

Fragile and Other Affinities

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The Rootless Wanderer

*“As an artist you have more freedom than any politician to explain something. It’s always important to bring all the people together, and talk together, even when we have different opinions.”*¹

Syrian-German artist Manaf Halbouni joined Deveron Projects for a residency in Huntly earlier this year. He saw his time in the North East of Scotland as a bit of an escape. Manaf was receiving a lot of attention - and had even started keeping an archive of the violent threats being made against him - after installing *Monument* in the war-torn town centre of Dresden in early 2017, referring to civil war in Syria and establishing a link with Europe. Manaf once told me he felt too German in Syria, and too Syrian in Germany.

Photos of bus barricades erected by civilians in Aleppo were shown last year in a constant stream of media, hosted via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and clickbait news platforms online. The world is passively shocked as we scroll on electronic devices (designed in California, made in China). *Monument* brings the images into real-time, attempting to remind people that we are global citizens and Syria is not someone else’s problem.

Germany’s right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) accused Manaf’s work of being scrap metal and an “*abuse of artistic freedom*” deliberately designed to “*snub the citizens of Dresden and drive Pegida on to the barricades*”.²

Claudia Zeiske and I arrived in Berlin on 22 November to participate in *Fragile Affinities: (re)strengthening international artistic collaboration*. The week prior, *Monument* had been moved from Dresden to Berlin. The Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of division and reunification, was our first stop to see Manaf Halbouni’s abuse of artistic freedom.

House of the Cultures of the World

We walked back through the Tiergarten to Akademie der Künste, passing Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Claudia suggested we go have a look. We had been chatting as we walked about material remnants of history. It was interesting to be in Germany with Claudia and to hear her perspective of the country she had grown up in during a very specific time in its history.

The exhibition was *Parapolitics: Culture and the Cold War*. It presented a tension between the artist as individualist and the political instrumentalisation of art throughout history, focusing on the cultural politics of the Cold War. It detailed the 1967 reveal of the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency as the financier of

¹ *Understanding the Middle East*. Deveron Projects. 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJmJnqxfcc>

² *Dresden’s bitter divide over Aleppo-inspired bus barricade sculpture*. Philip Oltermann, The Guardian. 2017. www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/07/dresdens-bitter-divide-over-aleppo-inspired-bus-barricade-sculpture. Accessed on: 20/11/17

the Congress for Cultural Freedom, formed in 1950. The anti-communist agenda of the CIA and their use of the CCF in manipulating culture to their specific aims was shown extensively through archives of artwork, text, publication and video.

I spent a lot of time watching a 1983/84 commercial for Apple Macintosh. Directed by Ridley Scott, it shows a dystopian future ruled by a televised 'Big Brother' Orwellian type figure. Lines of people march in the background with mute expressions, in dull tones of grey and blue. The industrial setting is punctuated by a woman running towards a screen. She is in full colour and throws a hammer at the screen, destroying it and disrupting the hypnotic spiel of 'Big Brother'. The titles read "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984'",³ informing the 1980's consumer that Apple Macintosh will be the saviour of humanity from conformity.

Fostering International Cultural Collaboration

The Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste (IGBK), dedicated to fostering international exchange and opportunities for German artists, is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. In cooperation with the Akademie der Künste they are hosting *Fragile Affinities*.⁴

The Akademie der Künste is one of the oldest cultural institutes in Europe, founded in 1696. It is an international community of artists contributing to the art of their time. In his welcoming announcement, Professor Wulf Herzogenrath, director of the Akademie's Visual Arts Section, describes art and culture as a free zone for the transformation of cultural difference and political conflicts. The consensus of the next day will reiterate this sentiment often: that art should remain a place of reflection on politics and society, without being restricted by current politics and society.

Wulf Herzogenrath details the history of the institution, citing the most serious breach of autonomy on 15 February 1933. Within 33 days of the Nazis coming to power, Max Liebermann, Käthe Kollwitz and Heinrich Mann were forced to resign from their positions at the Akademie.

In our current times of societal and political uncertainty and a return of a nationalist current in Europe, this conference comes at an important time. Focus panels on Poland, Hungary, Britain and Turkey have been arranged and three topics identified; political developments in Turkey; the weakening of democratic processes in Poland and Hungary; and BREXIT.

The raw characteristics and large exposed spaces of the Akademie building at Hansaviertel allow us ample area for discussion. I'm given a typed transcript of the introduction to the conference in English at the start of the evening. I always find it, somehow, more alarming when BREXIT is written in capital letters.

³ *Apple Macintosh Commercial*. 1984. Accessed on 22/11/17 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt

⁴ *Fragile Affinities – (Re)Strengthening International Artistic Collaboration*. IGBK. 2017. www.adk.de/de/aktuell/veranstaltungen/2017/PDFs/FA_Flyer.pdf. Accessed on: 20/11/17

Uncertain States

Wulf Herzogenrath describes a recent exhibition at the Akademie der Künste reflecting on its own history, detailing the 1933 replacement of Akademie members. *Uncertain States* places this historical reflection next to present day issues of war, poverty and terrorism, drawing parallels of crisis, flight, instability, violence and loss, and highlighting ideas of artistic resistance to xenophobia. Hearing a range of perspectives throughout the conference, the importance of considering history and different perspectives of history if we are to work towards strengthening international collaboration, becomes ever clearer.

A week prior to this conference Deveron Projects had produced an event, *Practices of Peace*.⁵ It involved various artistic collaborations of performance, storytelling, cooking, singing and crafting, as well as contributions from speakers such as historians, curators and artists. Our Director, Claudia Zeiske, spoke about her recent pilgrimage, which saw her walk from Huntly in the north-east of Scotland, to Unterpfaffenhofen, just outside Munich, Germany. She described the changing landscape of Scotland, England, the Netherlands and Germany from the perspective of the material commemorations of war in each town she passed.

I had studied war history extensively in school and, in the years since, had more and more realised how one-sided this education had been. I had made a point of trying to update my knowledge regularly from a variety of sources, speaking to people from a range of places. My introduction to GDR history was rooted in an essay I was assigned to write in German language class ten years ago, which involved watching the 2003 Ostalgie tragicomedy, *Goodbye, Lenin!*. Although my knowledge has moved on since then, when Lutz Dammbeck and Via Lewandowsky engage in their conversation on German art between 1949 and 1990, I feel the burden of my ignorance.

This isn't helped by the whisper-translator in my ear, trying her best to communicate the content of a clearly animated conversation, but lacking the tone and timing to provoke full understanding. It is not her fault, I am more aware than ever of my inability to speak a language I supposedly studied, and I am grateful for this entry into the conversation.

Professor Frank Druffner (Kulturstiftung der Länder) and Dr Roland Bernecker (UNESCO) address the audience with tones of unease regarding the safeguarding of creative spaces, and a refusal of art to become instrumentalised. Dr Bernecker references the National Conference of Artists that took place in Venice in 1952.⁶ Its role was to question and outline challenges to artists and the public, the role of the artist in contemporary society. This was 65 years ago.

Working together for an enriching exchange between artists and cultural workers across European communities will never be a conversation with a fixed conclusion. Preserving artistic freedom and freedom of expression, while working to reject coercion, oppression and censorship is an ongoing responsibility of creative workers. We can only try to take stock of past failures and exploitations and form our discussions today with practical outlooks and hopes for the future.

⁵ *Practices of Peace*. Deveron Projects. 2017. www.deveron-projects.com/events/practices-peace. Accessed on: 6/12/17

⁶ Committee on Visual Arts. UNESCO. 1952. unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141691eb.pdf. Accessed on 2/10/17

Be Careful What You Wish For

In 2015, there was an 'Aha!' moment of cultural policy in Poland. Following a realisation that culture could be used as a tool for shaping ideas and building identity, it became a central issue and the money flowed. With the instatement of Piotr Gliński, Poland saw a Deputy Prime Minister who also held the position of minister of culture and national heritage, for the first time since 1989. Katarzyna Wielga-Skolimowska, of the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung in Berlin, was the Director of the Polish Institute in Berlin during this time.

Katarzyna asks the audience what we think the government is speaking about when they say 'culture'. She goes on to outline an agenda of national values by the Polish government, promoted through the arts and creating new elites in society. From fake folk dance groups and alternative folk culture to cancelling 'blasthemic' festivals and a complete altering of historical narrative in the case of a new Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk, the governmental interest in Polish culture is not a welcome one. Małgorzata Ludwisiak, Director of Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, however, describes a recent exhibition, *Late Polishness: Forms of National Identity After 1989*, which was able to present a multi-layered and multi-generational perspective of national identity, confronting ideas of neo-liberal capitalism, post colonialism, multiculturalism and the digital age.⁷ Though it was exposed to a risk of scandal, it was allowed to continue, unlike the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk.

After opening in March of this year, the nationalist government quickly accused the museum of diluting Polish history. The museum's director and historian Pawel Machcewicz's approach was to focus on other nations as well as Poland, seeing Poland not in isolation but part of a wider historical context. Gliński's response was to cut the funding in half, sack Pawel Machcewicz and initiate plans for the museum to merge with exhibits that focus more on Polish heroism and military campaigns against the Nazis and the Soviets.⁸

I think about John Donne and about Wolfgang Tillmans, whose 'No man is an island. No country by itself' *Anti-Brexit Campaign* poster has been back-dropping the conversation.⁹ It's taped to a window behind the speakers, a collection of 24 slogans that challenge the economically-focused Leave campaign, bringing attention to culture, history and social consequence.

Katarzyna talks about a deep distrust on government level of international institutions. After 1989, Poland had to network with international institutions and find strength through relationships, for example, through international grants such as 2004 EU grants. Now, cooperation is suggested to be a betrayal of national values. Multiculturalism and liberalism are not seen as positive agents of change, and collaboration is a political statement in itself.

The need to facilitate dialogue spaces is severely challenged by constant disruptions within the country. Katarzyna raises another question; how can you work and talk with the conservative population? This question resounds in various forms throughout the day. We skirt around the idea of a contemporary art that reaches and engages people of all political positions, suggesting points of view and offering opportunity for

⁷ *Late Polishness*. Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art. 2017. ujazdowski.pl/en/programme/wystawy/pozna-polskosc. Accessed on: 7/12/17

⁸ *Polish government sacks Museum of Second World War Director*. Patrick Steel, Museums Association. 2017.

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/12042017-polish-government-sacks-museum-of-second-world-war-director>. Accessed on: 3/10/17

⁹ *Campaign Archive*. Wolfgang Tillmans. 2016. tillmans.co.uk/campaign-eu. Accessed on 1/10/17

discussion. Claudia and I glance at each other. This is our aim at Deveron Projects, but we are acutely aware of our own distrust and avoidance of our conservative politicians.

The Barbed Wire of the Iron Curtain

Hungary joins the conversation and we hear that there is no strong opposition to the current neo-religious, xenophobic and nationalist agenda there. Echoing the focus on Poland, theatre critic Esther Slevogt tells us that art has had to support a new national narrative. György Szabó, the artistic director at the Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, describes the cultural situation since the 2010 landslide win of the Fidesz, Hungarian conservative party, in the Parliamentary Election, followed almost immediately by a change of directors in three major contemporary art institutions in Hungary.

The independent art scene is threatened in society with reduced space and diminishing agency. Attempts at protest have not reached critical mass to affect political decision. What there is, is hope, through projects such as Verzio International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival.¹⁰ Verzio aims to engage the broader public, promoting open society, democratic values and political and cultural pluralism. Discussions are programmed alongside screenings, allowing space for participants to also consider the social responsibility of artistic industries and the effect works, such as documentaries, have on public opinion. They recently hosted, Kornél Mundruczó, director of the underdog revolution tale *White God* who is cited on the panel for his stunning optimism recently expressed in an interview, saying: "I believe this is a time of hope. Because it is a time of plenty open questions."¹¹

Jeanie Scott, of the Artists Information Company a-n in Britain, asks the panel how they feel about their organisations receiving government money. Katarzyna is quick to interject that the money in question is 'public money', it does not belong to one body or agenda, yet in both Poland and Hungary public money is going towards folk culture and nationally-focused projects. The panel members all express the same sentiment that this starts at a local level and advise us to be in close contact with local politicians. Local support for organisations, projects and institutions is vital for the survival of such initiatives. This need for public support raises the question again of how to engage a wider public and what purpose, possibility and responsibility art has to contextualise wider discussion.

György insists we have to go to the bars, the football clubs, social spaces people inhabit: artists need to go out. Several comments are made from the audience, most memorably from an artist who recently visited the German countryside and was frustrated with the instruction to 'go out'. Her experience of 'going out' presented her only with a lack of understanding for contemporary art among the public. The public and their 'lack of intellect and closed mindedness' come up a few times throughout the day and make me feel distinctly uncomfortable.

There is a contradiction in terms when we say that we want to promote cultural freedom - and an art with the power to change and challenge - while also saying we are tired of a public who aren't educated enough to understand our artistic language. If art is to communicate and offer spaces for cultural and political plurality,

¹⁰ *Welcome*. Verzio International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival. 2017. <http://www.verzio.org/en/2017/welcome>. Accessed on: 1/10/17

¹¹ *White God Review: surreal dog uprising thriller with bite*. Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian. 2015. www.theguardian.com/film/2015/feb/26/white-god-review-kornel-mundruczo. Accessed on 2/10/17

is the responsibility not with us, artists and cultural workers, to change the language and ensure it is accessible?

YOU BREXIT YOU FIX IT

Scottish author Ali Smith's 2016 novel, *Autumn*, is credited as the first in a new genre of 'post-Brexit' literature.¹² Johanna Zinecker, research associate for British Culture at the Centre for British Studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin, introduces us to the novel and its descriptions of democracy as a bottle being threatened to smash.

Johanna addresses the topic of artistic concerns in the wake of Brexit and political, economic and cultural responses. She reports on the three areas of impact on arts and culture according to the findings of initial surveys by Arts Council England, Arts Quarter and the Creative Industry Federation: funding, such as access to EU funding and cuts to UK funding; restriction of movement of people and goods leading to less diversity and cultural exchange; legal issues and the potential impact on artistic quality.

Johanna addresses that with a consensus from the majority of the arts sector, academia and young people voting to remain in the European Union, we are facing a major issue of social division in communities. She poses the question of whether we can really call on the arts to heal social division, as is done by some senior cultural sector voices. I glance again at Wolfgang Tilmans' *Anti-Brexit Campaign* and wonder if we can challenge one politically charged art, without imbuing our response with our own political agenda. Tilmans is trying to bring the focus over to European history and culture, something Britain has a tendency to struggle with.

Johanna continues talking about the contestations around 'using' arts as an instrument or tool: the danger of not falling into the same rhetoric of utilising art for political agenda that we have just disparaged national governments for doing. Rather than using art for a particular agenda, can we not promote arts to offer conversation points and spaces for multiple sides of a discussion?

Executive Director for a-n, Jeanie Scott describes the artist membership company as non-political and responding only to the needs and wants of their members. They offer support for long standing issues of artists in the UK. Without economic status, artists in the UK (80 percent of which are educated to degree level) typically make significantly below minimum wage per year. Things weren't great, is Jeanie's point. And now, Brexit.

a-n's EU members base has dropped by 300 members since the referendum result in June 2016. People are concerned and unassured. Jeanie tells us that a significant portion of UK artists make between 3-5 trips per year to Europe for their artistic practice, insisting that this is an employment issue, not an immigration issue. She raises the issue of economic recognition, suggesting the introduction of an artist's passport that acknowledges the necessity to travel in order to fulfil the culture exchange demanded of the global art market. She finishes by talking about the levels of anxiety artists are currently exposed to in the uncertainty

¹² *Autumn* by Ali Smith — 'the first serious Brexit novel'. Alex Preston, Financial Times. 2016. www.ft.com/content/0e227666-8ef4-11e6-a72e-b428cb934b78. Accessed on: 7/12/17

of the future of Europe and the UK. Anger, loss, and a difficulty in returning to making work have affected many artists in the UK.

Joseph Young is a British artist who is dissatisfied with the entire situation. In Joseph's case, however, he is making work that is accessible, and even humorous; to shape the conversation of Brexit into one that challenges the complacency of other sectors in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, since the result, Twitter has proven itself a prime location for trolling wars to be waged between 'Remoaners' and 'Brexiters'. Active online, as the founder of @artsforeu, an artist-led cultural campaign for Europe, Joseph has reclaimed this title in his remix of the 1979 The Knack song, *My Sharona*, to *I, Remoaner*. He has released this under his fictional politician persona of Guiseppe Marinetti.¹³

Discussion turns to British politicians and UK citizen's general distrust for their political representatives. The binary polarity British politics is often described with, leaves a large proportion of the population lazy about their political positioning and confused about governmental relationships.

Someone in the audience asks a question about flags in Britain: they were recently in London and surprised at the lack of European flags. Joseph assures the audience that this isn't a pro-Brexit showcase, the British just don't wave flags. It provokes an interesting line of thought about voting identity and the, often, shame attached to voting a certain way. Claudia Zeiske, Director of Deveron Projects, reminds us that she has never met someone who overtly admits to voting for Brexit.

The Town is the Venue

Deveron Projects is based in the rural market town of Huntly in northeast Scotland. The organisation connects artists, communities and places through socially engaged art projects, adopting a *town is the venue* methodology. By inhabiting, exploring and activating the place through artistic projects, it aims to engage a wider public than traditional art venues and methods.

The concept of 'Acting Local' has been thrown around throughout the day in the promotion of success through local support and attempting an art that can reach a public mass. Claudia explains in her presentation that the expression Think Global/Act Local was originally coined by Aberdeenshire born town-planner Patrick Geddes. This 50/50 balance of Global/Local is kept in check with Art/Community, Criticality/Hospitality and Tension/Solution in the work of Deveron Projects.

Claudia takes us through various projects from the archives of Deveron Projects' 21 year history: Thierry Geoffroy's *Made in Huntly*, 2004, which asked residents of the town to consider what percentage of Scottishness they were; Roderick Buchanan's *Salon des Refusés: ARTCUP* which saw two football teams of professional footballers and artists selected to represent Scotland and Denmark in a game at Huntly Football Club, in 2009 during the actual World Cup in Germany which both countries were not included in; *Slow Marathon*, originally devised by Ethiopian artist Mihret Kebede in 2012, who wanted to clock up the miles from Addis to Huntly by having a large group of people walk a marathon of 26 miles each; *The Lubare and the Boat*, 2014, in which Xenson Znja and Sanaa Gateja came to Huntly from Uganda to conceptually return

¹³ *artsforeu*. Joseph Young. 2016. twitter.com/artsforeu?lang=en. Accessed on: 2/10/17

missionary Alexander McKay to Aberdeenshire, his influence still being felt in their own homeland today; The *White Wood*, which was planted by artist Caroline Wendling and the community of Huntly in 2015 as a living monument to peace, involving acorns from Joseph Beuys' oak trees in Kassel and limestone brought over from France, planted together in the Scottish soil; Manaf Halbouni's *What If?*, 2017, which imagined an alternative history timeline to the Sykes-Picot Agreement which divided the Middle East; and Claudia Zeiske's own *Home to Home* secular pilgrimage from Huntly to Unterpfaffenhofen on foot this summer.

The range of projects have much in common. They all address globally relevant social issues in a local context, and involve non-art community partners, integrating the projects directly into the town through discussion, workshops, events and social activity. The latter project sees Claudia herself confronted with a complex identity question of where home is in a post-Brexit Europe. Claudia tells the audience that she hopes she has proven that art in rural areas does not have to be boring, unintelligent or inaccessible. Having already touched on a tendency of 'talking to ourselves' with contemporary art not surpassing the walls that contain it, Claudia gives practical and tested examples of how to effectively take art and artists out.

Admitting that the job is never finished, she acknowledges that we must now address what has been discussed earlier today, and find ways of pushing this forward to reach our Conservative MPs directly and maintain an open dialogue. Jeanie reminds us that with so much overhaul in every area of our government to pull-off Brexit, culture is down on the list of priorities. And Katarzyna's sentiments of 'be careful what you wish for' regarding government interest in culture is still fresh in my head. Joseph concludes by expressing his fears that we can no longer have consensual conversations with what he calls the 'conservatives' collective madness.'

Claudia finishes her presentation with a worry, already highlighted by Johanna; restriction of freedom of movement will lead to less diversity and cultural exchange. A continuous flow of artists, interns and specialists from various locations and fields of expertise is a core part of Deveron Projects. A picture of the current team lingers on the screen behind the panellists. Of Deveron Projects' artists and team members, three are Scottish, three are English, two are Italian, one is Polish, one is French and two are German. A Lebanese artist is also working with the organisation and a community of 'Syrian new Scots' resettled refugees. The list could go on, but Deveron Projects is worried it won't be able to keep going on.

We turn to the subject of the media and discuss right wing pressure from most national news outlets. Esther also talks about the exaggerated common public projection of 'the good artist against the government', often cited in western media in a nowadays overcome cold war matrix. Here, artists and media lose their credibility and function of modernity to give different points of view to the public.

It's Not the Time to Be a Hero

In 2008 Istanbul was a city renowned as a hub for critically engaged contemporary art. The Istanbul Biennial in 2009 reinforced Turkey's place on the contemporary art map with packed venues spilling into its bars and cafés. In 2010 the EU confirmed this status by selecting Istanbul as the European Capital of Culture. We are now seven years on and marked changes in civil society and artistic freedom show a reputation contaminated by the political climate.

Poet and photographer Achim Wagner opens the Focus Turkey discussion by going through a fast paced timeline including: a violent attack at an art exhibition in 2010; Gezi Park protests in 2013; Soma Coal Mine explosion in 2014, killing over 300 people; 2015 summer elections; 32 dead in the Suruc bombing in 2015; the 2016 failed coup and a state of emergency; 2017, constitutional referendum, diplomatic crisis; 21 October 2017, violent protesting against secularism at an art exhibition, *Doors Open to Those Who Knock*, in Istanbul.

Dr Necmi Sonmez, an independent curator, informs us that freedom of speech and critical interpretation are not welcome anymore. With journalists, artists and activists who speak out against the current political situation being arrested and imprisoned: how do Turkish artists deal with the current crisis? Museums and creative institutions in Turkey are privately owned and the art market and its decorative dominance is churning out 'harmless' work in stark contrast to its current context.

He describes a recent trip to Istanbul and his arrival at empty, once bustling, meeting areas and a severe lack of critical art to engage with. Such rejection of reactivity to the current situation, Necmi fears, will lead to a complete loss of cultural memory. The younger generation of Turkish artists are faced with a lack of support and opportunities. It is a necessity of an artist working in Turkey in the current situation, more so than in other circumstances, to be an editor, curator, artist and publisher of their own work. Those who are trying to protect the critical power of contemporary art are extremely stretched.

Selda Asal's *Apartment Project* offers a method that is perhaps more workable for Turkish artists who want to make art that refers to their current context. Established in 1999, *Apartment Project* was one of the first artist run spaces set up in Istanbul. Focusing on local/global ideas exchange, artists practicing under extreme circumstances work together as a collective.¹⁴

The upsurge of Turkish criminals with no crimes, and a pattern of those who demand rights coming under threat, has led the collective of *Apartment Project's* 49 artists to establish methods of indirect expression. When asked why, during her presentation, Selda responds, "*because it is not time to be a hero*". The use of fear as political strategy and the constant threat of harassment, intimidation and imprisonment has driven many artists like herself to seek refuge and find creative space in other places. *Apartment Project* now operates from Berlin and finds ways of talking about today, without talking about today.

belit sađ is currently exhibiting at *Apartment Project*, with an opening scheduled for tomorrow night. belit talks through her artwork *Ayhan and Me*, to articulate her own refusal to accept Turkey's silencing of artistic expression. The proposal for this work was developed as part of the group exhibition *Post Peace*, curated by Katia Krupennikova, initially intended to be shown in Amsterdam, where belit is now based. The piece was about Ayhan arkın, a member of an unofficial paramilitary wing of the Turkish security forces. Ayhan was active in over 1000 executions of Kurdish people throughout the 1990s. In 2011 he publically confessed to his involvement.

The Akbank Sanat International Curator Competition, 2015, accepted Katia's proposal for *Post Peace*, featuring belit's *Ayhan and Me*, thus changing the location of the exhibition to Istanbul, with belit being the

¹⁴ About Us. Apartment Project. berlin.apartmentproject.org. Accessed on 20/11/17

only Turkish artist involved. Akbank Sanat, bypassed the jury's decision by insisting they could not accept belit's piece, and without ever providing an official rejection letter. After much toing and froing, they accepted a revised proposal from belit but would eventually cancel the exhibition completely, without public statement.

Akbank Sanat had, in the 1990's, hosted an exhibition of paintings by Kenan Evron, the leader of the 1980 coup d'etat in Turkey, from which the region still suffers. They did not question his role in this and have since failed to take responsibility for a number of interferences in cultural content. belit talks about the normalisation of censorship through creative institutions' alliances with oppressive government policies. With opportunities for creative freedom continually shrinking, belit calls on artists and cultural workers to reject the acceptance of silencing artists. The current state of artistic censorship, alerts us to the fact that the majority of society in other sectors, people in more fragile places, are being censored already. In a statement she makes regarding the censorship of *Ayhan and Me*, she makes clear that she does not want to intimidate people who don't have the channels for speaking out, or who are living in fear or risking their lives, but that people must find ways to speak out collectively.

*"Every struggle in this region is connected, even though some might want to separate them. The one sharp difference is that some people get censored and others get killed in this country. Exactly because of this, we, the ones who get censored, need to keep ourselves connected to other resistances and realise our privilege."*¹⁵

How to Make Sense of Fog

When the floor is opened to questions after the Focus Turkey panel, the first comment expresses the view that the political situations of Poland, Hungary and Britain pale in comparison to that of Turkey. Although there is a consensus that what we have just heard from Turkey is deeply distressing, we cannot place other issues, such as those discussed today, on a shortlist. While looking back at history, such as through remembering the 1933 forced resignation of Akademie members, and the layered perspectives of *Late Polishness* and *Uncertain States*, we must also look at the fragmented variances of our current global context. We must be citizens of our world and look at our place collectively to see how each piece fits with each other, if we are to effectively strengthen international collaboration.

In the introduction to this conference, it was expressed that art and culture should remain places of reflection of politics and society, without being restricted by politics and society. We have been presented today with a range of current situations in regards to this. Polish representatives tell us that their government is now too interested in culture, to the point of censorship and reinterpretation of cultural history. Hungary tells us of cuts, replacements of creative directors, and a lack of strong opposition. British panellists are frustrated by the public's complacency to the impending exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, themselves driving campaigns to reach out and integrate the Brexit discussion into social spaces. Turkey, in a state of emergency, faces justification of severe cuts to art and culture, and struggles with how to communicate the current situation, without jeopardising personal safety.

¹⁵ Belit Sağ: *Refusing to accept Turkey's silencing of artistic expression*. 2016. www.indexoncensorship.org/2016/05/75504/. Accessed on: 7/12/17

We cannot see these circumstances with the same nationalist boundaries they are born from. Jeanie Scott has encouraged us today to familiarise ourselves with the facts, György Szabó has urged us to get out into public space, belit sađ has demanded we work together.

I am reminded of a clip of Theresa May insisting, *“If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere.”*¹⁶ I am confident to disagree with Ms. May today on this matter, and look forward to continue talking with my fellow creative workers.

As evidenced through the mention of the National Conference of Artists that took place in Venice in 1952, we will always have cause to consider the challenges and role of the artist, but when we do have opportunities to come together and create space, we must ensure there is a collective future considered.

The IGBK and ADK give us a practical progress plan to consider and work on:

Long-term perspective of the European Union will only grow with a cultural identity based on complexity and diversity.

These important values could be the groundwork for a possible creation of a space for exchange and dialogue between European artists and cultural workers.

Such a space – Council for Culture – should be an equal interlocutor for European institutions, not as another lobby organisation, but as an instrument, which reflects the complexity and the inconsistency of the cultural sector in Europe.

We discuss the name, the form and the how of such an initiative. But it is late, and we decide we must meet again. Such things are too important to rush talking them through at the end of a long day.

Machines For Living

On Saturday I meet Claudia at Zoologischer Garten and we ride the U-Bahn to Olympia-Stadium. She shows me Le Corbusier's 1957 Unité d'Habitation.¹⁷ I'm interested in the concept of this vertical city, with 'streets' instead of floors. A machine for living, what is that: a house, a home, a community, a globe? I think about boundaries and borders again, and about machines, restrictions and oppression.

We have a conversation about function and use, starting with Le Corbusier and leading to our own work at Deveron Projects. We are an arts organisation, but we don't bring art out for people to see, we don't necessarily even make art with them. Art is our method for engaging communities in projects that have relevance to their everyday lives and the wider world. Maybe art is always an instrument or tool of some kind, especially if we are talking about what it can do, who it can bring together, and what discussions it can provoke. And using it for 'good' is always relative, which is a problem of any tool or - for want of a better word - 'weapon'. I'm reminded of a comment made during the *Fragile Affinities* conference, that art is not innocent.

¹⁶ *May's Revolutionary Conservatism*. The Economist. 2016. <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21708223-britains-new-prime-minister-signals-new-illiberal-direction-country>. Accessed on 26/11/17

¹⁷ Unité d'Habitation. corbusierhaus-berlin.org/en/unite/. Accessed on: 7/12/17

The responsibility we have as artists and creative workers is heavy. The power of art to shape culture and society has been realised by nations such as Poland who utilise it as instrument, as so many nations have done before, evidenced in *Parapolitics: Culture and the Cold War*. How can we fight for artistic freedom when the very concept of 'freedom of expression' is packaged and sold by big business, such as Apple, Google and Facebook? When 'good' is relative to agenda, who is right and who can claim ownership of the toolbox?

In trying to reject coercion, oppression and censorship, we can only create space and dialogues for collaboration, invite as many voices as possible into them, and respect each. I shall write to my MP.