

Unstable Media

*Unstable Media, constructions and disruptions*

*Portuguese Small Press Yearbook 2017*

Unstable Media is a collective that acts through variable means and subject to disappearance, constituted by Ana Carvalho, Margarida Carvalho, paula roush and Sofia Ponte. Sofia lives in Porto but goes to Lisbon often, Margarida lives in Lisbon and once in a while visits Porto, Paula lives in London and frequently visits Lisbon, Ana has lived in Lisbon and now lives in Porto. The topics of the conversations that we have had, online and in person, for about three years, focus on specific artistic practices that interest us, the classes we prepare and teach (we are all teachers in higher education) and the various projects we are part of.

With an emphasis on the queering of gender issues, our activity as the Unstable Media collective focuses on the development of participatory artistic and curatorial strategies, seeking not only to provoke but also to investigate the complexity of these relationships. The liminal state of the artistic projects we have been carrying out calls for the study of exhibition, documentation and archive models. We work together because we have different perspectives and that enriches us. To this day we have been able to take advantage of the various visions in a constructive way and

for this reason we have advanced to a curatorial cycle composed of three collective exhibitions that have two elements in common: all exhibitions assume the scarcity of material means as a simultaneously conditioning and creative element, and are the result of an invitation to national and foreign artists, who develop mainly multidisciplinary and participatory artistic practices.

In 2016 we organised the exhibition *Do It Yourself – Art by Instruction*<sup>1</sup> at Sput&nik The Window, Porto, in 2017 we organised the exhibition *The Book Dispersed*<sup>2</sup> simultaneously at the Casa das Artes and at Sput&nik The Window, in Porto. In 2018 we plan to develop the third and final exhibition in this cycle.

Our aim with these exhibitions was to work with less conventional and lesser-known contemporary art approaches and to explore curatorial functions. In our view, the curatorial activity varies between dismantling the inherited visual regime, questioning how things are organised to be seen, as well as the conditions in which we observe them, establishing the representation of a particular theme / narrative / concept and materialising this representation by inserting it in its context.

In the exhibition *Do It Yourself - Art by Instruction* we have assembled a set of instructions created by artists, placing the emphasis both on the conceptual and

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<sup>1</sup> With instructions by Livia Flores, Mónica de Miranda, Daniel Moreira, Susana Pedrosa, Inês Ponte, Patrícia Portela, João Ricardo, paula roush, Luísa Salvador, Susana Mendes Silva, Adriana Tabalipa, Rui Torres e Nuno Ferreira, Marta Wengorovious.

<sup>2</sup> With bookworks by Beatriz Albuquerque, Patrícia Almeida & David-Alexandre Guéniot, Ana Alvim, Abigail Ascenso, Isabel Baraona, Ricardo Basbaum, Stanislav Brisa, Jessica Brouder, Catarina F. Cardoso, Isabel Carvalho, Paulo Catrica, Julie Cook, Ana Efe, Os Espacialistas, Ana Fonseca, Lara Gonzalez, Dejan Habicht, Michael Hampton, Teresa Huertas, Andrea Inocência, Calum F. Kerr, Sharon Kivland, Tanja Lažetić, Catarina Leitão, Ana Madureira, Fernando Marante, Daniela de Moraes, Eugénia Mussa, Eva-Maria Offermann, Andreia Alves de Oliveira, José Oliveira, Susana Paiva, Tadej Pogacar, Pedro Proença, Carla Rebelo, Eduardo Sousa Ribeiro, Mireille Ribière, Sara Rocio, Ana João Romana & Susana Anágua, paula roush, Ana Santos, Kim Svensson, Francisco Tomsich, Filipa Valladares, Francisco Varela, Rodrigo Vilhena, Emmanuelle Waeckerle e Gillian Wylde.

participatory dimensions, as well as on a gender approach, giving priority to works created by women. The artists developed their projects working towards a dematerialisation of the works, many of them expressed in verbal and imaginary gestures that could be interpreted and performed by the public. The instruction-rule (s), as work of art, can be understood as an order, as a form of organising a certain time - space and can be put into action and be, therefore, materialised. We consider that, as a result of the conceptual shift brought in by cognitive capitalism, art by instruction takes place in a society where the circulation of words, images and desires in the global information networks is intense, and participation has become its model of expansion and value production.

In historical terms, women artists have highlighted issues related with the distribution of art and audience participation. In this tradition, *Do It Yourself - Art by Instruction* proposed artistic practices that emphasise mutuality, empathy and dialogue, thus creating new connections in the space shared between the artworks, the artists and the public, calling for an emancipatory reception that seeks to distance itself from the fetishistic value of visibility.

After this experience we advanced gradually to an exhibition that would come to be entitled *The Book Dispersed*. In this exhibition we engage with an audience interested in publishing as an artistic practice, emphasizing the complexity of the historical moment. The exhibition is inspired in the concept of the 'dispersed museum' proposed by Charles Esche, a curator who understands that one of the greatest challenges in art museums today is not only to show the culture that existed

in a certain era but to intervene in the public sphere in a more meaningful way, encouraging, for example, the development of artistic practices that wish to establish a position for the future.

In the 1960s and 1970s the artists' book came to be seen as an alternative, democratic platform largely free from commercial and/or institutional control, which could be accessed in the private sphere. With the rapid development of digital technology and the consequent rise of the internet one might have expected the book to have become less relevant as an artistic medium, yet this has not come to pass. That digital technology has made it easier and less costly for artists to produce and distribute their work worldwide is certainly a contributing factor, but given its creative potential, couldn't the artists' book also provide a format that not only challenges exhibition norms, but also actually expands their horizons?

In a way, the exhibition *The Book Dispersed* hopes to contribute to the construction of an idea of contemporary art more synchronous with current concerns, proposing ways to circulate critical ideas that potentiate the interruption of the current logic of the more conventional art spaces. For this, through the possibilities of the fluidity of the arts and under an exploratory perspective of the artistic practices engaged with the text and the artists' publications, we invited a group of artists to contribute with their work to the project. We assembled the works in two art spaces in the city of Porto with the aim to create a collective space to read, think and debate a remarkable aspect of contemporary visual culture: the rich and diverse practices evident in publications produced by artists.

Thus, we built a relational space at Casa das Artes that created a space for publishing to be experienced as a social experience, removing the artistic work from its protective frame of uniqueness; and at Sput&Nik The Window we showed works that require a different encounter with the public, open to another type of poetic experience.

Collaboration, as part of our working methods, is a crucial principle that extends beyond the collective Unstable Media, drawing on our individual ongoing collaborations, expanding to other artists that we bring in for each exhibition. These are challenges that we set ourselves, more than anything else, and test our capacity for realisation. We seek to create spaces for action and creation, places full of trial and error. We consider that an exhibition is an unstable place, we want to contribute to its deaestheticisation , thus creating a space that is more open than closed.