



**A WINDOW AND A BASEMENT
NEGOTIATING HOSPITALITY AT LA GALERIE
DES LOCATAIRES AND PODROOM—
THE WORKING COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS**

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Two examples of self-organized and experimental institutional practices of the 1970s are juxtaposed in this text: Podroom (Basement)—The Working Community of Artists, an artist-run space active in Zagreb from 1978 to 1980, and La Galerie des Locataires (The Tenants' Gallery), founded in 1972 by art historian Ida Biard in a Paris apartment but governed by fully “nomadic” postulates.¹ Podroom was started in 1978 by Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, who invited a number of colleagues to jointly transform their studio into an independent exhibition space, as well as a place where the artists would socialize, work, and discuss. Podroom opened in May 1978 with the group exhibition *For Art in the Mind*, involving twenty artists with whom Podroom would continue to be identified, although the project was not conceived on the basis of stable membership.²

1 “Podroom” is an Anglicized spelling of the Croatian word *podrum*, which means “basement.” The original name is *RZU Podroom (Radna zajednica umjetnika Podroom)*, which I translate here as *Podroom—The Working Community of Artists*. Because of the pun implied by merging the Croatian word *pod*—(adv) under, (n) ground or floor—and the English word *room*, with its connotations of privacy or simply “space,” I will use the original name and spelling throughout the rest of the text, instead of translating it into *basement*. Since the topic of hospitality is highly embedded within the question of language and translation, I will also keep the original name of *La Galerie des Locataires*, or use *the Galerie* as an abbreviation, instead of introducing the English translation.

2 The title of the show (not reached without contestation) was proposed by art historian and artist Josip Stošić, with the participation of the following artists: Boris Demur, Vladimir Dodig, Ivan Dorogi, Ladislav Galeta, Tomislav Gotovac, Vladimir Gudac, Sanja Iveković, Željko

Active for two years until the beginning of the 1980s, Podroom represents the culmination of the rich history of self-organized artists' initiatives in Zagreb during the 1960s and 1970s, and at the same time it marks the beginning of their dissolution through gradual (self-)institutionalization. This history was formed not by synchronous and separate stories, but ones that followed each other organically and chronologically, often involving direct links through individuals who made up the cores of various groups.³ All these projects were based on temporary appropriations of nonart spaces where artistic activity was merged with everyday life: the street, the shop, a housing facility, a journal, and finally, in the case of Podroom, the studio—thus symbolically marking the end of the distinction between work *on* art and work *of* art. The history of these initiatives—which evolved in ephemeral communities of artists and intellectuals, with private and professional relations and interests among the members significantly intertwined—is also a history of alternative understandings of community, autonomy, public space, and audience.⁴

Although begun in a Paris apartment, La Galerie des Locataires belonged to the same historical and conceptual narrative that is, in turn, part of an international moment in the history of art. Nevertheless, its ties to the Yugoslav art scene and its markedly antibourgeois and anti-capitalist mode of institutional critique are crucial for understanding this

Jerma, Željko Kipke, Antun Maračić, Vlado Martek, Dalibor Martinis, Marijan Molnar, Goran Petercol, Rajko Radovanović, Mladen Stilino, Sven Stilino, Josip Stošić, Goran Trbuljak, and Fedor Vučemilović.

- 3 From Gorgona and their exhibitions in the “Salon Šira” frame shop (1959–66), to one-day exhibition activities organized by Braco Dimitrijević, Nena Dimitrijević, and Goran Trbuljak in the doorway of 2A Frankopanska Street (1970–72), the street “exhibition-actions” of the Group of Six Artists (1975–79), and their samizdat journal *Maj 75* [May 75] (1978–84), to Podroom (1978–80) and the PM (Expanded Media) Gallery (1981–), the latter eventually becoming part of the mainstream institutional system. All the groups continued the tradition of male circles and male friendship, to which women often had access only through personal (sometimes also professional) partnerships with the male artists. As protagonists, women regularly appeared through exceptional individualistic agency, as is the case here with Ida Biard's practice and Sanja Iveković's position of “standing out” among Podroom's predominantly male group.
- 4 See Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, “Dissociative Association, Dionysian Socialism, Non-Action and Delayed Audience: Between Act and Exodus in the Art of the 1960s and 1970s in Yugoslavia,” in *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*, ed. Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača, and Vesna Vuković (Zagreb: BLOK and DeLve, 2011), 250–309. The present text is strongly informed by the collaborative process of researching, thinking, and writing in the framework of the *Removed from the Crowd* project, initiated by Antonia Majača and myself. I also thank Antonia Majača for her dedicated reading and commenting on this text.

unique, lifetime project of Ida Biard.⁵ An art historian from Zagreb who lived and studied in Paris, Biard was simultaneously looking at and looking from the perspective of two different artistic and sociopolitical post-1968 contexts: that of a thriving neo-avant-garde art scene under the state patronage of Yugoslav self-managed socialism, on the one hand, and the increasingly spectacularized and privatized system of art galleries and institutions in the West, on the other.⁶ La Galerie des Locataires is today perhaps best known for its collaborations with artists who would soon become leading protagonists of the Western European art scene of the 1970s, including Daniel Buren, Alain Fleisher, Annette Messager, and others. Its beginnings, however, are tied to the collaboration with Zagreb-based artist Goran Trbuljak, whose preoccupations at the time revolved around deconstructing the institutional and ideological preconditions of the system of art.

In this text, I propose a comparative reading of these two projects, Podroom and La Galerie des Locataires, mindful of the ways in which their protagonists went beyond the binary oppositions that defined their positions at the beginning: artist versus curator, institutionalization versus venue-free experiment, the individual versus collective, private versus public, host versus guest. My analysis will rely primarily on the existing textual records of how the protagonists themselves framed and conceptualized their aims and methods of work, articulating a radical distancing from the mainstream system of art at the time, challenging the imperative of visibility and accessibility, as well as conventional notions of audience. I will address the issue of work/labor as one of their key preoccupations.

5 It is symptomatic that a curatorial experiment (Želimir Koščević's "Exhibition of Women and Men," 1969), and not an artistic work, was selected to illustrate the show on Yugoslav art—*Information sur le travail des jeunes artistes Yougoslaves (1973)*—in the gallery's brochure, as Koščević's experimental and politicized approach to curatorial and institutional practice is very much in line with Biard's own. See my text "Dematerialization of the Exhibition: Curatorial Experiments in Zagreb, Belgrade and Paris," *Curatorial Interventions*, a special segment guest edited by Lucian Gomoll and Lissette Olifvares, in *Viz. Inter-Arts*, ed. Roxanne Hamilton (Santa Cruz: University of California, Santa Cruz, in preparation).

6 For research on the link between self-management as official state policy and the field of contemporary art and its institutions, specifically the Yugoslav student centers as hubs of progressive artistic and curatorial practices, see Jelena Vesić and Dušan Grljā, "Two Times of One Wall: The Case of the Student Cultural Center in the 1970s," in *Political Practices of (Post)Yugoslav Art*, ed. Zorana Dojić and Jelena Vesić (Belgrade: Prelom Kolektiv, 2010). A previous version of this research, published in the framework of the exhibition SKC in ŠKUC, is available for download at <http://www.prelomkolektiv.org/eng/PPYUart.htm>, last accessed February 4, 2012. See particularly the discussion of the exhibition October 75, which explicitly proposed as its topic a critical analysis of the relations between art and self-management in Yugoslavia.

pations, situating it within the theoretical perspectives that define the crisis of Fordist labor in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as its resolution in the transition to the post-Fordist era with its emphasis on immaterial labor.⁷ In the capitalist West, this transition is generally interpreted as a counter-revolution that appropriated and co-opted revolutionary requests and tactics of resistance of the youths', workers', and artists' protests of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ In the context of Yugoslav socialism, the economic reform of 1965 is usually cited as the crucial date from which we can follow increased liberalization and bureaucratization of the system of socialist self-management that brought it ever closer to capitalism and, indeed, its post-Fordist form.⁹ In the contexts of both Western Europe and socialist Yugoslavia—albeit orchestrated by different dynamics whose nuances I will attempt to tackle—the dematerialization of the work of art during the 1960s and 1970s should therefore be seen as a symptom, if not an accomplice, of the dematerialization of work as such.

Since confronting all these questions involved primarily a search for autonomous and nonservile *spaces*—for art, work, and life—I choose to examine them here within an overarching conceptual framework of *hospitality* as discussed by Jacques Derrida.¹⁰ The complexity of the challenges posed by the Galerie's and Podroom's decision for autonomy and solidarity can be related to Derrida's discussion of the "double bind" of hospitality, which reveals hospitality not as some benign gesture, but instead as a political project of great relevance.¹¹ In an era marked by

7 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emery, available at <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm>, last accessed January 30, 2012.

8 See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

9 See Gal Kirn, "From the Primacy of Partisan Politics to the Post-Fordist Tendency in Yugoslav Self-Management Socialism," in *Post-Fordism and Its Discontents*, ed. Gal Kirn (Lulu.com, 2011), 253–302.

10 Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality," trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5 (December 2000): 3–18.

11 Derrida bases his analysis of hospitality on the reading of *Perpetual Peace* by Immanuel Kant, who discusses the right of all men to "communal possession of the earth's surface" and the "right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility." Derrida, "Hospitality," 5. Derrida's own reading relies, however, on ambivalence as the undercurrent of the concept and etymology of hospitality, the permeability between the guest (*hôte*) and host (*hôte*), as well as "the troubling analogy in their common origin between *hostis* as host and *hostis* as enemy, between hospitality and hostility." *Ibid.*, 15.

increased (and by no means only voluntary) mobility, migration, and geopolitical division of labor (its materiality and immateriality) when more and more space has been occupied by war, capital, and gentrification, posing the question of how to share, work with, and receive others in space—while in order to do that one must necessarily also be a master of space, that is, a host—yields no simple answers and requires constant negotiation.

In his film *Black Film* (1971) Želimir Žilnik took a group of homeless people home to his wife and child in Novi Sad, in a gesture/statement of assuming personal responsibility for homelessness—a taboo topic in the new society supposed to bring prosperity and happiness to all.¹² While the guests stayed at his home—and at the same time occupied the life and space of his own family against their will—Žilnik left in order to find a solution. He arranged meetings with social workers, randomly addressed people in the street, and asked the police if they might be able to do something. But it turned out that this common social problem was in fact nobody's problem. A radical confrontation with the double bind of hospitality in this film (in fact, a radical merging of the spaces of art and life, private and public) revealed that hospitality was not simply a matter of letting others in, but one that requires the host to abandon his or her own home in order to take action because the other's problem is also his or her problem.

I wish to propose that both La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom—The Working Community of Artists initiated similarly challenging processes for the negotiation of hospitality. They did so through their search for nonhegemonic ways to inhabit, occupy, and share space in order to achieve autonomous and nonservile forms of life and work. Such resistance to the subjugation to hegemonic power and also to its assumption implied a stubborn dedication to solidarity, and to the very double bind of hospitality that Derrida construes as an impossible and therefore necessary project.¹³ The Galerie engaged in this project by mapping out a principle of hospitality that—taking a simple cue from one of its projects, *The French Window*—I will here describe through the metaphor of the *window*. This window principle entailed a nomadic pursuit of—to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's terminology—smooth space, a constant flight, and deterritorialization, evading and obstructing the paths

12 I am grateful to Sanja Iveković for reminding me that this film is essential when discussing hospitality and art in Yugoslavia.

13 "If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done." Derrida, "Hostipitality," 14.

and flows of capitalist appropriation.¹⁴ In an analogous testing of the potentiality of the name, I will place as the key vantage point of Podroom's project of hospitality the metaphor of the *basement*, whose form of resistance implied the occupation of a base that is more akin to the classical Marxist agenda of assuming control over the means and products of one's own labor. In what follows, I want to examine the steps this project entailed in both cases: first, *naming* a shared space as a way of summoning a desired future; second, *contracting* working relations that condition the community; and third, raising *thresholds* as a response to the breaking of the contract of hospitality—as a way of intensifying the impossibility of hospitality—the failure of which would finally result in the communities' dissolution.

INITIATORY ENCOUNTERS

In the case of both La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom, what made these processes possible were an encounter and a readiness to enter into discussion and allow for the constant shifting of individual boundaries and positions. A basic gesture of hospitality made such encounters possible in the first place: inviting—or simply allowing—others to enter one's living and working space.

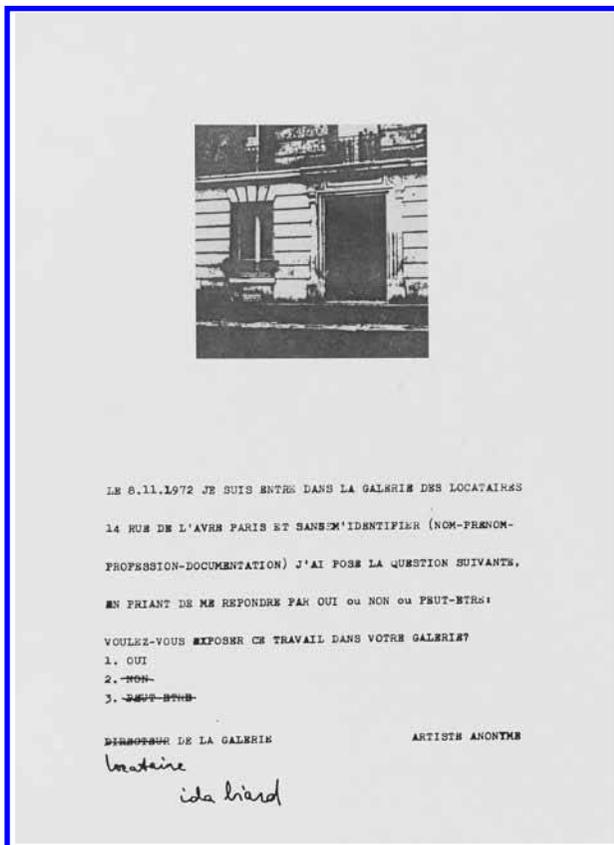
Encounter I: Paris, private apartment, 14 Rue de l'Avre, 1971:

On the 8th of November I entered La Galerie des Locataires, 14 Rue de l'Avre, Paris. Without identifying myself (name-surname-profession-documentation), I posed the following question: Do you wish to exhibit this work in your gallery? The question could be answered by yes, no or maybe.¹⁵

The question and the three available answers were placed on a written form to be signed by the “anonymous artist” and the “gallery director.” This is the textual part of the work that Goran Trbuljak made in the form of a survey conducted between October 1972 and February 1973 in both public and private galleries in Paris. The answer La Galerie des Locataires gave to Trbuljak's survey was affirmative. When she signed the form, the

14 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), see esp. “1440: The Smooth and the Striated,” 474–500.

15 Goran Trbuljak, reproduced in the online archive of La Galerie des Locataires, http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/1/galerie.php, last accessed January 6, 2011, my translation.



Goran Trbuljak. 8.11.1972, 1972. La Galerie des Locataires, 14 Rue de l'Avre, Paris.
Image courtesy of Ida Biard and La Galerie des Locataires Archive.

Galerie's founder Ida Biard crossed out the word *directeur*, replacing it with *locataire*, thus identifying herself as the gallery's tenant rather than its director. This was surely not the first encounter between Biard and Trbuljak, but I position it here as the symbolic, initiatory one that laid the foundations for the Galerie's *raison d'être*: "The artist is anyone whom others give the opportunity to be an artist."¹⁶ In a number of his works from this period, Trbuljak deconstructed the figure of the artist as the basis for the mythology of authorship and originality. He never put art itself in question, but rather called for the invention of "art without artists, with-

16 Cited in *Simplon-Express* (exhibition catalogue) (Rome: Editioni Carte Segrete, 1989), 1, my translation, also available at http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/6/galerie.php, last accessed January 20, 2012. This credo of the gallery quoted the title of another work by Trbuljak from 1971, a street referendum in which the citizens of Zagreb were invited to decide whether "Goran Trbuljak" was or was not an artist.

out criticism, without audience.”¹⁷ This eventually led him to conclude that what he had been producing were not artworks but “works-exhibitions.”¹⁸ Indeed, it was a curatorial position that Trbuljak appropriated when he exhibited “nothing” but surveys, forms, promotional posters, and catalogues—all parts of the bureaucratic and promotional machinery of exhibition. As Trbuljak himself put it, it was by what he did not do rather than by what he did that he might have been an artist.¹⁹ Translating this principle into curatorial practice, the Galerie too opted for being a gallery by what it did not do, and not by what it did, insisting that it did not exhibit works but rather “communicated” them. By answering “yes” to the anonymous artist’s question, La Galerie des Locataires committed to an impossible task: communicating the work of an artist who refused to be an artist and whose works were not artworks. This task would shape its entire mission: to construe a gallery as a space without walls, and one of lived experience; to renounce the system of art driven by spectacle and the market; to profess that an “outside” was possible; and to constantly invite others to join this pursuit.²⁰

Encounter II: Zagreb, basement studio, Mesnička Street 12,
1976–77

Sanja [Iveković]: Concerning Martinis’ and my experience with Podroom, it concerns the periods of ’76 to ’77, and only partly ’78 (Spring), and then again ’79 from February on. Although nothing happened here in ’76 and ’77, i.e., no exhibitions . . . , it was a significant time for me because that was when we started gathering around the idea of Podroom. We used to talk a lot, discuss, and argue about what should be the purpose and character of such a space—of a working community of artists. Then we made a concept of work and activities that would take place there (we still have written documents), etc. And later we met again, and talked again and argued.²¹

17 The quotation belongs to a text-based work by Goran Trbuljak reproduced in *Goran Trbuljak* (exhibition catalogue) (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1973), n.p., my translation.

18 Goran Petercol, “Interview with Goran Trbuljak,” *Studentski list*, January 23, 1981, 15, my translation.

19 *Ibid.*, 15.

20 The axiom of the conventional institutional critique is that an “outside” position is impossible, that there is no outside; cf. Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum* 44, no 3 (September 2005): 278–85.

21 Sanja Iveković, from a discussion published in *Prvi broj* [First Issue], samizdat (1980), n.p., translated by Hana Dvornik for the project *BADroom* by the collaborative performance collective Bad Co., conceived and originally staged in the framework of the project *Removed*



Artists preparing the first exhibition in Podroom—For Art in the Mind, May 1978.
Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

This quote is taken from a discussion among the members of the Podroom initiative, recorded and published in their first—and last—issue of the “magazine-catalogue” *Prvi broj* (First Issue) in the beginning of 1980.²² During the conversation, Sanja Iveković recalled a time when “nothing” happened, but during which heated discussions about the aims and potentials of an artist-run space had taken place. These early encounters, described as continued debates that did not yield a clear agenda, let alone consensus, were identified as a crucial precondition for all ensuing activities at Podroom. However, thirty years later, there does not seem to be a trace of the “written documents” that Iveković mentions, and that we might otherwise have compared to the “consent form” signed by La Galerie des Locataires and the anonymous artist.²³ Even when it documents what is symbolically their last—rather than the initial—encounter, the transcript of the cited discussion contained in *Prvi broj* is precious as it

from the Crowd, as a contribution to the exhibition *Political Practices of (Post)Yugoslav Art*, curated by Jelena Vesić (Belgrade, 2009).

- 22 Its name implied a serial character, and more issues were supposed to follow. However, shortly after publishing the first one, the Podroom experiment ended, after a common ground for continuing the project could no longer be identified.
- 23 As is often the case when witnessing prevails over forensic evidence, its protagonists’ picture of what these initiatory talks and propositions were precisely about is no longer clear. I am referring here to Antonia Majača’s and my conversations with Sanja Iveković, Vlado Martek, Dalibor Martinis, Mladen Stilinović, Branka Stipančić, and Darko Šimičić on the topic of Podroom. There were, however, many more protagonists involved, and the continuation of the research might bring missing documents or links to light.

remains the only document revealing, in the form of dialogue, the traces of the collective dynamics of the Podroom group and the ideas that shaped their work.

NAMING SPACE/CALLING FOR A FUTURE

As metaphors derived from the actual names of the projects discussed here, I propose to read the *window* and the *basement* as roadmaps for these projects' goals and strategies.²⁴ By the act of naming, one calls a desired future upon oneself (or on another).²⁵ Both names—La Galerie des Locataires and Podroom—The Working Community of Artists—evoke private spaces, spaces one inhabits either as a temporary home (as a tenant) or as a working space (one gathering a productive community). The name La Galerie des Locataires—The Tenants' Gallery—might lead us down the wrong path, however, as it automatically triggers the taxonomy of exhibitions and events organized in domestic spaces, whose history spans from the nineteenth-century salons to Moscow Apt-Art of the 1980s and the less-spontaneous, museum-organized *Chambre d'amis* (1986) project by Jan Hoet in Ghent. Any reading of La Galerie des Locataires will be enriched when seen in relation to this history, specifically the nineteenth-century salons that Robert Atkins considers key alternative spaces for the development of radical modernist practices, inciting both aesthetic and social transformations and involving the participation of different social classes.²⁶ These salons were mostly run by upper-class women, who in this way escaped from their own invisibility in the private and domestic sphere. Ida Biard, on the other hand, was not a landlady but a tenant; she was tied not to property but instead to precarity. The Galerie is then closer to the less narrated history of the “minor leagues,” a term Renaud Ego adopted from Steven Rand to further conceptualize “communities without attachments” that are formed through withdrawal and refusal: “Is it a space? Yes, but not in the sense of having extent. It embodies an elusive (and therefore free) form of interconnecting relationships. Is it an alternative space? Yes, but more

24 In the case of the “window,” as already noted, it is in fact the name of one of the subprojects of the Galerie, *The French Window*; however, I will go on to show how the principle of “window” relates to the entire project of the Galerie des Locataires.

25 Derrida also reminds us of the unity of naming, calling, inviting, and bearing a name (calling oneself) in the German *heissen*. Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 11–12.

26 Robert Atkins, “Alternatives and Aphorisms, Salon and Spectacle,” in *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces*, Kindle ed., ed. Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apexart, 2010).

like a ‘possibility.’”²⁷ A comparison with the motto of La Galerie des Locataires will prove the existence of such unattached yet strikingly connected players of the minor league: “La Galerie des Locataires is a state of mind. It manifests itself wherever it decides to be. It has no walls, and no decrees. It is not impossible.”²⁸

Rather than bringing to mind a series of apartment events and exhibitions, the name of the gallery should trigger an entirely different image: it is the tenants who constitute the gallery, and wherever they go the community of its hosts and guests is formed. The very notion of the tenant is transient; in contrast to the owner, the tenant is only temporarily occupying/borrowing a space. The tenant is a permanent guest and a temporary host; free of the bounds of territory and possession, he or she is always ready to move on. And so even as the Galerie’s activities happened inside an apartment, they took place in its special “compartment,” *The French Window*, through which Biard and Trbuljak unlocked the Galerie, transforming it into an open invitation:

The artists whose works (work + action) transcend the boundaries of the aesthetic and are rather situated in ethics are informed of the existence of FRENCH WINDOW. This space is exclusively oriented onto the street. The works will be presented in the order of their arrival to the address listed below. (*Art Vivant*, Paris, February 1973)²⁹

Duchamp’s pun whereby he transformed the transparency of the “French window” into the opacity of the “fresh widow” was reversed once again. The Galerie opened itself “exclusively onto the street,” and very soon its activities left the window to be spread and inserted like viruses into a diverse range of spaces and constellations. Its maneuvers were to be mapped by the postal network, a series of *postes restantes*—in Paris, Zagreb, Düsseldorf, Milan, Budapest, New York, Belgrade, Vancouver—serving as another series of multiplied and distributed “windows” that remained unconditionally open to artists’ proposals. This curatorial approach defies conventional institutional preconditions not only because it is nomadic

27 Renaud Ego, “The Forest in the Clearing,” trans. Robert Bonnono, in Rand and Kouris, *Playing by the Rules*.

28 *Simplon-Express*, 1. Note also the resolution to overcome impossibility, that is, to construe impossibility as possible.

29 The announcement was published in *Art Vivant*, cited in *The French Window* (Zagreb: Galerija Studentskog centra, 1973), n.p., my translation. The book credits the idea of the project to Goran Trbuljak, and the concept and realization to Ida Biard.



Jonier Marin. *Situation Panama*, project for *The French Window*, March 1973. Image courtesy of Ida Biard and La Galerie des Locataires Archive.

but also because it renounces the regime of selection, of the privilege of access. The Galerie counted on mutual recognition among the multitude of the minor leagues spread across the globe, who shared with it their ideas, work instructions, or simply notes expressing enthusiasm and support for the project.³⁰

The Galerie “communicated” the artists’ proposals through displays in the urban environment (*The Yugoslav Vitrine*, Zagreb, 1973); inserted itself into the program of the cinema, replacing the advertisements before film screenings (*Cinema Balkans*, Zagreb, 1974); invaded exhibition openings in private galleries by creating exhibitions within exhibitions

30 Among the artists and art critics who were part of the Galerie’s mailing network and activities were Gina Pane, Annette Messager, Daniel Buren, Sarkis, Alain Fleischer, André Cadere, the Zagreb and Belgrade Student Center galleries, László Beke, Petr Štembera, Paul Woodrow, Antoni Muntadas, Jan Dibbets, Christian Boltanski, Jiří Valoch, Josef Markulík, Renato Mambor, Radomir Damnjan, Katharina Sieverding, Endre Toth, Balint Szombathy, and Sztuki Aktualnej.

(André Cadere at Adam's opening at Maeght Gallery, Paris, 1973); and realized exhibitions and interventions in streets, markets, bathrooms, trains, and taxis of different cities. Even when it organized exhibitions in galleries, as in Another Chance to Become an Artist at the Student Center Gallery in Zagreb, the principle was the same: the invitation was a window, an opening, a possibility for *becoming*, for subjectivization to take place.

The Galerie's principle of hospitality was a window: it looked out; it owned no space and so it could not *receive* the way one did in a salon. Conversely—and paradoxically—in order to become a host, it constantly had to travel and visit, surprise those who did not expect it, manifest itself as a permanent guest and temporary host. And precisely because it didn't lay claim to the expertise regarding what or who was to arrive, the window remained open and anyone could become a *locataire*.³¹ Even such hospitality, however, had its conditions: those invited were to locate their "work" and "action" in ethics, rather than aesthetics, but it was they themselves who were the judges of whether or not they fulfilled the requirement.

Similar principles of mutual recognition governed the laws of hospitality in Podroom—The Working Community of Artists. Although *podrum*, a basement, unlike the living space of a tenant, can also belong to a public institution, it nonetheless remains a private space. The basement is locked away from view: it's a threshold barred from guests and visitors, a secret *base* where things are stored, archived, and protected for potential future use.³² This aspect of privacy, and especially of storing and nurturing, enables us to conceive of the basement also as a "female" space, in analogy with the Galerie's link to the nineteenth-century salons and its overall "minoritarian" belonging.³³

Podroom too did not count on knowing who its guests would be. It gathered a more or less consistent group of people, but in principle anyone was welcome to cross the threshold and set another process in

31 Derrida states that the "dimension of non-knowing," an act and intention "beyond knowledge toward the other as absolute stranger, as unknown, where I know that I know nothing of him," is essential in hospitality. Derrida, "Hostipitality," 8.

32 Of course, as is the case with any space, even the privacy of a basement in a public institution could be invaded, and its threshold transgressed, as was the case with the circle of artists in Prague (Petr Štembera, Karel Miler, Jan Mlčoch, and Jiří Kovanda) who used the basement of the Museum of Decorative Arts where Štembera worked as a night guard to organize clandestine after-hours performances and events for a small group of colleagues and friends.

33 Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the "becoming-minoritarian," or "becoming-minor," as the primary mode of the subjectivation of difference, which subsumes all others: becoming-woman, -animal, -vegetable, and so forth. See "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible. . . ." in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232–309.

motion. The position of host was not fixed, as it was in the case of Biard who acted as a nomadic, singular host with a mission to “communicate” and in whom all the points in the network were connected. Podroom, by contrast, implied a horizontal disposition of hosts whereby the only point connected to all the others was the space itself rather than a singular agency. The question was then how to take responsibility for shared space without assuming sovereignty, or how to claim it—both individually and collectively—without making it one’s own. Whereas the Galerie attempted to confront the problem of the estranged, deterritorialized individual of late capitalist society in the West, Podroom tried to tackle the socialist reterritorialization of collectivity and community in Yugoslavia, a country whose increasingly bureaucratized system of self-management was gradually losing ground, assuming a liberal and capitalist face.

Podroom’s own community was a community of artists, and this is what constantly challenged its horizontality, for it implied the equality of goals and chances, and the existence of chances always implied competition:

[Goran] Trbuljak: This is one difference between this and the one we had two years ago, because then we were already in the position that some of us had already exhibited at the Contemporary Art Gallery, some were still *aspiring* and so on. Now it seems to me that we’re all alike in this respect, that we’ve been through this phase. Now there is *no more fight*, so to speak.

[Dalibor] Martinis: Frustrations. . . .³⁴

But absolute horizontality is never possible, and the members of a community will always form new alliances, agendas, and secret aspirations. Deleuze and Guattari identify this as a feature of the “war machine,” drawing on Pierre Clastres’s writing about tribes and clans who, through constant, and often violent, renegotiations of hierarchical positions, prevent the coming of State—a structured, centralized rule.³⁵ It is this resistance to the form of the state that is the permanently active enzyme within the Podroom organism. In a statement that he read during the Podroom discussion published in *Prvi broj*, Mladen Stilinović noted that he worked in Podroom because he alone wanted to be responsible for his work, and because he “didn’t like going to court” (referring to one of his

34 Goran Trbuljak and Dalibor Martinis, *Prvi broj*, n.p., emphasis added.

35 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; see “1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine,” 351–413.



Željko Jerman. *My Space*, contribution to the catalogue *Works in the Basement*, a series of exhibitions conceived by Mladen Stilinović in Podroom, November–December, 1978. Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

favorite quotes by Aretino that “life is when you don’t have to go to Court”).³⁶ On the rare occasions when Podroom artists addressed the “court,” that is the state, by applying for support for Podroom’s activities, they stressed that they did not form an official group or a “basic organization of united labor” (as the self-managed units of organized labor were called in Yugoslavia), and that they would rather receive funds individually, with each organizer personally responsible for her or his program.³⁷ By insisting that there was no such thing as a common program and yet stubbornly sharing the same space based on equality, Podroom tackled in its own way the very paradoxes of a socialist state that promoted the autonomy of self-managed units, yet headed more and more toward bureaucratization and centralization. By refusing all forms of a collective contract and by—if we recall its initiatory

36 Mladen Stilinović, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

37 See “The Letter of the Working Community of Artists to the City of Zagreb’s ‘Self-managed Interest Community,’” February 16, 1979, Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb. It should also be noted how the name “Working Community of Artists” tactfully appropriates the discourse of the bureaucracy of self-management, while trying to avoid official links with that same bureaucracy. I am grateful to Jasna Jakšić and the Museum of Contemporary Art for giving me access to these materials, which will also be made publicly available at <http://www.digitizing-ideas.hr> in the framework of the Digitizing Ideas project.

encounter—constantly meeting and arguing, but misplacing the meeting minutes and documents, Podroom tried to salvage the idea of self-management from its appropriation by the state and its bureaucracy. The document, or the “decree” as Biard called it, was placed in the drawer, not as a recipe, not as constitution, but merely a (lost) documentation of a node in the process of negotiating the conditions of hospitality, of inhabiting and sharing the same space.

In contrast to La Galerie des Locataires’s nomadic singular agency, in Podroom’s case it was the space that was the constant. This space was a basement, a base where everything arranged itself and gained ground. But it was also *under* ground, a zone where traces of encounters, ideas, discussions, work processes, and their various materializations were stored for future use. The space was open to the public, but in reality there was a group of artist-hosts, and a number of recurring guests-visitors. They all became publicly marked by the space: as if it were a stigma, they were referred to as *podrumaši*, the “Podroomers” or “basementists,” with one art critic visualizing a group of artists somewhere deep in a mousehole.³⁸ The door could be opened, but it took a “basementist” to really recognize her or his tribe and wish to cross the threshold: “Petercol: Come in, come in . . . Martinis: Enter! Sanja: Yes, please? X: Eeeh, no, no, no way. Dorogi: Who was that?”³⁹

It was no one, a wrong number, because Podroom, just like the Galerie des Locataires, played in the minor league, in the game of *unpleasing* the crowd. They were part of the history and geography of those who “removed themselves from the crowd,” a mental, temporal, and spatial movement for which there are numerous historical antecedents.⁴⁰ Its contours have become increasingly meaningful to us today as we form the lines of their “delayed audience,” as Antonia Majača and I have described the way in which such audience-free constellations of people and events search for and form their public, always finding it in the future.⁴¹ At the time when they evolved there was no audience, just the negotiation of a community. Boris Groys writes of the returning relevance of the “weak signs” of the avant-garde, and of a propensity for the low visibility of weak

38 Josip Depolo, “Goran Petercol,” Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

39 Goran Petercol, Dalibor Martinis, Sanja Iveković, and Ivan Dorogi, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

40 See Bago and Majača, “Dissociative Association.”

41 *Ibid.*, 280.

gestures in which participants and spectators coincide: “[O]ne can become a spectator only when one already has become an artist.”⁴² Similarly, the members of Podroom were not concerned with an audience or with their social isolation in the “mousehole,” but rather with the very process of becoming and making sure that spectators were always also artists, that guests were always also hosts. Because everything began with the gesture of hospitality, the point when two artists invited others to test in practice the idea of an alternative social structure. If ever the group’s members suspected that they themselves were assuming the logic of the state and becoming the despotic masters of their space, then Podroom would cease to have any purpose. Precisely this suspicion arose during their last meeting:

[Goran] Petercol: However, there is another thing that seems to me very problematic, that we still act like a gallery for the artists we invite . . . we give them space, and through exhibiting here, they support the idea of Podroom. But then, this happens: when they make an exhibition, we have to wait until someone remembers to ask them whether they would come back and make another exhibition in a year or two or not. This is a kind of relationship typical of a gallery: what’s offered is the space, and the honor to exhibit, but cooperation isn’t on offer. *We should treat them on an equal basis.* . . . I think what happened here is a certain *accumulation of power* based on the past; that is, on the fact, the merit, that two years, a year and a half ago, we founded Podroom . . . and in addition to that, we own the space, that is, it so happened that we got the space.⁴³

The space became a stumbling block; as Martinis warned, its *name* alone could not be the sole guarantee of its difference from business as usual.⁴⁴ A suspicion arose that despite the initial rejection of “documents,” what was missing was some kind of contract, or a *common program* of action.⁴⁵

42 Boris Groys, “Weak Universalism,” *e-flux journal* no. 15 (April 2010): n.p. This is not an elitist but rather a democratic idea, for, as Groys has shown, the radical reductionism of the avant-garde implies that everyone *can* indeed be/come an artist, and this is paradoxically why the avant-garde is unpopular among the “democratic audience.”

43 Goran Petercol, *Prvi broj*, n.p. Emphasis added. The discussion about difference ends with Stilinović humorously locating it in the existence of a sink, as at least one certain piece of evidence that Podroom is also a “living space, and not a gallery,” and on which everyone could agree.

44 Dalibor Martinis, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

45 “It’s obvious that the space cannot and may not be what connects things. The Podroom should be a form of action.” Ivan Dorogi, *Prvi broj*, n.p.

WORK AND ITS CONTRACTS

Podroom tried to tackle the impossible project of hospitality, the permeability of receiving and visiting, of hospitality and hostility. It is this “impossibility” that would reach its peak by the early 1980 and result in the group’s dissolution. We can trace an analogous development with La Galerie des Locataires whose belief in radical openness and the rejection of rules also gradually faded. The following recollection of the Galerie’s motivations embodies its founders’ initial enthusiasm:

We started to put precisely this in question, declaring for example that the work of art had become work/labor, that the walls of the galleries, of the museums had been replaced by other walls, those of the posts or train stations, places outside the system: the market stalls, the places of life. It is there that we went. We even tried organizing exhibitions that never materialized anywhere except in the mind, all in order to extract ourselves from the system.⁴⁶

This kind of incognito art—for example, the “empty actions” of the Collective Actions in Moscow, the “invisible art” of Slobodan Tišma and Cedomir Drčma in Novi Sad after the state’s repressive intervention at the Youth Tribune, Milan Knížák’s “mind actions,” and so forth—is often romanticized when articulating the forms of artistic resistance in ex-socialist countries, usually in order to reassert their totalitarian nature. However, in this case it was the totalitarianism of capitalism from which La Galerie des Locataires’s camouflaged actions attempted to escape. This occurred in the era of the “communism of capital” whereby capital co-opted the means of resistance to materialist oppression and became itself immaterial, camouflaged, decentralized, and deterritorialized, shifting the surplus value from the object to knowledge and information.⁴⁷ We should note La Galerie des Locataires’s enthusiasm for liberated, dematerialized work, work that merges into life. However, it is precisely the indistinction between labor and free time, the transformation of work into communication, that has become the trap in late, that is, cognitive, capitalism. Dematerializing the work of art and insisting on communication rather than representation has turned out to be just part of the problem. Indeed, already by the mid-1970s the Galerie and its founder Ida Biard witnessed

⁴⁶ See <http://lagaleriesdeslocataires.com/>, last accessed February 5, 2012, my translation.

⁴⁷ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 113.

how easily the new, non-object-based art accommodated itself within the system. This had in fact been spelled out already much earlier, when the managers of Philip Morris, who sponsored Harald Szeemann's famous show *When Attitudes Become Form*, wrote in the show's catalogue that "innovation" and "experimentation" were indeed key elements linking the "new art" with the new business world and that this was why their company was committed to engaging in artistic activities not as "adjuncts to our commercial function, but rather [as] an integral part."⁴⁸

We could read this statement by Philip Morris as a neo-avant-garde manifesto of corporate co-optation (and a counterpart to the more often cited co-optation of the avant-garde by the Soviet Communist Party and the socialist state). It is not surprising that Alexander Alberro quotes it precisely in order to illustrate the "contradictions of conceptual art" in the opening chapter of his study on the link between conceptual art, consumer society, and publicity practices of late capitalism.⁴⁹ Alberro, however, makes serious generalizations in asserting that the idea that conceptual art ever "sought to eliminate the commodity status of the art object"—but failed—was a myth.⁵⁰ Whatever the case in the United States may have been, certainly in Yugoslavia such a dissenting attitude toward commercialization and commodification of art was not a myth, but rather one of the engines of a significant part of artistic and curatorial production.⁵¹ However, in cognitive capitalism, even the "mind" is no longer free from co-optation and exploitation, and so today *Live in the Mind*—the subtitle of Szeemann's show—or Podroom's exhibition *For Art in the Mind*—read less like revolutionary slogans and more like the dematerialized remnants of defeat.

In 1975, having become "[a]ware of the fact that the Galerie des Locataires was becoming just another breakthrough in the realization of an artistic career," the Galerie started casting doubt on its initial postulates of hospitality as it wrote once again to its artists in order to confirm its own

48 John A. Murphy, *When Attitudes Become Form* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Harald Szeemann (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969).

49 Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 2.

50 *Ibid.*, 4. According to him, this myth was heralded by Lucy Lippard in 1972 "when she lamented that the movement had rapidly capitulated to market forces and achieved commercial success." *Ibid.*, 4.

51 Since the market did not exist in Yugoslavia except in some "emerging" form, such negativity was often directed toward the Western system of art and the threat of capitalist infiltration in Yugoslavia.

difference from business as usual.⁵² Ida Biard asked the artists whether they saw the Galerie's noncapitalist principles as obstacles in the way of collaboration or whether, conversely, they found that the Galerie's oppositional stance could be transformatory not only for the art system but for society in general.⁵³ If the answer to the latter question, it was implied, were negative, then there would no longer be any reason for the Galerie to exist. With this letter, the gallery continued to provide individuals with opportunities to be/come artists, but now they were not offered unconditional trust on whether they fulfilled the conditions of "ethics and not aesthetics," and signatures on their artworks were no longer considered proof that they were indeed artists. Now a signature on a contract called Moral Contract was required:

By signing this agreement, the participant is obliged to:

- analyze the relation of the place where she/he exhibits with the work that is exhibited;
- explain the aims of her/his interventions in the traditional exhibition venues.

La Galerie des Locataires is obliged to:

- remain an open field of communication;
- intervene in the structures of existing relations between the artist and galleries.⁵⁴

La Galerie des Locataires implicitly asserted that the pragmatic settling of relations between the contracting sides—as is usual in a contract—was irrelevant *if* a contract stating that the collaboration was based on shared ethical and ideological principles was signed. This is what makes this Moral Contract radically different from the much more famous contracts drafted in the same period by Seth Siegelau and Daniel Buren. Their agreements regulated primarily the acquisition and resale of an artwork, and their very emergence signified that the relation between Western conceptual artists and the market had been intensified.⁵⁵

52 The letter to the artists proposing the Moral Contract; examples (and artists' replies) are available at http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/la_galerie_des_locataires/2/galerie.php, last accessed February 5, 2012, my translation.

53 Ibid.

54 The text of the Moral Contract; examples are available at <http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com>, last accessed April 4, 2012, my translation.

55 For Seth Siegelau's contract, see Alberro, *Conceptual Art*, 123–70. For Daniel Buren's contract, see Maria Eichhorn, "On the Avertissement: Interview with Daniel Buren," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Weichman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006).

Meanwhile in Yugoslavia, artists didn't have to deal with their co-optation by the art market since it did not exist; instead, they struggled with a system of state institutions—museums, awards, grants, acquisitions, the media—that continued to support, and view as art, only object-based, diluted modernism, and not the so-called New Artistic Practice, as neo-avant-garde and process-based, post-'68 practices in Yugoslavia were called.⁵⁶ Yugoslav youth—as the 1968 Belgrade student slogan “Down with the red bourgeoisie!” suggests—rejected both capitalism in the West and its disguised counterpart in Yugoslav society, which showed itself in increasing social differences and in the formation of a “red” upper class of bureaucrats and technocrats in a supposedly classless society.⁵⁷ The Podroom artists thus found themselves in an empty space—a basement—where the products of their work were neither destined for the market nor desired by socialist society, and could be only stored for a delayed audience, for future use.

In 1978, Mladen Stilinović conceived a month-long program consisting of a series of short exhibitions and events, titled *Works in the Basement*, in which the artists were invited to present works that explicitly dealt with the definition and value of artistic work/labor.⁵⁸ The project reflected on the one hand the obsession with the processuality of artistic work (processual painting was also affirming itself on the local scene at the time), but on the other hand Stilinović's long-term preoccupation with deconstructing the ideology of work in socialist Yugoslavia, and the figure of the worker as the builder of socialism. As I already noted, this ideology, formulated within the system of self-management—workers acquiring control over labor conditions and products—was undergoing a serious crisis at the time: not only in the sense that it was showing increasingly capitalist forms, but it literally turned a large part of the pop-

56 This is not at all to suggest that such practices in Yugoslavia did not have institutional support. Quite the contrary. Institutions such as the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Belgrade Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Zagreb and Belgrade Student Center Galleries were crucial for continued organizational, theoretical, and promotional support of the “new art,” as well as for establishing international contacts. But these institutions were in the minority and, together with the artists, formed a “common front” in opposition to mainstream art production that they considered bourgeois and complacent. For an early comprehensive overview, see Marijan Susovski, ed., *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978* (exhibition catalogue) (Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978).

57 See Kirm, “Primacy of Partisan Politics.”

58 Example projects include *The Artist Works Eight Hours a Day* by Antun Maračić, *Masterwork in Podroom* by Ivan Dorogi, *Conditions for Artistic Activity* by Boris Demur, and *Lines* by Raša Todosijević. In 1979 Branka Stipančić curated the group exhibition *Value*, which focused specifically on the issue of the symbolic and monetary value of artistic work.

ulation into *guests* of the capitalist West—the guest workers, or *Gastarbeiter*, who left the country from the late 1960s as there was simply no work for them in Yugoslavia. In a way, Podroom was an experiment that tried to salvage the idea of self-management socialism, detaching it from the state and practicing it in a nonbureaucratized, anarchistic, and solitary way, almost like a secret operation taking place in a basement, even if it didn't promise success.⁵⁹

The metaphor of an underground base where a plan of action is prepared construes Podroom as a form of potentiality, and even the one existing recorded conversation shows that Podroom signified a process of constant discussion of what it could be, rather than what it was. There seem to have always been two opposing visions between the members of the group, one that advocated self-sufficiency, autonomy (the “not-going-to-court” attitude), and the need to assume control over the means and products of labor—that is, literally over the *base* in Marxist terms; and another that claimed that Podroom should strive to be *more* than just artists—leave the factory, so to speak—so that the group would function like a base that coordinates a wider action on the level of cultural politics or, we might say, on the level of the *superstructure*. It was this conflict around whether such action would in fact eventually mean *more* or *less* that would finally lead to Podroom's dissolution in 1980:

Sanja [Iveković]: For then it didn't seem enough to us that this space exists where we can exhibit our works, create our catalogues, etc. . . . And besides, it was also because the character of our work had changed, along with the sense of what constituted the role of artist today; in a way, we ceased to be merely “artists,” and are starting to be something more than that. . . .

[Mladen] Stilinović: Less.

Sanja: More or less. In my opinion, it is more.⁶⁰

However, even if most participants in the discussion probably opted for “less,” Podroom and its Working Community were already perceived as dissenting voices that questioned the status quo of the cultural system and the ways it shaped the symbolic and economical relation of society

59 Resistance to collaboration with the state and to any form of co-optation as the principle of Podroom's work—even when it entailed “no gain”—can best be summarized by another statement by Stilinović: “The conditions of my work are not in my hands, but luckily they are not in yours either.”

60 Sanja Iveković and Mladen Stilinović, *Prvi broj*, n.p.



Prvi broj (First Issue), Podroom's catalogue-journal, cover and inside page, February, 1980. Image courtesy of the Archive of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

to their work. Podroom's members produced art that questioned the value of artistic work; coordinated actions that challenged the functioning of large exhibitions such as the yearly "Youth Salons"; and in their interviews and texts—published primarily in the student press of the time—pointed to the lack of space for their work and its presentation, its denigratory treatment by the mainstream media, and the artists' precarious financial status. Unlike La Galerie des Locataires, which stubbornly charted avenues leading outside of the system, the Working Community of Artists was essentially a community of artists whose work was also supposed to be their profession. Remaining in the basement, on the margins, therefore meant permanent economic, and not only social, isolation.⁶¹

The aim of the magazine-catalogue *Prvi broj* was to reflect on the past and future of the Podroom initiative but also on the relation between artists and the immediate sociopolitical context determining the condi-

61 This was explicitly pointed out by Stilinović in *Prvi broj*, when the issue of isolation was discussed, and by Boris Demur, who warned that one should think of infiltrating the galleries as an economic system, instead of remaining within a romantic idea of culture. *Prvi broj*, n.p.

tions of artistic production.⁶² The artists' textual contributions dealt with censorship and with the lack of professionalism of the media and institutions (Stilinović), the complicity of the artist in maintaining the status quo (Marijan Molnar), the relationship between material and immaterial artist labor and its value (Boris Demur), and the artists' low income (Željko Jerman). As if to respond to all these issues, Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis drafted a proposal for a *contract* that aimed to regulate the financial and other practical responsibilities of the artist and of the institution that presented her or his work. Again, unlike Siegelaub's and Buren's contracts, theirs didn't concern an exchange in the form of a sale, but rather the exchange of mutual responsibility for the public value of the artist's work, which was here conceived as a *common good* shared through public institutions with the wider community. This is how the artist was to earn her or his salary.⁶³

THRESHOLDS

Both Podroom's *Contract* and La Galerie des Locataires's Moral Contract were expressions of the need to raise the thresholds of hospitality. It was no longer enough to leave the window and the basement open or to welcome and receive guests in the order of their appearance. Instead, it became clear that, even though the door would remain unlocked, the threshold needed to be clearly visible.⁶⁴ The introduction of a contract—both literally and in the symbolic sense of requiring consensus over a common program of action—began the process of dissolution for communities that had been created through the merging of work and life and through shared resistance to “documents” and “decrees.” Both Podroom's and La Galerie des Locataires's contracts posed a challenge, implying that it was perhaps necessary to do *more* than just resist, and that this “more” required a clearly defined, solidary action. However, the challenge seemed to be too great, and this fact reflected the challenges faced by the resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s and their subsequent co-optation. Paolo

62 Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis proposed the idea for the launching of a magazine as an “additional form of action,” and whose editorial team consisted of Sanja Iveković, Mladen Stilinović, and Goran Petercol. Other contributors included Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Marijan Molnar, Antun Maračić, Branka Stipančić, Goran Trbuljak, Ivan Dorogi, and Boris Demur.

63 Naturally, such a concept of the value of artistic work can also easily be co-opted by society, by the community, or by the state, but today it seems once more highly relevant to insist on defining, and working toward, a common good.

64 According to Derrida, “[F]or there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality.” Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 14.

Virno stresses the underlying “communist inspiration” of the movements expressed in their nonsocialist, indeed antisocialist, demands: “radical criticism of labor; an accentuated taste for differences, or, if you prefer, a refining of the ‘principle of individuation’; no longer the desire to take possession of the State, but the aptitude (at times violent, certainly) for defending oneself from the State, for dissolving the bondage to the State as such.”⁶⁵ All these “inspirations” were at work at the Galerie and at Podroom alike as their own modes of resistance were constantly under threat of being co-opted by the coming “communism of capital.”⁶⁶

Despite the fact that a number of artists responded to La Galerie des Locataires’s questionnaire and signed the Moral Contract, the Galerie had to face the reality that an artist’s signature still carried more weight as a warranty of authorship for a work of art than as a commitment to a certain work principle. In its own approach to work and collaboration with artists, La Galerie des Locataires was itself entangled in the net of post-Fordist conditions of labor. In contrast to the Podroom artists who occupied the factory to regain control over its production, the Galerie functioned as an outsourced contractor that produced artists’ works according to certain instructions. However, the works’ surplus value remained attached to the institution of artistic authorship and its signature, that is, to the “brand” that produced the idea. It is no coincidence that there were many instances in which the contractual mechanism of the signature came to the foreground in the activities of La Galerie des Locataires. One example was a project with Sarkis, who in 1974 authorized Ida Biard/the Galerie to forge his signature and reproduce it anywhere it deemed appropriate during one year. Although the Galerie had full creative freedom to experiment and take control over this process, the results and the placement of the product—creative investment on all levels being the mark of post-Fordist, immaterial labor—the Galerie’s labor was in the end literally invested in reproducing and multiplying a brand, the logo of artistic authorship.

Ida Biard’s curatorial practice radically merged the artistic and the curatorial through constant shifting and translation; however, it could not move beyond the surplus value of the artist’s signature. In 1976 La Galerie des Locataires therefore pronounced a *Strike* by sending a “farewell letter” to its artists:

65 Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 113.

66 Ibid.



Ida Biard/La Galerie des Locataires realizing work by Daniel Buren on the streets of Budapest, 1974. Image courtesy of Ida Biard and La Galerie des Locataires Archive.

In order to express its disagreement with the conduct of artists/so-called dissenters and the avant-garde within the current system of the art market, LA GALERIE DES LOCATAIRES is on strike and will not communicate any work/so-called artistic as of the 7th of March 1976.⁶⁷

The conditions of hospitality had been violated as the “other side” was judged to be no longer following the Moral Contract. The window was closed.⁶⁸

At that point the threshold that was raised and intensified was the impossible project of hospitality itself, which had marked both the Galerie and Podroom from the outset. Spectators were invited to become artists as guests were invited to become hosts and the original hosts left to search for new spaces. In one of the events held in the Podroom space, Vlado Martek invited Ješa Denegri—the art critic, curator, and one of the key theorists and promoters of the Yugoslav New Art Practice—to give a talk. Denegri came, but Martek wasn’t there and the talk couldn’t begin.

67 Reproduced in *Simplon-Express*, my translation.

68 Another interesting example of a strike—or an invitation to an international strike—was proposed and distributed through a mailing network in 1979 by the Belgrade artist Goran Đorđević (*International Strike of Artists*). It is interesting that most artists from the West declined the invitation, considering Đorđević’s attempt naive. It is precisely this naiveté, a stubborn belief of many Yugoslav artists that an “outside” was possible, that is the undercurrent also of the Galerie de Locataires’s strike.

After thirty minutes of awkward expectation, Stilinović felt pressured to take responsibility and become the host for a guest whose authority—and the fact that he lived in Belgrade and couldn't therefore simply stop by another time—made the visit exceptional. The next day, when he was asked for an explanation, Martek admitted that what occurred had been the planned scenario for the event.

As he plays with the etymology of the term “hospitality,” the ambivalence between guest and host, hostility and hospitality, Derrida frames the host as hostage: “The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [*hôte*], the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home.”⁶⁹ In Martek's reversal of the equation, the guests became the hostages of the missing host.

This (undocumented) action may sound like an anecdote,⁷⁰ but in fact it illustrated the impossible project of hospitality that took shape in Podroom. It seemed to provide Goran Petercol's question—how to treat the invited guests like equals, how not to be the sovereigns of space—with a possible answer: invite them and then leave. The action also mirrors Podroom's beginnings when Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, almost immediately after opening up their studio to other artists in May 1978, left as visiting artists and guests of another artist-run space—the Western Front in Vancouver, Canada.

Iveković and Martinis weren't kept hostage in Zagreb by the guests they had invited because those guests were invited precisely in order to become hosts themselves.⁷¹ However, they were kept hostage by their responsibility for instigating the project of hospitality, and, in this sense, they were still the “primary” hosts. A year after their return from Canada, Iveković and Martinis ended the project. In February 1980 they sent a letter to the Podroom Working Community, informing them of the decision to revert the space back to its initial purpose (their studio). The reasons they gave referred to the *hostility* of several Podroom members (cohosts) toward a series of ideas and projects that Iveković and Martinis had proposed or realized in Podroom:

69 Derrida, “Hospitality,” 9.

70 It is recounted here based on a conversation with Mladen Stilinović.

71 In fact, the actual programs that took place in Podroom were mainly conceived and realized by other members of the group, not Iveković and Martinis, partly due to their absence. They returned in February 1979, after which they gave a talk about their research, presenting the self-organized artistic initiatives they had visited in Canada, which had informed their own idea concerning the potential of an artist-run space.

Our engagement with organizing the talk with the Canadian artist group CEAC caused severe criticism and allegations that we had *usurped power* within Podroom by organizing the event that didn't have support by all RZU members. At the same time most members advocated that *each member was free* to organize, invest his own effort and be responsible for any action, exhibition, or manifestation.⁷²

The CEAC talk was organized in June 1978, before Iveković and Martinis left for Canada, so it can be inferred that the moment of their departure coincided with a moment when the contract of hospitality ensuring harmonious and “free” relations in the community had seriously been put to the test. According to the letter, this hostility was reactivated once they had returned, culminating in 1980 with *Prvi broj*, because Iveković, as designer of the magazine, didn't sign the textual and visual “interventions” that she inserted in its pages.⁷³ The “community of the unsigned contract” thus fell apart over a lacking signature, which was seen as the imposition of unwanted collective ownership and responsibility. The double bind of hospitality in this way fully unraveled itself, in an acknowledgment of the presence of the ghost of hostility, which reasserted a clear distinction between hosts and guests, now perceiving each other as a threat.

Podroom's symbolic contract had been violated, and the proposal of a concrete contract (the one by Iveković and Martinis) only raised the thresholds. For this contract should be read as an attempt to regulate not only the artists' relations with the state, but also the relations within their own community. It could be put into practice only through the artists' solidarity, which was, in turn, constantly threatened by their “particular interests.”⁷⁴ And so the contract was never signed; it was placed in a drawer as yet another potentiality, a documented node in the process of the negotiation of hospitality, of the border between the individual and common ground.

72 Letter to the members of RZU Podroom, February 26, 1980, Podroom Archive of Goran Petercol, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, emphasis added. CEAC is the Center for Experimental Art and Communication, an artist group and space founded in Toronto in 1975 by Amerigo Marras, Bruce Eves, and Ron Gillespie, which was forced to close in 1980 because their activities were deemed radical and they were accused of promoting the overthrow of authority.

73 It is not indicated what precisely is meant by this, but we can assume that the photograph of a woman with a raised fist and the text, “I advocate a new legislation on independent artists,” was certainly one of them, and probably also some newspaper cutouts quoting state rhetoric about the relevance of art in socialist society.

74 As can be inferred from the discussion in *Prvi broj*, it nominally received the support of most members; however, the artists jokingly admitted that they would probably forget about it as soon as they were offered participation in the next exhibition by an institution.



Discussion with the Canadian artist group CEAC in Podroom, June 1978.
Image courtesy of Dalibor Martinis.

GROUND

The conflict, however, implied not merely the selfish needs of individual members, the constant pressure of competition, but also the different battles that needed to be fought in the relation between art and society, and the uncertainty about how to fight these battles. Asking whether art can do more, or whether it rather, by trying to do more, in fact ends up doing less, necessarily evokes another impossible project, that of autonomy, and its own double bind. Co-opted by institutions and the corporate sector, (some) artists in the West sought autonomy by joining the civil movements or activist initiatives or, as in the case of La Galerie des Locataires, simply searching for “an outside” of the (art) system. In the socialist countries where art was (nominally) not seen as a private act but as a common good participating in the shaping of society, artists fought for autonomy within art, trying to liberate it from the remnants of the ancien régime. In search for the right mode of struggle, La Galerie des Locataires chose the strategy of the nomad, the principle of the window: it occupied and inhabited space through constant distribution and deterritorialization, leaving behind no certain traces.⁷⁵ Podroom’s principle, on the other hand,

75 This is how Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the nomadic or smooth space. See “Treatise on Nomadology” and “1440: The Smooth and the Striated” in *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is worth noting, however, that for Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad is not the same as the migrant, nor is it characterized by movement; it concerns first of all deterritorialization and a distribution in space, a distribution that occupies space, but leaves no certain traces in a way.

was that of the basement: occupying and inhabiting the *same* space—and occupying precisely through sharing. Their inhabitation of space was sedentary, but not in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense where the sedentary, striated space—in contrast to the nomadic, smooth space—is always linked to a “state apparatus” or a “property regime.”⁷⁶ Podroom’s sedentary occupation of space was not hegemonic, but based on solidarity, even when it involved no common program of action. However, it also rejected invisibility, it wanted its presence to be clearly marked.⁷⁷ Today, when more and more space is ravaged by perpetual violence, exploitation, and privatization, and when the key word for global resistance movements is occupation—involving *sit-ins*, *squatting*, and *stubbornly staying in place*—we should reconsider the power of the sedentary.⁷⁸

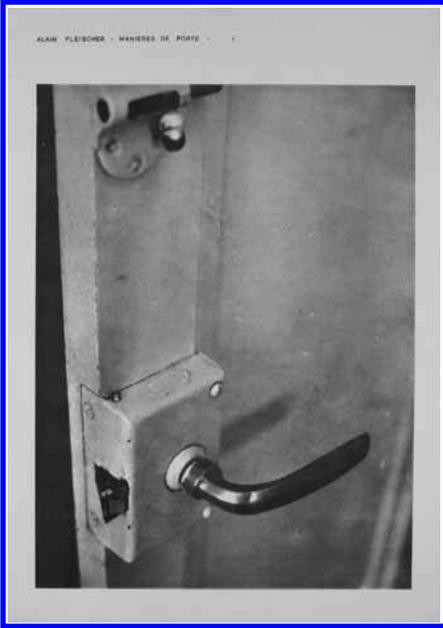
Many of the Podroom artists in fact literally came to Podroom from invisibility, “from the street,” where their actions and interventions were scattered around squares, parks, and buildings. They became “Podroomers” only when they acquired a base, when they became a potential threat that could always leave the mousehole, even without a clear agenda or common program. Although relatively short, the Podroom experience can in retrospect be said to have been crucial for the founding of the “Expanded Media” section within the Croatian Society of Visual Artists that accepted for the first time as members artists with no academic background, and in the framework of which the artist-run PM Gallery (Expanded Media Gallery) was founded, albeit within a state institution (which affected its gradual institutionalization).

Occupying a base also meant drawing a border. Because, as Marina Gržinić notes, when everything can be co-opted by limitless inclusion

76 The sedentary space is characterized by walls, borders; the sedentary relation to space is always mediated by something pertaining to the state apparatus. However, they again complicate the matter by stating: “[T]he nomad moves, but while seated, and he is only seated while moving,” using precisely the metaphor of sitting to describe the nomadic distribution in space. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 381.

77 It is easy to relate these strategies to the present prevalence of resistance as occupation. See, for example, McKenzie Wark’s comment on Occupy Wall Street, where he reminds us that OWS is not a movement since “[a]n occupation is conceptually the opposite of a movement,” and states the anarchic character of occupation, in contrast to the movement, which requires a common program, or “internal consistency.” McKenzie Wark, “How to Occupy an Abstraction,” <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/728>, last accessed February 5, 2012.

78 It is symptomatic that this turn is also synchronous with the renewed interests in objecthood, thus completing the reversal of the preoccupation with both the nomadic and the dematerialized as forms of resistance. See, for example, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, “Editorial,” *e-flux Journal* no. 15 (April 2010), or the introduction of the term “forensic aesthetics” by Eyal Weizman (for example here, within a project itself called *The State of Things*: <http://www.oca.no/programme/audiovisual/the-state-of-things.2>).



Alain Fleischer. *Manières de porte I*, 1973–74. Print on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm. Acquisition from the collection of Ida Biard—La Galerie des Locataires. Property of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

and endless exchange, “[i]n order to act it is necessary to draw a border. To draw a border within the inconsistency of the big Other, within the limitless inclusion means to act, to act politically.”⁷⁹ This was precisely what La Galerie des Locataires did when it pronounced its strike, lasting from 1976 to 1982. In the 1980s, the Galerie resumed its activities but at a much slower pace and more cautiously, aware of the traps of unlimited inclusiveness and borderless expansion. The decision to end the strike showed that the Galerie remained a believer, certain that art *could* be more, regardless of whether this was achieved by doing “more” or “less.” Today, La Galerie des Locataires finds one of its own bases on the Internet, in the form of an archive, of which its founder Ida Biard writes, “And of all those things—the *traces* are here. They were not—promises. I consider them seeds planted in the ground.”⁸⁰

So once again we are back in the ground: the planted seeds, the filed agendas of common action, the lost documents, the unsigned contracts; the unvalued labor; in the ground, under ground, gaining ground, waiting for a movement that is to touch base. And merge impossible and necessary pursuits past and present.⁸¹

79 Marina Gržinić, “Art, Activism and Theory,” in Rand and Kouris, *Playing by the Rules*.

80 <http://lagaleriedeslocataires.com/textes.html>, last accessed January 19, 2012, emphasis added, my translation.

81 In 2008 the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home, run out of a council property bedroom in Everton, Liverpool, UK, sent a key to their home to the curators of an exhibition in Zagreb (The Salon of Revolution, curated by Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, HDLU [Croatian Association of Visual Artists], Zagreb, 2008). Since there were not sufficient funds to invite the institute to realize the work they had proposed for the exhibition, they delegated the realization of this work to the curators, who were to make sixty-eight copies of the master key and hang them on sixty-eight nails hammered into the wall so that together they would form the word *Utopia*. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to take one of the keys and enter the institute’s home in Liverpool at any time. There, it wouldn’t be necessary to announce oneself: nobody would come to answer the door since those who held the key were not guests but hosts. In the end all sixty-eight keys were taken, and, to this day, nobody has arrived. Some keys might have been lost, others thrown away, and some placed in the drawer as evidence, in (the) case of negotiating hospitality.