

Passepartout: New Infrastructures. Performative Infrastructures in the Art Field

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New Infrastructures. Performative Infrastructures in the Art Field

Organization, or the ways in which art connects to social and political worlds, is increasingly becoming a focus of attention in the contemporary art field. Prompted by a situation in which contemporary art offers itself simultaneously as a touristic device, as a value in the creative economies, and as a means for creating amiable socialities, new critical art practices and curatorial initiatives emerge which pursue alternative politics of connection, and which turn this organizing process itself into the very center and material of artistic and political action. Such practices then become platforms for collective, cross-disciplinary inquiries and for art and social action to merge as crucial sites of experimentation between embodied experience, social struggle, and collective appropriations of space. Increasingly, also art museums and other institutionalized spaces become framed as scenes for public assemblies, for social gatherings, and participatory commitments. The adaption of "activist" strategies and co-creative practices into highly institutionalized settings is a signal of this. This special issue on New Infrastructures sets out to map an emerging field of experimental infrastructures in the art field. As an interdisciplinary endeavor, the call addresses itself to practice-based artists and curators, as well as to theorists from the fields of sociology, anthropology, art, urban design, architecture, critical theory, or philosophy. It invites theoretical as well as practice-based perspectives and close readings of case studies.

Infrastructure is about connecting people and things, and thus constructing a common world. However, while enabling connections, infrastructure simultaneously shapes these connections. Thereby, infrastructure allows some ideas to become valuable and some forms of life to exist, while precluding others. As the American anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli argues, infrastructures are belated events. They can be only grasped from their tailings – or from the effect they leave behind (Povinelli, *The Infrastructure Summit*, Bergen 2016). Similarly, urban theorist Keller Easterling, describes infrastructure space as the "undeclared but consequential activities" of an organization, "not the text but the constantly updating software that manages the text" (Easterling, 2016). Today, social practice has come to the fore in contemporary life as simultaneously the target of governance, and as the means for radical organization. This happens at a time when power is increasingly being theorized as infrastructural – not as an explicit sovereign power, but rather as discrete operations, the ways through which juridical, spatial or logistical systems are

managed and coordinated. Responding to this, a revolutionary approach to infrastructure and organizing has redefined the meaning of radical action. This can be seen in non-representational practices of democracy following the economic crisis in Europe, in activism, the Occupy movement, and other forms of horizontal social action. It is precisely this contested and performative nature of the concept of infrastructure which this issue wants to seize upon and explore further. When considered a contested and performative concept, infrastructure may work as a tool to make clear what's at stake in radical forms of organization, instituting, practices of commoning, or in curatorial experiments in the art system.

Questions to pursue may relate (but are not limited) to:

Reinventing the Notion of Public

The notion of the public sphere as a representational space of the modern nation state is in crisis today. Critiques of the public as a fundamental authoritative category, regulated by the state, by normative divisions between public and private, exclusionary definitions of citizenship, or as defined by private interests of corporations or cultural industries have demonstrated the need for inventing new practices of the public. How may experiments with organizational forms in the art field offer new ways of conceiving the notion of the public?

Commoning Practices

As non-representative strategies for organizing collective action, commoning practices have influenced activism and social movements during the past decade. In commoning practices radical politics emerge as immanent to the life forms that such practices invent. How do such experiences become adopted into the art field and into institutional practices? Do they respond to local urgencies, or do they operate as independent nomadic events? Is there a problem of commoning practices becoming representations of collective action, rather than a processing of collective action?

Transnational/Transdisciplinary Attitudes, Practices and Discourses and Situated Practices

Despite often globally shared critical debates, infrastructural issues are to a wide extent locally and/or nationally embedded. How do the actors translate their discursive sensitivities into a local practice, and how far are these very specific conditions represented in the theoretical abstractions? Is there an exchange between these two areas, or are they considered as two separate fields of action?

Strength of Informal Ties

In recent years, quite a lot of metaphors (network, platform, interpretative community (Stanley Fish), cluster – just to name a few – have been used to describe new ways of how gatherings based on shared interests or concerns are organized. Their fluid and open configuration was set as an alternative against rigid structures, thereby establishing new modes of interaction and production that often aren't stable, but rather subject of constant negotiations. At the same time, these informal ties request a lot of knowledge and communication in order to be visible. What does it need for such kinds of informal ties to be a perceivable mode of organization?

Playing Formats

In how far playing with established formats (be it on the level of organization or all kind of events) is a promising approach for interacting with fixed infrastructural settings? Is there a critical poten-

tial in these kinds of activities? Can this be read as a political, even subversive, attitude?

Abstracts of 300 word (in English) together with a short CV should be sent to smch@create.aau.dk or to rachel.mader@hslu.ch by 15 May 2018. Editorial response to abstracts can be expected late May. Deadline for submission of full papers the length of 5.000-6.000 words is 1 October 2018.

Reference:

CFP: Passepartout: New Infrastructures. Performative Infrastructures in the Art Field. In: Arthist.net, Feb 24, 2018 (accessed Jul 5, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/17456>>.