This House Is Not a Home: Producing Encounter-Based Collective Formats in the Time of COVID-19

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In the summer of 2020, the a-disciplinary platform K moved into the exhibition space of Lothringer 13 Halle in Munich. The event *This House Is Not a Home* that K organized there functioned both as an exhibition space for gallery visitors and also as a social format for meeting and sharing. Over the course of the intervention, more than 50 participants came together to inhabit the space, share their skills in art and other disciplines, eat together, and use the infrastructure. The space was furnished with artistic contributions that represented individual participants and were also functional. In this practice-based, autoethnographic essay, three organizers reflect on how the event was planned and unfolded in the light of the institutional regulations and demands that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They discuss the dynamics of social, nonrepresentational formats in art institutions and processes for negotiating them.

Keywords: a-disciplinary, artistic labor, collective practice, conflict, contemporary art, COVID-19, housing, K, self-organized, utopian

Isabel

From the 15th of June through the 20th of September 2020, the a-disciplinary platform K temporarily moved into the exhibition space of Lothringer 13 Halle, a kunsthalle run by the city of Munich. The space bears a vague resemblance to what we imagined Andy Warhol's Studio 54 looked like back in the day. This former engine factory from the 1930s is tucked away in a back building, and surprises visitors with its vast space, bright skylights, shiny concrete floors, and a creaky, winding wooden staircase leading to the offices. It is located just off pretty (read: bourgeois) Lothringer Street in Munich's tasteful French Quarter and can be found by following the smell coming from the Japanese patisserie next door, which makes excellent brioche. En route, one passes through a courtyard under the watchful gaze of a giant Virgin Mary statue. Mary, the imaginary guardian of Bavarian law, order and tradition, inhabits a niche in the wall of a neighboring house, the ground floor of which is used to host visiting

artists, such as ourselves. This atelier apartment became one of the houses and homes that we, the five core K organizers, as well as other K collaborators, got to inhabit over the course of these three months, together with the homes of private hosts and family members, hotel rooms and vacation apartments.

K is an open initiative that experiments with a-disciplinary forms of exchange in the fields of artistic practices and research. Since 2013, various people associated with K, whether temporarily or on a more long-term basis, have contributed to symposia, exhibitions, and workshops. These serve as a platform for young researchers and artists to test their own (un)contemporaneousness by means of recurrent personal encounters. By now, K has established itself as an intimate laboratory and a public forum for transnational cooperation. Previous meetings were organized in Karlsruhe, Berlin, Athens, Hydra, Munich, and Karlsthal in Brandenburg. Each time, we found different funding sources, including the ifa, the DAAD, and Erasmus, as well as various other international arts and research foundations. What started out as a K organizing meeting in a studio migrated through different temporary spaces, such as artist residencies, studios, self-organized project spaces, art school guesthouses, Airbnb apartments, and a repurposed barn. Thus, the theme of home had always resonated with K's practice, while never becoming permanently manifest.

Our thematic emphases emerge out of individual participants' contributions in response to the respective location and changing interpersonal constellations. This makes K a constantly changing body of multiple possibilities. It assembles current topics of artistic and research practice, as well as things that are of personal relevance for us, and brings them into new formats, again and again. The ever-changing group of people involved in different iterations of K came from a network of friendship ties built around shared interests, shared courses of study, or long-standing friendships. While the initial organizers, Angela Stiegler and Matthias Numberger, as well as the subsequent core team are all German, international participants came to K via encounters at academic exchanges, conferences, or through an extended international circle of friends. As such, K is very much the product of a purposeful cultivation of friendships based on shared interests, as well as of a new international level of academic training, paired with the accelerated possibilities of cheap travel and digital communication. For young people from their mid-20s to mid-to-late-30s, these influences come to represent the entire generation now growing up with a mesmerizing multitude of possibilities and a commensurate amount of exhaustion. British economist Noreena Hertz (2016) has named the generation after us Millennials 'Generation K': teens who are 'coming of age in the shadow of economic decline, job insecurity, increasing inequality, and a lack of financial optimism.' Things will only become more complicated moving forward. K wanted to offer an alternative way of being and working together in the face of these developments, whilst unavoidably being shaped by them.

This House Is Not a Home was organized by Isabel Bredenbröker, Sarah Lehnerer, Lennart Boyd Schürmann, Angela Stiegler, and Felix Leon Westner. K's intervention at Lothringer 13 functioned as an exhibition for gallery

visitors and also as a platform for participants. But we labelled it a 'platform,' rather than an exhibition, because it was first and foremost designed as a social format for meeting and sharing. In contrast to an exhibition format, which is focused on installed work with an optional side program of events and performances, the core elements of *This House Is Not a Home* were its many contributions and contributors. The space and its setup formed the 'home base' for meetings, talks, workshops, physical exercises, a live radio studio, and other kinds of direct interaction in the space. These took place over the course of the entire project phase and, in their most condensed and intensified form, during three activation periods. On these three long weekends, up to 30 invited participants and additional guests from the public came together to 'inhabit' the space, share artistic and other skills, eat together, and use the infrastructure. The 'house' was essentially furnished by artistic contributions that represented individual participants, but which were also meant to be functional.

The title *This House Is Not a Home* alludes to the fantasy of turning Lothringer 13's vast, loft-like into a place that can be inhabited. Yet, while we did not actually live in the loft-like space, it was furnished and used extensively. Our vision was not to recreate a communal living space like those of the 1960s and 70s. As time, capitalism, cities, and the art world have moved on, such a scenario has become both impossible and inappropriate. Most places which may formerly have been the ideal 'empty loft,' cheap and available places for partying and making art, can now only be accessed through institutions. Otherwise, they are in private hands and often unaffordable. In this sense, *This House Is Not a Home* was essentially a collaboration with an art institution that conceptually aimed to go beyond the limitations of institutional frameworks, where, as the slightly disquieting title suggests, one can never be truly at home. Rather, we wanted to inhabit the Halle by means of constant encounters and activities in the space. Having functional and hands-on artworks in the space acting as 'the furniture' aided in turning processes of exchange between participants into means of production, jointly bringing forth what was being experienced, shown, and made here.

So there we were in January 2020, looking at the beautiful space of Lothringer 13 Halle during our first meeting with the Lothringer team, planning towards what would be our biggest collective effort as of yet and our first collaboration with an 'art institution' that offered us a space, a budget to work with and a small team to help with planning and production. The connection to the Lothringer 13 Halle emerged when the new curatorial team arrived and reached out to different Munich-based artists who were working with issues of encounters and collectivity. The team—Lisa Britzger, Luzi Gross, and Anna Lena von Helldorff—announced a curatorial concept (Lothringer 13 Halle 2020: 'About') that

> 'focuses on collaborative, context-specific and transdisciplinary positions. Fostering enduring alliances and new temporary spaces, the site becomes activated for different uses. Artistic practice, its mediation and reflection become temporally and spatially intensified and serve as impulses for a joint negotiation of the contemporary.'

As is evident, K's practice and the curatorial concept for Lothringer 13 overlap in a number of aspects, making K a perfect fit for their program. When Angela, one of the K organizers and an artist living in Munich, was contacted by the team in late 2019 to see if a collaboration was possible, the COVID-19 pandemic was not yet a reality and K was a (temporarily dormant) loose structure with an organizational 'core' that had seven years of self-organized practice to its name. In various previous contexts and formats, K has enabled collective moments of encounter, circling the epicentre of the art world on its planetary outer rings. The difference between these two universes became apparent on several occasions. For instance, when we were in Athens, just before documenta 14, a project which was accompanied by criticisms of German art funding and presence in the city, these criticisms were projected onto K, producing uncomfortable frictions. Yet we were in fact unrelated and completely irrelevant to documenta, and only had a small budget which we spent on accommodating and feeding participants. While our meetings took place, participants took care of the temporary collective structure. When we went our separate ways, K went into hibernation mode—until the next time someone made an effort, organized new funds, gathered people together, and took the lead on communication.

In February 2020, a few weeks after our first initial meeting with the Lothringer team, all members of the core team were back in their respective homes across Germany, locked down and paralyzed as cancellation emails for all kinds of academic, cultural, and art events kept popping into our inboxes. Watching the course of events carefully as winter turned to spring, we communicated via Skype every other week. Yet, we had no clearer vision of how to proceed, let alone think of a scenario in which it would be possible to *get together*, actual physical bodies and all, in a physical space, *and* enjoy it. We decided not to cancel early on and instead waited for a bit. We postponed the event for a month and were lucky enough that, as it turned out, our chosen timeframe fit exactly into the summer months when art spaces were allowed to open in Munich, and 'meetings in professional contexts,' a title we could claim for ourselves, were allowed to happen. Plus, borders reopened. In fact, one week after we vacated the space in September, Munich's city administration went back to limiting get-togethers to 20 people. So, we were really lucky! Still, these summer months brought about many experiences that were quite unexpected.

K: Krisis/Korona

Given the simple fact that collective structures seem to fall apart if no one takes partial ownership of them and maintains them, our 'core group' of five people had crystallized around the wish to maintain and organize a practice that would correspond to a common desire—perhaps a mixture of responsibility, enthusiasm, and involvement. In a paradoxical way, the 'house that was not a home' was a haven of sociality for us that summer, with a multitude of positive and

productive experiences which will remain in the participants' memories and live on in the connections created between them. Yet, as persons producing, organizing, and participating during all three meetings that summer, we were also left with a lot of impressions and memories that remain unresolved.

While the work of making encounters and togetherness possible was more important than ever in the summer of 2020, the overall circumstances were even more difficult than they usually are when facilitating a meeting of many practitioners with their own projects and personal preferences. Usually, these encounters are just as exciting as they are intimidating. The new status quo under COVID-19 required us to constantly negotiate over what was safe, appropriate, and allowed, and, most importantly, over who got to make those calls. These processes were taking place in a setting ripe for vulnerability and conflict on several structural and personal levels. The public art institution could, unsurprisingly, have been much better funded, and would very much profit from additional staff and support systems; interacting with a self-organized collective was an additional challenge.

There had, of course, been multiple conflicts during previous K events, related to questions about where funding comes from, how it is administered and distributed, who is an enemy or a friend, how solidarity is enacted, what labor is worth and who does the work, and what the group represents to the outside world, as well as how to be aware of and deal with one's own privileges. There was also heartbreak. Those, among other things, had been issues discussed over the course of our meeting in Athens that took place just before documenta 14. Two years later, we dedicated a self-published zine (K Hybrid 2018) to these conflicts, in an attempt to work through what had actually happened, beyond all the personal stuff and emotions. Then as now, the problems that arose seemed to be largely related to systemic vulnerability and the anger that comes with it.

As is often the case within self-organized structures that depend on the mercy of arts and culture funding, things are never easy or very plannable, and it is usually expected that people work for free. That was already the case before COVID-19. The system of art professionalism, with its insides and outsides, claims to offer rewards through the opportunities it creates. One can get access through meeting people, showing your art, talking about your work, going places—activities that are part and parcel of cultural labor. Those who are in a position to invest their time and energy are inevitably aware of this, and may be assumed to have consciously signed off on this deal. Obviously, the structures that are created are circumstantially fragile, driven by high levels of affectivity which can go both ways very quickly, and are thus prone to breaking down under all kinds of interpersonal and systemic pressure at any point.

Adding COVID-19 to the mix felt like shifting the delicate balance of the system. It served as an additional agent, an agitator, which, like an aggressive solvent, had the potential to attack the barriers usually in place to divide the personal and the public, the zone of friendship and the sphere of professionalism. Discussions about the attribution of 'leisure' or 'private' time as defined by the state in response to COVID-19 show that there seems to be

a confusion of terms. According to the logic of the state, those activities that may be economized by labelling them as 'non-commercial' or 'leisure time' seem to be identical with those activities that enable cultural labor to gain value in the first place. Hence, the limitations that cultural institutions and cultural labor were now put under reduced the already fragile system even further in its ability to be a self-supporting economic sphere, a source of income and value. This in turn just comes to show that these labels do not work for artistic labor, as they are far too generalizing. Put in place by non-experts, they do not allow for negotiation—a process which is essential for cultural production. K's participants share the conviction that working outside of the sphere of defined institutions and professional roles in the arts is of crucial importance for enabling fruitful collaborative processes. Therefore, it has been a central concern for K to understand how relations within our fluctuating group are shaped and negotiated.

In self-organized contexts, since professional roles are not put in place by an institution, they are subject to a continuous process of articulation, enaction, and negotiation. There is no established infrastructure which creates a barrier between the private and the public. This increases the risk of things 'going wrong.' Or, in more positive words, it requires effort, energy, and willingness on all sides to do the work of communication. The same was true for the institutional and even political side of our negotiations with the Halle and the city. We were mostly in a position of having to rapidly adjust to new rules and regulations which, quite arbitrarily and with no room for discussion, dictated the terms under which we were allowed to meet, when to wear masks, when to let the public in, when to close, how to announce the events, what to call them, etc. At one point, the program was only being communicated to people who had pre-registered and was not even made public. At another point, we had to adjust to ever-changing public opening hours and throw masks on whenever a non-member of the group entered the space, just as we had to hide all foods and drinks on such occasions. And these things kept happening. While the rules were coming from above, from the city's board of the arts, they had to be enforced by representatives of the Halle, who also had to walk a tightrope, weighing their own judgement against the dangers of being closed down, risking people's health, or being held personally and financially accountable—an explosive mix. In that respect, COVID-19 and the drastic and often arbitrary limitations to social and cultural life that it introduced brought out the frailty in the system of artistic labor and of attempts to provide a different kind of environment in the face of political agents who consider artistic practices to be 'systemically irrelevant' exercises of leisure time and private consumption.

K: Koming together

For once, we learned that what we had been doing all along—bringing people together and attempting to spend funds on financing their trip, food,

and accommodation—was actually much more important given the current circumstances of increased isolation, the fear of meeting other people, and a general sense of despair in the face of a reduced social life paired with existential anxieties. Now, the sheer infrastructural possibility of encounter offered a much-needed outlet to those who could make it. Others, who were holding off on travelling and seeing people, or stuck in some part of the world for lack of transportation and open borders, were sadly not able to join. For myself, the meetings in Lothringer 13 were my only opportunities to meet people and be social that summer (besides the occasional dog walk with a friend). I think I can safely assume that it may have been the same for a lot of others who were there. So, finally, our precarious labor of love, of investing time and energy into a self-organized project that offered a decidedly different approach to the competitive professionalism of academia and the art world, seemed to be paying off.

The process of trying to find out what was safe, acceptable, and consensual gave us moments of great joy and pleasure: a wealth of contributions, experiences, and efforts. There were joint lunches and dinners, sharing the food cooked in the space on a long modular table including a set of dishes shaped like nerve cross sections. There were physical exercises, ecstatic headbanging dance workshops, spoken word performances, a secret bar, a spectacular dinner with electric daisies that made our mouths foam and spread hot gossip, numerous intimate talk rounds about health and feminism, screenings of films and video works, collective drawing sessions, tech investigations, audio walks led by migrant voices, tea from a samovar, a disguise session, theatre rehearsals and an exhibition in the exhibition, reading and writing sessions with and about Jewish antique books, heartbreak, fireflies, and friendship; a free-floating Hermès belt, queer nesting and dance experiments, a workshop for building clitoral reading chairs, a letter with questions from afar and a horoscope created long-distance, a set of chairs incorporating a bar, a pillow singing lullabies in a fantasy language, an army of crying onions and a makeshift tent commemorating collective living experiences in a London housing cooperative, a decorative hermit and angry songs about work, automated birds, a mobile sauna including an open-air shower, and the voices of a choir recorded over distance during lockdown.[2]

In the middle of the large space, if the tables or stage had not temporarily taken its place, sat a massive painting—Philipp Schwalb's 2016 *Pfütze des FlächtingsSog (Blues-Soul), Tod-Bild-Generator, Metamorph-Instru-mentz (Bildschatten), FleckSchlag als erstes virtuelles Farblicht (RÄPs), planetarische Spannung (Orangen und violette)*—a kind of puddle on which devotional objects could be deposited. Positioned on the floor, in a somewhat precarious position, this puddle served as the center of gravity. It was the first thing to arrive in the space and still remains there in my mind. It served as the bonfire to gather around, the TV replacement, the collective center. It represented a source of chaos and adoration, all of which needed an anchor to tie them to the group and the 'house that was not a home'—but was almost something more.

Figure 1. Soft headbanging session guided by Emma Waltraud Howes during a performance by Felix Leon Westner with participants on the 11th of September 2020 (courtesy of Constanza Meléndez)

Figure 1a. Painting by Philipp Schwalb with radio from Cashmere Radio and drawings by Anaïs Bloch (courtesy of Isabel Bredenbröker)

Angela

Before the pandemic arrived at our doors, we wanted to create a 'house that was not a home.' Once we were all affected and mostly restricted to the four walls of our very own houses and homes, we realized that this house at Lothringer 13 Halle in some ways felt almost like a home—with a massive living room.

Home is, ideally, a place where we take care of each other, no matter what. As we look at the pandemic now, in late fall 2020, we realize that actually the most dangerous places, the places where we are at high risk, are those of family, of closeness, of friendship. The places where control is lost and emotions move in. The home is one of these high-risk places, serving paradoxically as a refuge from infection and also simultaneously as a place where it is much more likely to get infected. *This House Is Not a Home* made it possible to escape those homes, empowering each other but also ending up in other kinds of troublesome situations. It turned out there were several risks to think about that were not strictly COVID-related.

As the people making up the core team, the organizational heart of the project, so to say, we knew that, in order to create this home/not home, we needed to physically come together. Did that also mean that we had to make ourselves at home in Lothringer 13 Halle? Making ourselves feel at home—what does that actually mean? Firstly, it meant talking about who takes care of what and how. They say home is where the heart is. Like the heart, home is actually a very fragile place. Maintenance is more than just housework; being a host is more than just saying 'hello' and opening a door. We all shed sweat and tears to make an exhibition space 'almost a home' (Brunnmeier 2020), quite contrary to what our title claimed. This is why our experiences together often hit close to home.

After knowing and working with some of the K collaborators for nearly eight years, our relationships can neither be appropriately described as strictly professional, nor as strictly private and affinity-driven. Just like in families, there are patterns that repeat and become habits. Within such a friendship economy, the price of working together is sometimes just as high as the risk of losing control. Claiming, as we discussed, to practice and exercise together-ness is a very idealized way of talking about an encounter between 50 people in an art space. One of the consequences of such an idealistic perspective is that, in some ways, everything that is hard and not soft feels about fifty times harder. The COVID-19 crisis became a 'contrast agent,'[3] a substance that makes existing, but overlooked, things visible. The fantasies and expectations around the creation of a different kind of exhibition space grew and grew because everything else was collapsing and one longed to leave the house at some point, to escape those circumstances. What was there to encounter outside? Other stressed individuals, groups and families with needs and worries, personal and professional.

Our encounter was based on 'decent' production circumstances, indeed 'better' than for any of our hybrid meetings the years before, but when all is said and done, what seems to be a lot of money in the budget is never enough to pay everyone a wage for their work. Some of us were lucky and, thanks to COVID-19, received a 5000 Euro support payment from the state of Berlin. Those in Bavaria did not really receive much support from the Bavarian government and had to find other solutions. But what about those who did not end up that lucky? Instead of slowing us down, the restrictions created in response to COVID-19 actually meant a speeding up. In a moment

of crisis, even the established ways of slowing down and counterbalancing the ever-increasing speed of productivity become a battleground where diverging interests intersect. If there was someone who did manage to slow down at Lothringer 13, it was the security guard, comfortably at home behind their mask and plexiglass barrier, using their phone, consuming endless hours of twitch streams, vaping and drinking energy drinks, neither recording the visitors' contact data as required due to COVID-19, nor performing the welcoming gesture needed to make someone enter into the home/not-home that we had created. How could such a disconnect between the inclusive social format and the front desk representing it have emerged?

While preparing the concept of the exhibition, we had repeatedly discussed the role of the janitor—the housekeeper, caretaker or concierge (*Hausmeister*), the one at the door, the one who was there by default, at least during the opening hours of the exhibition space, maintaining and taking care. The caretaker, the way we had imagined it, was the person who would be responsible for the exhibition in terms of security and technical upkeep. But rather than having one concrete caretaker, our idea was to make this a fluid concept that everyone participating could share and embody, making responsibility a collective thing. One concrete aspect was intended to be a person at the entrance who could welcome people, clearly marking the format as an exhibition within a homely context. Conceptually, the Lothringer 13 team and the K organizers were on the same page here, wanting to create an environment where vulnerabilities are given appropriate consideration, labor is acknowledged on both sides, and people in and around the project are encouraged to interact.

Reality proved to be very different. At Lothringer 13, the first person visitors encountered when walking into the space was the security guard: someone working for an external security firm who was appointed by the city, making them weirdly deaf to the dialogue initiated by K and the Lothringer team. We were troubled to find them at the front desk, yet actively not welcoming people. But what were the alternatives? It was clear that this job could not be done by us, as we could not really live in the Halle and would also not be paid for it——in short, we had no capacity for this. Nor did the system allow us to employ anyone else or return to the previous practice of having art students as guardians in the space. The position had been outsourced, and this strategy of exploitative neoliberal labor organization had produced a moment of disconnect. Here was someone who did not actually care, but depended on the money from the job, merely sitting it out until it was time to go home. Under COVID-19 conditions, we could sense this divide even more strongly. Things became more and more uncomfortable and all attempts to talk to each other proved fruitless. We felt that a t-shirt of a right-wing rock band was the straw that broke the camel's back. With a lot of effort, we liaised between the city's office for cultural affairs and the security firm until we were given a replacement, this time someone who was very engaged and interested in the project. A welcome change, but, as much as the first person, completely up to chance.

Another instance in which we experienced unexpected resistance was in response to a mobile sauna and the presence of people in the courtyard. Along the white wall behind the front desk was a pile of firewood that we were using for the sauna in the yard. A tried and tested tool for relaxation, the sauna was the first 'piece of furniture' that visitors saw before entering the house/not-home. We only got to use it twice before one of the neighbors complained about it, in particular about smoke from the fire that would drift into their apartment. After we used it a third time, they succeeded in getting a chimney sweep to confirm that the sauna itself did not pose any hazards in its construction, but that it was hazardous to their health, as the smoke could enter their apartments. We stopped using the sauna and put a lock on the door, as overcoming their resistance felt beyond our power. Although we were told that the previous team of Lothringer 13 had already received a variety of complaints from neighbors, implying that the complaints were not directed personally against the group, the events that followed made it hard to remember this.

Figure 2. Yard with Virgin Mary statue during a writing workshop with Stefan Janitzky and Laura Ziegler and a parallel session in Zeno Legner's sauna (courtesy of Constanza Meléndez)

After the sauna complaints, the outdoors had become contested ground. Given stricter COVID-19 regulations for indoor spaces, the yard had become very precious to us as a place where we could breathe, relax, and work together without masks while keeping the required distance. It was here where, on an afternoon in June, we sang workers' songs with lyrics that members of the group had written the day before. During the second activation phase in July, someone—we are left guessing if it was the same neighbor who had complained about the sauna or someone else—started attacking the group with stink bombs. Small glass vials with a stinky-yellow liquid came flying out of an open window which we could not locate, and suddenly, the whole courtyard stank. When whoever it was kept on throwing these tiny stinky things, we called the police, since we felt threatened by the fact that

we were unable to use the yard anymore. When the police finally arrived, they did not do much, or, in their own words, they were not able to do anything. Left to our own devices to defend our recreational area, instead of slowing down, we had to take rapid action. After another vial came flying, we rang several doorbells to investigate, without clear results. In any case, the attacks stopped. Our common precarity and the increasing heat of summer made us forget the animosities within our own lines. 'Enemies'[4] outside our group also really helped. But similar dynamics were fated to repeat themselves. In the last activation phase, the struggle to find collective moments shifted once more, and the common enemy was yet to be found.

Lennart

On an August morning, in the sweltering heat of a gallery space, a group of people sat on yoga mats. They listened to a voice which performed a journey through a linguistic cartography of the body, accompanied by the recurring question 'Is that ok with you?' As the mantra of consensual agreement was repeated for the fifth time, one of the participants collapsed. Regardless of the careful intonation of the voice and the proposed logic of consent, something seemed to be not ok. Was it the pervasive hypnotic penetration of the body/mind that incited this collapse, or just a lack of oxygen? We didn't have the chance to delve into the causes of this little incident. Quick and effective assistance in the form of fanning and administering fresh water seemed more essential than analytical clarifications. It seems that practice has its own rules that are not only fairly unconcerned with discursive elaboration, but indeed operate as a set of tacit schemes that are best not spelled out in detail. Is it a tendency of rational language to be sharper than collective practices can endure?

K: Rehearsing socialisms of distances

As the omnipresence of the 'manifesto' in twentieth-century collective practices shows, common endeavors are often accompanied by a desire for group consensus and a unitary vision, e.g., a shared intellectual horizon. K has searched for ways to abandon these modernist reprises of the group catechism. Instead, we have sought to establish a framework and set of practices that is more about acting out the right degrees of distance and proximity, thereby allowing for a variety of positions to coexist as different within a shared time and space. 'Sich aushalten'('enduring/bearing one another') served as our agreed-on formula, our minimal 'consensus of dissent,' a project that loosely resembles Roland Barthes' (2002) phantasm of 'idiorhythmic' co-living, as elaborated in his seminar held in 1977 under the title 'Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens.' Drawing on the organizational modes of monastic life, Barthes assembles

patterns of togetherness that would allow for individual rhythms to co-exist, envisioning the paradoxical utopia of a 'socialism of distances.' At first glance, our aim to gather practical evidence of fruitful alternatives to the status quo (the myth of atomized non-relations or commodified forms of interaction) seems rather humble. Yet, trying to build reliable relationships outside of the trope of 'higher aims' or 'die dritte Sache' ('the third thing,' as Bertolt Brecht liked to call the communist project, presupposing a rational 'common denom-inator,' the 'tertium comparationis' around which people would unite [1992]) has turned out to be quite an ambitious project.

Figure 3. *Ikebana (de Maistre/Jünger/Dustan)* by Lennart Boyd Schürmann. In the background: a writing workshop with Jenifer Becker (courtesy of Constanza Meléndez)

K has aimed to jointly enact procedures of relating within an environ-ment that develops along with each participant's contribution. Our scepticism towards a shared rational ideology as well as the absence of larger narratives prevented us from using the category of 'failure' that accompanies revolution-ary longings for utopian renewals. This was probably also a result of having experienced, in different ways, the practical contradictions of more heroic agendas. Instead of a positive thematic account of what we sought to attain, we tried to bring into operation certain open-ended procedures that would bring potentially quite heterogeneous agendas into contact. Using the rather elastic term 'a-disciplinary,' we tried to locate our position as a drifting one, aiming to keep our distance from established disciplinary segmentations of knowledge production as well as from the corresponding institutions that reproduce said professional delimitations. Since every experience presupposes institutionalized forms, our more cautious approach to collective experimentations can in ret-rospect be described as unintentionally adapting and translating premodern societal models of kinship, such as tradition, friendship, and the family. While some of these terms have a rather regressive appeal, which usually incites protest under the banner of emancipation, they might serve here as heuristic abbreviations outlining the implicit parameters that shaped K's practice.

Ks implicit models of self-regulation

Tradition in K

Sharing a practice through time allows for shared experiences to unfold in the form of enacted memories. A variety of common situations can serve as examples and points of reference. The singling out of particularly noteworthy moments can ground a common horizon in the form of festive repetitions. The implicit patterns that become crystallized and habituated enable a certain independence from explicit rules. Example: The K core group, the five people organizing K, has assembled as a result of enduring commitment, instead of being appointed by election or conscious deliberation.

Friendship in K

The way people were invited to K was by way of friendly association with one of the K core group members—that is, emotional affinity and mutual respect— whether as the result of a spontaneous intuition, of shared interests (political or thematic), or of an already established relationship. This procedure has, in contrast to what our self-concept would imply, led to our group being rather homogeneous in terms of its socio-economic and ethnic profile. Most people had an academic background and were already experienced in collective practices within the fields of art or cultural production, as well as accustomed to institutional critique.

Family in K

Within bourgeois society, the family serves as a unit of economic cooperation and affective investments, enabling social reproduction. The CSU (the Christian Social Union in Bavaria) used COVID-19 as an opportunity to pave the way for a renaissance of the infamous notion of the 'nuclear family' as the supposedly primordial and primary unit of social interaction and contact. Far from any association with the ideology of the *Kernfamilie*, the dynamics of K's practice, at times, resembled those of the family. Instead of biological features, elective affinities and contingent biographical paths gave the group coherence. Assembled under the common name 'K,' its various temporary members belong to a virtual framework of perceived kinship yet to be actualized, extended, reaffirmed, or renewed. K2020 was composed of an impressive number of couples and other types of partners who cultivate intensified affective, intellectual, and corporeal forms of exchange. These already existing bonds now potentially also expanded towards other people in the group and contributed to a 'familiar' atmosphere, including forms of excessive behavior which normally would not appear under the formalized and disciplined masks of friendly socio-political exchange.

COVID-19 regulations and the metalanguage of state authority

These aspects of K's practice (as I have tried to extrapolate them ex post facto) were faced with an endurance test as we tried to adapt our practice for

a public art institution under COVID-19 conditions. The required health and safety measures helped to take the pressure off in relation to some problems which accompanied our project. It seemed less urgent to communicate the relevance of our platform to external visitors and the 'general public,' since even a few people from outside joining us put the space near capacity. Yet COVID-19 regulations also forced us into a mode which required a meta-language and a centralized position of authority and control—aspects contradictory to the key parameters which had shaped our practice until then.

The set of rules to be applied was dictated by state authority and largely not open for negotiation by the participants. Even in situations where it would have been possible and necessary to reclaim the competence of decentralized and horizontal decision-making and agency, and to critically consider the relation between interdictions and virus prevention, none of those who were politically responsible wanted to take risks. The question of how seriously and compliantly these ever-changing hygienic measures were performed suddenly became a moral issue, a matter of solidarity and responsibility. The administrative meta-language of biopolitical security and protection always already suggested that advocating for the most extensive precautions was morally superior to potential doubts regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of certain limitations.

The dynamic negotiation of the relation between rules and rule-breaking, between obedience and disobedience, between anticipation and spontaneity, between form and formlessness—a process crucial not only to self-organized practices, but to every vital relationship—was suddenly rendered fragile. Different stances appeared mutually exclusive instead of dialectically interwoven. The logic of top-down regulations required definite decisions rather than provisional responses. Although we had tried to suspend the need for radical or clear decisions, the dualist discourse accompanying the COVID-19 virus reintroduced dichotomies on a broad scale, such as the distinction between friend and enemy, security and danger, health and disease.

Reflecting on the past months, I wonder which of the experiences and tools developed within eight years of K's existence are still applicable once things get 'serious,' once we shift from a marginal position to a position of institutionalized cultural production, however minimal its political and economic power may be. Is there, more broadly speaking, a potential for insecure, non-decisive agency within larger organizational structures, or is that a privilege of smaller, self-organized frameworks outside public institutions? Confusingly, groups who have traditionally considered themselves underground or oppositional are risking adapting discourses of security and surveillance with their centralizing political implications as they request safe spaces and the monitoring of social routines. Conversely, agents perceived as established have advocated keeping room for deliberation on state control open even in exceptional scenarios. Let's hope that this is not a sign of a world turned upside down, but rather an indication that heretical and defiant behavior is not a determinable gesture, but something highly situational—as were the manifold constantly shifting attitudes coexisting within K's temporary biotope.

Figure 4. Food with 'gossip herbs' for a dinner hosted by Amelia Groom, tables and ceramics by Achinoam Alon (courtesy of Constanza Meléndez)

1. The exhibition title comes from the 1964 Dionne Warwick song of the same name:
    A chair is still a chair
    Even when there's no one sittin' there
    But a chair is not a house
    And a house is not a home
    When there's no one there to hold you tight
    And no one there you can kiss goodnight'

2. A list of all participants and contributions can be found on the Halle's website (Lothringer 13 Halle 2020: 'This House Is...').

3. The phrase 'contrast agent' was used by filmmaker and K2020 participant Yulia Lokshina (Creutzer 2020) in relation to the circumstances of Eastern European migrant workers in the German meat industry: the sudden spread of COVID in meat processing plants put their vulnerable working conditions in the media spotlight.

4. Lennart Boyd Schürmann (K Hybrid 2018) had previously discussed the concept of 'the enemy' as a provocative metaphorical figure in email exchange relating to the Athens meeting: 'Personally, I was wondering if there are K-enemies? We have been reflecting on community in terms of softness and hybridity, we have actually practiced a very gentle and warm mode of interaction. [...] "The enemy" is the political formulation of this question. Can we offer an alternative to Carl Schmitt's definition of politics as the "distinction between friend and enemy"? Can we get rid of the enemy, break up the simplifying binary code? If we would get there, is it just the concept that is eliminated or the phenomenon? Is hostility possible within the group as it is within oneself? How to face within K the sort of schizophrenic behavior one has to adapt as a contemporary cultural worker?'

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