

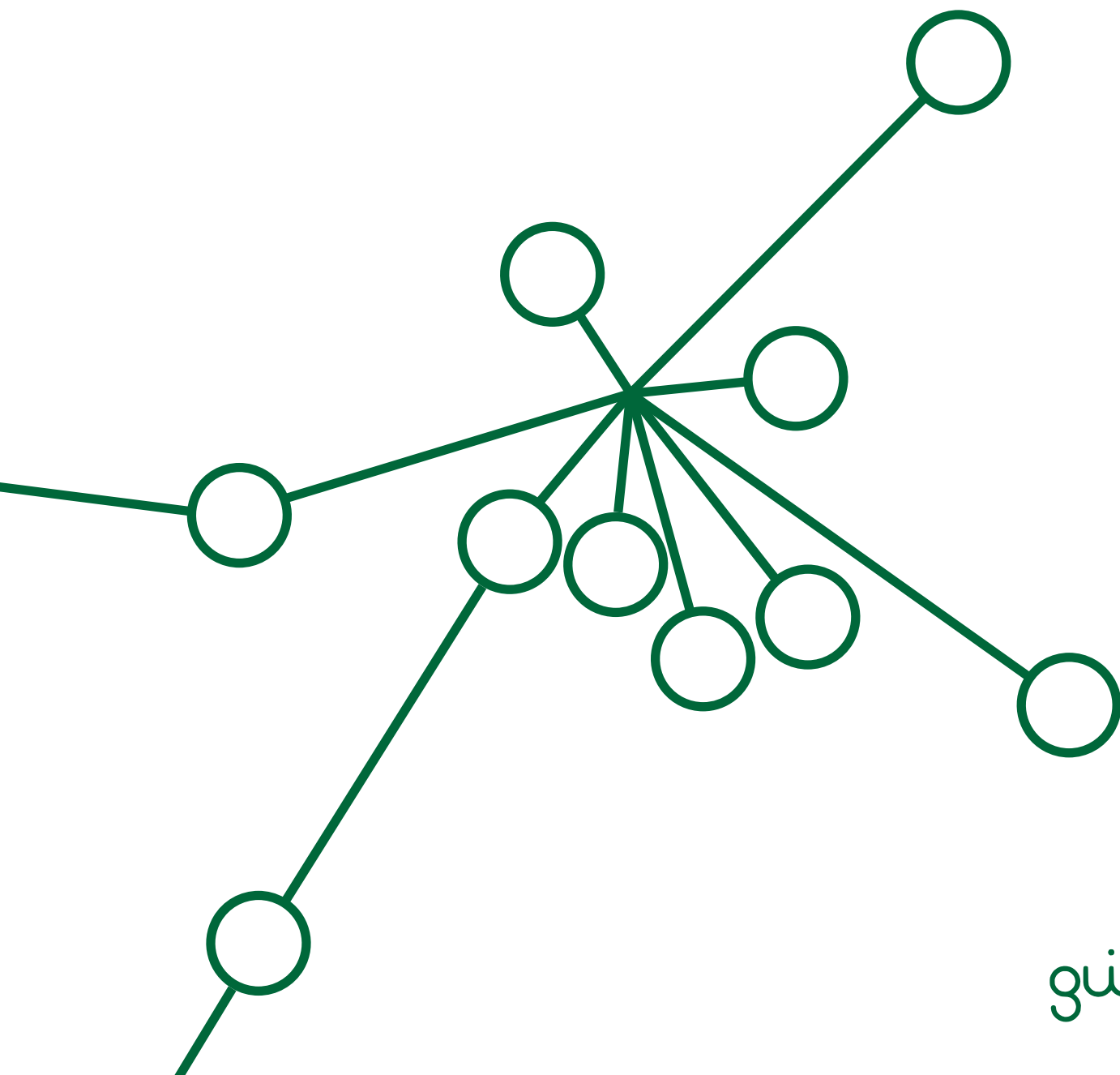
TRAINING CREATIVE ACTS AND ACTION

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FOREWORD

Katharina Neuburger, Antonia Gradnitzer

Training Creative Acts and Action is the title of our international, interdisciplinary project grounded in and propelled by artistic research which took place in September 2025. Bringing together perspectives from art theory and practice, it explored concepts such as “training,” “exercise,” “praxis,” “action,” and “mediation,” attending not only to their intellectual dimensions but also to their bodily, temporal, and relational registers. The workshop, held in Schwerin and structured around Hannah Arendt’s question of “What do we do when we are thinking?,” combined critical reflection with embodied practice, emphasizing the inseparability of thought and action as modes of knowledge production. In this way, the project explored the notion that artistic research is both a methodology and a field of relations, contingencies, and mutual transformations.

The contribution of the GUI IUG to the panels could be seen as informed by a practice of hospitality or as an investigation of the etiquette normally followed in such contexts. Ours was a ceremonial gesture that was at the same time a conceptual and ethical act. In Schwerin, a

city home to a significant Marcel Duchamp collection, we considered our “hosting” as a deliberate suspension of control, a readiness to hold space without prefiguring what might happen. A 1953 gesture by Duchamp—distributing candies wrapped in foil printed with the phrase “a guest + a host = a ghost” at an exhibition in Paris—offers a model for this practice. It enacted a subtle destabilization of roles. The roles of host and guest become unfixed, allowed to enter into a relation that dissolves their separateness on the tongue, producing a third term: an immaterial presence, not attributable to any single party, but itself possessed of a playfully physicality. This dissolving “ghost” names a value that exists precisely in its fragility. It manifests only in the encounter. To be a “good” host then is to cultivate openness, to resist framing or containing the guest, and to allow the unpredictable to emerge in the in-between. To be a “good” guest, on the other hand, is to enter, engage, respond, and contribute—to inhabit the space without dictating its contours, or, in other words: to simply be part of the possibilities created.

Our present moment is marked by closures, acts of control, and the normalization of hostility; practices which are not neutral but oppositional. We wanted to offer a humble but distinct counter-model: a space for radical freedom, attentiveness, and the cultivation of relations that cannot be reduced to any one thing. What emerged was a beautifully fleeting, unstable field—an atmosphere of thought, encounter, and transformation. Traces of the experience were, we hope, left in the participants and in the work done by the group itself. If nothing remains, however, that is all right as well. It was in this fragile excess, in the intersection of host and guest, that we found one of the most significant effects of the workshop. We were not startled by encounters with ghosts during our workshop.

It is thanks to the initiative of Nina Nielebock that this booklet is now available. Alongside her participation in the workshop, she has assembled, edited, written, and organized the material, invited graphic designer Theo Schäfer to create the layout of this booklet, and, last but in no way least, arranged for the financial support of Sophienpflege Tübingen. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to all of the

other participants whose engagement made this project possible: Aliz Farkas (who unfortunately could not be present in Schwerin), Alex Gross, Anna Helfer, Christina Irrgang, Cyrill Lim, Daria Nedelcu, Grégoire Rousseau, Göze Saner, Irène Unholz, Isa Fontbona, Johanne Mohs, Jacob Uecker, Knut Ebeling, Marie Götze, Nora Sternfeld, Peter Seeland, Stephanie Dvareckas, T.J. Demos, Verena Straub, and Georg Winter. We extend a wholehearted thank you to our fearless board members: Cathleen Leu, Kerstin Döring, and Mechthild Bening. And we thank Greta Pohl, whose care and attention were indispensable in welcoming such a large group of guests. We all were welcomed and supported by many more: Hendrike Nagel and her team at the Kunstverein für Mecklenburg und Vorpommern in Schwerin; Björn Egging, Sarah Schönewald, and Kerstin Krautwig of the Staatliches Museum Schwerin; André Bartheidel and his family and friends at the Internationale Feuerwehrmuseum Schwerin; and, more broadly, the environments through which we moved—from Schwerin’s impressive old city center, its restaurants and hotels, to its striking Plattenbau Utopia in the Großer Dreesch.

I.

PRACTICE

This article attempts to detach the concept of practice from its common opposition to theory and uses various examples to show how theory and practice are linked in artistic and theoretical research. For these novel connections between theory and (artistic) practice, the article proposes the concept of permeation, which analyzes aesthetic interpenetration between art and theory: theory no longer refers to art in the paradigm of criticism, nor as reflection; it allows itself to be permeated by artistic forms just as many artistic research projects today prove to be permeated by science and theory. The article illustrates this theorization of art and the artisticization of theory using historical examples such as the theoretical practices of the surrealist dissident group “Acéphale” (1937–39) as well as further writing experiments of the author. In the process, the epistemic divisions and exclusions between experience and reflection are rendered undisciplined, and new forms between theory and practice are explored.

WORK / SHOP / WORK

[WERK / STATT / WERK]

Johanne Mohs

“Concepts of Authorship and Creativity in the ‘Writing Workshop’ at the LCB and in OuLiPo”

Creative writing degree programs, which are comparatively young in the German-speaking world and in France, are enjoying steadily increasing popularity (cf. Kempke/Vöcklinghaus/Zeh 2019), thereby repeating a development that has been observable in the United States since the 1970s (cf. McGurl 2009). The number of such programs has been growing continuously in the German-speaking region since the mid-1990s and in France since the mid-2000s.

While these programs—commonly referred to in Germany as “writing schools”—initially had to contend with resentment from the cultural sections of newspapers, largely stemming from skepticism about whether literary abilities can be taught and learned (cf. Dürr 2019), the French programs, although not without controversy, have largely skipped this chapter in the history of the academization of literary writing.

This persistent popularity can be explained as a consequence of the “death of theory” following the heyday of so-called “French Theory” (cf. Eagleton 2003), or more specifically as a consequence of the crisis of literary studies (cf. Schaeffer 2011), which was observed in the 2000s—especially in France—in the context of a broader debate about the “end of literature” (Todorov 2007). The turn toward the practice of literature comes at the expense of theoretical engagement with it (cf. also Martus 2015) and simultaneously draws on the ethos of the creative that has prevailed in Western societies since the 1990s (cf. Reckwitz 2012; Raunig 2012). A creative writing degree program can thus be understood as one of many promises to fulfill the omnipresent desire for creativity.

In my habilitation project, I investigate this relationship between the theory and practice of literary writing with a focus on the history of theories of authorship since the 1960s and their (often unconscious) reception in “writing schools” in the German-speaking world and in France. My starting point is the observation that the increasing popularity of creative writing programs has produced a new generation of writers who routinely feed their writing into feedback loops and thereby practice a form of indirectly shared authorship.

My contribution to the workshop “Training Creative Acts and Action” focuses on two institutions that have been active since the early 1960s and that I propose, within the framework of my research, as predecessors of today’s writing schools: the LCB (Literarisches Colloquium Berlin) and OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) in Paris. Unlike many contemporary writing schools, early on the LCB and OuLiPo combined pedagogical approaches with developments in information technology. They engage with feedback structures in the cybernetic sense (cf. Greite 2014) and discuss shared authorship as a consequence of these structures (cf. Calvino 1984). For the workshop, I examine the extent to which both institutions understand themselves as workshops: on the one hand—particularly in the case of OuLiPo—emphasizing the workshop’s character as a space for exercises, and on the other hand—particularly in the case of the LCB—highlighting its experimental character.

CARE AND EMPATHY AS METHOD

Anna Helfer

The project “The Ethics of Care as Method: Reflections on Transcultural Collaborations on Senegalese Art Collections in German Museums” explores the collaborative research and curatorial work of Ken Aicha Sy and researcher Anna Helfer, focusing on the legacy of Senegalese modernism and its erasure from local cultural memory in Dakar, Senegal. Through Ken Aicha Sy’s project, “Survival Kit,” they began working together, addressing the dispersal of artworks from the École de Dakar to European institutions and interrogating the politics of restitution, representation, and epistemic sovereignty. Their practice—spanning exhibitions, publications, and education—foregrounds friendship and care as both methodology and political tool in decolonial artistic research. The project thus reimagines transcontinental collaboration as a lived practice of resistance and relational knowledge-making.

Practice

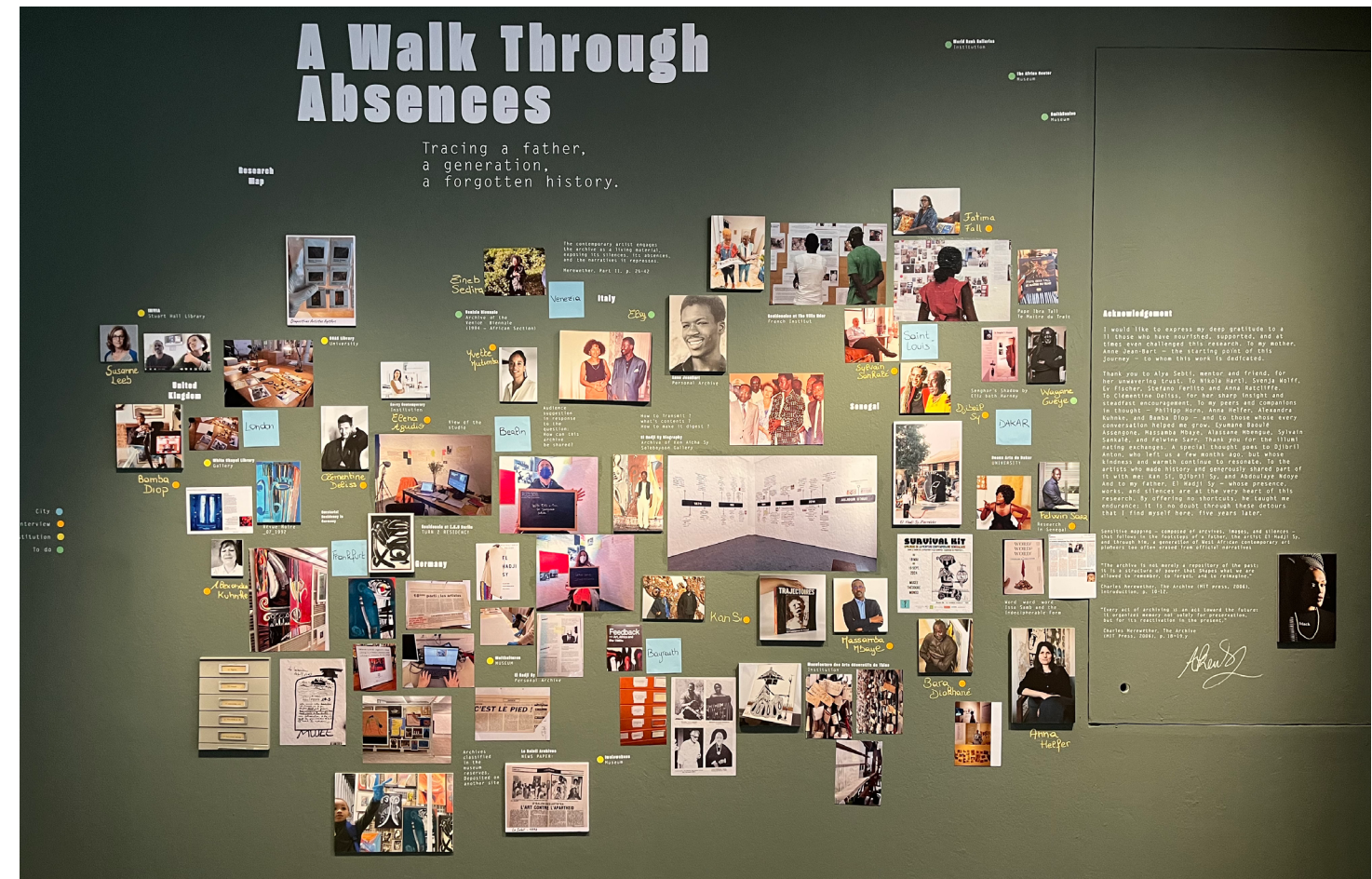


Fig. 1: Exhibition *Survival Kit*, Anna Helfer

Care and Empathy as Method: Key Points

Care and empathy are integral to artistic practice

- They foreground feelings and relationships
- Move beyond purely intellectual or theoretical approaches

Artistic research enables a “relational ethics”

- Draws from thinkers like Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy
- Ethics based on relationships, care, and connectedness
- Moves away from abstract rules toward lived responsibility

Relational ethics focuses on:

- Mutual dependency
- Shared responsibility
- Being together in accountable ways

Collaboration as a transformative practice

- Goes beyond recovering histories to reimagining ways of working
- Crosses geographies, disciplines, and lived experiences

Relational research is powerful when it is:

- Rooted in care and vulnerability
- Committed to justice and mutual accountability
- Not just critical of institutions—but transformative in how we engage with them

FACING GAI

Peter Seeland

Justin Brice Guariglia's Landscape Photography from an Ecocritical Perspective

In 2015, the American artist Justin Brice Guariglia flew over Greenland as part of NASA's Operation IceBridge and photographed the so-called "Galoping Glacier" at Jakobshavn. Few places make climate change as immediate and intense a visual reality. Guariglia was able to observe the masses of ice melting and hear the cracks splitting the archipelago. Later, he worked on the photographs for months using gesso, acrylic, and plastics, until works with sculptural surface structures such as Jacobshavn I emerged.

White surfaces layer upon one another, break apart, and appear strained to the point of bursting. Deep fissures run through the upper layers, directing the gaze through structures that are both massive and fragile. Calm and unease arise simultaneously—the viewers are drawn into the pictorial surface, losing themselves in the vastness as well as in the sculptural, landscape-like depths and elevations of the surface. The act of viewing immediately leads to disorientation. Macro- and micro-perspectives appear simultaneously: the large-scale surfaces of the background contrast with fine details. Cracks, valleys, elevations, and slanted planes that protrude into and out of the pictorial space rupture the ground. The initially static and stable background is permeated by a fragile dynamism that unsettles the viewer. The contrast between stable and fragile, calm and movement, broad surfaces and sculptural details complicates orientation and perception. Moreover, the scale and objecthood of the representation remain unclear. Is it a landscape, a microscopic close-up, or something entirely different? Despite this disorientation, a feeling

of entanglement with the work emerges. The dissonance of the compositional elements produces a peculiar sense of familiarity and strangeness at the same time. Forms, fissures, and structures seem recognizable and evoke vague associations. Yet this process of recognition remains incomplete and generates a desire for resolution—the viewers want to know what they are seeing, but the work itself provides no clear answer. This openness, the posing of questions, and the stimulation of associations create an integrative connection between artwork and recipient.

From the effects of disorientation, connectedness, and fragility arises a sense of the uncanny and the unknown. The inability to classify the image clearly, combined with the monumental white surface, may evoke a feeling of smallness and unease. Even without contextual information, viewers might think of mountains, seas, or other overwhelming landscapes. A year later, around 800 kilometers northwest of Jakobshavn, the French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour flew over Baffin Island toward Canada, where he was to speak at a conference on concepts of nature in times of climate change. He, too, looked down at the earth from the airplane. Baffin Island, the largest island of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, had been covered in ice for thousands of years. Yet instead of a white desert of ice, Latour saw a barren tundra stretching below him for hours. In recent decades, the island's ice sheets have retreated by more than half as a result of global warming. Human-induced climate change has melted the ice—the process still visible at the Jakobshavn Glacier is here almost complete.

Practice

The sight of the tundra, crisscrossed by fissures and only sparsely covered with ice, moved Latour deeply. Bitterly, he compared the scarred landscape to the tortured face and ravaged surface in Munch's *The Scream*.

Greenland and the Arctic are considered ground-zero zones of climate change. It is telling that these landscapes move Guariglia and Latour so deeply. The human-made transformation of nature becomes a visual experience for both. Yet this transformation does not affect the planet alone: Latour's account and Guariglia's work show that knowledge of and experience with this transformation also affects human beings. Latour describes the experience as an emotional dialogue, while Guariglia powerfully processes and communicates it through his art.

Artistic research—as a way of understanding Guariglia's artistic approach to the environmental crisis—offers a methodology for bringing together Anthropocene theory and practice in an epistemically interwoven relationship. In his works, Guariglia connects contemporary artistic positions with concepts of nature, the humanities and natural sciences, and art. Within this context, this workshop contribution examines Guariglia's landscape photography against the background of the crisis-ridden transformation of material environments by humans and specific Anthropocene conceptions of nature. His works, closely connected with Bruno Latour's concept of the Critical Zone, can be interpreted as expressions of crisis-driven conceptions of the relationship between humans and the environment.

The workshop addresses the embodied conditions of exercise, practice, action, and mediation, as well as the boundary between the creative act and political action. Guariglia's works challenge precisely these dimensions by establishing a form of ecocritical practice that is not limited to the artistic representation of the Anthropocene as a material state of environments but also incorporates theoretical thinking within the Anthropocene discourse. The embodied condition of perceiving reality in the Anthropocene, as well as the reference to the political necessity of responding to the crisis, converge in Guariglia's method and work. Particularly interesting is the question of how this artistic-ecocritical research can be fruitfully examined through methods of body-oriented practice, both in the creative process and in the reception of the works. The contribution approaches the works through the aspects of disorientation, unreadability, entanglement, uncanniness, as well as materiality and spatiality.

The aim of this workshop contribution is to present Guariglia's theory and works concisely and to discuss embodied, practice-based aspects within an interdisciplinary discourse. In addition, a distinctly ecocritical art-historical perspective can enrich the workshop with positions from the environmental humanities. The contribution is in principle open to collaboration with other projects and can be integrated flexibly into the workshop concept, with the practice session appearing particularly productive.

II.

EXERCISE

THE OVERSIZED LEMON

Georg Winter

Großer Dreesch, Schwerin at the Lenin Monument (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) “Das Dekret über den Boden” (The Decree on Land); see also the text “Bodenlos glücklich” (Groundlessly Happy) by Georg Winter

Notes of a Publicist (an unfinished article by Lenin from Collected Works, Vol. 33, pp. 188–196)
On climbing high mountains, on the harmfulness of despondency, on the usefulness of trade, on relations with the Mensheviks, and more of the same kind.

A kind of example (an anastrophic turn?)

Let us imagine a person climbing a very high, steep, and as yet unexplored mountain. Let us suppose that, after overcoming unheard-of difficulties and dangers, he has managed to climb much higher than his predecessors, but has still not reached the summit. He now finds himself in a situation where continuing in the chosen direction and along the current path is no longer merely difficult and dangerous, but downright impossible. He must turn back, descend, and search for other routes, which may be longer but which nevertheless hold out the possibility of reaching the summit. The descent, at such unprecedented heights as those our hypothetical mountaineer has attained, may in fact present even greater dangers and

difficulties than the ascent: one misstep is more easily made; it is less convenient to look carefully at the spot on which one places one’s foot; the particular uplifted mood that comes from climbing directly upwards toward the goal is lacking; and so on. One must rope oneself, spend hours hacking steps with the ice axe or niches for securing the rope, move forward with the slowness of a tortoise, and on top of that backwards, downwards, away from the goal – and still there is no telling whether this desperate, dangerous, and agonizing descent will come to an end, whether a reasonably promising detour can be found from which one might again advance – more boldly, more swiftly, more directly – toward the summit.

Exercise



Fig. 2: At the Lenin Monument, an exercise by Georg Winter

It is surely only natural to assume that someone who has fallen into such a situation will experience moments of despondency – despite the unheard-of heights he has already reached. And such moments would probably be more numerous, more frequent, more severe, if he could hear certain voices from below – from people who, from a safe distance and with a telescope, are observing this most perilous descent, which cannot even be called (to use the motto of the “Sema-Wech” people) a “descent with a brake,” since a brake presupposes a well-constructed, already tested vehicle, a pre-built road, and previously proven mechanisms. But here there is neither vehicle nor road – absolutely nothing, simply nothing that has been tried before!

Fortunately, in the conditions assumed in our example, our hypothetical mountaineer cannot hear the voices of these “true friends” of the idea of mountaineering; otherwise, he might feel sick. But nausea, they say, is not conducive to clarity of mind and steadiness of foot – especially at very great heights.

“The Lenin Eruv”

Eruv derives from the Hebrew word for “mixture” and traditionally extends the private spaces of religious Jews on the Sabbath into the public space of the city. It creates a kind of symbolic expansion of the living space of traditionally religious Jews into the public realm of a neighborhood. Within its boundaries, the *eruv* permits carrying.

It releases people from self-imposed limits by drawing a boundary. Within that boundary it allows the carrying of objects—or even children—that would otherwise have to remain in the home on the Sabbath.

An *eruv* made of wire, cord, or clearly demarcating architectural structures—such as a concrete wall along a highway—clearly marks the territory. Poles may be erected and cords stretched for the *eruv*.

In fact, the *eruv* is primarily a matter for Orthodox Jewish communities. Yet the *eruv* inevitably enters into the everyday life of all residents of the neighborhood. The *eruv* is discreet and does not obstruct any paths. It restricts no one. Its presence, however, also allows non-believers to engage with this form of influence on the city—and to learn from the *eruv*.



Fig. 3: At the Lenin Monument, an exercise by Georg Winter

URBAN TRASHURE MINING

Marie Götze

Exercise

That which keeps coming back is never thoroughly gone. It rests among the passed and the passerby, where, slowly and persistently, it ages and crumbles like a piece of fine parchment stored without care. Even when its color has faded and its content long since lost, still it resists dissolution.



Fig. 4: On the Tram, an exercise by Marie Götze and Georg Winter

The *Großer Dreesch* (“Dreesch” means “barren or wild land”) is being rummaged through, again, and again. Formerly ancient and fresh residues rest in its wastelands of rebuilding and regrinding. They continue as part of the soil, compacted within the earth, becoming the revenant who turns and re-turns, mutually mutating in contaminative intra-action. Sedimentation of (un) intent undermining and overriding dispersal.

Urban Trashure Mining is a gradual salvaging in the un-seeable, a tactile tactic that deals with the effects of an impact that went too deep, too far. It treats the matter around and within the hole that is left behind, the all-enveloping emptiness, that is re-turned to chthonic exposure.

Trashure is the re-engineered fossil, plundered through excavation and extraction, turned to hinder the process of passing, keeping a good (almost) alive, untouched and transportable. It comes often with the rash that itches, as skin, hair and mucosa come into contact with dry, irritant dust, or insects.

Griwweln (in the Saarland dialect, a mining term for sorting out dense rock [non-coal] during coal washing) is done often in a squatting position close to ground level, and diverts perception towards the hands, nose, alimentary system: grabbing, scratching, detecting, sorting, leaving remains.

GOLDBRÜCKE / GOLD BRIDGE

Nina Nielebock

Exercise

Bridge at Wittenburger Strasse / Reiferbahn, Schwerin

Material: Gold leaf 23,5 Karat, conversation

„If we’re to live up to our own time, then victory won’t lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we’ve made.“

Amanda Goreman

In the action *Goldbrücke* the exercise consists in, on the one hand, the technique of applying gold leaf and, on the other hand, dealing with people in a selected location at a specific time in a form of relational aesthetics, without losing sight of, in Rancière’s words, the “aesthetic regime” of art. In the 2025 iteration of *Goldbrücke*, I wanted to practice a form of *maieutics* (from the ancient Greek term *maieutikos*, the art of midwifery, as understood by Socrates), which entailed talking to people, being curious, and not being patronizing, as well as asking repeated questions to get to the bottom of things. This year, in terms of content, I was guided by Hannah Arendt’s essay on the concepts of freedom and politics in her book *Between Past and Future* (1968). In conversations with passersby, “freedom” was the focus, because, although it is an incredibly broad topic, it provided a positive starting point for conversation on the sidewalks

of the *Goldbrücke*, to which anyone could contribute their personal thoughts and ideas.

It is thanks to the relative freedom granted by the art context that currently prevails in Germany (for now) that it is possible to carry out this action in the public sphere of Schwerin. The performance brings together the concepts of art, politics, and freedom in a very vivid way. This is, of course, nothing new in public art. What is new, however, is that art’s freedom is at stake. I see us all currently in a permanent ‘practicing process,’ as we must constantly respond to rapidly unfolding events. I am pleased when, through trial and error, practice, and the repetition of proven methods, we find and further develop the best strategies for addressing these challenges without contributing to further polarization.



Fig. 5: Goldbridge, an exercise by Nina Nielebock



Fig. 6: Goldbridge, an exercise by Nina Nielebock

Nina Nielebock

Passersby are drawn to the line of gold leaf and clearly enjoy watching the work being done on the handrail of the *Goldbrücke*. Over the course of several days, while applying the gold leaf, I had about 40 conversations. When asked about freedom, people shared stories of personal moments of freedom and their views on the political situation in Germany. Below, some descriptions of various interactions:

Two schoolchildren (ages 9 and 10) talk about the wind in their hair as they race down the hill on their bikes, about drawing or building with LEGO bricks very intently, and about recess at school. Several adults also see biking as a form of freedom. Many people describe finishing the workday, taking vacations, and traveling as forms of freedom. One passerby believes that money and freedom are directly linked. Another always feels free because he is his own boss in his own business. What matters is one's own freedom, and what one makes of one's life situation, says a woman who lived through the "Wende" [German reunification] in the East and has built a good life for herself in the new system. In contrast, a young woman experiencing mental health challenges feels personally restricted, though she draws a comparison with Gaza and points out the difference in the extent of those restrictions. Other passersby emphasize personal freedom within the framework of democracy. However, some critical voices express mistrust of democratic forces and believe that freedom of speech was restricted, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. A daughter (50 years old) feels uneasy as she crosses the bridge with her mother (around 70 years old). Citing a lack of housing, the mother and daughter praise the AfD's immigration policies. Another passerby also sees the "overcrowding caused by immigration" as a major source of potential conflict and calls for the "deportation of foreigners." After a lengthy conversation, it turns out that this man has been in a dispute with a certain hot-tempered coworker for some time. After venting his frustration about his colleague, the conversation took a different

turn, and he became more tolerant on issues related to migration. A former entrepreneur, now retired, walking by, describes young people generally as useless and says the "Kanacken" [ethnic slur for non-Germans] need to get out. When asked whether he did not want to use his self-proclaimed insight to help young people, the man emphasizes that he has no desire to do so, but would rather go on vacation, which he sees as an expression of his own freedom. Furthermore, he states that "Only the stupid go into the army," because he believes that Putin will also attack Germany. A middle-aged man, sitting on his bike, tells me that I have no idea what I'm talking about and that "Germany's constitution, based on the 'Basic Law,' is invalid." He says that feudalism guarantees true freedom. He tells me I can find out everything I need to know on Telegram, the freest platform.

A situation which was almost spiritual came about when an elderly man passed by in the early evening of the final day of the *Goldbrücke* action. He was wearing a dirty, once-white cloth mask over his mouth and angrily confronted me about what I was doing—this nonsense!—with the gold leaf on the bridge. Once I had explained my idea to him and told him I'd like to talk to him about freedom, he softened. The man began to talk about the limitations he faced due to a serious illness. During our long conversation, all his tension seemed to melt away. After some time, he took off his mask and laughed as if he'd been set free. As I was packing up my things, it started pouring rain, and we said goodbye, both of us completely soaked.

III.

MEDIATION

MEDIATION IN TIMES OF IMMEDIACY

Nora Sternfeld

Mediation

The presentation reflects the concept of mediation in the context of what Anna Kornbluh calls *Immediacy: Or the Style of Too Late Capitalism*. Behind this background mediation is seen as a critical practice that counters immediacy, while it still opens interspaces between critique and practice, reflecting and acting, representation and presence. Behind this background we retrace para-institutional archival practices, encounter the unarchivable, and discuss art mediation as an emancipatory tool that can open up discourses on power relations and social norms.



Cyrill Lim
& Daria
Nedelcu

Fig. 7: *Build Yourself a Small Situation Without Future: Atelier 35 Bucharest*, by Cyrill Lim and Daria Nedelcu

BUILD YOURSELF A SMALL SITUATION WITHOUT FUTURE:

ATELIER 35 BUCHAREST

Mediation

Build Yourself a Small Situation Without Future: Atelier 35 Bucharest is a long-term collaborative curatorial project revisiting the history of Atelier 35 in Bucharest, Romania, a platform for emerging artists established by the Romanian Artists' Union in the 1960s. Starting from a dialogue with the history of Atelier 35—a platform created during socialist times in Romania—the project aims to generate acts of reflection and experimental engagement with the past activity of this space.

By revisiting the history of Atelier 35 through a series of collaboratively created “material environments,” the project invites reflective and interactive artistic acts that involve artists and audiences alike.

The notion of the situation, with its associated meanings of being processual, contingent, and liberating, functions as the conceptual framework of the project. Through this lens, the project moves beyond conventional curatorial methods, offering a program that opens up the micro-history of Atelier 35 for exploration and reimagining through collaborative artistic acts.

A central aspect of the project is its engagement with the socialist past, approached as a repository of overlooked non-capitalistic alternatives. With an emphasis on “prospective nostalgia,” the project seeks to reclaim elements of this past that feel absent in contemporary contexts, stimulating small-scale transformations within the environments it engages with while keeping alternative histories active and relevant. For its first iteration in autumn 2024, the curatorial program introduced three open exhibition formats, referred to as situations, accompanied by mediation activities. Each situation brought together different protagonists—artist-researchers

and historical artists previously active within the Atelier 35 framework—to foster interaction and exchange. Within these situations, art was employed as a medium for conversion, transmission of knowledge, and responses to the information collected and its broader context. Atelier 35 itself was established in the 1960s as part of the Romanian Artists' Union (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici, UAP), which had been created by the communist authorities in 1950. While the UAP served as an instrument for state control over artistic production and distribution, it also represented the professional and social interests of its members. Originally conceived as a space to provide ideological guidance to young graduates, Atelier 35 developed into a platform for meetings, dialogue, and exhibitions by emerging artists. It also became a site of exchange, where several fields intersected and new ideas were explored.

By reflecting on this history, “Build Yourself a Small Situation Without Future: Atelier 35 Bucharest” is informed by the practices and values of Atelier 35, not as fixed reference points but as dynamic tools for experimentation. The project invites multigenerational participants to rethink the past while creating a shared space for testing, dialogue, and collective imagination in the present.

CREATIVE ACTS FOR DECOLONIAL FUTURES

Verena Straub

Introducing the online platform *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab*

Far from being only a subject of historical interest, colonialism continues to shape the affective landscapes of the present. Its ongoing manifestations become tangible in almost every part of reality: social and political institutions, images and concepts, patterns of perception and feeling, economic inequalities, and modes of knowledge production. Recent global challenges such as the rise of far-right politics, the disproportionate impact of climate change on former colonies and marginalized communities, racist violence, and the activism against these injustices have exposed—once again—how closely affect and colonialism are intertwined.

The *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab* provides an innovative platform to discuss these issues by bringing together research in the fields of art, academia, journalism, and activism. I founded this platform alongside my colleagues Jonas Bens, Fabian Bernhardt, Débora Medeiros, and Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo in cooperation between Free University Berlin and Humboldt University of Berlin. The Web Lab is based on three pillars: (1) the continuous production of short videos by a broad range of participants,

(2) an ongoing podcast series, and (3) a digital fellowship program with a team of two people—one being a university-based researcher and another working in the fields of art, journalism, or activism—implementing virtual exhibition formats. In distinction from other academic websites, the Web Lab is not a mere repository to document academic conferences or to promote already-published results. Rather, as the metaphor of the laboratory already suggests, it is a generative space where knowledge makers within and beyond academia explore new modes of co-learning and creative forms of communicating scholarship. It allows for agile interventions on pressing issues related to the entanglement of affect and colonialism in various parts of the world.

The *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab* aims at two things: firstly, to strengthen cooperation and build enduring partnerships between the Global North and the Global South, and secondly, to support collaboration between knowledge makers in and beyond academia—such as journalists, artists, filmmakers, writers, political activists, and grassroots organizations. By providing an easily accessible and participatory platform,

Mediation

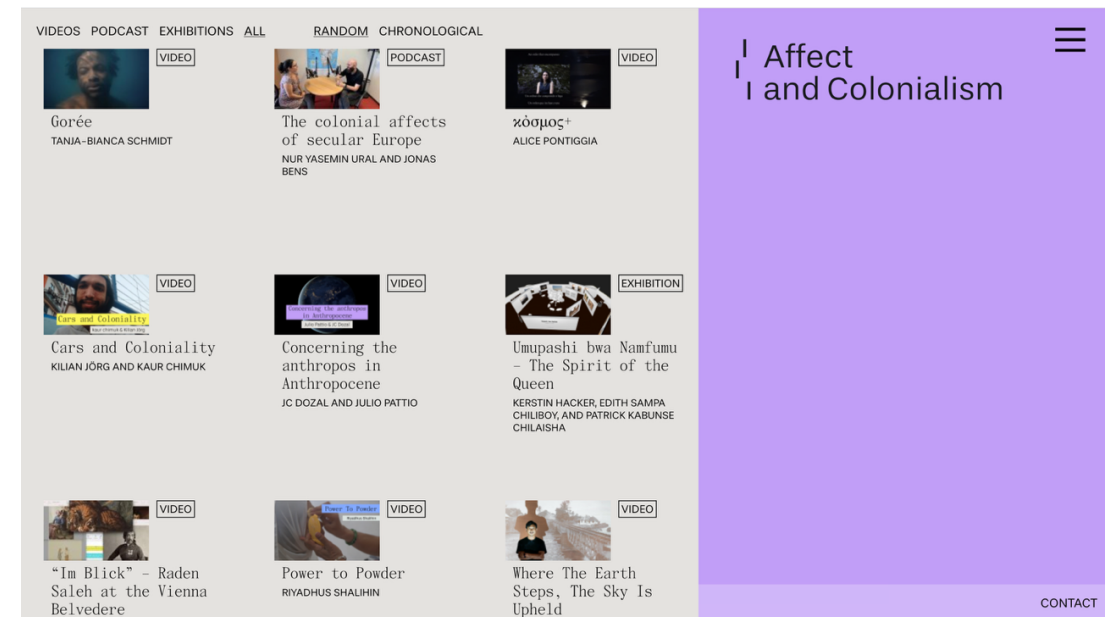


Fig. 8: DFG-Projekt „Bildproteste in den Sozialen Medien“

the Web Lab generates multiple perspectives and dialogue on topics related to affect and colonialism. Since its launch in August 2021, we have been able to build a network of over 80 active members from all over the world who contributed a total of 67 short videos for the Web Lab, ranging from presentations of research and/or art projects, to tutorials, interviews and conversations, video essays, personal reflections, ethnographic field notes, visual poems, or recordings of performances. In 2021, the *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab* was awarded a prize in the “Ideas Competition: International Research Marketing” by the *German Research Foundation* (DFG) and the *Federal Ministry of Education and Research* (BMBF). The prize money enabled us to pay honorariums for video producers and to realize three digital fellowships with researchers, artists, and activists focusing on the entanglements of affect and colonialism in Brazil, Zambia, and the Mariana Islands separately.

Instead of unilaterally conveying results to a broader public, we conceive of research communication as interdependent and multi-directional. Our thematic focus on affect and

colonialism demands a high awareness of how modes of knowledge production might reproduce existing inequalities. One central goal of the *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab* is therefore to impart a better understanding of how colonialism has shaped and still shapes the institutions we work in—and how this is connected with (and fueled by) certain structures of feeling. This also means questioning common Western conceptions of knowledge production in a more general sense: Who, for instance, is recognized as a knowledge producer and who is not? Which forms of communicating research are considered “legitimate” and which are not? Which languages, which formats are generally excluded from Western academic discourse? By experimenting with alternative forms of communicating knowledge that go beyond the standard academic publication, we want to disrupt hierarchies between knowledge producers inside and outside of academia as well as hierarchies that reflect global inequalities.

IV.

TRAINING

(NOT)

TRAINING



Fig. 9: “Stepping, Not Stepping,” training with Göze Saner

How can training be generated by not doing actions, by dislocating actions from their regular, habitual, or expected doings? When the goal of an action is not a product or an outcome, what possibilities open up?

Training

Over the course of six months, Fontbona, Groß, and Saner engaged in a messy dialogue proposing and responding to actions, documenting and sharing their experiences. Some of these were invitations to use the body, objects, and space without a productive objective, in a disordered way that renders actions useless, and to trace the resonances that such an action leaves behind. They explored their embodied responses to empty repetition, applying “absurdity,” “estrangement,” and/or “disorientation” within familiar acts that are often reproduced without much thought. They investigated what can awaken or be touched in the development of an action in which time does not have ultimate instrumental control, and how this can change the way they embody themselves depending on

whether a movement has presence or not and whether it takes place in a public or private environment.

Asking collaboratively, How can we connect these sensations with training? Can we see this formulation as a form of artistic research? And as a mode of training? they co-facilitated a participatory workshop that started with (not) cleaning, continued with touching and (not) kneading a ball of dough, (not) stepping and (not) walking in a public space. Testing unease, tolerance, and endurance, the workshop offered participants a chance to observe if the relationship to self found within a familiar action made strange through a different form of attention can function as a form of training (or not).

V.

ACTION



Fig. 10: Speakers Demos, Dvareckas, and Unholz, about „Action“ along with workshop participants, at the Säulengebäude in Schwerin.

How can we rescue the future from the grip of planetary negativity? Doing so requires cultivating an emancipatory chronopolitics—one that arises from the traditions of the oppressed and gestures toward an indeterminate “not-yet.” Beginning with the speculative, SF cinempoetics of TJ Cuthand, The Otolith Group, and Black Quantum Futurism—artists featured in T. J. Demos’ recent book *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Collapse / Chronopolitics / Justice-to-Come*—this presentation examines contemporary creative visions of radical Indigenous and Afro-futurist worlds-to-come grounded in social justice and ecological flourishing. Refusing to relinquish the horizon of transformative possibility, these artists draw on deep artistic genealogies that resist the pull of nihilism and collective negativity, as sometimes articulated in Afro- and Indigenous pessimist thought. The presentation further asks how such practices might illuminate our political and aesthetic engagements in the present—amid the crises of 2025, in the era of Trump 2.0, marked by escalating political

violence, intensified state control, and global assaults on universities. This backdrop of resurgent racial fascism, imperialism, and genocide is compounded by the rise of generative AI, the expansion of repressive state power, and the accelerating consolidation of far-right authoritarianism. Within and against this context, several questions emerge: How might we reconceive hope—not as a simple binary between optimism and despair, but as a material practice grounded in and generative of collective action and struggle? If the arts can contribute to such a grounding, how might we move beyond the impasse of institutional critique toward the transformative possibilities of institutional liberation? And how might the arts—rather than retreating into a misplaced faith in discredited liberalism as a false defense against fascism—instead play an integral role in building the political momentum required for genuine structural transformation? Ultimately, how can we reinvent and decolonize the future together?

IMPERIAL IMAGINARIES AND HYBRIDITY

Stephanie Dvareckas

Action

Nineteenth-century Russian painter Vasily Vereshchagin, who studied under the French Orientalist Jean-Léon Gérôme, justified military conquests abroad using naturalism and Orientalist tropes. His depiction of vice in paintings like *The Opium Eaters* (1868) served to construct a Russian imperialist view of Central Asia. Nikolai Khludov, a draftsman and surveyor working for the Russian regional government, created seemingly neutral landscapes intertwined with colonial mapping and eroticized portrayals of local women, underscoring how ideas from the academy were transferred.

Vereshchagin and Khludov became influential figures in Central Asia, and Kazakh artist Ablikhan Kasteev and Kyrgyzstani artist Semyon Chuikov even trained with Khludov. Despite

this legacy, artists such as Gapar Aitiev, Semyon Chuikov, and Ablikhan Kasteev navigated Soviet constraints to produce hybrid forms. The Soviet policy “nationalist in form, socialist in content,” prompted me to ask: How did artists reconcile this duality, and how did regional interactions shape artistic practices?

Aitiev and Kasteev’s bodies of work demonstrate how adaptations became acts of cultural resistance, blending Soviet and Kyrgyz or Kazakh elements. In his 1936 work *Collective Farmers Resting*, Aitiev presents an intimate interior scene featuring traditional clothing, music, and food alongside a clock signifying Soviet time. By combining Socialist realist aims with national themes, Aitiev formed a liminal space where cultural practices are negotiated. The blending

This presentation examines the performative relationship between the Soviet state and the people through artwork produced in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs, revealing subtle yet powerful disruptions.

of cultures becomes a hybrid form of artistic negotiation. The same can be said of several of Kasteev’s works such as *Kolkhoz Dairy Farm* (1936) and *Kolkhoz Toi* (1937).

Through these hybrid expressions, artists resisted Soviet aesthetic uniformity, disrupting traditional power dynamics, and forming a space of subtle non-compliance. Aitiev, Chuikov, and Kasteev each embody hybridity, encompassing and representing diverse cultural dimensions. In their neutrality, these dimensions inherently resist the notion of authenticity, and paradoxically, its non-resistance can generate a form of subtle resistance. Consisting of various, often conflicting, versions of nationhood, national identities often proved difficult for the Soviet center. A stronger sense of group

belonging was fostered by the commitment to national identity, which was instrumental in the development of unique Kazakh and Kyrgyz selfhoods. It is this interstitial space that scholars have speculated ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In what Feldman calls “staging conflict,” (Feldman 2018, p. 60) the resistance of assimilation in Kasteev and Aitiev’s work can be thought of as a rebellion, not merely a blend. Although all three figures are tasked with representing the national, only Aitiev and Kasteev could experience the conflict of identity between Sovietness and Kyrgyz/Kazakhness: Chuikov benefitted from this liminality, but Aitiev and Kasteev were beholden to it.

REPRODUCING, SIMULATING, ACTING? ON ARTISTS AND SYSTEMS

SNSF project *Real Abstractions*, Université de Fribourg

When artists such as Hans Haacke, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Pierre Huyghe, or artist collectives such as the *Ocean Earth Development Corporation*, *DIS*, and *ruangrupa*, operate as policymakers or corporations, establish infrastructures of communing, or initiate ecological processes, then they directly intervene in social, economic, and ecological systems rather than merely representing them. Approaching these practices through the aesthetic processes of reproduction, simulation, and action clarifies how they operate within social and economic structures and, at times, become enmeshed in the very realities they seek to address. Research over the past two decades has examined how computer-based simulations manifest in science and art (c.f. Gramelsberger 2010; Hinterwaldner 2017; Krämer 2011; Pias 2011). I propose transferring the technological concept of simulation as a blueprint to aesthetic and sociological processes beyond the computational, as it articulates a form of agency that tends to disappear between representation and direct political action.

This raises the question of possible scopes of action within, alongside, against, or as an alternative to existing systemic structures produced by late capitalism—as modes of artistic engagement and critique. These artistic practices reflect a globalized world in which no constitutive outside can be assumed (c.f. Hardt/Negri 2004).

The following examples thus also foreground the tension between artistic autonomy and systemic entanglement (c.f. Scholette 2022; Stakemeier/Vishmidt 2016), from the global to the local to the microcosmic. The Ocean Earth Development Corporation—founded in 1980 as a successor of *The Offices* of the artists Peter Fend, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters—reimagine cartography and geopolitics through systemic modelling; *DIS* applies corporate aesthetics, blurring contemporary art and cultural industry; *ruangrupa* builds community infrastructures and embeds them within art institutions; and Pierre Huyghe sets up entire ecosystems where human and non-human interact with each other. As different as these artistic strategies may appear, the concept of simulation, I argue, is crucial to understanding the contemporary modes of world shaping uniting these approaches.

With the purpose of transforming the sociopolitical architectures governing the planet and its resources, the *Ocean Earth Development Corporation* established itself as a legally registered company. They engaged in dialogue with politicians, consulted scientists, and advocated for their ideas in the media. In the 1980s, the group monitored geopolitical hot spots using satellite imagery and made it available to jour-

Irène Unholz

Action

nalists. Their projects thus included client-oriented services as well as presentations at art institutions. To exemplify the latter, the gallery exhibition *Site Simulator, Tivat Bay* (American Fine Arts, New York, 1992–93), was an installation that included maps and geographical models in which territorial units were not, as usual, demarcated by national borders and continental divisions, but for instance by river flows and land mass descending towards the sea (c.f. Fend 2001). The Tivat Bay in Montenegro served them as a representative case study that could later be scaled up to larger areas. In fact, the artists rejected calling this work an installation and instead, in the spirit of Earth Art, referred to the show as a “transplant from an outdoor site into the gallery,”—also as a “manifestation,” and a “real-world simulation.” They presented strategic proposals for the production of gas from marine algae at Tivat Bay. Furthermore, they intended to publicly televise the site’s biological productivity, pollution, and other factors to draw conclusions for concrete action to optimize these cycles. This approach shares the systemic orientation of scientific simulation: an attempt to understand and reorganize the world as a set of interrelated processes, which coincided with the rise of cybernetic thinking and ecological awareness in the 1970s.

By foregrounding flows of water, sediment, and energy the Ocean Earth Development Corporation even anticipated more recent discussions of climate modelling, digital twinning, and planetary-scale computation, all of which employ processes of simulation (c.f. Halpern 2025). In other words, their project shared an orientation toward simulating complex systems, drawing on a conception of the world as a set of dynamic, nonlinear interactions and emergent processes (c.f. Krämer 2011). Consequently, the *Site Simulator* exhibition allowed for experimentation with alternative ways of thinking about ecological governance. Designed to be technically feasible yet politically unimplementable, the *Site Simulator*, revealed both alternative ways of governing geological entities and the organizational obstacles on the political and economic levels that prevented realization (c.f. Smith 2001). Nonet-

theless, some of the *Ocean Earth Development Corporation*’s proposals also have a troubling undertone, notably the somewhat imperial attitude of imposing solutions on foreign territories (even if they aspired to work with local people), and a tendency towards techno-optimism that risks reproducing the managerial logics of capitalism (c.f. Wissen/Brand 2022).

As a brief comparison, *DIS* reproduces and repurposes certain commercial modes of action, also within renowned art institutions and on the fringes of the art field. Sometimes twisting but not necessarily undermining the aesthetic language also used by profit-driven companies, this tends to be reflected in the results rather than in internal processes or financial earnings. In turn, *ruangrupa*’s collective approach at *documenta fifteen* in 2022 introduced activist modes of self-organization into the institutional framework of a major art exhibition. Lastly, Huyghe constructs intricate systems in which human and non-human agents—organisms, artificial intelligence, elements of chance, and the audience—interact unpredictably. Through the lens of simulation, this can be regarded as working with process-based models that the different artists recalibrate by continually incorporating their experiences and insights. This also echoes scientific simulation as a method characterized by the continuing evaluation and adaptation of the underlying models (c.f. Gramelsberger 2010).

In the aforementioned cases, simulation processes tend to operate not as deceptive but as a generative artistic strategy. Simulation therefore upholds a mode of action that is neither surrendering nor radically attacking dominant systems. Simulative techniques enable artists to sketch out and test systemic behaviors and propose interventions that cooperate with and challenge existing structures—without fully replicating or immediately replacing those. These practices offer speculative tools that acknowledge complexity and contingency, rather than totalizing solutions from scratch. I would argue that simulation in that sense provides one with agency inside a capitalist reality, even if there is no way

out yet of the prevalent systemic structures that lead to social inequality and ecological catastrophes (c.f. Fisher 2009). The phenomenon may appear reformist or contradictory for an ongoing participation in the existing order may extend it. However, I argue that systemic modelling is a different mode, that can go further than just perpetuating existing structures: it addresses the operational logics of systems rather than merely adjusting their outcomes. Parallel to scientific computer simulations, a mutual, gradual adjustment between a model and the resulting outcomes, which in turn flow back into it, can be observed (c.f. Pias 2011). Potentially, this mode

of systemic modelling may be productive under conditions of polarized democracies, where entrenched positions and claims of inevitability often block political imagination and consensus building, by enabling experimental forms of action that remain situated within existing constraints while reopening them to revision. Simulating and modelling emphasize the action under specific conditions rather than a final, predetermined result. As Fend puts it: “I will not continue the old way of doing things, I will now start a new way of doing things” (cit. in Fend /Pocock [1992] 1994, 178).

VI. CONCLUSION

An audio work by Christina Irrgang and Grégoire Rousseau accompanying the workshop.

Part 1



https://www.guenther-uecker-institut.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Training-Creative-Acts-and-Action_IUG_Schwerin_public_session_part1_MP3.mp3

Part 2



https://www.guenther-uecker-institut.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Training-Creative-Acts-and-Action_IUG_Schwerin_public_session_part2_MP3.mp3

VII.

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS ON *TRAINING CREATIVE ACTS AND ACTION*

Nina Nielebock

“To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek work *archein*, “to begin,” to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion [...]. Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.”

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958.

In the face of manifold crises and the most extreme global upheavals, I traveled to Schwerin as a participating artist for the workshop *Training Creative Acts and Action* (TCAA). The workshop engaged in interdisciplinary research on the interstitial regions and intersections between art and politics. Mentors from various disciplines within the spheres of art theory and artistic practice formed panels with participants from equally diverse backgrounds. The focus on “What we do when we think”—following Hannah Arendt—was combined in the workshop with body-centered practices that allowed us to test out insights which might be sought and found outside of the usual contexts (see in his publication Gradnitzer/Neuburger, pp. 2+3). Drawing from notes I made during the TCAA workshop in regard to its individual elements, I would like here to present my engagement with the questions I brought with me.

Is the goal to bring about a fundamental structural shift, or to fight for the preservation of structures?

Art theory and cultural studies scholar Nora Sternfeld focuses her work on emancipatory, curatorial, and art-mediating practices. She offered Anna Kornbluh’s book *Immediacy: Or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism* (2024) as a starting point for the workshop in order to emphasize the particular significance of representation, which stands in contrast to the current “dictum of immediacy,” as Sternfeld described it in the workshop discussion. According to her, this means, rather than operating in a vacuum, learning from the past and working through it. The goal is not necessarily to resolve contradictions, but to abide in the complexity of situations (see Sternfeld pp. 29+30). Following her contribution, I note that embedding contemporary events within historical context is the space from which transformation can (and should) take place. Art historian Anna Helfer makes a similar argument in a presentation of her work with curator Ken Aïcha Sy, whose project *Survival Kit* focuses on reconstructing Senegalese art history, the representative works of which have, due to colonial

interventions, been scattered across European institutions. Helfer emphasizes how important the reconnection with one’s own history is, for, as curator Sy explains in an Interview: “[...]; only by connecting to the past can a society shape its future and profoundly impact people’s consciences and perspectives.” (Helfer pp. 92). Inspired by this collaboration, Helfer is now developing a new concept for scholarly work based on friendship and empathy (see Helfer pp. 11+12). In the globally active *Affect and Colonialism Web Lab* led by Verena Straub, who researches digital visual cultures, colleagues and representatives of (formerly) marginalized groups are offered a web-based art exhibition platform with the aim of offering them a sense of empowerment. During the lectures, I ask myself: “How can a (friendly) collaboration between former perpetrators and victims succeed, especially when the injustice has not yet been resolved?” For the “Global North,” this shift in the self-awareness of the “Global South”—something supported by the aforementioned scholars—can also mean an act of “putting-oneself-on-the-line-to-truly-hear-the-other,” as Alex Gross, a participating artist, describes it in his text for the workshop (see Gross pp. 38). I jot down: “Questioning oneself is the starting point.” Knut Ebeling gives a lecture in Schwerin on further methods of open-ended knowledge production. As examples, he presents the new anthology *Permeationen* and discusses his book *Krieg im Kopf: Meditieren mit Bataille* from 2024. Following in the footsteps of George Bataille and his *Méthode de méditation* (1947), Ebeling makes the interpenetration of theory and practice tangible through his own “meditation on writing.” The influence of (Eastern) meditation techniques is intended to expand (Western) knowledge production to expand the experience of the mind. In an accompanying text to his book *Krieg im Kopf: Meditieren mit Bataille*, the author writes: “Our speech [needs] a connection to touch, contact zones, and blurring, which as such already demonstrate to us the relativity and the wealth of presuppositions of discourses—extra-discursive zones [...]” (Ebeling, *Undiskursive Gegenwehr*). I note that multiperspectivity and new

methods of knowledge production make it possible to perceive simultaneities and contradictions.

I also find a connection in the radical conversational practice of *maieutics* developed by Socrates—the word is based on the Ancient Greek term for “midwifery”—which attempts to initiate a non-hierarchical, anti-binary, self-questioning mode of speech and thought (Plato described the Socratic “maieutics” in *The Apology of Socrates*, 399 BCE). It is intended to trigger a sense of “confusion” on all sides of the conversation participants (Ehrensperger/Altrichter, 2010, pp. 52). *Maieutics* is applied within the framework of my art project *Goldbrücke*, presented in Schwerin from September 17 to 21, 2025. While I apply a line of gold leaf to the handrail of a bridge railing, I speak with passersby. In doing so, I find that even politically charged topics, when approached using Socrates’ technique, can lead to encounters based in curiosity, enable exchanges without fear, and open up new spaces for thought (see Nielebock pp. 23). The sidewalks on the bridge can be understood as a different sort of “extra-discursive zone,” that is, as a “contact zone” for discourses adjacent to the “official spaces.”

I summarize that the participants’ demand is to allow for and help shape a profound transformation. A critical historiography is necessary as a reference point and value framework against which this change is to take place (see Nedelcu/ Lim pp. 31+32).

Can art, through its privileged position, its seemingly limitless possibilities, and its “socio-poetic force” (Harney/Morton, 2013, pp. 19), play a beneficial role in the process of upheavals in communal life and existence within the “critical zone”?

The “critical zone,” as described by Bruno Latour—who was mentioned by Peter Seeland (a master’s student in art history) during his lecture—refers to the narrow, not entirely clearly definable zone that makes life possible in space. According to Latour, following the end of

anthropocentrism, one must recognize that life consists of “[...] many contradictory and disputed assemblages of all sorts of entangled life forms striving to persist in time and expand in space a bit more.” Latour sees us moderns in a time of shock, because “there is the general feeling that from the old Ancien Régime we have passed to a New Climatic Regime” (Latour, Critical Zones, n.p.).

In the TCAA workshop, theoretical lectures on artistic practices alternate with body-centered artworks performed on site. “ACTION” is the section header under which Stephanie Dvareckas, T.J. Demos, and Irène Unholz will present. Johanne Mohs’ lecture is assigned to “PRAXIS.” Daria Nedelcu and Cyrill Lim present their interventionist art in the “MEDIATION” module. Artistic-participatory workshop contributions take place under the headings “EXERCISE” and “TRAINING.” I would like to attempt to revisit the aspects of the contributions that are most significant to me.

Cyrill Lim and Daria Nedelcu report on a resistance project based in the former USSR. Atelier 35 Bucharest, which emerged under Soviet rule in the 1960s and was originally created for surveillance, was used at the time by artists as a platform for dialogue and exchange “under the radar.” The artist couple Lim/Nedelcu revived it in 2024. With their initiative *Build Yourself a Small Situation Without Future: Atelier 35 Bucharest*, they are conducting research with young artists in what they call the “archive of the socialist past.” Art historian Stephanie Dvareckas is also examining contemporary testimonies from the former Soviet Union. In her lecture, she presents a striking historical example of artistic practice—one that struck me as almost incomprehensible—that defied the guidelines for pro-regime art. Drawing on the work of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh artists Semyon Chuikov, Abilkhan Kasteev, and Gapar Aitiev, Dvareckas demonstrates that in the execution of commissioned works, small changes could function as a means of resistance: “It is this interstitial space that scholars have speculated ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union” (see Dvareckas pp. 43+44). The method described by Dvareckas

as a “staged conflict” is a subtle form of rebellion, of non-compliance, thereby undermining standardization (see Dvareckas pp. 43+44).

We participants can experience resistance firsthand in the jointly prepared participatory works by Isa Fontbona, Alex Gross, and Göze Saner. Fontbona assigns us the task of cleaning over and over again a small patch of floor in the building where we’ve assembled. By having us perform this everyday action to the point of exhaustion, the artist seems to want to make us aware of the futility of our Sisyphean striving. While cleaning, a peculiar inner monologue plays out in my mind about strain, routine, limits, and escape. The limits of my endurance are also put to the test as I follow Göze Saner’s audio instructions, first standing still and then taking almost endless steps around a specific point. A sense of unease alternates with relaxing contemplation during this solo, albeit audio-guided, stroll through Schwerin. Saner invites me, as a listener, to observe “[...] how [the loss of control] can change the way [I] embody [myself] depending on whether a movement has presence or not and whether it takes place in a public or private environment” (see Fontbona, Gross, Saner pp. 38). She instructs us to begin with ourselves, with our own body-mind experience; from there, to recognize our own socialized subjectivity and, from this point, to reinterpret the world. Cyrill Lim and Daria Nedelcu, Isa Fontbona, Göze Saner, and I myself work with real social conditions. In every case, exchange takes place within a situation that is always situated within the aesthetic field. Reactions and interactions are encouraged in the spirit of relation-based artworks.

In the workshop sequence led by artists Georg Winter and Marie Götze, we begin with guided physical exercises as a group to performatively explore the boundaries of public space. Balancing on one leg in the tram or dangling from its handrail, we move out of the city center to the suburb of Großer Dreesch, where, crouching and lying on the ground and equipped with a wide variety of tools, we examine a vacant lot between the “prefab” buildings constructed

during the GDR era. The “EXERCISE” by Georg Winter, entitled *The Too-High Hanging Lemon*, takes place at a 3.5-meter-tall bronze statue of Lenin from 1985. Georg Winter aptly quotes the “early” Lenin, who addresses both the recklessness and euphoria, on the one hand, and the despondency and loneliness, on the other, that the advancement and testing of unknown strategies would entail. In addition, Winter introduced the Jewish tradition of the *eruv*, which is an artificially created set of boundaries in which observant Jews may “carry” things during the Sabbath (see Winter pp. 17-19). This, in the context of Winter’s artwork, I understand as the expansion of possibilities through specific regulatory changes. Winter and Götze transformed themselves and us participants in their module, perhaps particularly through connecting “EXERCISES,” so-called “anastrophes” (Winter/ Litz, 2013) in public space, as a “counter-proposal to the catastrophic situation” as Winter explained at the workshop. While site-specific themes are addressed, they are, as mentioned above, treated in such a multifaceted way and taken to the point of absurdity that no one-dimensional agenda can be read into or deduced from them. Their humorous participatory performance collages bring movement to the scene of the action. This part of the workshop was linked to audio recordings of performance readings by the *OuLiPo* literary group from the 1960s, which Johanne Mohs brought along and presented in her sequence. Focusing on shifts in rules, *OuLiPo* initially recited simple sentences that, through subtle, self-imposed changes, often transformed into humorous word sequences.

In considering the presented artworks, I am preoccupied with the question of whether they were conceived in the hope of triggering a (albeit differently formulated) transformation in the recipients/participants and thus exerting a formative influence on society. And I pose the following question for discussion: “If at all—how profound is the transformative character of our works?” Alex Gross also asks in the workshop whether sensory perception can merge into an open, ontological-performative practice capable of generating a different understanding

—one that ultimately also results in political change—and whether intensified artistic activism is necessary for this. Following this, T.J. Demos, author and professor of art history and visual culture, introduces artists and collectives who are currently operating in radical ways at the intersection of art and activism. Among others, he names Jeanne van Heeswijk, Jonas Staal in collaboration with Florian Malzacher, as well as TJ Cuthand and Black Quantum Futurism. I conclude that Demos emphasizes the centrality of the need for future-oriented thinking and action so as not to succumb to despair in the face of a drastic “status quo.” His most recent book, *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Collapse, Chronopolitics, and Justice-to-come*, which he mentions in the workshop, discusses “[...] contemporary creative visions of radical Indigenous and Afrofuturist worlds-to-come grounded in social justice and ecological flourishing” (see Demos pp. 43). At TCAA, Demos advocates learning from these groups, specifically by “[r]efusing to relinquish the horizon of transformative possibility [...]” (see Demos pp. 43). The strategies he mentions—whether observed or embodied—seem to stem from a specific ‘role’ and operating principle of art. I ask myself: “Can art, then, play an active role in this way within the current ‘process of restructuring’ of values, societies, climate, and thus the living conditions in the ‘critical zone’?” According to Demos, activist artists use artistic-utopian thinking to introduce new themes and visibilities into social discourses and, in this way, to devise scenarios for life in the future. Art historian Irène Unholz also examines the effects of interventionist art projects. In Schwerin, she presents findings from her research. Unholz identifies a notable tension between artistic autonomy and systemic entanglement. Furthermore, she does not attribute any direct influence on political decisions to the simulation of artistic research and artistic-activist practices. Nevertheless, she attests—as does Demos—to a particular mode of impact. Unholz describes how the form of systemic modeling can be particularly helpful in polarized democracies. There, she argues, entrenched positions and a sense of inevitability often block political imagination. By employing

experimental forms of action, artists operate within existing boundaries while simultaneously questioning them. According to Unholz, this opens up new spaces in which change can occur. (see Unholz pp. 45+46).

From the workshop contributions, I discern a research-based conviction that art, through its unique position, can simulate specific scenarios and thereby generate impulses for a transformed future.

The entire workshop experience is woven together in the work by Grégoire Rousseau and Christina Irrgang, which they compiled collaboratively during their time together. Sounds, recordings, and reflections on TCAA intertwine within it to form an atmospheric sound network for listening and further exploration.

Can concrete and current guiding principles for art be formulated?

In my understanding, working with the positions mentioned above yields a kind of “mandate” for artists and scholars. The mandate is that “we” must assume a responsible, integral role in exploring transformative communal life and existence within the ‘critical zone.’ The contributions of the scholars and artists (understood as aesthetic researchers) and part of Training Creative Acts and Action come together in my notes as approaches to starting places and actions, which I view as a counterpoint to unifying, fascistic, and reactionary currents. At all times, artists and theorists act politically and claim a space and a time for the intensive engagement with “something,” for obstinacy, for their own view of “the world,” for individuality. For art, this means that such a conceptualization of it is inevitably accompanied by non-conformity. Such art is a critical and disruptive factor in the organization of a uniform society, one of dull regularity.

As guiding principles, I would like to propose:

1. Art must cause confusion on all sides.
2. Art must rethink the production of knowledge in new and interdisciplinary ways.
3. Art must advocate for complexity, tolerate contradictions, and be critical.
4. Art must view human-environment relationships as intertwined.
5. Art must put to use its boundary-less space for thought and experimentation.
6. Art must stand (up) for itself. Art is always unfettered and allows no demands to be made of it.
7. Art must celebrate itself as a global network.

I also noted during the workshop: According to Hannah Arendt, there is an element of freedom in acting and beginning that we should make use of.

Fig. 11: Günther Uecker, 2014
Embossed print,
120.5 x 82 cm
Cotton fiber, handmade





Fig. 9: TCAA Participants

PARTICIPANTS

T.J. Demos

T.J. Demos holds the Patricia and Rowland Rebele Endowed Chair in Art History in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is the founding director of the Center for Creative Ecologies at UCSC. Demos is the author of numerous books, including *Radical Futurisms: Ecologies of Colapse, Chronopolitics, and Justice-to-Come* (Sternberg Press, 2023) and *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Sternberg Press, 2017).

Stephanie Dvareckas

Stephanie R. Dvareckas is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History at Rutgers University. She is a Dodge Avenir Fellow at the Zimmerli Art Museum where she works with the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union. Her work is supported by a fellowship from the Fulbright Scholars Program (Kazakhstan, 2022-23), a Foreign Languages and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship from Harvard University's Davis Center (2019), and a Graduate Dean Professional Development Award (2018). Stephanie holds an MA in Art History, Theory, and Criticism from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Knut Ebeling

Knut Ebeling is a media theorist whose work focuses on a material epistemology of the arts and knowledge. His research interests include modern and contemporary philosophy, cultural aesthetics and aesthetic theory, media of cultural memory, media archaeology, and the archaeology of contemporary art and knowledge. In 2009, Ebeling was appointed professor at the Weisensee Academy of Art Berlin. His publications include *Der Krieg im Kopf: Meditieren mit Bataile* (Matthes & Seitz, 2024), *Sorge: Autotheorie der Trauer* (textem Verlag, 2021), and *Wilde Archäologien I and II* (Kadmos, 2012 and 2016).

Isa Fontbona

Isa Fontbona is a performance artist, academic researcher, and bodybuilder. Her career focuses on using the body as a creative material to stimulate critical thought on issues that affect us as individuals in post/hypermodern society. Her works challenge the limits of her body, employing physical effort to penetrate the audience.

Marie Götze

Marie Götze works with industrial traces accumulating in more-than-human bodies as touching, contaminating & transforming guises. Her instalative, performative, conceptual & textile art practice connects within underground networks, merging nourishing, extractive & resisting tendencies.

Nina Nielebock

Nina Nielebock is an artist specializing in sculpture and performance in public space. In her art, she deals with contemporary politics and explores their impact on society in participatory performances. She studies under Sam Durant at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design. Nina Nielebock also works as an art educator, organizes discussions at the interface of art and politics and organizes group exhibitions.

Verena Straub

Verena Straub is an art and image historian at TU Dresden. Her research focuses on contemporary art, images in the context of political agitation and online visual culture. She is co-leader of the research project Image Protests on Social Media and a cofounder of the Affect and Colonialism Web Lab.

Alex Gross

Alex Gross, visual artist and PhD in art theory, has been working at the Chair of Visual Arts, Institute of Architecture at TU Berlin since 2010. His artistic practice focuses on destabilizing material processes as key agents in sculptural and performative interventions. At the Institute of Architecture, he develops and implements experimental teaching formats that focus on material-based artistic research and performative inquiry.

Anna Helfer

Anna Helfer is a Ph.D. candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin and the Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO). Her research focuses on art, memory, and postcolonial critique, and she has been conducting fieldwork in Dakar since 2018. From March 2024 to February 2025, she was a research associate at the Department of African Art at the Art History Institute of Freie Universität Berlin. Since 2023, she has been a member of the project Re-connecting "Objects" (TU Berlin), which was presented at Dak'Art 2024. From 2015 to 2017, she worked on the Café Deutschland oral history project at the Städel Museum, conducting interviews with key figures of the postwar German art scene. She currently teaches at the Institute of African Art at Freie Universität Berlin and holds a doctoral fellowship from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Christina Irrgang

Christina Irrgang holds a doctorate in art and media studies and works as a freelance author, publishing texts on contemporary art as well as on photography and modern art. In independent projects in the fields of publishing and teaching, she engages with techniques of democratic communication and dialogue, from which conceptual conversations emerge.

Cyril Lim & Daria Nedelcu

Cyril Lim, a multimedia artist and researcher, and Daria Nedelcu, an emerging curator and art historian, began collaborating in 2022. Their joint practice intersects art, research, and social engagement.

Johanne Mohs

Johanne Mohs studied Romance languages and literatures, art history, and journalism at the University of Hamburg and the University of Barcelona. From 2007 to 2010 she held seminars on French and Spanish literature at the University of Hamburg and since 2010 she works first as a doctoral candidate and then as a postdoctoral researcher at the Bern University of the Arts. Since 2020 she works as an independent researcher with institutions like the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the Kunstmuseum Olten or the Literaturhaus Berlin and as a lecturer at the Technische Universität Berlin. Her research interests include intermediality between literature and photography, poetics of European Avant-gardes (especially Tel Quel and OuLiPo), material aesthetics, collaborative writing cultures, and the interplay of art/literature, technology and science.

Irène Unholz

Irène Unholz is a PhD student at the University of Fribourg (CH), investigating strategies of simulating and reproducing systems in contemporary art. She studied Art History, Media Research, and Psychology at the University of Fribourg and FU Berlin. Alongside, she contributes as a cultural journalist.

Grégoire Rousseau

Grégoire Rousseau is an artist and educator based in Helsinki. He holds a degree in electrical engineering and a Master of Fine Arts and is currently a doctoral candidate at Aalto University. His research explores digital commoning practices with a focus on radio. In 2020, he co-founded Station of Commons and initiated lumbung radio for documenta fifteen. Station of Commons participated in radio curatorial work for Manifesta13, documenta fifteen, Miss Read 2023/24/25, the African Art Book Fair at the Dakar biennial OFF 2024, and Maison Européenne de la Photographie Paris 2025. In 2024, he co-edited and contributed to the publications Waves: Radio as Collective Imagination published by Missread Berlin and Radio as Radical Education published by Station of Commons in collaboration with HfBK Hamburg Art University. He holds an artistic working grant from TAIKE, the Arts Council of Finland.

Göze Saner

Göze Saner received her PhD in 2009 through a practice-based research project on archetypes while simultaneously developing a solo theater practice centered on social engagement. Her research and body-based work explore how training tools for solo performers can be conceived as an independent form of critical pedagogy. Until the summer of 2024, she served as Senior Lecturer and Co-Director of Research for artistic PhD candidates at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Peter Seeland

Peter Seeland is a Master's student in Art History at LMU Munich. His research focuses on ecological and eocritical perspectives in the history of art and contemporary art, with an emphasis on visual culture, landscape, and historical resource relations.

Nora Sternfeld

Nora Sternfeld is Professor of Art Education at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HfBK). Previously, she served as documenta Professor in Kassel (2018–2020) and Professor of Curating and Mediating Art at Aalto University in Helsinki (2012–2018). She also co-directs the /ecm – Master's Program in Exhibition Theory and Practice at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. She is a member of *schnittpunkt*: exhibition theory & practice, a co-founder of *trafo.K* (Office for Education, Art, and Critical Knowledge Production, Vienna), and freethought (a platform for research, education, and production, London). Sternfeld has published extensively on contemporary art, educational theory, exhibitions, politics of history, and anti-racism.

Georg Winter

Georg Winter lives in Völklingen, Stuttgart, and Budapest. In temporary laboratories, urban situations, self-organizing performances, and training sets, the sculptor develops research projects that define a cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary field of work. Starting from his concept of the University in a Suitcase. Winter has taught since 1994 at institutions including the University of Stuttgart, Merz Academy Stuttgart, Zurich University of the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg, and since 2007 at HBKsaar. Winter has co-founded numerous cooperatives, including forschungsgruppe_f (Zurich), Arbeitsgemeinschaft Retrograde Strategien (Berlin), Urban Research Institute (Nuremberg), S_A_R Project Office (Völklingen), AG AST – Working Group on Anastrophal Cities, Volume V (Mannheim), and TanzPflanzPlan

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