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DUSAN MURIC LEARNING CENTER

ex KIRIAKOS HADJIOANNOU LEARNING CENTER (2013)
ex SAN KELLER LEARNING CENTER (2012)

ARTIST-IN-RESISTANCE 2014: Dušan Murić (Serbia)



HERZLICH WILLKOMMEN im DUSAN MURIC LEARNING CENTER*. Dies ist ein Ort fürs lernen, Erfinden und Austauschen von Ideen, die über das kapitalistische Denken hinaus gehen, finanziert durch Kulturgelder kapitalistischen Ursprungs. Alle sind eingeladen, dieses Projekt mitzugestalten. Mehr INFORMATIONEN finden Sie unter www.notmylab.org. Jedes Jahr ist ein schlauer Kandidat/ eine schlaue Kandidatin zu einer 2-wöchigen ARTIST-RESISTENCY auf diesem Stück Land eingeladen. Danach trägt das LEARNING CENTER den Namen dieser Person für ein Jahr. Das Bewerbungsverfahren für 2015 läuft!
* Der Name LEARNING CENTER ist ein ironischer Kommentar auf Bildungsinstitutionen wie z.B. Rolex Learning Center oder Harvard Campus, getragen von kapitalistischen Unternehmen und Interessen, u. a. der Aneignung von geistigem Eigentum. Dieses Projekt versucht, derartige und ähnliche Logiken zu unterwandern. Die Idee entstand während dem Festival BELLUARD BOLDWERK INTERNATIONAL 2012, im Rahmen der Rahmenproduktion NOT MY PIECE von MARTIN SCHICK (CH).

BIENVENUE au DUSAN MURIC LEARNING CENTER*. C'est un lieu d'apprentissage, de la création et le partage des idées pour une vie au-delà du capitalisme, financés par l'argent de la culture d'origine capitaliste. C'est une espace ouverte, tout le monde est invité à participer en contribuant ses idées et son savoir. Plus d'informations: www.notmylab.org. Chaque année, une personne maligne est invité à faire un ARTISTE-RESISTENCY sur ce site pendant 2 semaines. En suite, le centre d'apprentissage porte le nom de cette personne pour 1 an. La demande pour 2015 est maintenant en cours!
* Le nom LEARNING CENTER est un commentaire ironique sur les lieux d'enseignement habilités par les entreprises capitalistes, comme le Rolex Learning Center ou Harvard Campus (s.e.), au service de l'appropriation la propriété intellectuelle et d'autres intérêts capitalistes. L'objectif de ce projet est de renverser et mettre en question cette logique. Il s'agit d'un projet libre, et n'est pas censé être artistique, ni divertissant. Il a été introduit dans le cadre de la production NOT MY PIECE au cours de la Belluard Festival Boldwerk International 2012 par MARTIN SCHICK (CH).

WELCOME to the DUSAN MURIC LEARNING CENTER*. This is a place for learning, creating and sharing ideas for a life beyond capitalism, financed by capitalist culture money. Feel free to PARTICIPATE by contributing your ideas and know-how. More INFORMATION: www.notmylab.org. Every year a smart person is invited to do an ARTIST-RESISTENCY on this site during 2 weeks. Then, the learning center bears the name of that person for 1 year. The application for 2015 is now open!
* The name LEARNING CENTER is an ironic comment on education places empowered by capitalist enterprises, such as Rolex Learning Center or Harvard Campus (s.e.), serving the appropriation of intellectual property and other capitalist interests. The aim of this project is to reverse and challenge this logic. This is a free project, it is not supposed to be artistic, nor entertaining. It was first introduced in the frame of the production NOT MY PIECE by MARTIN SCHICK (CH) during the FESTIVAL BELLUARD BOLDWERK INTERNATIONAL 2012.



Robert Bosch Stiftung

Szenenwechsel



"To engage oneself in projects that are known to be unrealizable but desirable, and to seek to convince others to also engage in such projects, turns the project a little less unrealizable."
-Marcel Broto/ Les Usines à Gaz

Between Utopia and Reality

The Martin Schick Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB

by Agustina Strüngmann

Since 2007 Swiss performer and choreographer Martin Schick has been directing his own theater performances that use both research and participation to raise questions about the limits and possibilities of the performing space. More recently, *NOT MY PIECE - Post-capitalism for beginners* (2012) became the starting point for extending Schick's questions into the realm of an enduring space.

This essay will look briefly at Schick's earlier work and then consider the more recent *NOT MY PIECE* and its elaboration into *The Martin Schick Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB*.

In all of his works Schick carries out research that then becomes the basis for his work. The audience's participation becomes the final ingredient. For instance, in *X MINUTES* (2014) performed together with François Gremaud and Viviane Pavillon, the artists critically investigate the logic of the art market, and its neoliberal economics of exponentially increasing value - 'More is more! According to the contemporary art market we could claim that the more well known, the more expensive and the more expensive, the more valuable'. Research into the art market underlies the piece. The artists start the piece with a length of five minutes, and they add five more minutes onto each successive piece. Next, they bring the audience into the experience by inviting it to buy each performance and define the length of each piece. For each piece they hold an auction where members of the audience buy the performance. The interesting part is that so far the buyers of the piece have been curators and theatre directors who then become collaborators and co-producers. The artists sign contracts with the buyers and the collaborator – or buyer – is then named in the touring of the piece.

Schick's anti-establishment evolution is apparent in much of his work before *The Martin Schick Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB*. For instance, Schick has collaborated with Swiss artist Vreni Spieser in *Candide and Cunegonde* (2012), a performance where – for eight days - they occupied a small garden cottage in a public garden in Fribourg. They had daily discussions with different local groups and prepared small revolutions that would happen in the public space. Schick's work overall tone is anti-institutional and reflective. He reflects on the role of the artist in our capitalistic society, encouraging artists to employ different strategies to remain independent. In *HOLIDAY ON STAGE* (2013), a collaboration with Damir Todorović, the artists present themselves as contemporary upper class artists who are against the idea of becoming a serving class. Also, as noted earlier, in *X MINUTES* the artists sell each performance to someone in the audience.

Schick encourages participation, asking the spectator to think of new economic systems, to question what these would look like, and to ask how we would

live without capitalism. Even the performance name *NOT MY PIECE* and the centre's name *NOT MY LAB* explicitly state the artist's letting go of authorship and accepting collaboration with the audience.

Schick's performance *NOT MY PIECE - Post-capitalism for beginners*, which was selected by the Swiss Contemporary Dance in 2013, was first presented by Schick and Kiriakos Hadjiioannou in 2012 at the Belluard Bollwerk International Festival in Fribourg, Switzerland. The performance stages a pessimistic scenario of bank bail-outs, the collapse of economies, unemployment, meltdowns in major financial institutions, and an on-going war in which it is easy to see that the world will only get worse. For Martin Schick, the capitalist system could collapse from one day to the next.¹ Envisioning the end of capitalism, the artist introduces the audience to the idea of experiencing a 'socio-political science fiction' or a life without capitalism - a utopia.



The theatrical event became crowdsourcing for a planned research centre. The play was the starting point for a long-term project: *The Martin Schick Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB*, a piece of land that is an open and enduring stage.²

During the performance, new alternatives to capitalism are proposed and it is announced that these will be further discussed and implemented at *The Martin Schick Learning Centre*. Schick involves the audience of *NOT MY PIECE* by inviting them to be the learning centre co-sponsors and members. The Centre gives a continuation and a social dimension to the performance *NOT MY PIECE*, and *NOT MY PIECE* gives the learning centre a place where audience and ideas will interact. The learning centre project emerges in this way as a narrative device that allows the performance piece to continue out into the future.

That future – *The Martin Schick Learning Centre* - was inaugurated outside the Belluard Bollwerk International Festival, Fribourg in July of this year. The project is located outside the institution, as most socially engaged artistic projects are.³ At the same time, the learning centre is supported by Fondation Nestlé pour l'Art, which underscores the artist's dependence on the system. It also furthers to conceit. The artist is using the money of the system to question the system, adding to the project's ironic and provocative quality, but also undercutting its power as an

independent production. This differs from other cases in which the artist inevitably loses independence when private money is involved.

Schick envisions The Centre as a long-term project, spanning 99 years. The time frame reflects the time on Schick's land ownership permit. The only aspect that appears immutable is the time frame. All else is temporary. The Centre, for example, was initially called *The San Keller Learning Centre* to honour the Swiss artist San Keller for his dedicated mentorship in the project's development phase. During 2013–2014 the centre changed its name to *Kirakos Hadjiioannou Learning Centre*, crediting the Greek artist who was at that time undertaking the 'Artist in Resistance' programme and collaborating in *NOT MY PIECE*. After its inauguration the centre changed its name once again to *The Martin Schick Learning Centre*, to credit Serbian performance artist who is now collaborating with Schick in the 'Artist in Resistance' programme.⁴ For now, it appears that Centre's name is subject to change according to the current artist in resistance. With the 'Artist in Resistance' project, Schick is calling for a resistance to the system in a piece of land. Instead of a name being identified by an institution, the project becomes personified by the artists, a sharply different alternative to in-residence programmes inside the institution. There is an actual open call for artists next resistance at the project's website.⁵ The website of the learning centre reads:

'*NOT MY LAB* is a non-profit, non-political, non-state, non-hierarchical organization.

It is an institute for post-capitalistic themes with role models for a life after capitalism. It shall become a meeting point for people who have fallen out of the system or who wish to do so. It shall be accessible to all members (cooperative principle) and have regular opening hours for visitors'.

'A laboratory for learning, creating and sharing ideas, often called church of the future'

But is it an institute at all? One of Schick's aims for the learning centre is to comment on the capitalist learning centres such as the Rolex Learning Centre in Lausanne, Switzerland and the Novartis Learning Center Horburg in Basel, Switzerland - a reflection of the private sector's increasing intervention in the education sector. The artist is playing with the word institute, parodying such learning laboratories with impressive architectural designs, and extensive libraries. We could say that Schick's notion of an institute is related to Andrea Fraser's argument that today it is not a question of being against the institution, but the fact that "we are the institution".⁶ I think this is Schick's intention. Unlike the Rolex Learning Centre, *The Martin Schick Learning Centre* is precarious and basic. It fosters the idea of being out in the field, a 'back to basics' exploration. Contrasting the sleek institutions of the city, the centre provides a form of isolation outside capitalism.

For its opening in July Martin Schick and Dušan Muric constructed the learning centre as a geodesic dome, a partial-spherical wooden shell structure developed by the neo-futuristic architect Buckminster Fuller. The artists covered the wooden structure with colourful umbrellas; making it look like a rounded tent. The geodesic dome proposes an alternative form of living that takes into account sustainability, energy savings and material efficiency. Historically, this type of building has been shown to have many practical disadvantages and the structure's impractical nature quickly becomes apparent. Therefore the actual structure of the learning centre is symbolic: the constructed geodesic dome is an alternative way of living, a structure

that in reality is ineffective, but will nonetheless host workshops on post-capitalism, a basic structure is enough to meet and exchange ideas.⁷ The gatherings are focused on discussions of possible alternatives to capitalism. What do people learn at the Centre? Participants would also learn from each other on how to prepare for a life without capitalism. These skills might be community gardening or other energy saving practices. The learning centre will act as a communal space where people can learn how to be self-sufficient and independent from the capitalistic system. The modest wooden structure and the idea of using it as a gathering place, recalls Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002), a collaborative and participatory project constructed outside the principal venues of *Documenta 11*. It too aimed at providing a gathering space where workshops were held, knowledge and information was imparted and people socialized. In its very structure it was outside the system.



The learning centre is 'accessible to all members', intended to become a meeting point for people who have fallen out of the system or who wish to. It is first addressed to the audience of *NOT MY PIECE*, but it is also open to anyone who would like to participate. To participate in the project people can inform themselves of what is happening on the website. The project encourages participation in making the audience question the system and think about other possible systems. It asks participants to be irritated. It invites those interested to go to the centre and work on a topic for a week or two. The Centre's first workshop on sustainability, *Sustainably different?* took place in November 2014. Others are expected to follow. With this cooperative principle of including the audience, we can see Schick turning to the social sphere, rather than remaining only in the field of performance.

The learning centre can be seen as a conceptual structure, an evolving elaboration of a world without capitalism, a utopia. Considering Thomas More's definition of utopia, as the island of good social order, a utopia is a community or society possessing perfect qualities, a hope for a better future, a conceptual 'no-place', beyond ordinary life. But what would a society without capitalism look like? That is uncertain, a topic for discussion and one that Schick sees happening at the Learning Centre. Schick's utopia: a life without capitalism entails a critique to the present situation.⁸ What is not utopian about the learning centre is that it offers partici-

pants a place to talk, exchange and reflect on how we use time, how much time we dedicate to ourselves and how we could be self-sufficient and satisfy our basic needs. The learning centre's platform would act as a space for reflection.⁹

Theodor W. Adorno has remarked that achieving a utopia is not impossible. In his 1964 essay in conversation with Ernst Bloch he writes that certain utopian dreams had already been fulfilled - the television, the possibility of travelling to other planets and the ability to travel faster than sound.¹⁰ He continues by saying that whatever utopia is, whatever can be imagined as utopia, it is the 'transformation of the totality', and he argues that nowadays people have lost the capability to imagine this totality as something completely different. Schick does exactly that by encouraging the audience to collectively think about a society without capitalism, a total change, something completely different to today's European reality. His work calls for an alternative universe of utopian possibility. Furthermore, Schick aims at materializing this utopia: making the project practical and real. Schick proposes workshops to reflect on his ideal scenario, and to learn sustainable practices.

The project provides a space to interact and collectively think about questions that are worth thinking about. Others might argue that Schick's commitment to maintaining an aesthetic utopian space for years in a site that could be put to "real use" offers an example of its aesthetic uselessness. I disagree. Projects that reflect on social issues are also useful and might also have great consequence. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Schick is reflecting on a life without objects, on a life where we would only have to satisfy our basic needs, in Switzerland, a place where objects are plentiful and where needs are generally met. The artist directs these questions to a specific audience that shares a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste or what Bourdieu described as *Habitus*, the social body. These same ideas would be perceived much differently in countries where the system has collapsed and extreme poverty is the norm. The irony of the piece could be misunderstood and it could even be offensive to some.

The Martin Schick Learning Centre's utopian vision is clearly artistic, detached from any practice that would relate to an NGO or projects that work in conjunction with government agencies, community activists.¹¹ The project provokes, and makes the audience think. We could see Schick's learning centre a utopia but also as an ironic, on-stage experiment, an extension of his performance work that invites the audience to reflect but also to participate in workshops to make a utopian vision less utopic. As Lars Bang Larsen remarked, it is this utilitarian aspect that gives the work a sense of purpose and direct involvement.¹² Martin Schick is turning social collaboration into an extension of his performance practice. It is in line with theater director Bertolt Brecht's conception of the *Epic Theater*, as surpassing entertainment and leading to social action. For Jackson, performance art transcends its material conditions to aspire to social effects.¹³

The learning centre today stands very much as a mind journey, a visionary place to imagine what would be possible to develop in a piece of land. The on-going process makes it very much a work-in-progress that could be transformed. Schick's utopian scenario is meant to evolve. Thus, the learning centre becomes a kind of a time machine, a utopia in transformation. The project is unfinished. There are 97 years remaining, giving it much time to transform and evolve. It has a utopian vision but things will be done, projects will be fulfilled. It offers artists a hybrid, a space between utopia and reality.

Notes

1 In his book *Dark Matter*, Gregory Scholette explains this same crisis scenario. Gregory Scholette, G., *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture, Marxism and culture*, PlutoPress, London and New York, 2011, 9.

2 Schick acquired a piece of land in his hometown of Fribourg, Switzerland. It is there that he has created *The Martin Schick Learning Centre / NOT MY LAB*.

3 Socially engaged artistic projects' objectives and outcomes vary within artists but they all share the belief of empowering collective action and sharing ideas. For Claire Bishop, "artists use social situations to produce dematerialized, anti-market and politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life". Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its discontents", *Artforum*, February 2006, 179.

4 Serbian artist Dušan Murić lives and works in Belgrade, Serbia. He performed in numerous drama and dance productions in Serbia and Montenegro, collaborating with authors such as Bojana Mladenović, Isidora Stanišić, Anja Suša, Petar Pejaković, Ister Theater or TKH. He has been a co-author and moderator for the interdisciplinary project *Mozart Or Z (of) ART* (2005-2006). He is a founding member of *Station, service for contemporary dance*, Belgrade.

5 To register and for further information about the project go to: <http://www.notmylab.org>

6 Andrea Fraser argues that: "the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals". Andrea Fraser, 'From a Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum* 44: 1, September, 2005, 281.

7 In Claire Bishop words, these proposed participatory practices "re-humanize—or at least de-alienate—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism". Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its discontents", *Artforum* Feb. 2006, 179.

8 The term Utopia was coined by Thomas More in 1516. Furthermore, Richard Noble describes two facets to the term utopia. On the one hand Utopia as 'a better place, a place in which the problems that beset our current condition are transcended or resolved, and on the other hand 'the negative vision of the contradictions and limitations that drive our will to escape the present situation, since imagining a better world implicates a critique to the present one'. In this sense utopian works are political. Schick is an example of this. This utopian impulse informs and animates contemporary art. 'It holds up a critical mirror to the world; a glass through

which the darkness of the future illuminates the present'. (Richard Noble, *Introduction// The Utopian impulse in Contemporary Art*, in *Utopias: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2009, 12-19).

9 Like *Utopia Station*, curated by Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Rirkrit Tiravanija at the 50th Venice Biennial in 2003, the learning centre is a gathering space that is open to social interaction and dialogue. The Station was also a place to stop, to talk and contemplate.

10 Theodor Adorno, *Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing*, in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Studies in Contemporary Social Thought, Cambridge, MA, London, MIT Press, 1988, 3.

11 Examples to these projects include artist group Superflex's *Supergas* and *Guaraná Power* projects where members worked with 'disenfranchised' communities and sought to ameliorate their condition through locally situated interventions. Another example of 'productive social practice' could be Ala Plastica, an Argentinean artist collective that operates as an NGO as well as an artistic group, working in conjunction with government agencies, community activists, and scientists. Grant H. Kester, *The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011, 127, 141.

12 Lars Bang Larsen, 'Social Aesthetics', 1999, in Claire Bishop, *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2006, 172.

13 Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, New York and London, Routledge, 2011, 29.

Martin Schick is a Swiss freelance performance artist currently living on the road. After a short career as a dancer, he studied theatre and performance at Bern University of the Arts, Switzerland. Since 2007 he has worked on scenic plays in the independent dance and theatre environment, and considers theatre a place of permanent transformation. He is interested in the awkward, the impure and the uneven, aiming to interfere with conventions and standardisations within theatre and everyday life.

Schick is currently focusing on a more generalist and spatial practice that includes exhibitions, text works and open formats. He is about to buy a military bunker in the Swiss mountains for a future Artist in Resistance program and is also designing a Learning Centre for post-capitalist ideas sponsored by the Fondation Nestlé pour l'Art. Within the coming year, with the support of the European network WEB he will realize several new cross-gender projects under the title Radical Living. He will be teaching and promoting a new training technique called Walkworks and is starting up a collective General Performances for spatial practices in Berne.

A selection of his internationally shown performances includes: TITLE (2009), awarded with the ZKB prize at Theaterspektakel Zürich; CMMN SNS PRJCT (2011), created for the Festival Freischwimmer 2011 and performed more than 80 times all over the world, such as Fringe Festival Beijing, tjcc Paris or Live Arts Capetown; NOT MY PIECE (2012), selected for the Swiss Contemporary Dance Days 2013 and PIFT 2014; HALF-BREADTECHNIQUE (2013), performed at Tanzquartier Vienna, Culturescapes 2013, Tanzwerkstatt Europa and WITS Johannesburg; HOLIDAY ON STAGE (2013) performed in Rencontres Chorégraphiques Seine-St.Denis, Julidans Amsterdam, and X MINUTES (2014), currently on tour.

<https://martinschick.wordpress.com>