

Alla Mitrofanova, Sevinaz Evdike, Nika Dubrovsky
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"And this is a world that doesn't begin in the centre, but a world that begins with the outskirts, because the outskirts are not the end of the world, but the beginning, for that's what lies behind it."

"The Outskirts" by Petr Lucik 1998.

ART AS A CARE

In the dialogue between Alla Mitrofanova, Nika Dubrovsky and Savinaz Evdike we would like to discuss the idea of the project of the Museum of Care in Rojava – the land of the feminist revolution, that have been in a state of war for 9 years now. The Museum of Care plans to develop in cooperation with the Video Commune in Rojava.

Alla Mitrofanova – philosopher, independent theorist of feminist art

Sevinaz Evdike – author and translator, member of the video community in Rojava

Nika Dubrovsky – an artist and author of a4kids.org project

Nika/Savinaz: Sevinaz, could you tell us about Video Commune in Rojava? How do your art interacts with the society of Rojava and with the daily practices of its people?

Savinaz: The Rojava Video Commune was started in 2015 by international volunteers in collaboration with local filmmakers. We had three main goals. First was educational: to teach everyone who wanted to learn how to make movies, to become part of the Academy of Arts. Now we are starting a new phase: Rojava's school curriculum will include a history of film, and we will



"The schools of the Future". Anthropology for kids (a4kids.org). HKW Berlin 2017.

help to facilitate it. Because of the Coronavirus, everything stopped a bit, but we will continue after the end of the epidemic.

Our second task is to spread an interest in cinema among the general public of Rojava. In the 1980s, the Syrian government shut down all the cinemas in Rojava, turning them into nightclubs

that were visited only by men or into wedding salons. Before that, however, we had many cinemas here: twice as many as in Damascus. So we want to recreate this culture. On November 13th, every year, we are holding a film festival.

Third, we want to make a film about people and for people. In recent years we have made films about war, about Islamic State and terrorists. But that's not the only thing we want to make a movie about.

It wasn't easy when we had our first film screenings in Rojava. At first, nobody came to us. Still, the society in Rojava is quite traditional. It's a big deal to let your son or daughter go to an unfamiliar place. But gradually, we established trust. We started by showing movies in the houses of people we know. Now we have many participants.

When we first went abroad and talked to Western artists and curators, we were mainly asked where we got the resources to produce and distribute our works. It was difficult for us to answer such questions. These are very "western questions". We do not need many resources. We just do what we think is right, and we are helped, just like we help others who do community service.

Alla/Nika: Tell us more about the Care Museum.

Nika: The Care Museum in Rojava is a very special relationship between people – the relationship of care, not the production, and distribution of objects. When we talk about art in the West, we talk about production and distribution, storage, and evaluation. It is no coincidence that these are the questions that members of Rojava's video commune were asked when they first encountered the Western world of art. After all, production, promotion, and distribution were the main concerns of the "creative class" in the era of capitalism. But there was a revolution in Rojava. It is interesting to think about whether we can change the relationship between viewer, artist and work in West, as they did it in Rojava.

Alla: If the Museum of Care is not the production of elitist consumer objects, it is not the propaganda of great ideas and ideologies, then is it open access to a cultural code?

Lets speak about practicalities.

Nika: With the onset of the current Coronavirus crisis, most cultural gestures are already



Джульетта Аранда – маски в подарок.
Facebook page карантин апрель 2020
(<https://www.facebook.com/julieta.aranda>)

becoming immaterial (i.e. elite consumer objects continue to accumulate at someone's home or in a safe, but the general public is not yet more affected than the existence of collectors of unique labels for matchboxes. In other words, the total quarantine has made it possible to change the mechanisms of public discourse formation.

On the one hand, popular creative experiments have appeared in social networks. Some of them have become memes. For example, I really like the "DIY art of mask production". There are a lot of very skillful, funny and simply beautiful works. The authors offer an unexpected system for distributing their masks. For example, one of the founders of e-flux, Juliette Aranda, who also sews her own masks at home, has posted an ad in social networks, offering friends to pick up freshly made (by Juliette) masks, which she will put under the door of her apartment.

It is interesting that art in this new format is not so much loss of materiality, but changes the attitude to it. Masks – it's both care and manual labor, you need not only to make them but to think of how to pass on to another.



Hiwa K "Chicago Boys: While we were singing, they were dreaming."

I would like to give an example of another artist, Hiwa K., whose work *Chicago Boys*, 2010 (*While we were singing, they were sleeping*) seems to me to be very suitable for this project.

Hiwa K. is a musician who has been interested in different ways of producing and spreading informal knowledge. Hiwa came up with a way to make it easier to learn to play musical instruments, which allowed him to quickly gather a group of participants consisting of students, artists, and just people who were willing to share their experiences with each other and the audience. In every place that Hiwa hosted "*Chicago Boys*", participants compiled a list of songs popular in the 70's in different countries. During rehearsals, participants shared jokes and family stories related to neoliberal policies that spread in the 70s.

The *Chicago Boys* is not only the name of a popular American group in the 1970s but also

a group of Milton Friedman's students who organized economic reforms in Chile's Pinochet, which was the beginning of the neoliberal reforms. The same reforms took place in many countries around the world: in the Middle East, the USA and, after Perestroika in the USSR, where young Yeltsin's reformers, which introduce an economic "shock therapy" was called "*Chicago boys*" as well.

Hiwa's project exists in between an open-source research group, an art installation that can be easily assembled on-site from what is available, and a musical concert.

One thing is necessary for its implementation: to build a relationship with future users: musicians and listeners.

Nika/Alla: I know what you wrote about Alexandra Kollontai and the women's councils that she deployed immediately after the Russian



Физкультурницы фабрики «Коммунарка». Шествие спортивных коллективов, 1938 год.

revolution throughout the USSR. They didn't know then, either, at the beginning of the 20th century, what kind of art and what kind of society would result from their experiments.

Alla: The general context of the revolutionary situation: people (women, classes of peasants and workers, ethnic groups) got access to the political imagination. But the structures in which this could be held were not yet in place. And this is why there was a need for horizontal network groups of initiatives: councils, proletkult (proletarian cultural) workshops, clubs, libraries, and women's assemblies.

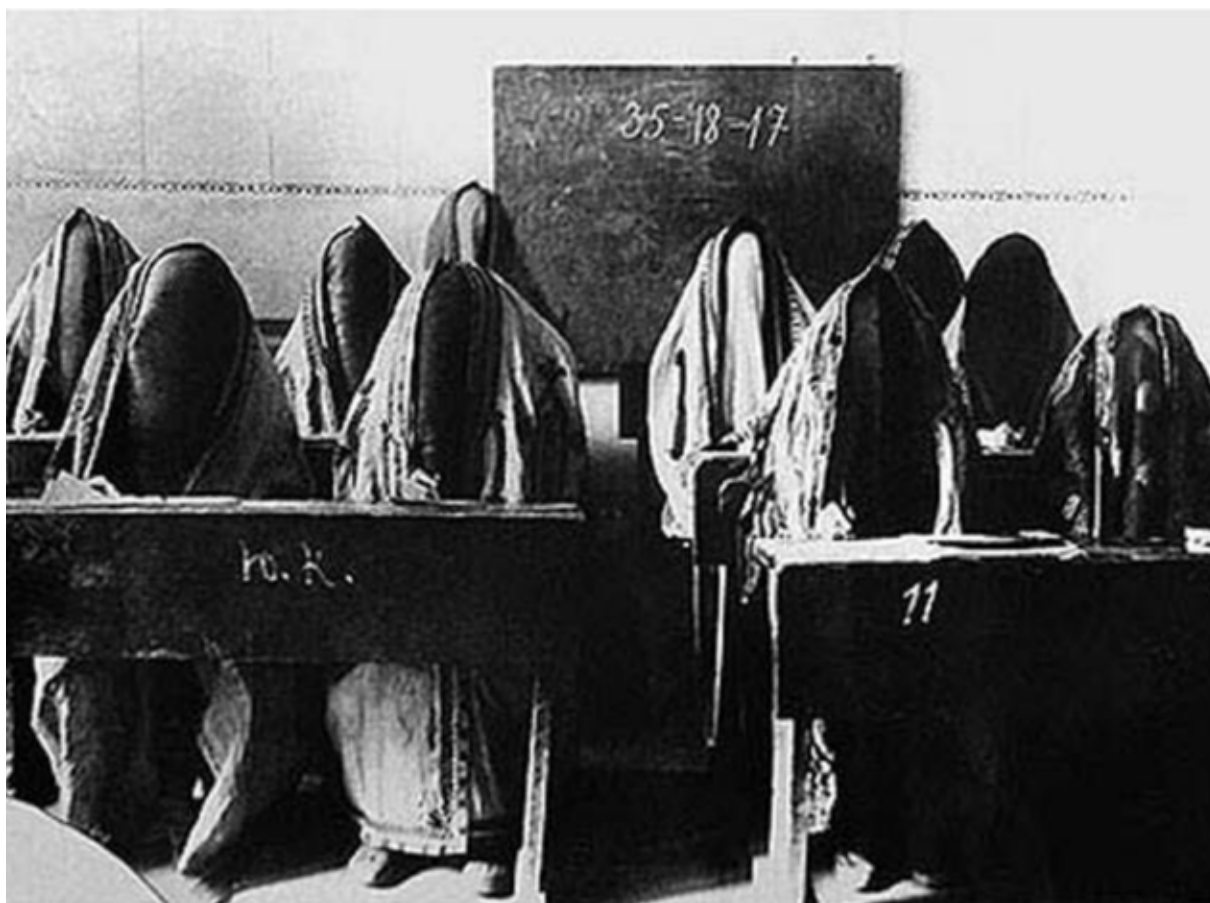
Women's assemblies are the most complex form, as they are more radical than others. Women's assemblies turn the most oppressed people into strong political agents: protecting women's labor and personal rights, establishing social institutions for social care (hospitals, kindergartens, schools), and preparing women for administrative and political activities.

Nika/Alla: What was the situation of Russian women before the revolution in relation to their European friends? How would you assess the activity of women's assemblies? How effective were they?

Alla: Gender law in Russia before the revolution was less exclusive for women, it wasn't transferred to the full disposal of her husband like in England, it's the remnants of class law, class more important than gender.

The Bestuzhevsk's courses, opened after 40 years of struggle in 1878, were most likely the first university in Europe for women with full education for scientific work. Many graduates became Soviet scientists and taught until the 1960s.

But as for the effect of the role of women's assemblies can only be said indirectly, because there is little archival research. But we see in the photos that the gender image has changed dramatically, athlete, delegate do not play the "bour-



Начало ликвидации неграмотности в Средней Азии. нач. 1920-х годов

geois" femininity. Also, female professionalism quickly became the norm, and the structure of kindergartens and polyclinics became ubiquitous. There is also criticism of women's double workload. But in modern capitalism, this double burden with the lack of kindergartens is much more painful. The establishment of gender equality has gone through many conflicts, sexist desecrations, rapes, and even murders in the 20s, especially in Central Asia (the removal of the burka).

But we cannot now lose these opportunities gained with such trials, because the political participation of women makes every person's life valuable, increases the amount of social and cultural care, removes filters dividing people into privileged and vulnerable.

Nika/Savinaz: Can you tell us about the role of women in Rojava's revolution?

Sevinaz: After the revolution took place in Rojava, the rule immediately appeared: in each council must be both women and men as a co-

chair, but there is only one, then it should be a woman must be present. Because we know how it was during the patriarchy and we should protect ourselves from undesirable developments. And besides that, there are many separate women's institutions: a women's house, a women's assembly, and more. I work in the Rojava Film Commune, but I also work in the Cultural Women's Committee. Our revolution was started by women, women who served in the army (YPJ). And now, seven years after the revolution, there are no women left in Rojava who just sit at home, for example, cooking and waiting for her husband to come back from work. Even if there are men in management in some areas, there are still women's committees that can protect women who need it.

Nika: It is interesting that in post-revolutionary Russia, as well as in Rojava, there were two important steps for women's liberation: first, the new laws were passed. The women in the USSR got the right to divorce, to have an

abortion, to live an independent economic life. The new laws were strictly monitored by the Soviet government, who later become abusive and patriarchal. The second direction was an introduction of the populations to accessible education.

Rojava, too protected women's rights with laws. The difference is that the women-protected laws in Rojava guaranteed by local assemblies and women's committees. In addition, the women of Rojava are armed. They are participating in a war on an equal footing with men.

It turns out that the implementation of progressive laws in Rojava does not require a repressive central government. What I am saying is that there are still notions in Russia today that "the government in Russia is the only European (i.e. "a civilized person"). Many Russians believe that if there is no central repressive body, then ordinary people will immediately start beating their wives and rampaging a variety of abuses.

Nika/Alla: Alla, what is known about the relationship between the women's councils and the Proletkult? The Proletkult also included the practice of "granting political subjectivity" to the masses of people who had been deprived of it before the revolution. You said that the women's councils were mostly made up of teachers. How was this project related to education? How did education relate to creativity?

Alla: The proletkult, like the women's department, theoretically relied on Alexander Bogdanov's theory of organization, i.e. open, expanding systems, the system coordinates its own balance, new agents can be built into it without absorbing each other or being absorbed by the system as a total. And here we need new cultural codes and meanings, which were developed by artists, amateur theaters, school noise

orchestras, songs and educational toys in kindergartens, collective reading of newspapers in the huts of reading houses, publishing local newspapers. The women's departments mainly provided total literacy training. There were educated women in women's departments, who before the revolution could get professional higher education (Bestuzhevsk courses were opened in 1878), but had no right to work and compete with men. Even if there were not enough land doctors, the women who were diploma holders were at best sent to distant counties and could be fired if their male colleagues did not agree. There were tens of thousands of them and they were well aware that new social institutions and norms had to be created. They faced threats, hunger, overcome mistrust...

Nika/Alla: Can we borrow now something from their concepts? To what extent have they been implemented and to what extent have they not?

Alla: We need their legal, social, and political experience more than ever, but it is getting out of the textbooks, archival access is getting more complicated. We should add to it the experience of American and German socialist feminism of the 1/3 20th century, English suffragettes. And also the experience of feminist movements of the 70s, especially in the USA. And in addition to the rich feminist sociology, cultural critique, epistemology and philosophy of the last decades... In Russia we are trying to bring feminist philosophy into philosophy for all. The same do our colleagues in other countries and do Academy of Women studies in Rojava for better understanding life values. Feminist philosophy develops the concepts of care and materiality, gives a political and ontological meaning everyday life.