

The Museum of Care: under construction!



This is a proposal for an as-of-yet to be developed structure: the Museum of Care. Given the neoliberalisation of the modern museum, the question that preoccupies this blueprint is: how to construct a museum that has no walls? Who are museums for, and who would the Museum of Care be for? How can care be combined with freedom and replace consumption and production?

Are Museums Really Public?

When designing a museum with no walls, it is worth revisiting their history. Museums are generally thought of as public spaces that showcase democratic values. The French and Russian revolutions began with occupying kings' palaces and turning them into national museums. In both cases, revolutionaries used the promise of liberation to redistribute symbolic capital from the few to the many.

Sergei Eisenstein's acclaimed film *October: Ten Days That Shook The World* (2007) portrays this alluring and mysterious world of the «old tsarist museum», populated by outlandish African masks, priceless paintings, and luxurious things, which unravels before the viewer's eyes. Eisenstein's museums transformed into places where people, not ghosts, are able to live.

Yet as we all know, today's museums have become churches for a particular kind of democracy - representative democracy - deeply connected to nation-states and their associated institutions of power.

The Hermitage and the Louvre are formally public places, created to celebrate national and humanistic values. They are financed from state budgets. They represent their nations: the power and the glory of their countries and their version of (art) history. Like the vast majority of museums, they are cultural-administrative corporations far from being controlled by any public. Similar to a parliament and other 'public' buildings, they are the symbols of what went wrong with western democracy.

Try entering into one of these museums and check out how much you own them.

Probably you will end up in the police station.

All over the world museums are becoming privatised, partly because they were not public spaces in the first place.

The truth is, currently museums are not for the public, but are there to build a value-border between what is considered to be priceless and what would be called mundane and ordinary. The public has little or no say in the way how public museums are run. These museums are in the business of organising projects, paying salaries and bonuses, fundraising, managing, archiving; and, as a result, create hierarchies. The primary motivation behind this is privatisation is the consolidation of power in the hands of the 1%, but it is also a result of a squeezing of public resources from the museum and an encouragement to fundraise at the same time. This has led to museums becoming dependent on new feudal lords who are setting the agenda.

As an example Julia Stoschek collection in Berlin. Germany or Garage Museum in Moscow, Both collection belongs to wealthy people who collect archives, hire curators, and create agency, shaping national and international

value system and history. There are different ways of looking at these particular art institutions: for example, one might consider them progressive and the aesthetic tastes of their owners emancipatory. We can admit that these super-rich people, instead of buying themselves a collection of cars, private tours into space or keeping giant private zoos with rare animals, invest money in art and contribute to social development. The defining feature of these museums they are the private territory of their owners. They can exist without people at all just as the Egyptian pyramids did for thousands of years storing the priceless objects.

And so we must remember what happens when the public interest is outsourced to be developed by private owners: they stop being public.

It has been a long journey from the revolutionaries' attempts to create a democratic museum that belongs to 'the people', to the current state of things where the neoliberal order has dismantled the dream of the people's museum.

Can we suggest that the two biggest revolutions of the past that led to the Museums' Occupations were not exactly a success story? Is it that they just replaced one type of palace with another?

What is The Museum of Care and Who Are We?

The idea of a 'Museum of Care' was born in a couple of texts co-written with David Graeber that further his thesis of replacing consumption and production with freedom and care. Someone may ask: why do we want to do it in the Museum in the first place? We live in a time when museums are monuments to lost revolutions.

Before the idea of the Museum of Care could be further developed by David and I, he died on September 2nd, 2019. In response, a group of his friends decided to organise a worldwide event called Carnival4David. The Carnival4David was in more than 250 places with thousands of people involved.

Each Carnival was created and realised by individuals or groups who did what they wanted, and how they wanted. They were united by only one connection: their relationship with David Rolfe Graeber and the ideas he represented.

The Carnival in itself was a burst of creativity. It produced an enormous amount of videos, photos, masks, talks, discussions, readings, and new human connections. An important part of the Carnival was all participants' ability to do what they wanted and to not do what they did not want to do. It seems so simple and natural, but it's actually quite rare to have that freedom.

Immediately after the Carnival, in a wave of enthusiasm for solidarity and, of course, a sense of loneliness, people wanted to unite and create a community, although it was not understood precisely the conditions under which it could happen. Almost accidentally, the decision was made to start a weekly meeting open to everyone that would like to try to form a new community that knows more of what it is not, than what it is. This was the beginning of the Museum of Care in action.

Isn't it striking that many people in the Museum don't know each other? We are not family. We are not a political party. We are not a nation. We are not schoolmates. We live in different countries, speak different languages, have different cultural backgrounds, and are of different ages. We began by trying to find common values outside of production and consumption focusing on freedom and care, only united by the relationships with the texts of David Graeber.

Interestingly, the initial attempts to build an institution with fundraising, core staff and a fixed social infrastructure quickly led to the normalisation of the same old game with some people marginalised, and others starting to take over without even trying to do so, quite naturally, without any bad intentions. There was a sense that the framework organizes people and people are quickly losing control.

The idea emerged of creating an experimental space sharpened to avoid such a fate: an empty space that owns nothing and hides nothing. The major value of that museum is the people themselves. When they leave the museum, it ceases to exist.

People, then, are indispensable to the Museum of Care: people who gather in it and bring their projects to it, people who come to the Museum to build, work, get to know each other, argue, and share. What is disposable to the Museum of Care, are its objects, its rooms and its programme.

Anyone who wants to add a room to the Museum is welcome to do so. It may be a room for music, a collective documentary, activist exhibition, or a collection of magic objects. No one needs permission to create a room and everyone takes care of their own affairs. The museum does not take responsibility for the success of the projects. It is instead a meeting place rather than a power structure by itself.

The Museum is not responsible for its projects' success - partly because not all successful projects are the best, partly because they refer first to their authors. The museum's principal mission is to create projects that can be taken away and copied.

Think about what a new Metropolitan Museum could look like: a museum that does not have any priceless paintings, but instead is filled with poetry. Museum visitors would be encouraged to learn poems by heart and then recite them outside the museum.

Construction Methods

Curiously, modern communities of poets are structured differently to communities of artists. Poets need less material resources to create, but it is much harder/ almost impossible to sell poetry. So these communities are less commercialised, with less competition and more solidarity compared to traditional artist communities.

Even in nonprofit communities that espouse the values of caring and equality, the problem of social architecture and power remains unresolved. If we take over the palace and turn it into a Museum, we need to manage it, maintain it, take care of the artifacts, let visitors in the morning and make sure they leave our new Museum in the evening.

Automatically there will be a caretaker, a director, a watchman, a policeman, lots, and lots of Bullshits jobs.

There are legends of Western hunters of the ancient Egyptian pyramids dying within a few years of getting inside. It is said that the cause of their deaths was a rare germ against which modern humans had no immunity. So how do we avoid these murderous germs?

How not succumb to museum magic?

We can say that the main purpose of the Museum of Care is to give away a blueprint or a set of tools by which other people can build their own Museum of Care. If we could answer all these questions right now, the Museum of Care would be complete. But we are just beginning with it.

How To Make Decisions

Let's talk about a project that is being developed in Museum of Care right now: a collective documentary "How To Make Decisions."

This project was born out of a humble confrontation in the Museum of Care, where ideas about the collective and the individual had collided. We were wondering: who can permit and prohibit, who can make decisions or how to make decisions together, and who are «we» in the first place?

The way that we shaped the Collective Documentary project itself is an attempt to answer these questions. It is research into the decision-making processes that people practice in different cultures, age groups, historical times, and social situations. We record interviews on zoom with different people: a London policeman and co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, anthropologists working in traditional communities, and autonomous movement activists, kids and their parents, and so on and so forth.

Current technology facilitates this: everyone can interview whoever they want to and post it online with hashtags to be a part of the project, since the Museum of Care has a community of hundreds of people, we can help to distribute it.

Anyone can go download and edit this materials to make their own version of this future documentary. The license allows free use of the materials. Hopefully many people will do it!

The production and distribution of the Collective documentary *How to Make Decisions* follows the basic principles of the Museum of Care.

- It is open to everyone.
- "the authors have it all": everyone can own it, change it, save it, share it and have the final say in it, so to become "an author"
- No one can stop anyone or order anyone around

The openness of the project is important: different people of different ages and different countries will participate, in contrast to an academic or social organisations that usually focus on one particular group. The Museum recognises instead that in any society decision-making is a human practice that begins at birth and ends with death.

In terms of using the materials generated by this research in interesting ways, they might for example be compared and contrasted against one other. We have already about 8 interviews, but 2 of them that seem very different, in fact, relate to each other:

One interview is with former London police officer Paul Stephens, and another is an interview with Matthew Schultz describing his Master's field research in Bolivia in 2010, one year after they approved the new constitutions that made the Bolivian indigenous courts on an equal legal standing as the state courts (derived from Spanish legal tradition).

Both Stephens and Schultz describe the existence of two parallel decision-making structures: the state (the police in the UK and the state justice system) and the community (community centers in the UK and indigenous courts in Bolivia). The interactions with these structures are surprisingly similar, as are the unfortunate results of the destructions of a complex balance of social architecture.

The final presentation of the documentary project can be very different: video essays by participants who use interview materials, mix them with their comments and publish it online, art exhibits and video installations, books and articles analyzing conversations.... maybe someone will come up with something else?

Will we be able to organise ourselves and make collective decisions that combine both care and freedom, replacing production and consumption?

Even if it fails in achieving its aspirations, How To Make Decisions is an exciting task, as is the creation of a Museum that could become a place that above all is for ourselves, and a place that would show that another world is possible.