community of practices, instead of establishing repeatable schemas. The then question becomes how can one regain connection with one's own self and surroundings so that one is able to move without specific direction, lose control and expand one's perspectives. At the same time, the existence of safe points of reference that can offer the needed stability in order to be able to take the risk to wander remains significant.

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[14] Parkinson, Chrysa. 'Self-Interview on Practice', available online: http://sarma.be/docs/1336, accessed 9 July 2017.

André Lepecki has clearly distinguished aesthetics of failing or failure (although failure's value is also often appreciated) from the development of 'broken compasses' that misguide or misdirect without revealing a 'proper', 'expected' destination, allowing one to be lost, *but still* getting them somewhere. And he has talked about the great value of the state of 'not knowing where to go next, but nevertheless going' in artistic creation.[15]

From thereon, additional concerns in today's context become how can one work towards the creation of such active thought within a money- and product-oriented neoliberal systems obsessed with efficiency? How can one (re)open things up, wander, escape expectations and lose authorship or the need for 'branding' his or herself in the market? All research processes in LAB#2, from the experimental coaching relationships and the workshops conducted in its frame, to the final *Half a House* event, aimed to test similar working and curating challenges, placing themselves outside the frame of specific projects, going beyond the expectations of neoliberalism, the art market or even the audience, and practicing how one may be able to meet and move in this case.

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[15] Lepecki, André. '"We Are Not Ready for the Dramaturge": Some Notes for Dance dramaturgy'. In *Rethinking Dramaturgy, Errancy and Transformation*, eds M. Bellisco, M. J. Cifuentes, and A. Ecija, pp. 181–197. Madrid: Centro Párraga, Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo, 2011.

HOW TO LEARN?

How, when, where does one actually learn? LAB#2 asked such questions quite often. Below, in the form of a list of directives, are the group's replies to what happens when one attempts to learn through the perspective of the 'idiot', by placing, for example, a community of people in a cardboard village in order to attend a lecture talking about marginal, alternative housing (as the picture above shows). 'Idiocy' is here used as a means not only for making the point that things (and events) could be other than they are, but that what things and events 'are' is constitutively 'other', in the sense that they are in a continuous process of becoming. Events, in this sense, are not fixed objects but occasions for posing or even inventing more interesting problems.

When operating as such 'idiot', then, one learns via:

- thinking no-one's thoughts, losing authorship, finding ways to circulate ideas in the room
- experiencing more freedom of thought
- becoming more concrete and sharp
- understanding things in more unexpected ways
- engaging on deeper levels
- discussing different things after addressing initial issues/questions, arriving at new starts via wandering
- rearticulating time, slowness and silence and other valuable but often lost qualities

HOW TO MOVE ON?

Soon after the end of *Half a House*, the five associate artists of N.O.W sent an email to all participants asking for their feedback and later reflections on the event. People's replies to that email gave rise to new, insightful perspectives, concerns or even problems related to the whole experiment, which could act as starting points for yet more experiments to come. Below are some of them:

1. The particularity of the experience for those already based in Florence who had to live their city in a quite different way for the course of the five days. The arrival of a new community in one's home-place, however fleeting this may be, with which one has exchange and reflect, can be seen as a social imaginary able to cause important shifts to one's 'normal' everyday life too.

2. The fact that no one during *Half a House* defined or categorized him or herself into the expected disciplines usually used when a group of artists or other art workers come together. This lack of division (into choreographers, artists, curators etc.) levelled the playing field and forced a deep reflection on the contributions of each person without isolating the participants. This interdisciplinary amalgamation is a much-needed factor in a contemporary arts world where divisions kill communities and create false barriers between fields inherently connected and completely in need of each other's strategies and energy.

3. The divisions that emerged in the cardboard community, where people once more built walls among them. When are such divisions necessary? Could the dissolving of these barriers be a way of shifting towards communal living and collective notions that extend beyond the socially prescribed norms relating to private space? The creation of these walls, however personalized, brings to mind also the way artists share studio spaces, creating curtains and dividers to close themselves into spaces. What other strategies for cohabitation may be used to heighten our awareness around shared space?

4. The use of cardboard as a material that points to the homeless. How can this be critically approached and examined in light of our actual situation, and put in dialogue with this sociological reality? It is difficult not to think about privilege when one sets up one's own space with this material as a game. More critical dialogue around the recognition and conscious decision of this relationship could be laid out.

5. The daily opening of the House to the public as an important point for reflection as it cannot but carry with it pressures to produce that may not be in synch with the objectives of one such project. People normally tend to shift into a more individualized mode of thinking when it comes to presentation and the collective needs more time to be able to engage in collective strategies for creation in this case.

6. The magic number of the multitude as something to explore further. The other half is less about the work that the event's organizers need to do and more about the whole community fully engaging in filling in the House and taking the experience beyond what is required or expected.

7. *Half A House* as an active practice of re-inventing: what cooperation could be, what an artistic residency could be, how artists could relate to an audience, what it means to open your door, to host, to define borders and boundaries, to communicate, to care, to be careful, to be an artist?

HOW TO INVITE?

Imagine entering, as a spectator, a space that invites you to:

- experience translation as a fragile process and constantly move between different languages while trying to make sense of your future.
- watch an old film in a dark room that resembles a cave.
- cook for over thirty people while discussing with others who do the same.
- play a hand-made attention game that requires you to carefully rearrange daily objects found on street in small scale constellations.
- sit for a while in the spookiest room of the house and respond to its sounds.
- reverse expectations and introduce the residents of a house to their own building and the activities that may take place in it, via your own expectations and imaginaries related to that space.
- leave a (written) present on a wall for other people to use (see picture above).
- walk in peculiar ways or with different entry points (for example as an animal, a hunter etc.).
- modify a space by imagining hidden possibilities or what else could happen in it.
- play a domino game that discusses agency both as a group and an individual process.
- create your own perfume of a personal memory.
- engage yourself with the diverse activities that take place around an unusually long table, which range from cardboard constructions to creating recipes for disaster or conducting anthropological surveys.

HOW TO DREAM?

During the workshop that took place in Iceland in August '16, I asked both groups of the LAB (project partners and artists) to approach, in an imaginative way, needs and desires related to their own work but also to their relation to the other group and dream about alternative modes of working and relating. Looking at those dreams and imaginaries one can interestingly observe how indicative those are of the common needs that emerge as a reaction to current neoliberal modes of artistic (but not only) production. Back there in the tiny town of Rif in West Iceland, in the lounge of *Freezer*, another quite imaginative space that keeps dreaming in its own way at the north side of the world,[16] participants of LAB#2 wondered about what could de done differently in the relations of artists and other art workers, and about how institutions today (i.e. larger non flexible structures with pressing production needs for dates, practical processes, easily available content for communication etc.) can take part in more open curatorial processes and correspond to new flexible, non object-oriented artistic productions.

And they dreamed of:

sharing and cohabitating a space for a longer period; wandering for at least ten minutes per day; co-creating a performative event with N.O.W.; co-creating a different environment and sociability in it; taking time to describe each other's practices and see what can be further developed and used by both groups; taking time to relax and sleep more; just taking time; spending time together not necessarily

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[16] The Freezer: http://www.thefreezerhostel.com, accessed 9 July 2017.

focused exclusively on art; avoiding small talks that promote one's work as a selling product; finding ways other than words in order to communicate; finding ways to approach anew empty spaces; working away from big production modes and more towards research-oriented ones; connecting to local communities and realities; encountering audiences in different ways; curating the accidental and the non-curatable.

Half a House aimed to realise part of that dream and reimagine what it means to build a culture of cooperation instead of competition today. Incomplete and ungraspable though it may be, as all dreams are, it sure remains an important attempt to be continued by all those involved in arts sector and beyond…

In Place of an Exit

Writing this report with a more than two-years distance that now separates me from my first involvement in N.O.W. in January '15, I realise once more the great value of similar researcher encounters that take place in the arts field today, especially when these include agents that normally work separate from one another and in quite different modes. The importance of the temporal, spatial and intellectual shifts that take place in such cases, especially in contexts that consciously work against them, as is our own European context, has been extensively analyzed in the course of this report. Instead of repeating points already strongly expressed, then, both by me as a writer of the report but also by all N.O.W. participants, I would like to instead take once more this opportunity to stress their value and insist on the fact that arts funding across Europe should dedicate an important part to similar initiatives in order for arts to be able to accomplish their role in society.

Having said that, the biggest concern for me remains neoliberalism's amazing speed of appropriation today. That has been too the number one trap that N.O.W. (as well as all similar research projects) had to face from its very start and it has not always managed to do that successfully, despite everybody's good intentions. As one of the project partners mentioned at some point, it is extremely hard today to define what or where the 'market' is, what is outside of it or how is able to stand there. Given the fact that it is indeed hard, if not impossible, to move today outside market's commands, since even when one tries to do that one can easily find him or herself trapped (or secretly wishing to be trapped) into a 'new', 'successful' profitable product, the questions I would now pose to N.O.W. participants or to anyone else who wishes to engage in similar projects, are the same questions that I also insistently ask myself every time I curate a project of artistic research. These are questions that relate to some of the following concerns:

- What is the difference between a network with clear marker aims and objectives (as these are often constructed lately all around Europe, most often with the participation of associate artists too) and a research group? What activities may be common but, most importantly, what activities are and should remain clearly distinguishable between the two?
- How willing is one to work around imposed time constraints and be available for the exploration of actual alternative temporalities? How can one avoid researching on current time constrains while acting him/herself in a state of constant deprivation of time?
- What is the difference between production and process? How willing are we to shift established habits of work, and risk testing new ones?
- Who should be there in similar research projects? With what criteria are participants selected in order to secure the necessary diversity, on the one hand, but also the important relevance for the specific research topic, on the other?
- How can we be attentive towards local specificities and needs when talking on a more or less generalised 'European' ground and in a language (English) that is rarely one's native and is averagely used by most participants?

With such questions in mind I continue to 'work and don't be proud of it', to return to Spångberg once more, looking for ways to resist and overturn whatever attempts to restrict arts real mission, which is the construction of social and political alternatives.

June-July 2017,
D.T.