

HOW TO STAGE URBAN STRUGGLES

INTRO
Participant artists: Pablo
Echaurren and Elof Hellström
Curated by Alba Folgado

1

This project analyses the agency of art to reclaim social justice as well as to criticize spatial restrictions and the privatization of public goods. To do so, it looks at past and current artistic representations, departing from the premise that each particular context has influenced them and their aesthetic choices. In this case, a written exercise is the catalyst for a conversation between Elof Hellström—from the Stockholm based collective Mapping the Unjust City— and the Italian artist Pablo Echaurren, who was part of the Metropolitan Indians group in 1977. Both have established a close relationship with art and the urban space, which will be shown and compared through the following letters.

1.- The term 'Indians', if referring to the Native American population, would be a very problematic one today. However, despite the contradictions the name 'Metropolitan Indians' could generate, the intention of the group was quite the opposite. They expressed their support in the struggle of Native Americans for self-determination in the 1960s and 1970s, and it was because of a slogan they used, 'Apaches, cheyennes, sioux, mohicani, siamo gli indiani metropolitani' that the press went to Sapienza University searching for the Indiani Metropolitani and identified them as such. It was a popular name given to them through which people identified their actions, not a name they used themselves.

The Metropolitan Indians (Indiani Metropolitani¹), was an artistic group born within the Movement of 1977 in Italy. The year was characterized by a break with traditional politics and unions in which attention to everyday problems, not just those in the political sphere, stood out. Students, young people in precarious conditions, and workers gathered around universities, refusing to work in the alienating conditions which had been provided, seeking alternatives that would better fit their needs. Information was shared in new ways—through alternative newspapers, fanzines, and free radio—which challenged the regular mediums and made art, performance, and music an extremely important tool of expression. Within this context, dressed and painted as clowns, the Metropolitan Indians soon gained visibility. Their presence became a representative image during the occupations of Sapienza University in Rome and in many other places afterwards...

INTRO

Participant artists: Pablo Echaurren and Elof Hellström
Curated by Alba Folgado

2

They were inspired by Dadaist and Futurist discourses, which led them to develop public performances, self-published newspapers, and even a housing occupation, satirizing the drifts in institutional politics as well as the contradictions of the movement itself. As a consequence, their actions, supported the reappropriation of public areas and vacant spaces, key places for gathering, for thinking, and for staging music and countercultural events at that time.

An especially important part of what the Metropolitan Indians did was the making of independent publications, in which Pablo Echaurren took an important role, partly because of his experience at the magazine Lotta Continua. Always collaborating with other people, he made many drawings and small notes that, with a satirical view, represented the group and the political climate Rome lived through that year. In them, it is possible to see the Metropolitan Indians represented as a monster that neither fit within the protests nor within established politics.

In a very different context and with very different representations, the collective Mapping the Unjust City was established. Formed by people from different fields, such as art, design, architecture, and aesthetics, it started work in Stockholm in 2015 and has been active since then. Their work critically connects with the increasing changes to spatial ownership in Sweden, which has, in many cases, shifted from being publicly owned (and enjoyed) to dependent on the management of private companies and investors. This situation, which especially affects areas of the city centre, has worsened with the rise of the global property market, resulting in the financialization of the city. With that in mind, and trying to produce a change, Mapping the Unjust City asked themselves how would it be possible to use art and aesthetics to communicate the problem, as well as to raise awareness over the consequences that the privatization of space brings to the most vulnerable collectives. Mapping the Unjust City uses counter-mapping, research, and

INTRO
Participant artists: Pablo
Echaurren and Elof Hellström
Curated by Alba Folgado



various performative actions to claim the right to the city. The creation of an 'underground map' of Stockholm, where they display names and detailed information of the, now, owners of the city, is one of their most important interventions. It is, thus, one of their goals to point the finger at the agents of public-space dispossession who are also responsible for the new restrictions on people's right to use the space.

The idea of the monster, the situationist maps, and the détournement are concepts present throughout the work of both groups. They use different tools to navigate the space around them, trying to draw a critical note on various examples of social injustice. This project's aim is to make a comparison between the artistic and aesthetic strategies used in urban movements of the past and the present, and to see how they have evolved over time. By engaging in this letter conversation between Pablo Echaurren, Elof Hellström, and Alba Folgado, the project aims to understand the particularities of each context and to learn from possible failures and successes.

How to Stage Urban Struggles

Alba Folgado, Pablo Echaurren and
Elof Hellström

Graphic Design: Futuro Studio

Translation from Italian: Benedetta
D'Ettorre

© Authors and copyright holders of
each artwork.

Thanks to Benedetta D'Ettorre, Pablo Echaurren, Vasco Forconi, Elof Hellström, Joanna Warsza and Mapping the Unjust City.

This project is supported by CuratorLab at Konstfack-University of Arts, Crafts and Design. Its research phase in Rome was funded by the Creative Europe programme (i-Portunus 2019).

CURATORLAB KONSTFACK

Curatorial course at Konstfack University University of Arts, Crafts and Design

WRITING AS A WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE SPACE

4

Dear Elof & Pablo,

How have you been?

It's been a while since I saw both of you and familiarized myself with your practice, and despite talking to you about the connections I found between the work you developed with Mapping the Unjust City (in the case of Elof) and with the Metropolitan Indians (on Pablo's end), you've never had the chance to speak with each other. Therefore, I write here with the hope that this encounter will actually take place, now as a letter exchange and later in a shared space and time. This exchange is somehow an experiment since what struck me the most about your work was its relationship with urban struggles and its presence in the public space. Writing is thus an unexpected realm to work with these issues, but, to be fair, it is so only for me. Both of you have always had a close relationship with text and publications, finding in them a communication tool adaptable to very different scenarios. Pablo, together with his friend Maurizio Gabbianelli, distributed leaflets ironizing on the contradictions of the Italian autonomous movement in 1977 and wrote a number of collective publications illustrating what was happening in the streets of Rome that year. Elof and the collective wrote and kept numerous emails that were sent to various people who contributed to the spatial privatization of Stockholm. You asked them for permission to hold demonstrations—which was ignored or denied—in what is ironically considered to be public space.

LETTER
How to Stage Urban Struggles
from Alba Folgado to Pablo
Echaurren & Elof Hellström

61

Thinking about these situations led me to reflect on how your work has always embodied the paradigm of the union between art and life or, to put it in a similar way, between aesthetics and politics. Regardless of the medium, the actions that the groups, of which you are part, developed have been a response to a particular political momentum and to what you considered as social injustice materializing in the streets and public space of your respective cities. It is still interesting for me to see that, even if art has widely accepted activism and political action as part of its representations, it doesn't necessarily occur the same from the opposite perspective. Not all activists see an ally in art, nor do they understand it as a useful strategy they could use. So, I wonder if this was perhaps the reason why Pablo decided to completely stop his artistic career in 1977 and to fully dedicate himself to the movement—a paradoxical decision, because even if their presence had a strong impact during the protests, all the actions of the Metropolitan Indians were about theatre and creativity. One could therefore think that art was still present in the Italian autonomous movement through their puppets, costumes, writing, and performances, but it wasn't identified as such.

I noted some differences in the case of Mapping the Unjust City—maybe because time has passed and nowadays it is easier to accept aesthetics as another important part of urban struggles or perhaps because of your decision to camouflage your actions in a way that is familiar to the work of both fields. In fact, I perfectly remember when I met Elof during an activist/academic workshop about tenants and ways of self-organizing. On this occasion, you performed a tour of a suburb, showing how madly privatization of the public space had grown in Stockholm in recent years. Theatricality and well-informed research were the main parts of this action, which was very welcomed by the participants as an interesting and efficient way to conduct field work, as well as to connect with urban struggles. I doubt your work was understood as art then, but sometimes I also wonder if that differentiation is important.

This way of ambiguously moving between art and social movements, as well as the responsibility of somehow having to respond to both with your work, is a link I have found between your two practices, and that, in a way, still surprises me. How can such different times and contexts be the germ for developing somehow parallel artwork? Are thus well-known art practices, such as the situationist détournements or dadaist absurdity, the references which connect your representations? Or even more, is there a tendency in 'non-institutional' art to use widespread activist language? I wonder how you feel represented within this last hypothesis. In my opinion, it would explain the eventual erasure of authorship in your artworks and the expansion of your actions beyond the limited scope of the collective. In particular, the figure of the Metropolitan Indians and their public performances were reproduced in different protests throughout Italy and even reached Germany, where they adopted the name *stadtindianer* (urban Indians) and reflected on their own sociopolitical marginalization. This event shows the potential of art to develop useful tools for urban movements and to bring visibility to these kinds of struggles. Similarly, the underground map and texts produced by Mapping the Unjust City have been used by housing activists, which helped them to understand who actually does own the public space in contemporary Stockholm and, therefore, to start fighting concrete corporations and state agencies with the names of the people behind them, rather than an abstract entity—actions that, in my view, speak of the influence of artistic language in the sociopolitical realm.

Also in the same line, and before ending this letter, I would like to open another question. There is one more element I have found common to your work. You might disagree, but, for me, the idea of the monster as a vulnerable being that camouflages itself within the mass and which symbolises the inadequate is something that, in a way, represents your relationship with urban struggles. Perhaps, to be pictured as a monster is a way to find oneself in a safe position, behind possible

fig. 1





attacks from the enemy but also from comrades. In the same manner, it could just be another tool to highlight situations of injustice in the public space, building a metaphorical shield behind a scary face. It is an image which might have been wrongly interpreted, but which undoubtedly relates to the aforementioned ambiguous relationship that exists between art and politics.

Still, today we can see that the rights which were claimed in 1977, such as the right to freely use public space, to have decent housing, or to not pay too much for basic needs like transport or education, have not been fully achieved, neither in Italy nor in Sweden, nor in many other places. The self-reductions, housing occupations, and counterculture that dominated the Italian territory for a time brought hope to many workers and precarious youngsters that frequented the universities. So, shouldn't we then try to learn from these experiences, from each other, and to share languages and strategies which might be useful within the art realm and beyond?

I hope this letter full of questions will awaken your memories and reflections so we could at least share that and learn from one another.

Yours truly,
Alba

TRYING TO DEFUSE A TICKING BOMB



Dear Alba and Elof:

I write to you both. Blowing away the dust from my memories, I will give you answers.

If you read 'elof' backwards, in Italian it reads 'fole' which means tales.

So here it is, an old tale, a story that I have already narrated to Alba.

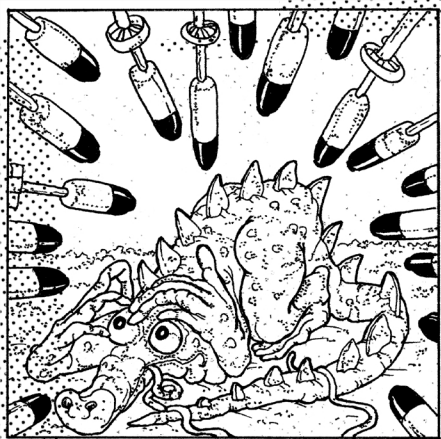
It was the year 1977.

That year was the occasion for me to bring to life what an artist finds himself usually doing in a muffled world, rarefied, detached from the material world. Art cannot and must not be the product of a curated selection to be exhibited in galleries, fairs, and biennales. Art and creativity, in general, belong to the humankind; they are its distinctive prerogative. Art must be a means, not an end. A means not only to interpret reality but also to try and change it and it must not reproduce itself within a system without references. When I stopped exhibiting to join the movement that was already becoming apparent in February 1977, I clearly perceived that it was time, finally, to get rid of 'art', to kill it so that it could be reborn, and to concretely achieve it in the flow of daily life.

Everything I did, we did, as Metropolitan Indians (Indiani Metropolitani) at that time was for me, for us, something irrepressible. Something that we would have never defined as 'art' but only and simply 'desire'.

The city (with the demonstrations crossing and shaking it every day, the political assemblies,

fig.1



the journals that we printed and handed out, our improvised happenings, the writings on the walls) was the surface on which a new creative landscape could be drawn.

The city seemed something to explore with new eyes, to joyfully occupy (like on 'the Sabbath/Saturday' at the Pantheon square, the celebration of the spring equinox at Villa Pamphili, or the housing occupation at Orso 88), to invade with meaningless songs and slogans. We wanted to shake the numb citizens, the schematic rituals of politics after 1968. We wanted to build a community of loving senses in which mutual weaknesses could be used to overcome the backwardness and stiffness of the Marxist-Leninist practices that still dominated the minds of activists. We wanted to contaminate forms of fights with unsettling actions. During one protest (in which weapons were not missing), we decided to break off and set up a relaxation zone equipped with a camping stove to make hot tea. It was an explicit invitation to take it easy, to overcome rage, and to reach a higher alterity level detached from the widespread violence.

If we identified an 'enemy', a hostile presence, instead of doing it the hard way or with insults (as was common then), we surrounded them. Doing a ring-around-the-rosie, together we intoned a childish sing-song, repeating 'dumb... dumb... dumb...'. It was a way to show our discontent whilst trying to defuse a ticking bomb—the always latent, ever present, aggressive dynamics.

In the same way, we created elusive and improbable entities, named with fictional and paradoxical acronyms, which we used to sign statements and very idiotic messages.

We spread fake news to confuse the enemy and lead our own comrades to doubt the infallibility of stances too palingenetic, which preached the imminent arrival of revolution or at least uprising.

fig.2



'Distrust reality' was our primary intention. Our password was disorder. Oask? was our newspaper, an entangled chaos, full of doubts and question marks as well as exclamation marks.

Towards forced grouping (of political parties, ideologies, the traditional revolutionary push), we opposed a lucid and stubborn 'disaggregation'. Everyone was bringing their own truth and fragility.

The communist 'rising sun' really seemed to us a legacy of the past, something too far away and not reachable soon enough. We preferred to warm ourselves in the sun of the Roman spring. Long snakes through the streets of the old town to the cry of 'Ea ea ea ea ea eaaaa' as in the western movies with fake 'Indians', with the redskins reduced to folkloristic caricature. We used to make fun of ourselves before others could do it. But we were taken seriously.

Anyhow, the movement got our message. A situation of total osmosis was created between two different ways of perceiving and understanding political action. It was a unique, unrepeatable, mass occasion. For an instant the entire protest movement dressed in 'Indian' colours. Colours, irony, slogans, widespread Dadaism became the unifying trait of a movement that had many faces and many souls.

The novelty of our 'political' approach was a wave which was destined to be beaten into extinction under the weight of lead, but it nevertheless left its mark.

Representing ourselves as 'monsters' or rather 'little monsters' (in our newspapers and in our drawings for the newspaper Lotta continua) was a 'joyful' way to indicate our otherness in the face of the militant rhetoric.

To be 'alien' and always 'elsewhere' with respect to the peaks of the struggle at the time was a way to escape the dogmatism and ideological rigidities, which also distinguished some strong

fig.3

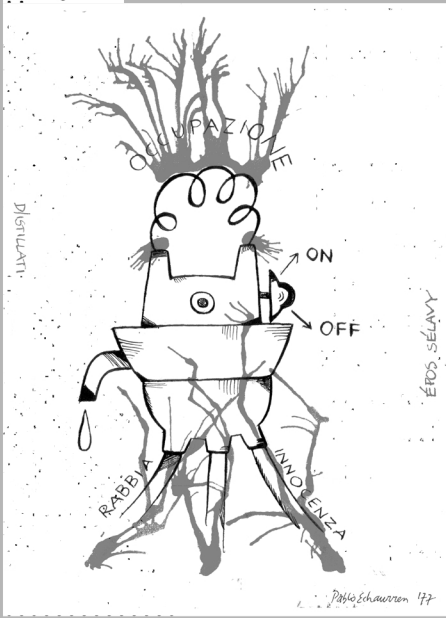


fig.4





components of 'the Movement of 1977' (as it was immediately defined).

We tried to create and use a new language, to mix creativity, irony, madness, with the rituals of political communication. We tried to redefine the city spaces with an unprecedented presence made of nonsense, absurdity, gestures. Combining creative impulses with direct intervention in assemblies, street demonstrations, occupations, was a gamble and a challenge that we can say we won (even if we did not perceive it immediately). I say this also considering the interest that is today, after more than forty years, registered in various parts of the world with young researchers (including Alba Folgado) who are involved in exhuming the remains of the Metropolitan Indians.

The idea of overturning the 'heaviness' of political activism, its harshness, into 'lightness' is perhaps the legacy we have left to those who came after us.

We used creativity to rewrite the city, to obtain a new and unusual vision of the 'urban, too urban' fabric (to use and détourn Nietzsche), to imagine another horizon. Like Elof, who with Mapping the Unjust City creates a map of a city subjected to the laws of profit and deprived of the right to joy and idleness awakening a desire for justice in citizens, we, the Metropolitan Indians, tore up any toponymic and linguistic order. We considered the detours of our brain the only possible path to free ourselves of existential, connective, and collective habits. We went into a mental and political labyrinth to create a psychological guerrilla plan against any form of organization, of work, of art, against the trivialization of thought and of ourselves. It was a challenge to break the cages in which they tried to lock us up.

CREDITS

Fig.1
Pablo Echaurren,
drawing for "Lotta Continua",
felt-tip pen on paper, 22x21 cm.

Fig.2
Pablo Echaurren,
Putting grass in your guns, 1977,
notebook, 16,7x27 cm.

Fig.3
Pablo Echaurren,
Dis/instillates, 1977, India ink on
paper, 34,5x24,5 cm.

Fig.4
Pablo Echaurren,
drawing for "Lotta Continua", 1977,
felt-tip pen on paper, 22x33 cm.

TWENTY-ONE HOURS OF LIVE RADIO

12

Dear Alba and Pablo,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am writing from the suburb in which I live, here in Stockholm. I am also recovering here from broadcasting twenty-one hours of live radio at the social centre and cultural space Cyklopen on the 1st of May. Today, there has been heavy rain and thunder, and the radio experience will be the starting point for taking on some of the notes and questions from your letter. We initiated the broadcast with the idea that most people would feel disoriented on May 1st. Since demonstrations were cancelled, we assumed people would stay at home or, in the best case, spend the day with friends having a picnic. Neither of us (the organizers) had previous experience doing radio, and the intensive weeks of preparation were a constant learning process and transfer of knowledge. There was, to quote Sade, maximum joy in the making, which hopefully could be read as suggestive in itself.

The response was actually massive. Almost everyone we asked to participate said yes. We ended up with 150 participants and nineteen hours of material, which included poetry, speeches, sound pieces, letters, audio dramas, quizzes, DJ mixes, and concerts. To create a sense of liveness, there was no set programme, and two hosts were broadcasting the material from a temporary studio in the main space of the house. To make it virus secure, most of the audio was pre-recorded, but there were also some live concerts, a sing-along band, and people coming by.

fig.1



Anyhow, the most striking thing for us was that it worked—from all the technical aspects to the editing of the material. It all ended at six o'clock in the afternoon, when the last hosts brought out the microphones to the sun outside the house and, with singing birds in the background, they presented the final concert: Noise Against Fascism. During some parts of the day, more than two thousand people were listening at the same time, and even if the numbers are not important, the act of listening simultaneously was significant.

I wanted to start here since the broadcast has been occupying all my thoughts, and I believe the letter format allows for an acute start. To provide some background on the house, its mode of use, and how the management works as an urban commons, the house is run through assemblies, which are open for everyone to join and take place every second week. In terms of finances, there was a decision from the beginning not to take any contributions from either the state or the private sector. This is not connected to the idea that an ideal and absolute autonomy is possible or even desirable; we have learned over the years that the inequalities which incise our everyday life also continue here. But there is a collective belief in the urgency of what we can call 'situated outsides': commons which foster the kind of publicness that the architect and activist Stavros Stavrides calls 'porous' and that, at the same time, challenges the logics of a mechanical and reductionist neoliberal placemaking. Or less abstractly, the house is an attempt to not separate the means from the ends. Additionally, when speaking about art and culture, it is Cyklopen's aim to take control of and experiment with production, distribution, and consumption as well as the relation between producers and audience. The radio programme was, for example, broadcasted through Radio Noden, a new technical platform inspired by quarantined radio programmes around Europe and which wants to connect and collect critical podcasts and voices that disturb the smooth flow.

On a personal level, I became active at Cyklopen thirteen years ago. It was a completely different

house at that time. It was built out of shipping containers and had no electricity and water. During my first Autumn as an activist there, I arranged punk concerts, and when the house was burnt down by neo-Nazis, I became active in the long process of getting building permits and building the house again. It has been my best school, and also the entry point to most things I do now. But, at one point, I also got tired of it all. I longed for practices which were not connected to solvability and which allowed for other temporalities and perspectives. It was probably then that I started doing parallel work with other formats and other collectives, such as Mapping the Unjust City later on.

We initiated Mapping the Unjust City when we were in a post-master's course at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm in 2015. Early in our collective process, we made a map of ownership relations and different degrees of publicness in local centres. This map started to live its own life as it was shown in museums, art spaces, conferences, and squats. We had worked with these issues before without the same response, and this sparked my interest in visuals. We wanted to approach the rapid shifts of ownership in the city as an aesthetic problem, as well as a pedagogical and even cognitive one. It became clear how maps are not only tools for designing physical space but for also creating discursive, mental, virtual, and political spaces. Mapping, in the broadest understanding of the activity, is a great strategy to visualize narratives and relationships. This is also connected to our choice to not once again gather and highlight the histories of the victims of privatization and securitization processes but instead try to highlight the owners and ownership as a segment that is often hidden in discourses about the segregated city. We looked for methods on how to portray finance and ownership without being abstract and mystifying. This led us to always present quantitative elements in our map together with qualitative elements in order to supplement the abstraction that follows numbers with images, stories, and micro-investigations,

fig. 2



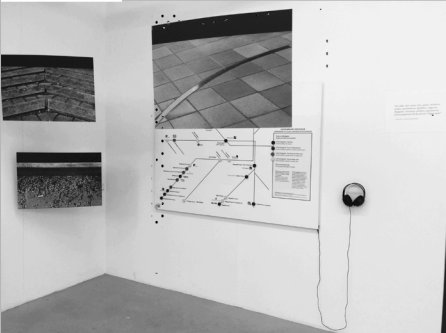
such as the emails you mentioned.

We could say that we have seen our aesthetic and visual practices as an opportunity to communicate not just as 'political art' does but also as an attempt to develop a collective practice that claims the right to the city. In the same way, Cyklopen is managed and filled with artistic ideas and methods in both its everyday uses and its dreams. On the one hand, there is, in my practice—as you write—an ambiguous interchange between art and social movements. But I also think that it is of utter importance to be able to separate the two. With Mapping the Unjust City, we hope that our work could be used as a collective resource for tenants and people suffering from the uneven city. Additionally, an ideal reading of the aforementioned map is that it suggests other understandings of the city geographies and, in that way, also allows for new forms of organizing. But we are conscious of the fact that, most often, we operate from inside the art world, and we have an ongoing discussion of the possibilities and limits that come with this.

As you write Alba, not all activists see an ally in art, and I think this scepticism must be recognized as both reasonable and productive. Over the years, Cyklopen has had the interest of different segments from what we can call the 'art world', and it's easy to be flattered by that attention, to feel that one's invisible work has finally been recognized. Here, I think a good strategy is to nurture your confidence to be able to say 'No', which is a word one cannot use too often. Even if artistic practices and institutions could practice different ways of organizing and suggest other spatial horizons, they often reinforce individualism, hierarchies, and capital.

In an era of urban entrepreneurialism, art also has an important role in urban development, where it is not only instrumentalized and used for placemaking but, by covering conflicts with their good intentions, it also becomes an active part of the problem. This is what the spatial agency BAVO called 'NGO art', a certain kind of commissioned artistic practice which, instead of addressing

fig.3



the larger political questions, only deals with the feasibility of a given action.

In Stockholm there has been a tendency for many years now to perceive art as something that could contribute to solving all kinds of problems, as well as being a quick solution to put a certain center or suburb "on the map". In both cases there is a refusal to see the conflicts between, for example, private interests and tenants, and therefore these processes end up contributing to displacement. This said, cultural venues like Cyklopen must be very cautious with collaborations even when their goal is to widen the circle with those that find the space meaningful.

I doubt that the Radio 1 May broadcast could have happened in a contemporary art space. This doubt does not concern the specific groups that participated in the activity but the form in which it was done. Everything happened beyond the limiting role of the curator, as well as from the labour division that exists even in artist run spaces. But, at the same time, many artists and curators worked with the broadcast as participants and organizers. Perhaps we could understand this as part of an experiment, which is exactly how social movements and art could form alliances: departing from a collective will to refuse exploitative relationships and economical structures and supporting different ways of sharing and distributing knowledge and resources.

Pablo, when doing the radio broadcast, we (once again) read about the free radio station, Radio Alice in Bologna. Moreover, the Italian autonomous movement is more or less a constant source of reference and inspiration for many people in Cyklopen. This said, I did not know about the Metropolitan Indians, but I am now feeling eager to learn more, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and reflections departing from Alba's questions.

All my very best,

Elof

CREDITS

Fig.1
Radio 1 Maj at Cyklopen, Stockholm
2020. Photography by Sarah Liz.

Fig 2
Mapping the Unjust City
collective at Iaspis, Stockholm
2020. Photography by Jean-Baptiste
Engblad Béranger.

Fig 3
Mapping the Unjust City,
installation at view at WIP
Konsthall, Stockholm 2019.
Photography by Sarah Kim.

WHAT CAN ART DO?

17

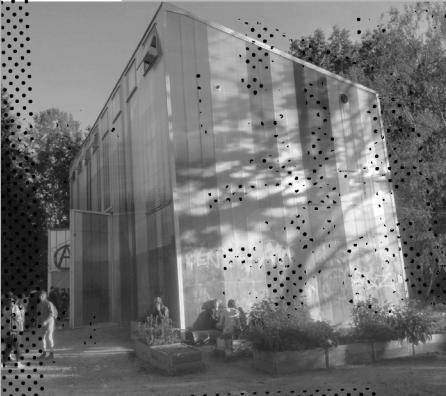
Dear Pablo and Elof,

It has been a good experience to read through your letters. Not only to remember events that you had already shared with me on different occasions but also to understand the way in which you reached and lived those moments of creation and social commitment, as well as to confirm that there are some links between them despite their apparent disconnection. I hope you had a similar perception when reading each other's text. If not, we could keep this exercise as it was originally conceived: a catalyst for a future exchange in which conversations about art and urban struggles can extend in time and space.

One of the thoughts which remains with me after reading your letters is the widely acknowledged influence that independent radio such as Radio Alice have had in the history of communication and counterculture. The radio that Franco Berardi (Bifo) and other people founded at the end of the 1970s in Bologna was a truly radical experiment inspired by situationism and dadaism. Moreover, it guaranteed freedom of speech when, in addition to playing music or broadcasting theatre plays and yoga classes, it covered protests and allowed everybody to express their opinions and critical views. To take this approach is what made them so popular and, at the same time, one of the police's main targets, who closed them down in March of 1977.

I find it interesting that the experience of this specific radio station could have widened the re-

fig. 1



presentational possibilities of art, mainly outside institutions. Alice has become an icon which I saw represented in some of Pablo's drawings, and now its influence is confirmed again through the experience of Radio 1 Maj, which Elof described in his writing. I have to say that, together with other colleagues and artists, I also participated in doing a small collective radio experiment; however, even though we dealt with subjects such as precarity and the invisibility of affective labour, we were way less radical. At that time, I knew very little about the Bolognese broadcasts and had not dug deep into the history of free radio. At least we had the chance to experience the openness and community commitment which Resonance FM with worked from their headquarters in South London. All of these thoughts led me to the conclusion that (free) radio, despite being an intangible medium, can generate a space for collectivity and critical thinking. We could even say that it does so in a similar way as social centres, such as Cyklopen in Stockholm, do.

I would also like to draw a comparison between Cyklopen and some of the Italian centri sociali (social centres; often as unauthorised occupations). Both of you have some connections with these kind of spaces, where culture is understood in a very particular way and completely detached from commercial and institutional rigidity. I understand that Elof has been intensively dedicated to Cyklopen because he has been there since the very beginning, fighting for the endurance of the space, its reconstruction, getting involved in many of its activities. Even though Cyklopen is not a housing squat, it is a self-managed space which hosts collective activities in a neighbourhood whose public space has been highly privatised. Likewise, I know from past conversations about Pablo's close relationship with social centres in Rome and, that he co-founded, wrote, and designed Carta - Cantieri sociali (Map - social sites), a weekly and social magazine. Besides this, he also had a long commitment with Metropoliz, a social centre and housing occupation which became popular for creating a museum in its

own space: MAAM. Pablo has supported this social centre and many others by making flags, banners for the streets and several drawings and murals, among other things.

These spaces in Italy meet important cultural and social needs which are also recognised and replicated in many other places worldwide. In fact, a curious finding during my first visit to Cyklopen was a small banner from Forte Prenestino in Rome (an occupation in a former military fort) which was probably a souvenir from one of the activists' trips to Italy. It reflected the desire to persist in the struggle as much as them. From my point of view, the still active relationship of Pablo with the centri sociali evokes the former gatherings at Villa Pamphili, the countercultural events of the late 1970s and the always urgent claims for justice and decent living conditions. To understand culture as a way to bypass power, to have fun and, most importantly, to point out injustice in society is what makes the work of Pablo a reference which goes far beyond the art world. This is also why, in my opinion, those engagements link with the practice of Elof and his activist views and commitment.

From my first letter until now, I have insisted on the similarities or points of connection between your works, both independently but also as part of the Metropolitan Indians and the Mapping the Unjust City collectives. This is because it was my aim to understand the power which aesthetics and artistic strategies bring to urban struggles, as well as to analyse how it can be enhanced. Well, it seems that there are many of these connections between your works and also elements that come up here and there throughout your letters, for example, criticism of hyper-curated contemporary art spaces and the need to point out internal contradictions and inequalities within the struggle itself. It has been intriguing indeed to read through these similar experiences. They allow for reflection on contemporary cultural production and the danger for it to be instrumentalized in favour of urban displacement of the poor and the privatization of collective assets.

On the other hand, it seems also important to acknowledge the differences that time and context have brought to you. In that sense, I wanted to highlight the rejection of Pablo and the Metropolitan Indians towards the assemblies as a central element of the university occupations in Rome. The assembly format, which at that time could have been overvalued because of its democratic character, eventually became a tedious, unproductive and egocentric activity that rarely led to action. It represented more a dialectical battle within the movement itself more than anything else. On the contrary, what Elof described from his experience at Cyklopen is a profound admiration towards their system of open assemblies, which guarantees consensus and horizontal management of the space. I imagine that there are many differences between the assemblies which were held in Rome in 1977 and those of Cyklopen nowadays; it is definitely something to further reflect upon together with the formalization of your works, which is where I understand the biggest differences between your practices can be found.

But even if Mapping the Unjust City decided to use similar aesthetics to those which can be appreciated in power representations, while the Metropolitan Indians preferred to use language to merge art and life, both decisions are valid and respond to the needs of each political context. In different ways, they both rely on irony and camouflage to revert the impact of repressive policies that intend to restrict freedom in the public space. The cryptic jokes of the pamphlets handed out in the streets of Rome and the subtle sarcasm in the Stockholm map of spatial ownership are clever ways of protest through artistic representation. Thus, I wonder if this is not exactly what we, at least the three of us, aim for—to expand the scope of art and understand these puzzling interventions as a shield and engine of urban movements?

LETTER 4
How to Stage Urban Struggles
from Alba Folgado to Pablo
Echaurren & Elof Hellström

I will leave these reflections open to further discussion in the future. But before closing this letter, I would say that this epistolary exchange has triggered some hope in me to understand that we can depart from art to generate debate around urgent social problems. Thank you both for continuing doing this important work!

Yours truly,
Alba

21

CREDITS

Fig.1
Cyklopen, Stockholm 2017.
Photography by Miguel A. Martinez.