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Asociación de Arte Útil
a nomadic and multiform platform for usership

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Introduction

The Asociación de Arte Útil operates as a constellation of independent nomadic initiatives using its website as a platform and a toolkit for users. Since 2014 the Asociación has focused on the dissemination of multiple projects and information related to Arte Útil, and it functioned as a space for research and exchange for its users. Starting from the analysis of the toolkit for institutions and users as different modalities to effect real societal change while operating beyond representation, this text will illustrate how the Asociación offers an ideal cultural and artistic ground to activate users in order to raise up, speak and act. Since 2013 Arte Útil has been circulating inside many institutions in Europe and United States thanks to its initiator, Tania Bruguera, and to its associates. Due to its porosity and the presence of its users in different locations, the Asociación has been developing its program both inside and outside the institutional framework - precisely like a 'patainstitution', the Association is committed to pushing the boundaries of artistic research, presentation and education.

As such, The Asociación de Arte Útil is continuing to generate its own tools in order to grow and maintain a live and active archive through different approaches: based on cooperation; playing the role of a platform of legitimation and visibility; fostering analysis; opening up a flexible space and opportunities for research and, above all, using a sort of 'holistic approach' to build new forms of (and approaches to) constituent usership.

In collaboration with art institutions and universities (such as the Van Abbemuseum and Liverpool John Moores University) the Asociación is co-producing an alternative curriculum as a model for institutional growth and sustainability: as a way to increase the knowledge around practices of usership and Arte Útil whilst, at the same time, encouraging the generation, application and activation of new strategies-projects that could be added to the archive.

In 2018, the Asociación begun to develop and test models of the alternative, constituent pedagogies through a class at the San Francisco Art Institute, an Arte Útil school at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, an art lab and a summer school at the John Moore University in Liverpool. This article is composed by a polyphony of short texts analysing different approaches and uses of the Asociación as a 'patainstitutional' organisation aiming at generating knowledge and disseminating it.

Repurposing Education Through Constituent Use

Text by John Byrne

The Uses of Art Lab at Liverpool John Moores University 's School of Art and Design is a small research hub that aims to develop and test forms of ground-up, constituent led 1:1 Scale Arte Útil projects, interventions, and activisms as learning resources within the University framework. The Use of Art Lab has also grown out of, and continues to contribute toward, the developing and extending meshwork that currently constitutes the Association of Arte Útil (AAU). As such the overall objective of the Uses of Art Lab (UoAL) is to develop Arte Útil projects and thinking amongst staff and students

at Liverpool John Moores University's School of Art and Design through active forms of thinking and doing that are developed as forms of constituent led co-design and collaboration with local, regional, national and international communities.



The Office of Useful Art in Granby, Liverpool, 2016.

To begin making this happen, the UoAL is currently developing a range of small-scale projects with local and regional constituencies across a range of community projects, health and well-being initiatives and Museum/Gallery based research projects. For example, makers and doers from Liverpool School of Art and Design (both Staff and Students) are beginning to plan projects and workshops which will see collaborations between existing community arts initiatives, such as the Florrie¹ and the Spider Project². However, the aim of the both the UoAL and the AAU in collaborating with these initiatives is not simply to teach or skill share (as staff and students will be running workshops with constituents ranging from 3D Modelling, documentary film making and creative writing) but to openly learn, as an Art School, a University and an online/offline community of activists, about how to change and adapt in a rapidly shifting political and economic landscape.

For example, both the Florrie and the Spider Project offer a range of participatory activities, programmes and skill sharing workshops that are open to anybody, but which can also lead to qualification. As such, both initiatives have themselves resulted as a means to address the long-term social impact of Liverpool's postwar economic decline. Like many port cities across the world, Liverpool's dock's provided most employment in the city until their terminal decline and stagnation in the 1970s. Since the collapse of the traditional docking industry, and the shift to mechanized containerization, Liverpool has only seen a highly concentrated economic recovery, largely in its city center, which is based around service industry, tourism, leisure activity and shopping. Within this climate, what initiatives like the Florrie and the Spider Project would gain from working with the UoAL is open access to a University's human and equipment resources and, in return, Liverpool John Moores University would gain the opportunity to rethink the application of its own resources and skill-sets through developing a series of meaningful and collaborative initiatives – in a sense, both communities and University would open themselves up to a form of reciprocal skills hacking. In addition to this, the AAU would provide the Florrie, the Spider Project and the UoAL/Liverpool John Moores University with access to a growing network of world-wide and ground-up educational activists which provide both a resource, and also a community, to grow constitutively within. Through sharing workshops and discussion groups based around the AAU archive - and by identifying and activating those projects from the archive that carry within them the most potential for useful repurposing within the specific contexts and conditions of Liverpool and Merseyside – the aim will be to collaboratively develop the AAU archive through its use and activation as a constituent learning tool.

In turn, it is also hoped that the development of such projects – as well as the practical, critical and activist context that will grow around them – will affect the operating systems of both University, Art and Design School, and local communities alike. For example, one of Liverpool John Moores University's current 'Mission Statements' is to become a Civic University – so by enabling staff and students to work with the AAU as a means to develop collaborative and constituent projects and initiatives with artists, activists and thinkers from local communities, it is hoped that staff and

students will begin to re-think what they do, what their current roles and self-perceptions are, and how existing logics of art education could be challenged and changed. In turn, it is hoped that the changes this may affect and enact within the University – through day to day project planning and longer term curriculum and course/programme/ research development – will help the University, as an institution, to re-think its current role and possibilities within the construction of a constituent civic realm.



The Office of Useful Art at the Liverpool John Moores University, organised by Liverpool School of Art and Design, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Tate Liverpool and Exhibition Research Lab, 2015. Photo: Gemma Medina

But why a university? What possible use would it be to think of developing Arte Útil practice through the mechanisms of yet another form of established, sedimented and hierarchical institutional structure? And how would it be possible to conceive of such a practice as offering anything beyond an academicized facsimile of Arte Útil aims and objectives – as offering something other or beyond the usual forms of one-way-broadcast (this time from educational provider to local community as opposed to the museological equivalent of cultural provider to disengaged audience)? And what are the dangers implicit in such an action, when both educational and cultural institutions alike seem equally engaged in the economic imperative to monetize and instrumentalise their relationships to 'diverse' constituencies. The answer, on one level, is simple. To offer the possibility of an alternative: to provide models of practice that could disrupt the smooth flows of neoliberal semicapital – that currently emanate so seamlessly and incessantly from centre to periphery- through the coproduction and co-design of peripheral initiatives that demand real change of the centre, and which are prepared to do so by acting within and across the intersections of active local community and institutionalised state power.

Of course, the questions of both scale and relevance immediately become apparent here – how can one even begin to take on the overwhelming might of neoliberal capital through a collaborative combination of AAU thinking, art and design universities and small community based initiatives? And how would this even be possible when the neoliberal machine is so well versed in the logic of deregulatory equivalence – forcing such initiatives and collaborations into a legal and economic framework of corporatized impotence (in the UK, for example, having to register any form of oppositional initiative as a recognised charity or social Enterprise in order to gain any recognisable status) which immediately forces such ground-up opposition into the recognisable systems and legalised frameworks of centralized control (in effect becoming voluntary 'micro-fascisms' to paraphrase Guattari and Deleuze)?

Perhaps the most obvious way to look beyond the current horizons of neoliberal logic is to examine the alternatives that we have to hand, to the Zapatista movement for example, or to the possibility and potential that the Occupy Movement, Syriza, Podemos, or the short lived Arab Spring held within them. Whilst this is, of course, an essential undertaking, I would argue that another (and perhaps more neglected) means of rethinking opposition would be to look more closely at the historical conditions of power today – and to re-think and repurpose the means, mechanisms, tactics and plays of institutionalised power that have provided neoliberalism with its very means of control. After all, neoliberal globalisation is not an a priori entity that somehow grew the conditions for its own putrefying existence – it is, itself a self-regulating, genetically re-organising and continually restructuring network of small, medium and large scale organisations that have ruthlessly, and often illegally, miss-used commonly available tools as a means to construct a veneer of total power and

control. Neoliberal logic functions in the same ways, and via the same means, that are available as oppositional tools for resistance. Power is not simply the smooth surface of inaccessible alterity – unfortunately it is the successful abuse and misuse of commonly available tools, tools that could be shared for good and by the many, as a means to cause coagulations of wealth and power for the few. And these commonly available tools have complex histories of struggle and contestation.

For example, if we return to the university, and take the current neoliberalisation and financialization of higher education - and with it knowledge, as exemplified by the university system in the UK - we see a growing indebtedness of an increasingly large student population who are increasingly unable to find work on graduation. Whilst this fosters the understandable (and maybe accurate) reaction amongst students that their 'degrees are impractical and useless' - if useful is here measured solely in terms of direct and unproblematic access to an already squeezed and continually precarized workplace – this reaction is also accompanied by the paradoxical realisation that most employees now demand a degree as a bare minimum for considering any job application. As individuals and families plunge themselves deeper into debt, whilst students from poorer backgrounds increasingly opt out of the burden of educational debt (and therefore education) altogether, many cities and towns in the UK increasingly rely on student populations for their income in a post-industrialised climate of service industry and servitude. One only has to witness the cheek by jowl construction of safe and gated student accommodation in cities like Liverpool that are built next to, and often within, depopulated residential communities that are now made up of the long-term unemployed or largely unskilled service workers.

Within this increasingly bleak landscape it might seem rather whimsical, if not futile, to look for the growing AAU network, and its potential collaboration with universities, for help. Until, that is, we remind ourselves that the European university system as we know it or knew it to be - and in particular the 'red brick' university system that developed in the UK during the industrial revolution - did not emerge fully formed as a neoliberal by-product of the post '89 collapse of the Eastern Block. Instead, it evolved during the nineteenth century as a response to the bourgeois ascension of industrialised capital and its concomitant population explosion. More specifically, and again in the case of the UK, the university system as we now know it was a legacy of mechanics institutes that were formed in the early 19th Century. These mechanics institutes, often built as a direct result of industrial wealth and philanthropy, were a direct response to a growing population of largely uneducated and illiterate workers who were migrating from the country to cities. Like so many of today's global migrants, those fleeing the country for the city in the 18th and 19th centuries were arriving penniless, and looking for work, in the newly industrialised urban centres of Europe and the USA. As the UK underwent its historical shift from an agrarian to industrialised economy, and from craft based industries built on guild apprenticeship to wage based machine labour, mechanics institutes provided free educational classes to an expanding population in the new sciences of industry. The first mechanics institute in the UK opened in Edinburgh in 1821, then Glasgow, Liverpool and London followed in 1823, and Manchester in 1824 (all of which subsequently became universities). This number grew to over 700 Mechanics Institutes in the UK alone by the mid-1850s, with similar numbers opening across Australia, Canada and the United States.

Whilst these mechanics institutes were undoubtedly instigated by philanthropic industrialists as a means to both educate and improve a new workforce - and, at the same time, appeasing the new ethical concerns of a wealthy bourgeoisie for charitable solutions to the plight of the poor and destitute 'urban masses' of the new cities - the mechanics institutes themselves also played an undoubted role in the development of the labour movement, the continued growth of the cooperative movement, and also acted as a locus for the birth of the trade union movement. At one and the same time the mechanics institutes became a bourgeois resource for improving the quality of a new industrialised labour force and a hotbed for the effective political radicalisation of that same labour force. As such I would argue that the legacy of the mechanics institute carries within it the potential for dialectically rethinking the role and function of education and activism today.

For example, in the hands of the UK based organization Grizedale Arts, the mechanics institute has provided both a model for re-thinking our current situation and a direct link to a previous historical point through which that re-thinking originally became possible. For over a decade, Grizedale Arts have worked on numerous projects around the world that have challenged artists and audiences alike to think themselves differently and, above all, to make themselves useful. More recently, these projects have played themselves out via the remarkable work that Grizedale Arts have undertaken in collaboration with their 'local village' of Coniston and, more specifically, with the Coniston Institute. Once a working mechanics institute, funded in part by John Ruskin, the Coniston Institute has come to play a key role in developing the templates that Grizedale Arts offer for practical change. As Ruskin argued for a new form of holistic and rounded education, with art and making at its epicentre - an idea that Ruskin later developed in his book 'Unto this Last' (Ruskin 2007) and which, some years later, was cited by Mahatma Gandhi as a key influence in his own project of grass roots democracy and nonviolent change through education³ - so Grizedale Arts began to argue for The New Mechanics Institute, and its contemporary and mobile derivative 'The Office of Useful Art', to be active sites for social exchange and re-imagination through use, making and application.

Since the first proto-Office of Useful Art iteration by Grizedale Arts – as a mobile ‘Mechanics Institute’ at Sao Paulo Biennial in 2010 - there have been numerous iterations including one at Tate Liverpool, in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University, during the ‘Art Turning Left’ show 2012/2013 (which influenced the development of Tate’s recent ‘Exchange’ projects at Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool), Birmingham’s Ikon gallery in 2013, Liverpool John Moores University (in association with L’internationale, MIMA, The Visible Award and Tate Liverpool) in 2015, Granby 4 Streets in Toxteth 2016 and the Office of Useful Art at SALT opened in Istanbul in 2017. In 2012, and during the run up to Tania Bruguera’s ‘Museum of Arte Útil’ show at Van Abbemuseum, Grizedale Arts hosted debates which led to the development and refinement of the Association of Arte Útil’s eight criteria for what might constitute Arte Útil. Subsequently, Deputy Director of Grizedale Arts Alistair Hudson has gone on to develop AAU ideas around Usership, Constituency and Museum 3.0 at mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, UK) before recently accepting the challenge of taking those ideas mainstream as director of Whitworth and Manchester Museum and Galleries.

For my own part, I have had both the opportunity and the privilege over the last decade to work closely with Grizedale Arts, Van Abbemuseum, the L’Internationale Consortium of Museums and Galleries and the AAU whilst many of the now recognisable projects and positions around use and usership were beginning to develop. During this period my own thought, as well as my own approach to work and the job of art, has undergone a radical overhaul.

Whilst helping to facilitate The Office of Useful Art at Liverpool Tate, operating an Office of Useful Art at Liverpool John Moores University, collaborating on an Office of Useful Art in the Granby 4 Streets area of Toxteth, helping to develop a range of ongoing Arte Útil initiatives at the Florrie in Toxteth, Liverpool and, more recently, becoming Director of the Useful Art Lab at Liverpool John Moores University, I have become convinced that, however problematic it may seem, the Association of Arte Útil provides a modest (though simultaneously credible and ambitious) platform for building a constituent network of hope, opposition and alternative/activist change.

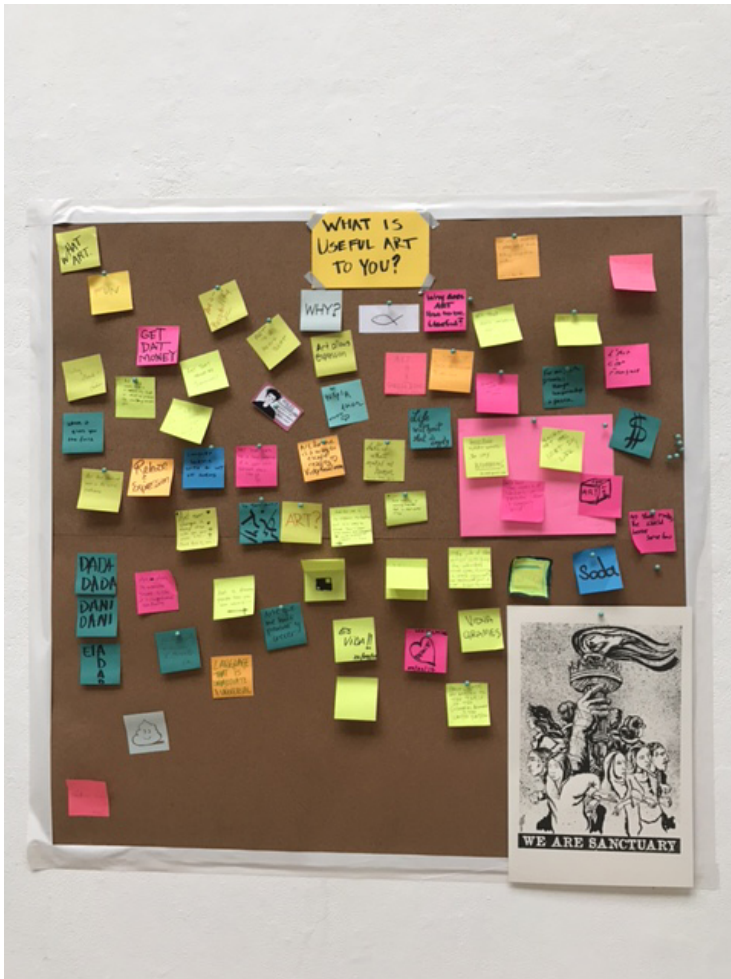
As we will see in the other two contributions to this paper, the AAU is growing as a both a lobby for change whilst, simultaneously, representing the institutional potentialities of a continuously changing lobby. Its scale is at once small – granular even – in terms of the projects and positions its members and affiliates propose and enact whilst, at the same time as this, it scales-up as a network (or meshwork) into a growing, recognizable and credible platform for re-thinking what we do, how we do it and why through our everyday uses of art. As the AAU begins to think about uploading open-source educational programmes and constituent discussions on repurposing and reapplying its 1:1 scale activities across its network - where 1:1 scale refers to projects and initiatives that are ongoing activities in the world which do not, therefore, depend upon the production of art objects, performances, exhibitions or displays - it also begins to resemble a network of New Mechanics Institutes that, as Tania Bruguera argued at the 2016 AAU Summit at MIMA, can begin to provide a credible platform for talking to the existing institutions of power. And, at this point, it is worth noting again that this process of networking and scaling up is precisely how our current institutional frameworks of power and control - amongst them the civic roles played by universities, museums and galleries alike - came into being almost two centuries ago. It is also worth remembering, as I have argued, that the tools available to the AAU for implementing change - through micro and macro networks of radical oppositionality and ground up-alternatives for living otherwise - are still precisely those that our current neoliberal hegemony has inherited and corrupted as a means to regulate, fractalize and exploit. The difference lies not in the tools we pick up and use, but in how we use the tools we pick up, for and with whom we use those tools, to what effect and why. As such I hope that the Uses of Art Lab at Liverpool John Moores University can play a small but useful role in effecting this change and recalibration of use and can, in turn, help to build a truly useful and constituent University of the Future through the growing networks of usership that is the Association of Arte Útil.

Acting as an Infiltrator

Text by Alessandra Saviotti

The Asociación de Arte Útil (AAU) was founded as part of an art project initiated by Tania Bruguera in 2013 in collaboration with Queens Museum and the Immigrant Movement International in Corona, Queens (USA), Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (NL) and Grizedale Arts in Coniston (UK). After a series of meetings and workshops involving many artists, policy makers, curators, activists and citizens, eventually Bruguera and her collaborators named Arte Útil as a new movement. At the core of which is an archive⁴ conceived as a free database of almost three hundred case studies featuring artistic practices that produce beneficial outcomes for their users and apply artistic strategies beyond the realm of art. Stephen Wright, a theorist of artistic usership, proposes to

understand such practices as characterised by what he calls a double ontological status (Wright 2013), artistic projects that are recognisable for whatever they are, for example a restaurant, while being the artistic propositions of the same thing. Since its first project, the so called 'Museum of Arte Útil' (2013-2014, Van Abbemuseum)⁵, the AAU was shaped as a self-organised and nomadic environment operating beyond the museum context, while reusing discourses and techniques originating in it. Due to the fact that most of the people involved in AAU are involved in the contemporary art, its activities have always been organised in collaboration with art institutions, while reaching out to a plethora of independent spaces, nongovernmental organisations, and informal collectives, who expressed their interest in using the resources that the AAU provides.



The Evolving Office: an Arte Útil Project, organised by the students of the Collaborative Practice Module - Fall/Spring 2017, San Francisco Art Institute, US

'Usership' became a key-word popular among the initiators of the AAU, a concept, which still provokes hostile reactions in the so called 'expert culture', another term coined by Wright (2013) to denote a group of people who control tools, spaces, and infrastructures, which users take over and transform in the process of everyday use. Repurposing the art institution and trying to define the use-value of it is an ambitious attempt which should start with the radical reorganisation of the relationships between artists, museums, galleries and their spectators. If every Arte Útil project should operate on a 1:1 scale (Wright 2013), i.e. not only as a conceptual prototype but as a fully-fledged social practice, so the AAU must do the same. The Association intends to create a model for its users to be replicated, but what is the model that the very AAU follows? And to what degree the organisation needs to be legitimised by the very artistic structures that it aims to contest, in order to remain effective?

Between 2015 and 2016, together with Gemma Medina Estupiñán, we developed 'Broadcasting the archive', an independent programme aiming at emancipating usership around the Arte Útil archive through a series of talks, workshops and city tours across Europe and the United

States⁶. Our aim was threefold: we were keen to learn from some projects we included in the archive, we wanted to mediate how the archive could be used as a real tool providing information to people organising themselves in their own community, and we expanded our research by

adding more case studies into the archive. In this last activity, we followed the criteria of Arte Útil, as every project in order to be qualified to archive needs to: 1) Propose new uses for art within society; 2) Use artistic thinking to challenge the field within which it operates; 3) Respond to current urgencies; 4) Operate on a 1:1 scale; 5) Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users; 6) Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users; 7) Pursue sustainability; 8) Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation⁷. Even though Arte Útil seemed to become a sort of shared agenda across other institutions, especially in Europe⁸, 'Broadcasting the archive' was one of the first projects which used directly the legacy of the 'Museum of Arte Útil'. Far from using a top-down approach, we decided to operate as 'infiltrators' in other contexts using the flexible and porous identity of the AAU, playing with the idea of being an institution, when in fact it is not. After a year of programming we realised that 'Broadcasting the archive' could potentially become a model of radical pedagogy, not contained by the academic apparatuses in its use of art as a vehicle or tool to fill the gap between artistic institutions and non-trained audiences.

Even though the AAU strives for operating outside of the art context, as much as possible, it still acts almost exclusively within it. Despite the attempts of Tania Bruguera to step back from her authorial position, I would argue that there is still a sort of resistance in the art world to give up the idea of authorship. The initiator of the movement is still needed to legitimise what we have been doing so far. Rather than fighting and rejecting this aspect, the AAU is in constant collaboration with Bruguera, and tries to rethink its relationship with the art institutions and to shape itself accordingly.



Escuela de Arte Útil, a commissioned art project for the exhibition Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017. Courtesy Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Photo: Nando Alvarez-Perez.

For her solo exhibition organised by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco (USA) 'Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power/Hablándole al Poder' (2017) the artist proposed to update her pedagogical project 'Catedra de arte de conducta'⁹ in collaboration with the curators Lucía Sanromán and Susie Kantor. They worked closely with the AAU to adapt the previous project to the current cultural and political situation in the United States. In a country where education is not easily affordable to the majority of students, Bruguera proposed to activate a free 'Escuela de Arte Útil' (School of Useful Art) in collaboration with California College of the Arts, San Francisco Art Institute, University of California – Berkeley, San Francisco State University and the YBCA Fellows program. Conceived as a real class taught every week by Bruguera herself and invited guest lecturers, the course was free, and the students who enrolled through their universities received credits for attending. The fact that the class was free and open to anyone is already quite a challenge in a context where the majority of people are forced into debt for basic needs such as education¹⁰.

The 'Escuela de Arte Útil' was developed following different steps. In order to create a common ground between institutions, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the AAU became the fulcrum of a series of activities tailored in preparation for the Escuela.

Through a collaborative class at the San Francisco Art Institute called 'Evolving the Archive'¹¹ a group of students helped the AAU to select and add new case studies submitted to an open call

addressed to the Bay Area art community. From January to May 2017 the students helped us to research the San Francisco art community, they produced a toolkit with key questions, a bibliography, a timeline and a map of Arte Útil case studies, to be used during the Escuela. The conclusion of the class was a temporary office of Arte Útil called 'The Evolving Office' where they transformed the Diego Rivera Gallery into an office space that was available and open to everyone for a week¹².

The archive with its new case studies included as the result of the above-mentioned open call, was used as the main resource to develop the curriculum for the Escuela. The 8 weeks course was designed around different topics such as institutional self-criticism, active hyperrealism, reforming capital, a-legalism, sustainability and usership, and the class took place in the gallery space. Every week (4 hours, 3 days per week) we invited a national or international guest teacher and a member of a local project included in the archive, who spent a considerable amount of time with the class.

I can argue that the Escuela itself challenged the field within which it operated. Firstly, it took place in a sort of neutral space, in this case represented by the exhibition space, in order to be fair with all the schools involved. Secondly, it provided an exceptional curriculum, which comprehended at least 2 guest classes every week, led by such speakers as Bruguera herself, Debt Collective, Daniel Godínez-Nivón, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Alistair Hudson, Rick Lowe, Damon Rich & Jae Shin, Bonnie Ora Sherk, The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and WochenKlausur. Students were organised in groups, every week they worked on a couple of assignments in order to familiarise themselves with a practice and eventually present a prototype to be implemented beyond the class.

During the course of two months, I was personally challenged by the level of the conversations taking place in the class. Despite the fact that we conceived the curriculum as an open and flexible space, devoted to listening, 'unlearning' and sharing our experiences instead of just lecturing the students, we were criticised for not being inclusive enough, for example by omitting other useful art examples outside of the Western canon. It is true that the majority of the case studies we presented represented the Western perspective, rather than the global one. However, we conceived the curriculum in order to respond to some of the current urgencies of the Bay Area - inviting contributors dealing with the urgencies present in USA. Furthermore, I believe that the Escuela was conceived as a flexible space to be used by and with different constituencies, and to be activated in various environments, not just the educational one. The Escuela was an excuse for us to learn, to research and to strive for being as inclusive as possible, while exposing our methodologies to public scrutiny. The project is developed as an additional tool in the AAU's repository, potentially used by other people. In the same time we played a double role – first users of the project and its initiators.

This being said, I keep asking myself whether the AAU can still be considered as a self-sustained environment despite its constant collaboration within other art institutions. As curator, archivist and coordinator of the Asociación, I would say that the Asociación can potentially operate outside the art context and so it did already. For example, in 2015 an Office of Useful Art was established in collaboration with the residents of the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust in Liverpool (UK). The office provided access to the AAU toolkit, engaging the residents in collective reflection upon the role of art in their community. The office was followed by an onset of other collaborations already mentioned by John Byrne in the previous text, which are still ongoing. The office provided free tools, such as the archive licensed under the Creative Commons and direct access to the initiators of the projects as well as to different constituencies. We tried not to control obsessively the development of the activities, but we were still present to make sure that the theoretical framework was clearly understood.



Escuela de Arte Útil, a commissioned art project for the exhibition Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablándole al Poder, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017. Courtesy Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Photo: Nando Alvarez-Perez.

However, I am still struggling to see the future of AAU as an alternative institutional model even if I clearly see its potential. Sometimes it is frustrating not being eligible for funding because the AAU does not have a legal framework. Precisely because it was hard to foresee the future of the AAU before the development of these constellation of transnational activities, the project grew up thanks to the personal commitment of different individuals sharing ideas around usership. Thinking about how to use the AAU as a potential alternative institutional model, started to become a real prospect quite soon. I would argue that little by little, we all begun to understand the potentialities of a non-structured model precisely because of its openness and quite uncontrollable development. So far, the AAU has been using everyone's institutional links, which are very different from individual to individual, to experiment and research inside and outside institutions themselves. On the other side, the lack of legal framework means that the AAU does not provide any structured funding system, and it needs to evolve and find a financial strategy for every particular project. At the time of writing this text (2018), the AAU needs to rely either on other institutions who share our vision, or individual grants in order to keep our program running. Lately, we have been exploring some options around the establishment of a membership scheme, where institutions willing to collaborate and use the AAU's resources, may finance the AAU itself. That being said, the absence of a legal status allows the members to literally 'infiltrate' different fields, contexts and places, providing a level of flexibility not achievable if the AAU would have a recognisable structure.

During the Symposium 'Does Art Have Users?' organised in collaboration with SFMOMA and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco (28-30 September 2017), both Jeanne van Heeswijk and Tania Bruguera elaborated with different words and in relation to their different projects, the same notion, which perfectly summarises what does it mean working with an Arte Útil mindset. van Heeswijk explained her practice as a sort of 'training for the not yet' especially in relation to her latest work 'Philadelphia Assembled' (2016-2017), which poses the pivotal question of: how can we collectively shape our future while city's urban fabric is radically changing? Bruguera instead refers to the idea of 'rehearsing the future'¹³ in relation to the necessity for artists, not to react to certain events, but rather to prevent those events, creating artworks that might suggest a different idea of how our future could be.

Using very different approaches they both expressed their need as artists to trespass the boundaries between art, politics, sociology, philosophy and so on, to provoke a real change in the context in which they operate.

To conclude by borrowing these concepts, I would argue that the AAU is a group of 'believers' ready for the 'not yet', who - through a constellation of projects across disciplines - rehearse the future. Thus, in order to implement our mission we act a-legally, we read between the lines, we infiltrate wherever we can.

Emancipating the local user

Text by Gemma Medina Estupiñán

With the project 'Broadcasting the archive', we activated a process of interaction with artists and communities that usually develop their activity outside the spotlight and the influence of the art world. Many of these episodes challenged and problematised the dynamics of the art institutions and galleries involved, pointing at their alienation from the local context and self-perpetuation of the modernist institutional framework. This project broke through the contemporary art system, creating some space and time for analysis, criticism, visibility and research around Arte Útil and other non-orthodox practices. Through this network of activities and collaborations, that keeps growing organically, the AAU has been expanding, fostering new uses and partnerships, the flow of which infiltrates other institutions, even without the involvement of the AAU. However, projects organised around 'Broadcasting the archive' operated mainly on a short-term basis, not being able to modify positions taken by institutions in their respective local contexts. Although the overall intention of the AAU is to generate an accessible compendium of different forms of art practice that seek to have a direct and lasting social, political and economic impact, each activity would require a long-term engagement of institutions and agents involved to engender a process of genuine transformation (Byrne 2016). Particularly demanding is facilitation of connections between artistic institutions and communities located beyond the professional art world. An example of such attempt is project 'Agents of Change' that started in 2015 as an aftereffect of the Museum of Arte Útil in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. As curator and archivist of the AAU I joined The Umbrella¹⁴, a group of social designers that were working already on projects in different neighbourhoods of Eindhoven, to formulate a concept of furthering collaboration with the museum. 'Agents of Change' is focused on engendering creative strategies in local development by engaging a network of artists, social designers and community initiatives in Eindhoven through interactive tours, workshops and various activities, and by creating a social map of the city to reveal its current urgencies.

The starting point was Arte Útil and some of the questions enunciated by John Ruskin (2016a) and Victor Papanek (1974) to reflect about the multiple connections between art, design and life, the social responsibility of artists and designers. We did so by combining different forms of artistic thinking, collective action and extraterritorial reciprocity, a term introduced by already quoted Stephen Wright to discuss the exchange that unfolds when artists and designers leave their conventional territories, vacating space and making it available to be used by practitioners originating in other areas of expertise (Wright 2013). We were intrigued by how and to what degree such practices are affecting and transforming Eindhoven so we decided to initiate a programme of action research.

During the first stage, in 2015-2016, we aimed to add new cases studies, further developing the archive by including local examples, while questioning the position of the Museum as a public institution, the traditional role of which is to confer value and constitute identity of a place. We wanted to reconsider the role that can be played by a museum in a city like Eindhoven, marked by the legacy of Philips: branded as a 'brainport: Europe's leading innovative top technology region' and defined by the glossy facade of technology and product design¹⁵. In methodological terms, we asked ourselves whether we are able to transform dynamics of co-creation, co-design and strategies of Arte Útil into useful tools for people invited to partake in the study, and to broadcast the voices of outsiders inside of the institutionalised space of contemporary art? Are we able to reverse the established hierarchical dynamics of an art institution and its relation with the public? Do we dare to activate a Museum 3.0, understood by Wright (2013) as an institution based on usership instead of spectatorship, where the cultural content and its value is generated and shared out equally between the museum and the community that uses it? Can communities involved shift from being mere spectators to active constituents, moving from a conventional contemplative approach to the art and art institutions, as merely passive observers and recipients of a given discourse, towards a proactive position of co-authors, co-producers and users? How to avoid the instrumentalisation of the groups engaged in such study, especially at this moment when the museums largely operate as factories producing cultural contents, a machinery that absorbs and gobbles everything down as part of their public programmes but does not provide neither remuneration nor recognition for the users-producers of contents utilised? Are we able to generate a relationship based on use inviting different groups to approach and repurpose the museum fostering a relationality based on the modality of use that generates distinctive opportunities for engagement? Can we really operate independently? How to evaluate the process? To answer these questions we went into action.



Visit to 't Strijps Hùske, Agents of Change's tour to Strijp District. Photo: Ron Krielen.

Eindhoven was founded in 1920 by incorporating the five neighbouring agrarian polities to accommodate the explosive growth of the Philips industry in the region and provide housing for its workers. There are still five districts that shape the map of the city, including the city centre. We curated guided tours through these different areas of Eindhoven (Woensel-West, Woensel-Noord, Stratum, Tongelre, Strijp and finally Gestel) with small groups of 8-9 participants composed predominantly by artists, designers and students from the Design Academy, curators, staff from the museum, city officials and people interested in social organisations.

The structure of the population in Eindhoven is strongly affected by specific chapters in the history of the economic development of the city and consecutive waves of industrial growth, labour shortage and recruitment of 'guest workers' mainly from Turkey, Morocco, Italy and Spain in the 60s and early 70s (Virtual Department of Dutch 2018; Lucassen 1997). Other important aspect that defines the character of the city is its role as a centre of cooperation between research institutes and high-tech industry that began with Philips and the NatLab / Physics Laboratory (Vries and Boersma 2005) and continues today through the Eindhoven University of Technology and other large cooperative networks. One third of city population is of non-Dutch heritage, a diverse group composed by entails a flowing population of international students, engineers and high tech professionals, the second and third generation of the migrants from former Dutch colonies, and families of factory workers (Krielen et al. 2017)¹⁶. This situation generates certain incompatibilities between these groups, the municipality and the museum, creating a distance between a large part of the populace and the cultural institutions.

With 'Agents of Change', we explored some of those neighbourhoods that were built by Philips and DAF in the 1930s for their former factory workers like Strijp or Stratum and the newest neighbourhood, Woensel-Noord, which is more connected with industrial development since the 1970s and the recent arrival of high-tech professionals. During each trip, we visited four initiatives in a district, meeting initiators and volunteers who introduced us to their activities and grassroots organisations. Citizens initiated most of these projects autonomously, but some of them operate in cooperation with diverse institutional or private stakeholders like social housing companies or the municipality itself. Although each area has a particular character and its own issues, the groups of active 'Agents' were largely formed by middle aged and elderly white Dutch citizens that tried to bind places together, generating common activities as nexus of communication confronting loneliness, disconnection and the problems that affect each neighbourhood.

We visited, among many others: communities of gardeners and urban farmers generally focused on bonding people together, neighbourhood's restaurants providing professional training for people facing the problem of long term unemployment, housing associations, safe playgrounds distributing free meals in one of the depressed areas of the city, independent spaces of alternative education, occupied buildings that offer low rent ateliers for artists striving with the current wave of gentrification, grassroots organisations based on second hand and gift economy, an auto-generated museum of music instruments that is pressured to uphold its location in the city-centre against the future plans of urban regeneration or a neighbourhood-run pop-up restaurant focused on performing uncomfortable diners in Strijp as a collaboration between artists and the inhabitants of the former workers quarter (Krielen et al. 2017).



Alternative economies workshop, Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Minsung Wang.

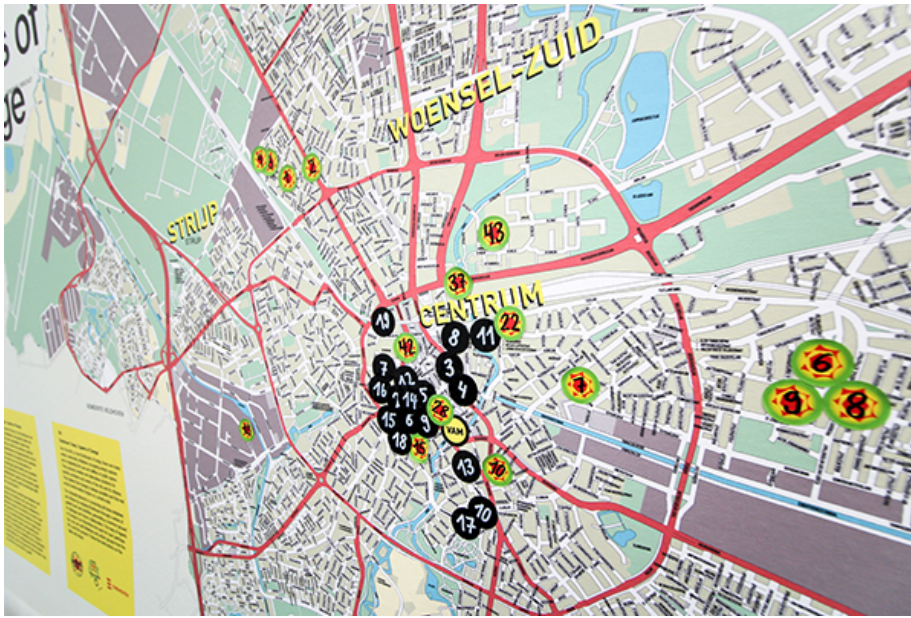
Later we encouraged the participants to use the museum differently, amplifying their knowledge and expertise through a series of co-designed workshops, convened around specific issues like 'temporary use of the space' or 'alternative economies', to participate in which we invited representatives of the museum and the City Council in order to discuss the challenges that those groups face on a daily basis. Personally, I struggled, and I still do, with the risk of instrumentalisation of these groups, by the institution and politicians, questioning if they receive a truly rewarding experience in exchange for their participation. During these conversations, we created a space for transversal dialogue within the gallery without knowing exactly how it would play out. Some discussions highlighted tensions and frustrations against the structural dynamics of power playing in the city, opening up a space for debate, in which criticism emerged, targeted at both the institution and project itself, emphasising aspects like the institutional use of the language or the international character of this project, considered by local people as a form of snubbing. However, eventually the workshops were evaluated positively, as generating use value for the participants, who took advantage of the cultural capital of the museum. In fact, from the very onset of this project, we welcomed proposals to activate and take advantage of the resources in institutional disposal. In total, seventy-three initiatives were included in the map, twenty locations were involved in the tours, nine projects joined the co-design workshops and three initiatives proposed and developed activities for the general public of the museum.



Tour's map and postcards. Photo: Ron Krielen.

The porosity of Arte Útil has demonstrated its usefulness as a tool to bridge contemporary art with many different audiences. Although in the case of the AAU, it seems necessary to condense the analysis around artistic practices to maintain the radicalism of the proposal; 'Agents of change' faced challenges intrinsic to a city that seems disinterested in art. Moreover, the use of the archive, in terms of structure and multiple examples gathered, provided us with different ways to analyse,

archive, giving spotlight and voice to Arte Útil and other practices. During the last two years the project has grown, with the support of the AAU and L'Internationale, becoming an autonomous programme that operates by applying the tactics of the Asociación, as a nexus-platform for local practitioners operating within and sometimes without the museum.



The 80's: today's beginnings exhibition. Van Abbemuseum.

Although it is impossible to evaluate quantitatively the repercussion of the project, 'Agents of Change' has initiated a process of negotiation with the art institution. For the communities and individuals involved, it means shifting their perception and relation with the museum, reconsidering a modernist paradigm, which conventionally confers specific functions to art and museum. As Duncan Cameron pointed out in her text on new museologies, a museum is defined by a dichotomy of being a Temple or a Forum, as the gallery seems to be trapped in its ontology and functionality, extracting objects from their original context, isolating them in order to produce knowledge, in the same stroke getting isolated from the local producers (Cameron 1971). To unpick this conundrum, we experimented with a relation between museum and its constituents, breaking these preconceptions, disassembling the idea of 'disinterested spectatorship' that refers to a passive, contemplative approach to art by suggesting that it should not satisfy any particular need of the spectator. Immanuel Kant, among others, introduced this notion of artistic uselessness at the end of the eighteenth century to ensure universality of art and protect the objective dimension of aesthetic experience; hence isolating definitively art and use, as criticised, amongst many others by Ruskin (2016b, 20–21). The activities of 'Agents of Change' have generated a horizontal space of dialogue inside the galleries where external and internal agents, members of the communities and curators, shared knowledge, interest and resources, moving beyond modernist paradigm of art.

Currently, we are closing the second stage of the project as users of the Werksalon - an experimental space devoted to work with constituencies¹⁷. We have invited groups of participants to discuss the practices from Arte Útil archive, challenging them to describe and imagine their own practices in the framework regulating Arte Útil case studies, to exchange practical knowledge, learn and share methodologies that could be transferred and applied elsewhere.



Visit to Huiskamer Tivoli, Agents of Change's tour to stratum. Photo: Connor Trawinsky.

Luckily the Museum is committed to cultivate the Werksalon as a long-term programme, as we are depending on the institution, its resources and capacity to engage with the communities involved and ensure sustainability of the process. Both, AAU and Agents of Change confront similar dilemmas: even if we are fostering an emancipated user, we need an institution to sustain and legitimatise the process.

For the museum, it implies a slow process of restructuring. It requires moulding protocols and procedures within the organisation, expanding their operations to public space, forming multidisciplinary teams and defining alternative programmes to involve different groups usually not connected with each other and distanced from the art world. It entails a troubling task of co-curating with the constituencies, or perhaps to become a constituency itself. It involves renouncing or reducing the control around the production of content in a process of co-creation, sharing visibility and giving room and recognition to other voices coming from outside of a discipline or an institution. Ultimately, it requires an alternative institution that gets closer to the local community, responding to their identity and dilemmas. The artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, during her intervention at 'Does Art Have Users?' symposium in 2017¹⁸, posed the same question: are museums ready for the real usership?

It is a crucial question addressed by the AAU, the Escuela, a project like Agents of Change and by many artists and practitioners of Arte Útil who have initiated longstanding projects of collaboration with different museums. It is a fundamental question that we are not able to answer, yet.



Ongemakkelijk diner (Uncomfortable diner), performance-workshop organized by the community of Drents Dorp Hoofdkwartier at Van Abbemuseum. Photo: Niek Tjisse Klasen

Alessandra Saviotti is a curator, educator and cultural activist who lives in Amsterdam. She is a PhD researcher at the Liverpool John Moores University - School of Art and Design. Her focus is on socially engaged art, collaborative practices and Arte Útil. Her work aims to realize projects where the public becomes a co-producer in the spirit of usership. Her reflection is taking into consideration collaborative processes according to the motto 'cooperation is better than competition'. Since 2014 she has been working with the Asociación de Arte Útil especially aiming at emancipating the usership around the [Arte Útil Archive](#). She is currently researching and writing about how alternative education models framed as Arte Útil could be successfully implemented within the institution of education fostering sustainability, hacking the institution itself. She is a member of [Art Workers Italia](#) and her recent project is [Decentralising Political Economies](#), realised in collaboration with The Whitworth (Manchester), LJMU's The City Lab and the Asociación de Arte Útil. She is a regular guest lecturer at the international Master Artist Educator and Master Education in Arts at the University of the Arts - ArtEZ, Arnhem (NL). Her website is <https://www.alessandrasaviotti.com>.

Gemma Medina Estupiñan is an art historian, independent researcher, curator and educator, based in Eindhoven (NL). She focuses on the relationship between art and society, particularly the uses of art, researching Arte Útil, socially engaged art and activism. She participates in curatorial and pedagogical projects that fall outside standard artistic discourse to bring art closer to non-specialized audiences, fostering connections and collaborative processes between artists, designers, and different collectives. She has worked in diverse experimental projects with the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, NL), like Be(com)ing Dutch (2007-2008), the residency program Artistic strategies in Psychiatry (2018) and Agents of Change (2015-2020), among others. After 2012 she collaborated with the artist Tania Bruguera and the Van Abbemuseum to gather the Arte Útil archive, which was the core of the exhibition "The Museum of Arte Útil" (2013-2014), where she co-curated the public program with Alessandra Saviotti. Together they co-curated "Broadcasting the archive" (2016-2018). She works with the Asociación de Arte Útil to facilitate and promote the use of the archive as a tool to open up our imagination and recover the meaning of possibility. She is a founder member of Axioma, Laboratorio de mediación artística (Canary Islands, ES). Her recent and current projects are In/Out: a possible map (Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno CAAM, Las Palmas, SP), and the toolkit/publication <<_ it shapes the hollow spaces_>> TAC (Eindhoven, NL). Both reflect on the role of art, art institutions, the very construction of History, and his modern narrative, encouraging the uses of art and communal sources of knowledge to generate counternarratives. She holds a PhD in Contemporary Art and Humanities (Universidad de La Laguna, SP), and she is a regular guest lecturer at iMAE, ArtEZ hogeschool voor de kunsten (Arnhem, NL).

John Byrne is a Reader in The Uses of Art at Liverpool John Moores University where he is also the Lab Leader of [The City Lab](#) which forms part of Liverpool School of Art and Design's Institute of Art and Technology). Byrne is also currently Researcher and Writer in Residence at [the Whitworth Art Gallery](#) where he is Lead Researcher and Research editor for the [Decentralising Political Economies Project/Platform](#) which he developed on behalf of The Whitworth Art Gallery in collaboration with the Association of Arte Útil and the City Lab. From 2008 Byrne worked closely with the Van Abbemuseum on the development of 'The Autonomy Project' and, in 2013, Byrne managed and co-ordinated Liverpool John Moores University's participation in the L'Internationale project 'The Uses of Art: The Legacy of 1848 and 1989'. In September 2015 Byrne took on the role of Co-ordinator for the L'Internationale 'Constituencies' Research Strand was lead editorial on the resulting L'Internationale publication 'The Constituent Museum: Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation' in 2018. In 2015 Byrne also became a Narrator/Curator of the L'Internationale 'Glossary of Common Knowledge' and, together with Zdenka Badovinca (Director of Moderna Galerija), co-curated a 'Constituencies' Glossary of Common Knowledge Seminar that was held in Liverpool at Liverpool John Moores University's School of Art and Design in 2016. As well as this, Byrne has been an active member of The Association of Arte Útil (AAU) since 2013 when he collaborated with The AAU, Grizedale Arts and Tate Liverpool to install and run a temporary 'Office of Useful Art' during Tate Liverpool's 'Art Turning Left' show in 2013/2014. Since then Byrne has also coordinated a series of pop up Offices of Useful Art at Liverpool School of Art and Design, The Granby 4 Streets area of Toxteth in Liverpool, and at the Florrie Institute in Liverpool. Via The City Lab, Byrne is committed to helping to growing and develop the Association of Arte Útil network as a worldwide constituency if artists, designers, activists, and makers who wish to explore ways in which we can use as art as a ground-up tool for imagining and making ourselves otherwise.

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1

A Grade II listed Victorian community arts and heritage venue, located in the Toxteth area of south Liverpool, which is an area of high density unemployment and long-term poverty: www.theflorrie.org

2

A 'creative arts and well-being recovery community project' based in Birkenhead – again an area of high unemployment and long-term poverty on the Mersey estuary directly opposite the city of Liverpool: www.spiderproject.org.uk

3

In the Gandhi's own words: "'Unto This Last", I translated it later into Gujarati entitling it 'Sarvodaya' (the welfare of all). I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life.' (The Gandhi Foundation 2009)

4

The Arte Util archive can be found at <http://arte-util.org/projects> [accessed 22.12.2020]

5

<http://museumarteutil.net/> [accessed September 22.12.2020]

6

<http://broadcastingthearchive.tumblr.com> [accessed 20.12.2020]

7

The criteria are listed on the web page of the Asociación de Arte Útil: <https://www.arte-util.org/about/colophon/> [accessed 20.12.2020]

8

'The Museum of Arte Util' was the first exhibition organised as part of 'The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989' a program developed by L'Internationale, a confederation of six European modern and contemporary art institutions and partners. <http://www.internationaleonline.org/confederation> [accessed 20.12.2020]

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<http://www.taniabruguera.com/arteconductaintro.html> [accessed 20.12.2020]

10

For more information about the Students' Debt in United States go to <https://debtcollective.org/> [accessed 20.12.2020]

11

'Evolving the archive: Arte Útil in the Bay Area' was a collaborative class conceived as a joint venture between YBCA, the Asociación de Arte Útil, and SFAl. It is conceived as a contribution to the exhibition 'Tania Bruguera: Talking to Power / Hablandole al Poder', which is organised by YBCA. It was co-taught by Fiona Hovenden, Lucía Sanromán and Alessandra Saviotti.

12

<http://www.sfai.edu/events-calendar/detail/opening-reception-evolving-office> [accessed 20.12.2020]

13

The same idea of 'rehearsing the future' is formulated by Thomas Binder in his essay included in the book published under the same title (Binder et al. 2010). In the introductory essay Binder considers performativity of co-creations in the context of design practices as an example of understanding usership as a condition situated between duty and rebellion. He argues that the process represents the tension between creating new conditions for socially engaged art and conditions of labour.

14

<http://theumbrella.nl/the-umbrella-network/> [accessed 20.12.2020]

15

<http://www.ddw.nl>, <https://www.dutchtechnologyweek.com/en> and <http://www.gloweindhoven.nl/nl/info/over-glow> [accessed 20.12.2020]

16

Following the municipal record of inhabitants dated in January 1st 2017. Web: https://eindhoven.incijfers.nl/jive/?report=fact_2_01 [accessed 20.12.2020].

17

See <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/werksalon/>, accessed September 17

18

<https://www.sfmoma.org/event-series/does-art-have-users/> [accessed 20.12.2020]