G.L.A.S. / GLASGOW LETTERS ON ARCHITECTURE AND SPACE /

G.L.A.S. was a workers cooperative of architects, designers, teachers and activists. Its objectives were to construct a theoretical and practical critique of the capitalist production and use of the built environment, and through design activity, graphic works, and writings to question and suggest alternatives to the dominant manner in which our built environments are put together. In short building and urban design is already a political event, the point is to change it’s politics. As a way of doing this G.L.A.S. consciously drew not just on the history of building but on the history of communes, avant-gardes and practical experiments in liberated labour and space, in brief the history of praxis. This included the classical revolutions of European history, but also looked to learn from the historic struggles of architects, construction workers and tenants to develop a socialised building economy. This inclusive agenda also embraced the concept of the ‘heterotopia’, the ‘temporary autonomous zone’, the “independent collective”, the smaller but politically profound attempts to carve in the interstices of capitalism embryonic forms of a new social space, whether it be a sit-in, a protest march, or a shabeen.

Some of these ideas were first explored by the founder members of the co-operative as post graduate students at the Department of Architecture, University of Strathclyde. Over a period of five years a number of attempts were made to develop a practice that sought to develop strategies for interventions and critical frameworks for thinking about them. Rather than the idea of the building representing the starting point of investigation, more generic socio-spatial themes such as the relationship between architecture, madness, war, and gender, were investigated as a basis for questioning the assumptions on which design decisions are normally made.

The effect that a small organisation like G.L.A.S. could have on some of the profound socio-spatial contradictions thrown up by the consequences of neo-libertarian economic regimes and the growing legitimation crisis of western democracies was of course strictly limited. Besides which there is a strong argument to suggest that as long as the production of the built environment is controlled by private capital, there is little chance that the uneven development of the built environment and the continued massive discrepancies in the resources that are deepening social and spatial divisions locally and globally will be arrested. This made it all the more important to find ways of making a critique in what appeared and still appears to be a dearth of imaginative political thinking in the popular press and media about how we might make better use of existing buildings and cities and of developing improved ways of making them. G.L.A.S.’ newspaper -glas-paper- was a contribution to that struggle. Our first page, the ‘Manifesto’, was a declaration of principles, a modest statement of intent. As in all little manifestos there is a mixture of romantic idealism and over inflated aspirations. In addition slogans are in many ways empty vessels, they say everything and nothing, it is after all the practice that counts.

This said, it seems important at an historical moment when there continues to be a strong ideological push to identify capitalist social relations as the natural form of human organisation to remember a different ideological agenda. In the same manner that the Anti-Capitalist Movement is taking on the institutional power of global finance capital, the idea that the construction of a giant specifically capitalist complex commodity is the only legitimate way of organising the built environment needed and still needs to be seriously challenged.

G.L.A.S. MANIFESTO:

G.L.A.S. is committed to fighting all manifestations of socio-spatial inequality, exploitation and deprivation
G.L.A.S. produces multi-media critical works and design ideas that promote a radical social and political rethinking of how we make and experience buildings and cities
G.L.A.S. is engaged in a critique of the capitalist production and use of the built environment
G.L.A.S. is committed to the dissemination of it’s ideas to as wide an audience as possible, exploring a broad range of communication techniques
G.L.A.S. aims to offer free advice and assistance to individuals and social groups engaged in struggles to transform their environment
G.L.A.S. is organised around the political principles of temporary existence and of collective self management and ownership of assets and ideas.
We adapted living rooms and studies of various members of the co-op; we used office space out of hours; and we occupied, transformed and re-configured spaces throughout the City of Glasgow and other cities and places within which we worked.

G.L.A.S. were: Allan Atlee, Judith Barber, Jason Bell, Gary Boyd, Jonathan Charley, Alistair Clements, Tony Dunworth, Ulrike Enslein, Florian Kossak, Carole Latham, Rosalie Menon, Alan Pert, Tatjana Schneider, Adrian Stewart with numerous others on a project to project basis.

Architects, designers, teachers and activists collaborating with artists, local residents, community groups, and the general public.

Set up with ex-students of the Department of Architecture at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, G.L.A.S. was a temporary co-operative organisation who published a quarterly newspaper, organised exhibitions and workshops in order to promote a radical rethinking of how we might challenge the capitalist built environment. G.L.A.S. consciously drew not just on the history of building but on the history of communes, avant gardes and practical experiments in liberated labour and space, in brief, the history of praxis. This included the classical revolutions of European history, but also looked to learn from the historic struggles of architects, construction workers and tenants to develop a socialised building economy - embracing the concept of the ‘heterotopia’, the ‘temporary autonomous zone’, the ‘independent collective’, and the smaller but politically profound attempts to carve in the interstices of capitalism embryonic forms of a new social space, whether it be a sit-in, a protest march, or a shabeen.
Each of these words represents a 'tactic' that G.L.A.S. employed in its critique of the contemporary built environment.

01 GATHER MANIPULATE AND TRANSFORM MEANING - this poster is part of a series that supported the local anti-motorway campaign group JAM74.

02 MARCH, DEMONSTRATE AND STAND FOR YOUR RIGHTS - allying with the Glasgow Govanhill protest group, G.L.A.S. fought against the closure of a local public bath and swimming pool, highlighting the problems with the rush towards privatisation of almost all our built assets whether through closure or PFI schemes.

03 QUESTION, INTERPRET AND LEARN FROM OTHERS - with a group of teenage boys and the help of local residents G.L.A.S established a temporary network in the London King’s Cross area to seek out, document and display useful information through signs and physical interventions.

04 TRAVEL, LOOK AND THINK TWICE - in 2004, G.L.A.S. travelled from Estonia to Slovenia to investigate the social and economic conditions shaping these countries and to explore alternative ways to experience place and history.

05 MEET, ORGANISE AND SHARE YOUR IDEAS - this chippie in the east end of Glasgow became a stockist of glaspaper.

06 DISMANTLE, DISRUPT, AND REMEMBER TO LAUGH - a spoof ad for a three-bedroom detached family home with security brick walls between adjoining properties, high level security fencing, thorny shrubs planted beneath fences to reduce access potential and bullet proof glazing on all windows.

07 WRITE, DRAW AND CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT - glaspaper 05/06 was a contribution to the debate of ‘war’. It tried to indicate ways in which we can understand or view the relationship between war and architecture.

08 PLAN, MAKE AND INTERVENE - glaspaper 07, ‘Unser Berlin / Our Berlin’, was produced in its entirety in Berlin. All of the featured stories, interviews, comments, and drawings were made during a 15-day period in September 2003 when G.L.A.S. established its office in the Aedes East Pavilion within the Hackesche Höfe.
Urban Cabaret

For two weeks at the end of September 2001 G.L.A.S. visited neighbourhoods, met community groups, distributed the first issue of glaspaper and tried to make a visual, social and political impact on the city of Glasgow. With ‘Urban Cabaret’, G.L.A.S. toured through peripheral and deprived areas as well as through the city centre and distributed 4000 glaspapers in this time; it was welcomed at a Gala day in Govanhill, and chased out of Possil by a group of teenagers.

For ‘Urban Cabaret’ G.L.A.S. had utilised a bright red Piaggio three wheeler van, the Ape, to act as a mobile exhibition device, carrying a set of twelve mis-used record boxes that contained newspapers, postcards, cushions and a sound machine. The boxes could create a news-stand, a group of seats, a message system or simply a spatial intervention. The Ape itself had four white translucent panels with lettering on the back, which could slide up to form a three dimensional sign board enhancing the visual impact of the small Ape. One of the panels showed a simplified map of Glasgow and was constantly updated with additional images of ‘Urban Cabaret’s’ journey through Glasgow.

The Ape was placed at strategic places like a local street corner, the entrance of a shopping mall or the centre of a little square make contact with as many people as possible. On some occasions, the Ape was just positioned in front of a building pointing a bright red arrow at the causes and consequences of inequality, repression and segregation within the city.

Doing all that, the Ape and ‘Urban Cabaret’ became a travelling display unit that would invite passers-by to engage about buildings and the use of them. Bringing the opportunity to discuss urban issues to the various communities around Glasgow rather than expecting people to come to a static ‘professional’ venue was crucial in our approach. As such ‘Urban Cabaret’ and G.L.A.S. promoted a radical socially progressive manner towards architecture and tried to offer a forgotten and long overdue antidote to the scarcity of ambition shown by those who normally claim to speak of the citizens’ behalf.

G.L.A.S. has been asked how the cabaret aspect came into ‘Urban Cabaret’. Traditionally a cabaret is a place which entertains an audience through various media and performances while they are being served with drinks and snacks at their seats and tables. But most of all it was the context that produced the cabaret. A group of strangers with a funny red vehicle standing at a corner in Possil, Pollok or Parkhead, serving tea and distributing a newspaper with no football page or a page three stunner, discussing capitalist contradictions in front of a private shopping centre, playing reggae music was cabaresque in itself.

The response on the street proved that there are many individuals and groups who do care about their built environment, looking for political and architectural alternatives but sense that they and their needs are marginalised in the current communication channels both within the architectural profession and in the so-called public arena of galleries and exhibitions.
The stories presented in this edition were related to G.L.A.S. by individuals and groups who visited our newsroom and met us throughout the city and by the city itself.

Many of the stories that have emerged during this time will resonate with readers in Scotland. Closures and cuts forced upon local communities have much the same consequence in a Berlin or a Glasgow housing estate. Local institutions which are treasured by the communities they serve are often disregarded by central authorities and omitted from official portraits of the city. The collective memory is a battleground where ideologies clash. Many of these issues are amplified in the charged atmosphere of Berlin, but can be found in any city, any community.

This portrait can only be understood as a product of the time in which it was constructed. Had G.L.A.S. been here in the spring, the winter, last year or next the story might have been very different.

‘Unser Berlin/Our Berlin’ was supported by Aedes East, British Council Berlin, Dominik Bröllos, Hans-Jürgen Commerell, Christiane Droste, Kristin Feireiss, Sören Hanft, Thomas Knorr-Siedow, Franziska Meisel, Hans C. Müller, Isolede Nagel, Florian Nolte, Jan Rave, Attila Saigel, Scheinschlag, Rolf Teloh, The Lighthouse, Tilman Weitz, Caroline Wolf and by many other individuals and organisations.
On the Edge

On the Edge was conceived in May 2004 when ten new member states joined the European Union (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus). Like Scotland, these countries exist on the geographic periphery of the EU. ‘On the Edge’ records aspects of GLAS’s critical journey through 8 of these 10 new member states.

Political, cultural and historic mechanisms shape our built environment and everyday lives. G.L.A.S. travelled by train from Estonia to Slovenia to investigate the social and economic conditions shaping these countries and to explore alternative ways to experience place and history.

G.L.A.S. devised four specific tasks (‘Photo Reporter’, ‘Treasure Hunt’, ‘Get On The Bus’, and ‘Passport Control’) to explore each city and gain impressions within a short time frame. These tasks established alternative criteria for looking at places and challenged the ‘official’ histories and cultures that are relentlessly represented on conventional tourist trails.

G.L.A.S. used the tasks to observe, follow, encounter and record each city; its urban structures, infrastructures, social relations and rituals. It is hoped that these might be used as a template for students, teachers and individuals to construct similar critical journeys.

The outcome of the ‘Photo Reporter’ task has been compiled into a large fold-out poster to form a Polaroid matrix of places and activities: the architecture of the everyday.

Information gathered during the remaining tasks is presented as a series of critical writings and graphics to encompass pertinent issues affecting the countries visited.

On the Edge presents shifting European boundaries in their wider historical context. The new eastern European ‘Edge’ has been reviewed from Moscow. Readily accessible European state capitals are shown to be wide open for capitalist invasion. The recent concentration of wealth has been limited to tourist trails, business districts, UNESCO heritage centres and huge, out of town shopping malls.

The erosion of existing public services and the decline in locally controlled commerce are an inevitable progression.

G.L.A.S. believes this to be a step in the wrong direction.

G.L.A.S. was supported before, during and after ‘On the Edge’ by The Lighthouse, Levente Polyak in Budapest (www.kek.org.hu), Karina Kreja in Warsaw, Ondrej Chrobak of Display Gallery in Prague, Ivan Stanic and Maja Simoneti in Ljubljana (www.trajekt.org), Barbara Colicnik, Egbert Kossak, John Davies, Jan Timmermann, Holger Schwarz and many others whom we’ve met during our trip.
l’atelier d’architecture autogérée est une plateforme collective de recherche et d’action autour des mutations urbaines et des pratiques culturelles, sociales et politiques émergentes de la ville contemporaine. AAA fonctionne à travers un réseau inter- et extra-disciplinaire ouvert à de multiples points de vue: architectes, artistes, étudiants, chercheurs, retraités, politiques, chômeurs, militantes, habitants et tous usagers concernés. Nous proposons des «tactiques urbaines» pour accompagner les micro-processus locaux dans les milieux urbains où les décisions sont prises au nom d’intérêts économiques privés et de mécanismes politiques centralisés inadaptés aux mobilités territoriales actuelles: transnationales, informelles, multiculturelles… Nous explorons la réappropriation des espaces urbains délaissés et la création de nouvelles formes d’urbanité par des aménagements réversibles, des pratiques du quotidien, par l’implication des habitants et des usagers en tant que porteurs de différents savoirs faire. Plus accessibles, ces espaces conservent un potentiel d’expérimentation urbaine et d’exploration à rebours de l’accroissement de l’efficience, de la densité et du contrôle. En valorisant la position d’habitant et d’usager comme condition politique nous développons ensemble des outils d’appropriation symbolique des espaces de proximité et nous renforçons le pouvoir de décision et d’action des acteurs de terrain dans la ville. L’architecture autogérée provoque des agencements de personnes, de désirs, de manières de faire… Une telle architecture ne correspond pas à une pratique libérale, ne passe pas par des contrats bâti après bâti; elle s’inscrit dans de nouvelles formes d’association et de collaboration, basées sur des échanges et des réciprocités tant avec les habitants qu’avec les institutions intéressées. Notre architecture est à la fois politique et poétique car elle est d’abord une «mise en relation entre des mondes».

studio of self-managed architecture (aaa) is a collective platform, which conducts actions and research concerning urban mutations and cultural, social and political emerging practices in the contemporary city. The interdisciplinary network was function with architects, artists, students, researchers, unemployed persons, activists and residents. We develop «urban tactics» to accompany micro-processes and enable rifts within the standardised urban contexts, which are regulated by private economic interests or centralised policies. These policies are incompatible with the global, informal and multicultural mobilities that characterise the present-day metropolis. We encourage the re-appropriation of derelict spaces and the creation of new forms of urbanity by local residents through reversible designs and lived everyday practices, which make use of their skills and knowledge. These spaces conserve a potential of accessibility and experimentation by resisting the increasing control of the urban context. We valorise the position of the resident/user as political condition and develop tools cooperatively to re-territorialise their spaces of proximity and empower their decisions and actions within the city. A ‘self-managed architecture’ provokes assemblages and networks of individuals, desires and different manners of making. Such an architecture does not correspond to a liberal practice but asks for new forms of association and collaboration, based on exchange and reciprocity. Our architecture is simultaneously political and poetic as it aims above all to ‘create relationships between worlds’.

diffused creativity
eco-urbanity
everyday life uses
gardening assemblages
interstitial practices
local know-hows
micro-politics of desire
precarious competence
self-managed spaces
temporary and mobile urban devices
translocal networks
urban recycling
participative architecture
La Chapelle area, North of Paris

First working places included the flat of the two founder members, different cafés and offices of local organisations. In a second time, we have moved temporarily in an industrial building that was demolished, and after two more years, we have moved again into a loft located in an office building to be demolished.

La Chapelle is one of the most cosmopolite and poor areas in Paris. It is an area currently facing a massive urban transformation. Main problems are: drug addiction, unemployment, the lock of cultural infrastructure, the isolation from the other areas and the great number of wastelands. The last is at the same time a problem and, from our point of view, a chance.

For the first four years, the working space coasted very little, almost nothing. Currently we pay 5 €/m² per month.

We have started with a 45 m² flat, have moved into a 3000 m² industrial space and have moved again into a 120 m² loft.

We have always shared space: in the beginning with artists and the ECObx’s users, now with collaborators and artists in residence.

We moved twice - always in the same area.

The users of spaces that we have initiated, students, internees, researchers and numerous friends.

CE, DPVI, Préfecture, Région Ile de France, DRAC, DAVID, DAC, FASILD, Mairie du XVIIIème, Mairie du XXème, Fondation de France.

The practice has started with a couple of architects-inhabitants and a number of students. During the second year, other artists, activists, researchers, film makers and a whole neighbourhood network have joined in. This network included families, shopkeepers, retired people, unemployed people, artisans, executives, students, social workers, artists, etc. Currently the core group is formed by architects, students, filmmakers, artists and researchers.

Currently the team varies between three and 10 part time workers, including one full time employed and few volunteers.

We have developed our practice in an area which faces a major top-down transformation. In this context, most of the residents are directly or indirectly excluded from the decision making process. We try to create the conditions for residents to claim space for collective management.
Les outils développés par aaa incluent des réseaux trans-locaux, des processus catalyseurs, des architectures nomades, des «agencements jardiniers», des espaces autogérés, des plates-formes de production culturelle, ...visibilité locale.

Tools developed by aaa include among others trans-local networks, catalyst processes, nomad architectures, ‘gardening assemblages’, self-managed spaces and platforms for cultural production, ...local visibility.
La Chapelle est un quartier enclavé au Nord de Paris, en manque d’espaces publics et d’équipements de proximité, ayant en même temps un grand potentiel foncier constitué par le grand nombre de terrains en friches et d’immeubles vétustes présents dans le quartier. C’est aussi un quartier populaire habité par des populations d’origines diverses.

Notre projet de «réseau d’éco-urbanité» vise l’appropriation par les habitants des délaissés urbains et leur mise en réseau en tant qu’espaces autogérés. ECObox, le pôle fédérateur du réseau d’éco-urbanité a commencé à fonctionner en 2002. Cette démarche initiée par aaa est portée actuellement par un réseau «trans-local» incluant habitants, architectes, artistes, enseignants, activistes, chercheurs, étudiants, etc.

ECObox fonctionne à la fois comme un lieu de jardinage, de croisement social et culturel, comme un équipement flexible et de préfiguration d’usages à venir, comme un «générateur urbain». Il est équipé d’un plateau démontable et transportable de jardins partagés (construit avec des matériaux recyclés) et d’une série de modules mobiles (cuisine urbaine, établi outils, bibliomobile, média-lab...). Ces micro-dispositifs peuvent être installés temporairement dans différents espaces du quartier, créant des situations de rencontre et pouvant servir comme support aux différents projets portés par les habitants et le réseau de collaborateurs. Ces installations mobiles permettent une diversité de «tactiques» pour le détournement d’un quotidien régulé par des modèles de vie stéréotypés et des réflexes sécuritaires.

ECObox organise des ateliers de production culturelle trans-locale et des événements périodiques: un laboratoire d’urbanisme participatif, des productions de films avec débats, des cuisines et repas croisés, des ateliers média recyclés etc. Il s’agit ainsi de créer des passages réciproques entre une échelle de proximité et des échelles plus larges. Le jardin ECObox a démontré sa capacité de mobilité et la durabilité de son infrastructure humaine lors d’un premier déménagement et une reconfiguration sur un nouveau site.

eco-urban network / ECObox
We have initiated a series of self-managed projects in the La Chapelle area of northern Paris by encouraging residents to get access to and critically transform temporary misused or underused spaces. This strategy valorises a flexible and reversible use of space and aims to preserve urban ‘biodiversity’ by encouraging the co-existence of a wide range of life-styles and living practices. We began this process by establishing a temporary garden constructed out of recycled materials. The garden, called ECObox, has been progressively extended into a platform for urban criticism and creativity, which is curated by the aaa members, residents and external collaborators and which catalyses activities at a local and trans-local level.

The progressive construction of the ECObox garden between 2002-2004 in the yard of Halle Pajol, in La Chapelle area. Dismantling, displacing and temporary reinstallation on another vacant plot in the same area in 2005.
La parcelle du 56 -ancien passage dans le centre du quartier Saint Blaise, fermé suite à la construction d'un nouveau bâtiment- est considérée inconstruc-
tible, car bordée de nombreuses fenêtres, et laissée à l'abandon. En 2005, la DPPI propose à aaa d'ex-
plorer les potentialités d'usage de cet espace très visible et qui intrigue… Après quelques mois d’ar-
pentage et de multiples contacts avec des acteurs locaux, aaa propose un projet élaboré sur la base des désirs récoltés, et qui devrait évoluer par la suite avec les futurs usagers du lieu. Un réseau de partenaires se tisse -parmi eux l’APIJ, une associa-
tion spécialisée dans l’éco-construction. L’usage du terrain -d’abord libre, puis équipé par deux modules mobiles- n’est pas interrompu pendant les travaux; au contraire, les réunions de chantier -comme dispo-
sif du projet- sont l’occasion d’échanges sur des questions écologiques que le projet explore. Des interventions ponctuelles donnent lieu à des chantiers «parallèles» pour la construction d’une serre mobile, de «murs de voisinage», des parcelles… Fin 2007, une trentaine de personnes ont les clés de l’es-
pace et l’utilisent périodiquement pour du jardinage, des spectacles, expositions, débats, fêtes, ateliers, projections, concerts, séminaires… D’autres projets d’usage d’aménagement continuent à émerger .

The project 56, explores the possibilities of an urban interstice to be transformed into a collectively self-managed space. This project has engaged an unusual partnership between local government struc-
tures, local organisations, inhabitants of the area and a professional association which run training programmes in eco-construction. The management of the project gives space and time to construction, the construction site becoming itself a social and cultural act. Together with the construction of the physical space, different social and cultural networks and relationships between the users and the actors involved are emerging. The project has an important take on the notion of proximity and active borders. Neighbourhood walls transform the boundaries of the site into interactive devices, which rather than sepa-
rating, multiply exchange and connections. Another strong take is on the ecological aspect: energetic autonomy, recycling, minimal ecological footprint, compost laboratory.

a magazine for everyday urbanism
During a participative workshop in Bremen, northern Germany, ‘unemployed’ people edited and published a magazine of critical urbanism. The project was a critical take on ‘employment’ and ‘creativity’ as they are understood within the neo-liberal concept of the ‘creative city’. The workshop took place within the framework of the ‘A Lucky Strike’ exhibition organised by the Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst GAK-Bremen, September-October 2005.

Au contact de la ville nous sommes interloqués par l’immense projet d’‘urbanisme financier’ échoué et, parallèlement, par le taux de chômage de 20% / malgré un système informatique rigide, nous arrivons à officialiser une annonce d’emploi à la recherche d’«activistes créatifs» pour la constitution d’un groupe de rédaction d’un «journal d’urbanisme du quotidien» / 12 personnes sont intéressés par le projet et se presentent à l’entretien d’embauche / rédaction d’un premier numéro par aaa et la nouvelle équipe de rédaction / le deuxième numéro est édité par l’équipe de Bremen de manière autonome /
Blok / Local Base for Culture Refreshment

Blok - Local base for culture refreshment is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation that produces and organises innovative artistic events, works on widening and changing public spaces through inspiring citizen participation, hybrid artistic research projects (focused on rethinking social phenomena) and urban structure. Blok works on creating and preserving a continuum of artistic effect in public space.

Projects:
Urban Festival is a multimedia project consisting of street theatre, performances, art instalations, and urban interventions of performing and visual artists. The project is based on the concept of art as a component of a society that tries to actively communicate with its urban population.

www.urbanfestival.hr

Operation: City is a project that was realised in 2005 in collaboration with Platforma 9.81, an organisation for research in architecture. During 10 days the temporary colonisation of a former industrial complex -Badel and Gorica- involved a series of innovative cultural programs (the central event hosted 26 organisations and initiatives from the independent cultural scene) and the development of a new organisational model for a new type of cultural institution. Given the local cultural and political circumstances, the project had a strong impact in raising the visibility of independent production, reaching the wider public and advocating the needs of the cultural sector. A new temporary cultural zone and gathering place for young people of Zagreb was created. 14 000 people visited 8,000 m² of exterior and 5,200 m² of interior abandoned space, occupied by culture.

www.operacijagrad.org

Recollecting the city - Recollecting the time is an ongoing research project. Through public actions (open offices) citizens are invited to contribute their memories and documents to a new archive that will record the history of the city spaces -from demonstrations to artistic actions. The goal is to create a specific database that will help to create alternative histories of Zagreb since 1945 to the present day.

www.operacijagrad.org

[Recollecting the city - Recollecting the time]

Zagreb / since 2001 / Status NGO / www.urbanfestival.hr
The office is located in the centre of Zagreb, on Bosanska 15.

A rented room on the ground floor of a private house. There is a glass facade (as shop window) but no direct access to the street (unfortunately, since such a public display could well be used for different interventions). We are separated from the street by a small garden and a wall.

2 people: full time and partly voluntary

Curators, cultural activists, artists, students (mostly humanities students), architects, citizens...

16 m² (+ a small bathroom, + part of the cellar used for storage)

200 € per month (including all costs)

Before renting this small office (4 months ago) we were working in net.culture club mama (led by Multimedia Institute – a NGO gathering of civil activists, media practitioners, independent cultural actors and social and media theorists). We have also been ‘parasites’ at the DJ desk (using it as a desk). We still use their hall for lectures, presentations, and larger extensive meetings.

We have moved 4 times. At the very beginning we were working from a private apartment (2), then we moved to mama, and now to this new office.

Our partnerships range from working with organisations from the independent cultural scene in Zagreb to local informal citizens’ initiatives.

The Croatian Ministry of Culture, the Zagreb City Council for Culture, foreign cultural institutes (the Goethe-Institut, the Dutch Embassy…), the National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society.

All our projects, based in Zagreb, focus on local problems and specific issues, while involving international artists as well as lecturers. By focusing on local specifics, we open up certain types of discourses, addressing broader socio economical, political and cultural questions.

We are members of platform Zagreb -Cultural Kapital of Europe 3000- a group that draws together 6 local organisations committed to addressing: changes in the social conditions of cultural production; developing the structural position of independent culture, and questioning the dominant regimes of representing culture.

We also belong to the network Clubture - a national network committed to strengthening exchange and collaboration within Croatia’s independent cultural scene. In developing our projects or in producing artistic works we establish temporary platforms that include local actors (artistic or cultural organisations, informal initiatives, activists, citizens, individuals).
tools / methods / forms of work
- artistic interventions in the framework of Urban Festival
- extension and reanimation of public space through encouraging citizens’ participation
- long-term research artistic projects
- building temporary platforms
- developing transversal tools and structures for cultural action

theoretical and practical approaches
Our starting point was an observation: that institutions like theatres, museums and galleries are neither adequate nor relevant as sites for the presentation of contemporary art, that art today actually needs to be presented outside of these generic spaces. For the artist doesn't withdraw into an 'ivory tower' in order to create and produce and then, afterwards ‘return’ to show to the world the finished work; contemporary art practices are now deeply intertwined with activist and political action. Aiming to problematise local specifics, we regularly host artists-in-research residencies. Besides providing them with guided tours, materials and literature on topics they are interested in, we also arrange meetings with local actors: NGOs, citizens’ initiatives, experts etc. It is of great importance for us to involve locals in the production process as much as in performance and representation. This is not just because of language barrier or some specific local knowledge. What is more important in this case is: to impregnate social capital as well.

What could be a form of local specificity, particularity, peculiarity, is actually a pretty tight network of social connections (which is, unfortunately, being weakened in the neo-liberal system that recognises only individuals or market groups). Therefore, the works are produced upon existing social capital, always in collaboration with local groups (NGOs, informal initiatives, neighborhoods etc). In doing so, these works are, on the one hand, necessarily imbued with the ‘imprint/aura’ of local context imprinted into living urban tissue, becoming more complex. On the other hand (and much more importantly), these works encourage and support local -if only to help them gain visibility, sometimes internationally, but more significantly, enabling artists to transfer good practices and artistic tactics. Thus, transversal tools are being developed and transversal structures established for cultural action.

We do not want to control the process, but rather enable a process and try to find strategies that avoid representation and other commodified structures.

Having chosen to step out of the framework of traditional art institutions, choosing instead urban open spaces as the strategic sites for addressing broader socio-economical, political and cultural questions, necessarily brings us to the question of public space. The answers are to be found in political theory: for public space isn’t just a physical space, a mere location, it is primarily a political space. The public comes into existence only and always anew in the moment of conflict and dispute. Where there is conflict, or more precisely antagonism, there is the public. Where it disappears, the public disappears with it.

The idea of a city that exists independently of the objects and practices that it contains, as a space that regulates our everyday life, the idea of a city as a direct expression of power and the brute interest of capital, is being replaced by a political view of the city: as a space that is being produced by its citizens over and over again.
UrbanFestival is an international festival of art in public spaces (or Public Art) with seven years of artistic activity and presence on the cultural map of Zagreb. The festival affirms contemporary art practices; through specific topics, but also through specific organizational forms, it aims to extend and reanimate public space encouraging citizens’ participation, as well as hybrid artistic-research projects that reconsider urban structure and social phenomena. The programme is usually carried out in public city spaces – with the intention of broadening the territory of action from the protective walls of galleries and theatres, as well as animating public spaces as spaces of both co-existence, of confrontation of different views, and possible antagonisms. The starting point for the UrbanFestival was an observation: that institutions like theatres, museums and galleries are neither adequate nor relevant as sites for the presentation of contemporary art, that art today actually needs to be presented outside of these generic spaces. For the artist doesn’t withdraw into an ‘ivory tower’ in order to create and produce, and then, afterwards ‘return’ to show to the world the finished work; contemporary art practices are now deeply intertwined with activist and political action. The selected works address the problems and specifics of urban life, provoking citizens to think about their everyday lives and including them in the realisation of a work – the spectators are by no means passive consumers of a cultural programme, but active participant and co-authors of the projects. Having chosen to step out of the framework of traditional art institutions, choosing instead urban open spaces as the strategic sites for addressing broader socio-economical, political and cultural questions, necessarily brings us to the question of public space. The answers are to be found in political theory: for public space isn’t just a physical space, a mere location, it is primarily a political space. The public comes into existence only – and always anew – in the moment of conflict and dispute. Where there is conflict, or more precisely antagonism, there is the public. Where it disappears, the public disappears with it. Politics of Space, the title of the last year’s issue, could unsettle ‘sedimentary’ notions and opinions.

In appearance and in name UrbanFestival may not seem to differ from the typical festival, at least at first sight, but the difference here is in the pre-production of the festival and festivity, as a place of ‘collectiveness’, an attempt to reappropriate the very notion of the festival and festivity, as a place of ‘collectiveness’, collective participation, a place of community revival. The name itself – UrbanFestival – probably evokes associations and meanings related to representational culture or to artistic camouflage of certain social and economic processes under the guise of so-called ‘regeneration’. But UrbanFestival is, in fact, an attempt to reappropriate the very notion of the festival and festivity, as a place of ‘collectiveness’, collective participation, a place of community revival. In appearance and in name UrbanFestival may not seem to differ from the typical festival, at least at first sight, but the difference here is in the pre-production of the festival, that is long and invisible. To sum up: our approach to art, as well as to festival as an organisational form, does not primarily aim to demonstrate and conclude, but rather to experiment, question, and unsettle ‘sedimentary’ notions and opinions.
**RoToR**

RoToR is not us, nor is it what we are doing. It is a mechanism of constantly evolving in relationships that we are creating. RoToR is the heart of an engine – it produces the movement and provides the action. Once RoToR was set in motion by Vahida Ramujkic and Laia Sadurní, in Barcelona 2001 it introduced different agents, factors and components, constantly mutating its functions and appearances.

By direct, not by mediated action, using our own body as a principal tool and immediate surroundings as surface, RoToR is basing its method in personal experience and the processing of raw materials as a way of transforming itself and its surrounding initiating evolutional processes, opening corridors and ties for the circulation of ideas. RoToR is neverending, instead it opens up connections, constructing bridges, between the inner and outer, personal and collective along the slow itinerary through the fundamental environments: Land, Water and Air. Though dispersed across different locations, agents are fed by and connected to RoToR functions via independent but interconnected functions and explorations in a dislocated way: Local and personal experiences within unknown, abandoned, transitional territories show up as the neutral common ground, a form of support in which new codes are established to be exchanged and shared. The final aim is not dependent on concrete results, but is a sum of intentions that by itself defines the form and process of transforming itself and its surrounding inciting evolutional transgression:

**1st phase: TERRAE / The great adventure has begun**

ENTERING UNKNOWN LANDS / PROSPECTING ALONG THE ROUTES OF THE TERRAIN: strolls, routes, explorations, adventures, safaris, tracking short cuts, obstacles, construction of temporary structures

THE BODY IN MOVEMENT TRACING THE EXPLORED SPACE: jumping, ascending, climbing up, climbing down, balancing, descending temporary guides to zones undergoing transformation

DRAWING MAPS AS REFERENCE TO ORIENTATION: signaling 1:1, graffiti, GPSmanual, audio guides

CREATION OF NEW SIGNS AND ALPHABETS: zone typology based on personal experience - shared, composed dictionaries

FROM THE INDIVIDUAL => TOWARDS THE COLLECTIVE: personal experience - collective events

(PobleNOW, Sculpture Olympiad, GPSm, Singing the street...)

After six years of joint experience, RoToR is celebrating its 1st rotation reviewing its practices an methodologies of everyday struggle within three phases of its evolutionary transgression:

**2nd phase: WATER / Pirates on the board!**

APPROACHING THE LIMITS - CROSSING THE BORDER: Water - an environment inhospitable to humans

SHARED AMBITIONS - CONSTRUCTION OF AN ARTIFACT: joint action as a motor of group formation

FORMING A GROUP - CREW / Tripulación Pionera - COOPERATION / COORDINATION

MANUAL FOR RAFT CONSTRUCTION IN URBAN AREAS: standardized material of urban development / "Geopatographic" map, exotic routes / FLOATING + PROPULSION

rowing, sail + DIRECTION rudder + SURVIVAL life vests = NAVIGATION tests: Zürich (lake), Bristol (river)

PUTTING TOGETHER THE FLOTILLA:

The Big Disembarkment, Invasion of the Forum, Pirates - Paterem

TRANSFORMATION: OBSTACLE => ACCESS: using street barriers as principal material for raft construction / recycling

(Turn the barrier)

**3rd phase: AIRE / Let’s take the air**

BUILDING NEW LAYER IN URBAN HEIGHTS: aerial routes connecting different roofs via constructed connections: bridges and ladders / gardening, sustainable energies / construction of the physical and social platform on the superior level - utopia?

TRANSMISSION - LARGE DISTANCE CONNECTION: frequencies - communication medium - control - access; antennas WiFi, radio, TV, Internet...

TEMPORARY AUTONOMY - SELF-ORGANISED EVENTS: aerial encounters / journeys of AirAutonomy

CROSSING INFORMATION - MATCHING HOSTS AND AUTONOMOUS GROUPS: mediating in construction of the creative situation

DISPERSSION OF THE GROUP - FLEXIBLE STRUCTURES:

(AAA, AIT-TerraTo, Telechronicas...)

creation of situations

body_interface

orientative-exploration

raw material-processing

trespassing limits

practical experience
Terrains of exploration: urban areas undergoing transformation, wastelands, non-functioning industrial quarters, frontier areas.

Logistics and administration: neighbourhood community centres, museums, artist residences…

Service, promotion and information: different street spots.

Raft construction: summer studio on the beach, winter studio in the Old Hospital’s Chapel and storage room in Maritime Museum.

Testing sites: rivers, lakes and the seaside.

Building a new urban layer ‘overground’: roof surfaces, public, private and communitarian.

LAND, WATER and AIR

From 2 to ∞ - working when feels so

Kind, friendly, funny, courageous, independent…

When available

Exchange agreement depending on the particular situation

With inhabitants and workers

Permanently

Individuals and groups forming a network

Initially self-funded / in development – experimenting with different kinds of private and public funds

Instinctual
ROTOR / PROJECT OLPΜΠΙΑΔΑ ΕΣΚΟΥΛΤΟΡΙΚΑ / SCULPTURE OLYMPICS

SITE: Barcelona (different neighbourhoods) / TIMING: July 2002 / FUNDS: Fundación 30km (book publication)
ROTTER / PROJEKT LOI...LOI...LOISIR!

SITE: Bruxelles / TIMING: August 2004 / PARTNERSHIP: Within the residency program in arrangement of CityMine(d) during the Plein Open Air Festival / FUNDS: Fundacion 30km (book publication)
The structures in the air are diffuse and unstable
- The particles organise and interconnected themselves in flexible order – a cloud.
The construction of a physical and social layer in the urban heights - the ultimate cover of constructions built and inhabited by human.
Living utopia is already truth.

This is an activation of urban territory on another level, this time in the heights, followed by the generation of another layer of social organization, independent and parallel to the ‘ground floor’, where pre-established conventions and laws rule. In the same sense that underground once was related to the ‘ground’, now ‘over-ground’ could become its new less dark alternative. The Festival of Air Autonomy was an experiment in organizing a self-managed one week festival on the roofs of Ciutat Vella (Barcelona).
Through e-mail - communication people were invited to take an active part in festival by opening their roof spaces for hosting events or preparing and organizing the activities and workshops.

During the preparation of the festival three principal directions of actuation were defined:
- **Av**: vertical connection - creating a rod // working with the neighboring community in the building, exploring the possibilities for collective use of roof surfaces // roof gardens, sustainable energy, etc.
- **Ah**: horizontal connection - opening a landscape // connecting adjacent roofs, getting neighbouring communities together, discussing the problems of security and control, moving or jumping the fences, constructing ladders and bridges.
- **At**: transversal connection - long distance connections // Includes various kind of long distance connections that could be established in air medium: internet, TV, radios, etc. creating a network on global level.