

Breaking the Silence – Towards Justice, Solidarity and Mobilization

Nearly two years have passed since the ArtLeaks platform published its first case. Enough time, however, for this transnational project to gain force and speak for itself. It speaks of a threshold which borders the structural violence of a system that we recognize as unfair and unjust. For everywhere we look, be it in the old West, in the New Europe, or in Asia or Latin America, we recognize similar patterns: unpaid cultural workers, censored artists, the precarization of life, the brutal crushing of one's rights for political, social, and economic emancipation.

In these two years in which cases have been regularly published on ArtLeaks, we learned that Mexico City is far from Toronto, and that Calcutta has little in common with Dubai. Nevertheless, it is symptomatic that from amidst zones of the global cultural realm previously not at the forefront of debate, some of the most powerful voices which struggle for new types of democratic engagements have emerged. It is here where violence appears most evidently, where Capital is in the process of producing its discriminating laws and its oppressive hierarchies, and where Creative Capital organizes in its laboratories its most dreadful experiments. At a global scale, we witness how political radicalism is digested with easiness by corporate culture, while the commons are registered as copyrighted trademarks; we diagnose the artistic research being privatized, we see how the market takes over and dictates the conditions of art production, dissemination and reception, while spreading its ideological representations of wealth and fame to come in a future afterlife. Last but not least, we acknowledge how nationalisms, xenophobia and racism are incorporated into the official dominant culture of the neoliberal state, while dissenting voices are censored, repressed, and shut down.

If the ArtLeaks platform intended to highlight and expose structural redundancies of the art and cultural system, through the first issue of our Gazette we aim to address the problematic of reinventing tools for the mobilization of resources and emancipatory models that help to articulate the movement of cultural workers. The texts, which were selected from a pool of open-call submissions under the theme of

“Breaking the Silence,” bear the mark of the specific contexts of their production: nevertheless, they are all brought together by the red thread of the will to bypass the passive registering of a future cultural death.

In the aftermath of the Canadian student protests of 2012, which saw an unprecedented solidarity between students, artists, and other professions, Milena Placentile revisits processes of the privatization of education and the arts: she suggests that what is at stake is control over culture, as control over the autonomy, rights and citizens’ power of imagination and she revisits models of artistic resistance which have been shaped by the will to resist repression. With the experience of the Dutch infrastructure of the arts, currently under fierce right wing attack, and basing his approach in key moments of recent history of culture, Jonas Staal argues for a new approach towards what we understand through the concept of institutional critique, an approach which strives to make visible different ideological camps and that involves taking decisions on which of these camps one belongs. In this context, he discusses how his New World Summit project – which articulates alternative parliaments for political and juridical representatives of organizations currently placed on so-called international terrorist lists – articulates a transgressive movement before and beyond the demarcation lines between art and activist politics. Evgenia Abramova achieves a practice based radiography of the labor conditions of art workers in Moscow, and draws conclusions on further steps to be taken in the harsh Russian political context. Veda Popovici, a participant in the occupation movement of the Bucharest University and in the Romanian street protests of 2012 investigates art’s power to act politically, and analyses the opportunities allowed by the cracks in the state’s law. Mykola Ridnyi brings forwards the social and political context of Ukraine, highlighting its derive towards repression, conservatism, and Christian orthodoxy, and denounces cases of censorship in relation to these shifts. Amber Hickey recounts the story of the birth of the Liberate Tate collective in which she is part of, and focuses on the tactics that this spontaneously articulated group considered amidst the blatant conditions of censorship that Tate Modern imposed in relation to its main sponsor, British Petroleum. She also investigates the larger framework of the ethics of art’s sponsorship deals, in the context of the struggle of institutional critique artists. Fokus Grupa suggest that inheritors of last century’s thrust for articulating artistic manifestos are various attempts to formulate artist’s contracts; through the workshops that they organized with various types of audiences, they propose that articulations of artists’ contracts and agreements represent concrete steps in the struggle of protecting cultural workers’ rights. Marsha Bradfield and Kuba Szreder recount London based research cluster Critical Practice’s attempt to propose a project which would have inserted itself in the fibre of the institutional apparatus of the Berlin Biennial, with a declared intent of changing the biennial’s economy. Acknowledging their failure, the two authors investigate what it would take for such a proposal, amounting to fairer revenues to all the actors involved, to be successful. Finally, drawing on the history of artists which have refused, in

various occasions, to take part in exhibitions which were ethically and politically problematic, Lauren van Haaften-Schick presents her project of collecting letters of “non-participation” which will be further disseminated as a publication and exhibition series. To these contributions, Evgenia Abramova, Milena Placentile and Gregory Sholette, added to the glossary of terms, by discussing the concepts of “art worker”, “labour conditions”, “neoliberalism” and “glut”.

Thanks to all those who have contributed and helped to put together this first issue of the ArtLeaks Gazette, the editorial collective is confident that the discussions which will follow will significantly contribute to our common struggle of reinstating justice, solidarity and mobilization in the cultural field.

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