

There is no Alternative: THE FUTURE IS SELF-ORGANISED Part 1

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As workers in the cultural field we offer the following contribution to the debate on the impact of neo-liberalism on institutional relations: Cultural and educational institutions as they appear today are nothing more than legal and administrative organs of the dominant system. As with all institutions, they live in and through us; we participate in their structures and programmes, internalise their values, transmit their ideologies and act as their audience/public/social body.

Our view: these institutions may present themselves to us as socially accepted bodies, as somehow representative of the society we live in, but they are nothing more than dysfunctional relics of the bourgeois project. Once upon a time, they were charged with the role of promoting democracy, breathing life into the myth that institutions are built on an exchange between free, equal and committed citizens. Not only have they failed in this task, but within the context of neo-liberalism, have become even more obscure, more unreliable and more exclusive.

The state and its institutional bodies now share aims and objectives so closely intertwined with corporate and neo-liberal agendas that they have been rendered indivisible. This intensification and expansion of free market ideology into all aspects of our lives has been accompanied by a systematic dismantling of all forms of social organisation and imagination antithetical to the demands of capitalism.

As part of this process it's clear that many institutions and their newly installed managerial elites are now looking for escape routes out of their inevitable demise and that, at this juncture, this moment of crisis, they're looking at 'alternative' structures and what's left of the Left to model their horizons, sanction their role in society and reanimate their tired relations. Which of course we despise!

In their scramble for survival, cultural and educational institutions have shown how easily they can betray one set of values in favour of another and that's why our task now is to demand and adhere to the social principles they have jettisoned, by which we mean: transparency, accountability, equality and open participation.

By transparency we mean an opening up of the administrative and financial functions/decision making processes to public scrutiny. By accountability we mean that these functions and processes are clearly presented, monitored and that they can in turn, be measured and contested by 'participants' at any time. Equality and open participation is exactly what it says—that men and women of all nationalities, race, colour and social status can participate in any of these processes at any time.

Institutions as they appear today, locked in a confused space between public and private, baying to the demands of neo-liberal hype with their new management structures, are not in a position to negotiate the principles of transparency, accountability and equality, let alone implement them. We realise that responding to these demands might extend and/or guarantee institutions' survival but, thankfully, their deeply ingrained practices prevent them from even entertaining the idea on a serious level.

In our capacity as workers with a political commitment to self-organisation we feel that any further critical contribution to institutional programmes will further reinforce the relations that keep these obsolete structures in place. We are fully aware that 'our' critiques, alternatives and forms of organisation are not just factored into institutional structures but increasingly utilised to legitimise their existence.

The relationship between corporations, the state and its institutions is now so unbearable that we see no space for negotiation—we offer no contribution, no critique, no pathway to reform, no way in or out. We choose to define ourselves in relation to the social forms that we participate in and not the leaden institutional programmes laid out before us—our deregulation is determined by social, not market relations. There is no need for us to storm the Winter Palace, because most institutions are melting away in the heat of global capital anyway. We will provide no alternative. So let go!

The only question that remains is how to get rid of the carcass and deal with the stench:

We are not interested in their so-called assets; their personnel, buildings, archives, programmes, shops, clubs, bars, facilities and spaces will all end up at the pawnbroker anyway...

All we need is their cash in order to pay our way out of capitalism and take this opportunity to make clear our intention to supervise and mediate our own social capital, knowledge and networks.

As a first step we suggest an immediate redistribution of their funds to already existing, self-organised bodies with a clear commitment to workers' and immigrants' rights, social (anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic) struggle and representation.

There is no alternative! The future is self-organised.

In the early 1970s corporate analysts developed a strategy aimed at reducing uncertainty called 'there is no alternative' (TINA). Somewhat ironically we now find ourselves in agreement, but this time round we're the scenario planners and executors of our own future though we are, if nothing else, the very embodiment of uncertainty.

In the absence of clearly stated opposition to the neo-liberal system, most forms of collective and collaborative practice can be read as 'self-enterprise'. By which we mean, groupings or clusters of individuals set up to feed into the

corporate controlled markets, take their seats at the table, cater to and promote the dominant ideology.

Self-organisation should not be confused with self-enterprise or self-help, it is not an alternative or conduit into the market. It isn't a label, logo, brand or flag under which to sail in the waters of neo-liberalism (even as a pirate ship as suggested by MTV)! It has no relationship to entrepreneurship or bogus 'career collectives'.

In our view self-organisation is a byword for the productive energy of those who have nothing left to lose. It offers up a space for a radical re-politicisation of social relations—the first tentative steps towards realisable freedoms.

Self-organisation is:

Something that predates representational institutions. To be more precise: institutions are built on (and often paralyse) the predicates and social forms generated by self-organisation.

Mutually reinforcing, self-valorising, self-empowering, self-historicising and, as a result, not compatible with fixed institutional structures.

A social and productive force, a process of becoming which, like capitalism, can be both flexible and opaque—therefore more than agile enough to tackle (or circumvent) it.

A social process of communication and commonality based on exchange; sharing of similar problems, knowledge and available resources.

A fluid, temporal set of negotiations and social relations which can be emancipatory—a process of empowerment.

Something that situates itself in opposition to existing, repressive forms of organisation and concentrations of power.

Always challenging power both inside the organisation and outside the organisation; this produces a society of resonance and conflict, but not based on fake dualities as at present.

An organisation of deregulated selves. It is at core a non-identity.

A tool that doesn't require a cohesive identity or voice to enter into negotiation with others. It may reside within social forms but doesn't need to take on an identifiable social form itself.

Contagious and inclusive, it disseminates and multiplies.

The only way to relate to self-organisation is to take part, self-organise, connect with other self-organising initiatives and challenge the legitimacy of institutional representation.

We put a lid on the bourgeois project, the national museums will be stored in their very own archive, the Institutes of Contemporary Art will be handed over to the artists' unions, the Universities and Academies will be handed over to the students, Siemens and all the other global players will be handed over to their workers. We need the state only as an administrative unit—just as neo-liberalism has suggested—but now with mechanisms of control, transparency, accountability and equal rights for all.