

Ruben Ostan Vejrup – Spiritus Agens

Comment [R1]:

In collaboration with CoCoCo

Fail Better -Through the Administrative Looking Glass and Beyond-

Master of Fine Arts thesis project
University of the Arts Helsinki, Academy of Fine Arts

**UNIVERSITY
OF THE ARTS
HELSINKI x**

Supervisors: Wolf von Kries, Nikos Doulos
 Examiners: Suvi Lehtinen, Kaija Kaitavuori

The CoCoCo, group in charge of the event, consisted of Aino Unkila, Teppo Vesikkuka and Ruben Ostan Vejrup, and is often referred to in the text as “us”.

Exhibition Laboratory is often shortened to ExLab.

Fail Better lasted from 20.9-9.10.2016.

This thesis was written by Ruben Ostan Vejrup.

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Following the three weeks of *Fail Better* in Exhibition Laboratory, the necessity to reflect onto what we have done became increasingly stronger. As I am ~~writing~~ reading this now, the feeling is almost gone, as the project has continued, reshaping itself into new situations, realities and possibilities. Still, I will try to spread out what and why, in hopes that this will not generate an extended epitaph, but rather a clarification that would allow others to follow upon the path I have taken.

Fail Better was a three week long event held at Exhibition Laboratory, a gallery of the University of the Arts Helsinki. It included a number of smaller happenings and events, some oriented towards discussion, some towards hands on creation and some towards reflection. The themes in question originated from the relationship between the academy and the student body, which have tried engaging each other in constructive dialogue in regards to numerous educational and building related issues, but did not manage to reach a common ground. The event was a continuation of our active involvement with administrative labor in our school, and the investigation of student roles in contemporary art education.

This text will try to include the historical background, documentation of selected events, as well as my own reflection on how social and political forces created the necessity for this work.

For all the martial artists behind the office desk.

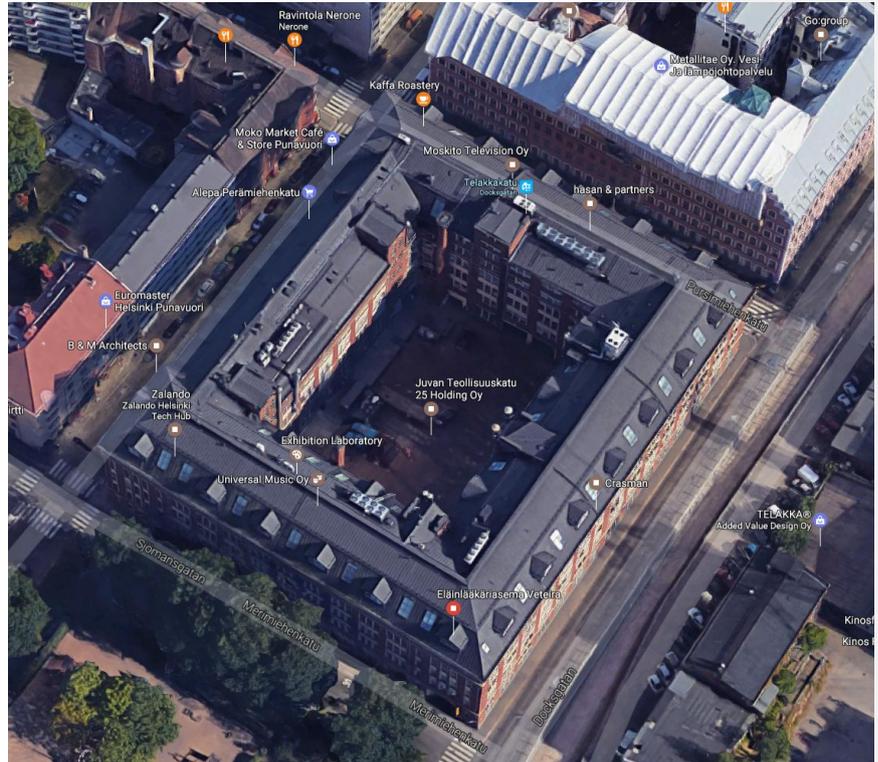
The history behind the event

Exhibition Laboratory = ExLab

Exhibition Laboratory was created after the unification of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The building of the gallery is located on Merimiehenkatu 36 in Helsinki. It is not far from the center, in a middle class living area surrounded by a record company, coffee roastery, supermarket and other businesses and institutions. For a school gallery the space is quite big. It's divided into three floors, with the middle one being the biggest, with movable walls and pillars supporting the high ceiling. The upper and lower floors are not as spacious, but still offer more than enough for exhibition practices.

Getting the new gallery coincided with the school moving location and losing a smaller gallery, which was located in the lobby of the former building. This meant that the school now operated two galleries, both in the same area of Helsinki. Project Room, which is the name of the other, is mainly used for MA student exhibitions, while ExLab was allocated for group exhibitions, BA shows, visiting artists etc.

The size of ExLab required the school to invest additional resources into generating an identity for the space and this was eventually done by hiring Barbara Vanderlinden, an international curator to lead the space. Unfortunately, the collaboration between her and the school did not work out, which left the development of ExLab's identity unfinished. While searching for a replacement for the curatorial position, the school initiated a working group consisting of professors, students and administration to organize ExLab and plan the schedule for the upcoming events.



Merimiehenkatu 36 – The location of Exhibition Laboratory (the gallery is actually located on the corner of Merimiehenkatu and Telakkakatu - Docksgränd in Swedish)

Comment [R2]: The Exhibition Laboratory Working Group

School Building

The school moving to a new location had multiple effects on the students attitude towards the school. The reason for the move was the bad air, or even mold, in the previous building and therefore many students could no longer spend time in it. The search for a new building had been ongoing for a while, and as the opportunity for arose, we quickly and hastily relocated. The new building had previously been offices for Nokia, which resulted in a very different physical and mental appearance of the school, with lower ceilings, many glass doors with locks and office lighting. Overall a much more corporate environment.

Generally the students found the new building and the moving situation disheartening, as they were often directly and indirectly reminded of the troubles the administration had with reorganizing the building. It also meant that the students had to unwillingly participate in the administrative issues of the school, which they saw as an opposite to what art education should be. Therefore the discussions about transparency regarding internal affairs of the academy started. The students felt the need for the information about changes to be clarified and explained, which, depending on the case, was either difficult or borderline impossible.

Comment [R3]: From Kaikukatu 4, an old bread factory, to Park Vallila - Business park in Elimaenkatu 25-27.
www.parkvallila.fi

Comment [R4]: Depending on the question the explanations were hazed either because of juridical or personal reasons, or just because nobody actually knew any better.

How we work for the school

It was in late 2014, a year after the unification of the different academies into the University of The Arts Helsinki, when I for the first time truly invested myself into changing the school of which I was part. As many other incentives my actions were partly my own, but also a reaction to the social situation and the peer pressure desiring change. My peers and I were aware of the merger, but reluctant to invest ourselves into the process beforehand. It took about a year for most of us to comprehend how this process affects us, and when the realization hit, the dissatisfaction started. In retrospect, the dissatisfaction seemed hasty and generally perpetuated by ignorance and lack of engagement, but as we knew of no other way of interacting with our institution, we turned to a confrontational dialogue.

As a reaction to the rebranding of the University, we (a smaller group of students) started a petition against the new logo. This petition was the first form that we would use to engage in dialogue with our school. It was obvious choice to express political and social opinions, one we have seen heavily used in the media. We took it as the commonly accepted way of exposing dissatisfaction.

Comment [R5]: It was revealed as a surprise, posted as stickers around the school over night, with no explanation. As students, we felt violently stamped by the superficial identity of the logo and excluded from the creation of the universities identity.

After spreading the petition through the three academies, it quickly gained traction and quite a big portion of students and teachers signed it. There was a clear difference between the academies and differences in why they disliked the new logo, but they did not hesitate to express it. The petition quickly gained traction. This eventually led to a meeting between the new rector of the university (Tiina Rosenberg) and two students behind the petition, myself being one of them. It became quickly obvious that in our immersive and energetic pushing for change we unintentionally created an unwanted confrontation between the schools leadership and ourselves. In the meeting, we were met with an attitude of aggressive self-defense, which we did not expect, and by using the hierarchical power between her and us, the rector sent us running with our tails between our legs. Afterwards followed a public meeting to discuss the issue, unfortunately they scheduled it when I was not present in Finland so I only got reports of how it turned out. We currently still have the same visual brand, and the design agency that created it, has worked for our university on numerous other occasions, including events and commercials.



Comment [R6]: In Trondheim they have used through many years another form. They have continually sent letters to the people in charge of the school and to the press.

Comment [R7]: The Sibelius Academy especially came from a more traditional perspective, where their previous logo was a historically important symbol.

On May 15th 2015 a MFA class dropped out from USC Roski School of Art and Design's MFA program.¹ They wrote a public letter describing their study conditions and their reasoning behind the walkout. The open letter echoed back our own frustration with the academy and the changes happening in the centralization process.

I am unable to justly compare the school situations, as my knowledge on both is limited, but I would argue that similarities exist. Not only between these two schools, but also on a broader scale of art educations in the West, where an increasing amount of academies have decided to **merge into bigger institutions** and struggle with reforming the education for a more precarious working life.

In the case of our own school, the inability to generate a **clear** structure of education became increasingly visible. To form a curriculum that would cover the vastness of fine arts, both paying respect to tradition, history and giving time and free hands to break that tradition, is a task full of hurdles and canyons. This task becomes even more difficult when the school needs to give a meaningful report to the outsider of their accomplishments. The impotence is clearly felt by the student body and the individuals working for the institution. Both groups are expected to fulfill the official desire of the institution, to represent it like it represents the state - clearly, unified and working towards a goal - while simultaneously taking on the unofficial role of the individual, who breaks the rules in case they are working against the wellbeing of the institution. **The academy will act similarly in relation to the state as the professors and students in relation to the curriculum.**

Fail Better - CoCoCo

After the school relocation and the firing of the ExLab curator Vanderlinden, the feeling of collective complaining became overwhelming. One of our students organized a meeting in the **Helsinki University lecture halls**, where we discussed the situation and the possible actions forward. It quickly became obvious that more meetings were needed, as most of the discussion formed around relieving the dissatisfaction and anger with the system, but not investigating the issues themselves. We decided to revitalize the student division of the academy, and continued to meet weekly, trying to offer students a place where they could ask questions regarding the leadership and administration of our academy. We would then approach the administration and try to answer the question in the coming meeting. The number of students in the meetings rarely exceeded 10, which was quite discouraging, and an initial indicator of our missing self-criticism.

With three other students I joined the Exhibition Laboratory Working Group, as the schools exhibition policies were often discussed in the student meetings. The working group's initial task was to rethink the proposed identity of the exhibition space and guide it towards a direction both students, and staff would agree on. Unfortunately, the meetings were quickly filled with responsive tasks, such as choosing and planning the schedule for the upcoming events, and it left little to no time for discussion and progressive decisions. The outcome meant that the exhibition space started lacking an overall vision, as well as a red thread binding the events together. As an unnamed professor put it: "...it feels like planting the same vegetables over and over again." Because the group was failing to deliver a clear reflection of the situation and a proposal forward, the idea to invite an outside investigator/instigator arose. We agreed on inviting Nikos Doulos, an artist based in the Netherlands, who had previously attended our academy as a visiting lecturer. He spent the December of 2015 collecting information from the student body, teachers, staff and administration. Together with the Exhibition Laboratory Working Group and the student division he organized a whole day seminar *WHAT NOW MY LOVE?*. It tried to address questions posed by the different agents of the school and cooperatively establish a platform for further development. After the seminar, he also formed a report, which was made public for everyone to read.

Comment [R8]: The outcome usually brings a growth of the administrative layer and a distancing between the students and the administration. The contact is kept via a growing amount of bureaucratic labor, performed by all the involved parties, but the personal contact is increasingly lost.

Comment [R9]: This play of the unaware bully, which grants us organized support when the critique is positive, but leaves us alone when the critique is negative, is repeated over and over and defines the way we interact with each other on the school premises.

Comment [R10]: To show solidarity to the Helsinki University, as they were hit by massive budget cuts.

¹ <http://mfanomfa.tumblr.com/> 16.3.2017

WHAT NOW MY LOVE?
THURSDAY 10th DECEMBER
12.00 – 19.00 @ Exhibition Laboratory
All are welcome!

WHAT NOW MY LOVE? is a one-day discursive seminar, set to function as a horizontal assembly of multiple voices stemming from and outside of the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, along with a constellation of acclaimed and not so (yet) acclaimed examples of contemporary curatorial practices.

In practice WHAT NOW MY LOVE? will consist of an on-going round table discussion and interstitial presentations that feed the process of thinking about Exhibition Laboratory – the Academy of Fine Arts' prominent exhibition space. It will set a light to existing forms of exhibition making within the Finnish cultural scene and call upon the participants to envision Exhibition Laboratory (and thus the Academy of Fine Arts itself) as a complementary counter narrative to those models while still sustaining its fundamental educational character.

The day will be divided into three (3) modules starting from outside and gradually moving inwards.

MODULE A: THE FARAWAY NEARBY
12.00 – 14.30

On the autonomy of the academies and their role in the given socio-political landscape.
With (skype) contributions by: Markus Miessen (Studio Miessen) and Xenia Kalpaktsoglou (Athens Biennale)

MODULE B: THE LOCAL OUTSIDE
15.00 – 16.45

On the Finnish cultural scene and its exhibition models.
With contributions by: Hanna Ohtenen (artist/curator/writer), Inkeri Suutari (SIC) and Studens of the PRAXIS Study Program

MODULE C: THE COUNTER NARRATIVE
17.00 – 19.00

On shaping Exhibition Laboratory by rethinking the educational modes of the Academy.
With contributions by: Gabriëlle Schleijsen (Dutch Art Institute), Tarja Szaraniec (Rietveld Uncut) and Tania Theodorou (Dead Darlings)

ALSO:

TRANSPRESS EXPRESS

Students from Printmaking Study Program will be setting up a pop-up printing studio, transforming quotes emerging from the discussion into handmade posters.

FAT-BOY READING ZONE

Chill-out reading zone with relevant literature.

The seminar is moderated by Nikos Doulos, a guest teacher/researcher invited by the Dean of the Academy with the support of the Academy's Artistic Activities working group. Doulos' interest lies on inclusive modes of knowledge production achieved through discursive practices and temporal interventions. In his work he creates situations/conditions not as transmitters of knowledge but rather as generators.

Nikos Doulos is a member of Expodium.
Read more: Expodium <http://expodium.nl/>



As I was both invested in the Exhibition Laboratory Working Group and the student division, my dedication and expectations for the event were high. We knew one of the challenges the event would possibly face is student participation, which we discussed throughout the organization of the event.

However, as the seminar unfolded, it became visible our approach towards generating student discussion at the event had failed. The student numbers were low, and without them bringing up the issues that they had brought up a couple of months earlier, the talks became informative, but not resolving.

In his report Nikos Doulos stated:

*"I sense that the academy is running the risk of prematurely opening up platforms of agency for a student body which – with some exceptions – is not yet ready to utilize productively. I fear that a significant amount of students perceives the school as a mean of serving their individual desires and claims and rely on third parties to carry the 'dirty work' for them. They are not directly interested in politics of running the institution, but they have very much adopted a mentality of hash criticism that in many cases is non-productive."*²

But the report also included a proposed strategy for the development of Exhibition Laboratory:

"In his article "Institutional Crossbenching as a Form of Critical Production" Markus Miessen advocates in favour of small-scale frame works as responsive, flexible and experimental ecosystems that challenge the institutional ideas in practice.

"The small-scale frameworks nestled on the margins of state-controlled or privately-funded education are more agile, flexible, and smart to generate content-driven approaches, and also create and participate in local projects as well as self-initiated collaborations. These are environments in which participants and contributors learn how to unlearn, critically consider the differences between practice and professionalism, develop a socio-political reading of their surrounding, and insert a criticality into the territory in which they operate."

*During the WHAT NOW MY LOVE? Seminar, he addressed the possibility of those micro-communities existing within a bigger operating framework. I would propose that Exhibition Laboratory encompasses the potentiality of becoming one."*³

Through this text that the idea of a third space in ExLab started forming. Following the report, the idea of cafe or bar was the first to emerge. I heard it the first time from our sculpture professor in the Exhibition Laboratory Working Group, and as parties and social mingling was something people enjoyed, the idea stuck.

It was around this time I met with Teppo Vesikkuka, a fellow student, who had been participating in other administrative groups of the school. We were both interested in creating the proposed third space in ExLab, and we noticed that the idea of the café had spread. This allowed us to create a proposal for the Dean of the academy, describing a general direction of the project, which we called Co-op Café.

We wanted to create a student run space, which would both strengthen the fundamentals for student involvement in exhibition practices and a space that could serve as a hub for a student managed cooperative.

Comment [R11]: Oh, how angry I was. There were about ten students that day. In comparison to the many professors, teachers, students from the praxis department and outside visitors the art student numbers were pathetic. It did not help that I had organized a Christmas party the next evening, which was very well attended. There is something so very despicable and disgusting in drunk people thanking you for your efforts. I still cannot understand how art students, who so often present themselves as empathic and understanding, are so quickly engulfed in the circle-jerk of complaining. WITHOUT trying to break that circle. So fucking angry.

Comment [R12]: Most importantly he was a member of Johtokunta - the Management board of the academy.

^{2,3} Nikos Doulos, 2016, excerpt from REPORT: EXHIBITION LABORATORY, PRODUCTIVE CRITISIMS AND FUTURE SCENARIOS

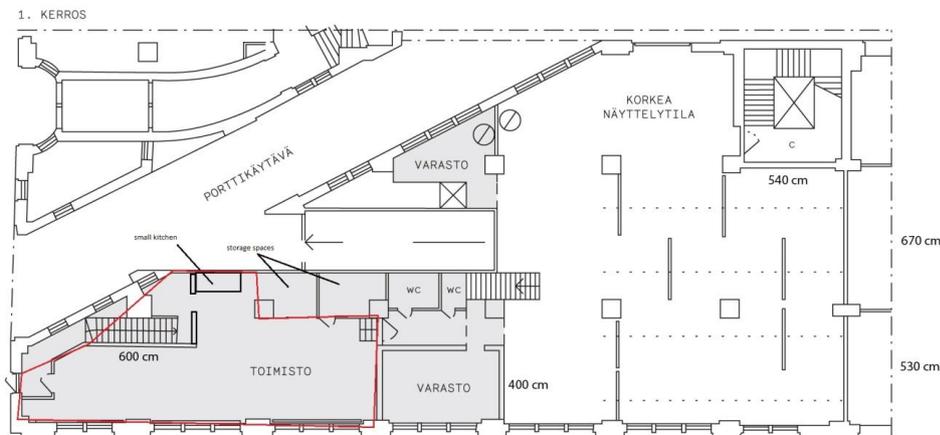
Excerpts from our proposal given to the dean of the academy:

Working plan:

We would start by blending into current exhibitions and events in ExLab, collaborating with and facilitating with intent to determine what such a space would need, to develop towards a more open and social platform. This could include more permanent locational initiatives, such as a lecture space or a bookstore for books published by the University or more pop---up oriented activities, such as serving food and refreshments at lecture and exhibitions, a performance venue or a space for workshops that would include the public. We would strive to avoid creating already existing forms provided by the University, such as a white-cube gallery space, a theatre or a concert hall, but acknowledge that to move away from existing structures without falling back, baby steps are required --- especially as it would be an educational procedure as well.

Modifying the space would be essential if we would want to make it more inviting and to get people to stay in the space. For this reason, we would propose to modify the ceiling, which is at the moment the source of lighting, and the bland floor. These modifications could be done under the summer renovations of ExLab. The ceiling was installed by the school and would be easy to modify and the floor renovation has already been investigated for the Kuvanvevät. Afterwards we would propose to remove the fake walls that close off the door entrance and windows. The windows would open up the space and bring in daylight while opening up the entrance from the street would diminish the feeling of a dead end street.

Comment [R13]: Until then, the space in question had been used as a storage and sometimes exhibition room.



The red line marks the room which we started working with.

There was never really an open call for proposals regarding a new space in ExLab, but as both Teppo and I were involved in different administrative layers in the academy, we were able to push for the development from many directions. In the beginning we were both interested in some common ideas, with Teppo wanting to experiment with the possibility of an osuuskunta (cooperative), a legal organizational form, historically established in Finland, but not yet present in the art academy. I was interested in the idea of creative administrative work and building a platform for a connected student body.

To show the school that we were serious, we started serving food at the events happening in ExLab. Quite often the school invited curators and artists to present their work and discuss with visitors and we agreed with the administration that they pay for the ingredients and we cook and advertise. This

went on for about half a year, through which we both got more familiar with the space and the people working there. Through the working process, it became more and more obvious, how detached the gallery space was from the academy, both in physical distance and also in communication.

At that point the space was mainly managed by the lecturer of Exhibition studies and Spatiality, Suvi Lehtinen and the technician Olli Karttunen. Especially around the time of Kuvan Kevät, the final group show of the MFA students, you could feel the pressure on the staff.

In end of the spring semester 2016, the academy hired a new professor of Exhibition studies and Spatiality, Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger.

By then Teppo had introduced me to Aino Unkila, a theatre pedagogy graduate who was both interested and willing to work with us on the project. Together we contacted Anna-Kaisa and introduced to her our ideas. She was more than willing to let us work with the space, and openheartedly allowed us in. What followed was a back and forth dialogue between us and the Facilities Manager, with whom we had to arrange for the dates for the physical renovation of the space. Luckily, the school had arranged for a renovation of their own in August, so we were able to renovate our room at the same time.

We also argued for a salary for the renovation, as the room was still their property, which they agreed on. The work lasted for a bit over a month, with usually three students working in teams. In the beginning, we removed the fake walls that blocked the windows and the entrance from the street. Then we removed the plastic floor and the office looking ceiling. Eventually we removed the lights and repainted the room.

At this point the room looked bare, but quite presentable. We discussed the possibility of having an opening event, but it turned out much bigger than expected. Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger was allocated an exhibition time in ExLab as the new professor, and she asked if we as a student group would like to cooperate with her on creating an event dedicated to the new space. This proposal in turn generated the foundation for *Fail Better*. It became a three week event occupying both the renovated room and the big exhibition room of ExLab.

Our intent was to generate a distilled and increased working process, similar to the one we had journeyed through following up to this point. This in practice meant that we collaboratively, with both Anna-Kaisa and Suvi Lehtinen, discussed what form a student run space inside a school gallery could take. We eventually agreed that we were interested in creating a meeting point between the street and the exhibition space and a platform for developing events and happening which desire a different setting than a traditional gallery. We all pitched in with proposals for content, which mainly involved inviting people from different backgrounds to come and investigate and interact with the space.

This resulted in a number of smaller events, some geared towards physical production of the interior, others towards a self-reflective discourse and still others investigating already established collaborative methods in relation to the state or the art world.

Comment [R14]: The physical renovation was and still is one of the major parts of the work. In its simple intent and hard execution it pushed us away from our normal working processes of organizing, talking and thinking, into a dusty and dirty chaos. If at any point we were performing Guerilla Art, it was being manifested physically in a traditional renovation. It also allowed us to change the pace of work, with rewards being visible in a shorter time frame. Working with administrative duties is comparable with video editing and CGI, with extensive periods of waiting time, either with rendering or just staring at your inbox.

The official event program:

FAIL BETTER – three weeks of cooperative building
Exhibition Laboratory 20. 9.– 9.10. 2016

The three week long event is a starting point for research about alternative exhibition practices and the development of a new social space within Exhibition Laboratory. We want to openly discuss the functions such a space can take, physically build materials for the space and research the role of a cooperative in relation to different layers of society.

We welcome you to participate in the development of CoCoCo, a location with versatile functions.

From the 20th September onwards, we will organize an intense three week period of workshops, discussions and presentations, which will form the newly renovated space within Exhibition laboratory as an open and responsive platform. In exchange for your participation we will serve a free late lunch every open gallery day.

What is CoCoCo?

Rethinking of social, economic and ecological possibilities through a collaborative model.

We are working on an autonomous, symbiotic, micro organization within Exhibition laboratory which works as an educational platform focused on organizational and collaborative aspects of art practice. It offers the possibility to organize events or assist/collaborate with the events in ExLab, while maintaining a cooperative dialogue with the academy and investigating what is needed for and/or desired by the community. This organization allows students to gather educational experience within administrative and collaborative areas, following a belief that artistic thinking and practices can be applied to countless areas of life, starting with the administrative behind art.

We strive towards a cooperative model that allows for a more experimental approach than other state regulated organizations and a possibility to change and appropriate the cooperatives function, while focussing on building it as a legal entity. Our aim is to allow art students to educate themselves and experiment with their role in relation to the state and the laws surrounding their practices.

The process is open for everyone to attend.

Week 38 Planning

Tuning, thinking, chatting, breath, draw, sketch, find, research, food&drinks, love, passion, productivity, unproductivity, relaxation, learning, collaboration

20.9 Tue: 17-21 Opening An open invitation to participate in an evening of cooking, talking, eating, and planning the upcoming weeks of the exhibition and the future form of CoCoCo.

21.9 Wed: Physical and metaphysical planning day

22.9 Thur: Physical and metaphysical planning day

17-20 Screening of selected works by Leslie Thornton, Q&A and conversation with the artist, moderated by

Monika Czyzyk

23.9 Fri: 13-17 Riku Saastamoinen: School of Unforced Errors

Tekoja, kävelyä, pakotettuja ja pakottamattomia virheitä. Mikä on virheen suhde toimintaan, oppimiseen ja taiteeseen? Mikä on niiden suhde tilaan? Saastamoinen ja Kauppila, ohjaaja ja space designer, avaavat yhteistyössään luomiaan käsitteitä ja metodeja keskustellen ja tekoina.

24.9 Sat: Reflection cafe

25.9 Sun: Reflection cafe

Week 39 Doing

Building, painting, furnishing, sewing, rebuild, material bases for various needs, food&drinks, love, passion, productivity, unproductivity, relaxation, learning, collaboration, knowledge, touch, sharing

Go in and set up – Workshop by Jan Lütjohann

In order to turn potential practices into real practices, the participants plan and build work-furniture for their empty new space. The resulting benches, tables and other objects facilitate for example work, dining or lectures. Participants practice versatile construction techniques, improve their use of essential tools and evaluate the potential of furniture as a tool itself.

26.9 Mon: CLOSED

27.9 Tue: 11–16 Go in and set up, workshop by Jan Lütjohann

28.9 Wed: 11– 16 Go in and set up

18.00 –20 Prognostic lecture: Ruben Castro

29.9 Thur: 11– 16 Go in and set up

16-18 Monika Czyzyk: BOdyssey workshop, female audience is invited to create their own video



with the barbie, which will be a part of the BODyssey exhibition.

30.9 Fri: 11– 16 Go in and set up

18–00 The Night of Passion – Workers’ edition
Art workers of KuvA talk about their passions: professional, non-professional, private or public, past or forthcoming. What they are enthusiastic about? What do they think is irresistible? 5–10 min presentations with food and drinks. The event starts at 6 pm and continues until the passion runs out.
1.10 Sat: 11–16 Go in and set up
2.10 Sun: Reflection cafe

Week 40: Sharing

cooperative, lecture/workshop, learning, thinking, collaboration, income, knowledge, globality, touch, sharing, rituality, labour, food&drinks, love, passion, productivity, unproductivity, relaxation, learning, collaboration, knowledge, touch

Aamuhoitoja

Bodily treatment practices to keep yourself open!
Open for everyone to attend!

3.10 Mon: CLOSED

4.10 Tue: 10-1130 Mustonen&Unkila: aamuhoitoja workshop

The aim of this workshop is to facilitate a collective evaluation and reflection session which is primarily centered around the following questions: What have been the outcomes of the project and which type of impulses and knowledges are useful for the participants in relation to their own practice? How did the dynamics of collectivity develop throughout the project? What kind of conflicts or tensions occurred and how were/can they be resolved? How to proceed in future and what will be the next steps? We will use a variety of facilitation methods in order to discuss those issues. The structure of the workshop is open to negotiations by the participants, according to what seems the most urgent issue(s) to discuss.

18–20 Studio generale lecture

5.10 Wed: 10-11 Mustonen&Unkila: aamuhoitoja
More information:

Ruben Vejrup Ostan, ruben.ostan_vejrup@uniarts.fi, 0417010935

Teppo Vesikukka, teppo.vesikukka@uniarts.fi, 0442375347

Aino Unkila, aino.unkila@gmail.com, 0443351081

Prognostics-luentosarjaa tukee Saastamoisen säätiö. /// The Prognostics lecture series is supported by Saastamoinen Foundation.

11– 16 Nikos Doulos: The anti-seismic academy
Think of an institution equipped to withstand any type of seismic activities – geological, structural, ideological. It shakes but doesn’t break. It bends but bounces back up. What are the internal apparatuses that sustain it? What are the ‘laboratories’ that test its endurance? The Anti-seismic Academy is a one-day workshop investigating the limits and creative prospects of shaking and bending within the Academy and beyond. It is the laboratory that tests an institution’s flexibility through the deployment of speculative design, discursive practices, precarious attempts, stage meltdowns, improvisation strategies and collective interventions. Unlike actual anti-seismic engineering we are not here to just prevent the collapse; we are here to enhance the bending.

18–20 Prognostics lecture: Päivikki Alaräihä

16–20 Gallery Wednesday

6.10 Thur: 10-1130 Mustonen&Unkila: aamuhoitoja

15-17 Temporary: a sandbox for practice-based research into experimental interactive formats: John W. Fail & Agnieszka Pokrywka

18–20 Studio generale lecture: Anastasia Rybova

7.10 Fri: 10-12 Mustonen&Unkila: aamuhoitoja

12-18 Coop Day - Day for rethinking emerging possibilities of cooperatives

12.30-14.30 Ulla Leppänen:

Inspiring examples of co-ops in field of culture

15-17 Jukka Peltokoski:

Cooperative as new commons

8.10 Sat: Reflection cafe

17- Monika Czyżyk: MEMORYBOXin - BODyssey dance performance. Choreography: Riina Koivisto. Performers: Julie Gasnier and Riina Koivisto

9.10 Sun: Reflection cafe

16- finissage, Monika Czyżyk: MEMORYBOXin - BODyssey dance performance. Choreography: Riina Koivisto. Performers: Julie Gasnier and Riina Koivisto



Fail Better – CoCoCo the conglomerate

Fail Better lasted from the 20th of September to the 9th of October 2016. It was located in Exhibition Laboratory, at Merimiehentätkatu 36 in Helsinki. The event was open every weekday (except for Mondays), from 11:00 until 18:00 and in case of evening events until their end. There was a theme of collaborative cooking, which covered the many smaller events and was used as a fundament for binding them together and icebreaking the discussion. This meant that we offered free ingredients and cooking tools, and that we would cook together each day.

Description of selected events

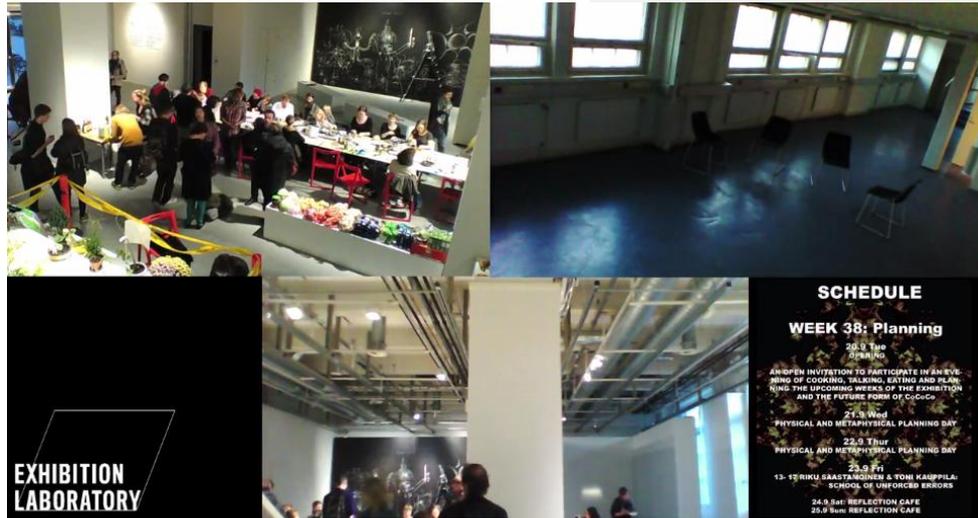
Week 38 Planning

The opening:

The opening on 20.9. started at 17:00. It was meant as a social event, revolving around food and small talk. It coincided with the opening of another exhibition in ExLab, *BOdysey* by Monika Czyzyk. While she exhibited on the upper floor, *Fail better* occupied the two downstairs spaces. The main event was held in the bigger room, while the smaller room was exposed bare, devoid even of proper lighting. For the purpose of the event we purchased hotplates and necessary tools for cooking (knives, cutting boards, pans, pots, etc.) and a wide range of different ingredients for dishes. While the tools were bought from flea markets and IKEA, the food was provided from different bigger stores and some of it dumpster dived. The setup of the room was as follows: most of the room was occupied with a long table, consisting of many smaller tables put together and covered with wood boards. The cooking tools and certain ingredients were placed on this table, while most of the other ingredients were placed on a nearby bench. A pile of dumpster dived bananas were displayed on a white neutral pedestal behind a pillar. On one side of the room there were two chalkboard painted walls and pots of charcoal. On the other side the white stairs/podium, produced by the academy for the space (which were to be returned because of bad quality), which we decorated with dumpster dived, donated and bought plants.

In the corner, before the passage to the smaller downstairs room, there was a pile of wood, which would be used in the furniture workshop, and a description of the upcoming workshop.

As mentioned the small room downstairs was



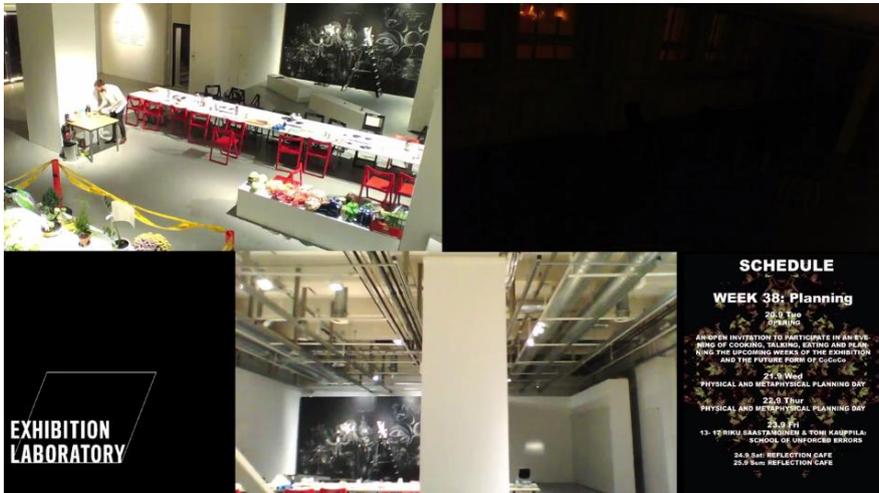
Documentation from the live feed: The opening - 20.9.2016, Day One - Time: 2.55.54

void of interior, only presenting a couple of blackboards, the previously installed kitchen and the new open entrance to the space. It had no proper lighting and was mainly used, because of the running water in the kitchen, for washing dishes.

In the beginning, people were hesitant to cook, but after a while, the situation turned to a very pleasant social event, with many smaller groups cooking food, chatting and some drawing on the blackboards. The event lasted until after 24:00.

Comment [R15]:



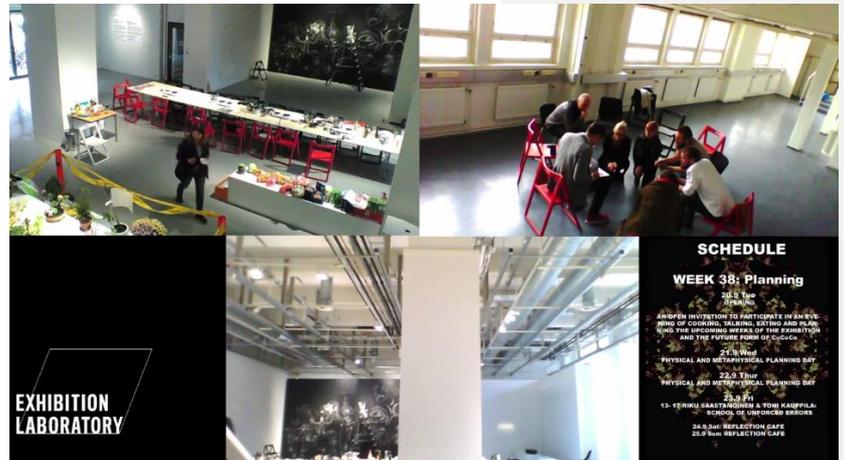


Documentation from the live feed: The opening - 20.9.2016, Day One - Time: 5.17.36

School of Unforced Errors:

We were visited by Riiku Saastamoinen and Toni Kauppila, both professors at different art fields. Riiku teaching theatre at TEAK in Helsinki and Toni Kauppila teaching architecture at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. They were invited to discuss their project, *School of Unforced Errors*, and talk with us about different ways of interacting with administration and generating alternative social spaces.

They described the issues they experienced as employees of educational institutions, and how confronting them alone proved quite difficult. They *School of Unforced Errors* was created as a legal group through which would allow them to create a unified front when dealing with bureaucracy.



Documentation from the live feed: School of Unforced Errors - 23.9.2016, Day Four - Time: 4.27.42

Week 39 Doing

Go in and set up

"Workshop by Jan Lütjohann:

In order to turn potential practices into real practices, the participants plan and build work-furniture for their empty new space. The resulting benches, tables and other objects facilitate for example work, dining or lectures. Participants practice versatile construction techniques, improve their use of essential tools and evaluate the potential of furniture as a tool itself."

The workshop spanned over 5 days from Tuesday to Saturday. The weekend and Monday before we bought the materials (wooden planks, plates, sticks, etc.) with which we would build up the interior of the space. The tools used were provided by Jan and by the gallery. We used the blackboards for sketching up the plans. We tried imagining a realistic outcome of the workshop and build towards it. We settled on two tables, four benches and a bar desk. In the beginning the progress went slower, as most of us had to be taught how to build the furniture, but after a couple of days the working pace increased. The end result were two tables, two benches and a bar desk, all exceptionally sturdy and ready to be used for multiple purposes.

The workshop was open for everyone to attend and we made lunch every day together when we felt hungry. Eventually we ended up having two to six participants per day.



Go in and set up - 29.9.2016, Photo by Jan Lütjohann

The night of Passion – Workers' edition

"Art workers of KuvA talk about their passions: professional, non-professional, private or public, past or forthcoming. What are they enthusiastic about? What do they think is irresistible? 5–10 min presentations with food and drinks. The event starts at 6 pm and continues until the passion runs out."

The night of Passion – Workers' edition, was an evening event initiated by the professor of exhibition studies Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger, as an event where employees of the academy can present their passions to the colleagues and students. She sent email invitations to other professors and staff, while we sent a general email invitation to students. The turnout for the event was great, almost overwhelming and even though the start might have been a bit slow, eventually many people made short presentations about their passions. It was our intent to only allow the employees of the institution to present, but eventually also some students who have been employed by the school presented.



The night of Passion – 30.9.2016, Photo by Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger

Comment [R16]:



Comment [RW17]:



Comment [RW18]: The reason for the exclusion of students was that most of the other events were catered mainly for the student body and we wanted to represent the administrative and teaching staff of the institution as more than employees.

Week 40: Sharing

Mustonen&Unkila: aamuhoitoja

"Bodily treatment practices to keep yourself open! Open for everyone to attend!"⁴

Maija Mustonen and Aino Unkila occupied the space in the mornings through the week, offering body treatment for visitors and by passers. One with a background in massage and another in Reiki, they also offered instructions and teaching,

Evaluation and reflection workshop

"Workshop by Airi Triisberg. The aim of this workshop is to facilitate a collective evaluation and reflection session which is primarily centered around the following questions: What have been the outcomes of the project and which type of impulses and knowledges are useful for the participants in relation to their own practice? How did the dynamics of collectivity develop throughout the project? What kind of conflicts or tensions occurred and how were/can they be resolved? How to proceed in future and what will be the next steps? We will use a variety of facilitation methods in order to discuss those issues. The structure of the workshop is open to negotiations by the participants, according to what seems the most urgent issue(s) to discuss."

Even thou we had planned days in the event where we could collectively self-reflect and gather thoughts, we eventually used them mainly to distance ourselves from the work, as it had generated a lot of pressure on us, both in the ongoing two weeks and the time leading up to the opening.

This meant that Airis arrival was not only welcome, but of outmost necessity, as she managed to facilitate our dialogue about what

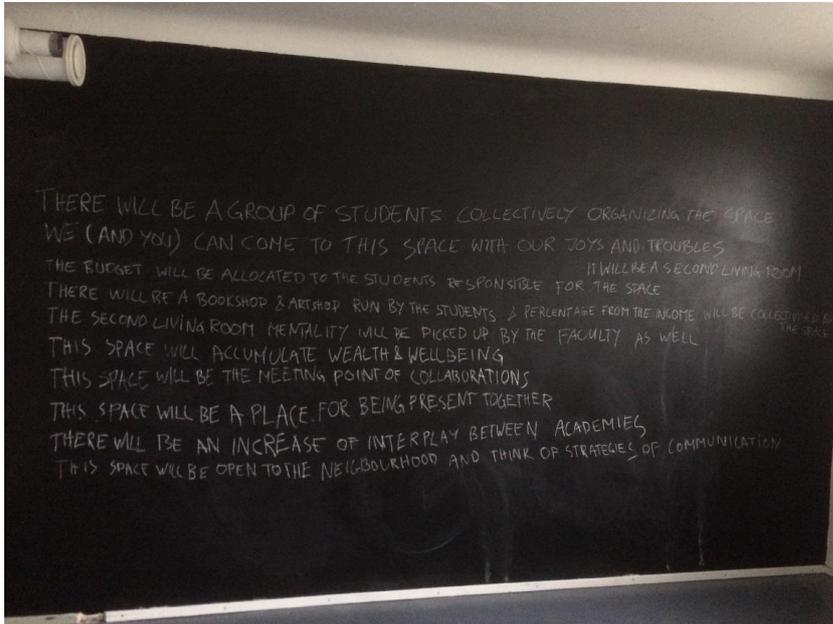
we have been doing and question how we have been progressing. The results of the workshop differed by participant. For most, it was a clarification process, reinstating red lines into the process, but for others it became an emotional therapy where they were able to express their building frustration.

Comment [R19]: Within me, it triggered feelings of overwhelming responsibility, which resulted in an emotional breakdown. My perception of the work up until then was that I had assisted from my own goodwill as a mediator and administrator the school in their intentions to build up a better education. This eventually started generating a heavy load on my shoulders, as my role was generally supported from the side of the school, but as a student my role was also easily exploitable and manipulated. This led to me seeking supportive structures solely in my private life, which was tiring and unhealthy.



Documentation from the live feed: Evaluation and reflection workshop - 4.10.2016, Day 15: 4.24.29

⁴<http://sorbusgalleria.tumblr.com/post/152330527178/maija-mustonen-aino-unkila-aino-voutilainen> 19.3.2017



Manifesto from the Evaluation and reflection workshop

The anti-seismic academy

"Workshop by Nikos Doulos. Think of an institution equipped to withstand any type of seismic activities – geological, structural, ideological. It shakes but doesn't break. It bends but bounces back up. What are the internal apparatuses that sustain it? What are the 'laboratories' that test its endurance? The Anti-seismic Academy is a one-day workshop

investigating the limits and creative prospects of shaking and bending within the Academy and beyond. It is the laboratory that tests an institution's flexibility through the deployment of speculative design, discursive practices, precarious attempts, stage meltdowns, improvisation strategies and collective interventions. Unlike actual anti-seismic engineering we are not here to just prevent the collapse; we are here to enhance the bending."

Wendelien van Oldenborghs work "*Beauty and the right to the Ugly*" was the pivoting point of the discussion initiated by Nikos. In the work, she explores the life of an experimental multifunctional community center in the Netherlands from its opening in the 1970s to now. The building was built in a period where utopic ideas of community building were very big in the Netherlands, generating ideas like the New Babylon by Constant Nieuwenhuys. Wendelien Van Oldenborgh examines the devenir and partial failure of this utopian architecture, while conceiving and implementing a filming methodology that translates architecture premises such as open, user-led and participative into cinematic devices.

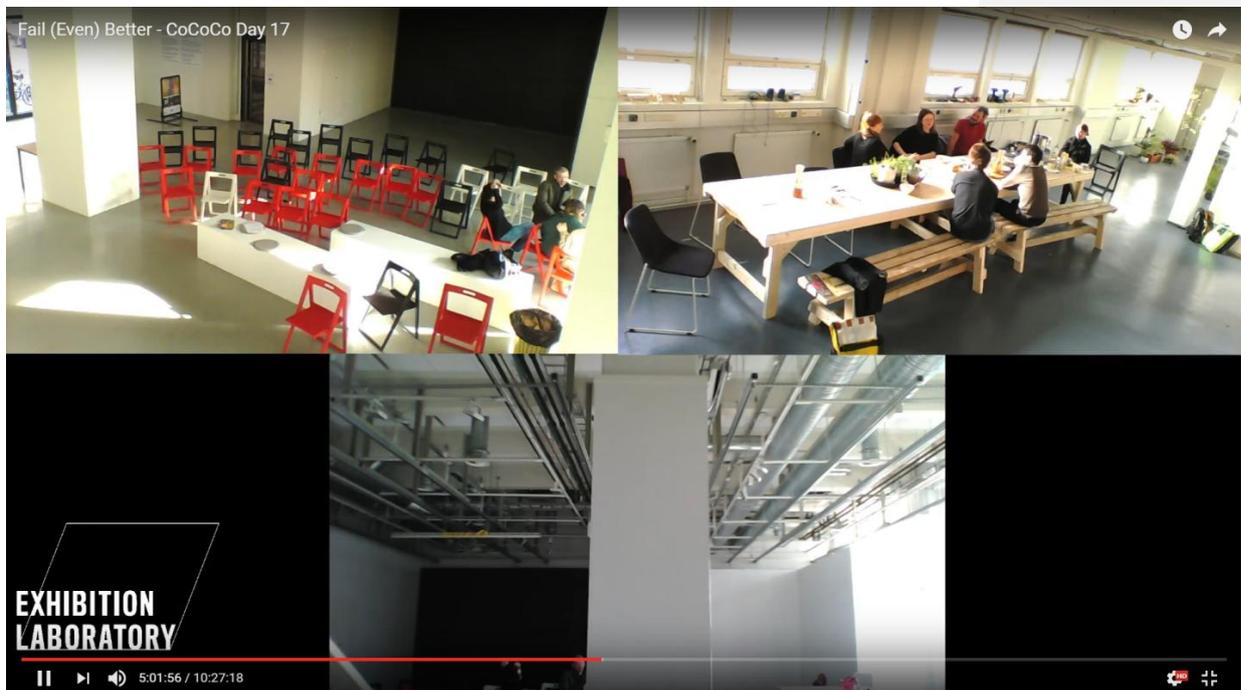
The work presented a fresh insight into practical working with already created buildings, and how their identities and characters can be shifted.

Temporary: a sandbox for practice-based research into experimental interactive formats
with John W. Fail & Agnieszka Pokrywka

"On the surface, Temporary resembles a typical 'project space', with regular activities and events. However, Temporary specifically discourages the types of activities that already have suitable venues in Helsinki. The focus of Temporary is participatory, experimental forms which may not fit anywhere else. Temporary is not centrally curated; it asks the public, across sub-cultural boundaries and disciplines, to both program and participate in its experiments. All of those activities are monitored and translated into credit points, or 'Temporaries' (₣), via the Biathlon Cultural Toolkit.

Temporary aims to provide a creative environment that operates on a regular basis, building resources both tangible (furniture, equipment, people) and intangible (inspiration, expertise, and assistance)" ⁵

Agnieszka and John were invited to present *Temporary*, a space which they have rented out together in the area of Kallio in Helsinki, and discuss how they tried reimagining it as a contemporary project space. They explained how they implemented a digital currency into the space, giving visitors 'Temporaries', which they would be able to spend on initializing projects in the space. We compared situations, between a self organized project space and one supported by a bigger institution, and discussed the relationship between the participants and organizers.



Documentation from the live feed: Temporary - 610.2016, Day 15: 5:22:54

⁵ <https://temporary.fi/>, 19.3.2017

What happened?

Our goal was to create a distilled and increased reflection of the working process which we (Teppo, Aino and me) had encountered in the months leading up to the event of *Fail Better*. I am not sure if we managed to do so. We indeed created a very intense working period over the course of the three weeks, but rather than being a reflection, it seemed to be a continuation of the previous working processes. There was much less dialogue with the schools administration, and much more self organizing. In that sense it felt that we had already created a fundament beforehand, and the event was building on top of that fundament.

The work leading up to the event was more reactionary, we were acknowledging outside forces and fluidly shifting our way of working, while still moving towards a general direction which we had envisioned. We never had a specific outcome in mind when we started the process, which helped us navigate the rigid bureaucratic structures in the academy. This was very much a shift in mentality for me as an art student and worker. This fluidity, together with the idea of baby steps progress, constituted the method of working for this project and it allowed me to work with a reasonable spirit and a calm mind. It was an educational shift for me, to distance myself from specific desires and outcomes, and to treat the working process as navigating a stream instead of generating my own.

The work while the event lasted was not as fluid. Instead of searching for already established incentives for change and development, we had to generate our own. This created a collage appearance of the content, as most of our desired proposals for projects actually got realized. We suddenly stopped being part of heavier forces and had to introduce our own. Suddenly you could feel the differences in the individual desires of the group members, which have previously been masked by the common effort. This did not lead to confrontation as such, but more of a splitting point which we had to acknowledge.

The different events which occurred through the three weeks of *Fail Better* ended up very site specific, their themes revolving mainly around the space itself, the schools exhibition space which allowed us in and the school which owns the gallery.

Because of this the work was mainly oriented towards individuals and groups which seemed interested in participating over a longer duration, specifically focusing on ourselves (the organizers) as the main producer, viewer and reflector.

This in turn resulted in a work which was able to produce an extensive amount of valuable emotional and intellectual experiences for the ones who were involved, but might have failed in producing meaningful experiences for a short time visitor. This was an issue addressed very often, and we tried combating the lack of inclusivity by being present in the space and initiating dialogue with visitors. I don't know if we were successful, but the visitor numbers were also low outside of the main events, so it is hard to create a clear estimate.

Comment [R20]:



Comment [R21]:



COMMUNIQUE

FROM THE Guerrilla Art Action Group.
(At the Art Students League of New York - " ESTHETICS & REVOLUTION ").
January 19, 1971.

TO BE INVOLVED IN USEFUL LABOR - AS A REVOLUTIONARY ARTIST - YOU MUST:

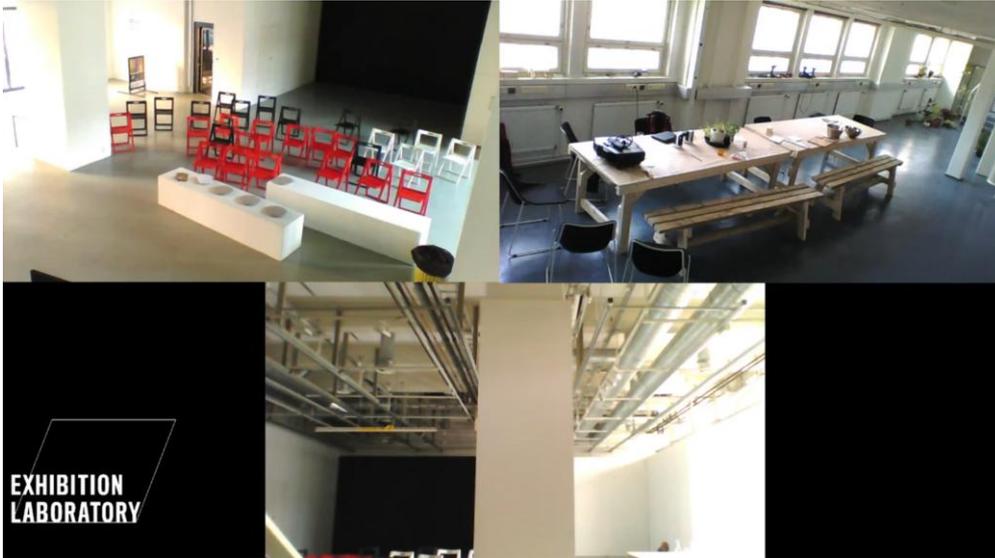
- 1) BE AVAILABLE WHEN NEEDED.
- 2) FORGET ABOUT IMPRINTING YOUR OWN STYLISTIC ESTHETIC ONTO THE REALITY.
- 3) DEAL WITH DAY-TO-DAY REALITIES, NOT FANTASIES.
- 4) BE ABLE TO OVERCOME YOUR PERSONAL HANG-UPS.
- 5) DEAL WITH ISSUES, NOT PERSONALITIES.
- 6) BE ACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE.
- 7) BE ABLE TO WORK ALONE, OR WITH OTHERS.

- 8) BE FLEXIBLE.
- 9) BE ABLE TO TAKE INITIATIVE WHEN NEEDED.
- 10) NOT BE AFRAID OF MAKING MISTAKES.
- 11) NOT BE AFRAID OF BEING INCONSISTANT.
- 12) BE VERSATILE.
- 13) BE IMAGINATIVE.
- 14) GET RID OF PRECONCEPTIONS.
- 15) CONSTANTLY REDEFINE YOUR ROLE AS REALITY DICTATES.

Jon Hendricks
Jon HENDRICKS.

Jean Toche
Jean TOCHE.

“Very few of these projects manage to overcome the gap between a ‘first audience’ of student-participants and a ‘second audience’ of subsequent viewers. Perhaps this is because, ultimately, education has no spectators. The most effective education is a closed social process: as Roland Barthes observes, ‘the famous “teaching relation” is not the relation of teacher to taught, but the relation of those taught to each other’. Institutional pedagogy never needs to take on board the questions of its communicability to those beyond the classroom...”⁶



Documentation from the live feed, Day 17: 2:08:18

We invested both time, social relations and our own economy into *Fail Better*, hoping that it would also generate a possibility of income and financial security.

This was a certain aspect of the work that was usually only discussed between the core group and if mentioned in dialogue with outsiders, a strife of comedy usually followed, as to prevent the need for a hard moment of self-reflection. This aspect was a pushing force that both generated the work and kept it grounded in a pace of development, which never became fully experimental. We were creating jobs for ourselves and other students. This is probably not uncommon in our field or others, but the act of building a working place is something that is not done publicly, but discreetly. Both shame and carefulness are present. Shame stemming from the inability to truly become an outsider to the system, a desire of many art students, and carefulness to prevent economic competition. At the end of the day, these methods appear increasingly dishonest and generate a haze around the working process. This may have attributed to the reduced inclusivity of the work.

Similarly to the Artist Placement Group, created by Barbara Steveni and John Latham⁷, we explored the roles we, as art students, could take upon us when venturing beyond the worlds of traditional art production. But instead of creating agreements with unknown institutions or corporations, we focused on our own academy. Even though students had beforehand tried engaging the academy in constructive dialogue, they had done so on the academy's premise. This required the students to sacrifice time and energy to be involved in the administrative working pace (which is quite much slower than the pace of studying). This often resulted in frustration from the students' side, and revealed their lack of knowledge in how to approach the bureaucratic systems.

⁶ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.272

⁷ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.163-177

We approached this by fully engaging the administrative world, only to step by step distance ourselves from it, creating a possible foundation of student autonomy within the academy. This indeed progressed to a certain degree, as we now have a space which allows student created content, without the bureaucratic requirements of the school.

But in our process we also reverted to a friend based working process, which could be argued is what the bureaucratic procedures are trying to diminish. At no point were we trying to hide information from others, but our lacking ability and power in spreading information resulted in some confusion with both students and staff.

Comment [R22]: Old boy network also called boys' club, Hyvä veli -verkosto in Finnish.

We hoped that by being intensely involved in administrative and organizational procedures, it would allow us to see them clearer, if not clearly. I think we did achieve practice in recognizing existing structures and how to deal with them, but through working, the presupposed bureaucratic structures also fragmented all the way down to the individual level.

My critique of the academies administration hasn't necessarily changed. I still believe that the bureaucratic structures holding up the framework of the academy are preventing direct forms of constructive and critical dialogue between the student body and the administration. But if the bureaucratic structures are to be kept, the ways of dialogue have to be rethought.

We ended up trying a very direct form, where we personally engaged with professors and staff, seeking support for our project. This dialogue would normally be completely appropriate, but as our intent was to change the common institution, we lacked the ability to include more people.

But, through the creation of an autonomous students space we might have created an incentive for student participation in the administrative procedures of the academy.

If the academy desires a self reflective existence, investigated by students and staff alike, they would have to clarify to themselves and others their own working processes. As a student I had multiple problems in creating a picture of the working structures of our school. This in turn left me unable to narrow down my critique, which quickly became too vague and centered around my dissatisfaction, rather than a constructive critique.

Both students and staff would need to rethink the fundamentals that allow us to uphold our bureaucratic system, and how to appropriate them for contemporary art education.

As the *Fail Better* ended, we decreased the pace of working and focused on long term plans. This immediately gave us the ability to be more self-reflective and create a stronger narrative for the space.

Both Aino and Teppo are pursuing the possibility of creating a University funded course dealing with legal cooperatives. New students have joined the working group of the space, which has been named ExClub after a couple of different voting events. We are currently focusing on creating a smooth and accessible way for the students to interact with it, creating a booking system, webpage and archive of ongoing events.

Hopefully the space will be able to appropriate its character for the use of others.

"Pedagogic art projects therefore foreground and crystallize one of the most central problems of all artistic practice in the social field: they require us to examine our assumptions about both fields of operation, and to ponder the productive overlaps and incompatibilities that might arise from their experimental conjunction, with the consequence of perpetually reinventing both. For secondary viewers like ourselves, perhaps the most educational aspect of the projects is their insistence that we learn to think both fields together and devise adequate new languages and criteria for communicating these transversal practices."⁸

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 274

Sources:

Bishop, Claire 2012. *Artificial Hells*. Verso. London

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