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wpZIMMER

**Practicing
Through Tension**



In recent years, the world has witnessed tectonic geopolitical shifts marked by escalating conflicts, increasing authoritarianism, and growing social and economic inequalities. These developments have led to the dehumanisation, marginalisation and extermination of entire communities, deepening class divides, and a rise in poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, we are also witnessing the emergence of powerful grassroots movements that resist these hegemonic forces — united students, teachers, public employees, miners, farmers, social and cultural workers — asserting collective and transnational forms of solidarity and action.

On a local level, public funding priorities are shifting in ways that undermine democratic values. Budgets are being increasingly redirected towards militarisation and security, often at the expense of culture, education, and support for minority and marginalised communities. This reallocation of resources represents not only a form of structural censorship but also a gradual erosion of civic space and critical discourse.

Within this context, the cultural sector is particularly vulnerable. The consolidation of power, reduced transparency in decision-making, and shrinking public support for culture are reshaping the conditions of cultural labour. Artists and cultural workers face growing precarity, limited access to resources, and heightened psychological strain.

We navigated these tensions throughout *On Mobilisation*, oriented by the question: *How can we respond to these challenges and address systemic problems within the sector, while positioning culture as a vital space for democratic engagement, solidarity, and resistance?*

Realignment

wpZimmer has initiated a transformative process within the organisation, running in parallel with *On Mobilisation*. Through critical self-reflection on its operations at both micro and macro

levels, wpZimmer has undergone an internal realignment — reimagining itself as a *living organism* rather than a fixed structure. This shift aims to stimulate a multivocal and transparent way of working, one that is responsive to the complexities and multiplicities of the people who work with or within the organisation. Curiosity, agility and criticality, as much as softness and generosity, are fundamental to this approach. This opens up an incredible and vast landscape of collective learning, rooted in the micro- and transnational communities we all are part of.

Practice Through Tension

As an echo of internal processes, for the *On Mobilisation* project wpZimmer focused on the connection between *mobilisation* and *learning* by collaborating on and facilitating two artistic research projects: *The Institute for Anarchic and Artistic Language Learning (IAALL)* by Ahilan Ratnamohan, and the long-term artistic research *The Practice of Democracy, specifically An Attempt to Devise a Democratic Assembly* and *The Adversaries* by Danae Theodoridou.

IAALL was hosted by wpZimmer over two years, welcoming adults who want or need to learn a language. The space would transform into a classroom. Tables, chairs, laptops, and a projection screen were set up in a theatre or an atelier. After welcoming

everyone, Ahilan would take on the role of teacher or coach. However, the course did not begin with the shared desire to learn a specific language. Instead, the focus was elsewhere: for participants, it was about collaboratively learning in a democratic, inclusive, and experimental way; for Ahilan, it was about co-developing and documenting artistic processes and performative methodologies that emerge from language learning. What was possibly shared was an understanding of the power of language, and the value systems it enforces, particularly in how it shapes who is deemed deserving of participation in social, cultural and political life, and who has access to the labour market and who does not. The peer-to-peer alternative language learning model, while being playful, absurd, and funny, is a critical commentary on the hegemony of languages and the often hidden, violent language learning processes that strive for proficiency and promote elitism. These processes unintentionally expose the colonial and exploitative histories of nations that fund and promote only certain language learning courses.

Danae's scripted performances *An Attempt to Devise a Democratic Assembly* and *The Adversaries* challenged the notion of publicness within wpZimmer as a publicly funded organisation. They questioned how the organisation's work could be part of a political public arena while still functioning

as an art residency. Alongside the partly scripted score, the set design of both projects subtly choreographed the way participants inhabited the space and related to each other—both as individuals and as part of an assigned collective body—transforming wpZimmer into a political public arena.

Both participatory performances, in their specific ways, operated in relation to micro-community members, collaborators, and the organisation through tension. In the case of *The Adversaries*, conflict and unease were not only allowed but actively invited, creating space for political and democratic dialogue to emerge within the group. This dialogue did not arise from shared points of view but rather from a confrontation with the unknown, the misunderstood, or opposing positions. It offered a glimpse into the possibility of direct democracy — practiced by the people, for the people.

Here, tension shifted from a negative connotation to an emotional, and at times even physical, state of productivity. It became a force rooted in understanding and in challenging contradictions between ideas, values, or practices — rather than enforcing violent assimilation into a dominant position.

Both Ahilan's and Danae's projects are developed through public try-outs followed by participants' feedback. This approach

underscores the ever-evolving nature of these artistic works and their capacity to actively respond to unfolding changes beyond anyone's control.

Being part of these two artistic processes either as a host or a facilitator, have enabled wpZimmer to reclaim its political self, resisting external pressures to depoliticize culture. More importantly, new alliances grew out of this project, that can easily be activated when needed.

Celebration and Slowing Down

The closing *On Mobilisation* symposium and exhibition were organised by wpZimmer in collaboration with Out of Sight towards the end of the project. What it means to be a host, and how we can practice care rather than simply discuss it, were some of the guiding principles that shaped the preparation. Special attention was given to the findings of the project partners and artists, integrating them in ways that would gradually become part of the organisation's infrastructure, thereby promoting a sustainable and inclusive way of working (e.g. providing free babysitting during public events, preparing a prayer room, designating a calm space for rest, suitable for breastfeeding). The symposium and exhibition brought together a diverse group of artists and cultural workers whose work reflects, supports,

and amplifies practices of bottom-up civic mobilisation. A space for artistic reflection, public dialogue, and engagement with the political and social questions was created. The exhibition showcased works by Kalle Brodin, Siniša Ilić, Psychedelic Choir, The Agency of Singular Investigations, Danae Theodoridou, Davide Tidoni, and Zorka Wollny. The works engaged with and documented citizen-led movements, collective memory, and grassroots resistance, and encouraged visitors to consider how art can be a tool for political imagination, protest, and community building.

The dramaturgy of the symposium reflected the six artistic processes that have evolved throughout the *On Mobilisation* project. Besides presentation of artistic research projects of six trajectory artists, the symposium invited: de Kompaan — a neighborhood kitchen, a food studio, and a community garden, Ana Kutleša — a curator and researcher who is a co-founder of BLOK's *Trešnjevka Neighbourhood Museum*, Anamarija Batista — an interdisciplinary researcher and curator working at the intersection of art, architecture, and economics, and Milutin Milošević — one of the students involved in the ongoing student protests in Serbia.

Emphasis was placed on creating situations that would stimulate experiences and meaningful encounters. Storytelling, as a practice, ran as a continuous thread throughout the day. This experience was punctuated by shared meals,



with the “kitchen” table serving as a space for sharing stories and engaging in debates.

The natural rhythm of the day was reflected in the curatorial approach, beginning with a morning breakfast and baking bread together, playing, learning, resting, practicing and sharing what we learned, and concluding with a celebratory dinner while listening to two stories, one about the past the other about the present as a way to fall asleep and dream collectively desired futures.

