Make, Share, Change

Perspectives on Audience Development and Capacity Building from Re-Imagine Europe (2017-2021)

Re—
Imagine
Europe

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Photo cover page
Audience at Sonic Acts Academy 2020. Photo by Pieter Kers

Introduction

Arie Altena, Sandra Trienekens, Annette Wolfsberger

Re-Imagine Europe (2017-2021) was a four-year project involving ten cultural organisations from across Europe. With a programme of residencies, commissions, symposia, and workshops, the project partners stimulated both artistic production and audience development. They experimented with new ways of reaching out to their audiences, motivated by the ambition to develop a broader and more engaging approach to audience development.

The main aim of Re-Imagine Europe was to engage audiences through art with the social and political challenges that are decisive for Europe's future, such as climate change, rising nationalism, and migration. Therefore, the project partners – Sonic Acts and Paradiso from Amsterdam, Elevate from Graz, Lighthouse from Brighton, INA GRM from Paris, Bergen Kunsthall from Bergen, KONTEJNER from Zagreb, A4 from Bratislava, Disruption Network Lab from Berlin, and Radio Web MACBA from Barcelona – commissioned new interdisciplinary and experimental works to address these issues and to engage audiences. Throughout the project, special attention was paid to how technological advances continue to change society, politics, and the ways we interact, and how new technologies urge us to explore new modes of acting and thinking. Re-Imagine Europe hoped to open up new spaces for new ideas, to propose alternatives to the status quo, and to stimulate and open up the critical imagination of both artists and audiences, with a view towards contributing to a more democratic and resilient European society. Rather than suggesting one coherent vision for the future, Re-Imagine Europe provided a platform to many, very different artistic voices and perspectives.

Over the past four years the project partners commissioned more than 100 works from diverse artists, makers, composers, and musicians from, or based in, Europe. They presented and distributed these works, so a wide audience was able to experience and engage with them. They organised more than 160 workshops, symposia, and lectures to involve audiences into the practice of making art and in discussions about how art can inform our ideas about society. The partners shared the knowledge they gained throughout the project, not only in workshops and lectures, but also in a great number of podcasts, as well as digital publications for a large audience, and in publications that aimed at improving and building the professional competencies

and digital capacities of artists and other professionals working in art and culture. As a result, these four years of collaboration have now led to a sustainable network of organisations for the commissioning, production, presentation, and distribution of new interdisciplinary artworks.

This publication collects articles, interviews and reports that specifically reflect on the audience development and capacity building activities of the ten cultural organisations that participated in Re-Imagine Europe. Re-Imagine Europe developed tools for audience development which connect audiences with art that addresses current social and political challenges. It also enabled those working in the cultural field – from artists to communication staff – to improve their skills, and work on their professionalisation.

In this publication we have intentionally chosen to follow a practice-based approach: most of the texts explore audience development and capacity building from the vantage point of one or more projects that were part of Re-Imagine Europe.

Increasing access and inclusion

The first three articles address access to the arts, and how arts organisations can foster inclusion. Eva Rowson and Sandra Trienekens report on *Who's doing the washing up?*, a programme of institutional interventions at Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse, Brighton to increase accessibility. A contribution written collectively by artists and the Lighthouse team reflects on the Pier Residency, which was an experiment to carve out a space at an arts organisation for specific community groups and individuals who identify as coming from marginalised backgrounds. Arie Altena and François Bonnet discuss access from a different angle by looking at ways in which INA GRM in Paris interacts with and builds its international audience.

Workshops as informal learning environments

HHow does the format of workshops within a festival, as environments for informal education, feed into audience development? In *A Temporary Public*, Margarita Osipian takes the Elevate Festival in Graz, and A4 in Bratislava, as case studies, while Arie Altena reflects

on the Critical Writing Workshops at Sonic Acts in Amsterdam. Sandra Trienekens and Arie Altena zoom in on the masterclasses and workshops of Sonic Acts and Paradiso. The second half of their article is based on an interview with artists Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui, who argue that workshops can be a tool to build communities of interest.

Building communities of interest

Building and maintaining communities of interest was central to other Re-Imagine Europe projects as well. In an interview with Jodi Rose, Tatiana Bazzichelli and Lieke Ploeger of Disruption Network Lab discuss the strategies they use to organise and curate community events, and how they bring together communities of trust in highly focused conferences and meet-ups. The Working Group of the online radio project Radio Web MACBA collectively wrote a reflection on their communal working process.

Engaging the next generation

What are the ways in which children and youth, as participants, learn to engage with art? For this publication, Karolina Rugle produced three articles that explore informal arts education for children and young people that are derived from her interviews with the artists and staff involved. *The Factory of Sound* is about the experimental educational music programme for children at KONTEJNER. *Sounding the Future* focuses on workshops for children at A4 in Bratislava, and maps some perspectives and possible directions for the re-design of arts education. Finally, Hilde Marie Pedersen, head of education at Bergen Kunsthall, explores the Kunsthall's approach to youth arts education in a conversation with Karolina Rugle.

The publication concludes with two overarching contributions. Heather Maitland's short guide outlines essential ingredients of audience development for small and medium-sized organisations. Sandra Trienekens closes off with a text based on her observations during the four years of Re-Imagine Europe, which shows how the work on audience engagement benefits audiences, as well as the development of artists and arts organisations.

Who’s doing the washing up?

Who's doing the washing up? was a Re-Imagine Europe programme of institutional interventions at Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2018) and Lighthouse, Brighton, UK (2019). Curator Eva Rowson assembled a report of the programme with contributions from the artists, participants and arts institutions that were involved: Jordi Ferreiro, Johanne Hauge Gjerland, Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås, Lara Antoine, Bobby Brown, Emma Wickham, Connor Clark, Jamila Prowse, Alli Beddoes and Matt Weston. For the purpose of this publication, Sandra Trienekens made a selection from this report to give an insight into the intentions of the programme, the experiences of the participants, the process and the reflections that resulted from it.

The full report *Who's doing the washing up?* can be found at: https://re-imagine-europe.eu/resources_item/whos-doing-the-washing-up/

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Takeover: Inventing Structures with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018. Photo by Eric Wangel

Communal Lunches. Lighthouse Brighton, 2019. Photo by Lara Antoine

With the programme *Who's doing the washing up?*, curated by Eva Rowson, Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse set out to explore questions such as: If we could rethink our organisation what would it look and feel like if all the workers had a voice in how the activities, organisations, buildings are re-imagined, and then sustained, on an everyday, practical, in-use basis? Could change be enacted and sustained with the input of everyone who would ultimately be making it happen practically: Who cleans up afterwards? For Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse *Who's doing the washing up?* was an earnest attempt to re-imagine how they are organised, how they use their buildings, work with people, use budgets, develop programme activities and administer decisions, and also actually to change the infrastructures they work in, in order to not reproduce old models, narratives and values under a veil of innovation or hospitality.

As part of the *Who's doing the washing up?* programme Eva Rowson commissioned Barcelona-based artist and educator Jordi Ferreiro to develop two interventions, one at Bergen Kunsthall and one at Lighthouse in Brighton. At Bergen Kunsthall, Ferreiro collaborated in August and November 2018 with Siv Bryn, Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås

and Johanne Hauge Gjerland and other members of Unge Kunstkjennere (UKK) to explore how an arts organisation can accommodate self-directed areas that give space to different voices and actions. The UKK is the young people's association at Bergen Kunsthall, who meet regularly with an aim to make contemporary art more accessible to their peers and to give young people their own voice in contemporary art. In a series of exploratory meetings and activities, they planned and enacted a one-day takeover of Bergen Kunsthall to explore specific issues of accessibility, and ended up focusing on physical accessibility, and the main entrance of the building: Who is the Kunsthall really made for if the main entrance only has stairs?

In July 2019 Jordi Ferreiro co-hosted a week of communal lunches at Lighthouse as a follow-up. With guest lunch-hosts he asked what cultural organisations need to do if they genuinely want to become inclusive of different perspectives. The lunches were developed with Matt Weston from Brighton-based agency Spacemakers, and catered by Lalibela Ethiopian Kitchen, Brighton Cauldron, and Lerato Foods. The invited curators, artists and producers working in Brighton and beyond included Ben Messih, Lara Antoine, Boudicca, Chanel Stephens, Saygal Yusuf, Jamila Prowse and Amrita Dhallu. The *Who's doing the washing up?* programme title extended in Brighton to '– *and where's the sink?*' in response to Lighthouse's current aims to re-design the building to become more open and visible from the outside, and to acquire more appropriately designed spaces for the diverse activities, groups and tenants they host in the building.

Both interventions involved collaborations with workers and associates of Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse who are not usually involved in core curatorial or programming decisions or activities: the youth group, the operations teams and the tenants. Specifically, these two projects investigated the inner workings of the organisations to try to propose some new ways of reconfiguring existing organisational and architectural structures that would include new uses, voices and challenges.

Takeover: Inventing Structures with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018. Photo by Eric Wangel

Unge kunstkjennere exploring Bergen Kunsthall from top to bottom, workshop with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018. Photo by Eva Rowson

A shared exploration of openness and accessibility

Jordi Ferreiro

‘From my perspective, a good institution involves a very complex creation process to generate a new structure of limitations, needs and opportunities in a respectful way, without eliminating previous structures and dynamics but repositioning them or turning them around. I think it’s much easier to create something totally new and overwrite what was previously there, but it’s certainly not good practice. That is why we, already before *Who’s doing the washing up?*, engaged in discussions on the concept of “la musea” – as a kind of correction of the actual Spanish word for museum “el museo” – to imagine an institution that follows transfeminist policies. That is, an institution not governed by hierarchical regimes that perpetuate infrastructures from economic, military or colonial spheres (which many of us found ourselves working in at the time), but instead one that embraces horizontality and cooperative and collaborative ways of working that recognise and equally value all the different work tasks and people involved. To understand

management, coordination or production, as an artistic practice is a positioning to which I also feel very close. In fact, I always talk about the artist as a "hoster" who organises the table or a "master" of the board game, roles that organise a situation so that the others take the reins. To understand the role of the artist as an organiser is to escape the romantic idea of the "creator-genius", but how to do it when you arrive into an unfamiliar context on a parachute for only a few weeks? Here the guiding concept became "making a *flan* [a Spanish custard desert] without knowing the mould", meaning that you have to create something but you don't have a structure to do it, so it needs time to give it a shape, and sometimes it's not the shape you expected, and that turns into a really interesting shape, or into many shapes which surprise you, serendipities from which you learn. Like at Bergen Kunsthall it was also extremely serendipitous to discover that the Norwegian Blind Association shares the same building as the Kunsthall... I think in that moment our project started to take shape, and we knew that was a very special shape. Both the notions of "la musea" and "making a flan without knowing the mould' are collective reflections about the social importance of cultural institutions, and how these institutions consider citizenship. Who gets to participate in their culture, who gets excluded, what are the edges and boundaries of the institution's shape?'

Linnea Halveg, Lisa Holmås & Johanne Hauge Gjerland

Members of Bergen Kunsthall's UKK, actively involved in the *Washing Up* and the one-day takeover

'The first thing we did was to deconstruct the organisation and look at it from every corner by visiting the roof and the basement, the sound engineer, the backstage spaces and the woodworking room where the technicians work with artists to build what they need for the exhibitions and installations. And we ate lots of snacks! We also visited the Blind Association, because they rent part of the Kunsthall for their offices and meeting/event space. The people who are working there talked to us about different forms of blindness and visual impairments and different tools and aids people with a visual impairment use as support. We also talked about what's important to remember when working with blind people and how society is or isn't accessible to blind people – a lot of things you don't think about when you're not blind. Physical accessibility quickly became our focus after this. Back at the Kunsthall, we made a giant map of the things we had learnt and we looked at how we could connect these things in a takeover of the Kunsthall in some way. The main entrance of Bergen Kunsthall is not accessible for those with a disability, or those not able to carry a stroller up the stairs; they will need to use the side entrance, but only few people know its there. When Jordi came back in November, we decided that during the take-over, we would close the front entrance to the Kunsthall and make the ramped door at the side of the building the main entrance for the day. There we took away the dust, put down carpets and made it nice place to come into and re-did the signage so people would understand how to get into the building. Since the exhibitions were closed that day, most of the people were coming to Landmark to eat and there were a lot of families with small children. We thought that the side-entrance would only make the Kunsthall more accessible for people in wheelchairs, but it turned that the parents with small children, prams and pushchairs were grateful for the ramped entrance too. We invited the people into our gallery space where we had maps for people to write down their thoughts on accessibility. We talked with them about how accessible the Kunsthall is, how it's designed, and who for, and how they would change the design of the Kunsthall if they could. The children were playing in the galleries

and the whole space had a different, social feel during the day. During Jordi's first visit in August, we started the workshop by making a giant plastic "building" together inside the Kunsthall, using thin plastic sheets and tape. It was a way to design a building together which could move and change. Once we'd made the structure, with different rooms, we used an electric fan to inflate it and it was big enough for us to sit inside. We did a similar thing on the takeover dag – which the children thought was wonderful – and projected a picture of the Kunsthall on the outside surface to suggest a dynamic potential. By closing the main entrance, we made a lot of people think about the access to the Kunsthall andwho is actually included in this "main" in the "main entrance" – and who actually is instantly marginalized from the main because they can't use the main entrance. The most obvious outcome from the takeover was making visible the lack of accessibility for wheelchair users and the difficult colours in the Kunsthall for those with reduced sight. This is not something Bergen Kunsthall can solve easily in the architecture since the building is protected as Norwegian heritage. But what our conversations also demonstrated is that many people felt that art galleries are not meant or available for everyone, because the idea and feeling tied to the gallery stereotypically belong to a specific group of people. When we asked for a solution to this, people often responded that they wanted an inviting space where they could just be, meet up. Sounds simple enough but the question then becomes: How exactly can a gallery become a place people just want to meet and stay in without losing focus on its main goal: presenting art?'

Lara Antoine

Speaker at one of the communal lunches during Ferreiro's residency at Lighthouse, former participant in Lighthouse's Viral programme, and independent video maker, writer, founder and editor of online media platform AVRA

'During the lunches we explored how we can use Lighthouse as a welcoming space for the local community both in-house and beyond. I was intrigued when I heard all of the doors would be open throughout the course of the week, because Lighthouse is easy to walk past, not many people know about it or where it is. So, I was interested to find out what that looked like and how the public would react as they walked past. With the tenants we had lunch together and we spoke about potential possibilities that could improve the physical state of the building. From dropping the main wall back to addressing the question of the effect of the layout of the room on the intimacy and comfort for the audiences we invite into our spaces. We spoke a lot about "navigating (hostile) institutions" by focusing on issues around race and young people. What stood out for me were the ideas around programmes for young people aimed at keeping them involved in the long-term, rather than using them for a short time with little to no pay before replacing them. Our talks during the week also shone some light on other ways of being open than those that necessarily mean having the front door wide open all the time. We talked about the impact of having a closed-door space for feminist women, gender non-binary, lesbian and queer-identified people in the Devil's Dyke Network. To be open means more than just opening the doors. It means being there for young people, helping them realise their potential rather than just teaching them. It means being an organisation that listens and supports communities who seem to have een overlooked. Lighthouse is already good in providing a professional community space that supports young creatives outside the music industry. Brighton is very music-focused, so as an artist, especially a young artist, it's not easy to find a space for you to be welcomed in. It's even more difficult if you aren't at university. So, it would be a great place for young

people to try new ideas, host workshops and meet like-minded people (all of which Viral did) even if it's just a short-term or one-off. For people who are into film, it would be useful to have a space to screen and reflect on their latest films. Or have a 3-day pop-up residency for a young emerging artist. It would be great to have a space as a testing ground for our ideas. However, that comes with a potential risk in terms of finances and resources. These are the doors that seem to be closed for young people in Brighton. There are several "takeaways" from the conversations, such as "work *with* people not *for* people", having more public moments leads to more visibility, knowing the right language improves the way in which people perceive you, listen to the people you wish to reach, provide the infrastructure to accommodate ways to move forward, and increase the openness of the physical space – without forgetting that being open can mean having a space with a closed door!'

Emma Wickham
Head of operations at Lighthouse

'What came from asking the question "who's doing the washing up? And where's the sink?" is a change in vibe within the team through asking the question over a period of time and it seeping in and the question being championed by Eva. It led to a great feeling of pride in our work and a boost to team moral. Through asking the question, we thought about and respected ours and others' everyday work tasks and every person that goes in to making that task happen... and this came over time. This has been a very positive change and our language around our work tasks has definitely changed since. Talking about certain tasks as boring or a chore is now a rarity. It really helps towards feeling you are part of something worthwhile and you are all working together toward a positive goal – and that's priceless really. What also struck me was how this programme was different in that it was asking questions not only from within but out loud to the public, about how we are working or how we are feeling and how we would like to improve or change. And in that way, it felt inclusive and honest.'

Eva Rowson

'At a time of constantly hearing "opening up" as a methodology for arts organisations to become more inclusive, accessible, diverse and welcoming of "hard to reach" audiences, I found Jamila was asking different questions during the lunch session she co-hosted with Amrita: Who is deciding what this opening up looks like and for whom? Why does the conversation about how to be more accessible always feel like the answers are already written before the questions are even asked? And does anyone in these institutions actually really care or want to take responsibility for the difficult conversations and organisational (and personal) self-reflections, which come from genuinely changing the way we think about access and inclusivity? Jamila and Amrita worked through different constellations of care they had personally experienced to propose strategies of caring for collaborators, friends, other workers, and to look after our own mental health when we start asking the questions in our institutions which no one else is asking. That was inspiring. That is the kind of questioning that should also stretch beyond the re-imagining, after the revolutionary moment has happened: Who's doing the washing up *now*?'

Unge kunstkjennere, workshop with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018. Photo by Eva Rowson

Who is doing the washing up now? And tomorrow?

Jordi Ferreiro pointed out that real transformation in a project of one, three or even twelve months is unlikely. A true transformation of imagination will only happen over an extended period. In his experience, effecting real re-imagining and real change in institutional dynamics requires making space for long-term changes. Actions that only last a few days, after which the organisation quickly returns to its usual dynamics, are not enough. What artists, educators and cultural agents in general can do is submit proposals for other ways of working. Now at Bergen Kunsthall all workers involved in an exhibition are acknowledged in the exhibition credits. Naming and acknowledging every worker equally in a space that was previously reserved for full-time staff or curators, has made a difference for the Kunsthall in 're-imagining' the acknowledgement of all the work involved. It's a promising beginning for how these acknowledgments could also probe and inspire further thinking of who has internal agency, who gets paid what and on what kind of contracts. Bergen Kunsthall is currently commissioning re-design work for its wheelchair-unfriendly front entrance, in conversation with disability consultants.

At Lighthouse, the team are now working on developing their public signage for access around the building, and on an accessibility document that further defines and implements what being a safe, inclusive space entails. The programme team has taken on a share of operational work such as sitting at the reception desk. Inspired by the communal lunches during Jordi Ferreiro's week, Lighthouse continues the lunches with tenants and local catering charities to create social meeting spaces for all tenants, and now also organise catering for their room hires through local food charities.

What is interesting in Jordi Ferreiro's interventions in Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse is how they draw our attention to the interrelations between architectural, physical accessibility and the wider issue of inclusion. During the interventions, it became manifest that concepts such as inclusion, openness, accessibility and hospitality have an architectural, physical element, but are in essence cultural challenges. It's easy to employ an architect or designer to fix the obvious things, such as knocking down a wall to create more openness, or decorating a room to make it appear more hospitable, but one might still not be dealing with the roots of the problem. The core question remains: what do institutions have to do to open up culturally. How do they make sure that conversations with partners, artists and audiences, and the shared re-imaginings that emerge from those, become actions as well as part of the institution's overall strategy? How do they keep listening to what is needed? What information needs to be gathered from feedback initiatives? How can they continue to learn from 'opening the door'? The re-imagining at Lighthouse made it clear that an organisation's accessibility is about open-ness as public-ness, and anti-racism,[1] as well as about providing for closed and semi-closed activities and spaces, as public spaces may quickly become only public for some people. Openness can thus also mean having closed-off spaces to enable organisations and groups other than the usual to have a space where they can work and develop their ideas. *Who's doing the washing up?* led those involved to experience that, for all the outreach work about bringing in audiences, art organisations also need to think about the people working for them. 'Reaching in' is just as important as 'reaching out'. In both, the ability to listen and the possibility to be actively involved proved to be key.

[1] https://lighthouse.org.uk/anti-racism-plan

And still, we move

A Reflection on Pier Residencies at Lighthouse

How can an arts organisation do more to carve out space for specific community groups and individuals who identify as coming from marginalised backgrounds? The Pier Residency at Lighthouse was an experiment to carve out such a space. This text is a journal that has been written in collaboration with the artists that took part in the residency, as well as artists working with Lighthouse as a result of the call, and the Lighthouse team and trustees. With contributions by Elijah, Amaal Said, Munotida Chinyanga, Erin James, Elsa Monteith, Sian Habel-Aili, and Simone Carty.

How can artists get the chance to execute big ideas if you haven't been given the chance to execute small ones? Residencies are supported spaces to that next step. – Elijah

Photo previous page
Munotida Chinyanga. Photo by Erin James

Top line, left to right: Sian Habell-Aili, Alli Beddoes, Elsa Monteith. Bottom line, left to right: Erin James, Munotida Chinyanga, Elijah. Screenshot.

In the spring of 2020, the uprising and strength of the Black Lives Matter Movement took hold of people's attention across the globe. Protests and tireless campaigns shone a spotlight on racism and racial violence in ways we have not seen in this generation.

It is nearly a year since Lighthouse released the Anti-Racist action plan to begin work on adapting methods in which the organisation operates and address how we work to be more inclusive. These issues are by no means new. But what is new is the attention and the space that has informed everyone to address the language and systems played out in cultural institutions. As a cultural organisation, we offer a public service. Therefore we should be accountable to everyone, and we should work continuously to provide space in these institutions that are genuinely safe.

It is an understatement to say that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the cultural and creative industries across the world. Yet amongst the devastation, there is a renewed recognition of the effects and the power that art and culture can have on society. Now, more than ever, we must take this as our chance to address and dismantle the things that do not work for everyone.

It is important to articulate that Lighthouse is a predominantly white, cis-gender and able-bodied organisation. However, the team and the board have a deep-rooted belief that what we do will have a more significant impact if our charity reflects the city and the sector in which we work to bring different voices and experiences to the team and programme. We recognise the need to do more, to make real and permanent changes in the organisation.

Last year, we worked as a team alongside the Board of Trustees to set out an Anti-Racist Action Plan. In amongst all the flurry of statements of solidarity and support from other organisations, we committed ourselves as a team to dismantle systemic inequality and to build a fairer cultural sector for the future – to do this, action was needed and urgently. There are key points in the action plan which held long and short term targets.
We addressed the language used, the occupancy of the building, our team and recruitment and our programme. As a charity and arts organisation, our mission is to increase the diversity of arts leaders and programming by supporting artists, producers and curators to develop their practice, but recognise the need to do more. To prioritise and drive change for our cultural landscape.

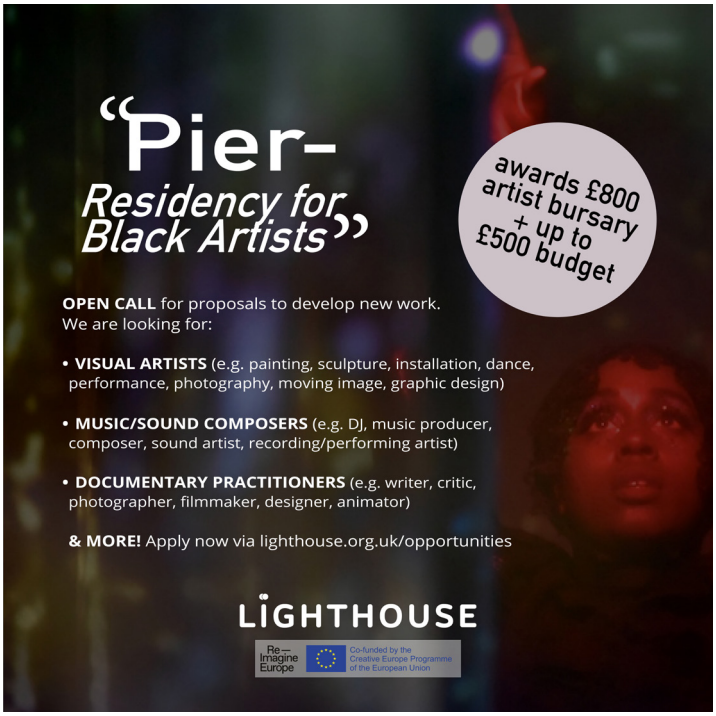
This work started immediately; thanks to our commitment to Re-Imagine Europe commissions and residencies remaining, we were able to implement the space and funds for Black creators. We took the pandemic as an opportunity to create *Pier – Residencies for Black Artists*, a three-week collaborative 'artist residency at home' with an £800 bursary (per person) that was awarded to three Black[1] artists/creatives. The opportunity was for artists, practitioners, producers, and technologists to expand their practice, research, and develop ideas and methodologies with remote support from the Lighthouse team and our co-conspirators. The outcome of the residencies are now being developed to inform commissions of new work in 2021.

This residency programme was initiated to be a home-based opportunity to connect with the creative community and develop artistic projects to acknowledge that many people experienced barriers to participation before the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to be affected by isolation stemming from structural inequalities. We particularly welcomed applications from disabled artists who might benefit from working remotely/flexibly.

The response to the call-out was extensive, with over fifty artists from all over the world putting their work forward. We used the usual platforms to promote the opportunity, which helped widen the reach, and artists who had never encountered Lighthouse before made applications.

The selection process was carried out with Elijah and Lighthouse representatives Alli Beddoes and Sian Habell-Aili. They met with ten artists to discuss their practice and how they'd use their residency time. In the end they selected Amaal Said, Simone Carty, and Munotida Chinyanga.

[1] Following discussions with our Black peers and collaborators together with our reading and research, we define black as African or Caribbean descent. This opportunity was for anyone whose heritage includes African or Caribbean descent.



Open Call – Residency at Home for Black artists. Screenshot

Having worked at Lighthouse as Associate Artistic Director from 2017 – 2018, Elijah brought knowledge and experience of working from, with and in response to Lighthouse and the programme. He referred to his role as a bridge between artist and organisation, and was clear that everyone that took time to apply for the opportunity should have the time for one-to-one feedback. Elijah recalls the reduced capacity of the Lighthouse team, so taking on the 'people part' freed up the programme team to support the artists during the residency. 'It's not possible, in any time, never mind a pandemic, to support people and deliver the programme AND feedback to the artists and talk through the sensitive things. We knew we wouldn't get things 100% right and that this opportunity didn't come from a place of perfection, so working through things in public was a risk but one that adapted and responded.'

Erin James, a Lighthouse Young Creatives alumni and a photographer, designer and editor based in Brighton, runs Tough Cookie, a business and magazine edition that focuses on campaigning for Black rights. She was invited to document the artists on their residency and says: 'It was refreshing to see action at that time while other organisations were making statements. The actual investment in Black people was (and is) more powerful than words. This residency that carved out a specific space for Black creators made a step to normalise calling for Black artists. It was a shift and one that needs to continue if we are to make any difference.'

Open Calls are a process that Lighthouse has worked with many times, but we are conscious that this is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as an organisation, we receive applications from artists worldwide and artists we might not encounter in our

research and development. On the other hand, open calls require labour and energy. There is inevitable collateral damage where some artists are unsuccessful in their application and it can quickly become the opposite of an Open Call, and the door is firmly closed.

Lighthouse is keen to find a balance needed to reduce the number of open calls for projects and work with the talent that we would like to support. Where open calls feel like the best-suited approach, we would like to ensure there are opportunities extended to all applicants, beyond the primary offer (exchange sessions, invitations to workshops, sharing funding opportunities, feedback). Elsa Monteith, a Lighthouse Young Creatives alumni who is an artist, writer and curator, observes that Open Calls have a value in that a creative practice changes or adapts over time and that they do have a place in the sector. We continue to ponder on how to keep the door open for opportunity and reduce the labour of constant applications.

Amaal Said. Photo by Erin James

Amaal Said is a Danish-born Somali photographer, and poet, based in London, whose work is concerned with storytelling and how best she can connect with people to document their stories. She stated: 'I want to work on a poetry and photography project about mental health and intergenerational trauma and what it's like not having the language for it in my family. The work will concern family in both Kenya and United Kingdom and hopes to capture a conversation that occurs across this distance about mental health. I want to work on 3-4 poems about my own experience and the experiences of my family members and to also work on photographing them.'

Simone Carty. Photo by Erin James

Simone Carty is a 28 year old music producer, sound designer & filmmaker. She stated: ‘I wish to craft a self-produced 3 track EP utilising my skills with film and sound design to tell a story about my personal journey towards self-love. The sound design and visuals will be entwined with songs performed by me. The sounds will be a mix of abstract, dreamy and ethereal sound bites with foley. The visuals, as well as creating a sensorial experience through merging sound and visuals together, will also depict the lyrical storyline of each song and journal entry. All art forms will work with each other and be a fluid performance.’

Munotida Chinyanga is an anti-disciplinary practitioner creating work through direction, sound design and international collaboration. Her practise explores how theatre, performance and sound art can facilitate the making or bringing together of a community, especially in environments that do not have a constant connection to the arts. She stated: ‘I want to investigate ways in which digital technology, social media and sound can support cross-cultural dialogue and the making of new communities, right from your computer across Europe. How can we facilitate conversation between strangers? I propose creating interactive performance that takes place on an online platform, in which I facilitate conversations and dialogues between strangers using a similar structure to that of Netflix show *Love is Blind*. However this is not with the purpose to find love but to connect and share with people you may not encounter with in your everyday. This will experiment with digital technology, and headphone art.’

Reflection

Amaal Said: ‘The Lighthouse residency changed the direction of my work in the best possible way. It came at a time when I needed it the most. I didn’t have the language to describe the project and the time to sit down and do the work. The three-week residency allowed me that time. I knew I wanted to do something about mental health and family archiving, but the conversations I had with others and the reading I did guided me towards developing greater understanding and empathy.’

Amaal Said: ‘What I thought would be an exercise in going back to the archive and filling in what I deemed missing, stories and other archive materials, turned into my interpretation of what was missing through poetry. I didn’t have to find proof or evidence. My testimony of the stories that had been passed down felt enough for the project. It wasn’t only about the family photo album and going back to it, but the ritual itself of bringing it out and talking through family memories together. The guidance of the Lighthouse team was a blessing. Knowing I had the support whenever I needed it gave me confidence. I never felt alone. Taking the project further is a huge aim. The residency gave me the most amazing start and I’m excited to keep doing the reading, continuing the conversation with people about how they document themselves and their families and writing even more poems about the stories that have been passed down but haven’t been recorded yet.’

Munotida Chinyanga: ‘The residency gave me the time and space to access my creativity during a time when it was not even something I could consider. And because it was at home, it allowed me to find ways and engage with behaviours to form a creative space at home. Because most of my work before lockdown required to travel, and so my inspirations came from different communities and the countries I visited, I found it hard to get inspired. Still, this residency allowed me to reform my space and find that balance. I have met artists and mentors who have inspired me, challenged my creative practice, and introduced me to other contemporary methods. Not to mention the fee – to be paid to research and think is a privilege, and I am grateful. The budget given has also allowed me to up-skill myself with the equipment purchased, which has led to so many other personal creative achievements. Even though my research idea may not have gone to plan or become what I wanted it to be, I think it is important to mention that the broader effects of being a part of this residency have been virtual, if not pivotal. From managing my practice, managing and transforming my creative space, to connecting and exchanging practices and to finding ways I can see small creative personal challenges from home.’

Elijah: ‘The Pier Residency process helped me to work out where to put my energy. Over the years, I have been in positions in organisations where I can support people to do work, which has brought a privilege that I am committed to directing in positive ways. I have worked with organisations and institutions beyond my role in music, and I could do that. This project has helped me think through the balance of that and how that would play out in busier times. I don’t believe that this work can be down to charities and organisations to do this and that individuals in a privileged position need to seek out ways to support too.’

Munotida Chinyanga. Photo by Erin James

Elsa Monteith: ‘For everybody to feel like they belong in this space, we must choose to make art accessible and approachable. Whilst it can feel like you have to use “industry” words and vocabulary to be taken seriously in the art world, it’s important to use language that everybody can understand and relate to. So again, it comes back to representation, accessibility, support, and inclusion. We must platform the marginalised voices in our community and listen to those who have been doing the work without recognition. I spoke to an artist about another project I was working on with Lighthouse. She said there should be “nothing about us, without us”, a sentiment to carry forward when we talk about the future of the residency programme and callouts in general.’

Erin James: ‘The callouts for opportunities and jobs across the sector tend to mention how they want to support minorities within minorities. While the Pier Residency was for Black creatives, there was also a note that this included disabled and queer Black artists – this is good, but there need to be clear reasons for addressing distrust and the idea of being tokenistic. It is essential to be open and give considered reasons for specific ideas

and use of language. These ideas and dialogues are constantly shifting, so it is noticed when paragraphs are lifted from previous opportunities and added in, seemingly, as an afterthought.'

Going forward

The Pier Residency format was experimentation into how an arts organisation can do more to carve out space for specific community groups and individuals who identify as coming from marginalised backgrounds. We were successful in doing that and can see that other spaces are also bringing similar models to their programme. We have learned much from the process and intend to replicate it as an opportunity annually.

Munotida talked about the importance of positioning the interview as a conversation with a balance of formalities and space to meander through thoughts. She says it was one of her favourite interviews to date and allowed her space to talk through her ideas without an established hierarchy. Elsa and Erin, as alumni of the Lighthouse Young Creatives programme, note how Lighthouse aims to offer a horizontal and non-transactional environment which enables artists to build ongoing relationships and trust with an organisation that can lead to continuous collaborations as the individuals grow and develop their practise.

Through the assessment of the applications, we noted strong connections with the artist's works and with people who had not met before. We set up three online networking sessions for all the artists who applied to meet each other and talk about their work. This sense of community was strong, artists from Ghana, the US, Egypt, the UK and beyond exchanged ideas, methodologies, encouragement and ways of coping and thriving creatively through the pandemic. It's something we wish to develop in terms of using the Lighthouse platform to connect people and present their work in more ways. The Lighthouse Communal Lunches curated by Eva Rowson as part of the Re-Imagine Europe programme were noted as the most powerful way to bring people together. In times outside of the pandemic restrictions this is a format that we'd bring to the Open Call structure where artists can meet and not be asked questions for a feedback form, but one that is natural and comes with ease.

And still, we move

Change is difficult, but it is possible – it requires the privileged to both give something back but also give something up.

How do we continue the learning and listening with other organisations in the sector and keep the attention and energy that still drives these changes?

How do we keep the mission at Lighthouse going beyond the people here now driving forward with this work?

How does this learning carry on through the process rather than being driven by the burning passion inside individuals?

How can other organisations and individuals adapt similar ways of working to address the vital need for change?

Building an International Audience at GRM

Interview with François J. Bonnet

by Arie Altena

In November 2020 Arie Altena interviewed François J. Bonnet, composer, musician and director of INA GRM in Paris. They discussed the ways in which GRM interacts with and builds its international audience. GRM, short for Groupe des Recherches Musicales, was founded by composer Pierre Schaeffer in 1958. It was the successor to the GRMC – arguably the world's first electronic music studio, and the place where *musique concrète* was developed – which he founded in 1948. Since 1975 GRM has been part of the French national audiovisual institute INA, and is concerned with the creation, research and conservation of electroacoustic music and recorded sound. It develops innovative tools, presents concerts, and organises workshops and residencies.

Photo previous page
Acousmonium, Paris, 2020. Photo by Didier Allard

Acousmonium at Elevate Festival, Graz, 2020. Photo by Clara Wildberger

Arie Altena: This interview is intended for a publication on audience development, so I'd like to ask you about the audience-building strategies you use at GRM...

François J. Bonnet: I'm always cautious when discussing audience development, because of the marketing language that is often used. Sometimes I feel the methodology of audience development may lead you to lose the scope of what you are trying to accomplish as a cultural organisation. There's a danger of subconsciously sublimating your goals to commerce, to the idea that you need to grow just because you need to grow. Having said that, I think that we can reach a wider audience with what we offer at GRM, with the music we defend. We can reach curious people who don't know about us yet. We don't feel the need to target a mainstream audience, but we can touch more people than we do. Worldwide, we can reach many more people, especially young people, and we can change more lives a little bit. Because this is ultimately what it is about: reaching more people whose lives can be changed by what they see and listen to. We need to find strategies to grow in that respect. It's not growing merely because you need to grow, but because you believe in what you're trying to do and that this experience can be shared.

Arie Altena: Maybe it's not so much about growing as building and strengthening a network? Connecting people with certain interests, people who don't belong to the same sociologically or culturally defined groups. The amateur musician with 16 years of classical piano training, the computer nerd, and the 20-year-old outsider: all three of them might be blown away by a new Okkyung Lee piece. You could develop an audience through producing new work, and making sure it gets out there. The work, the music is then a focus point. Because indeed, I agree with you that there are plenty of curious people, and you need to create opportunities for them to make discoveries.

François J. Bonnet: Exactly. We don't go to concerts to mingle, we go to concerts to discover. Creating a welcoming space is very important, because it makes discovery possible. But this is not an issue of opening a café next to your concert hall or museum. For example, with our festival *Présences électronique*, we don't try to attract people with the 'socialising' aspect of the concert. The concerts are seated, they are presented in the radio building, where there's a strict protocol. The strategy we use is that we programme artists from different fields; we mixed up the artists. So we work on the content, we share with the audience artists we all value, and who may come from different cultural worlds. That makes discovery possible. And it worked, because little by little the audience took shape around the festival itself. Now we manage to have sold-out concerts without big headliners. Of course this is only possible in a city like Paris, where you can have an audience of 800 for experimental music – if you have the trust of the audience.

틈 / *Teum (The Silvery Slit)* by Okkyung Lee, Sonic Acts Festival, Amsterdam, 2019. Photo by Pieter Kers

Arie Altena: One of the things you've initiated recently is the Spectres books that you publish bilingually in collaboration with Shelter Press, and are distributed internationally. How did that come about, is it a way of reaching out to a new audience?

François J. Bonnet: We have a tradition of book publishing at GRM, and GRM has worked with publishers throughout its existence. GRM itself was built around the theory of *musique concrète*. The second life of GRM started in 1966 with the publication of Pierre Schaeffer's *Traité des objets musicaux* (Treatise on Musical Objects). In the 1970s and 1980s, we had a series of books, the Cahiers recherche/musique, which were more like series of articles. After that we published a series of monographs of composers, the Portraits polychromes. That was a nice initiative. When I took over as head of GRM, I thought it might be a good moment to start something new with publishing. I wanted to do it a bit differently though, and learn from the successful and the less successful aspects of the earlier series. I liked the format of the Portrait polychromes, but the less successful aspect was that we were printing and distributing the books ourselves. We were in fact doing everything ourselves, but lacked the necessary know-how in book distribution, for example. I felt this was like academics who write a book, and when the book is done, assume that the job is done, forgetting that part of the job is also to bring it to the people. Another bad academic habit is churning out massive books and writing long, overly complex articles that are aimed only at specialists in a university network. And the authors, although academics, aren't necessarily the best theoreticians in a given field. Complexity isn't always necessary. And sometimes a text seems complicated just because it's poorly written. A text on music or sound doesn't need to be complex to be relevant. I looked at such academic publications and thought: what's the opposite of that? The opposite is a well-conceived, well-curated, and well-distributed book, published by a well-equipped, professional publisher that has a network, and can reach the right audience. We're currently collaborating with Shelter Press, a nice, efficient publisher. The people at Shelter Press are very good friends, and we can really work well together. We publish short texts to address an audience that maybe had given up on musical theory because articles on the subject were too long and over-complex, or didn't always seem relevant to the contemporary context.

Arie Altena: Who selects the authors for the Spectres books?

François J. Bonnet: We find and select the people ourselves. We don't send out a call for contributions. We work on a theme, and find writers for essays, as well as musicians to interview. We give specific instructions to our authors, we ask them to write on a certain topic, but, in the end, they are quite free to write whatever they like. We don't supervise or censor them; we only channel the content. For example, I invited Drew Daniel of the experimental group Matmos, because I know he's a specialist in English and French literature, and knows a lot about Georges Bataille. I thought that Drew could write something great on *musique concrète* and heterology (a concept developed by Bataille). We solicit renowned artists and writers like philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy or sound-recording legend Chris Watson, but also other interesting people who the audience might not know about. An example is Espen Sommer Eide, a bright mind and a great composer, but who is not so well known worldwide. He has written a beautiful text on Jakob von Uexküll and field recording.

Arie Altena: Why did you choose to make the Spectres books bilingual? The French and English texts are printed back to back in the books.

François J. Bonnet: The idea was to make the book a desirable object, to put great care into its manufacture. We decided to make it bilingual, so we can reach more people. English is the easiest way to reach the maximum amount of people, as it's the *lingua franca*. But, of course, it's also raises questions about possible cultural imperialism. We do the book in French, because we're French. We want to reach the largest possible audience with the technical and material means that we have.

Recollection GRM series by Editions Mego and Spectres publications. Photo by Jean-Baptiste Garcia

Arie Altena: How was the first Spectres book received?

François J. Bonnet: The first book was quite a success; we sold around 2500 copies, which for this kind of publication is very good. It was well distributed, and you could find it in very different places, for instance, also in synthesizer shops. The readers were very excited. I think it's because the format of a series of short but intense texts that you can really dig into, works well. It's also a very nice mix of texts, there is a range of tones, from philosophy to interviews and more diary-like texts. I think that works well. We try to bring interesting people together; we curate the content with care. The idea is to bring people to the theory without compromising by simplifying things. And it's a pretty dry book in the sense that it's only text, no illustrations.

Arie Altena: That so many copies were sold confirms for me that there is an audience for this kind of music theory, an audience that includes modular synth makers, young people interested in electronic music, as well as people involved with electronic music, composition, serious music and contemporary art. I sometimes have the impression, but I might be mistaken, that the approach that you've been pursuing at GRM has historically been quite a French affair. It was something that people knew about, but they could only really access the theory and cultural context if they could read French. In that sense these books also share a form of electronic music, and a French approach to composition and sound with a more international public. GRM's legacy has certainly become much more visible to an international audience over the past few years.

François J. Bonnet: Indeed. We started to receive a lot of feedback from people from all over the world. They were looking for information about INA GRM, what we were doing, about the software we were developing, our history. My predecessors at GRM realised that our organisation was known worldwide. And I'm not sure that this was very consciously acknowledged at GRM before the late 1990s or early 2000s. GRM certainly had an international reputation before this, but that was more within an academic network. Only later did a younger, non-academic, let's say freer audience, find its way to GRM. The need to address everyone was on the table from then on. We're probably the world's oldest research centre for electronic music that still exists, so we understood that we had a role to play. A lot of people claim to be influenced by Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry and all the others who are associated with GRM. Using English is a practical way to address this vast community. Having a common language is extremely handy. And now we are maybe more famous outside France than in France.

Arie Altena: What do you see as the function of the weekly radio programmes that you make for France Musique?

François J. Bonnet: We have a long history of making radio programmes at GRM. Of course GRM was born at the radio. It was part of national radio and television for a long time, before being attached to INA. I think it's still very important to broadcast experimental music on national 'hertzian' radio. Pioneers of *musique concrète* like François Bayle or Eliane Radigue will tell you that they discovered this music through listening to radio.

Arie Altena: Couldn't it just be a podcast?

François J. Bonnet: Hertzian radio still allows you to hit on something by chance, which could change your life. Suppose you're listening to a radio station on a Sunday night, and you hear something you don't know, because it is not part of your cultural milieu, and you're hit by it, that is still 'gold'. Hertzian radio can reach people who didn't know they were interested in this particular type of music, who discover it by accident, are attracted to it and inspired by it. Hertzian radio allows for random discovery. It has become harder to stumble across something on the Internet, because people don't really explore the Internet anymore, instead, they are fed by recommendations through social networks. Secondly, radio is still a support for artists. National hertzian radio generates real money for artists. Spotify doesn't and neither do podcasts.

Arie Altena: Could you tell me something about your choice of artists who developed work within the Re-Imagine Europe project? You had Kali Malone, Okkyung Lee, and Lucy Railton, among others.

François J. Bonnet: There was no set format. The project was a way to move the boundaries a bit for the artists as well as for us at GRM. We wanted to do long-term projects with three-week residences, and work with people who might not be regarded as acousmatic electroacoustic composers, but whose work is interesting in this context.
The idea was to create an intersection between their work and the sort of music we defend at GRM, and instigate a sort of shift. That Okkyung and Lucy are both cellists is a coincidence, both were very interested in expanding the territory of their playing. I knew that they are very open-minded, and they both have a strong personal approach to playing and composition.
It would be worthwhile for them, I thought, to have time to develop a new project. Kali is more used to working acousmatically, and she was really into our multichannel system. Composer Marja Ahti also had a residency with us, among others.. Re-Imagine Europe gave us the opportunity to invite European artists to come to Paris and discover GRM. This is always difficult because Paris is so expensive. We extended our network with people who were already familiar with our approach and with whom we wanted to work. It was a good opportunity.

Rehearsal Michèle Bokanowski on *Acousmonium*, Paris, 2020 . Photo by Didier Allard

Arie Altena: Was the collaboration with Editions Mego, which led to the Recollection GRM series, a way of exposing a new audience to GRM's music?

François J. Bonnet: Yes, but actually it was an initiative of Peter Rehberg from Editions MEGO. Editions MEGO was starting to set up a collection of sublabels. The trigger point was at the Kontraste Festival in Krems, Austria, which was curated by Sonic Acts. Our loudspeaker orchestra, the Acousmonium, was featured there in 2011. Peter Rehberg and Stephen O'Malley performed on our system. You'll remember that, as you announced the concert. Peter and Stephen had done a residency at GRM shortly before, so we had really got to know each other. Peter came up with the idea of doing vinyl releases with us. This was just before the resurgence of vinyl. I wasn't in charge of GRM at the time; Daniel Teruggi and Christian Zanési were. They didn't know Peter Rehberg and wondered what he wanted from us. I said, it's going to be good and interesting. They said, let's try just one. We released Pierre Schaeffer's *Le tièdre fertile* on vinyl. It's a later piece by Schaeffer, who never really supported his own work. I think it's a great piece, and it wasn't available for a long time. It was an opportunity to connect GRM's productions to a worldwide distribution system. When we sold the first 1000 records of *Le tièdre fertile*, the others at GRM were really pleasantly surprised. And when I started the Spectres books, years later, I used the lessons learned from the collaboration with Editions MEGO: find a good partner that you trust, that has the expertise and knowledge that you don't have in distribution, and that has a network with connections in the right places. MEGO was the perfect partner because the label was attracting a lot of people from the radical computer music scene, the hacker scene, the scene of young people interested in experimental music. This was an audience that was rediscovering gorgeous things from the past mostly through the Internet. And suddenly, through the *Recollection GRM* series, they had access to things they didn't know about, but which definitely had a major influence on the music they were listening to. I completely understand the success of the Recollection GRM series: it's well crafted and curated with great care. Stephen O'Malley made a superb layout for the sleeves. We're very careful not to flood the market. We do two to four re-issues a year. We're very proud of it, and I can say this because it was not my initiative, but Peter Rehberg's. Also, it was one of the earlier re-issue series on the market. Now there's almost too many of them.

Arie Altena: And GRM is still releasing CDs...

François J. Bonnet: It's a tradition at GRM to do the big box sets of CDs as well. I upheld that tradition. I did the Eliane Radigue CD box set, because it's important to compile an overview of the work of a groundbreaking composer. You don't attract a new audience with it. You make it for the people who already know it, and who are quite happy to pay 60 euros to have it all. To attract new people you need something else.

Arie Altena: You also started a series of vinyl releases with new pieces...

François J. Bonnet: We started a series of new pieces by both famous musicians like Jim O'Rourke, and lesser-known ones like Max Eilbacher. We wanted to go back to the idea of pieces, not albums. That is why we do split records. The Jim O'Rourke piece is 35 minutes, so that is one LP. But if a piece is around 20 minutes long, it takes up one side of a split LP.

I like to compare it to the Philips *Prospective 21 siècle* series from the late 1960s that also featured *musique concrète*, and the Wergo series of contemporary music, where you had works by several composers on one LP. It's a chance for people who buy an LP for a Lucy Railton composition to discover Max Eilbacher, and the other way around. If we commission a work, and during the concert, we think, wow, this is amazing, then we might release it on vinyl too. It's not that we release everything we commission. The vinyl release is really the cherry on top.

Arie Altena: *Would you agree that it is important to open up of the history of electronic music and look beyond the canonisation of certain figures? I have the impression that this is certainly happening with GRM's history. Besides the 'bigger' names of Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, Bernard Parmegiani, François Bayle, and maybe Luc Ferrari (who himself was some sort of an outsider at GRM), there is now much more attention for composers who worked at GRM throughout its existence. This includes composers who've worked at GRM who have an aesthetic or approach to music that was somehow different from let's say the 'classical acousmatic composition'.*

François J. Bonnet: At some point in GRM's history there was maybe the danger that 'GRM' was becoming synonymous with a specific type of academic electronic music. I think that was a generational thing. This can happen when you have a homogeneous group of people of roughly the same age, who've worked together for a long time and have too many shared values. Then, at one point, you might lose your connection with the rest of the world.
I think quite a few electronic music laboratories disappeared like that.

Arie Altena: *How important is it for GRM to push the boundaries of what you're doing?*

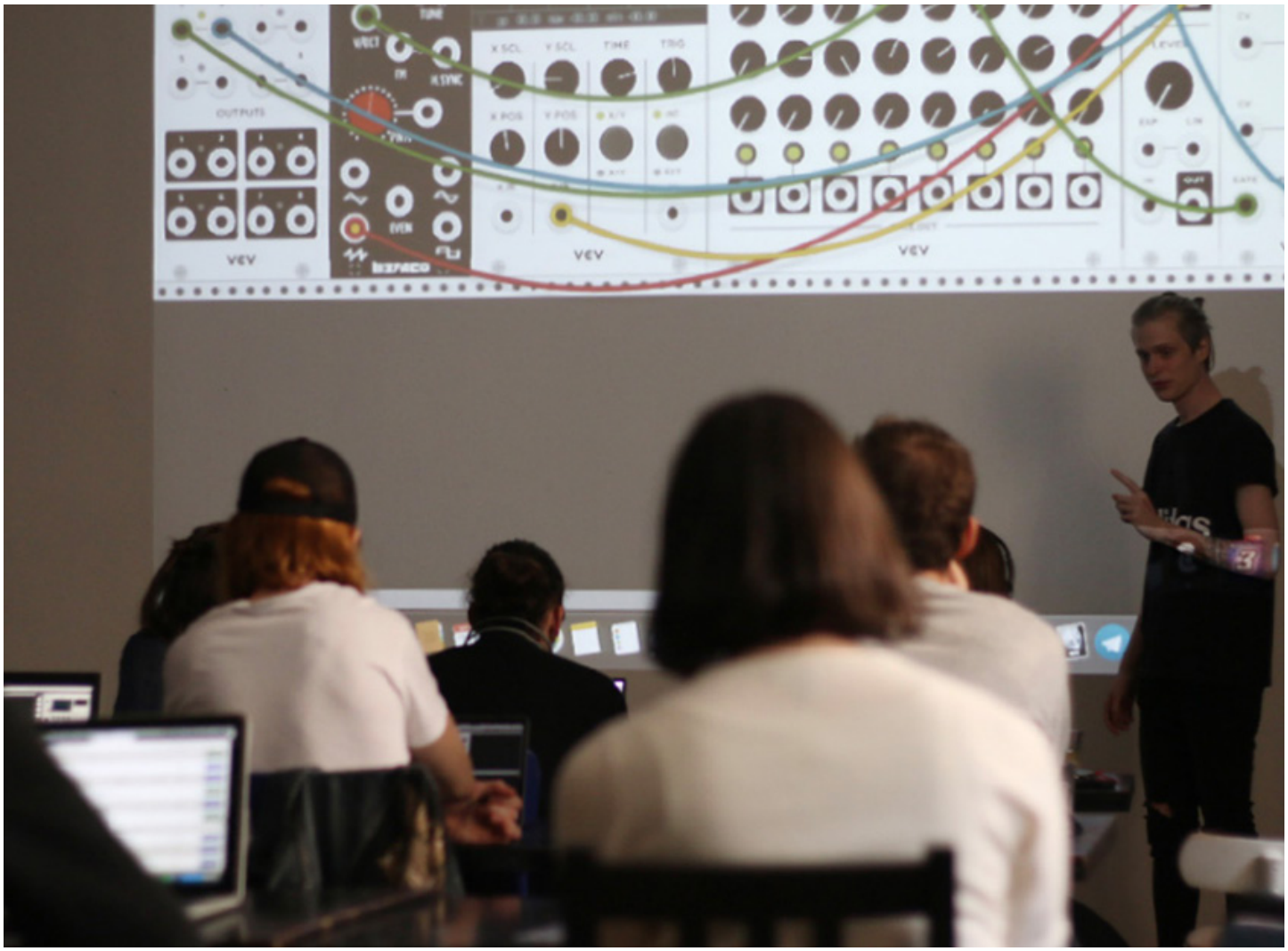
François J. Bonnet: I think it's fundamental. In the past, people sometimes had the idea that GRM was a bit like an ivory tower. But GRM has always been moving on in technology as well as in its approach to music and sound. It has never been purely a centre for acousmatic music. Acousmatic music is our specialty, and it's something we really claim and defend, but at GRM it has always been combined with many other approaches to sound. Of course we want to defend the idea of acousmatic music, and that music can be focused on the experience of listening, as well as on the qualities of sounds themselves. Attracting artists to this vortex nourishes us because it obliges us to just keep thinking about what we do. We don't have a recipe for doing music. We're constantly reinventing our approach to music and sound. It enables us to attract new artists and present their music to an audience in the wider world.

A Temporary Public

by Margarita Osipian

A workshop can act as a temporary social space that offers an agile and responsive format to address and respond to social and political changes. A workshop is also a means for cultural organisations to deepen relations with their existing audiences and connect to new ones. In this article, Margarita Osipian takes the Elevate Festival in Graz, Austria, and A4 in Bratislava, Slovakia, as case studies for examining how the format of workshops and informal education within a festival feeds into audience development. She interviewed Bernhard Steirer, Roland Oreski and Daniel Erlacher of Elevate Festival, and Slávo Krekovič and Ľudovít Nápoký of A4, to dive deeper into these questions.

Photo previous page
Elevate Festival 2020, *Workshop Decolonizing Technology*. Photo by Manuel Rieder



A4, Workshop *Modular Synthesis on VCV Rack* by Ondrej Spiritza, 2019. Photo by Léa Rosenfeld

> How can we envision, design, develop, and enjoy environments in which one learns 'with' someone else instead of 'from' or 'about' others, as Deleuze suggested? How can we invent, create, and compose 'spaces of encounter with signs' in which distinctive points 'renew themselves in each other, and repetition takes shape while disguising itself?' What would make these spaces different to the ones we have been forced to experience in the past?
>
> Florian Schneider, (Extended) Footnotes On Education [1]

Elevate Festival originally emerged from an event concept called Exit Space, a dance floor in a club where hundreds of people came to dance and talk to one another. Exit Space was initiated after a meeting between 27-year-old Daniel Erlacher, who was running the record label Widerstand Records, and 55-year-old Christian Wabl, a cofounder and activist from the Green Party in Graz who was inspired by the record label's link between (electronic) music and political content. This link reminded the older activist of a time when 'music not only accompanied the revolutionary potential of a society, but was an active part of it'.[2] The meeting between Erlacher and Wabl led to an event

concept that combined music and political discourse. The collaboration lasted for two years and produced six Exit Space events leading up to the first Elevate festival, which was organised in partnership with the Green Party Academy who provided the financial support to get everything off the ground.

The dance floor is understood as a space for resistance, thanks to, for instance, the work of Bogomir Doringer.[3] Doringer demarcates what he calls the 'dance of urgency'—something that arises 'from the emotions that occur in times of personal and collective crisis'.[4] For him, the collectivity formed on the dance floor can also extend beyond it, acting as a political body. Within festivals and cultural organisations, the dance floor is not the only space to form a political body—informal educational initiatives are also spaces for political and social engagement that facilitate the creation of a temporary public.

In opposition to the clearly demarcated (and often static) groups that exist within formal educational structures, workshops allow for a more agile and responsive relationship with an audience—allowing the audience to take shape around informal educational initiatives. This text takes the Elevate Festival in Graz, Austria, and A4 in Bratislava, Slovakia, as case studies for examining how the format of workshops and informal education within a festival feeds into audience development. What artistic approaches and tools are being used for audience development? How do you build and sustain a public through programming? During the quarantine, I interviewed Bernhard Steirer, Roland Oreski, and Daniel Erlacher of Elevate Festival, and Slávo Krekovič and Ľudovít Nápoký of A4, to dive deeper into these questions.

While Elevate and A4 have very different organisational structures, they both employ similar methods of audience development. They approach the relationships between workshops, the larger curatorial programme, and the communities they are addressing in a comparable way. A4 is an independent cultural centre focusing on contemporary forms of professional theatre, dance, music, film, visual art and new media. The centre organises more than 300 cultural, art, and social events each year, ranging from performances and movie screenings to exhibitions and workshops, as well as the annual NEXT festival for adventurous music and sound art. Elevate, on the other hand, is an annual interdisciplinary festival held over the course of four or five days in a variety of venues in Graz, which combines critical political discourse, contemporary music, and art.

In her article 'The Workshop and Cultural Production', Anja Groten conceives of workshops as a space between 'work and leisure' that offers a 'framework for social gathering, producing, and sharing knowledge'.[5] Particularly within the festival context, the workshop acts as a temporary social space that comes into being and takes shape in relation to the overarching theme of the festival or cultural programme. Workshops allow for the creation of a flexible space that can address urgent and contemporary questions, with participants developing skills around new tools and techniques. If we want to ask how a festival can address and respond to social and political changes, then the workshop offers an agile and responsive format to address the fast pace of our contemporary social and political lives.

Workshops offer an environment for learning that functions outside more rigid academic structures—providing hands-on learning, direct interaction with musicians, artists, and programmers, and the creation of a (temporary) community. As Groten writes, '[t]he potential of the workshop as a space for experimenting with new forms of social and technological interaction lies in its being an iterative process, constantly in flux'.[6] In their capacity to build and develop a new skill set within a community, workshops also contribute to the creation of social and cultural capital. When we talk about audience development, the audience can have many roles outside that of a spectator or listener. Workshops that teach coding, or different tools for making music, help to build the base for a future audience, as well as for future artists or performers for the festival.

Elevate Festival 2020, *Workshop Decolonizing Technology*. Photo by Manuel Rieder

A4, *AIAM Workshop* by Robert B. Lisek, 2019. Photo by Léa Rosenfeld

Curating alternative education

Since their inception both Elevate and A4 have included workshops in their programming. As Slávo and Ľudovít from A4 told me, that means that they've been holding workshops for more than 14 years, with the workshops changing over the years. They've ranged from course-based workshops to sound workshops as a community-building tool to workshops that targeted specific groups by filling a gap in formal education. For A4, the workshops were prompted by the need to expand the community of practitioners around them in relation to the kind of artistic production and programming they were engaging with. As Slávo, the artistic director, noted during our interview 'in the beginning online tutorials were few and far between, so having these workshops was very important'.

For A4, the curatorial approach to the workshops is linked to the act of building a community of young people working within a specific creative field. These kinds of workshops have mostly been related to sound art, experimental music, digital music, visual art, and interactive media. On the other hand, workshops that are geared towards children focus on visual art history and practical training, and are split between two age groups. Both of these kinds of workshops take a 'bottom-up' approach, with the hopes that they can help with increasing audience engagement and the formation of a future audience.

As an independent cultural centre, A4 hosts quite a diverse annual programme encompassing a wide range of genres – theatre, dance, music, film, visual art and new media. The workshop programme is an important element of the annual festival. Slávo stated that the main topic that workshops focus on is the 'creative and critical relationship to technology and the artistic practice'. Overall, Slávo and Ľudovít see their workshop programme as filling a gap in the more formal education systems that are used in Bratislava's visual art and music schools. A4 has a track record for being the place for experimental and electronic music and their programming reflects this – reaching an audience of people that are interested in these practices.

Elevate has included the workshop format in every festival. These workshops include music workshops for children, technical and skill-building workshops, workshops with speakers, and workshops with musicians. The organisation of workshops was prompted by the wish to make better use of the resources that were on hand during a festival, encouraging visiting artists, speakers, and musicians to share their skill sets and knowledge. The intentions and aims behind the workshops were a mixture of selfempowerment for participants and to help, promote, and foster the local cultural scene. The workshops were led by artists, but also educators, so that with these overlapping skill sets they could both perform and teach at the festival. The speakers from the discourse programme were also included in this exchange, with their workshops serving as a platform for knowledge transfer, or a more intimate interaction around a specific topic.

As Elevate is an annual festival, Bernhard, Roland, Daniel and the Elevate team develop the programme and the theme throughout the year. A workshop can be included in the programme because a speaker or artist who is already part of the programme may offer a workshop that really fits the theme of the festival, or a workshop itself is interesting enough to be included. In general, workshop topics and ideas emerge out of other parts of the festival. It is not so common that workshops are sought out directly. However, Daniel noted that the team at Elevate can create and bring in their own workshops, like the *Riot in the Matrix* workshop,[7] which focused on teaching the audience about Matrix, an open standard for decentralised, real-time communication that can be used to power chat rooms, messengers, and even the Internet of Things.

With topics ranging from video mapping[8] to mapping the future,[9] Elevate Festival has workshops connected to all three strands of the programme: music, art, and discourse. Workshops that are part of the discourse programme are usually explicitly curated around a specific theme and contribute most to a feeling of intimacy among the audience. The core team of Elevate festival has different perspectives on the workshops. During our conversation, Bernhard and Roland noted that they have mixed feelings about workshops in the music programme. These are always free and there is no business model connected to them yet, contrary to the music programme itself, which is bringing in money through entrance fees. The discourse programme of Elevate is always free, so it would make more sense to align the music workshops with the discourse programme model. Another difference was that audience members could only join the workshops that were part of the music programme by applying and registering beforehand, while the discourse programme workshops were usually open with no need to register.

Setting goals

The inclusion of workshops into a festival or cultural programme usually emerges from a series of goals that the organisation has mapped out. The goals of the children's workshops at A4 are generally the most specific and clearly defined. They need workshop leaders who can work with children and speak the local language. In some cases A4 brought over workshops that they knew were successful in other cities, and in other cases they tried to develop ideas with artists and musicians they already knew. In general, these workshops arose from a combination of opportunities offered by the people who were already part of the festival and the regular programming. Similar to Elevate, A4 also looks for artists who can give a workshop. An example is Robert B. Lisek who was performing at A4 and was also able to host a workshop around the theme of AI and music.[10] Throughout the years, A4 has used different workshop structures. For the regular workshops that happen over the course of a year, they focus on introductory courses to specific programming languages and software used in production. For the SuperCollider sessions for instance,[11] they wanted to build regular sessions or meet-ups with the same group of people over a period of time. Creating a series of successive workshops distilled the audience over time, with only the most interested people continuing with them.

For Elevate, it was a bit harder to pin down the goals and processes of development for the workshops. Daniel mentioned that the goal is always to go deeper and to be inspired, citing the example of a psychedelics workshop[12] from the 2020 festival. This workshop was very interactive and allowed the audience to intensively explore whether psychedelics can act as a catalyst for rebuilding connection with ourselves, each other, and nature. In relation to the discourse programme, the workshops add a layer that goes beyond listening to a speaker talk about a specific topic. The *Decolonising Technologies* workshop[13] asked the audience to engage in a collective deconstruction of contemporary Internet-based technologies through the act of creating speculative fiction. This kind of workshop allows for a more in-depth exploration of a specific topic through a more interactive and hands-on approach. The team at Elevate noted that most of their workshops are taken as they are, and they rarely develop workshops themselves. However, it was clear that if the team has ideas for workshops, they are often developed in relation to the audience and the themes chosen for that year. For example, in the 2020 festival a talk about AI and music attracted an audience of twenty school children, and the speaker was asked to adapt the talk for them.

Audience response

So what is being offered to the participants of the workshops? A4 wants to teach the audience specific tools. The underlying idea is to expand the community of people who are active practitioners as a way to contribute to the programming in the future but also as a way to build the audience base. The social aspect of the workshops is critical for building an audience base and developing people's interest in tools and cultural topics. In Bratislava, the communities that are interested in the intersection of art and technology are not very developed, so there is a lack of skills—either the artists don't have tech

skills or the technologists don't have the creative skills. For instance there is still no local community that is actively using an audio synthesis and algorithmic composition tool like SuperCollider. As Ľudovít pointed out, this is different in larger cities where there are more professionals who are interested in specific tools and technologies.

A4 doesn't have specific data about the participants in their workshops, but knows it is a very active group. The type of audience that attends workshops depends a bit on the level of the workshop. If it's an introductory workshop, the audience is usually mixed, with half of the audience being beginners who are curious and want to do something creative, and the other half having more experience but wanting to learn something new. Some participants work in the tech sector, but join in order to play around with new tools in more creative ways—showing that the workshop really fills a gap. The number of participants declines as the workshop becomes more specific.

Slávo and Ľudovít made it clear that their audience really enjoys the communal aspect of the workshops and actively communicate what they miss in the workshops and ask about follow-ups. Public presentations are not normally part of the adult workshops, so it is hard to know what the audience response is. However the results of the children's workshops are presented to a small audience, with a very positive response, and parents are often really surprised about what their children accomplished in just one or two days.

A more international audience attends the annual A4 festival. Therefore the workshop structure differs somewhat from the regular A4-programming. The festival workshops are organised in response to artists who are at the festival, and there is often a public moment where the workshop participants perform using the tools or technologies they learned. During the festival there is always an audience for workshops, which is not the case for the year-long programme.

The response to Elevate's workshops from the community and the festival audience has always been very positive, with workshops having a consistently good attendance. As Daniel mentioned, they know that their audience appreciates the workshops because they show up even on a Sunday morning after a late night dancing in the Dom im Berg. Elevate does not usually collect data on their audience or their response, but in the context of Re-Imagine Europe they distributed a post-festival survey to get direct feedback. In addition, Daniel is working on having people register for workshops, rather than just keeping them open, which would provide more information about the audience.

Audience development

In the process of developing a workshop programme, it is important to understand whether the programme takes shape primarily from the perspective of audience development, or whether the focus is on the artistic concept and the audience is then built around it. A4 prioritises the artistic vision and the importance or relevance of specific tools or topics. They are constantly on the lookout for tools that open up new

creative possibilities and then try to create a community around that tool. The question then is if different, or new, tools are being used as tools for audience development? At A4, Ľudovít conceded that their approach to building a community wasn't particularly sophisticated, but that they were trying out different approaches to reaching an audience and working with general computer programming languages that people might be interested in learning. They also often utilised the network of the workshop leaders, with many participants joining in this way.

For Elevate, Daniel was clear that thematic content comes first, and the workshop and symposium programme is built around it. The workshop programme is always connected to speakers in the programme. Whether a workshop is interesting for a specific audience, such as the AI and music workshops, is often a side effect of the process and not the main intention. The psychedelics workshop triggered an audience development that they hadn't anticipated. In regards to the music programme, Roland noted that they always start from the artistic approach. In terms of new approaches or tools for audience development that arise from an artistic vision, Bernhard and Roland made it clear that it is part of their method of booking artists, to think constantly about who the audience will be for different musicians. For example, when they presented the Acousmonium,[14] they identified students from the university and music students as an integral part of the audience. When Pamela Anderson was part of the 2019 discourse programme, they reflected on which people, and how many of them, would show up for certain parts of the programme. Daniel added that they want to improve on audience development and make more lasting connections with the audience. Registration for workshops would allow them to continue their relationship with the audience beyond the festival.

Audience compositions

How do you build a diverse audience and find people who want to take part in workshop programmes? Daniel noted that Elevate builds the workshop audiences based on experiences from previous festivals and workshops. There have been workshops where they have talked first to specific groups or communities who they thought would benefit from the workshop. In such cases they rely on the communities to spread the word about the workshop and assist with this element of audience building. This is a bottom-up strategy for audience development that starts from targeting communities who would be interested in the workshop. Connecting the dots between artists, musicians, and audience is an integral part of their motivation for the workshop programme and the festival itself. Bernhard noted that if an artist or musician teaches a specific skill during a workshop, they focus their energies on bringing together an audience that would benefit from the workshop – especially individuals who can build on their current skill sets and further develop their career.

A4 often targets students from the art schools in their promotion and communication, even though there is still a bit of rivalry between formal and informal education. They also target the online community of creative professionals and share promotional material to build an audience. Another strategy is to keep contact lists of previous

workshop participants and communicate regularly about upcoming activities that might interest them. A4 has a reasonably consistent attendance, with a handful of people who participate in all the workshops. Slávo noted however that at this point they are struggling to attract a large enough audience for the workshops, which is what they want to focus on developing. Since most of the workshops are introductory, they should be able to attract a larger audience. Previous workshops have been male-dominated and they're thinking of having workshops targeted specifically at women. There is even less gender diversity in children's workshops than in adult workshops, and they are investigating how to attract more girls in general.

Audience collaborations

In 2020, Elevate festival collaborated with the local university, Kunstuniversität Graz, on the presentation of the Acousmonium, as part of the Re-Imagine Europe program. This collaboration has since then intensified, and collaborations with the Institute for Electronic Music and the University of Applied Sciences in Graz have been initiated. The intention is to continue to deepen this relationship with the university. Bernhard gave the example of a conference organised with the Institute for Musicology, with lectures both at the university and at Elevate. These kinds of collaborations contribute to audience development, with students or school classes attending the festival. The students range from high school age or younger (13 to 17 years old) to those in their early- or mid-20s.

While collaborations with universities and art academies are integral to audience development, there is also a unique importance in facilitating informal forms of education, such as workshops or masterclasses. These allow for an overlap of different fields, bring in an international element, and allow for interactions with artists and musicians in a deeper and more direct way. 'For these workshops', Daniel stated, 'The context is different, which is important. (...) This interaction might give you more inspiration in a short moment then you would get inside of a classroom'. The festival is a free space for creative response, and 'they have the role of being a fertile ground for many things to grow'.[15] While the setting is different, there are still important connections to be made between the festival programme and university programmes—they are all part of one ecosystem.

For A4, the importance of these informal educational structures is that they contribute something that is lacking in formal education. There are hardly any programmes at the art academy in Bratislava that include electronic or digital arts, which means there isn't a pool of students who are learning to use electronic and digital tools. However, there will be possibilities for future collaborations with the Academy of Fine Arts and Design since they have added a department for digital art. Slávo pointed out that they feel they have influenced some of the practitioners and people who are teaching at the university now, who are responsible for formal education. He added that fifteen years ago the impact of technology was debated among a small circle of artists or theorists, and now it is a global issue. The interest in the relationship between technology and art and culture is growing, and A4 has been at the forefront of highlighting this importance within their community.

Elevate Festival 2020, *Workshop Decolonizing Technology*. Photo by Manuel Rieder

Filling a gap

Every cultural organisation and festival exists within the larger ecosystem of a community. So how do the workshops relate to the local community and the younger generation? As Daniel stated, Elevate aims ‘to inspire, to share information, to change things for the better, to activate’. If they can do this for a younger generation, then all the better. Roland noted that one of the venues that they worked with employed someone with links to schools, and this relationship enabled them to reach a younger audience. As a team they would like to engage even more with young people and several schools have invited Daniel to speak about the process of organising a festival, so some of the younger generation get to

hear about Elevate. Seeking out and engaging with a younger audience benefits Elevate as a festival, because these young people can become the new audience and participate in the festival programme. It is also very important to share the value system that is being developed in the discourse programme with a younger generation by means of conversations about democratisation, civil society, climate change and human rights, and by 'presenting alternatives which can contribute to a better future for everyone'.[16]

The *Climate Emergency – What's Next?*[17] workshop was a great example of how Elevate connects to the local community. This workshop did not originate with the core team, but was proposed by an activist who has been affiliated with Elevate for many years. The festival was able to 'elevate' the kick-off for this project and connect it to smaller towns around Austria. By connecting the project to the festival they were able to help promote it and increase an audience base for both themselves and the project. As Daniel made clear, bringing together these systems, and these different audiences, was a technical challenge: they had six outposts and two parts in the programme (lectures and workshops), as well as a joint live session with all the outposts. Since 2009,[18] Elevate festival has been engaging with topics relating to the climate crisis and local community-supported agriculture (CSA).[19] Uli Klein, who manages a farm that is part of a CSA project, has been a guest on several panels at the festival and presented a workshop in 2014 about food sovereignty and solidarity agriculture.[20] After these presentations, membership in a local CSA increased significantly – demonstrating the mutual benefit that can emerge from building and sharing audiences between community initiatives.

Future developments

What other future developments are Elevate and A4 aiming for with their workshop programme? Bernhard noted that previously Elevate organised more workshops but decided to decrease the amount of new workshops because of the lack of new audiences. With a new generation of visitors, and the collaboration with the universities getting stronger, they plan to have more artistic workshops examining specific topics in much more depth. Elevate also would like to extend the duration of the workshops. Participants would pay more but then have a deeper commitment. This will help solve some of the financial issues around how to fund workshops, particularly those connected to the music and art programme.

A4 noted that they are in the midst of a strategic planning process for the entire organisation, and the educational programme is one of the areas they would like to develop further. They will systematically re-evaluate their previous programming and set up some more structure for the educational programmes. They are also developing a new project within Erasmus+ (the EU subsidy programme that supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe), organising educational seminars that focus on art and education. Overall they want to focus on structuring the educational programme, developing a long-term strategy, and formalising their role as an independent cultural centre within the educational system. Inspired by the move online that was triggered by the corona crisis, A4 is also thinking about having online tutorials on modular synthesis

and on how to work with SuperCollider. These have the potential to open up a larger audience and increase engagement. The music and AI workshop received a lot of interest, and the hopes are to move into these more specialised topics in the near future.

These future developments show that workshop programmes are a vital part of festivals and cultural initiatives. As informal educational structures they provide opportunities for local participation, teach new skills, build ties between local and global networks, and contribute to social inclusion. Both Elevate and A4 develop their programming with the artistic vision at the core of the process, and with the audience being built as a response to this artistic vision rather than the artistic vision being shaped by the audience. The focus on the artistic vision creates a unique educational space that fills gaps within more formal learning structures and institutions and helps to raise the bar on emerging technologies and cultural and political discourse.

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Critical Writing for the Future

by Arie Altena

In this article Arie Altena looks back on the Critical Writing Workshops that Sonic Acts has organised over the past ten years. These workshops took place during the festivals and other Sonic Acts events. They offered young writers and students the opportunity to improve their writing skills, and develop a critical approach to interdisciplinary and new art practices. The workshops functioned as a space to experiment with new ways of critical writing. Through their critical texts they also offered Sonic Acts a way to engage with its audience on a deeper, critical level.

Photo previous page
Potential Wor(l)ds Workshop, Anna Bunting-Branch and Aliyah Hussain, Sonic Acts Academy 2020. Photo by Pieter Kers

Critical Writing Workshop, Sonic Acts Festival 2019, De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Since at least 2008, Sonic Acts has brought together a group of young writers, bloggers and students to write about its festival. Sonic Acts started doing this because of a lack of critical reflection on the interdisciplinary works and performances that were featured at the festival in mainstream media and traditional (print) media. Gathering a group of volunteers, students and young bloggers to report on the concerts, lectures, performances, masterclasses, installations, and critically reflect on subjects covered at the festival, was a practical way to produce reviews contributing to the visibility of the festival. In the beginning Sonic Acts offered students the possibility to visit the festival free of charge in return for critical coverage. These students more or less spontaneously formed a group that worked together, supervised by one of the curators and an experienced writer. That the bloggers and students were themselves implicated in the field they were reviewing, as they were aspiring artists and critics who cared for the field of art and technology, was seen as an advantage.

In 2012, a proper Critical Writing Workshop (CWW) was set up by Sonic Acts in collaboration with media partners such as magazines Gonzo Circus, Neural and The Wire. It has become an annually recurring workshop in which upcoming journalists, critics and bloggers –

from a generation of digital natives – become proficient in critical writing about artistic research and current developments in art and music. Since 2012 it has been part of the programme of all the Sonic Acts festivals and academies, and it has been included in the Dark Ecology programmes (a Dutch-Norwegian-Russian collaboration, 2014–2016) as well. The international calls for participation always received much response, indicating a need for such a workshop. The workshops usually include presentations about the craft of writing about art, the editing process and the function of critical reflection on art. During the workshop, participants write reviews of events, and during this process receive feedback from the course leaders and each other. The CWWs are based on the conviction that learning from each other in a workshop situation, working collaboratively on texts, editing each others' texts, is an optimal way of progressing in the art of writing critically.

In 2019, Urban Paradoxes conducted a qualitative research of how the participants valued the workshop. Some interviewees stated that 'they felt like the workshop was important for them in the process of becoming a more critical writer'. They also said that they felt stimulated by the workshop leaders to reflect critically, and were inspired by the interdisciplinarity of the programme, as well as by working in the context of a festival.

With the CWW, Sonic Acts is taking an in-depth look at the current artistic production, and stimulates a critical exchange between artistic practice and research. It looks at how artistic production and research are connected with developments in culture, society and politics, as well as with the interests, questions, feelings and motivations brought in by the audience.

The value of embedded critical writing

This goes beyond informing a public about new developments in order to convince them to attend the events: critical texts are concerned with engaging the public over a longer time span. A critical text shows its own involvement in the things it describes and critically reviews, and is clear about its own interests. The aim of such a text is rather to engage the reader with those interests, and show how these interests are entangled with other issues. This connects to the aim of CWW to foster new critical voices with diverse cultural backgrounds. CWW strives to be a breeding ground for a new generation of 'media makers' who get the space to develop their voices and experiment with new forms of art criticism that engage a culturally diverse audience of digital natives.

The results of the CWW are usually published on the CWW-blog[1]. However, this is only one part of Sonic Acts' efforts to stimulate critical reflection on current artistic production and research. Since 2001, the Sonic Acts Festival has been accompanied by the publication of a book giving context and depth to the research and themes of the festival through commissioned essays, interviews with artists and theorists, and visual material. Until recently, additional texts and videos were regularly published online as the Sonic Acts

[1] http://sonicacts.com/critical/

Research Series. These were mostly interviews and commissioned essays that gave the public also a chance to follow the research of the Sonic Acts curatorial team throughout the year. Since 2019 the focus has been more on the publication of documentation of the most recent events as well as earlier festivals. The CWW thus is not an isolated undertaking, but is embedded amongst other efforts of Sonic Acts. It has happened that writers who start out at the CWW later find their texts published as an instalment of the Research Series[2] or in a Sonic Acts publication.

The CWW is not the only project initiated by an arts organisation that tries to stimulate critical writing. Similar undertakings are the writing programme of Kunsthuis SYB, SYB Circles (NL)[3], Kritikklabbet (SE)[4], the mentorship programme De Nieuwe Garde, publishing projects of the Institute of Network Cultures (NL)[5] and the Talk About Music Course at the Darmstädter Ferienkurse 2018[6]. These give similar reasons for the need to develop new forms of critical writing: the transformation of arts and music, the changed status of critical writing, the decline of criticism in mainstream media, the fourth industrial revolution and the rise of social media. For arts organisations the primary motivation is often to make sure there will be critical reflection on the projects they've curated.

Critical writing remains very valuable and an important ingredient of a 'thriving' culture and art ecology. It connects art to concerns of people, it gives answers to questions the audience might have, it contextualises and embeds art in the larger social, cultural and artistic milieu, it connects different forms of art, it shows why a piece of art is relevant, how it relates to issues in other fields, and why it motivates and moves an audience. It can also emphasise the importance of culturally diverse perspectives. Critical writing can also speculate further on ideas put forward by an artwork or festival, or stimulate such further thinking; it can show what is lacking, or 'how to do it yourself'.

The value of critical writing is emphasised the Amsterdam-based Institute of Network Cultures. Their researcher Miriam Rasch stated: 'Technological, economical and aesthetic developments in what is called "the fourth industrial revolution" have put considerable strain on public critical reflection.[7]' With the INC she considers this a problem because, 'critically assessing artistic and cultural productions in an open and inclusive media sphere is a prerequisite for a reflective society.[8]' She formulates concisely why a platform for critical writing, and the stimulation of new critical voices is of the utmost importance. It's in critical writing that we can 'formulate both ethically and aesthetically what it means to be human (together) in a given time and place; to critically evaluate the desirability of the status quo; and to envision possible (other) futures.' And she adds to that: 'In this way, art criticism is connected to the establishment of a critical culture, which can be seen as essential to a strong democratic culture.[9]'

[2] http://sonicacts.com/portal/research-series/overview
[3] http://kunsthuissyb.nl/programma/schrijversprogramma/
[4] http://kritiklabbet.se/
[5] https://networkcultures.org/artofcriticism/, and see also https://networkcultures.org/makingpublic/
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[7] https://networkcultures.org/artofcriticism/2018/03/13/join-our-expanding-network-on-the-art-of-criticism-and-participate-in-research-and-experiments/
[8] Idem.
[9] Idem.

A change in criticism

Criticism has changed as much as the arts have changed in post-digital times. It has changed as much as the way in which we inform ourselves about the arts and music, and what this means to us. Though some conservatives might disagree, critical writing is something else than handing out value judgements. The function of value judgement and recommendation is now largely in the hands of algorithms and social media. It has been radically 'democratised' (or platformised) and automated. Data is harvested habitually for recommendation systems that have made value judgements by authoritative cultural critics largely superfluous. The flip-side of this is not the decline of elite-culture, but the fact that all these data are owned and handled by corporations.[10] But as Dutch essay writer Miriam Rasch states: 'Anyone can open a twitter account and start a blog. Yet, the second step is even more important: the one that takes us from voicing an opinion to meaningful and purposeful reflection.[11]'

Critical writing and experience

Since its very beginning in 1994 Sonic Acts has stressed the experiential quality of the activities and works it presented. The organisation always took great care in staging the concerts, audiovisual performances, films, sound installations, field trips and lectures so the audience could immerse itself in the experience. This was based both on the belief that these activities and works deserved such a presentation, and also that the sensory quality of these works enables the enjoyment and understanding of these works without a prior knowledge of the history of art, motivations of the artist or the context of contemporary art. Looking, listening, with open senses and an open mind, is where the impact and the value of art starts.

The task of critical writing then becomes to stimulate the involvement of the audience in the work by zooming in on the experience, bringing out the various levels and aspects of the experience of the work, or by engaging the audience more deeply with the creative process. Such an engagement means a deeper and more lasting felt connection to the experience, the work and the issues that are touched upon in the experience. Such critical writing makes the experience of a festival relevant beyond just having fun on a night out.

Giving shape, as a cultural organisation, to a reflection on the experience of art, is a way to connect an audience to the organisation. Stimulating critical writing is then an aspect of audience development. It is a way of giving form to an audience, that together feels

[10] The detrimental effects of this fall outside the scope of this essay. You can think of the slow emergence of surveillance capitalism as well as filter bubbles, the lure of lowest denominator and the attractiveness of stupidity which seems to be inherent in the recommendation algorithm of youtube.
[11] Miriam Rasch, 'Divide and conquer: the future of online criticism, review of The Digital Critic: Literary Culture Online', on http://www.miriamrasch.nl/nieuwe-media/divide-and-conquer-the-future-of-online-criticism/, 29 April 2018.

connected in a certain experience of a work of art, and through that becomes also involved in a more in-depth discussion of the creative process, motivations, ideas and issues. Such critical writing looks towards creating a community and a communality, it will try to formulate what the audience has in common, instead of pointing to the irreducible originality of the work of art, created as the highly individual expression of authentic feeling of an artist.[12] Such critical writing looks at entanglements first.

Entanglements

How to write about today's hybrid practices at the intersection of art, music, technology and science and do justice to their inherent complexity and entanglements? During the 2019 CWW, the Dutch art critic, curator and researcher Ingrid Commandeur attempted to sketch what could be considered to be 'good critical writing' now. She highlighted how the conventional idea of the artwork shifts to a materialist notion of practice. One aspect of this shift is that 'the notion of agency and politics is relocated again within art and design as part of a complex, interlocking system, leading to a new aesthetics based on entanglement and co-constitution'. Good old art criticism used to contain description (what do I see), analysis (how is the work organised), interpretation (what is the message), and finally judgement (is it successful). Such writing isolates the art practice from the world, reduces a pluriform practice to a singular object, presupposes a hidden meaning which needs to be revealed, and enforces a judgmental criticism, successful or not, five or no stars. It also grants the human a centralised position, whereas post-humanism challenges us to think beyond the mind-body split, and beyond the binary opposition of human – non-human. Commandeur stressed that for the critic it is important to recognise one's own embeddedness in the object or cultural moment, and one's stance in relation to it. To be critical is not only about analysing, deconstructing, and judging, but about inhabiting a problem. In writing one has to recognise that meaning is never produced in isolation but rather through intricate webs of connectedness and participation. Commandeur proposed another model in which questions like Who is addressed and how? How does the work of art take position? and How does the work address or intervene in the complexity of the world? are central.

[12] For the shift from an art ruled by the Romantic idea of individual authentic expression to art as the attempt to research what we have in common, see Ruben Jacobs Iedereen een kunstenaar. Over authenticiteit, kunstenaarschap en creative industrie, V2_, Rotterdam, 2014. English translation: Everyone is an Artist, V2_ Rotterdam, 2015.

Practical recommendations for the future

Practically speaking stimulating critical writing has provided Sonic Acts with texts on commissioned works, interviews with artists, and reviews of events that otherwise would not have existed. There are however several aspects that until now have not yet sufficiently or explicitly been addressed in the CWWs and that could provide directions for future editions.

Reflecting critically through the use of images, sound recordings, podcasts, video, and various ways of online publishing (from epubs to Instagram stories) as well as using different outlets to disseminate this content, is key to communicating with the second generation of digital natives.[13] Until now the CWWs have mainly focused on writing texts between 800 and 1600 words long.

Critical writing preferably accommodates different voices and different cultures. Though all the CWWs had international participants, most of them were somehow rooted in Western culture, and wrote in English. Using and accommodating different languages is difficult but important. Different countries, regions and organisations have different cultural histories and contexts that also have an effect on the position and form of critical writing. Cultural differences have not disappeared because 'everyone' supposedly uses the same social media-platform or tries to communicate in international English. The use of international English as lingua franca can only be practical solution for stimulating a cross-cultural dialogue. More attention to translation, both between languages as well as cultures, would be welcome in order to be able to truly learn from each other and understand cultural differences.

After organising several CWWs, Sonic Acts has begun to explore the idea of creating a more steady 'critical writing team', recruited from the participants of previous workshops. This would be a community of writers and editors that collaborate on new critical writing, to be published on a multi-lingual platform, syndicated by partner media. Such a community and platform could be a next step in the stimulation of critical writing, and the building of an engaged audience for the arts. In a world where experience of the audience is central, it's critical writing that can contextualise this experience, and activate the audience to reflect: why is this experience of art important to us? Through writing we can tease out the shifts in how and why we appreciate art and how it relates to our daily lives, or for that matter, to politics, an idea of democracy, the future, dealing with cultural differences, or how art relates to the desire for a better, more inclusive society. A discussion of the experience of art, in the end is never just a discussion of only art, but also, be it implicitly, on how we relate to the world, make our world, what we identify with (or not), or how we would like to give form to society or prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

[13] The oldest members of the first generation of digital natives are born around 1986 (going online when they were about 10), they are now over 30 and have kids that quite soon will go and visit concerts and exhibitions. The second generation of digital natives is already here.

Community Building through Artist-led Workshops

Sandra Trienekens & Arie Altena

Mario de Vega's and Victor Mazón Gardoqui's workshop *Speculation as Interface* is a good example of the artist-driven workshops that Sonic Acts organises. Partly based on an interview with Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui, this text explains the rationale behind organising artist-led masterclasses and workshops at Sonic Acts, and the role they can play in building communities of interest.

Photo previous page
Speculation as Interface, workshop led by Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui at Sonic Acts Academy 2018, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Tuning Vine, masterclass by Robin Hayward at Sonic Acts Festival 2015, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Sonic Acts started organising workshops and masterclasses in 2010 because it saw that Dutch, as well as international artists and makers, felt a need to exchange knowledge and critically reflect on their arts practice outside the boundaries of institutional education. Sonic Acts has always stressed the importance of critical reflection on the arts and the exchange of knowledge. Critical reflection is at the core of the organisation, as it started as a collaboration between music venue Paradiso in Amsterdam, the Interfaculty Sound and Vision of the Royal Conservatory and the Royal Academy of the Arts in The Hague. The Sonic Acts festivals have always had a discursive programme, and organising workshops and masterclasses was a logical extension of the programme.

The masterclasses give young and emerging makers as well as mid-career artists the occasion to exchange knowledge with international artists in the field of interdisciplinary and technological art. They usually focus on creative processes and artistic methodologies, and provide participants with an opportunity for in-depth exchanges of ideas and extensive discussions with renowned artists. Intergenerational knowledge transfer and insight into artistic methodologies are important aims. With the masterclasses, Sonic Acts hopes to ensure that

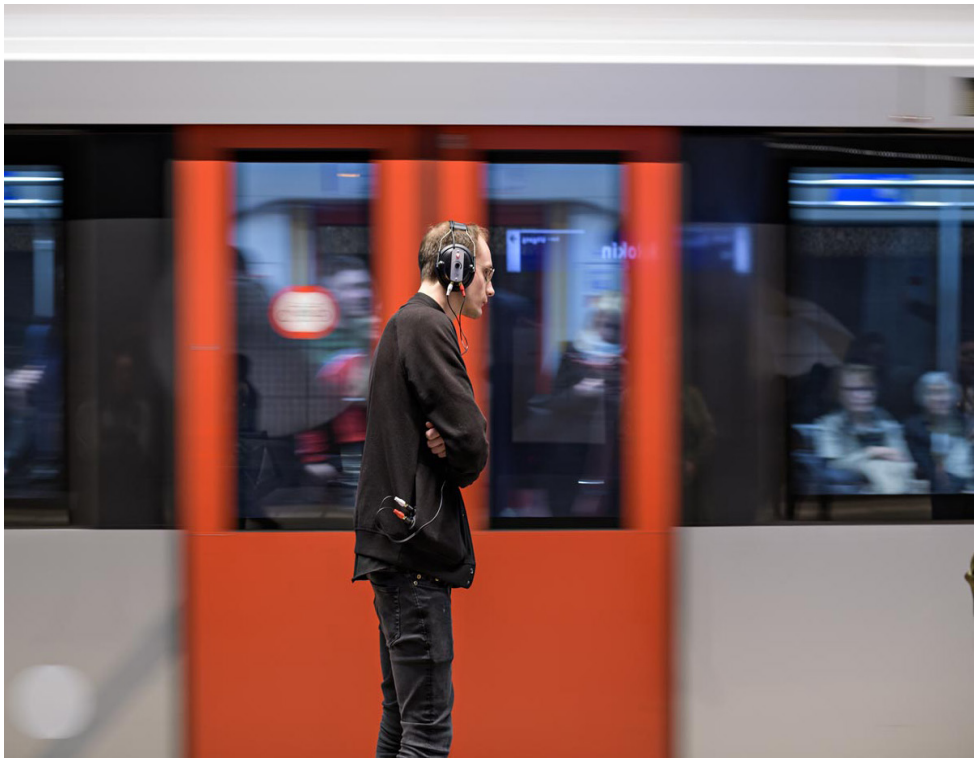
the knowledge of pioneering interdisciplinary artists is passed on to a younger generation. Often this knowledge is not part of canonical art history, and is hardly present in the curricula of art academies.

The workshops aim at talent development and the professionalisation of 'makers'. Generally speaking, they focus on acquiring and exchanging practical knowledge, technical skills and methodologies relevant to creative professionals in the wider field of digital culture, visual or performing arts. To provide public insight into the process, they frequently conclude with a small public presentation of the results by the participants. Very recently Sonic Acts also started programming educational workshops aimed at young people (12-18 years), which bring this target group into contact with new forms of art and offer them practical skills and inspiration.

Participants in the workshops and masterclasses are recruited through open calls. The communication targets professionals and students of arts academies who are interested in expanding their capacities and exchanging insights with more experienced artists. The number of applicants often exceeds the number of available spots. This provides the curatorial team, in consultation with the workshop leaders, with an opportunity to carefully select the participants, for instance, with an eye to enabling peer-to-peer learning, by having participants from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skill sets.

Artists who have presented workshops or masterclasses, which vary in length between one afternoon to a full week, include Catherine Christer Hennix, Pauline Oliveros, Tony Conrad, Jana Winderen, Steina & Woody Vasulka, Susan Schuppli, Christina Kubisch, Nabil Ahmed, AM Kanngieser, Ben Russell, Anna Bunting-Branch and Aliyah Hussain. The content and specific approach differs per workshop or masterclass. Workshops have, among others, covered field recording methods, working with scientific data, building and experimenting with DIY electronics, music theory, and philosophy. A deepening of practice in these workshops often goes hand-in-hand with a sharpening of critical reflection, and vice versa.

The subjects or techniques covered in the workshops and masterclasses have a direct or implicit connection to the theme of the festival. Workshop leaders and artists who present the masterclasses have also performed and/or had works exhibited at the festival, and have spoken in the conference. Most of them were also interviewed for the festival publications or for the online Sonic Acts Research Series.



Electrical Walks Amsterdam by Christina Kubisch. Sonic Acts Festival 2019, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Sensing in radically different ways

Looking back, many workshops have been about building or using technologies to sense one's environment in radically different and critical ways. This was the case in the field recording workshop by Jana Winderen and the masterclass by Christina Kubisch. In Jana Winderen's workshop, participants listened to sounds from difficult-to-reach spots using hydrophones; participants in Christina Kubisch's masterclass learned to explore the electromagnetic landscape of the city using the technology Kubisch has developed for her own artistic work. The masterclasses by composers Catherine Christer Hennix and Pauline Oliveros focused on radically different ways to perceive, be aware of, sense and use space and sound. These masterclasses were also about 'changing perception', treated either in a more theoretical sense, or through practical exercises. In general, radically changing perspectives on what one assumes to be reality (with its social, political, or artistic conventions) have always been on the agenda of the masterclasses and workshops – even though this goal was never formulated as such. It was usually a consequence of the choice of the workshop leaders, and their artistic visions and outsider perspectives.

Exploring new and old technologies to challenge our perception or extending the human sensorium is a central topic of Sonic Acts. This exploration is as much about challenging the audiovisual experience, as it is an investigation of the sensorial, social and political repercussions of technologies and their impact on everyday life. Experimentation is

important to the organisation because of the need for radically different visions and truly innovative ideas that can activate the imagination of the audiences – and practitioners – to envisage a different reality. For Sonic Acts, the role of art is not to supply answers or practical solutions, but to formulate questions, to experiment, and to make visible or audible aspects of reality that are invisible or inaudible to our senses, or are beyond our comprehension. For Sonic Acts, art is an attempt to imagine the impossible, and an exploration of uncharted waters.

Informed by this overarching idea, the workshops do not aim to solve today's wicked problems through a creative use of technology. They are set up as occasions for the participants to become critically aware, acquire technical or other skills, and engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue with other participants and artists. The workshops aim to stimulate the participants to explore their own ideas or visions, and provide them with methodologies, ways of approaching technology, ways of thinking, and tools. In other words, they offer participants an opportunity to speculate and experiment, and could be considered a call to rethink and respond to significant problems. With the workshops, Sonic Acts creates a space with a potential for change, connection and inspiration. If this happens to result in a change of ideas about the role of art in society, it is a consequence of what happened between people, and of what emerges from the exchange.

Speculation as Interface

During the Sonic Acts Academy 2018, the artists Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui led a hands-on workshop entitled *Speculation as Interface*. Twelve participants from various artistic and academic disciplines and from different generations, worked for three days at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Together with the artists, they explored disruptive technologies and instigated an ongoing discussion on alternative ways of creating communities. This workshop is a good example of how the imagination of participants can be triggered, how artists and participants can learn from each other, and lastly, how such a workshop can contribute to building a community of interest.

De Vega and Mazón Gardoqui started presenting workshops about ten years ago because, like many other artists working in the field of technological arts, they felt that the artist-individual is no longer at the centre of artistic practice. As Mazón Gardoqui stated: 'It is not about the two of us, the work needs a wider community.' For them mutual exchange and the building of communities is the centre of artistic practice.

In the workshop *Speculation as Interface*, participants learned to assemble and programme a custom radiation detector, through which they learned about the architecture of WIFI networks, how one can sniff the transmitted data, and put these communications to a different use. They were busy with media intervention, for example, by interrupting or meddling with the signals of local WIFI-networks.

This custom radiation detector, Limenia, was developed by De Vega and Mazón Gardoqui, as part of a larger project. At the core of this is a 'book', which is both a book and a portable server with a microcontroller that can open a WIFI spot. The book is printed with invisible ink. 'Turning on' the book initiates a public WIFI-spot, allowing everyone in the vicinity to access the information contained on the server. However, the same device can block other networks and confuse mobile devices. This 'book' then serves as the starting point and centre of a set of experiments, interventions, discussions and theoretical reflections. The overall project consists of a series of workshops, performances, interventions, and a printed publication. It is ongoing, and is developed in different phases through various applications of the tool.

Field Recording Workshop by Jana Winderen and BJ Nilsen. Sonic Acts Academy 2016, Amsterdam. Photo by Lucas van der Velden

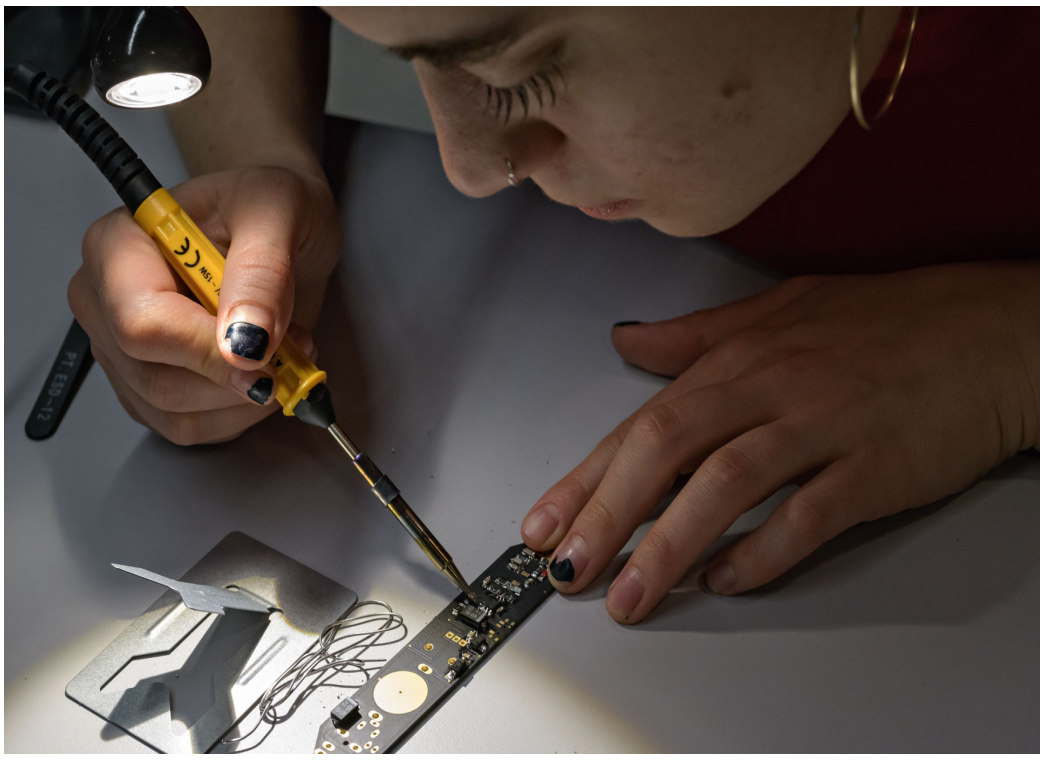
Explaining the Limenia

Explaining the Limenia, Mazón Gardoqui states: 'The small hand-held device first of all reveals high frequencies, microwaves or electromagnetic pollution of Bluetooth, telecommunication systems or security cameras. It helps us to receive and listen to that invisible or hidden information. Secondly, the device transmits, bringing these frequencies into the spectrum of human perception by turning them into sounds that can be used in a composition.'

De Vega considers this device as a tool to open up possibilities for education. The microcontroller can be set up to measure different types of radiation, or gather weather data, for example. During the workshops, participants are encouraged to explore such possibilities and disruptions. An archive of information is created by adding to the information in the publication and on the portable server. Integral to the project is that others – participants in the workshop, invited writers – actively contribute.

Central for them is the realisation that we need access to and knowledge of technological devices to be able to envision a different social reality. De Vega: 'We live in a world that is governed by our dependencies on technologies. For this world we need more than our five senses. We need certain interfaces or extensions that allow us to perceive the world in a different way. When you materialise the invisible through a medium, even a medium like sound that is invisible itself, you can demonstrate that there is much more than that we normally sense or perceive. This applies to everybody regardless of age or expertise. It becomes the common ground between the participants; they realise that all of us need more than five senses to approach the world.'

In the workshop, De Vega and Mazón Gardoqui are concerned with discussing and sharing tools, and enabling participants to use these in whatever way they see fit. The artists point out that it is entirely up to the participants whether or not they eventually apply the workshop's technology or insights in a more activist or political realm – for example, building devices that register the electromagnetic fields of security cameras. Discussing the implications may also open up ways to protest against or sabotage such technologies that invade both our public and private spheres.



Speculation as Interface, workshop led by Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui at Sonic Acts Academy 2018, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

From speculation to engagement

Explaining the title of the workshop *Speculation as Interface*, De Vega also elucidates why he leaves the participants so much space: ‘In the workshops we speculate what an interface can mean. When you start to unveil the invisible, when you start to engage, you start to speculate. Revealing what is indiscernible or hidden, what is beyond the range of our perceptions, is also the bridge to start communicating. Neither of us can see more than what is right in front of us. This is the common ground: we are all in the same story. Through certain tools you can show that there is much more. That is where the sharing of knowledge and interests comes in. When you deconstruct these processes and topics, it is logical that there will be a reaction from those involved. As artists leading the workshops, we might not be able to directly change anything, but what could change is how participants approach these topics.’

In addition to providing a collective experience for the participants, the workshop’s intention is to make them aware of what surrounds them and to initiate a dialogue. There are many important reasons for doing so, according to Mario de Vega, and the impact of technology on how we view reality, on our feelings, and on the decisions we make is one of them: ‘Topics addressed in the workshops are the impact of technology, but also the value of vulnerability: the vulnerability of systems, the world, and of individual people. We’re all exposed, observed and maybe even manipulated by technology that has been developed since the first spacecraft was launched into orbit by the Russians. This has radically changed the way we communicate, navigate the world, and predict the weather. Basically, the way we see the world is from above. We can perceive of ourselves as being observed from above. It’s a silent oppression. We need to realise that our decisions may not be truly ours. In the end we may become a downward-looking species again. People may be more aware of certain privacy issues than in the past, but we are trapped because of our dependency on technology. Victor and I don’t say that these technologies are necessarily bad; the issue is how we can use them sensibly and what the consequences of using them are. In a way, building the device is just an excuse to start a conversation on these topics. The workshop is not meant to just expose the invisible, but to create awareness of what surrounds us. Learning how to build and use the device, while at the same time discussing the impact of these frequencies or pollution, allows for much more interesting discussions and a deeper understanding.’

Building a community

Mazón Gardoqui points out that the discussions become part of an ongoing dialogue in a community they are creating: ‘The result of the workshop is meeting all these people, and exchanging, learning and discussing topics such as the invisibility of high frequencies, electromagnetic pollution, or the dissemination of information. The conversation in this particular workshop becomes part of all other workshops and works that we have been producing together for ten years.’

Opening up technologies in a workshop and starting a dialogue with participants thus becomes a way to build a community of the like-minded. De Vega: ‘We need to examine the impact that technology and artificial waves have on us human beings, and on the natural equilibrium of the planet. To explore these topics, as well as the possibilities and different methods, we’ll need to build up a community of interested people. We’ve used our website as a platform for this. We don’t sell our technology as ready-made devices. Instead, we offer all the information around it on our website. Festivals are contexts in which we like to organise workshops to bring people together and extend the network.’

Dialogue and exchange are central for them. De Vega: ‘People from different generations, backgrounds and contexts participate and realise that they have something to exchange. That is the transformation: if these people meet again the future, they will certainly remember each other. Inviting new participants for each workshop expands the network and the community grows. That’s why we prefer working with open workshops as opposed to giving seminars to a fixed group, even though we know that many participants would like to join in again. Though obviously, we’re happy to welcome back someone to share his or her expertise with the new participants.’

An important aspect of this way of approaching a workshop is that people with different skill sets and knowledge come together and exchange insights, skills, and knowledge. As De Vega says: ‘Learning is a completely different thing when you bring together people from different backgrounds and disciplines as we did in our workshop at Sonic Acts Academy. There was a biologist, a musician, a physics student, an architecture student, and so on. Such an encounter of expertise makes the process and the conversations around the topics much stronger. That is important, as the workshops are not about who is the fastest builder or the best, but about peer learning and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. That is the underlying reason why we do this work.’

As the workshop offers a setting for mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise between artists and participants, it comes as no surprise that the artists also benefit from working with the participants. As Mazón Gardoqui concludes: ‘We receive expertise from the participants in return for what we give them. But the satisfaction for us also lies in the confirmation that people need to know about these topics.’

Creating change through engagement

The example of Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui’s workshop shows that workshops can be a way of deepening the relation with an audience. Workshops create engagement with an issue, and stimulate an exchange of knowledge, which is also a way to shape a community. The participants in *Speculation as Interface* stated that the workshop broadened their understanding of technology, and that they felt they had become part of a growing community, and of an ongoing dialogue on the impact of technology. They all indicated that they would like to remain involved.

Key to the success of building such a (temporary) community is ensuring that the setting of the workshop enables mutual exchange and shared learning. This is not only about creating an atmosphere of trust, but also about shaping the workshop around a clear topic or tool, and making sure that different participants can bring diverse ideas and skills. The focus should not be on the workshop leader but on the collective process, which can be open ended. The goal of the workshops at Sonic Acts is therefore not a directly quantifiable increase of knowledge or skill of a participant, or proposing a solution to a problem, but raising the audience's awareness of pressing issues. Such a workshop offers the audience tools to approach such issues, in order to open up a discussion, engage in mutual exchange, and create a potential for change.

Electrical Walks Amsterdam by Christina Kubisch. Sonic Acts Festival 2019, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Rethinking Communities

Interview with Tatiana Bazzichelli and Lieke Ploeger by Jodi Rose

Tatiana Bazzichelli and Lieke Ploeger of Disruption Network Lab explain how their vision of ‘examining the intersection of politics, technology, and society, to expose the misconduct and wrongdoing of the powerful’, is achieved through bringing together communities of trust in highly focused conferences and meet-ups. In this interview with Jodi Rose they also discuss the strategies they use to organise and curate community events, and reflect on how these could be adapted and used to bring about change worldwide.

Photo previous page
Keep Fighting, 2015. Photo by Nadine Nelken

Disruption Network Lab

Disruption Network Lab developed from a combination of highly engaged critical practices in media art curating, investigative journalism, hacking and open knowledge production. Informed by the history of activism in alternative cultural underground centres, Disruption Network Lab offers a platform that amplifies diverse voices across interdisciplinary and networked knowledge. It questions structural dynamics and reveals imbalances of power. The programme of Disruption Network Lab's conference series is a conceptual artwork in itself that is intertwined with its community programme and meet-ups. Building networks of trust around very specialised communities has given Disruption Network Lab a framework to have a significant impact on society. Disruption Network Lab exposes inequalities and power imbalances through a combination of creative activism, knowledge exchange and critical analysis that involve non-profit organisations and experts, as well as grassroots networks locally and globally.

Networked disruption

Founding artistic director and curator Tatiana Bazzichelli and her team have built an impressive ecosystem of engaged practitioners who not only speak openly about strategies for contesting abuses of power and corruption, but actually hold those in power accountable, while activating the conditions necessary to provoke long-term and real world change. Disruption Lab is not an ivory tower think tank for academic exercises, but a laboratory for experimentation and networked disruption in the scientific sense of the word. Disruption Network Lab offers possibilities to create genuine shifts in power and perception through an inherently interdisciplinary approach, remaining closely connected to grassroots activism by harnessing the energy of the collective skills, knowledge and networks of those involved.

Artist and writer Jodi Rose asked Tatiana Bazzichelli and Lieke Ploeger, Disruption Network Lab community director, to unpack some of their strategies, and figure out how these could be adapted and potentially used as models for change worldwide. Their vision of 'examining the intersection of politics, technology, and society, to expose the misconduct and wrongdoing of the powerful', is achieved through a particular set of curatorial methodologies they have developed that bring together communities of trust in highly focused conferences and meet-ups. If you can never be truly outside the institution, as artist Andrea Fraser claims in *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique*[1] then it's high time to create and build our own alternatives.

[1] Andrea Fraser, '*From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique*', Artforum, September 2005, XLIV, No. 1, pp. 278–283.

Lecture *Racial Discrimination in The Age of AI: The Future of Civil Rights in the United States* by Mutale Nkonde, AI Traps Conference, 2019. Photo by Maria Silvano

Jodi Rose: How did Disruption Network Lab come into being?

Tatiana Bazzichelli: My activity on the discourse of networking goes back to the 1990s when I started to be interested in the discourse of art and technology. The first time I was at Ars Electronica in 1996, and started to research this subject, it was still not mainstream. I was living in Italy studying Sociology of Media and Communication. I was part of a hacker collective in Rome (AvANa at the Forte Prenestino social centre), where I was trying to connect the discourses of art and hacking. I began working with grassroots networks in Italy, like *Strano Network* in Florence, another group of artists, activists, and hackers. When I moved to Berlin in 2003 I found that I was raising these networks to an international level. The first exhibition I organised in Berlin was *hack.it.art – Hacktivism in the Context of Art and Media in Italy*, at Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Bethanien – about the connection between art and hacking in Germany and Italy.

Moving to Denmark in 2008 for my PhD at Aarhus University, and then back to Berlin as a curator at transmediale festival from 2011 to 2014, I brought together a network of project spaces connected with the festival, the reSource transmedial culture Berlin. I was trying to understand how the festival could benefit from the local communities in the city. This was an important moment in which I was connecting with the local context of the free independent scene in Berlin working with art and technology, as a curator at the festival.

At transmediale I also worked on the subject of art and whistleblowing. The activities of whistleblowers started to become very important from 2013 on, in the context of the Snowden's disclosures. I was trying to connect the hacker and whistleblowing communities with the activist, artist and queer communities. I always had the idea of connecting these different networks, elevating the discussion to both an international and a local level, with network meetings in spaces around the city during the festival.

When I left transmediale festival in 2014, I decided to found Disruption Network Lab. We are expanding the networked structure by having conferences that are international, and develop the community meet-ups in Berlin with Lieke. We systematised some ideas that I was already trying to bring together inside transmediale, and we did it independently by creating our own organisation and conceptual framework.

My PhD was about the discourse of network culture and media criticism. I developed a theory around disruption as art, and as a result of my PhD research, I wrote the book *Networked Disruption: Rethinking Oppositions in Art, Hacktivism and the Business of Social Networking*[2]. My research focused on how disruption was used tactically as an artistic methodology to dismantle hierarchy in the technological, political and artistic fields. For example, I connected interventions of resistance by Neoism and Luther Blissett to mail art and queer critical practices, leading to the present critique of commercialised social networking platforms. Reflecting on how disruption as art could be viewed as a new form of political criticism led me to study the ways in which certain networking- and community-building practices have been co-opted by tech corporations. This also helped me to understand how to break this circle of co-option related to network structures. Disruption Network Lab emerged from the desire to disrupt systems from within – how to provoke change that is unexpected inside a closed system? We try to expose a power mechanism as a form of art. Disruption then becomes an action interfering with a system from within, to generate the unexpected and create a change inside this closed structure. This is what we do at Disruption Network Lab, following the motto of 'exposing systems of power and injustice'. We bring together artists, computer experts, whistleblowers, investigative journalists, hackers and activists to discuss issues and actions that provoke constructive disruptions in social, technological and political systems.

Lieke Ploeger: I started working in this area in the early 2000s. I was involved in the freetekno scene in the Netherlands. One of the strongest influences for me was this feeling of community building and belonging. It was a tight knit group of people focused around specific sound systems, who organised parties, events and did things together. I found this sense of cohesion and people doing things together inspiring; it originated in the squatter movement and frames ways of doing things yourself outside established systems.

I studied culture, literature and translation studies – and started working at the Royal Library in the Netherlands, digitising information and archives, and bringing this knowledge to wider networks and people. I also worked on giving people access to the technical platforms we used there. It was important to work together and not just be at your own

[2] Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networked Disruption: Rethinking Oppositions in Art, Hacktivism and the Business of Social Networking*, Aarhus, Digital Aesthetics Research Center, 2013.

library. I wanted a change and moved to Berlin, where I continued the same work, but now for the Open Knowledge Foundation with OpenGLAM, a specific working group around cultural data. We advocated the access to open cultural data, not only from the library, but also from museums and archives. I became the community manager of OpenGLAM, and it was my task to develop the online community. We organised events and defined principles around how to open up digital content. The Open Knowledge Foundation is a virtual organisation, and is mainly active online.

I felt it would be a nice change to move into direct community work. A year after moving to Berlin, I started an art and community space with a friend, SPEKTRUM Berlin. Having a physical space is a great way to connect with people, mix-up different crowds, bring together artists and scientists and people interested in different things. We brought these people into the space and engaged with different community groups. That's when I met Tatiana, as we hosted a screening of Disruption Network Lab. It was one of the more interesting communities. I found a lot of connections between my work in open data and knowledge sharing and the interests of the people who came to the Disruption Network Lab events.

The conference programme of Disruption Network Lab involves people who are trying to provoke change on a social and political level in specific areas both local and international. Since 2015 we organised twenty conferences, covering topics such as the drone war, whistleblowing, counter-surveillance, and artistic and activist strategies in times of increased geopolitical control. Our speakers come from different backgrounds and have different expertises, but they all work on exposing injustices in politics and society, and also some of the imbalanced structures of the art world.

The Activation Programme is the community work of Disruption Network Lab. It is not just about connecting local groups; it's also about fostering exchange between local and international networks of trust, exposing systems of power and injustice. We do this through the conference programme, community programme, and the streaming online programme that we started during the Corona pandemic, called *Disruptive Fridays*.

Panel and Screening *Never Whistle Alone*, 2020. Photo by Maria Silvano

Jodi Rose: How do you connect with a specific community, and how do you build a community?

Tatiana Bazzichelli: First, we have to define what communities are. We have our own perspective on community building. It makes sense to speak about network development in relation to all the events and things we do. This is in the name of organisation: Disruption Network Lab. Having the word *network* in the middle signifies, both philosophically and in our practical approach, that for us the key activity is creating communities of trust.

Our philosophy informs how we approach people, communities, networks, and our speakers. We start from the idea of enabling networks of trust. There are many different kinds of communities and networks that we build up; they all come together in a conceptual framework. We see the idea of *creative connection* as something that is really at the core of our programme. This manifests in a sharing experience with our audience and the people who participate in our network development.

On one side are the direct and personal connections with people who are part of different communities and on the other side are new ideas and relations that we develop in our programme. This approach creates a montage of practices, and becomes a *thematic networking structure*. We are always aiming to engage with topics that are current and relevant to society. We also learn about new topics thanks to our networks of speakers, collaboration partners, and audience.

By connecting different areas of expertise we establish a solid network of trust with whistleblowers, hackers, investigative journalists, artists, and critical thinkers. So at the same time we generate a *network of networks*. Our programme deals with disruption and tries to expose injustice from within the system. This is also an experimental methodology of curating, that's why we are called a lab.

The interaction between the networking structure of the conference and the communities is important for the development of our own programme identity. During the conferences people are very engaged, and there is usually a lively debate. The community programme allows us to develop our topics before and after the conferences, to reflect with people and follow up in a very practical way what comes up in the panels and keynotes. People also start to cooperate with other people they meet at the conferences. This happened among whistleblowers and artists, investigative journalists and data analysts as well as the housing activist groups that we connected to people doing research about housing that had data – allowing them both to improve their own research and connect with our communities.

Our partnership with Transparency International is really inspiring. They do critical work on investigations, and they do research analysis and policy-based projects with an international focus. From our side, we can work with a global organisation that is doing great investigative research. We invite speakers from their network, while they connect with our networks and audiences, and to the city in a different way. Thanks to our events they can reach people who will benefit from the data they have uncovered. This creates ongoing in-depth content sharing.

Lieke Ploeger: The word community is a challenge, as it is overused in corporate jargon. I see the meet-ups as a way for people to interact and practically engage with our network. We focus on two angles. The first one is strengthening the community that already exists around the Disruption Network Lab. For our meet-ups we focus on inviting specific local communities around the conference topics. Defining the groups as a community is a nice way of setting the tone, of nurturing a feeling of belonging and of people working together. It's a mental state, something people feel they can join and easily contribute to.

Meet-ups are a great way to discover local perspectives on specific issues and create connections. The conference topics incite a lot of discussion and bring together many people, but there isn't always time to go into details. We hold workshops, teach people a specific skill and host discussions to explore the topics in more depth. We see people at meet-ups who don't go to the conference. They feel more connected to each other when the group is smaller and the space more intimate.

Conference *Borders of Fear*, 2020. Photo by Jan Petersmann

Jodi Rose: Have you seen any changes in the ways people engage or connect during the Corona lockdown?

Tatiana Bazzichelli: When the Corona outbreak started at the end of March we were supposed to do our *Evicted by Greed* conference. We moved it to the end of May and held it

online. However, in between we didn't want to be silent in the face of the closing down of all cultural venues in Berlin. We hosted many online concerts, lectures, classes and streaming events, and we wanted to use the occasion to develop our approach to digital culture. We therefore started *Disruption Fridays* in early April as an online panel with a maximum of three speakers. This allowed us to experiment with the streaming format before the conference in May, and connect with our network and the people who had been part of the conference and community programme in the past.

We could address topics happening in these months, and offer fresh perspectives, as these events were organised quite spontaneously each Friday. Everybody in the team could propose a *Disruptive Friday* topic, and activate their networks of trust. This allowed us to see the range of expertise and interests we share as a group, and develop the presence of members of the team who aren't curators, along with generating ideas for our outreach programme.

They also gave us a constant presence in the cultural scene, in a time when presence and physical meetings were lacking, and when the fear that we might never be able to meet in person again was pervasive. Together with our streaming partner Boiling Head Media we developed a digital tool to host the streaming session, working with the Mix software, which is based on open-source technology and does not have the same privacy concerns as proprietary platforms. It also allowed us to customise the interface, to create something that represents the graphic look of Disruption Network Lab.

We had a community meet-up just before the lockdown, and we decided to continue these also with online formats because we wanted to stay connected to our community. Some hot topics came up during the pandemic. Eviction was a big one, so we organised a meet-up in April about housing evictions in times of crisis. We used the open source online tool Big Blue Button for the online meet-ups. We started each one with everybody introducing who they are, why they are joining, so that the event would be a two-way thing. We also organised a workshop about real estate data, with presentations giving an overall picture, and a discussion between the communities we invited and the speaker. There are benefits to online meet-ups too – it's nice to have people from communities outside Berlin taking part, and you can still chat and speak.

We also organised an online workshop with the *'Steal This Poster'* group on subvertising connected to the *Evicted by Greed* conference. They were supposed to come to Berlin from Italy and London, but couldn't due to the pandemic travel restrictions. We invited one member of the London collective to hold the workshop online. It was interesting to use this format, and see how he shared his knowledge with slides, discussed subvertising with participants, and explored how this could be applied to the discourse of housing and eviction. In September we followed up with a real-life workshop, with four members of the collective from Rome, London and Paris, held at Supermarkt Berlin. This was part of the Data Cities conference about smart technologies, surveillance and human rights.

Steal This Poster by Hogre

Jodi Rose: How could people in, for instance Africa, India, or Australia benefit from your experience?

Tatiana Bazzichelli: It would be really interesting if people started to organise events related to disruption and technology in other parts of the world. The methodology has to be interdisciplinary, and try to bring together different communities as we do: hackers, activists, data scientists, researchers, whistleblowers, trans and queer communities. These are areas that interest us, also personally.

The idea of trying to open up systems and their logics, and exposing the power of these systems unites the different approaches. All these communities are engaged with opening up systems. A hacker opens up technology and advocates for freedom of speech and open codes. Whistleblowers expose misconduct within systems, either on a government or a corporate level. An activist does it because politics and power are part of everyday life, but also because of the challenge to bring about change creatively.

We also know artists who open up artistic codes to expose the power of artificial intelligence or what goes on behind the interface of corporations. Some people, who are part of queer

and trans communities, do the same with their own sexual identity – they open up the codes of their sexuality to try out a fluid way of experiencing their bodies. All these people do disruption very differently. At Disruption Network Lab we do it on a different level through our events.

Lieke Ploeger: The community programme has been running for two years now. At Spektrum we wrote a guide on our community-building process after three and a half years.[3] It outlines what we were doing with all the different groups, and what we learned from it. We met three times a year with all the communities and reflected on our working methods, thought about what was going wrong and what was going right. Since all these groups were working in the same way, they could all connect with and learn from each other. I thought the most interesting part in creating this guide was going through the lessons learned on how to solve some of the shared problems in the community: how to interact with people, and how to stimulate people to do something. We started to understand some aspects of how communities work, and we put all the lessons learned in the guide. But it is important to be aware that there is always a specific context in which you work, and some things don't translate well.

Meet-ups should always be two-way conversations. Everybody introduces themselves to say why they are there, what they want to learn, and everybody allows space for everybody to speak. Everyone should feel welcome. You don't need to be a computer scientist; it's not about knowledge being spread from 'us' to 'them'. We also host events that are more hands-on, like workshops. People really start to talk during the socialising that happens around them. At the conference we always organise a dinner to conclude the day and this is an important moment, as the speakers can start talking with each other and participants can find a common ground. It's a more intimate setting to start sharing ideas, and you already know the people and what they are working on.

Tatiana Bazzichelli: I always try to talk with each speaker individually before the conferences, to help them understand the concept behind our event. When you are a speaker at Disruption Lab you are ideally not just coming in to give your speech and then leave. We hope our speakers are open for an experience of connection, and are willing to really participate. We are trying to answer a question with the conferences, and the answer becomes stronger if we develop it collectively.

Sometimes speakers suggest other people who can give a lecture, and that expands the network. We trust the suggestions of others, and try to create an inviting environment in which people already know each other's work, and want to be on the same panel together. It might be people who've been following each other for years but have never met. Organising a conference is really about creating a network.

[3] The guide is available at https://re-imagine-europe.eu/resources_item/how-we-can-all-make-it-to-the-future-a-guide-to-offline-community-building-in-art-science-2/

Visiting the Invisible: A Berlin City Tour to Anonymous and Aggressive Real Estate Investors, 2020. Photo by Maria Silvano

Jodi Rose: How would you like Disruption Network Lab develop in the future?

Tatiana Bazzichelli: We've developed a format of organising a conference every three months, combined with the structure of the regular community meet-ups. We can be timely and address issues that are burning at the moment because we have ongoing events. We aim to expand beyond our geographical borders to address issues that are impacting other countries. We organised a conference on ISIS's media propaganda and its influence across the Middle East and Europe. Next year we will focus on Asia. We aim to be more global and try to understand how our topics could be an inspiration for analysing practices of digital culture, and for political and media critique in different contexts.

Lieke Ploeger: I'm excited to continue the meet-ups, and develop the community conference. Holding a community day on the Sunday right after the conference gives us a way to connect quickly and directly to the conference. It's a three-day event, so we have to make the Sunday interesting otherwise people won't come. I'm excited to see what will happen with all the groups when the conference is longer.

Jodi Rose: What's the most surprising thing you've learned?

Lieke Ploeger: You always wonder who is going to show up and what their background is. We even had a retired police officer in the audience at one meet-up. I'm interested in knowing who are the people who find us, come back, and ask questions in the conference.

Tatiana Bazzichelli: To give visibility and support to people who are doing critical work is really important. Brandon Bryant, a former drone operator in the United States Air Force who turned whistleblower, was speaking at Disruption Network Lab in front of a large public about the Drone War in 2015. It was very important for me to meet him, because it completely changed my perspective. I wouldn't have met him twenty years ago when I was involved in Italian activism, because we were in different circuits. I would have considered him the enemy. Meeting him and hearing about his whistleblowing experience helped me to shape the future direction of the programme. I learned about the impact of changing opinion, and about the value of connecting people who work on social justice and whistleblowing in very different fields and levels.

The boundaries that separate us are almost non-existent. We can connect with people from different backgrounds and have a common mission. Meeting Brandon Bryant made me understand how important whistleblowers are as people who decide to act within their systems. They are really able to re-orient what is happening in society. What they do comes with great personal risk and a possibly a huge devastating impact on their life. They suffer isolation, persecution but at the same time they provide a wonderful change of mind. This encounter with the unexpected still inspires how we work at Disruption Network Lab.

Radio Beyond Radio

The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group

Ràdio Web MACBA (RWM) is an online radio project based at MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona: a radio-beyond-radio that dwells in the folds and intersections of critical thinking, contemporary art, artistic research, activism, knowledge transfer, sound... and everything in between. RWM produces podcasts which can be listened to on demand, downloaded, and/or subscribed to. Bordering on filecasting, it also publishes essays, texts, and related documentation.

The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group[1] started in 2016 as a means for the closest members of the RWM team to spend some time together, slow down processes, share physical space, and see what happens along the way. The Covid-19 crisis put this approach on hold, and the group is now trying to rework a methodology that was heavily dependent on the suspension of ordinary time and schedules, and on a hands-on practice of togetherness. The questions in this interview were posed by the editorial team of Re-Imagine Europe and answered by various members of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group.

[1] Many hands and voices have dipped in and out of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group, but we regularly meet with: Dolores Acebal, André Chêdas, Antonio Gagliano, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, Verónica Lahitte, Violeta Ospina, Tiago Pina, Gemma Planell, Quim Pujol, Anna Ramos, Txe Roimeser, Matías Rossi, Anna Irina Russell, María Salgado, and Albert Tarrats.

Photo previous page
Conversation with Élisabeth Lebovici. Photo by RWM Working Group

The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group in action, Barcelona, 2019. Photo by RWM Working Group

Why did you feel that it was important or necessary to start a working group?

Quim Pujol: In a post-human society in which the myth of the liberal subject is breaking down, it is improbable that anybody is not 'working in a group' already. But once you realise that knowledge stems from making connections between ideas, and that other people boost this process, it becomes desirable to consciously work with as many people as possible in order to keep these myriad connections emerging. However, space and time constraints limit the maximum number of people for a conversation to remain understandable, without noise completely taking over meaningful exchanges. So the important thing is not just to start a working group, but also to figure out the right size and rhythm for the group at a given moment.

Anna Ramos: It began with the simple gesture of sharing both time and space in a different manner. We are interested in duration, and time seems to be elastic in our conversations and processes: we rarely hesitate to test weird twists, ideas and connections in post-production, knowing that the worst thing that can happen is that we might waste time in the process. Nonetheless, everything else seemed to be rushed, we never seemed to spend a single moment sharing anything but the practicalities of whatever current project we were involved in. The Working Group began as a proposal to be together, to get to know each other as a group, to embark on a collective conversation that is not necessarily about RWM.

Interestingly, we spent the first sessions talking about what we were doing, discussing the politics and aesthetics of editing from an amateur stand-point, identifying what we could learn from each other, and sharing tips, likes, and fears. And then we began cooking (this is not a metaphor), doing different kinds of stuff together.

Who is in the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group? Is it a mix of artists, curators and radiomakers? If so, what distinguishes a radiomaker from a sound artist, with regards to approaching an audience, for instance?

Quim Pujol: I believe the group would happily describe itself as a freak show. Our backgrounds could not differ more from each other. In our conversations, there is an unspoken rule against resorting to pre-established identities based on work categories such as artist, educator, curator, or radiomaker. We are all multi-employed cultural workers engaged in really diverse activities and bread-winning occupations. The fact that we manage to keep working in the cultural field in Spain despite many adversities is in itself a huge common denominator.

Verónica Lahitte: The fact that we are so all different makes it possible to share knowledge and tools. That is one of the group's commitments: to generate a space for self-learning and exchange, a space in which we convey our own experiences and strategies and at the same time enter into the worlds and interests of others. Creating that hybrid space of text, gadgets, and sound is part of radio.

How would you describe the aim of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group? Is it mainly to make better, more interesting podcasts that probe subjects more deeply? Or is it just as important to grow a community of like-minded people and learn from each other?

Quim Pujol: The thing about making connections between ideas is that you can't foresee the exchanges that will take place. Sometimes we discuss a practical issue and we have a conversation aimed at solving an audio-editing problem. Other times we ramble on for hours about astrophysics and obscure YouTube videos. Both types of conversations are equally satisfying and we can easily switch from one mode to another almost without realizing.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Everything is permeable, and so is the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group. So, yes, we are sure that our get-togethers influence our podcast-producing practice in one way or another, but that is not the main objective. As you put it, it is more about the possibilities arising from this community of like-minded people. Although we would say it is more about nurturing than growing.

Discussions after lunch, Barcelona, 2019. Photo by RWM Working Group

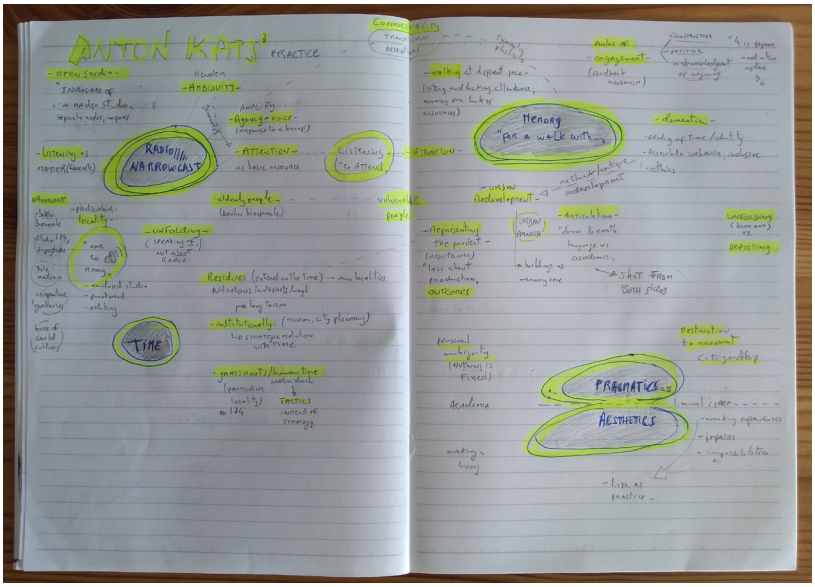
How would you describe your way of working?

Roc Jiménez de Cisneros: As clichéd as it may sound, it's a rather organic process rooted in the very simple premise of sharing a given space: a kind of office space that turns into a kitchen after a few hours. So by being in the same place, working on our own things, chatting, procrastinating, cooking together, then eating, you create a window of opportunity for shared interests to arise. More often than not, these meetings turn into parallel sub-meetings, based on different ideas, interests, etcetera. Simply by having a bunch of people under the same roof for a few hours, these unexpected Venn diagrams occur sporadically. Every now and then, one of the things that have come out of those interactions gains enough traction to become an actual project, or a loose idea to explore as a group, such as building antennae or recording Foley.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group has evolved in a kind of parasitic way. During our gatherings, we do not always all work together. As Roc points out, we tend to split into smaller groups that feed on each other's interests and obsessions, until eventually Anna (thank you Anna!) brings us together to go over things we might have left open or unfinished as a group. These are often opportunities for collaboration among members of the group who may otherwise not have worked together directly based on their interests. Or they may even be invitations to merge our interests with outside communities and extend our parasitic practice. Examples of this could be our

incursion into gamelan with the Gamelan Penempaan Guntur[2] at the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, and helping with the audio archives from the Euraca project.[3]

Verónica Lahitte: The way we do the RWM interviews is not the usual way of creating content. We do not work with fixed scripts prepared in advance. Instead, we allow room for the conversation to move in unexpected directions. Talking while leaving room for hesitation and for the possibility of error is a different way of producing knowledge.



André Chêdas' notes for our podcast with Anton Kats

What did you discover during the get-togethers with the Working Group? Did you share any obsessions, interests, objects of fascination that you had not expected beforehand? How did that translate into your working process?

Violeta Ospina: I found that I could learn from the way others work, and take risks with our podcasts that I would never have dared without first discussing those processes as a group. I could make a proposal, and also make sure it had meaning within the podcast.

[2] We recorded a bunch of sounds on a Gamelan to be used as background audio for podcasts. The idea was to capture Gamelan sounds that are non-canonical in terms of structure and timbre, thinking of them as raw source material rather than actual Gamelan music.

[3] Euraca is a laboratory of speech, of tongue, of deed, of language, of poetry. It is based in Madrid, but draws on experiences from places like Argentina, Chile, and Belgium, to name a few. Euraca had recorded quite a lot of performances and talks during their own events, but never got around to doing anything with them due to lack of time and experience. We helped them clean up the recordings so that they could publish them online.

For example: leaving in a fragment of voice that would normally be taken out, where the interviewer (Anna) was giving reading instructions to the person doing the voiceover (Juan) in the fictional reading of a letter. A bit like creating a fiction in order to then break it. Or another time, we spent an afternoon talking only about the annoying clicking and popping sounds that people make when they speak, which are amplified in the membranes of our ears. It was quite comforting to hear everyone's pet peeves in that regard, the difference between what we deem natural and artificial when it comes to human voice, things that have no real answer, but can be shared with intuition. Being able to share these obsessions brings a smile to your face in the solitude of the editing process.

In what fields did you feel you needed to grow as a group?

Violeta Ospina: In connecting to the material we work with and to sound-matter in more playful and intuitive ways: through the practice of Foley, live broadcasts, studio rehearsals, and making antennae. Kneading sound together as a group, plunging our hands into the dough, is a long and tricky process. And the long impasse we are currently going through may end up providing clues for ways in which to attend to the meaning of what we do.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Since the group is shaped by the needs and interests of each of us, it is hard to speak from a single point of view. Energies and situations always vary from person to person, and we try to be attentive and listen to them when choosing our next steps. For example, right now we are rethinking ways to get together in these forcedly online times that are keeping us from eating Roc's delicious cakes. We're starting a sort of reading group (in name only, because we might deal with any kind of document that interests us, not just books) as an excuse to keep sharing thoughts.

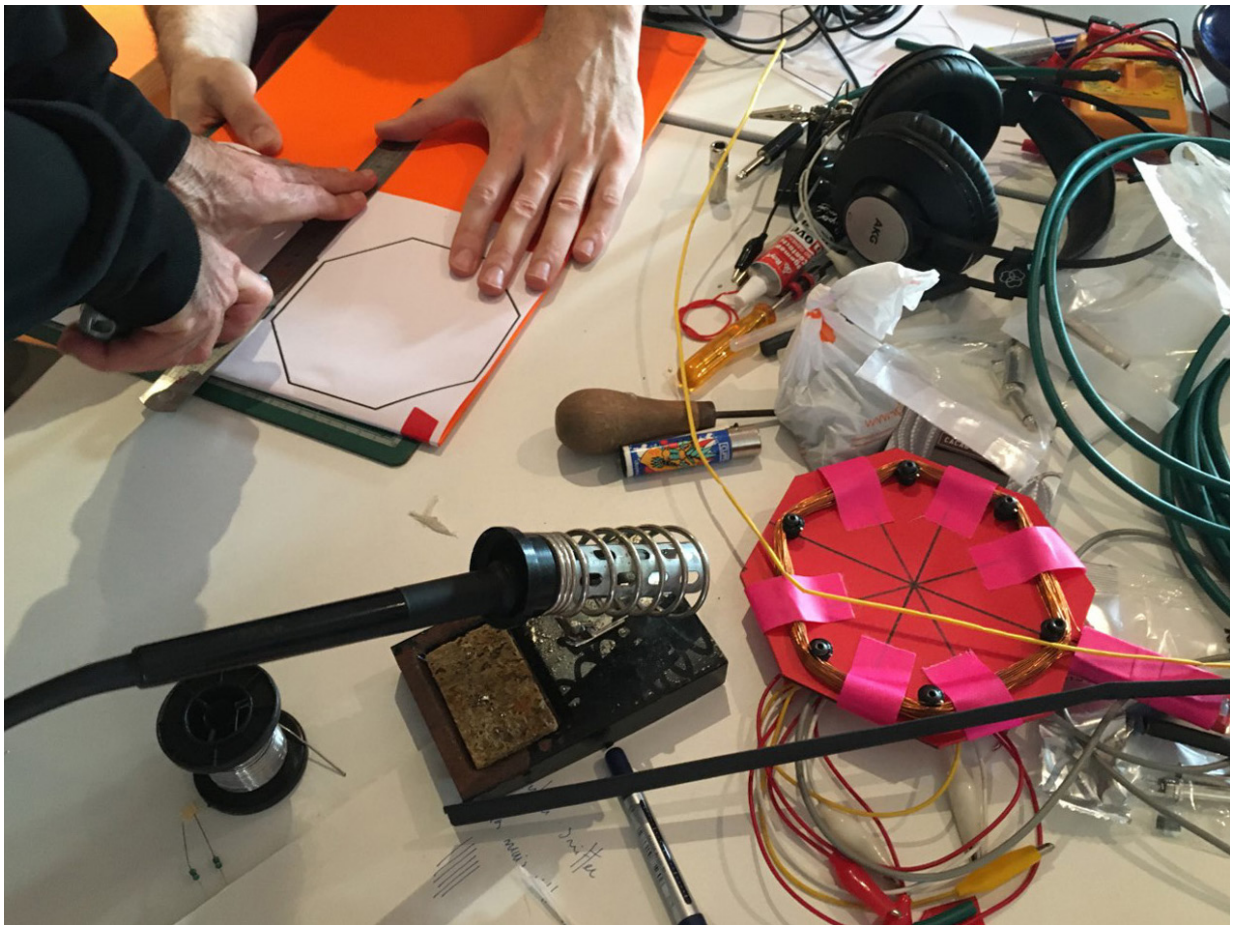
Why was slowing down considered so important? How do you slow down?

Anna Ramos: The synergies, conversations, alliances, and generosities that the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group has generated led me to realise, for the first time in more than a decade behind the scenes, that our community is inside. It is made up of the hands, ears, and brains that have forged the RWM project. It is made of all the tiny yet huge contributions of our interviewees, the beautiful amateur voices we use for our voice-overs, our colleagues at MACBA... and especially, of those who have been involved in making our podcasts. We are all amateurs, we have learnt (from) and taught each other. Slowing down is such a simple, yet challenging, gesture, because you don't see any immediate results, there's no clear objective. It does help to keep the learning curve quite high, as it has always been, and to keep things even more interesting, open to discussion, to reflection and to unexpected chaotic, collective contributions/experiments.

Could you describe the most important result of slowing down?

Roc Jiménez de Cisneros: Even in projects that should be all about reflecting, learning, and digesting vast amounts of information, it's easy to get caught up in production cycles, deadlines and so on. Meeting once a month with no clear goal in mind, no fixed order of the day, just for fun, means that our meetings are not subject to those constraints. In fact, 'fun' is a key word here, encapsulating ideas related to amateurism and a playful approach to experimentation with whatever side-project emerges from the meetings. Slowing down means trying things for kicks, regardless of the outcome or how productive they may be.

Quim Pujol: We may still be hampered by the invisibility of production modes. In itself, simply sharing space and time with a bunch of people with similar interests gets a lot of work done, as we constantly update each other about our concerns and experiences each time we meet. So I would say there are always different types of 'work' going on at the same time. There is a certain type of work where we don't really need to do anything except pay attention to each other and try to understand what a particular person is going through at a given moment in time. And for that type of work, we need emptiness. We need to let go of our particular and collective aims, although they will be enriched by this apparent hiatus in our activities.



DIY sniffers and antennae in the making, Barcelona, 2019. Photo by RWM Working Group

Do you feel there is a community around RWM, or is RWM a tool that grows communities for MACBA?

Violeta Ospina: Both. There is a working and listening community linked to the production of RWM podcasts, which is organised around the shared work, social relations, thinking, and affects involved in each project. This community does not just consist of the relationships among the people in the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group, but also encompasses the people (voices) who weave together ideas and sounds, beyond RWM. On the other hand, there is a growing community of RWM listeners and thinkers, for whom radio is not just a tool, but a channel for interconnecting these communities based on subject matter, style, meanings, practices and knowledge. They also contribute tools that enrich the museum. It is important to add that the physical space where some of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group meetings have taken place, the MACBA Kitchen (which had previously been a multipurpose space) has allowed the chance encounter of listeners and thinkers, people from other departments and from initiatives such as educational and public programmes. These activities sometimes include people who are not necessarily linked to the museum.

Where would you place current RWM podcasts in the landscape of radio documentaries, radiophonics, radio programmes (and their history?)

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: We are kind of new to the world of podcasts (Anna Irina & Albert), but we'll take a shot anyway. Before we started participating with the group, we had used RWM as a resource for our own research and as an ear-opener to lines of thought that were around us but may have slipped under our radar. We feel that RWM has quite a distinctive approach to the podcast format. The lack of an interviewer or narrator's voice, plus the usual duration – definitely aiming for long podcasts – offers interviewees the chance to explain themselves calmly and at length. This often brings up tangential thoughts that may otherwise not have surfaced. If they find their place in the overall narrative of the podcast, these provide a broader view of things. And if they don't, they can always end up in the lovely catch-all deleted scenes section.

How do you relate to the wider community around RWM? Are activities such as the electromagnetic sniffing workshops, the public events in the city, and the kitchen project a part of that?

Violeta Ospina: I think it's the podcasts and writing that give rise to these other activities, producing this extended community. And also the people who are interviewed, and the path that the writing creates (or not) in the museum. I may be wrong, but instead, I think that taking part in public events such as the Radiotón #2 (XRCB)[4] and Smart City[5] pilots (which we did with the support of Re-Imagine Europe), help to expand the notion of a single audience and to talk about radio in different ways. Not just content, but also finding meaning in being present, as a cooking group.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Events like the Barcelona Community Radio Network (XRCB) Radiotón#2, where we played around with the sounds we had recorded in the Blind Foley sessions, and the Smart City Week programme, where we did a couple of antennae and sniffer workshops, are opportunities to open up our small community to the outside world. The work we do with the group often focuses on shareability, but that can only happen when some of these projects gain a certain momentum and coincide with opportunities. However, this openness is not always about giving and showing, it can also involve learning and receiving from other communities, as in the case of the sessions with the Gamelan group. In any case, it's always a slow simmering process.

How do you grow a community around the podcasts? Is content (the subject matter) the main attractor? Do you shape a community or do you 'listen in' to your community to find out what their fascinations and interests are?

Antonio Gagliano: In my experience, RWM content crystallises in a blurred zone between planning and chance. Sometimes we talk to people who are passing through the city: the interviewees are often people linked to the museum's activities, with whom we wouldn't otherwise manage to arrange a meeting and get together. When we do, the conversations are a celebration of abundance, but also of straying, which is a way of dismantling any kind of prefabricated discourse. The interviews often go down unexpected paths. The editing process conveys sensitive decisions that frustrate expectations of what that particular interviewee was supposed to say. So I think that the content is also shaped by our persistence in encouraging and capturing moments in which something special happens. Atmospheric instants in which multiple gut feelings intertwine, giving rise to disconcerting, not immediately obvious ideas. I'd say that this exploration comes through, and that it is one of the project's attractors. As for the relationship with communities, I think that rather than directly seeking audience loyalty, RWM content is chosen based on identifying what research processes need to be accompanied, what ideas need to be stretched in order to grow, what is so sexy that it can't be left out, what discussions cannot be postponed.

[4] Radiotón #02 was a live radio event organised by XRCB (Barcelona Free Radio Network). The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group had a slot in the general programme to present our work on what Anna Irina Russell (one member of the group) called Blind Foley – that is, Foley sounds not intended to accompany any images. From her experience and methodology, we built our very first collective library of sounds.

[5] Within the context of the Smart City Week in Barcelona, we had our second ever live radio event, again organised by XRCB. Since we were working on DIY sniffers and other electromagnetic antennae at the time, we decided that our contribution would be to actually build sniffers there, as the event unfolded. At the end, we tested them live and talked to the audience about the devices and how we approached them from different perspectives and levels of (non)-expertise.

Presentation of *Colapso* in the context of Radiotón #2, Barcelona, 2019. Photo by RWM Working Group

How would you like to see the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group develop in the future?

Violeta Ospina: Like a small, open community that works online or cooks together, exploring the meaning of being present, of listening and broadcasting. A space in which to heal together in a situation of isolation and precarity in several senses: precarity of contact, technological precariousness, affective precarity, precariousness of collective learning...

Quim Pujol: I'm very thankful to the institutional framework that allows our get-togethers, but at the same time I believe this Working Group could lead to experimental proposals that overflow the aims, interests and dynamics of the institution. I dream of working on proposals that the museum would not know how to frame within its current understanding of itself. This grassroots approach might even lead to a new understanding of the public mission of the museum. In a virtuous circle, this redefinition could lead to a further expansion of the field of possibilities at RWM.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: As long as it remains active, which is the main thing we would like to see happening, and it keeps on being a space for getting together – ideally physically, if the situation allows –, we do not have any special requests for the future. We are sure that having fun and being open to each other's interests, which has so far been the main engine of our projects, will keep giving in many unforeseeable ways.

The Factory of Sound

by Karolina Rugle

The Factory of Sound is an educational programme by KONTEJNER for the youngest musicians of the future. The project is led by electronic musician, composer and teacher Nenad Sinkauz, together with percussionist, composer and teacher Nenad Kovačić. The children learn how to improvise through using their own voices and bodies, and audio equipment like microphones, effects, synthesizers and other devices. They produce music with these devices, as well as with live sampling, voice modulation, and body percussion, but above all, by playing together. This allows the junior improvisation ensemble to perform ‘instant compositions’ at a level appropriate to their age, perception, and knowledge of music.

Photo previous page
The Factory of Sound, workshop led by Nenad Sinkauz & Nenad Kovačić at KONTEJNER, Zagreb, 2019.
Photo by Silvija Dogan

The Factory of Sound, workshop led by Nenad Sinkauz & Nenad Kovačić at KONTEJNER, Zagreb, 2019. Photo by Silvija Dogan

Introduction

The increasing importance of informal learning structures in the cultural sector, and the relevance of the participative and innovative elements in such activities, have prompted a wide range of workshop programmes within festivals, artistic organisations and institutions. However, these often seem to assume a similar initial position to that of formal education, thus missing the opportunity to reinvent the existing paradigms within art education. *The Factory of Sound* project was implemented as a part of Re-Imagine Europe, with the aim of introducing children to contemporary music and art, and making music on their own. Factory of Sound tried to address the gaps in standard musical education, not only on a national level, but also in the general Western education system. The initiator of *The Factory of Sound*, curator and musicologist Davorka Begović, reflects on this project and the resulting insights, experiences and recommendations. Speaking from the perspective of an interdisciplinary arts organisation, she stresses the importance of establishing a high-quality relationship with audience members as an integral part of nurturing and educating them.

> Audience development, part of the greater need to create changes that are imminent to any creative sector, has to be naturally embedded in the overall identity of a cultural organisation, enabling a two-way communication with the audiences, and an active participation in developments in society.
>
> Davorka Begović

Points of departure

> Very helpful starting points are passion and dedication, combined with honesty. And, of course, constructive self-criticism and a willingness for open discussion.
>
> Davorka Begović

Begović explains the basis for a collaborative children's workshop that, in the Croatian context, turned out to be a pioneering project offering an alternative approach to music and art education. Due to a general notion that, for something to be deemed 'musical', it must adhere to a previously established system of music, one of the important goals of the workshop and the potential long-term project was for the participants to realise that 'musical sounds' encompass far more than what they had been told was musical. The aim was to introduce children to the importance of freedom in music, authorship and creative roles, and to have them actively acknowledge from an early age that music today (and, more importantly, the music of tomorrow) goes beyond the traditionally taught definition and understanding of music.

A composer and performer with a highly interdisciplinary profile, Nenad Sinkauz has been designing and leading the project workshops since their inception. He explains how getting children acquainted with different musical devices from an early age enables them to start creating their own music much sooner. This is different from the classical musical training prevalent in some educational systems in Europe (even when other approaches are encouraged), where one learns only to *reproduce* somebody else's music, which is likely to go on for months or years before children have an opportunity to perform music of their own. Given the young age of the participants, the main aim was for them to simply become acquainted with another type of sound world and not be afraid to express themselves within it.

Methodology

Sustainable thinking within the field of music practice and teaching is somewhat uncharted territory that certainly deserves more attention in order to develop a proactive shift in the perception of both arts and education. Questioning to whom, why and how we teach music is an important step that eventually leads to developing the capacities and competences of professionals who engage in the activities and design them. The endeavour to create a methodology and form a suitable artistic approach in the workshop meant deviating from one's own music making practise and education activities in general. As none of the workshop leaders teach regularly in the school system, eliminating this general practice was not an issue. In comparison to the interactive programmes, activities and workshops that had taken place thus far, the particular approach and new elements that were introduced when designing the workshops did bring about changes with regard to the tools and methodologies.

Experimenting with one's own personal music making and listening to and discussing a variety of musical sounds and options was a way of progressing towards further work. It meant fostering interest, and building relations and ideas with other participants. Merging conceptual and technical information within music making became possible very quickly thanks to solid foundations in the workshops. The assortment of instruments was always briefly introduced at the start by the workshop leader(s), followed by assigning each participant a particular instrument or musical part. After this the workshop leader(s) would electronically manipulate the sounds, introducing a set of signs that would be used for the remainder of workshop. The creative exploration of music listening is also an important part of learning music, alongside overcoming technical challenges and gaining a conceptual understanding of music making – whether it's singing, playing or working on the produced material.

> We also had a game to introduce the different, less common percussion instruments, in which the participants had to give their impression of each one and grade them on a scale of 1 to 10 – how they like its sound and how they like the sound when it has been processed. Then they would get to hold and try out the instruments.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

As soon as someone was introduced to a device or an instrument, they were given it to play with straight away. To prevent the workshop from turning into a playground of sounds – given the young age and short attention span of the children – the crucial point was to encourage listening, improvisation and a form of prototype composition. This meant introducing actually making music as early as the second or third session, and developing skills along the way.

Good preparation and guided individual exploration enabled a sense of a non-hierarchical approach and fostered trust from the children. The advantage of having two music instructors at the same time contributed to this. One always played music with them, deepening that collaborative relationship and giving the children a greater sense of participation, while the other manipulated the sounds and gave them real-time feedback on the produced material. Listening to their recordings meant a lot to them and made a great difference in their approach later on.

> The programme does not discriminate in terms of sound – between melody and sound. At first it seemed strange to the children that an abrasive sound, such as scratching or screeching, can also be incorporated into the soundscape. It is important to make them understand that there are no mistakes in making music.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

As the range of possibilities for working with the sounds and music making grew with each session, the children also developed their ideas about what they wanted to create with the tools they had at their disposal, and their curiosity for learning more about technique increased as well.

Fostering inclusion and openness

While communication about most of the music workshops and programmes for the youngest music enthusiasts is usually directed at the children's parents, and is presented as something that the child will surely like, and for which the parents would be willing to pay, in this case the starting point was the complete opposite. The programme was aimed at a particular age category, but it came without any preconditions and was open to a more diverse group, free of charge. It also respected the possibility that a child might choose not to stay for the duration the programme, but would get to know new people and things – gadgets, devices, instruments and sounds. That approach also opened up ways of developing new learning and performing methods that foster audience development, diversity and inclusion. The aim of broadening the scope and methodologies of the project led to shaping a grassroots approach befitting an inclusive practice. Without any exoticising or labelling, it resulted in a full performance at a festival, and raised awareness about social issues – tackling the issue of refugees, asylum seekers and asylees in this case.

Although condensed into six sessions spanning less than two weeks – instead of the usual two months – the workshop with the children of asylum seekers from different backgrounds employed the same artistic methods as it did for all the other children, with the exception of language. Seemingly an obstacle, the language barrier became a communication tool because the participants who spoke Croatian translated for the ones who didn't, and sounds and lyrics were used as an effective communication system,

The Factory of Sound, workshop led by Nenad Sinkauz & Nenad Kovačić at KONTEJNER, Zagreb, 2019. Photo by Silvija Dogan

enabling the children to share their ideas throughout the learning experience. Through this they also acquired a certain critical literacy, giving them a voice to tell their own stories.

> We also gave them a task to share the fairytales that they like, and then we tried to create the accompanying music for them. The other task was for them to sing several songs from their culture. We quickly realised that a lot of them knew and were singing this one song, 'Atuna Tufuli', which translated means 'give us back our childhood' and we realised that it was about being a refugee. This is something all of them could relate to, so we incorporated it, and it became a way to bridge the gap, to find common ground.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

All the children in these workshops were addressed equally, and in such a way that their participation formed the core of the project. There was no preconceived result. Individual ways of learning to engage with art developed throughout the session and in such a context the teachers had to constantly be prepared for potential detours from what might have been viewed as a desired outcome at the start of the collective work. The values transferred during the process included artistic, social and intrapersonal skill sets, knowledge and, primarily, awareness of the possibilities at hand.

Challenges and take-outs

> We knew we wanted to create this as a long-term project. We knew we would encounter several obstacles and problems, and we wanted to use the first year as a sort of test run for fine-tuning the ideas for the future editions. However, we had no idea how and whether this would work.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

A challenge that presented itself from the outset was the age range of the participants in the same group, which was at the same time an element of inclusion and a potential obstacle to further planning and structuring activities. When the group consisted of children from many different countries, many more problems arose, especially when there was less time to work. Some of these children were living at the reception centre for asylum seekers, which created additional scheduling problems.

> In addition to the language barrier, there were cultural differences. But most of all, they were refugees – we didn't know what sort of conditions they had left behind, what their emotional state was. At first it was pretty chaotic, we tried different methods until finally, just some days before the performance we were able to get through to them and connect.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

Some of the shortcomings of the Croatian educational system, both in schools and music schools, which were addressed here were the motivation, ability and readiness to perform music, without the pressure of having to resemble any other performance, interpretation, and in general, without an imposed and tacitly accepted single way of doing things. This

usually impedes the desire to perform even further and often does irreparable damage to the young people's motivation.

> Whereas at end-of-year performances in school you are able to reproduce a few minutes of music, at the end of the workshop, we performed a proper, 20-minute concert and the parents were really amazed, both with the amount of music their children could produce and the level of concentration they were able to achieve.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

As the practice and performance is undefined and led by a teacher-centric set of technical and musical challenges, it allows for more personal investment. Participants were asked to listen and analyse their own performance, their own music, with authentic engagement, especially in the days leading up to the presentation.

> The final performance is a vital element, because precisely by demonstrating what they have learned and achieved, the children acquire a better sense of the value of what they have created. This gives them a sense of pride, and it also creates a change in the parents' perceptions of what experimental music is and can be. Several children returned to the workshop, becoming 'regulars'.
>
> Nenad Sinkauz

A meaningful practice of sharing ideas, learning through overcoming challenges, and also by setting out into the unknown: all this matters a lot to young people in their formative years. The effects go beyond the performance, into the social realm. To develop further and 'level up' in both the practice and understanding of art and music, and the role they have in our communities and education, it is necessary to question the purpose of our music schools in Croatia, and perhaps other parts of Europe that share similar concerns. If the scope and goals of music schools stop at the practice of classical music – however admirable, beautiful, and necessary that is – and their mission is limited by the standards of (at least) 50 years ago, as is largely still the case in Croatia, then a whole sphere of expressivity and artistic practices is being ignored. Such a system of music schools not only runs the risk that music education will be labelled as elitist, but also excludes a lot of potential. Providing the knowledge for playing and singing is one of the elementary tools of music making, but it is only one aspect of the musical experience. Creative exploration, involving a lot of experimentation, listening and exposure to a wider variety of musical sounds, techniques and styles, should be an essential part of working with young people and children.

Although mostly neglected, one such practice that is very important and useful in the process of learning music is also one of the oldest: improvisation. Improvisation contains specific creative possibilities in terms of performing according to a more or less structured idea, and is thus considered more of a process than a final result or a 'product'. However, the initial positive impulse for creation that it provides, as well as the liberating effect it has on the children, is channelled as an encouragement to express oneself, something that is usually either lacking or not prioritised in music education. This is often a result of the ideal to reproduce certain music as accurately as possible. Such a practice has long-

term effects, extending even to higher music education, where professional musicians can experience a crisis due to a lack of development in the area of musicality and creativity.

Therefore, as one of the important elements to include in any such endeavours, improvisation serves as a perfect catalyst for many aspects that move the creative process forward. It prompts the young musician to make decisions on the spur of the moment; the unpredictable and uncontrolled phenomenon of creativity thus resurges suddenly, bringing the motivation to the forefront. The number of ideas spring into the mind of a highly motivated participant is much higher. This can be seen in the quantity of interesting musical ideas the participants came up with, which made the intensity and fruitfulness of the collective efforts in the ensemble grow exponentially.

Some of the elements that should be part of any well prepared and creative-led music education system are, for instance, adding chamber ensembles of various configurations to the existing formats of classical music (choirs, orchestra, etc.), encouraging students to form their own ensembles, enabling personal experience in creating music through composition and improvisation, creative listening, and discovering other dimensions in music theory (and even music history). Designing such an approach could also foster interest in contemporary art and music, or a way to make it more accessible through participatory elements such as those explored in *The Factory of Sound*. Along the way, children learned about processes, art styles or directions, artists' poetics and questions

> While further experimenting with methods and tools, it is important not to miss analysing the results and outcomes, pros and cons, and formulate effective conclusions that could be embedded in the future work. In the long run, I think the methods and approaches of *The Factory of Sound* could provide a useful basis for a potential future alternative music school. It could be developed in such a way that it really acts as 'the other' music education system. Coming back to the initial reasons for creating such a workshop, there was a need to fill in some gaps and deficiencies in music education, not only the Croatian, but perhaps also in other parts of Europe. From where we stand right now, one could create programmes for different age groups, and also different groups content-wise, with different specialists from the field of (contemporary) music and more.
>
> Davorka Begović

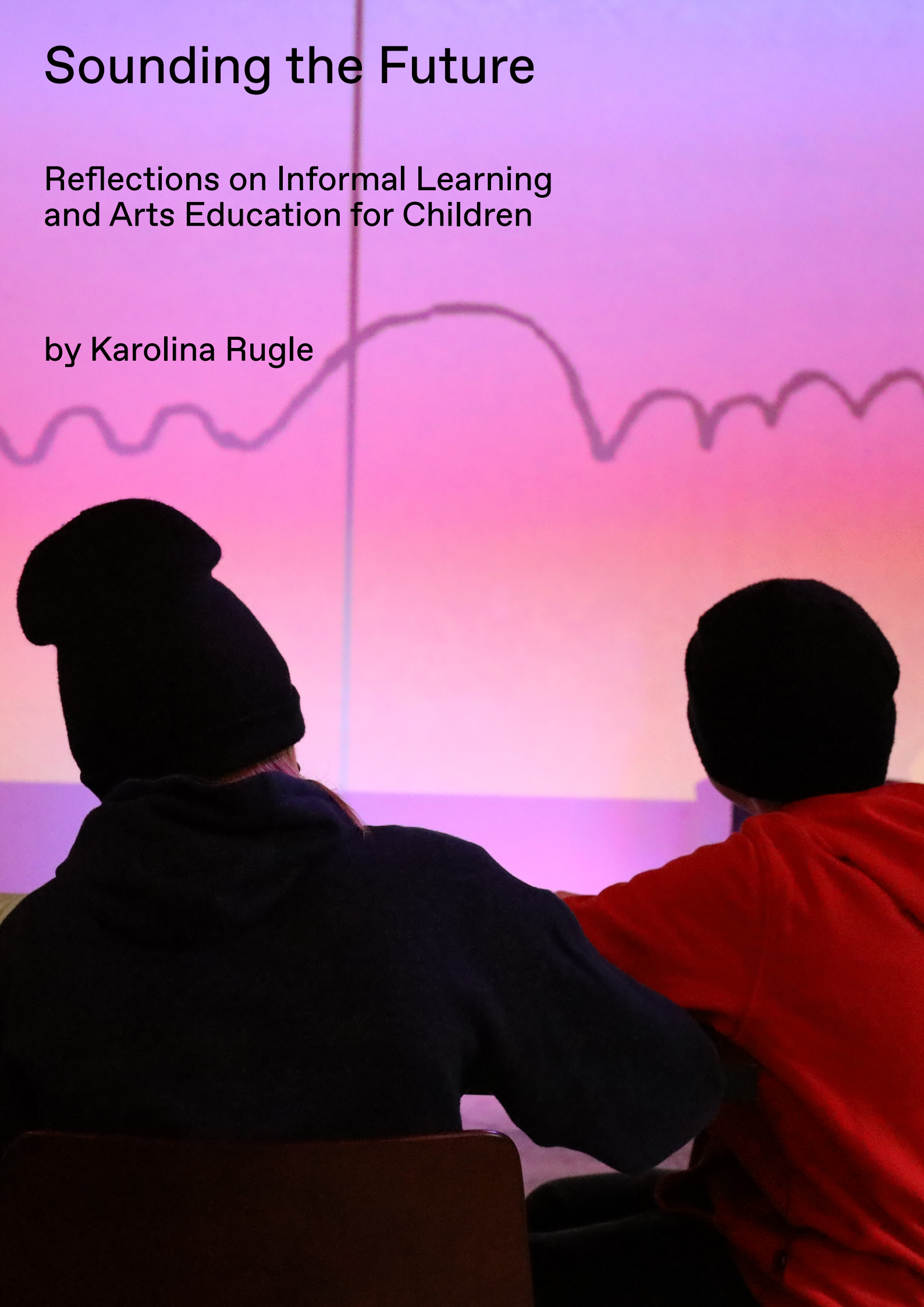
An education that would help young people to communicate, and to be free and creative in their ideas would also equip them with the tools to shape a different kind of society. Those of us who have been classically trained are very much aware that current music education does not explore potential to the full extent, and that those artists who are perceived as truly authentic are not a fruit of the music education system, and that the need for change is long overdue. Programmes that connect education and artistic practices, with a particular sensibility for the contemporary, have demonstrated that such approaches create other opportunities and open up more directions, a space for intuitive development with children. This has insufficiently explored implications for their overall education and psychosocial development. That is why a potentially alternative system should in fact become (part of) the system, intended for and available to everyone.

The question of what kind of education is needed and the type of society we want in the years to come, is in fact a political issue that we have the opportunity and responsibility to shape and define today. Simply put, the wider aspect of music making with others could effectively help children to make sense of the world.

Sounding the Future

Reflections on Informal Learning and Arts Education for Children

by Karolina Rugle



Interviewed by Karolina Rugle, the artists Rian Treanor and Jiří Suchánek, as well as Slávo Krekovič and Ľudovít Nápoký of A4, reflect on two workshops they organised for children. They share approaches, feedback, their thoughts on art, informal learning, and the relationship of education and the arts, and map some of the different perspectives and possible directions for the re-design of arts education.

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Inter-Symmetric Workshop 1: Drawing Sounds To Make A Graphic Score, workshop led by Rian Treanor at A4, Bratislava, 2020. Photo by Ľudovít Nápoký

Experimental Music, workshop led by Jiří Suchánek at A4, Bratislava, 2019. Photo by Charlotte Schrõder

A4 organised a number of music-making workshops in 2019 and 2020 as part of Re-Imagine Europe. The first workshop — in December 2019 — took place *in situ*, and was led by the musician and pedagogue Jiří Suchánek. The focus was on creating experimental musical instruments from found materials and objects, simple motors, and contact piezo mics. Using a hammer, a saw, or a screwdriver, the children turned everyday objects into unconventional musical instruments. In November and December 2020, A4 organised two so-called Inter-symmetric workshops, in collaboration with British sound artist and DJ Rian Treanor, for a group consisting of five ten- and eleven-year-olds. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, both workshops led by Treaner were done remotely, with Treanor leading them via Zoom from the UK. The children in Slovakia worked and performed at A4, with a mentor-mediator who facilitated the communication between Treanor and the children, translating from and to English. Treanor's first workshop took place in November 2020 and focused on a series of listening exercises and musical activities. The children were invited to playfully respond to their sonic environment, creating drawings which became graphic scores. For the second part of Treanor's workshop, participants drew on the graphic scores to create a new group composition, based on making connections between, for instance, shape, colour, texture, movement, pitch, timbre and velocity.

Karolina Rugle: What was the idea behind your project? What was your point of departure? Did you already have specific issues you wanted to address, or did the project shape the goals as you went along?

Slávo Krekovič: In the context of the whole Re-Imagine Europe collaboration, we wanted, on the one hand, to focus on new artistic approaches that were interesting from both an aesthetic and a technological point of view. On the other hand, we felt a need to expand our usual audience and also to work more closely with children and young people. We believed that this could lead to the development of a future community around our cultural space, with people who would hopefully become our future audience or even artists. One of the motivations was also the idea of trying to develop a strand of training and educational activities to fill in the gaps in official arts education, for instance, the lack of experimental music and creative coding. We also wanted to foster creative thinking in music education, with an emphasis on interesting tools and aesthetic concepts such as live coding.

Rian Treanor: I was thinking about how to create participatory work. A lot of my work involves making drum machines and pattern-generating devices on a computer. I spent time developing ways to link people up to play those devices remotely. I discovered there are many things you can do. Once it got to the point where people could connect and play together in real time, I became more interested in exploring forms of interaction. It made me question previous ideas about the role of the performer and the audience, and things like the singular venue and stage became redundant for me.

Jiří Suchánek: My main goal is opening peoples' ears to everyday sounds produced by normal objects and understanding them as potential musical material. This is done through a process of building and constructing instruments from easily available and simple things (nails, plates, washers) and basic electronics. A second goal is developing technological skills and strengthening creativity through giving one's ideas a functional form by working with the materials.

Experimental Music, workshop led by Jiří Suchánek at A4, Bratislava, 2019. Photo by Charlotte Schrõder

Karolina Rugle: Who were the workshops intended for? What did you have to take into account when addressing the group?

Slávo Krekovič: We were thinking of children from different age groups, also youngsters and young professionals.

Ľudovít Nápoký: The workshops were designed for children who could already play an instrument in some way, but also for children who couldn't play an instrument. We thought the workshops could be an interesting addition to the classical approach of music-making, by creating a non-conventional instrument, or by making music using a laptop, algorithms or a simple programming language. They can learn to create music using a tool already familiar to them, like a laptop, and this can increase their interest in music. When we were organising the workshops, we mostly chose Slovak- and Czech-speaking lecturers, to eliminate the language barrier. The pandemic forced us to find an alternative approach, so we did one series of two workshops with the English-speaking Rian Treanor, because we really like the concept he's working with. To make this happen there was a mediator who translated and helped the children at the workshop. Rian was present through a video connection from England. When we were selecting concepts for the workshops we tried to choose ideas that would appeal to a broad audience. For example, by working with free software and equipment or technologies that most of the children already have or at least have access to. During the practical workshops the participants built their own instruments from free or cheap materials.

Rian Treanor: II've never hosted workshops for trained musicians. To an extent I'm excited by not fully understanding what I do. Discovery is an important part of creativity. That's why I like to work with people who have no experience or who have different abilities. It makes you encounter your practice from a different angle and can lead to more insightful directions.

Jiří Suchánek: I always like to know the age of the participants and the size of the group. I adapt the workshop depending on who it's for. The methodology that I follow is almost always the same, but the way I explain things differs.

Karolina Rugle: In what way do the workshops organised by A4 go beyond traditional arts education available to the young people in the places where they live?

Slávo Krekovič: Arts education in Slovakia is, indeed, very traditional. This is the case for all stages and age groups and it's especially valid for the field of music, where for decades the main focus has been on imitating existing music – although this is probably the case almost everywhere. Fortunately, at least in larger cities there are a few exceptions at several primary music schools with teachers who are also improvising composers, but this is quite rare. Primary music schools are mainly teaching the basics of theory and how to play traditional instruments; there are no electronics or performances or intermedia aspects involved. Because of this, we focus on more contemporary practices.

Inter-Symmetric Workshop 2: Drawing Sounds To Make A Graphic Score, workshop led by Rian Treanor at A4, Bratislava, 2020. Photo by Ľudovít Nápoký

Karolina Rugle: The most recent challenge in artistic practice has been the remote mode of working. Could these networked processes enable new forms of musical performance?

Rian Treanor: The entire context around the pandemic (restrictions, inability to travel, remote activities) is a situation that needs much problem-solving. The workshops I designed during that period were a response to that and aimed to rethink what we do. Online events often seem to mimic the functions of the venue. That's totally missing what working remotely really means. For instance, I could make a patch that could function like a receiver. That way, I could make music here and other people could receive it somewhere else, and every single one of the receiver points is like a venue. It's a very different paradigm. That way it is relatively simple to interact with the content. It opens up exciting opportunities to explore networked interaction, and as it isn't just one person presenting something on stage, it completely changes the notion of authorship and ownership. The idea isn't to recreate earlier systems. Other options might be more interesting now, and I don't think they will be redundant afterwards either.

Karolina Rugle: What artistic practices did you choose to work with and why? How are the children directed to engage with art creatively?

Slávo Krekovič: We encourage the kids to learn new creative techniques and to develop tools and skills useful in real-time music performance, for instance creative (live) coding, collaborative music-making and improvisation with digital tools, building experimental electronic instruments from scratch, and creating and interpreting digital graphic scores.

Ľudovít Nápoký: We chose these artistic practices, firstly, because they're not offered in formal arts education. The second reason is to demonstrate that computers can be used not only as a medium, but also as a tool for producing, which is actually the original purpose of the computer. We also want to show the children contemporary ways of music production and thereby educate and influence our possible future audiences or artists. During the workshops, children were not asked to repeat sounds they'd heard before, or play a specific song from a score. They were asked to express things they hear and see in an unconventional way within the framework offered by the workshop leader using software or physical materials. The results of the workshops were always unexpected and very different. We repeated some workshops with different participants, and every time the outcomes were completely different. The children were often surprised by what they actually created/produced. Sometimes they realised that they could enrich the music that they were already playing before the workshop. For example, there was a group of children who have a band, playing conventional instruments, and they said that this is a nice and interesting way to enrich their music.

Rian Treanor: For every workshop I consider which sounds will steer the children towards particular ways of drawing (these are later used as graphic scores). I give no instructions or input in terms of what they should aim at when making music. If I explained everything in advance of the workshop, it would be like me drawing outlines and asking them to colour inside them. Ideally, I'd like to work with no reference point at all. You don't have to understand something theoretically to engage with it or have interesting or enjoyable experiences.

Jiří Suchánek: My goal isn't to turn my workshop participants into musicians; I just want to open their senses to some new types of sound and new structures in sounds. The workshop isn't so much about music itself, but a process of building things. It doesn't matter what direction you take later on; the approach can be applied to many different situations.

Karolina Rugle: What approach did you choose as artists-mentors, and how did this relate to the different backgrounds of the participants?

Jiří Suchánek: From an artistic point of view, it's very interesting to see the spontaneity of the children, how they view the new tools that they relate to during the workshops, and how open they are to combining and manipulating things in a playful way. Every group is different, depending on the constellation within the group and the participants' background.

Rian Treanor: Because I don't play an instrument, I'm more interested in designing systems that can work or sound good, regardless of how they're played. That approach can also work for people who aren't classically trained musicians.

Karolina Rugle: How did you succeed in presenting innovative artistic creation as something interesting to the younger audiences?

Rian Treanor: To be honest, if I were a teenager, and someone gave me a drum machine to play on, I'd be thrilled. I've never actually considered that they won't love it – it's music, why wouldn't they want to try making it! I'm into popular culture, youth culture, popular forms of music. One of the reasons why I like working with children is that it's a kind of collaborative process. There's a dialogue that makes you rethink what you do and question the directions you're taking. Also, one of the reasons why they're interested in those activities is because they're 'hooked' on technology and enjoy creating sounds as a part of it – be it noisy or chaotic.

Jiří Suchánek: They're just naturally interested. I show them works by artists from the older generation who made music using unconventional instruments and principles, to open them up to the idea that this is a serious way of approaching art, and that they can make music using any type of object. Moreover, usually only a few participants are into the purely technological aspect of the work.

Experimental Music, workshop led by Jiří Suchánek at A4, Bratislava, 2019. Photo by Charlotte Schrõder

Experimental Music, workshop led by Jiří Suchánek at A4, Bratislava, 2019. Photo by Charlotte Schrõder

Karolina Rugle: Do you incorporate your musical styles into the workshops? Do children learn about particular techniques or sounds specific for some artists, do you talk to them about poetics in sound art and music, or is the work purely sound-focused?

Jiří Suchánek: I play them music by composers like Edgar Varèse, Pierre Boulez, or Iannis Xennakis, music that is based on sound masses, densities, spectrums, trajectories, or clouds, rather than pitches and steady rhythms. It helps them to understand music differently and hopefully more freely. I don't really separate my own practice from the approach at the workshops. A certain subjectivity and preference, or a certain aesthetic, always plays a role in the presentation. And of course, I do have some tricks that I can't show to the children at the workshop because of time constraints, or because they are too complicated.

Rian Treanor: The first time I did a workshop, one of the parents came to me after the performance and said he thought they were performing my music. I think my ideas about music are implicit in some of the choices I make in terms of instrument design. The direction of the workshop leans on what I usually do and what interests me.

Karolina Rugle: What were the biggest challenges and how did you tackle them?

Slávo Krekovič: One of the biggest challenges was to actually get children to participate in the workshops. Since this kind of content is a bit unusual, it took a while to find the best communication and promotion channels. It turned out that, unsurprisingly, personal connections worked the best.

Ľudovít Nápoký: There is only a limited number of people who are active in experimental music, who can lead a workshop, and who speak Slovak or Czech. So finding suitable workshop leaders was a challenge, as was dealing with the language barrier in Rian's

workshop, plus the fact that he wasn't physically present. The moderator had to translate and also interact with the children. But eventually, this worked out fine: there was a great atmosphere between Rian and the children and the communication went well.

Karolina Rugle: What were the challenges you encountered as artists-mentors? Have these led to a methodology or working principle?

Rian Treanor: One thing I find difficult to balance is the outcome. What do the children really get from the workshop apart from an unusual and exciting experience? Maybe it makes them think about the materials in a different way? When you work with teenagers, making club music is something they find meaningful. But when you're making 'weird' music with kids, the question is what they gain from it. To be honest, I don't know. Saying that, I'm interested in how you make complex systems with number patterns or general kinds of algorithmic processes. How can you simplify complex systems in a way that people can have fun and interact with them in ways that could be an intellectually stimulating experience. As a kid I never thought that, by learning music, I would become interested in mathematics, geometry, algorithms and that kind of stuff.

Jiří Suchánek: During the workshop, the children's interest in and relation to sound changes. The best practice for musical thinking was to have them close their eyes for ten minutes and just listen to the sounds of their instruments, the others and themselves. They could focus more on the sounds in the dark. It's interesting to see how they deal with the 'concert pressure' of the final presentation, the performance. They don't talk about it, but you sense that they aspire to be better at playing the instruments they built during the workshop. After they try using contact microphones on everything, the initial feeling of discovery is gone, and they need something more. Processing sound, using effects, using motors: all of this is addressed in the various stages of the working process, building on what they tried and learned previously. This layering takes time, but they learn from using the tools, by practising with them. There are children for whom most of the tools are new. Most adults think that having them work with unfamiliar tools is inappropriate, but older people often don't understand the tools that they use. It's important that children learn to use tools by building something, and not just by passively using something that already exists, like an iPhone. For society it's important that, from the very start, they see the value of being a creator — not just a user — of tools.

Karolina Rugle: What are some of the overall values transferred in the process? What is most important to you as educators, artists and stakeholders in culture?

Slávo Krekovič: WWe believe in creativity, artistic freedom in both individual and collective work, and playful and exploratory experimentation with various artistic techniques, new technologies and tools, which includes life-long learning. We try to apply these principles and values to our curatorial thinking about both performative and educational programmes.

Jiří Suchánek: Listening to each other is one of the key things we learn. It's much more natural to do this in informal spaces than in traditional schools with their rigid atmosphere, the constant evaluating, the high pressure to acquire skills, and so on.

Inter-Symmetric Workshop 1: Drawing Sounds To Make A Graphic Score, workshop led by Rian Treanor at A4, Bratislava, 2020. Photo by Ľudovít Nápoký

Rian Treanor: Making something that opens the children's eyes to the fact that there are other ways of doing things: this is very important to me. How to make something that is weird, but exciting and meaningful for people? This makes you think about the choices you make in your own practice.

Karolina Rugle: How successful were you in reaching a wider audience?

Slávo Krekovič: The production and dissemination of online videos with documentation and interviews have been a big step forward for us. In general, we think that in the future we need to be more systematic and long-term oriented, including perhaps cooperation with schools.

Ľudovít Nápoký: The production and dissemination of online videos with documentation and interviews have been a big step forward for us. In general, we think that in the future we need to be more systematic and long-term oriented, including perhaps cooperation with schools. didn't, came to the workshop together as a group to have fun, and continued to make music together. That's something we consider a success. It's a result of creating a safe environment and being able to involve people who aren't musicians. Less successful was that we mainly targeted the existing A4 audience. In the future we could do more to reach people who don't know about A4.

Inter-Symmetric Workshop 1: Drawing Sounds To Make A Graphic Score, workshop led by Rian Treanor at A4, Bratislava, 2020. Photo by Ľudovít Nápoký

Karolina Rugle: What did you learn from the project, from an educational perspective, an artistic one and, also as an organisation?

Ľudovít Nápoký: It was very clear that the children were interested in the proposed topics and activities. It looked like they appreciated the workshops and they were keen on participating. So the workshops proved to be relevant. They learned about contemporary music from different perspectives, and realised that there is so much more than the music you hear on the radio. We managed to break down those preconceptions. They also learned about ways in which music can be made in a more detailed way. As an organisation we learned that it's a challenge to get them sign up for a workshop.

Karolina Rugle: What draws you as an artist to this type of work?

Rian Treanor: I find it inspiring to make something together with people who are untrained. My aim is to find new ways to approach creativity. Training, orthodoxy, all those things lead to formulaic responses to materials. Kids are less dogmatic in their approach and I find that exciting. I prefer creating something with children and people who don't usually make music, rather than just making music with people who are already in that headspace.

Jiří Suchánek: I really miss connecting to people with similar interests. For me, the workshops were mostly about the social aspect rather than about learning skills. The group creativity is very inspiring and I learned that the music I make on my own is less complex compared to the results of group work. Musical structure quickly becomes more intricate when you play as a group. I can layer structures in a solo performance, but that isn't the same. The workshops always make it feel more active and creative.

Karolina Rugle: Taking a wider perspective, to which local or national contexts and urgencies do these workshops respond? How does this project address the need for social and political changes today?

Slávo Krekovič: There is a need for a major shift in our arts education, from traditional ways of thinking and making to newer, more creative and playful learning approaches. We also think educational projects of this kind will help stimulate future makers, artists, and audiences to explore creative and challenging forms of art and music.

Rian Treanor: The discussion around art is usually about the artist's intentions and what artworks represent, while music training is focused mostly on learning how an instrument has been played in the past. There are many more ways of enjoying art and music. People don't feel confident enough to have an opinion about art and music and that needs to change, so it's very important to work on inclusivity as well.

Jiří Suchánek: Workshops should be an equal part of education. In the Netherlands I've seen some good school programmes that include that.

Karolina Rugle: Do you think developing these types of learning structures should remain an alternative to the general educational system or should such examples of good practices be embedded in the overall system?

Jiří Suchánek: I work at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno, where we have a lot of workshops throughout the year. We've also established the Svitava association that presents programmes like this for an interested public rather than within the obligatory school programme. Such workshops always bring out the authentic interests of people and connect people who are really interested in a certain topic.

Rian Treanor: The Western education system emphasises language studies, maths and science. In the UK, you don't learn anything about the environment, emotions, or more holistic approaches to people's general well-being. We need to start by answering the question: what should we emphasise in education?

Slávo Krekovič: The official educational system could maybe take some inspiration from the educational activities run by independent cultural operators that are better connected to cutting-edge artistic production, as well as to the rapidly evolving international contexts. This connection with the practical side of making art, together with curatorial open-mindedness and courage, makes them a source of good practices to be developed and integrated in schools and state-run educational institutions.

What Art Can Do

Youth Arts Education at Bergen Kunsthall

by Karolina Rugle

In response to an outdated approach to arts education, especially in schools but also in museums, artists and educators have developed modern arts education projects that are much closer to the methodologies and concepts of contemporary art. Their efforts have resulted in a series of good practices, but these also expose the challenges of updating a largely outmoded system. Artistic organisations setting out to offer such alternatives to current models of children's arts education aim to engage their future audiences from an early age, often emphasising the embodied social and political aspects of artistic activities. Such programmes explore, investigate, and connect to the art of today – to the ways artists research, think, and work – and they provide compelling insight into the path they take to try to make sense of the world. Karoline Rugle interviewed Hilde Marie Pedersen, head of education at Bergen Kunsthall, about their approach to youth arts education.

Photo previous page
A collaborative artwork produced by children and artist Solveig Sumire Sandvik, showcased as part of *Mylder* exhibition with contributions from sound engineer Jonas Skarmark. Photo by Hilde Marie Pedersen

Unge kunstkjennere, workshop with Jordi Ferreiro, 2018. Photo by Eva Rowson

Arts in education

Within Re-Imagine Europe, which showcases varying approaches to engaging audiences for art, the arts education projects for youth at Bergen Kunsthall, a Norwegian contemporary art centre that produces more than 200 events and 12 exhibitions a year, emphasises the social aspect of audience engagement. Focusing exclusively on contemporary art, Bergen Kunsthall physically and symbolically is the central place in Bergen for young people who wish to familiarise themselves with what's happening in the art world of today.

While the cultural and creative industries form an important and expanding part of the Norwegian economy, the significance of arts education is not reflected in Norway's education curriculum, nor is there a general interest in arts education within society. In the current curricula, basic data-processing skills are taken to be more important than arts education. Such skills encourage compliance with certain rules, rather than creativity. Designing an arts education programme risks falling into the trap of drawing on the same evaluation methodology used in other fields. For example, the benefits of teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects are far easier to measure, and teaching STEM is consequently easier to justify than arts education, which is not easily quantified. Ironically, the current pursuit of innovation has turned the attention of the overall education curriculum away from the arts. Yet, it is precisely through creativity coupled with knowledge that innovation is made possible.

However, in the past ten years there has been a consistent effort on behalf of artists and educators who form collaborations with school groups to develop an approach to the arts within the educational framework, striving to ultimately demonstrate how the arts reflect the human condition. Such practice has proved that creating programmes that stand for something does make a difference. Apart from providing a window into artistic expression, engagement with the arts challenges students to relate to, empathise with, and react to the realities of others, themselves, and other relevant social issues.

Developing critical thinking

Aimed at creating and developing critical thinking and reflection with the students, the Bergen Kunsthall programmes introduce various forms of art experiences for different ages: visits by kindergarten children, tours and workshops for school children, as well as collaborative work and learning projects with high school groups. Choosing the appropriate media and connecting the students with guest artists enable them to engage in a concrete artistic practice, to express their ideas through different media (from photography, film, sculpture, painting, installation and ready-mades, to a number of multimedia and interdisciplinary approaches), and also to emulate the artistic practices of distinguished contemporary artists.

Hilde Marie Pedersen is the head of education at Bergen Kunsthall. The workshops that take place at Bergen Kunsthall, she says, ‘delve deeper into one or more ways of thinking about problems and processes raised in the exhibition. They give answers to basic questions of how things are done, what artworks are chosen, and also start a discussion on the issues that the exhibitions open up.’ Among the methodologies applied in the workshops is a version of ‘peer to peer’ learning used in group work within the project *Unge kunstkjennere* (Young Art Connoisseurs). This project for young people between the ages of 13 and 23 started in 2017 within Re-Imagine Europe. ‘The methodology is guided by the notion,’ says Pedersen ‘that the starting point is art itself, in this case the exhibitions in Bergen Kunsthall. Children coming to the exhibitions will experience everything from performances, installations, films and videos, photography. The methodology isn’t focused on particular techniques or types of work, but on the way they discuss and approach art and go deeper into the issues related to the exhibition, be it women’s rights, ecology, or any other aspect relevant to daily life and social changes.’ The young art connoisseurs meet twice a month to discuss art, visit exhibitions together, interview artists, and work with social media. Through this project the young people have an opportunity to become actively involved in the institution’s creative programme by working with artists and employees. Those who wish to extend their engagement can also gain professional experience, along with meeting friends and developing creative skills in ways different from those they are used to.

Unge Kunstkjennere participating in the project *Taking over* with artist Jordi Ferreiro. Photo by Eva Rowson

Art as the starting point for everything

Pedersen shares a glimpse into the processes and work of the Kunsthall team which has – for the past ten years – been working in different ways to provide arts learning opportunities in an effort to bridge the gap between Bergen's largest contemporary arts institution and the next generation. During a normal week, Pedersen curates programmes connected to education at the museum, along with several mentors. Most of the programmes are associated with the actual arts programme or the exhibition taking place. Young people of all ages are welcome to participate in the workshops after a tour of the exhibition. A direct approach is taken in order to get closer to the nature of art-making and the processes at the heart of artistic work. While walking through the exhibition, the mentors share details and interesting things that occur within, but also behind an exhibition, going deeper into the processes beyond those that one can usually see. It takes time, but the more they get into it, the more the young people engage, and they welcome the responsive element of such an educational project. With time, what they think extends their boundaries, demonstrating the very tangible benefits of introducing children to art at an early age. As Pedersen says: 'Dealing with contemporary art means dealing with what is going on in the contemporary society – structural, political, environmental and social questions, but also everything else happening in the world today. What can art do? It can comment on what is really going on in the society, from a different angle.'

Apart from being an art historian, Pedersen is also a teacher. She believes that working in a contemporary art institution and teaching art to young people are two very different things. She finds it particularly significant to acknowledge the processes behind making art. ‘Once a year I find an artist to work with. The artist prepares an exhibition and a workshop for children. We started that in 2010 because we wanted to have children feel what the artist feels and creates.’

About the differences between how a museum deals with art and how teaching young people deals with art, Pedersen says: ‘Museums are mostly looking and copying things, in terms of production and projects, but that doesn’t represent a good way to teach about art. They keep the attention on the surface level of things, isolating, occasionally touching on or completely ignoring contemporary art. If you only talk and present, you don’t get to really know the thoughts and realities of the young people you are communicating things to. Discussions, criticism, and viewing are ways to engage with art in general. By doing this, you are creating awareness of the multifaceted and transcendent function of education, and that of the arts.’

Unge Kunstkjennere taking part in *Who’s doing the washing up?* Photo by Eva Rowson

Preparing the stage: initial encounters

Bergen Kunsthall usually presents more than ten different exhibitions each year. Some artists prepare workshops for the children throughout the year. All of this generates the key material used as a starting point for the youth programmes. Getting the young people to talk, to understand, to listen, or simply to be in the space is already an accomplishment. The first step is letting everyone adjust to being in a new space and in different surroundings in their own way, with the curator inviting them to sit down and just be in the room for a while. The simplicity of this initial step usually provokes interest, questions, reactions and ultimately prepares them for deeper discussions. This is followed by asking questions that open them up to engaging, without creating preconceived notions among the group. Another way is simply welcoming everyone and inviting them to observe. Many artists create things intended for the audience, but some opt to emphasise 'being-present'. This is also an approach to expanding the awareness of the children within the group, who are well acquainted with goal-oriented learning, with tasks full of missions and assignments. Here, the mission is: relaxing, clearing the mind, calming the pulse and the excitement that is focused on arousal, be it auditory or visual.

Taking it further

The nature of a performance is essential to opening up a wider discussion – for instance, on social discrepancies, through examining simple gestures and noticing a big change in the receptiveness of a person sitting on the floor as opposed to someone who is standing, and so on. These aspects can influence perception and potential action regarding individual, local, or universal questions and urgencies: 'You start local and expand to a bigger topic, issue or problem. Some local topics are also general. The performance is intended for the local people and audiences, so it's related mostly to people who can travel to them, be there for a while, and go back again. Sometimes a longer relationship is established with a particular class (for example in a video project), which enables them to approach it in a more individual, deeper and personal way. The results displayed in the exhibitions are very personal and open.'

Site-specific art projects can be especially suitable for education projects, as children often can relate to them. In the experience of the Bergen Kunsthall team, such works have proven very useful, as they produce different results, additionally enabling them to start viewing things (and thinking) from a local perspective and expand this into a more general topic.

Language is key

The hands-on approach is based on several key points, but fails to eliminate some of the obstacles that would require a rethinking of the educational system. The most important element is communication: 'the feeling that they are seen, spoken to, taken into consideration, is an important element for having young people come back. Relevance is important when it comes to earning trust and respect from children and young people. There must be some sort of recognition for them; if everything is presented and perceived as foreign, they are unlikely to return.' In the case of Kunsthall, if a new educator is hired, an effort is always made to ensure that they understand the importance of speaking to people in a language they understand. Developing imagination is a desired result, but also one of the ways of bringing art closer to young people. An example of a very creative way of formulating some of the elements in art for children was the fanzine Kunsten å Koken (*A Cookbook for Art*) that Unge kunstkjennere created themselves.

Children working with artist Solveig Sumire Sandvik on a site-specific project titled *Sound and Movement* for the exhibition *Mylder*. Photo by Hilde Marie Pedersen

Importance of continuity

Continuity is crucial to establishing, developing and maintaining connections. In the case of Bergen Kunsthall, the same classes can come back every year and participate in the programme. 'That is also how you can get to know the children very well, and they feel at home and can introduce others to the programme.' In order to make this happen, it is important to establish a link to the education system, which comes with some obstacles.

Mylder exhibition

Relating art to other subjects taught in school has become standard in our approach to arts education. As schools eliminate arts programming from their curriculum, and even extracurricular programmes, the programmes at Bergen Kunsthall shoulder an even greater responsibility in assuring that these programmes do not become out of reach for children altogether. We should beware to not lead children to conclude, that art is not important, and that investing their time and efforts in art practices will receive little to no acknowledgement, and that they cannot contribute to society in a meaningful way through arts. In order to prevent the problem of the (education) system from becoming a student's problem, as is often the case nowadays, it is important to raise the awareness of the educators, who will have to increase their knowledge and competence when it comes to widening the school's role in the area of arts education, or to highlight informal education projects in arts, thus enabling educational institutions to play a role in promoting not only art education, but also psycho-social well-being.

Bergen Kunsthall sees itself as an additional channel for increasing arts resources for students and educators alike: 'as Bergen Kunsthall is the only contemporary art institution in Bergen, if someone wants to introduce these types of projects to the students, it is quite likely they will have to reach out to us.'

Approaching people

The goal is to keep abreast of what is going on in the arts and develop these projects. Gathering feedback is essential, even if it is simply to ask people passing by if and what they know about art. Bergen Kunsthall team dispatched a team of young people, asking random passers-by in the street to fill in a questionnaire about their views on the arts, with a 'goal to inform people about the importance of art because it affects how one sees the society and life,' Pedersen explained, adding that 'although a lot has changed in the arts, many people have an outmoded way of looking at the arts, as a foreign sphere.' The study showed that, many people who aren't directly connected to art in any way had very interesting thoughts on art.

Stills from Adelita Husni-Bey's film *Agency*

The importance of sustainability

Apart from the social and artistic aspect, the overall complexity of funding makes it difficult to map the needs and create conditions for a more sustainable work in this direction. Projects are funded for two years, but what is lacking is a guarantee of development and continuation. Continuation and consistency are not considered successful outcomes of a project; novelty far outvalues consistency in project proposals. 'It's difficult to make good things grow and be acknowledged. Moreover, it's almost fashionable to change approaches and methodologies, so it ends up making working difficult instead of supporting and sustaining it,' Pedersen says. In fact, it is young people who are looking for long-lasting opportunities and consistency. Everything comes and goes and they need a challenge, a consistent approach take on their own challenges.

The Essential Ingredients of Audience Development

by Heather Maitland

In this short guide, Heather Maitland outlines essential ingredients of audience development for small and medium scale arts organisations.

Photo previous page
Audience during *Deformation Studies* by Hugo Esquinca. NEXT Festival, Bratislava, 2018. Photo by Nina Pacherova

Progress Bar at OT301, Amsterdam, 2019. Photo by George Knegtel

What are we talking about?

I wish audience development was called something else. Those two words cause so much trouble. ‘Audience’ sounds like a group of people who just sit and observe while other people do the art. And ‘development’ suggests there are people who need ‘developing’ because they aren’t engaging with the right sort of culture – our sort of culture. That’s not audience development.

Audience development is anything that enables an organisation to deepen relationships with people outside the organisation or build new relationships with more of the same kind of people or engage with different kinds of people. That word ‘or’ is really important. Not all of these three options – to deepen, widen or diversify relationships – will be relevant to every organisation. It depends on what the organisation is trying to achieve. And who are these people? Persons who will enable the organisation to reach its goals.

As Sandra Trienekens from Urban Paradoxes points out in her review,[1] ‘there is no universal, clear definition of audience development’. Every cultural organisation does it differently. That’s a good thing. Audience development is neither a task list nor a pre-determined set

[1] See the contribution ‘Potential for Change’ in this publication.

of projects and schemes to choose from. It's a way of thinking about an organisation's relationship with the outside world that helps it achieve its goals. Or, as Trienekens puts it: 'a deliberate, strategic process of creating meaningful, long-term connections between people and the organisation'.

So, every organisation does audience development differently. All cultural organisations have different goals. All have artistic goals; most have some kind of financial goal and some have social goals, but they prioritise them differently. The art they nurture, produce and/or present is different, and they wrap different activities around it. The organisations are part of different communities. They have different values, histories, geographies and budgets, so what is possible differs from organisation to organisation. Different goals + different inputs = different audience development. The ten partners collaborating on Re-Imagine Europe are certainly proof of that.

Several of the partners feel coerced into audience development. They contrast audience development with their own organisation's approach to engaging people. Their goals focus on the depth and quality of engagement by specific audiences but they believe, rightly or wrongly, that their funders put them under pressure to increase audience numbers.

Audience development can be about numbers. Public funding makes up around 5% of Paradiso's turnover, so one of its key goals is to maximise earned income. It is already highly successful at widening audiences locally, nationally and internationally, so its priority is to deepen relationships with new audiences to increase frequency of attendance and income. Why? So the organisation can continue to invest in achieving its artistic and social goals.

Most public funders are required to demonstrate value for money and they do this by evidencing public demand and equality of access. That's why their goals are often to grow and diversify audiences.

But audience development doesn't have to be about numbers. It's about what is right for the organisation. Many of the Re-Imagine Europe partners are driven almost entirely by their artistic goals so it's entirely appropriate that artistic development should be at the heart of their audience development.

But is it realistic to expect small- and mediumscale organisations such as those involved in the Re-Imagine Europe project to engage in audience development at all? Trienekens points out that, although their scale and structures couldn't be more different, they are all 'lean organisations with a relatively small overhead'. Her literature research shows that ideas on audience development are 'predominantly based on developments in large-scale arts organisations such as theatres or museums that are most likely to have marketing, communications and educational departments taking care of outreach and audience programmes.' This structure is way beyond the resources of the Re-Imagine Europe partners. So, what are the essential ingredients of audience development without which it simply doesn't work?

Joined-up thinking

Audience development is about creating meaningful, long-term relationships between people and an organisation. Such relationships can't, however, be created and sustained through communication or education activities alone. In large-scale organisations, audience development can become a poorly resourced add-on, championed by an isolated and stressed-out member of the marketing or education team who feels that the rest of the organisation doesn't care.

Effective audience development needs joined-up thinking by the programming, education and participation, front-of-house, and marketing functions because they are all involved in initiating, sustaining and deepening relationships with people outside the organisation.

Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse understand this, and their pilot project, *Who's doing the washing up?* involved everyone in the organisations, including audiences, in re-imagining how they are organised, how they use their buildings and resources, how they work with people, make decisions, and develop their programme[2].

Viral Open Session: The Informals. Lighthouse Brighton, 2019. Photo courtesy of Lighthouse

[2] See the contribution about *Who's doing the washing up?* in this publication.

Planning

Joined-up thinking needs a shared vision. As audience development is all about trying to achieve the organisations' goals, everyone must agree what they are. The partners' goals are wide-ranging and include some that are common to them all:

- the development of an artform
- facilitating interdisciplinary exchange
- talent development
- creating the potential for political and/or social change

and some that are prioritised by just a few:

- mediation between artists and the public
- engaging the artists and audiences of tomorrow
- shared learning
- increasing earned income

Joined-up thinking also needs everyone to buy into the organisation's values. That means a shared understanding of its history, context and resources. KONTEJNER told Karolina Rugle that: 'Audience development (...) has to be naturally embedded in the overall identity of a cultural organisation, enabling a two-way communication with the audiences, and an active participation in developments in society.'[3]

Shared vision and values emerge only through an effective planning process. A4 embraces this, and over six months, every member of the team has been part of a visioning and strategy process facilitated by a long-standing, critical friend of the organisation.

Sometimes, joined-up thinking can be more difficult to achieve. From the very first festival, Elevate has programmed workshops led by the contributors to the core programme. The goals for all the workshops are to foster and promote the local cultural scene and self-empowerment for participants. It's possible to explicitly curate the workshops in the discourse programme around the festival theme but, for practical reasons, the music and visual art workshops are dependent on what the artists and other speakers are able to offer, and only limited adaptation is possible to suit a particular audience. As a result, the team feels that opportunities to respond to the needs of the local cultural sector are missed.

Target groups

No-one likes the idea of being a 'target', but, in spite of the unfortunate connotations of the phrase, 'target group' is a useful concept. It's part of that all-important shared vision

[3] Interview by Karolina Rugle with the curators of KONTEJNER.

and enables organisations to focus their time and energy on the kind of people who will help them achieve their goals. Defining a target group simply means setting out the needs, attitudes and habits that those people have in common.
Disruption Network Lab's goal is to bring together people who are trying to provoke social and political change. They curate the participants in their meet-ups around a specific issue to establish 'a solid network of trust' between the different people engaged in that issue, including whistleblowers, hackers, investigative journalists, artists and critical thinkers.

Target groups can also be defined in terms of differences. Like several of the partners, Sonic Acts uses the word 'community' instead of 'audience'. The team see a community as 'a gathering of differences', which means that its members can learn from each other. They describe how they recruit workshop participants through open calls. This enables them to curate the participants in the workshop around the key differences they have defined to ensure diversity, including cultural background, skill set, age and discipline.[4]

Several of the partners say they want to develop long-term, meaningful relationships but also that they end up engaging with audiences as a side effect. Developing relationships is almost impossible if activities that might sustain them are only there by chance because the focus is mostly on artistic imperatives. Defining target groups is a way of making sure that relationship building is at least considered when programming decisions are made.

Elevate, for example, often consult with specific groups before they programme workshops, and thinks constantly about who the audience will be for different musicians. They have strategies in place to continue their relationship with those audiences beyond the festival. [5]

Lieke Ploeger from Disruption Network Lab takes a more structured approach, describing how she wrote a guide on her organisation's community-building process that sets out its plans for each group, the specific context and the lessons learned on how to interact with people and stimulate them to take action. This was based on a dialogue with the communities themselves. She says: 'The team would come together three times a year with all the communities and reflect on our working methods, think about what's going wrong and what's going right.'[6]

Many of the partners feel uncomfortable about the idea of defining target groups. To them, descriptions like 'young, culturally diverse and hard-to-reach' are tokenistic.

They are correct. Social and cultural features like this don't pinpoint why this group of individuals are important in helping the organisation achieve its objective. They are just superficial descriptions. Attitudes and beliefs are what matters. Just a few descriptions, particularly life stage and social or educational background, are useful because they partly drive peoples' attitudes.

Although some partners are critical of what they see as funders' tokenistic focus on the 'vulnerable' and 'excluded', most of them have equality and diversity at the heart of their

[4] See Arie Altena's and Sandra Trienekens' Community Building through Artist-led Workshops in this publication.
[5] See A Temporary Public by Margarita Osipian in this publication.
[6] See Rethinking Communities with Lieke Ploeger and Tatiana Bazzichelli in this publication.

organisation. Lighthouse is driven by values of social justice and commits to 'dismantling systemic inequality' and to working 'in an attempt to drive enduring change in our industry'.[7] This involves a planned, long-term investment of resources in specific, marginalised target groups.

Acousmonium at Elevate Festival, Graz, 2020. Photo by Clara Wildberger

Curiosity about audiences

The organisations are motivated by their artistic goals, so they talk about finding 'the right audience for the work'. But all organisations need to be interested in audiences beyond the ones who are most engaged. Finding 'the right audience for the work' can so easily slip into focusing only on the people who will be most appreciative of the work as opposed to being critically engaged, or those who best mirror the attitudes and beliefs of the people inside the organisation.

Meaningful relationships start with people, with getting to know and understand them to find a common ground. Then you can do things differently to create relevance. The depth of engagement is all-important. In an interview with Arie Altena, François Bonnet of Ina/GRM says: 'We impose no preconceived boundaries regarding with whom we can or cannot collaborate or attract as an audience. All is possible if it fits the GRM aesthetics. On the basis of mutual respect there can be exchange.'[8] By contrast, A4 attracts audiences from all over the city but wanted to engage more with the diverse communities on their doorstep. They see their café-bar as an essential space where the organisation and local people can get to know each other.

[7] https://lighthouse.org.uk/anti-racism-plan consulted 28/11/20.
[8] See Building an International Audience at GRM, the interview with Francois Bonnet, in this publication.

Empathy with audiences

Several partners talk about building strong relationships with the audience based on mutual respect and understanding. To create a strong link, Lighthouse and Bergen Kunsthall developed a programme in which they walked in their audiences' shoes, collaborating with them to investigate the inner workings of the organisations and their buildings so that they can be reconfigured to become more relevant. They say that this experience taught them, among other things:

- to work with not for people
- to listen to the people you want to reach
- that using the right language, their language, changes perceptions
- that asking questions not just within the organisation but out loud to the public feels inclusive and honest and creates worthwhile change.[9]

Walking in the shoes of the audience identified barriers that the organisations were unintentionally placing in the way of people wanting to engage with them. The importance of actions to remove barriers to engagement is not about the barriers themselves but that their removal creates added relevance for artists, audiences and organisations, and strengthens the relationships between them.

Cultural organisations often make unconscious assumptions about audiences. Eva Rowson, who compiled a text on the collaboration between Lighthouse and Bergen Kunsthall asks: 'Why does the conversation about how to be more accessible always feel like the answers are already written before the questions are even asked?' The organisations in Re-Imagine Europe achieve their goals because their close relationship with artists and audiences leads them to question these assumptions.

Practical resources

Effective audience development requires joined-up thinking by everyone in an organisation, and allocating responsibility for audience development to specific people can get in the way of that. But audience development requires time to think and plan: time to seek out the people you want to engage with and time to listen to them. Organisations don't need specialists but they do need enough people on the team to make investing time in audience development a realistic proposition.

The people working for the organisations involved in Re-Imagine Europe are all highly skilled and totally committed to their organisations' goals. But a few of the teams are so small that they lack the practical skills that would enable them to communicate more effectively with the outside world. Some are small, specialist units within very large organisations

[9] See the contributions on projects at Bergen Kunsthall and Lighthouse in this publication.

that are prevented from engaging with the people they wanted to reach by the priorities, communications systems and rules thought necessary to sustain the wider organisation's brand.

Cultural organisations also need to be brave. The different sectors within the cultural infrastructure tend to develop standardised approaches to marketing and communications, looking to others like themselves for affirmation that they are doing it right. These models are often based on the visible practice of large, established and well-resourced organisations. The Re-Imagine Europe organisations are anything but standard. They need the courage of their convictions to do less but do it effectively, ensuring that what they say and how they say it truly reflect their values and will help them achieve their goals.

Putting values into practice

This courage has led the organisations to develop new strategies for connecting with the outside world. The Sonic Acts' team, for example, have started to engage more with their audiences in their workshops, and have rethought the way they engage online to better reflect the digital lives of their artists and audiences. A4 and KONTEJNER had to rethink how they could become more visible and sustain the roles as key influencers that they had built up over decades, as they were under threat from increasing competition for peoples' attention.

Sometimes it's about information. Paradiso wanted to understand their audiences better so they could design a membership scheme that really would strengthen their relationship with them. Lighthouse wanted to check that they were making the most of the information they already collected about their artists and audiences.

Sometimes it's about the message. Disruption Network Lab were great at telling the outside world what they did, but also wanted to communicate why they did it – and its impact – to a wider audience.

And sometimes it's about finding practical solutions to relatively straightforward challenges. Elevate wanted to find ways they could sustain and deepen relationships with audiences from festival to festival. Radio Web MACBA wanted to find a way of broadening audiences for their podcasts without compromising complexity or using very scarce and precious time resources.

The recipe

So, over the course of a four-year journey together, it has become clear that the essential ingredients for effective audience development are:

- an abundance of attitude: an organisational culture that enables collaboration, encourages empathy and tests assumptions
- a good dollop of clarity about what your organisation is trying to achieve, and who you need to engage with to achieve it
- the time and a large pinch of practical skill to make it happen
- the courage to mix it up, putting your values into practice and doing it the way that's right for you.

Potential Wor(l)ds, workshop by Aliyah Hussain and Anna Bunting-Branch, Bergen Kunsthall 2018. Photo by Thor Brødreskift

Creating Potential for Change

Reflections on Audience Engagement in Re-Imagine Europe

by Sandra Trienekens

Throughout the four years of Re-Imagine Europe Sandra Trienekens (Urban Paradoxes) followed its experiments with different forms of audience engagement. In this article she captures the many faces of audience engagement and the ways in which it can benefit the audiences, as well as the artistic development of the artists and arts organisations involved.[1]

[1] This article is based on Urban Paradoxes research on Re-Imagine Europe (interviews, surveys, etc.) and integrates the previous articles in this publication.

Photo previous page
Humane Methods by Marco Donnarumma. Touch Me Festival, Zagreb, 2020. Photo by Damir Zicic

Stirred Mandala II by Mariska de Groot. NEXT Festival, Bratislava, 2019. Photo by Nina Pacherova

As part of Re-Imagine Europe ten arts organisations experimented with different formats to engage with their existing audiences, deepening the relationships they had with these audiences.[2] They also explored how to connect to new audiences using artistic practices as a base. 'Audiences' here means people attending events in the arts programmes as well as people actively engaging in debates, workshops, and community meet-ups. They might be artists or creative professionals, students in relevant domains of the arts, science and technology, as well as the general culture-minded public. Staff of other arts and non-arts organisations, who were directly or indirectly involved in the design and organisation of the Re-Imagine Europe events, were also regarded as audience.

In festivals, debates, workshops, the commissioning of new art works and other activities, the organisations[3] addressed the social and political challenges of climate change, and migration. They actively involved the audiences, which meant that audience engagement predominantly manifested itself in direct connection to the artworks, artists and speakers, and themes of the artistic programmes. Audience engagement was aimed at stimulating audiences to critically respond to these central themes and to participate in (digital) capacity-building opportunities. As such, audience engagement became a relay not only for transforming 'passive' audiences into actively involved participants, but also for enabling

[2] See our literature review for more details on the difference between audience development and audience engagement: https://re-imagine-europe.eu/resources_item/re-imagine-europe-towards-a-sustainable-audience-development/
[3] With 'organisations', this article refers to the ten Re-Imagine Europe arts organisations.

them to critically reflect on current challenges, exchange knowledge and develop skills around new tools and techniques to address them. The Re-Imagine Europe practices illustrate the many facets of audience engagement, and the many ways it can benefit audiences, as well as the artistic development of the artists and arts organisations involved, and possibly the wider arts and cultural sector. They confirm that an organisation's artistic mission or curatorial choices and audience engagement can go hand in hand. But they also underline the indisputable fact that time is needed to develop and experiment in the arts sector.

Audience engagement as taking responsibility for the development of the arts and cultural sector

Small and medium-sized arts organisations, such as the ones in the Re-Imagine Europe consortium, do not have separate departments for audience development, marketing or educational activities. Audience-engagement activities are often born out of a desire, and a need, to take responsibility for the artistic and creative development of their domain in the arts and cultural sector. As such, audience engagement can be understood as an intrinsic part of the organisations' quest to innovate and develop their artistic programmes, as well as their domains. To give some concrete examples: For A4 in Bratislava, the reason and importance of providing informal arts educational structures, such as workshops, was to contribute to something that they perceived is lacking in Bratislava's formal education structure. Since there were hardly any programmes at the city's art academy that included electronic or digital arts, very few students were learning to use electronic and digital tools, which prompted the desire to expand the community of practitioners around A4 in relation to its artistic production and programming. For Elevate in Graz, (international) 'change makers' and creative professionals such as artists, curators, organisers, journalists, filmmakers or political activists are a growing target audience, given that they all play a role in developing the sector. In the Netherlands, Sonic Acts started organising workshops and masterclasses because they perceived a need among Dutch artists and creators to exchange knowledge and to critically reflect on their art practices, and by doing so extended its reach.

Performance Kali Malone at Sonic Acts Academy 2020, Amsterdam. Photo by Pieter Kers

Audience engagement as artists' development

Taking responsibility for the development of their artistic domain also means stimulating artistic innovation and supporting artists' development. Audience engagement is regarded by the organisations as something that simultaneously has to do with audiences and artists. Audience-engagement activities offer artists different ways to interact with audiences and involve them in their artistic processes, whereas it enables the arts organisation to make better use of the presence and availability of the artists during their festivals or events.

Encouraging visiting artists, speakers and musicians to share their skills and knowledge in workshops or masterclasses brings together an audience that can benefit from the activity, and at the same time generates additional working opportunities for artists, strengthening their careers within the cultural sector and beyond. During Re-Imagine Europe this often manifested in interdisciplinary collaborations between cultural organisations and academic institutions. An example is the collaboration between Elevate, INA GRM and Graz Art University as part of the Acousmonium performances during the Elevate Festival. Almost all of the participants in the Re-Imagine Europe workshops concluded that they acquired digital and other skills and knowledge that they thought would inform their (future) work.

Strengthening careers and enhancing artists' skills was also an objective of the workshops targeted at artists as the beneficiaries. An example is KONTEJNER's Multichannel Sound Diffusion workshop for artists that aimed at increasing skills and knowledge in the field of spatial sound and multichannel sound diffusion. Young up- and-coming artists or non-professional creative talents were addressed in the organisations' activities that were intended to broaden access to a career in the arts and cultural sector. For example, Lighthouse's two-year programme Viral engaged 16 to 24-year-olds from demographic groups underrepresented in the creative industries, to develop their skills as designers, coders, makers, musicians and filmmakers of the future. The participating talents came from non-academic educational backgrounds and low-income families, some were people of colour, and they all lacked creative role models. Many of them had been in Lighthouse beforehand as audience members. The participant-led programme offered the young people room to voice their experiences and to adjust the programme according to their specific needs. Local creative organisations supported them with training and production. Viral was set up to help young people with talent and ideas to develop their skills, practice and entrepreneurial confidence, because Lighthouse believes that young people should have the opportunity to work in the creative industries, regardless of who they are, or what their backgrounds are. A truly diverse workforce is needed for culture to be vibrant and for the creative industries to thrive, and for it to matter for diverse audiences.

Audience engagement as intersectoral collaboration

If ‘audiences’ encompasses anyone outside one’s organisation then it also includes members of other arts and non-arts organisations. As reaching new audiences hardly ever works without extending one’s existing networks, the organisations teamed up with more and diverse partners, basically with every new audience-engagement activity. These new partnerships were not only established with professionals and organisations in the arts sector, but many new collaborations were intersectoral.

Partners took on several roles in these collaborations: the local creative industries supported the Viral participants in Brighton; members of non-arts organisations such the Blind Association or the Red Cross at Bergen Kunsthall participated in the programme. In Barcelona, Radio Web MACBA (RWM) and its RWM Working Group staged its event at public gatherings organised by, for example, the Barcelona Community Radio Network (XRCB) Radiotón#2 and the Barcelona Smart City Week. This helped the RWM Working Group to expand its notion of a single audience, to talk about radio in different ways, and to open up its small community to the outside world. This openness was not always about giving and showing, it also involved learning and receiving from other communities.

Audience engagement as interdisciplinary shared learning

Re-Imagine Europe interpreted audience engagement as enhancing the audiences’ experience through creating spaces that enabled active participation in, learning about and critically discussing the social and political challenges addressed. Reflection on these challenges often ensued from facilitating a combination of dialogue opportunities and practical ways in which audiences could gain awareness, knowledge and skills, both in relation to the themes and artistic processes. In the workshops, the focus was neither on the individual participant, nor on the artist(s) operating as workshop facilitator(s), but on the collective process and the mutual exchange between artists and participants. The programmes were about bringing together different kinds of knowledge, about interaction and thus about interdisciplinary and intersectoral shared learning.

Examples are programmes by Paradiso and Sonic Acts such as the Critical Writing Workshops and the artist-led *Speculation as Interface* workshop. Research showed that a deeper understanding of the topics addressed among the participants was fostered by shared learning, and by combining working on practical skills with theory and reflection. Even participants who were already quite familiar with the topics discussed reported that their understanding of technology was ‘broadened’, that the workshop ‘facilitated further investigation and reflection on technology’, or ‘created more awareness’. Participants indicated that they were stimulated by the workshop facilitators to reflect critically and

inspired by the interdisciplinarity among the workshop participants, who represented diverse arts disciplines and worked in a wide range of arts and non-arts fields. The participants in workshops by A4, INA GRM and KONTEJNER produced their own artworks, which they publicly presented. The workshop format thus offered participants the possibility to assume several active roles, and research confirmed that this deepened their relationship with the involved artists and arts organisations. Bergen Kunsthall observed that working in a collaborative manner based on shared learning was rewarding for the participants and communities involved, that it offered the artists more time and a more serendipitous way to introduce people to their art practices complementing the exhibition programme, and Kunsthall added 'shared learning workshops' to its existing set of curatorial strategies. In their ideal form, shared-learning activities are a way for audiences, artists and arts organisation to learn.

Audience engagement as building communities of interest

The experiences gained from audience-engagement activities made apparent that active involvement, and stimulating audiences to respond to urgent challenges are not individual acts. These acts are based on exchange and informal shared learning between people with different skills sets, expertise and knowledge, and they thus point towards the building of a community. The effect and appreciation of this interdisciplinarity illustrates that a community is not a gathering of 'the same people', but a gathering of differences. A 'mixed' community here refers to diversity in people's age, gender, cultural and/or socio-economic backgrounds, but more importantly, it stresses the variety in people's skills, expertise, and experiences. That way, workshops – and similar capacity-building activities – are an occasion to come together to develop communities and exchange expertise and skills, with the effect of people deepening their awareness and knowledge. The community is mixed, but what participants share is their interest in the topic. Such communities do not need to be 'thick communities' (with a high degree of identification and a low degree of diversity), but can thrive as 'networks of networks of interest', as Disruption Network Lab calls them. That is, as more ephemeral, diverse communities.

Working from a thematic approach, engaging people around shared topics of interest proved to be an effective way to work on inclusion during Re-Imagine Europe. To some extent, this is also an inversion of the cultural policy approach to inclusion: by foregrounding what people have in common (their interests), the project's activities reached diverse crowds (in skill set, expertise, as well as demographics). Whereas arts policy tries to diversify cultural activities, perceived as homogenous, by defining potential audiences through indicators such as age, gender, ability, level of education, socio-economic status and ethnic or cultural affiliation – and thereby to differentiate between them.

Visiting the Invisible: A Berlin City Tour to Anonymous and Aggressive Real Estate Investors, 2020. Photo by Maria Silvano

Disruption Network Lab exemplifies the thematic approach. Its platform amplifies voices across interdisciplinary and networked knowledge to examine the intersection of politics, technology, and society as a way to expose the misconduct and wrongdoings of the powerful. This is achieved through the curatorial methodologies they developed to bring together communities of trust in highly focused conferences, meet-ups and Disruptive Fridays (a weekly online format set up during the Covid-19 pandemic). Recent themes addressed in the activities – that could be understood as a conceptual artwork in itself – varied from collective care during the pandemic, workers' rights, migration, surveillance and control, data cities, and climate change, to queer care. Among the individuals and communities that get involved are artists, activists, data scientists, hackers, researchers, trans and queer communities, whistleblowers, and investigative journalists. Disruption Network Lab notices that bringing people and communities together around shared topics of interest allows people to improve their own work or research and to connect to other Disruption Network Lab communities. People start cooperating with other people they meet at the conferences, continuing the dialogue and community-building process elsewhere. Disruption Network Lab stays connected and builds (longer) lasting relationships between its organisation, its audiences and other organisations.

Audience engagement as creating space for experimentation

Audience-engagement practices that are given the chance to evolve and result in unforeseen outcomes underscore the importance of exploration and experimentation in the arts and cultural sector. The importance of creating space for experimentation is acknowledged by all the partner organisations. KONTEJNER's workshops *The Factory of Sound*, for instance, introduced 8 to 11-year-olds to the importance of freedom in music, authorship and creative roles, and had them acknowledge that music goes beyond the traditionally taught definition and understanding of music. 'Traditional' refers to the still dominant approach in Western music-educational systems (even when other approaches are encouraged), central to which is learning to master an instrument and reproduce somebody else's music, a process that is likely to go on for months or years before children have an opportunity to perform music of their own. 'Traditional' also refers to the dominance of classical or pop music as opposed to KONTEJNER's aspiration to familiarise more young people with electronic and experimental music – motivated also by their wish to actively contribute to the development of their sector. Additionally, KONTEJNER and the workshop facilitators stressed that they understand creative exploration – experimenting with and exposure to a wide variety of musical sounds, techniques and styles – as essential to working with young people and children. Like improvisation, exploration provides a positive impulse for creation and an encouragement to express oneself. According to the workshop facilitators, engaging in a meaningful practice of sharing ideas, learning through overcoming challenges, and setting out into the unknown, may offer the participants skills that are much needed in our current and future societies.

Audience development as creating the potential for change

The acknowledgement of the importance of exploration and experimentation also relates to the call for change that drove Re-Imagine Europe. Exploration implies giving agency to artists and audiences to discover what they think is needed, as opposed to arts organisations telling their audiences how or what to learn, think or change. The organisations aimed to stimulate participants to critically reflect on and gain deeper insights into pressing problems, so that they are enabled to respond to them, to act differently and to inspire people around them to do the same. This manifests in the artworks, events and workshops that the organisations commissioned. These activities are as much a speculative position as they are a reality-check and an urgent call to rethink and respond to significant problems. These activities do not solve, as in social design, today's 'wicked problems', but create above all a potential for change.

Sonic Acts, for instance, understands several of its activities as creating spaces from which a potential for change, connection or inspiration can emerge, spaces in which audiences can become critically aware, acquire technical or other skills and can engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue on pressing issues. The organisation observes that the potential for change is a consequence of what happened in-between people, and of what emerged out of the cross-disciplinary exchange. A concrete example is the workshop *Speculation as Interface*, led by Mario de Vega and Victor Mazón Gardoqui. The artists enabled the participants to use the tools they developed and engaged them in discussions on the workshop's central themes (the impact of technology, speculation and the value of vulnerability), but to whatever end the participants saw fit. The artists left it up to the participants to decide if they eventually apply the workshop's technology or insights in a more activist or political realm, but their thinking was given a chance to develop, which increases the chance of them acting differently in the future.

Jordi Ferreiro, Barcelona-based artist and educator, commissioned firstly by Bergen Kunsthall to work with its youth group (Unge Kunstkjennere), and secondly by Lighthouse for a modified edition of *Who's doing the washing up?*, remarked that these workshops entailed only 'a moment of activation'. With workshops lasting from a few hours to a few days, and given that activating people and community building are usually long-term processes, one should carefully consider what one expects to achieve in such a short time-span: not solutions, but a potential for change.

Audience engagement as a tool to rethink arts organisations

Several organisations addressed the functioning of arts organisations and the cultural sector in their Re-Imagine Europe activities – another way in which space was created for potential change. Several artworks, seminars and related audience-engagement activities dealt with topics related to the limited openness and accessibility of arts organisations. This ties into a wider trend of re-thinking arts institutions in terms of hospitality, collaboration, and care. These activities motivated audiences to reflect on diversity and inclusion and to critically respond to assumptions underpinning the norm in society. But what Re-Imagine Europe might have demonstrated most of all is that the effect of such activities should not be gauged primarily on the level of individual audience members, but on the change triggered within the arts organisation. The (evaluation) question should not only concern the extent to which the programmes increased the audiences' active engagement with and their response to the artworks and the challenges addressed by them. Nor should the question only concern the extent to which certain target communities were reached (as one possible definition of inclusion). Instead, the most important question might concern the extent to which the activities contributed to opening up and changing arts institutions: what did they learn about how to emancipate, decolonise and innovate their organisation and the arts sector?

A clear example is offered by the three stages of the programme *Who's doing the washing up?*. First, Bergen Kunsthall examined its own functioning: how do they use their building, work with people, spend their budgets, develop programme activities and administer decisions? They did this in order to learn how to change the infrastructure they work in without reproducing old models, narratives and values under a veil of innovation or hospitality. In Jordi Ferreiro's work with the youth group, for instance, participants learned important lessons about people with visual and other physical impairments, and about how publicly funded (arts) institutions function in practice: who is (not) part of the 'main' that is able to use the 'main entrance'?[4] The group responded by exploring these topics with the people who visited the exhibition space on the day they took over the Kunsthall. Bergen Kunsthall became more aware of issues regarding access and is currently working on making its main entrance permanently more accessible to people with disabilities.

Second, during a week of communal lunches at Lighthouse, Ferreiro and the guest-hosts asked what cultural organisations need to do if they genuinely want to become inclusive. As at Kunsthall, the intervention involved workers and associates of the organisation who are not usually involved in curatorial or programming decisions. A collective re-imagining highlighted the interrelation between architectural, physical accessibility and the issue of inclusion, openness, accessibility and hospitality as being, in essence, cultural challenges. It revealed that an organisation's accessibility is about open-ness as public-ness, about anti-racism,[5] as well as about providing (semi-)closed activities and spaces to enable groups other than the usual to have a place to work and develop their ideas. It demonstrated that, for all the 'reaching out' to bring audiences in, arts organisations also need to 'reach in' to the people who work for them, and that the ability to listen and the possibility to be actively involved are key.

Third, Lighthouse commissioned independent curator, writer and editor Jamila Prowse – one of the guest-hosts – to continue the process of rethinking in a podcast series. One of the topics she examined with the invited speakers was the dominant 'diversity and inclusion' approach as a corporate strategy: inclusion, representation or the setting up of diversity boards in white arts institutions may quickly become about little more than 'getting more people to participate in the same, unaltered structures'.[6]

[4] https://re-imagine-europe.eu/resources_item/whos-doing-the-washing-up/
[5] https://lighthouse.org.uk/anti-racism-plan
[6] Lighthouse podcast Episode III: https://www.lighthouse.org.uk/events/collective-imaginings-podcast

Audience engagement as a means of slowing down, taking care

Several activities and audience-engagement activities focused not only on community building and shared learning, but also on nurturing and caring for each another. Participants of the RWM Working Group remarked that their meet-ups influenced their podcast-producing practice, but that this was not the main objective. Although opportunities arose from their community, the emphasis was on nurturing rather than on growing. Moments of quietness, of allowing oneself to slow down, are considered important in the current arts sector, now that many professionals experience pressure and precarity. Caring, nurturing and slowing down also characterised Jamila Prowse's involvement in *Who's doing the washing up?* at Lighthouse. During one of the communal lunches, Prowse explored how workers inside and outside arts organisations can maintain space for listening to and caring for each other. She invited the attendees to discuss questions such as: Do arts institutions really listen and really take care? How, as workers in institutions, do we practice care towards artists and those who work with us? As independent artists and curators, how do we find and hold space for ourselves, our mental health and financial stability? How do we each perform self-care and how do we care for each other when navigating hostile and inhospitable institutions, resisting capitalist productivity and the ego-based, exploitative art system?

In conclusion

In the Re-Imagine Europe practices, audience engagement evolved through the active involvement of audiences in seminars, conferences, workshops or debates in direct connection to the artworks, artists and speakers, and/or themes central to the organisations' artistic programmes. These practices confirm that the artistic mission or curatorial choices and audience engagement can go hand in hand. The practices also underscore the need to create space for exploration and experimentation, and the importance of being open to shared learning, and of taking care of both artists and audiences. A crucial prerequisite for all of this is time. A four-year funding model, such as the Creative Europe grants, proved essential, as it enabled the organisations to plan for the continuation of relationships with artists and audiences and to let these relationships evolve: to build programmes that can progress from residencies or workshops to commissions to transnational distributions, and that allow for long-term conversations between organisations, artists and audiences.

Arie Altena (NL) is an editor, writer and researcher who works in the field of art and technology. He is an editor at V2_ in Rotterdam, and as part of the Sonic Acts team co-organised numerous Sonic Acts festival editions and projects such as Kontraste and *Dark Ecology*. He has edited several Sonic Acts publications, and is the author of *Wat is community art?* (2017).

Tatiana Bazzichelli (IT/DE) is the founder and artistic director of the Disruption Network Lab. In 2011-2014 she was programme curator at transmediale festival, where she developed the year-round initiative reSource for transmedial culture and curated several conference events, workshops and installations. She is the author of *Networked Disruption* (2013), *Networking* (2006), and co-edited *Disrupting Business* (2013). She curated exhibitions such as *Samizdata* (2015), *Networked Disruption* (2015), *HACK.Fem.EAST* (2008), and *Hack.it.art* (2005).

François J. Bonnet (FR) is a Franco-Swiss composer, writer and theoretician based in Paris. He had been a member of INA GRM since 2007 and became its director in 2018. He is the author of several books: *The Order of Sounds, The Infra-World, After Death* (all published by Urbanomic) and *The Music to Come* (Shelter Press). Bonnet is co-editor of the SPECTRES book series (Shelter Press) and the Recollection GRM and Portraits GRM record series (Editions Mego). He also produces a radio show for national radio France Musique. His music, often presented as Kassel Jaeger, has been played at renowned venues and festivals all over the world.

Slávo Krekovič is a musician and sound artist, musicologist, contemporary music and new media art curator and cultural organiser/nonprofit activist. He is the organiser and curator of series of experimental music and multimedia events, including the annual NEXT Festival of Advanced Music (since 2000) and Multiplace new media culture network festival (since 2002). In 2004 he co-founded independent cultural centre A4 – Space of Contemporary Culture in Bratislava, where he holds the positions of Deputy Director and Music Curator.

Heather Maitland (UK) is an arts consultant providing audience development and strategic marketing support, training, audience research and box office data analysis for cultural organisations. She has worked in arts marketing and audience development since 1983, and has marketed a wide range of arts organisations: from the smallest of touring theatre companies to running the London end of the Royal Shakespeare Company's marketing operation. She supported audience and artform development in over 100 visual and performing arts organisations as head of two of England's audience development agencies.

Victor Mazón Gardoqui (ES) explores amplification, electromagnetic phenomena and perception by using locative audio techniques and custom electronics. Mazon Gardoqui's work questions perception, altered state and vulnerability through un/stable arrangements. His work materialises as interventions or site-specific performances through experimental processes, exhibitions as consequences of previous actions and collective work through seminars in cultural and or academic institutions. His works have been performed or exhibited in museums, galleries, billboards, urban screens, public TV and radio stations across the world.

Ľudovít Nápoký (SK) is a project manager currently working in the independent cultural centre A4 based in Bratislava. He has five years of experience with project management, event production, coordination of artist residencies and working with international and local volunteers.

Margarita Osipian (CA/NL) is a curator, researcher, and writer living and working in Amsterdam. Engaging with the intersections and frictions between art, design, technology, and language, she organises collaborative projects both in formal institutions and in more precarious and fleeting spaces. She is part of The Hmm, a platform for internet cultures; a member of the Hackers &

Designers collective; and an editor and curator for *Versal*, an art and literature journal based out of Amsterdam. She has done programming and curated exhibitions for the W139, Salwa Foundation, TodaysArt, Bits of Freedom, Tetem, Hackers & Designers, and Mediamatic, amongst others.

Hilde Marie Pedersen NO) is an art historian from the University of Bergen. She has extensive experience as a mediator, lecturer and writer, and taught art theory & history at the Art School in Bergen and the University of Bergen. Since 2007 she has worked as head of education at Bergen Kunsthall, where she founded Unge kunstkjennere (2017) and Art Stories (2014), both to generate greater interest and understanding of contemporary art. She has written several articles and texts on contemporary art for publications and exhibition catalogues.

Lieke Ploeger (NL/DE) is the community director and administration officer of the Disruption Network Lab in Berlin. Her core interest lies in building and developing both online and offline communities of interest, with a focus on sharing knowledge and expertise in an open way. Previously, she co-founded the independent art space SPEKTRUM Berlin, and worked for the Open Knowledge Foundation, where she was involved in various European research projects in the areas of open cultural data, open access and open science.

The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group started in 2016 as a means for the closest members of the RWM team to spend some time together, slow down processes, share physical space, and see what happens along the way. Many hands and voices have dipped in and out of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group. Regulars are Dolores Acebal, André Chêdas, Antonio Gagliano, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, Verónica Lahitte, Violeta Ospina, Tiago Pina, Gemma Planell, Quim Pujol, Anna Ramos, Txe Roimeser, Matías Rossi, Anna Irina Russell, María Salgado, and Albert Tarrats.

Jodi Rose (AU/DE) is an artist, writer, producer, and creative director of *Singing Bridges*, an urban sonic sculpture playing the cables of bridges as musical instruments on a global scale.

Eva Rowson (UK) is Managing Director of Bergen Kjøtt, a production house and cultural venue in Bergen, Norway. Her work is organised around hosting, collaboration and organisational practices – focusing on how the different types of work involved are valued, and with what consequences. This thinking is at the core of long-term collaborative projects including the project space 38b, co-run from her living room in London, and *Como imaginar una musea?*

Karolina Rugle (HR) graduated in musicology at the University of Zagreb. In her work she focuses mostly on contemporary and experimental music, as well as interdisciplinary and performance practices. Apart from producing, organising, and curating music festivals, she has a weekly radio programme, makes music documentaries and writes reviews. She is active in advocating for human rights through the international work of the non-governmental organisation Are You Syrious.

Jiří Suchánek (CZ) is a sound and media artist, musician and multimedia experimenter who focuses on building permanent audio-light installations that are usually interactive and placed in natural or public spaces. In his works he connects sound, light, sculptural objects, electronics and code with carefully chosen spaces to explore the relationship between nature, technology and durability of the electronic media. Currently he has a fellowship at the Institute of Sonology in The Hague; he teaches at the Department of Audiovisual Technology of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Brno University of Technology. He is also a PhD candidate at Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts.

Rian Treanor (UK) is an artist and producer based in the North of the UK. His sound practice re-imagines the intersection of club culture, experimental art and computer music, presenting an insightful

and compelling musical world of interlocking and fractured components. Drawing upon his study with Lupo at Berlin's Dubplates & Mastering, plus years spent curating the Enjoy artspace in Leeds, Treanor's sound uses off-centred rhythmic arrangements, referencing the dynamics of garage and techno as much as Fluxus and Dada cut-ups. Since 2015 Treanor has focused on his solo sound works, developing musical environments for improvisations within his live performances.

Sandra Trienekens (NL) is a cultural sociologist (PhD) and social geographer (MA). With her research bureau Urban Paradoxes she researches citizenship, diversity and the arts. She has also worked as a scientific collaborator and lecturer at various Dutch and English universities. From 2007 to 2011 she was Lector of Citizenship and Cultural Dynamics at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. She is the author of *Participatieve kunst* (2020).

Mario de Vega (MX/DE) is an artist best known for his site-specific interventions, sculptures and sound improvisations. He explores the threshold of human perception and the physicality of listening. De Vega's work digs into the materiality of sound, the vulnerability of systems, materials and individuals, and the aesthetic potential of unstable arrangements. De Vega is also interested in both the perceptive capacities and incapacities of humans, such as the limits of aural perception and the transposition of high and low frequencies into audible sounds. He has been guest artist and lecturer at a.o. Universität der Künste Berlin, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts de Paris; and his work has been performed and exhibited worldwide.

Lucas van der Velden (NL) is the director of Sonic Acts. He studied at the interfaculty for image and sound at the Royal Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. He is co-founder of the Rotterdam art collective Telcosystems and co-founder of Baltan Lab in Eindhoven.

Annette Wolfsberger (AT/NL) Is a producer based in Amsterdam, facilitating collaborative arts projects that relate to technology, society, and the environment. She was project coordinator of Re-Imagine Europe. Previously, she was producer of Sonic Acts (NL) and Dark Ecology (NO/RU), and has managed and co-curated various international artistic research, exchange and residency programmes, a.o. for Trans Europe Halles and the Netherlands Media Arts Institute.

A4 – Space for Contemporary Culture (SK) is an independent centre for contemporary art in the centre of Bratislava established in 2004. It is oriented towards creation, presentation, and education in innovative forms of theatre, dance, music, film, visual culture, and new media art.

Bergen Kunsthall (NO) is a contemporary art centre, concert venue, book shop, bar, and café. Since its founding in 1838, the centre has been lauded as one of Norway's premier arenas for contemporary art, showcasing a wide range of international and Norwegian artists. The programme includes presentations, lectures, and debates with leading artists, curators, and theoreticians from the fields of contemporary art and culture; a concert series presenting new and experimental music; and screenings and presentations of interdisciplinary art projects, including new commissions.

Disruption Network Lab (DE) is an ongoing platform of events and research focused on the intersection of politics, technology, and society. Since 2014, the Berlin-based non-profit organisation has organised participatory, interdisciplinary, international events at the intersection of human rights and technology, with the objective of strengthening freedom of speech, and exposing the misconduct and wrongdoing of the powerful.

Elevate Festival (AT) has been held every year since 2005 in different places around Graz, offering a unique combination of concerts, political debates, and films. Elevate Festival has established itself as an innovative, hybrid festival that questions art through politics.

INA's Groupe de Recherches Musicales (FR) has been a unique locus for creation, research and conservation in the fields of electroacoustic music and recorded sound since its foundation in 1958 by Pierre Schaeffer. Integrated into the French National Audiovisual Institute (INA) since 1975, the GRM has found a major place in the fields of electronic and electroacoustic music, updating its historical repertoire whilst pursuing an ambitious policy of music creation, workshops, and residencies.

KONTEJNER (HR) is engaged in curatorial work, the organisation of art festivals and other public events, education, and social theory. Its main field of interest is progressive contemporary art which investigates the role and meaning of science, technology, and the body in our society. Within this field, KONTEJNER focuses on urgent and current phenomena, especially within provocative, fascinating, and intriguing subjects and topics – also such that are perceived as taboo. In addition, important parts of KONTEJNER's work are activities in the field of sound art, experimental music, and related art forms.

Lighthouse (UK) is a Brighton-based arts charity, providing an accessible programme of talks, exhibitions, commissions, professional development, and education initiatives. The work they do connects new developments in art, technology, and society.

Paradiso (NL) is an internationally renowned cultural venue founded in 1968, which organises over 900 music, visual, and performing arts events per year. Paradiso has developed many cultural projects and large-scale festivals, presenting events within and outside of the organisation itself.

Ràdio Web MACBA (ES) is a radiophonic project from MACBA that explores the possibilities of the internet and radio as spaces of synthesis and exhibition. Founded in 2006, this laboratory of orality and sound publishes weekly podcasts on subjects at the intersection of critical thinking, contemporary art, activism, philosophy, sound, and everything in between.

Sonic Acts (NL) is an interdisciplinary arts organisation based in Amsterdam. Founded in 1994 to provide a platform for new developments in electronic and digital art forms, Sonic Acts is known for its biennial international festival – an intensive art, theory, and technology gathering. It also facilitates artist residencies, commissioned works, publications, and year-round activities both on- and offline.

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KONTEJNER BERGEN KUNSTHALL URBAN PARADOXES

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