Exploring the politics of collectivity.
A manual, a recapitulation and a projection into new possibilities for culture and its institutions. Based on experience, facts and incipient transformations.

In this presentation we would like to unravel what we call the politics of collectivity within the artistic cultural field. It is also an invitation to think whether this approach might be able to un-mold the existing (pre)-conceptions of what an Institution is, how it works, how it functions and how do we in charge develop our practices and responsibilities. We would like to believe that new rituals and attitudes should be activated in order to be able to address the institution itself as a generative resource at disposal for a social transformation.

When I say we, I am talking of myself and Gerardo Tuduri who unfortunately could not accompany me in this presentation. We bring to this specific table our own experiences, in my case at Intermediae, an experimental institution in contemporary creation dependent of the city council and based in Matadero in the city of Madrid and Gerardo´s as one of the promoters of the Factory of Authorless Cinema still under construction as one of the initiatives taking place now at Intermediae.

I would like to introduce myself as a curator. My practice is curatorial, understood as a creative and organizational activity. I am not a theorist although I sometimes enter this field to better understand my position as well as my practice. I don't act generally as a lecturer although I do it at present as a way to commit critically with the cultural production.

In order to contextualize I will briefly introduce Intermediae and the Authorless Cinema collective. Intermediae is a space and a program for experimental practices mediated by art. It opened in early 2007 as the first institution settled at Matadero Madrid. Matadero is a giant complex of industrial warehouses intended to be dedicated to representing different disciplines in the art

culture. Matadero was also imagined to function as a powerful icon that would crown the urban reorganization and gentrification plan for the south of the city.

See the following links:

http://www.madrid.es/UnidadesDescentralizadas/ProyectosSingularesUrbanismo/MadridR
%C3%ADo/J Multimedia/Presentaciones/MataderoyZonasur.pdf

Procesos
http://vimeo.com/15659178

The collective of Authorless cinema (from now on CsA) develops a method for film production that claims a horizontal way of realization between any interested person and its team, all of them with specialized profiles in the field of cinema. They theorize and put in practice a democratic approach in all the processes within cinema production and its distribution. CsA was founded in 2007 and since then has developed various projects based in different neighborhoods of the city as a way to engage with multiple communities.

See the trailer:

Estudio Abierto – Sinfonía Tetuán
https://vimeo.com/26673288

When we started Intermediae we decided to challenge our mission seeing it as an opportunity to start questioning our power positions as curators and organizers and also those given to the art Institutions. This was our point of entry when we set out to explore the politics of collectivity. We were hoping to find a way to democratize culture and its institutions.

What follows is a possible manual of how to enter the politics of collectivity, which has been put together through an exercise of recapitulation of relevant events and facts, of experiences past and present. Meaning, it is a manual that has been already tested and that we offer for

its improvement.

See:
Puertas abiertas
http://vimeo.com/15658894

One of the first things we pursued at Intermediae was the de-activation of the assumption or identification of the art center as an exhibition space and/or event launching machinery. We wanted to build up and to put at stake other ways to organize the cultural experience with the conviction that the tension and difficulties that this exercise might cause to us all, as producers and as publics, will also open possibilities for rethinking alternatives. This goal was put as the initial question to be problematized and to make us reflect on some general assumptions we have inherited: such as how art centers should look like and also about what are the sets of rituals that through the history of museums we have acknowledged in our practices and have imposed to others. At that moment we were creating a state of shared liminality as a possible entrance to explore collectively the means of an art institution in its very starting process of definition. It was a first proposal; a challenge and an invitation to all agents who might potentially get involved in the future activity of the institution.
Because the term liminality plays a very important role I will quote a simple definition that the wikipedia gives:

In anthropology, liminality (from the Latin word līmen, meaning "a threshold"[1]) is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. During a ritual's liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which the ritual establishes.

*Being situated at this liminal stage, old rituals,
especially the ones using the exhibition as the tool to
centralize or channel our forms of relation with the art
institutions, had to be abandoned and new ones needed to be
found and practiced.*

*We wanted to release the pre-conception of art as a co
modified condition by proposing the introduction of a
rehearsal of a new technology – what we call, the technology
of experiences–. The art of this new technology would be
acquired thanks to the cultivation of processes instead of
exhibitions. Processes seemed to us the organic medium able
to operate as a transitional device in the already opened
liminality condition. Also the expanded perception of time
that the practice of processes implies will be of benefit to
all those involved. And as a very relevant point I would say
that the institution could then be understood as a
continuum, a being thought always becoming.*
*I will quote here Philosopher and theorist Pedro Aullón who
tried to explain our understanding of process.*

*Process is the idea relative to the relation and the
dynamics of change and assumes, in our way of seeing
things, a vivid sense of experience… Process as a necessary
becoming, no longer in the theoretical or practical sense
but rather as the reality which goes beyond that
distinction, is indivisible both from an idea of reflecting
upon the becoming as well as from the idea of becoming
itself, since it is possible to believe that any becoming
is subsumed within the passing of events. Pedro Aullón de
Haro. Philosopher and theorist*

*It seemed we created for ourselves a weak position in which
the very action of denying the general given in order to be
able to produce a common and relational system could easily
be misunderstood. At that point it was, as if we were
offering an empty gift more than offering an emptying action
that needed to be achieved in order to create a condition
for a dialogical and shared construction of the future.*

*This technology of experiences being activated through the
cultivation of processes instead of exhibitions and situated
in a liminal stage as an entrance to welcome new rituals and
attitudes enabled us to develop a techne, a craft-like*

knowledge of experiences and forms of subjectivation in order to perform and rehearse a specific function of art in social transformations. We became craft-makers of experiences mediated through art. When I say we, I mean all the agents, individuals or collectives that engaged in the production and transformation of the institution. A craft-like knowledge of experiences is a knowledge sustained always by multiple authors, and has the capacity to grow never identical and never unequal because each experience is unique and all of them have value.

To develop a technology of experience through art could be qualified at first as a minor practice or medium, but our intend was always to transgress this position of being positioned as a minor in relation to major ones. Meaning: we wanted that the minor could become major without loosing its qualities.

This is how Raqs Media Collective describes Minor practices:

The differences between different kinds of practice are chromatic. They are differences of character, not of quantum. There may be major and minor media, but the differences are not analogous to the differences between greater and lesser or higher and lower practices… Minor practices introduce tonal alterations that rearrange the regularities made familiar by the repetition of major practices. They alter the mood or setting or emotional tenor of a practice by insisting on attention to irregular variations. They are ways of remembering, imagining, and accounting for things that do not get remembered, imagined, or accounted for in the ordinary course. At the same time, they are things that can be done every day.

Minor media are not masterstrokes and do not seek to produce masterpieces, and they are not necessarily worked on by great masters. What they do allow is a dense layering (by one person or by many over lengths oft time) of the work of art with a multitude of surfaces that produce a context, rhythm, and texture of accumulative annotations. It is this accumulation that occasionally yields the sharp significance that is the unique property of a work done in a minor key.

By situating the technology of experience at the center of our processes we needed to change our general ways of

addressing publics. We could no longer see the other as a user or as publics. A different position needed to be found for a reconfiguration and especially since through the technology of the experience it seemed we were practicing ways of becoming other and many. It is at this point that I would like to introduce another one of our maxima or steps in order to come closer to a manual for the politics of collectivity. For what I just said, we tried to renew the status being assigned to audiences or publics which run parallel to the history of museums, by addressing them not as audiences or publics but by its condition of citizens with a right to art.

Our task at intermediae has been always to practice these stands as our policy, hoping for them to be understood, taken care of and if possible cultivated fully by us and partly or fully by all the agents taking part in the construction of the institution. Through the years, we got involved in the production of a variety of projects that in one way or another resulted in a series of activities that contributed to the cultivation of this policy. We have always applied this policy through the activity, testing all the possibilities to be imagined and envisioning little by little its power of transformation.

But, at some point we reached the stage in which a need emerged to fix the new rituals in order to not forget them and be aware of the risk of seeing them fading away out of exhaustion. A constitutive and sustainable methodology needed to be found for a further materialization. We had been resilient to the given models and had proposed ways to un-mold them collectively and we had been acquiring the needed skills to rehearse successfully our policy but what still seemed unclear is whether we were able to overcome a stage of endless liminiality.

See a selection of images from Intermediae´s activity:

The proposal that the CSA collective made to Intermediae recently, to accompany and support the construction of a factory of authorless cinema, could foresee a very interesting and unique turn for Intermediae´s present and future. The fact that CSA´s proposal is not to host a project, not even a one off, but a factory of authorless cinema opens up the possibility to think of a transformation of Intermediae´s policy into concrete and specific politics. This point should not be left aside precisely in this discussions on the elaboration of a manual for the politics of collectivity.

CsA entered Intermediae after spending five years exploring and testing, theoretically and practically, possible ways to transform the given cinema industry into a new system of cinema production. During this time, they managed to define a specific policy and also an exemplary methodology of work, based mainly on changes of procedures that will look at the fabrication of collective ethics.

The specificity of their proposal makes it very interesting in the sense that, precisely the fact to be acting in a framed field, that of the cinema industry, allowed their methodology to be very sharp and consistent and highly operative.

CSA started by studying deeply the set of rituals that were defining the cinema industry. They analyzed them critically taking into consideration its forms of production, administration and distribution and not only its forms of representation. These former forms have been historically under the dominion of two hegemonic powers, the power of the studio system and that of those recognized as authors. So to say, minorities that where producing and distributing films assignating the other the position of spectator or consumer.

Departing from there and taking into consideration the impact of the digital processes, the free culture and the net, it was clear to CsA that there was an urgency for revising the inherited rituals of cinema production and to transform them by taking into consideration all these social and technological forms. A very pertinent moment to claim a

democratization of the production and distribution of cinema.

I will now describe the particularities of the policy they propose in order to achieve their objective. You will see it, although under different vocabularies, very similar to Intermediae´s policy, in CsA´s case applied to the system of cinema production instead of being looking at instances such as the art institution or the art museum.

The author should commit suicide, meaning that the author should put at disposal its authority, power position, knowledge and disciplinary control. This would be a voluntary decision by which the old rituals of production that were -exclusionary, elitist, minority, individualist or corporative-, should be abandoned to reach new ones, those characteristics of an authorless practice by which anyone is to be included actively, creatively and critically in the production, administration and distribution of cinema. This would be the first and crucial step that would allow the cultivation of a new policy by which the old author could leave behind his old practices and find a sense in his new condition as Non-author. This emptying action (of property and authority) is essential for allowing any collectivity an entrance to occupy creatively the field, to have a right and a responsibility.

From this crucial gesture and position is from where their name Authorless Cinema comes, opposing it to the last enunciation of a policy in the cinema world, that was declared by François Truffat in the 50s as the "Politics of the author".

Once this possibility of occupation has been created what happens is that a new imaginary composite is there for reorganization. The imaginary that organized the production traditionally was coming from the minority subjectivities of the investors and of the professionals in the field and now the authorless cinema proposal displaces them to welcome those coming from any one and the many, grouped as new social collectivities producing films. Those considered spectators or consumers for the cinema in the XX century

will now become producers and will form the politics of collectivity for the new cinema to come.

In order to achieve its means the CsA will transfer the operational modes of production, administration and distribution of cinema, before in hands of a minority, to the hands of the citizen transforming them into social operational modes. Instead of hierarchy, elitism, private activity, exclusivity and difference of class, gender, etc. CsA will introduce horizontality, inclusion, public activity, equality of social value, equality of authority in decision making processes and the promotion of dynamics by which professionals and non professionals are both considered as producers and administrators of its filmic representation.

What CsA proposes is that all the traditional methodologies and procedures accounted to produce films would have to be transformed into democratic ones, always open to citizenship participation.

The reorganization of methodologies will also result in the formation of new politics that according to CsA would be defined as follows:

1 A Social Operational mode of pre-production.

Pre-production which is usually intended to be devoted to planning the viability of a film should be transformed into social encounters between the team, who puts at disposal its knowledge and media, and the plato-mundo, the world-set. This coming together will trigger the process of "wanting to do one or more films together"

2 A social operational script.

The script should be done through collective discussions around the different social narratives based on the interests of the people involved in creating a movie.

3 A social operational mode of filming and staging.

People should have the opportunity to review, propose and decide on what is being shot as well as to hold different technical roles in the production process according to his own inclinations and interests.

4 A social operational mode of editing and post-production.

The film editing process and postproduction should be open and public. The raw audiovisual material is viewed collectively and the decisions on its modifications are also taken collectively.

5 A social operational mode of Display.

The most relevant events of display should be those that bring together the first or Present viewer (the one who have participated in any way in the making of the film) with the Remote viewer (the one who was not involved in the production and would be in the position of the old cinema viewer). The exhibition should be a time for exchanging and an opportunity of sharing work and for the remote viewers to join the film production.

6 A social operational mode of management and distribution.

It should be each specific community the one to determine the mode of management and distribution of the film and the community should be the ones presenting and defending the film when it is displayed and showed anywhere.

See the audiovisual compillation:

Videoblog Fábrica de Cine sin Autor – Capítulo 3
http://vimeo.com/51914091#at=0

These are the politics of a new model of social production in cinema, in which the old rituals are opened up, put at disposal and finally performed by the population that gets organized around the production and exhibition of films. This model has been tested and improved for some years involving communities of different types and with all sorts of reasons for coming together. The actual challenge for CsA with their proposal at Intermediae is one related to growth. What are the risks and what are its cures in the work to be

done to transform a project, its policy and politics, into a factory of Authorless film production, a factory owned by the citizens?

The factory of authorless cinema and its realistic construction in Intermediae is still a version of futurity, but it is a great field for speculating new scenarios within the art production and its institutions. The more tangible and closer speculations open questions such as if the exercise to think of a factory of authorless cinema would give Intermediae the opportunity to acquire sustainable procedures and methodologies and if those will be key for transgressing its minor practice into major? And further away but attractive enough to think about it. Would it be possible to think of Authorless Factories as the ones to constitute a testing model for reorganizing our given systems of production within the art field and its institutions? Would we be, with this, envisioning the politics of collectivity?

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