

## **THE TEMPORARY ACADEMY OF ARTS. ART AS AN ECONOMY OF EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE.**

### ***Was that a pat or a slap?***

*The Temporary Academy of Arts (PAT, from the initials of its Greek name) is a para-institutional structure that focuses on the interplay of art with systems of knowledge and power. PAT adopts mechanisms from different systems of knowledge and artistic practice for the production and transmission of artistic programmes and the construction of their historicity. Instead of simply functioning as an educational platform or an art school, PAT is a research project and analytical tool that focuses on issues of work, education, and institutional critique to explore the limits, permeabilities and contradictions concealed by public discourses and spaces. The Temporary Academy's works combine the symbolic with the tactical to examine art and the conditions of its production and to explore the establishment and the potential of art in the social field, while challenging its own mechanisms. In each project, artists and theorists are invited as educators, visitors or consultants to organize and run the Academy's programmes while using different artistic modes and educational practices, such as workshops, discussions, production of custom-made visual works, interviews, performances, and so on.*

### **About the Methodologies.**

*But if we cannot make our history just as we like, oblivious to inherited constraints, we can always transform our pessimism by organizing and aiming it [...]*<sup>1</sup>

The Temporary Academy of Arts (PAT) is part of a wider research project on art and its systematic interplay with knowledge systems. It concerns the production of artistic works by methods of scientific research, archival practices, town planning and other scientific methodologies and their effects on artistic production. PAT is a tool that aims to shake up the special parameters that describe the domestic convention. More specifically: the conditions of work, education, knowledge and the production of discourse; the lack of public institutional investment to enhance contemporary artistic production versus the obsession with archaeology that prevails in our country and the association of these things with phenomena of chauvinism, localism and ahistorical nationalism; the disengagement of artistic production from the economy and working conditions in the field of art are what formed the focus of the Temporary Academy of Arts – the creation, in other words, of a schema to investigate, pursue, propose and produce work related to these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Ray, "Culture Industry and the Administration of Terror". In Gerald Raunig, Ray, G. and Wuggenig, U., eds, *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'*, London: MayFlyBooks, 2011, p. 179.

Often, due to the relative lack of curatorial, theoretical and artistic practices that systematically produce tools and reasons for a material interconnection with the specific parameters and context relevant to any local framework, as well as due to the prevailing formalistic reading and production of art, we turn to tried and tested theoretical and artistic models from the Western example. It is a fair convention and often inevitable (due to the relevant bibliography, exhibitions, and so on) but not enough on its own, especially when it is not undertaken systematically or when it does not account for the traps posed by the use of theoretical models that have emerged from different perceptions, historical configurations and circumstances. In addition, the general lack of systematization and documentation in the field has led from the beginning to continuous questions about conditions of participation, funding and the local context, in order to address these and other fundamental issues widely discussed in similar international projects.

For these very reasons, the form of an Academy was adopted, which, by definition, has to structurally confront similar problematics and contradictions within itself. Bearing in mind that an Academy is at the centre of the mechanisms of the cultural industry and the capital it produces is called upon to find its place within the system, PAT's interest from the outset turned to the terms that describe and problematize the Creative Industry.<sup>2</sup> PAT's character was shaped by flexibility, the precarity of the creative subjects, the intensification of their work, a (cynical) interdependence with institutions and an ever-increasing pressure to capitulate to the dominant system. Even its name reflects this character in a way. The Temporary Academy of Arts acts within the cultural industry and is proposed as a para-institution that is temporary, nomadic. The precarity suggested by its name highlights in a manner the fact that the differences that exist between the systems and mechanisms of education internationally, deepen the gap between central and regional knowledge centres in the ways in which degrees or diplomas are validated and capitalized on, the ways in which they are connected to the global market, the ways that they produce economic and symbolic capital, and the ways in which graduates are classified and become part of a network.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2014 when the Academy started operating, we have developed a methodology that is linked to the features we have just described. Below we try to briefly present the most important of them.

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<sup>2</sup> See the publication on PAT's first project published as part of NEON's *Community Projects* programme. Collective work, *Temporary Academy of Arts*, Athens: Futura Publications, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Lina Dokuzović's analysis in *The Resource Crisis and the Global Repercussions of Knowledge Economies* (2012), in which the author refers to the ways that human resources and innovation are generated and distributed through organizations designed to control them, is very useful in this regard. Formulated within this context are knowledge policy programmes, at the core of which one can seek traces of the struggles and conflicts around the terms imposed on the global distribution of labour today, through "filter mechanisms in the transnational distribution of exploitation and crisis". Dokuzović highlights the importance of the struggle against the commercialization of knowledge or educational reform, emphasizing that in any case knowledge is a "fundamental force". Available at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/dokuzovic/en>.

## 1.1 Para-institutionalism

Gene Ray, in his article *On the Conditions of Anti-Capitalist Art: Radical Cultural Practices and the Capitalist Art System*,<sup>4</sup> notes that a “position outside the institutions makes avant-garde practitioners more vulnerable to social and economic exclusion and more exposed to direct political repression”. In this sense, we would say that adopting a position “para-” (near, alongside, side by side, around) the institutions and their mechanisms becomes a practice of self-preservation, which, however, must seek the interrelations and networks necessary for the survival and mutual support of para-institutional activity and the (political) effectiveness of our proposals. According to Ray, an art that resists absorption into the dominant system must ensure a balance between flexibility and security. From this perspective, a para-institutional structure attempts this balance but to what extent this can be achieved as long as the system increasingly pushes “toward a global crisis of legitimacy”<sup>5</sup> remains open.

Since the establishment of PAT, we have been concerned with how to organize a para-institution through an off-centre, temporary, flexible practice that, in spite of these characteristics, seeks to secure payment for the precarious subjects involved in its activities. The funding of a “self-organized” education programme such as the Temporary Academy of Arts by private organizations (as has been the case for specific projects), organizations with their own profile, provisos and agenda (such as NEON), or by international organizations that regulate cultural policies (such as the Goethe Institute), make the project accountable to anti-capitalist critique but at the same time sustainable. PAT operates within this contradiction, paying particular attention to reflection and self-criticism, playing with irony and employing strategies of hyper-identification and hyper-affirmation, as well as shock tactics. Often, in the context of activist art practices of “offering” in the social field, PAT’s practice is seen as coinciding with an “elitist” approach available only to those aware of the modern art context as organized by the dominant cultural institutions, and therefore a reformist rather than a revolutionary undertaking.

The organization of an academy is an establishment in real terms of a necessary minimum structure, a (para-)institution, an act which is by definition a re-structuring practice. A radical movement (the “revolution”) after a negative phase requires, in any case, an effort to build a positive alternative proposal, a proposal that will envision a different convention where inequalities will be reduced and the concerns of the most vulnerable groups can be addressed. Such a movement indicates in advance that PAT’s focus is not an ongoing reaction to the problems of the world or a response to the crisis but an active action that forms a part of the complexity of reality while aiming at the same time to shape it. It is a projection into the future that takes place beyond totalizing fantasies of universal rehabilitation and unity, beyond the fantasy of a perfect harmonious world and “fair” educational system – a revolutionary art, free from its contradictions. It is a movement towards the future that realizes, however, that it will

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Ray, *On the Conditions of Anti-Capitalist Art: Radical Cultural Practices and the Capitalist Art System*, 2006. Available at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0303/ra/en>.

<sup>5</sup> Gene Ray (2006). op. cit.

also include mistakes and sometimes inflexibility, aggression, combativeness, and similar disappointments.

The proliferation of educational artistic projects in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with examples such as the proposal by Manifesta 6 (2006) to function as an alternative school in Cyprus, created a genre of artistic practice. Numerous self-organized schools, lecture programmes, academies and so on, have sprung up worldwide, giving, however, a new perspective in the field of culture and power, beyond the emancipatory. Cultural policies reinforced these initiatives since the burden of education could shift into the hands of private organizations and private initiatives, providing relief to shrinking humanities studies worldwide and enhancing instrumental and productive benefits for the global education economy. The importance of temporariness, movement, individual initiative and ingenuity have been strengthened. These are all elements that could satisfy government intentions to prepare a populace for survival within temporary and precarious conditions in a society without demands for social security and social welfare structures, following the model of the lone and resourceful cowboy or the golden boy of the stock markets in the most contemporary version.

PAT has deliberately adopted all these features; it is temporary and mobile and tests various models of self-organized initiative and individual responsibility. Nevertheless, this position is a “negative affirmation” which is adopted as a method of problematizing the convention in question. The purpose of the academy is not “pedagogical” in the sense that it attempts to bring contemporary art and new forms and processes of artistic production a priori into contact with a neutral, unified “general public” (because such a thing does not exist). Neither does it want to be linked to a network of educational and emancipatory community actions/offerings that promote a humanistic ideal of care and transfer responsibility from organized society to the philanthropic feelings of individuals – these are often linked to cultural politics of social sensitivity which more often than not are aligned with gentrification policies. On the contrary, PAT endeavours to challenge this role by trying to give voice and impetus to other claims related to art and extending beyond it and which do not depend on the good, pure intentions of an inspired mentor, an institution of a philanthropic bent.

A part of the para-institutionality is the very conditions in which we work and the contradictions of our practice. These define our professional identity, which is in constant suspension between amateurism and professionalism, an unpaid offering to contemporary art and a poorly paid livelihood in jobs that often bear little relation to our profession. It is about the dilemmas that we must face daily in our practice, issues of survival in and capitulation to the globalized system of economy and production, part of which is the cultural mechanism, and our practice is not excluded from this system. It is a process connected to a wider tough working reality and the complex relationship between manual and intangible, volunteer and paid work.

## **1.2 Soft Power**

The term “soft power” was coined by political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990 in a study of America’s Cold War policies (it is now a commonplace that forms of soft power were an important tool in the outcome and victory of the Cold War). In the book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Nye describes “soft power” as the exercise of power aimed at the subjectification, normalization and “conformation of the subject” to specific requirements, using persuasion, examples, seduction and myth.<sup>6</sup> For Nye, soft power is a disciplinary form of government, which through education, culture and other such mechanisms enters the mind-set of the subjects who internalize and appropriate the stances of authority and a perception of themselves through the viewpoint of the powerful. The soft power of a country or a transnational organization is mainly based on three factors: its culture (where it appeals to others and can be appropriated), political values (when they are seemingly compatible with their domestic reality), and in external policies (where these are considered legitimate or have moral value). Soft power can be exercised through the production of car design, by a quality espresso or the export of soap operas. Soft power may involve funding to carry out European cultural programmes on creativity, civil society, and so on. According to Nye, soft power is a struggle to win “hearts and minds”.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, where Athens has gained international visibility as part of a “southern experiment”, as a European example of “creative viability” in times of crisis, the concept of soft power has a very ambiguous significance. When Athens is sketched as an agent of resistance that can teach and suggest survival strategies but also a new way to make art without money, with alternative economic and communalist practices, it is worth asking ourselves what problems this image creates viewed through a European landscape of precarity, cuts in culture and humanities studies and the establishment of art as an unpaid hobby, as well as the problematics raised by the emergence only of positive features such as flexibility, sustainability, performativity, resourcefulness, creativity, informality and so on, which in recent years have been a steady reference point for both large institutions and the Athenian scene.

PAT organized a series of lectures on soft power<sup>8</sup> in an endeavour to reverse and appropriate this power but also to identify the “negativities” or cacophonies inherent in these technologies. The exploration of these soft regulatory practices brings to the fore contemporary technologies of power, governance and “conduct of conduct”,<sup>9</sup> which through consensual and conciliatory practices and discourse become less perceived as such.

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, 2008, pp. 94-109. Available at: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/25097996?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25097996?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) [last accessed 24 July 2018].

<sup>8</sup> The Soft Power Lectures were designed and performed by Elpida Karaba, Glykeria Stathopoulou, Despina Zefkili, Sofia Dona, Panos Sklavenitis, Constantinos Hadzinikolaou.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “Δύο δοκίμια για το υποκείμενο και την εξουσία” [Two essays on the subject and power] in *Η μικροφυσική της εξουσίας* [The microphysics of power], Athens: Ypsilon, 1991, p. 71.

**OR SHOULD THE REFERENCE BE IN ENGLISH LIKE SO (I think this is the same text as the Greek. It is divided in two parts):**

Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1982, pp. 777-795. Available at: [http://www.unisa.edu.au/Global/EASS/HRI/foucault\\_-\\_the\\_subject\\_and\\_power.pdf](http://www.unisa.edu.au/Global/EASS/HRI/foucault_-_the_subject_and_power.pdf)

With soft power/diplomacy, the dominant ideology is reinforced and enshrined. The different versions of PAT form a record of actions, tactics and strategies, educational material and possibly new artistic methods and practices, attempting to contribute to the discussion about which models of knowledge, movement of ideas and culture will be the next dominant models; how the ideological forms/exclusions behind the promotion of one or another cultural and educational model are formed and, chiefly, how one can intervene, participate and organize certain models that will resist the exclusions imposed by uniformity and express the concerns and desires of an approach that is off the systemic centre.

Several challenges were attempted through performances and talks. For example, the fetishized domestic artistic object, history as dogma, the patriarchal narratives of artistic subjects, the idealization of antiquity, the cultural discourses that attempt to be incorporated as dominant and hegemonic (but also the issue of the desire to produce and establish certain other discourses as hegemonic), the dominance of an institutionalized form of cultural capital in education (qualifications, diplomas), unpaid work (volunteering) and the precarity of work in the cultural field are some of the questions that engage the soft power programme implemented by PAT. The counter Soft Power Lectures, organized by PAT, in the Actopolis programme, a project funded by the Goethe Institute and the Urbane Künste Ruhr Foundation, attempted to reverse and appropriate this power. The Actopolis programme was the initiative of a strong western partner, and took place in seven cities in Southeast Europe. The theme of Actopolis concerned the crises facing modern metropolises and focused on actions related to the public space. The choice of seven Southeast European countries was not accidental as the region is currently at the epicentre of interest for Central Europe for many critical reasons: economic, political and geopolitical, and reasons related to the refugee issue. In this context the Temporary Academy of Arts attempted to perform the role of the powerful (in a spirit of hyper-identification, since as an Academy it has not been legitimized and does not have the institutionality that would allow it to exercise cultural policy).

The material that was produced varies from video, recorded lectures, archival material, sound works and performances that recount the story of southern subjects (the term in which the dominant narratives are currently constructing the subjects of specific localities was adopted intentionally). This material supplies PAT's exhibition, theoretical and editorial practice and is a collection and organization of the discourse that is produced around the exotic Athens of crisis and creativity. In addition, the Soft Power Lectures programme aimed to reposition us in the domestic professional field on different terms and to negotiate the working, living and precarious conditions of our practice. At times we focused on topics of "artistic news", certain of which were considered more generally newsworthy such as the much-discussed *documenta*; these we dealt with as case studies in order to reveal reproductions or disguises of power relations through them, of interest to the Actopolis programme itself and more generally.

### **1.3 Recounting the past**

“Those who cannot historicize the conditions in which they live will never be able to politicize them.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2013, as part of his research at the Contemporary Greek Art Institute, Constantinos Hadzinikolaou presented a portrait on Super 8 film of the Greek artist Aspa Stasinopoulou.<sup>11</sup> Stasinopoulou was a special case for contemporary Greek art and the aged portrait by Hadzinikolaou, in which, in some strange way, the artist resembles a female Duchamp, is not just an interesting portrait but a portrait of the Greek artistic field. The artist presents a narrative about a meeting he had with Aspa in her dark, non-electrified studio. Hadjinicolaou's story has, as he says, the precision of fiction and the freedom of biography. It is a story about the traces left by art in its wake, the roads it opens and the opportunities it loses. This work also has, however, an extra tension as it confronts us with the way in which different historical creative subjects are studied, with the terms of construction of the past, with the readings of gendered identity, and even with the oblivion and the counterfeiture that corresponds to cases of local subjectivities.

PAT's interest in history finds a foothold in the relationships between the local and the international, the relativity of cosmopolitanism and domestic indifference to gendered narratives, for the purpose of recording a vital history that will more systematically seek to find the thread between the past, present and future. A thread, which is not necessarily meant as a continuum, but as a “bypass”. It is not often clear that recognition of this continuum or this “bypass” gives the appropriate meaning to the previous convention, which every new generation is called upon to de-establish, deconstruct or even reproduce. The study of the history of a field and the determination of the parameters that defined it helps to avoid essentialist approaches of art, according to which each new generation seeks a mythical origin, placing itself and its work in an almost transcendental sphere, where questions are asked without conditions.

Gregory Sholette in his book *Delirium and Resistance. Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, highlights the significance of a reality emancipated from given narratives of historical experience or from corresponding “hyper-determination”. Sholette emphasizes the importance of an “intra-relational space” that artistic practice can open up when it is not trapped in representationally determined practices (such as exhibitions for example), or when substance is given to art through the “accumulation of knowledge about art” and “capital consumption”.<sup>12</sup> It proposes the rejection of the exclusivity of the visual against practices centred on the organization of structures, communication networks and dispersion economies, producing a “counter-public sphere”.<sup>13</sup> According to Sholette, when artistic practice and curatorship are perceived as sites of production rather than representation of knowledge, they are not just struggles for visibility, but produce this intra-relational space, which, hopefully, will be unfamiliar

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<sup>10</sup> Boris Buden, Lina Dokuzović, *The Gastarbeiter: In Search of an Afterlife*, 2016. Available at: <http://eipcp.net/>

<sup>11</sup> The research was undertaken as part of the series, *Archive Rights*, curated by Elpida Karaba.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, London: Pluto Press, 2016, p. 193

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., 193.

and slippery enough so as not to be trapped in procedures of regulation, valuation and consumption.

In this sense, our historiographical practice uses scientific research, artistic production, and exhibition and curatorial practice indiscriminately as tools for the production of this “slippery” and “unfamiliar” “intra-relational space”.

In 2017 we began a research project on the construction of the modern art field in Greece, as it has been shaped over the last decades of the 20th century until today. We presented the first cycle of our work, with parallel actions, interviews with field actors, serial publications in the press with extracts from our texts, and at an exhibition organized by the artist Yannis Papadopoulos as a work of art in which we presented the draft of a chapter of modern Greek art.<sup>14</sup> The focus of our work was the systematic study of the mechanisms that determine the forces within the field but also a history of contemporary art and actions in a more contextual rather than anecdotal historiographical way. In order to understand, for example, why gendered readings of artistic production have been undermined even by female artists, why in monographs of artists there is a formalistic approach which furthermore proposes the model of the “unique and extraordinary” (usually male) artist, what is the role of state and private institutions in the equation of economic and symbolic capital, institutional and counter-institutional balance, what are the forces that organize the discourse of art until is recorded in history, and so on. A systematic history such as this illuminates not only the terms by which identities and mechanisms are formed within the limited space of art, but at the same time, the relations of power that define a society more generally are reflected in the study of the history of contemporary artistic reality. In addition, “the material of history” assists theorists and artists to deepen their research and practice.

The issue that was raised for us was not the absorption of a historical counter-canon or a counter-institutional discourse, neither was it the wholesale rejection of the need to historicize the institutional and counter-institutional contradictions that characterize the field. A “historical” venture on our part is not about a comprehensive, inclusive history of art because something like that is impossible. There is not one history but many histories and we hope our historiographical practice will result in other stories being told. In our research we attempted to illuminate some aspects of the field’s formation which are related to our research fields and practices – aspects which have not been systematically recorded and which remain quite marginal in relation to the predominant, Greek, representation, focused on the means of approach to Greek art. We would like this perspective to complement the approaches that

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<sup>14</sup> See PAT, *Towards a History of Contemporary Greek Art: An Agreement Without Principles*, Athens: Contemporary Greek Art Institute, 2017.

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<http://dp.iset.gr/en/book/view.html?id=134497>

dominated the past decades and to open them to new interpretations, discourses and counter-discourses.

For this reason, PAT's interest in education, recounting the past; "institutionality", the constitution of a programme of artistic educational process (even if tangential), participation in the production of artistic works through research processes, archival work, targeted audiences versus a profuse appeal to a large neutral public, and penetrating into existing institutions in order to converse with current and future actors in the field and examine their conditions of work, are – some of – the ways, to claim knowledge and participation in the process of creating new, fairer and more interesting terms of art production and more.

### **Conclusion**

Amanda Holmes, interpreting the Lacanian narrative about the case of a young child who when he received a slap asked, "was that a pat or a slap?", proposes the "artful" version of this question as a challenge to the perpetrator, of the type "Come on now, is that all you can do? Was that a pat or a slap?" Such a challenge, which hangs in the air, provokes and tests its own boundaries and those of others, amongst "soft and tough challenges and tactics", is the driving force of PAT (whose abbreviation coincidentally coincides with the English word "pat").