

Never Again

Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries and Internationalism After the End of Globalization

Never Again was an interdisciplinary conference of two parts - Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries on October 24th, 2019, and Internationalism After the End of Globalization on October 25th and 26th, 2019. This event took its name from the concurrent exhibition Never Again: Art against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21st Centuries, which was organised in cooperation within the EU programme Our Many Europes and L'internationale coalition of European museums, to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. Both exhibition and conference took place at Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art and both were part of the Anti-Fascist Year.

The Anti-Fascist Year is an emergent programme of cultural activity launched on February 1st, 2019, lead by a group of Polish comrades with a growing concern: the resurgence of right-wing populism. The methods of the Anti-Fascist Year are pragmatic and protean; the group's call to arms entails rethinking what fascism is as it mutates to confuse and deceive, then mobilising against it. These activities are documented at rokantyfaszystowski.org.

In what follows participants and organisers offer an account of Never Again and the projects that grew from it. The first two days of this event hosted conference papers from European museum directors, academics, and practice-based researchers. The third day manifested in an assembly of participatory working groups that brought together cultural producers from across Europe to propose, develop, and network practical forms of resistance.

The polyphonic composition of this report stands to acknowledge the range of voices and perspectives that made Never Again a wellspring of new learning and emergent solidarities as it bridged knowledge of fascism, past, and present. Our interest in publishing this document lies in our desire to promote international networks of resistance against complex forms of oppression. We, the editors, are committed to collective care and institutional organisation as cultural expressions of hope. Writing the report's introduction on Winter Solstice 2019, we are reminded that the darker the days, the more crucial it becomes to make hope a political project.

We offer thanks to the Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art for its generous hospitality and to everyone who supported and attended Never Again and contributed to this report.

Never Again: Art Against War and Fascism in the 20th and 21 Centuries
by ZOFIA CZARTORYSKA

The first day of Never Again was directly connected to the exhibition by the same title at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Two academic sessions represented new scholarship related to anti-fascist artistic manifestations in the pre- and post-WWII period, while contemporary art and its political context was discussed by the directors of seven European museums from the L'Internationale confederation (www.internationaleonline.org). These talks highlighted how relevant the strategies adopted by anti-fascist artists of the past are today, in the face of rising nationalism and the brutalisation of the public sphere.

Jenny Nachtigall's remarks on the relationship of early twentieth-century Berlin Dada to the mass culture of the time, introduced insights into the question of the mainstreaming of the anti-fascist cause today. Agata Pietrasik pointed to the serious status even a frivolous work of art can acquire in an extreme, authoritarian context. The political ambiguity of antifascism in the communist Eastern Bloc (which weighs heavily on the perception of anti-fascism in the region today) was reflected in presentations by David Crowley, Dorota Jarecka, Piotr Słodkowski, and Justyna Balisz-Schmelz.

The discussion of the museum directors on the role of art institutions at this time of extreme political polarisation linked the question of the cultural heritage of the left with that of the current need for solidarity. A common view among the participants was that the traditional authority of the museum to impose narrations should be replaced by the "structures of the commons" (Manuel Borja-Villel). Zdenka Badovinac analysed "the end of the society of solidarity" in the 90s as something to be reversed, possibly by a more "affective relationship with the public" (Joanna Mytkowska) or by turning museums into shelters from "zombie capitalism" (Charles Esche). While not denying the "culture of narcissism",

we live in (Meriç Öner), Bart de Baere underlined the need to relinquish control and “allow contamination” of the sterile museum space.

The first part of the Never Again conference revealed the untold histories of the anti-fascist art that needs to be further investigated but also popularised and made relevant in our contemporary context. For the participants it was clear that at a time when fetishising the past and rewriting history in a nationalist, simplified and exclusive manner are powerful tools of populist politics, building an audible counter narrative becomes one of the key tasks for academics and progressive art museums alike.



Day One

Internationalism After the End of Globalization by KUBA SZREDER

We, the curators, invited a group of speakers to trigger collective discussions and update each other and the audience on the recent developments in both the theory and praxis of antiauthoritarian struggles in art and activism. Debate was embedded in the context of Warsaw and more broadly of Europe and its peripheries.

The presentations by members of the Anti-Fascist Year and Zuzanna Hertzberg, an activist working within the Anti-Fascist Coalition, conveyed the complicated politics of today's Poland. Worryingly, similar stories were told about other European countries. We heard about refugees evicted from squats in Greece, the struggles of ecological activism in Venice, and the complex politics of popular fronts that emerged in the aftermath of the Gezi Park uprising in Turkey. Keep it Complex shared their experiences of feminist anti-Brexit activism, while Why, How & For Whom reported on struggles against erasing leftist histories waged in Zagreb. Tomislav Medak and Ana Teixeira Pinto scrutinised the connections between alt-right, fascism, and technocapitalism. Joanna Bednarek moved from deconstructing the prose of H.P. Lovecraft to analysing the politics of fear underpinning resurgent fascism. Yaiza Hernández Velázquez criticised the Western

colonialism and pseudo-universalism that motivates nationalist violence and Charles Esche spoke about complex entanglements of Western modernity, and whether the same critique applies in the countries of Eastern Europe.

The conference was an opportunity to search for ways to counter resurgent fascisms and challenge the forces of technocapital that encroach on democratic politics and daily life. In this vein, Angela Dimitrakaki called for a new, anti-nationalist alliance of feminist proletarians, while the comrades from Plan C advocated Acid Communism, which mobilises techniques of consciousness raising to rekindle leftist politics.

The delegates managed to bridge theory and praxis, art and activism, and link their struggles. Seemingly abstract discussions about art institutions proved their merit when we had to formulate a response to the alt-right takeover of one of the major art centres in Warsaw the following day.

Day Two

Internationalism After the End of Globalization by MARSHA BRADFIELD

This public assembly offered time, space, and a self-organised structure to support attendees in working together. This was an opportunity to hatch and progress practices of resistance related to overlapping concerns, specifically: the current crisis of capitalism; fascist revival; climate catastrophe; attacks on democracy, public institutions and on radical social practice.

As the assembly's facilitator, I focused on creating common ground by holding a space where diverse voices could be expressed and heard. This unfolded through a tripartite structure: the sharing of pitches from individuals or collectives who wished to propose a working group (collected through open call); two and a half hours of working group sessions; and finally, a plenary.

PROPOSALS FOR WORKING GROUPS

Szabolcs KissPál pitched Propaganda Train, which took its cue from the brightly painted agri-trains that chugged across the Soviet countryside in 1918. This current iteration will provide a space for cultivating radical imagination and producing counter-narratives to prevailing right-wing propaganda (report below). The next contribution was more an opportunity to raise awareness about the fatal protests in Santiago in resistance to Chile's oppressive status quo, with Sara Buraya and Jesus Carrillo reading aloud a declaration by Red Conceptualismos del Sur (redcsur.net/en/2019/10/25/outbreak/). Next, Quinsy Gario proposed using Caribbean resourcefulness in the face of hurricane disaster and EU discrimination against tax havens. This lens was inspired by Aimé Césaire for thinking through fascism as a colonial procedure applied to Europe. The proposal for Collective Research on Gender Ideology came from Marisa Perez Colina and explored feminist tools for

fighting fascism and the far-right's special obsession with smashing "feminist ideology". Central here was the shapeshifting of this obsession depending on its national or cultural context.

Keep It Complex then proposed Making Networks that Work. The workshop would begin with probing desires, brainstorming formats (both on and offline) and developing mobilities to support one another (report below). Nadia Idle of Plan C made the sixth proposal, Consciousness Raising Under Capital Realism would begin with this activity and then analyse the experience to understand the techniques involved (report below). Livia Páldi drew on her lived experience to raise questions about connecting practices that are context specific (report below). Natalia Romik of RUCH Collective invited attendees to develop the Anti-Fascist Kiosk as a mobile space for displaying anti-fascist texts, images, drawings, photos, and songs (report below, as part of Anti-Fascist Dining Car).

Next, Kuba Szreder solicited contributions to the newsletter you are now reading. This working group was initially conceived as meta space to develop a mission statement for the Anti-Fascist Year but was eclipsed on the day by more pressing urgencies; namely the Crisis in the Castle. Mobilised just minutes before the Assembly began, this working group was a rapid response to the situation at Ujazdowski Castle, a state-funded venue for contemporary art. A new right-wing director had recently been appointed by the Ministry of Culture. The Crisis in the Castle working group was an opportunity to discuss the strategic marginalisation of critical contemporary art by growing nationalistic interest in heritage.

A large group of activists from the Czech Republic proposed slowing down and practicing sustainable activism. After this Katalin Erdodi asked: What is the place of the countryside in the anti-fascist struggle? What to do as regional media outlets give way to centralised broadcasting networks intent on hindering the access of rural communities to diverse perspectives? Jana Shostak described her growing interest in the changing connotation of words, such as 'refugee' in Polish. Working with philologists and others, Shostak is searching for new and more humanising language. Finally, Tomislav Medak's proposal bridged two invitations. The first related to practices of pirate care, i.e. technologically aided practices of disobedient care that are emerging in response to the politics of retrenchment, precarity and austerity, and the criminalisation of solidarity. The second invitation concerned practices of custodianship and shadow librarianship, specifically his work on Memory of the World (report below).

WORKING GROUPS AND PLENARY

The assembly self-selected into working groups, which fed back into the plenary by sharing what they had discussed and how this might be taken forward. The following reports summarise the respective responses:

Anti-Fascist Dining Car led by Szabolcs KissPál (Propaganda Train) and Natalia Romik of RUCH Collectiv (Anti-Fascist Kiosk).

The agit-trains initiated in the year 1918 served as important instruments for the dissemination of political propaganda and for the enlightenment of the rural population in the Soviet Union. Extremely multifunctional cultural products, they transported intellectuals and political agitators, carried books, brochures and propaganda films to remote places, merging the tasks of a university, a mobile cinema, an exhibition space and a library. In the midst of fascist revival, the agit-trains, both in their concept and methods, could provide contemporary art not only with a brilliant metaphor for art activism today but also offer models for functioning formats: making possible a long-term investment into the educational potential of art, and offering a platform for alliances and tools for networking to cultural workers and institutions on a European level. During the group session the following considerations were developed with regards to the possible future realisation of the project:

1. NETWORK/INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS – Anti-Fascist Year, Union of railway workers, NGOs dealing with commuters' rights, railway museums, trainpotterers, art institutions
2. SPACE, STRUCTURE-INFRASTRUCTURE what infrastructure should the train car have? Kitchen? Projection screen? Security? Ownership of the car? insurance? How to counteract possible violence?
3. DESIGN convertible, modular furniture? Glass walls (accessibility)
4. CONTENT innovative form of the message (humour), dialogue-based, participatory, emphasis on the input of the local community, transformative content (partly generated locally), opening up, art residency, public-private spaces, the element of the trip itself – cooking, eating, drinking.

Anti-Fascist Populism led by many, summarised by Jesús Carrillo

This working group merged several proposals in a spontaneous response to the question asked by Vasyl Cherepanyn in his presentation Against an Anti-Communist International. The hypothesis of a "popular front", which may respond to the success of right-wing ideologies among European population, was present in the very conception of the summit. The analysis and different diagnoses discussed in the previous day's presentations showed both the urgency to rehearse new languages to meet the current demands of people, as well as the difficulties to do so from the fragments of leftist discourse. Different voices (Angela Dimitrakaki and Yaiza Hernández, amongst others) engaged in debate, confronting a clearly class-based perspective with others, which stressed the need of a radical critique of any sense of commonality from a feminist or anti-colonial position. In spite of the obvious difficulties

to reach a consensus there was a clear will to avoid the automatism of the current polarised debate.

Cheat Sheet on How to Talk about Anti-Fascism over a Family Dinner proposed by Tomislav Medak

The cheat sheet should contain counter-arguments to common pro-fascist, revisionist, racist, xenophobic, anti-LGBT arguments. Such arguments are constructed and repeated with the intent to legitimise fascism and disavow the history of the anti-fascist struggle. As they get repeated over and over, by politicians and in the media, they are turned into common sense. Their counter-factual character is performative and adversarial; whoever disputes them risks becoming the enemy of the nation. The cheat sheet will list common pro-fascist rhetoric and counter them with informed arguments. These are primarily meant to be used in private and non-adversarial communication in informal settings, with the intent to change the opinion of people.

Anti-Fascist Syllabus proposed by Tomislav Medak

Building on the work that the Anti-Fascist Year has already done around creating an anti-fascist syllabus Marcell Mars, Valeria Graziano and Tomislav Medak are working towards creating an online framework for syllabi of social movements (for context see their text "Learning from #Syllabus" <https://tinyurl.com/y3h6n27r>). We propose to create this online syllabus condensing anti-fascist learning materials. This public document will be easily editable to suit different political contexts, be translated into different languages and taught to different groups.

Keywords proposed by Lívía Páldi

The selection of keywords was prompted by experiences when working on short-term contracts across Europe and resulted in a query regarding curatorial and institutional methodologies. Moving between contexts means to identify a shifting set of internal and external factors that need to be navigated to create a framework for particular projects. The selection included the Dig Where You Stand Movement, the critical revisiting of the manual for participatory heritage activism written by Sven Lindqvist, the activist-scholar/historian, in 1978; and The Neighborhood Academy (Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin), a self-organised open platform for knowledge sharing, cultural practice and activism. The interconnectedness of these keywords supports action via a nuanced understanding of the cultivation of critical consciousness and plural and participatory learning of and from legacies that possess great emancipatory potential, including that of anti-fascist resistance.

Consciousness Raising Under Capitalist Realism led by Nadia Idle of Plan C

This working group began with a consciousness raising workshop. Discussion focused on two questions: When did you last feel anxious? and When was the last time that you experienced collective joy?

For many in the working group, this was the first time they had heard of "post-capitalist joy", which is the subtitle for *Building Acid Communism*, the unfinished book by cultural theorist Mark Fisher. Consciousness raising like this is a process for identifying common features of lived experience. It very quickly produces new relations amongst those in the room; stronger bonds for creating stronger work. This particular session ended with "lifting the veil", which is to say reflecting on the experience of consciousness raising to better grasp the methods involved and consider their future use in other contexts. We can think of this as a kind of care - a way to build solidarities by creating common ground as a basis for acting together. It is a political release to prime a transformative process.



Networks that Work led by Keep it Complex

Art professionals are involved in radical politics on the ground, to act out and defend ways of interspecies living and working together that demand and value equality on all levels of life. We are many and we are everywhere. This might not be obvious and therefore needs to become such. We focused on a simple and usable technical solution to make this critical mass visible and usable. A simple code would be able to list all the affiliation networks on any website, e.g. you enter makeitclear.eu (the website of Keep it Complex) into this new search engine and will see the list of all links from this website, instead of going through webpage after webpage. A risk assessment assured us that the enemy might have these tools already, so we should make use of them to affirm our ubiquitousness. Everything is made by many, and we are many.

This newsletter contributes to culture beside itself, as a part of issue #11. The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, www.joaap.org

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