

A thousand kitchen tables

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the meeting without knowing why, and Ali runs outside to better understand what is going on.

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Two days later I see the helicopter rising into the air having scooped water from the loch below ready to be dumped onto the wildfires. The flames have been sprawling unpredictably across the land, branching and multiplying as they are blown to the west across dead bracken and heather.

That first night we lay in bed with the blinds open, watching a thin line of flame describe the hill line through the trees. All the signs are good. We have an overnight bag ready, but we know we will probably be OK. The wind is blowing away from us, but the anxiety remains in parallel to the pandemic. As the virus blazes across the planet, we are all staying home, if we can, in our attempt to slow its crossing.

My laptop starts chirping, an insult to the birds outside. The ringtone is calling me to my next meeting where we can be alone together.

Pil and Galia Kollektiv are artists, writers and curators. Their work addresses the relationship between art and politics. They've had solo shows at Project Hospitale, Tottori, Centre Clark, Montreal, Naughton Gallery, Belfast, Pump House Gallery, London, Te Tuhi Center for the Arts, Auckland and The Showroom Gallery, London. They have also presented live work at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the 5th Montreal Biennial and Kunsthall Oslo. They are the directors of artist run project space xero, kline & coma and work as lecturers in Fine Art at the University of Reading, Royal College of Art and CASS School of Art.

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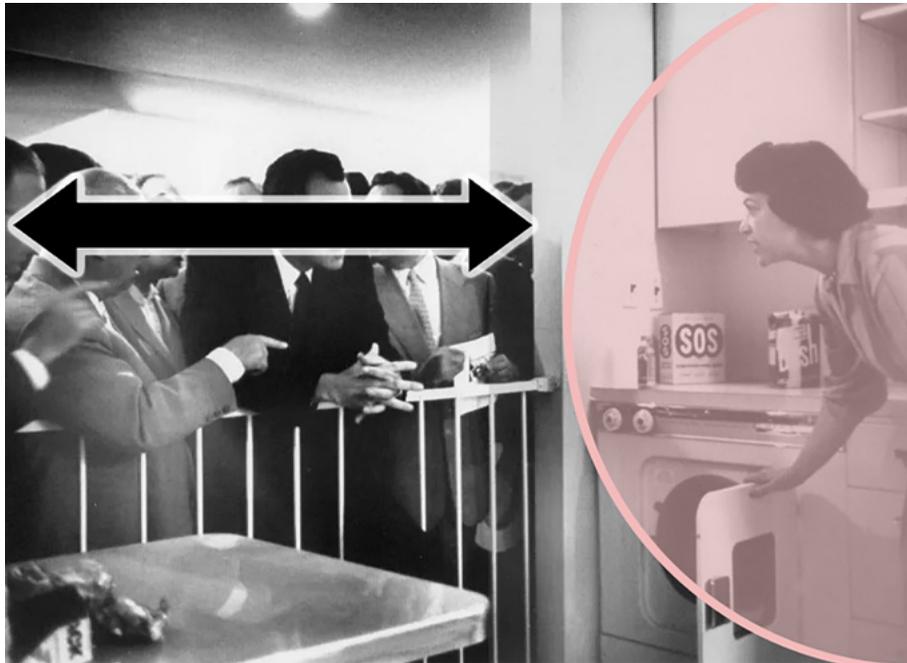
A Thousand Kitchen Tables

By Pil and Galia Kollektiv

Over the last few decades, a series of dichotomies have been eroding quietly under the pressure of life in late capitalism. Private/public, work/leisure, consumption/production have become irrelevant in a system where value emerges directly from the marketisation of human capital. In 1971, Daniel Buren described the artist's studio as 'a private place, an ivory tower' where portable objects are made to be consumed elsewhere.¹ For most artists until very recently, the studio has been 'anywhere with a WiFi' – a kitchen table, a café, a train journey. The artist has become an entity that collects, connects and displays internet searches, mobile moving images, social media conversations and eBay listings. Art production has moved away from Buren's model a long time ago and is now rooted in dialogue and process, ephemeral and responsive, produced directly at the point of engagement with other humans and objects.

¹ Buren, Daniel, 'The Function of the Studio', *October*, Vol. 10 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 51-58.

In a pandemic, with the removal of (semi-)public spaces for the consumption and production of art objects or spectacles, these conditions have become even more pronounced. In this respect, through COVID-19, conditions that were already prevalent but somehow still shapeless under the patchy surface of austerity, have crystallised into clear form. In redefining practices that were previously supported by more public spaces of production and display (or at least fed into them), artists now have to accept these post-Fordist structures. Where in the past the artworld



may have been divided on how to respond to the rise of post-studio practice, with some doggedly insisting on materiality and regularity as marks of resistance and others adapting more keenly to project-based, post-internet art, the choice has now been removed from us, at least temporarily, leaving us to re-evaluate the hierarchies embedded in these positions. Art will now emerge from bedrooms, quarantined hotel rooms and parks as a default rather than as the consequence of failure to attain the historical conditions of studio practice or by vanguard choice. One of the interesting questions for artists is how to find critical distance within this: how can we create work from within these imposed conditions and reflect on them at the same time?

On the one hand, this question, of how to be critical without occupying an outside position, has plagued artists for a long time. However, in the time that has passed since Joanna Drucker celebrated complicity as the end of critical negativity in art, the world has changed. We are well past the 'end of history' moment that saw neoliberalism unfettered in the wake of the end of the Soviet Union. In the face of the current resurgence of fascism, complicity hardly seems like a problem and being in opposition feels easier than ever. Where fifteen years ago, dissident artists would be offered the crumbs from the table of the major art fairs via performance and talk programs, in the age of austerity there is far less risk taking on the part of those institutions and the precarity of millennial life means fewer opportunities than ever present themselves to make the tough choices of resisting the seductions of the art market. At the same time, while the aims of dissent feel clearer than ever, our means of expressing it in the form of some kind of collective action have been curtailed by circumstances.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt notes the division in classical Greek culture between the private realm, where economic activity resides, and the public realm where political life happens through debate and collective action. For Arendt, part of the problem of modernity lies in the collapse of this binary and the creation of an economics driven politics. COVID-19 has brought back an interesting version of this dichotomy. A lot of economic production now happens in the privacy of one's home, while politics is exclusively about the policing of the coming together of bodies in public, at least while economic activity is suspended. This new realignment of the public and the private does not skip art institutions. Public museums, as Benedict Anderson and Carol Duncan remind us, are an arm of the state whose function it is to reproduce citizenship, a sense of belonging to an imaginary, shared, history and geography. As such, it will hardly be surprising to find that these institutions will likely participate in the biopolitical policing of access privileges where entry into their 'civilising' spaces is granted to citizens but forbidden to those designated as non-productive (the 'shielded', disabled, ill, old and those who care for them).

However, since exclusion from these sites is nothing new for many, there are plenty of examples to draw on in thinking about how art might proceed outside them. We can think of feminist

art that dealt with the institutional marginalisation of women by resorting to mail art networks and exchanging art objects by post. The work that came out of these exchanges was clearly a critique of domesticity and the gendered labour associated with private spaces, but through circumventing traditional galleries and modes of display they never allowed for an external 'public' critique of the private. The site of production, materials (often 'domestic' stuff from newspapers to yarn) and modes of display created a critique of the domestic without stepping outside of it. Consider for example Su Richardson's *Burnt Breakfast* (1976), a crocheted 'full English', a critique of domestic labour paradoxically delivered through a labour intensive and underappreciated medium, or Carlyle Reedy's *Yoga with Interference* (1981), using the bed as a set and referencing 'lists of groceries, schools schedules, Christmas lists, book lists, lists of all the things that women have to do in slavery of domestic life'.²

Similarly, we have long been fascinated with the Moscow Apt Art movement, where domestic spaces became sites for production and display of art, as a model for making art in the absence of a legitimate public sphere for critical artists to operate in. With the evisceration of our own public space nearly complete, we might do well to draw on such historical precedents for strategies, where a fridge becomes the first page of a novel and the kitchen sink a monument for Malevich, or Yuri Albert's performance piece of (literally) helping people with household chores. The concept of Skretiki, recently foregrounded by the Moscow Garage Museum's survey, reminds us of the possibility of art as a secret practice shared between initiates but coded for future use, in anticipation of a public to come.

As the current uprising against white supremacy and police oppression demonstrates, it is too soon to condemn the political constitution of publics to the history books. And yet there are many for whom this type of public collective action will be impossible. With further repression inevitable and a shrinking cultural space for critical production, away from the Zoom curatorial initiatives and online galleries, it may be that the artistic public sphere of our plague times yet to emerge is being constituted across a thousand kitchen tables, awaiting its time.

² Reedy in Di Franco, Karen(ed.), *Carlyle Reedy*, exhibition catalogue, London: Flat Time House, 2014, p.25.

[Juliet Jacques](#) (b. Redhill, Surrey, 1981) is a writer and filmmaker based in London. She has published two books, most recently *Trans: A Memoir* (Verso, 2015). Her short fiction and essays have been included in several anthologies; her journalism and criticism has been published in *Granta*, *Sight & Sound*, *Frieze*, *The Guardian*, *The London Review of Books* and many other places. She has made four short films, one with artist Ker Wallwork, which have screened in galleries and festivals across the world.

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The Digital Classroom and the Digital Studio

By Juliet Jacques

Recently, my colleagues and comrades [Pil & Galia Kollektiv](#) contributed a [piece](#) to this series about how the Covid-19 crisis means 'Art will now emerge from bedrooms, quarantined hotel rooms and parks as a default rather than as the consequence of failure to attain the historical conditions of studio practice or by vanguard choice'. Pil teaches with me at the Royal College of Art, and was on the picket line with me in March 2020, just before the UK began its fatally belated lockdown, striking against the [consequences of neoliberalism in the art school](#): casualisation of labour, unsafe workloads, falling pay, and pay gaps relating to ethnicity and gender. One of the things we discussed, stood outside in the freezing cold, was the possibility of the institution forcing staff and students to move to online learning and how much that might diminish not just our employment rights but our pedagogical horizons. Before the strike even ended, the pandemic forced the issue: we might not yet have been asked to record lectures that can be paid for once but recycled endlessly, but we have been forced to teach students whose bedrooms