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Tamás Kaszás's Art Laboratory: Anticipating Collapse, Practicing Survival

Tamás Kaszás's experimental practice, in which an assemblage of enlightening residues from past epochs and their social struggles combine with future oriented imaginings around the prospects for the earth, models for self-sufficiency and techniques of practical survival, calls for a sensitive interpretive framework that is in tune with artist's methods and intentions. Just like laboratories, closely controlled spaces where special care is required to maintain the ideal conditions for research if one is not to endanger the integrity of the work that goes on there, to gain entry to the collage of references and ideas that make up the environment of the artwork requires similar attentiveness. In this essay the interlinked spheres of Kaszás's practice are approached through an analysis of the artist's own sources, the parallels offered by ecological thought and the theoretical insights of anti-capitalist critique.

After graduating from the Intermedia department of Budapest Academy of Fine Arts in 2003, Kaszás became one of the most prolific artists of his generation, exhibiting at prestigious art centres and participating in international biennials. However, despite a decade of intensive artistic career, his bibliography still does not reflect the scale of his artistic achievement and is mostly comprised of exhibition entry texts that rarely engage with his work beyond the scope of the show. This might be in part a deliberate strategy, in line with the artist's preference for decentred and non-hierarchical forms of knowledge, where quotes from Wikipedia take priority over authoritative introductory texts, as is the case in Kaszás's latest publication entitled *Visual Aid* (2013).¹ On the other hand, the artist himself is a diligent writer and a poet, as well as a fertile blogger,² continuing in a way a long established practice of self-historicization in East European art.

The phenomenon of self-historicization is situated in the specific circumstances in which art history as a discipline functioned under socialism, as 'the local institutions that should have been systematizing neo-avant-garde art and its tradition either did not exist, or were disdainful of such art, [as a result] the artists themselves were forced to be their own art historians and archivists.'³ Indeed, Kaszás smoothly navigates the neo-avant-garde legacy and incorporates it regularly into his own practice, as will be shown, although it is important to bear in mind that referring to the older art production is not the purpose in itself, but rather an additional sheet that coats his work. While Kaszás investigates similar existentialist questions to those that preoccupied the earlier artists working in one party systems, he does so in response to the social and ecological challenges posed by neo-liberal global capitalism.

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¹ Tamás KASZÁS: *Visual Aid*. Budapest, Kisterem, 2013.

² See for instance: <http://narrative.freeblog.hu> and <http://improcomix.blogspot.hu> (last accessed June 2013).

³ Zdenka BADOVINAC: *Interrupted Histories*. Exhibition catalogue. Ljubljana, Museum of Modern Art, 2006.

Another dimension inherited from the pool of independent East European artistic traditions is his scepticism towards institutional art structures, although Kaszás directs it towards the mechanism of globalised art world. He formulates his critical stance of the institutional art world by agreeing to participate in its circuits until the conditions are met for him to be able to live without having to pursue a professional career and ultimately become an 'ex-artist' who can afford 'an art practice without institutional mediation'. This is the drive behind his collaboration with Anikó Loránt (b. 1977), which bears the name Ex-Artists Collective to illuminate their radical intention to 'exist in a parallel world (institutional and non-institutional) until there are enough goods collected to give up „the art career“⁴.

The awareness of the power of collective work is one of the main characteristics of Kaszás's practice, as he has initiated and participated in numerous collaborative activities, some of which were more temporary formations, while the Ex Artists Collective and the Randomroutines with Krisztián Kristóf (b. 1976) acquired a more permanent existence, interestingly both dating back to 2003. In her re-reading of recent art history through the lens of participatory art, art historian Claire Bishop identifies the appeal of collectivity vis-à-vis 'the denigration of the individual', who becomes synonymous with the alienating values of neo-liberalism, while collaborative practice is perceived to offer 'an automatic counter-model of social unity, regardless of its actual politics.'⁵ Bishop formulates her discussion as a polemic against Grant Kester's thesis of dialogical art⁶, which she brands as 'politically correct' and a 'new kind of repressive norm'⁷ in its overriding emphasis on the ethics of the artwork at the expense of all other artistic criteria. Nevertheless, collectivity is a notion that is abundant in a wide spectrum of meanings, from the history of East European art to environmental discourse and the critique of global capitalism.

Despite being understood as heterogeneous and emancipatory in resisting dominant art structures and critiquing social institutions and political systems, collectivity is regularly perceived as something essentially East European.⁸ It was selected as one of the 'seven sins – or virtues of East European art' in an exhibition that spectacularized the stereotypes of regional artistic production, finding itself in the company of faults such as utopianism and unprofessionalism, as the curators explained that the 'idea of collectivism is connected in essential way to the communist system and its heritage.'⁹ Situated in that context, the collective aspect in Kaszás's approach is another manifestation of his sleek incorporation of the legacy of East European neo-avant-garde art.

However, the collaborative seed that sprouts through Kaszás's practice is arguably more in tune with green thought, in which alienation is one of the serious threats to social sustainability. In his influential study *The Three Ecologies*, published in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, Felix Guattari warned that 'ecological disequilibrium will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface,'¹⁰ and while societies are in general content to tackle environmental problems 'from a purely technocratic perspective', only an 'ethico-political articulation', encompassing the 'three ecological registers' of the 'environment, social relations and human

⁴ As stated in interview conducted by Maja and Reuben Fowkes on 17 May 2013 in Budapest.

⁵ Claire BISHOP: *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London–New York, Verso, 2012. 12.

⁶ Grant KESTER: *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley–Los Angeles, California, University of California Press, 2004.

⁷ BISHOP 2012. op. cit. 25.

⁸ Zdenka BADOVINAC–Viktor MISIANO–Igor ZABEL: *Seven Sins: Ljubljana – Moscow*. Ljubljana, Moderna Galerija, 2005. 8.

⁹ WHW, New Outlines of the Possible. In: *Collective Creativity*. Eds. René BLOCK–Angelika NOLLERT. Kassel, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005. 15.

¹⁰ Felix GUATTARI: *The Three Ecologies*. London, Continuum, 2000. 27.

subjectivity' offers the chance of a real solution.¹¹ Guattari called for 'reconstructing the modalities of „group-being” not only through „communicational” interventions but through existential mutations.'¹² In other words, the necessity of re-establishing more intimate relationships, of which progressive and durational artistic collaborations could be seen as an exemplary form, is crucial in counteracting pollution that equally affects environmental, social and mental domains of our lives.

An affinity for collective approaches also chimes with the networked culture and *modus operandi* of contemporary protest movements, whose emergence in the wake of globalization was influentially described by anti-capitalist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their paperback popularization of the notion of the Multitude – a revolutionary social subject that 'is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity.'¹³ Drawing on the liberating social and economic insights of the Italian Operarism of the 1970s, a 'cultural, post-Marxist leftwing political movement' that was 'opposed to work ethics and hierarchy as much as exclusive ideological rigidity',¹⁴ Hardt and Negri developed radical cri-



Fig. 1. Ex-artist's collective (Anikó Loránt–Kaszás Tamás):
PANGAEA, visual aid for historical consciousness, 2011, mixed media installation, variable size.
Realised in the architectural and conceptual frame of the 12th Istanbul Biennial

¹¹ For discussion of the three ecological registers in relation to artistic practice, see Maja and Reuben FOWKES: Planetary Forecast. The Roots of Sustainability in the Radical Art of the 1970s. *Third Text*, 23. September 2009. 5. 669–674.

¹² GUATTARI 2000. op. cit. 34.

¹³ Michael HARDT–Antonio NEGRI: *Multitude*. London, Penguin, 2004. xiv.

¹⁴ Sylvère LOTRINGER: In the Shadow of the Red Brigades. In: *Autonomia. Post-Political Politics*. Ed. Sylvère LOTRINGER–Christian MARAZZI. New York, semiotext(e), 2007. v.

tique for the age of globalization. In their view there are ‘two faces of globalization’, explaining that while ‘Empire spreads globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict’, globalization is also ‘the creation of new circuit of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters.’¹⁵

In that sense, one can observe Kaszás’s mode of operating on both levels – voicing strong criticism towards economic globalization and its dominating powers, while at the same time he is logged into the counter-globalization currents. This is visible in the project he developed with Anikó Loránt for 2011 Istanbul Biennial entitled *Pangaea – Visual Aid for Historical Consciousness*, which in its name implies the longevity of the geological history of our planet, pointing to the period more than 200 million years ago when all the continents formed one landmass surrounded by a single ocean (*Fig 1*). While on the one hand it refers to the transformative power of natural matter, Pangaea is also a powerful metaphor for the unity and interdependence of ‘all-earth’, both historically and from today’s globalised perspective.

The installation, consisting of a complex structure made up of wooden poles on which bulletin boards and shelves were arranged with drawings, monitors, crafted objects and projections, was organised around separate wings devoted to the themes of *Symbol Rehab*, *Agro-culture*, *Collapsism*, *As We Live It*, with a *Memorial Centre* located in the inner corridor. Symbolic entrances to the pavilion were marked by posters declaring ‘Pangaea United’ and ‘We are all from Pangaea’, emphasizing our common prospects. The installation is also indicative of Kaszás’s artistic practice in which various entities are inextricably interlinked and where one artwork leads to another, while many of the concepts, drawings and materials are recycled and re-arranged, forming new constellations with similar re-occurring concerns and long lasting pre-occupations.

The power of symbols is not unfamiliar for an artist who was born and grew up in the ‘first socialist town of Hungary’. Starting from scratch in the 1950s, on the spot of the geographic centre, it was ‘built by workers coming from all parts’ of the country and famously dedicated to Stalin, until 1962 when the neutrality of the river Danube was found more suitable to stand in its name.¹⁶ Kaszás programmed guided tours of Dunaújváros to ‘acquaint the wider public with curiosities and values of the socialist model town.’¹⁷ Witnessing how potent political and social symbols tire, get worn out and get hijacked, or simply acquire new meanings through history, Kaszás incorporates them reoccurringly in his work. The artist puts down his fascination with symbols to the experience of growing up in ‘pseudo-socialist Eastern Europe’ as he explained:

‘Back then, for a child, who most of the time only sensed what is on the surface of things, life was great. The scenery that surrounded me was excellent for communicating clear and pure ideas. I liked the posters and coats of arms made with modern design, whose inspiring force radiated a kind of positive energy. I was enthused by their optimism and the image of the future they were foretelling. Although the scenery has since dissolved, nothing that I could be inspired by has taken the place of those ideas. The symbols have proven to have no real content behind them; they were only fabrications serving to conceal something.’¹⁸

¹⁵ HARDT–NEGRI 2004. op. cit. xiii.

¹⁶ ‘Be a Tourist on the Architect’s Desk’ – publication poster by Intercultural Orientation, Dunaújváros, 2006.

¹⁷ Ibid. One of such tours were organised on the occasion of *Service* exhibition in Műcsarnok in 2001. See: Szerviz. Ed. Judit ANGEL. Budapest, Műcsarnok, 2001. 6–7.

¹⁸ See entry by Tamás Tibor Kaszás for *System Change: Incomplete Project* by tranzit.hu, especially part entitled ‘Symbol Rehab’; http://tranzit.org/posttransition/?page_id=718 (last accessed June 2013).

As part of *Pangaea*, *Symbol Rehab* consists of prints from the *Fist Collection* that started as a collaborative blog collection of images with information about each piece, such as red fist, the rising one or one pointing down, and so ensuring that in 'this way the archive works also as a living propaganda tool.'¹⁹ Furthermore, re-appropriated coats of arms of socialist countries, often stripped of red stars and similar communist paraphernalia to keep only the underlying basic motive of the wreath, that clearly shows how interwoven the natural elements are in the ideological functions, were further decorated and recombined into new potential tools for imagining utopia.

One such use of a reconfigured symbol of the wreath on a grand scale was realized during a public art festival called Urban Potentials in 2006, when as part of The Randomroutines activities Kaszás and Kristóf made a drawing on a firewall in seventh district Rózsa Street 32. Overlooking a nursery courtyard and visible to passers-by on the street, the huge wall was a canvas of opportunity for the artists to address both young and grown-up audiences by creating a surreal story with blue figures engaged in enigmatic actions inhabiting the space of the giant wreath, whose two branches grow from small pots and are twinned and tied together. Rather than wanting to depict a concrete situation, the artists' aim was to 'stimulate fantasy' of the observers by combining the fantastic with the accuracy of natural science book illustrations, posing the unanswerable question of nature/culture relations.²⁰

The Great Seed Saving, as this public art project was named, could be approached from the concept of 'mental ecosophy' as Guattari envisioned it, that would lead through awakening of 'phantasm', passage of time, of 'mysteries of life and death' to the search for 'antidotes' to mental pollution caused by mass-media and the 'manipulation of opinion by advertising' that promotes the economic profit and investment as the only rational forces in society.²¹ In an urban environment where spaces such as firewalls are almost exclusively used for the economic purpose of placing goods into the imaginary consumerist needs of the exposed citizens, an image with the burning fire at the centre, whose message cannot be reduced to shopping instruction, stands there with the potential to ignite the unrestrained imagination.

The figure of the agricultural worker as a revolutionary force is a recurrent theme in Kaszás's symbolic vocabulary and has the lead role in the section of *Pangaea* focused on *Agro-Culture*. Already in the *Demo* exhibition at ICA Dunaújváros in 2003, which was one of the earliest public appearances of the artist, he made a statement with the work *Propaganda Barricade*, which consisted of a mobile barricade on wheels, equipped with posters, activist literature as well as tomatoes and eggs that might come handy in street confrontations.²² The front of the portable protest station, with incorporated reference to Tamás Szentjóby's iconic 1969 *Portable Trench for Three*, was flanked with rake and scythe – ultimate peasant tools, turned here into weapons and symbols of political uprising that would become leitmotifs which span throughout Kaszás's practice.

A part of the artistic reflection in *Agro-culture* was centred around historic peasant movements that periodically spread across the continent demanding, for instance, as in the case of the English peasants' revolt in late 14th century, 'everyone to be equal in plenty and in happiness, and not in terms of penury' and also called for 'rivers and forests and the game' to be

¹⁹ 'First Collection'. In: *Revolution I Love You: 1968 in Art, Politics and Philosophy*. Eds. Maja and Reuben FOWKES. Manchester, MIRIAD–Manchester Metropolitan University, 2008. 116.

²⁰ *Tűzfal*. Eds. Katarina ŠEVIĆ–Rita KÁLMÁN. Budapest, Fiatal Képzőművészek Stúdiója Egyesület, 2006. 12.

²¹ GUATTARI 2000. op. cit. 35.

²² *Demo* exhibition was curated by Hajnalka Somogyi at Institute of Contemporary Art in Dunaújváros in 2003.

come 'common property'.²³ The idealization of the medieval commons that peasant revolt sought to protect has tended to be undertaken in a mood of nostalgia and regret for its passing with the inevitable development of industrial civilization, beginning with ecologist Garrett Hardin's 1968 text 'The Tragedy of the Commons'.²⁴ The commons has also reemerged in recent years as a key element in anti-capitalist critique and it is in this sense of the common as a goal of future transformation that it appears in the work of Tamás Kaszás.

On the opening pages of *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri discuss the concept of the common foremost as 'the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soul and all nature's bounty', however insisting that 'results of social production' such as 'knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects' are also part of the common, emphasizing that 'the notion of the common does not position humanity separate from the nature, as either exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care and cohabitation in a common world'.²⁵ Notably, it is only in the third sequence of their collaborative critical enquiry that the theorists consider the environmental issues as connected to challenges of contemporary global society. Such an approach is indicative of critical theory's tendency to sideline not only ecological concerns and the insights of green thought, but also the existence of the natural world itself, as epitomized by the attitude of Michel Foucault, who when shown a magnificent landscape would snap back 'My back is turned to it'.²⁶

While the critique of neo-liberal capitalism spread synchronously across the world on the wings of globalization, the modern ecological consciousness that accumulated around 1968, despite its planetary ramifications, was only truly able to go global after the end of the Cold War, even if the Iron Curtain proved to be porous in that sense.²⁷ Indeed, according to some authors, the collapse of communism was triggered by the deteriorating ecological conditions which prompted the rise of civic environmental movements, while at the same time, it was acknowledged that only once the East–West divide ceased to exist could the world's attention be focused on



Fig. 2. Tamás Kaszás: We don't ask nor demand, but we take and occupy, 2011, ink and home made walnut dye on paper, 228x100cm

²³ Yves FLEMION: *Orgasms of History: 3000 Years of Spontaneous Insurrection*. Edinburgh, AK Press, 2002. 22–23.

²⁴ Garrett HARDIN: The Tragedy of the Commons. In: Ken CONCA–Geoffrey D. DABELKO: *Green Planet Blues. Environmental Politics from Stockholm to Johannesburg*. Colorado–Oxford, Westview Press, 2004.

²⁵ Michael HARDT–Antonio NEGRI: *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Belknap Press, 2009. viii.

²⁶ Foucault and the Environment. In: *Discourses of the Environment*. Ed. Éric DARIER. Oxford, Blackwell, 1999. 6.

²⁷ Maja FOWKES: Central European Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism. PhD thesis. University College London, 2012.

environmental issues, palpable in the momentum generated by the 1992 Rio Summit.²⁸ Nevertheless, the legacy of the ideological distortions through which ecology was perceived under communism remains a productive seam for artistic explorations that also resonates through the agrarian-utopian imagery of *Pangaea*.

The artists' strategy is to salvage from the past potent role models, which they recast as premonitions of the future development of the planet and society. This vision is foremost embodied in the poster that shows a contemporary looking young man and a woman appearing on the left side of the frame holding a hay-fork and scythe as their attributes, delicately referencing the iconic 20th century image of the revolutionary couple – Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*, which crowned the Soviet pavilion at the 1937 International Exhibition in Paris. While the original pair made in steel march forwards with their symbolic hammer and sickle raised up, unstoppable in their mission of building socialism, the contemporary duo depicted in *Pangaea* are much more uncertain in their posture, holding the symbolic instruments in such a way that they still maintain their primary function as agricultural tools (Fig. 2).

In the Ex-artists' view, agriculture will take on a reinvigorated position in a society that is heading towards economic and ecological collapse, with the return to organic food cultivation being one of the possible modes for survival. Such contemplation is close to the principles of permaculture, according to which a 'restructuring of agriculture is an essential part of any attempt to deal with the environmental crisis with which man finds himself faced.'²⁹ This corresponds to two possible outcomes from running out of natural resources on the planet, as was visualized in the posters belonging to the *Collapsism*³⁰ section of *Pangaea* bearing the inscription 'After Oil', where one path leads to a 'new slavery', if things do not change, while the other draws on 'folk-science' to find a way out from imminent catastrophe.

Notably, it is a collapse not a crisis that figures in Kaszás's works, as was for instance shown in the title *Cargo Collapsism* of his solo exhibition in Bratislava in 2012.³¹ The radical theorist originating in Italian Operarism, Franco Berardi Bifo, makes a distinction between the ubiquitous notion of crisis which 'means the deconstruction and reconstruction of an organism which is nonetheless able to keep its functional structure' – a possibility that he rules out in relation to the stage of today's capitalism, and collapse, which is a more accurate denominator of today's situation.³² In that sense, global economic crisis marks, according to Bifo, the 'final collapse of a system that lasted five hundred years' which should be seen as 'an anthropological turning point that is going to change the distribution of world resources and of world power.'³³

In parallel to such thinking goes also renewed interest in the uncovering of the history of civilizations that no longer exist on earth, such as the ancient Maya and Easter Island, attempting to reach beyond the romantic mystery and nostalgic fantasies projected on such societies. The puzzle put together by archeologists, climatologists, historians and paleontologists researching past civilizations, suggests that the reasons for their disappearance from the face

²⁸ Maja and Reuben FOWKES: *The Ecology of Post-Socialism and the Implications of Sustainability for Contemporary Art*. In: *Art and Theory after Socialism*. Ed. Mel JORDAN–Malcolm MILES. Bristol, Intellect, 2008. 101–111.

²⁹ Bill MOLLISON–David HOLMGREN: *Permaculture 1: A Perennial Agricultural System for Human Settlements*. Tyalgum, Australia, Tagari, 1990. 4.

³⁰ FOR THE MONUMENT TO COLLAPSIISM, SEE: SÁNDOR HORNYIK: *IMAGINARY ICONOLOGY: ON THE PATH TO UTOPIA, ANTI-UTOPIA, AND DYSTOPIA*. IN: *THE SCIENCE OF IMAGINATION*. ED. HAJNALKA SOMOGYI. BUDAPEST, LUDWIG MUSEUM–SIEMENS STIFTUNG, 2011, 76–82.

³¹ *Cargo Collapsism* was held at Faica Gallery in Bratislava in 2012. See: <http://artycok.tv/lang/en-us/17703/cargo-collapsism> (last accessed October 2013).

³² FRANCO BERARDI BIFO: *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Los Angeles, Semiotexte, 2009. 212.

³³ *Ibid.*

of Earth were 'at least partly triggered by ecological problems: people inadvertently destroying the environmental resources on which their societies depended.'³⁴ The collapse of modern society however, which is ultimately also caused 'by scarcity of environmental resources', will not happen in isolation as was the case before, but, according to scientist Jared Diamond, 'for the first time in history, we face the risk of a global decline.'³⁵

In Kaszás's view, although the economic, political and ecological situation is heading towards collapse, this could create an opportunity to 'form a new society', for which he is preparing by working on his survivalist skills, rather than engaging in political activism. This is visible in the artist's withdrawal from Budapest and settling in Szigetmonostor on the island of Szentendre, where he found more suitable conditions for leading a 'slower lifestyle' and being closer to 'permaculture gardening, folk science and agro-culture', notions and experiences that are crucial to his current preoccupations with developing future models for survival. This is further emphasised by the artist's appearance and disappearance from the institutional art world, where exit rather than political activism is his response to the current less than optimistic situation.

In a chapter of *Temporary Autonomous Zones* entitled 'The Will to Power as Disappearance', American anarchist writer Hakim Bey discusses the tactics of disappearance, which he envisions as 'a very logical radical action for our time' since these gestures are made against institutions as well as politics and can be seen as replacing 'traditional revolutionary confrontation'.³⁶ Similarly, according to Bifo, the 'prospect of revolution is not open to us' as it 'entails an exaggerated notion of the political will over the complexity of contemporary society' and therefore the main prospect is 'to shift to a new paradigm not centred on product growth, profit, and accumulation, but on the full unfolding of the power of collective intelligence'.³⁷

In a recent interview recorded for an on-line art TV channel, one can observe Kaszás cooking outdoors on a self-built oven that does not require much wood to heat.³⁸ This belongs to tools and concepts that the artist 'collected from the folk-science', and is used as an exercise in developing survival skills. *Famine Food* is another common project with Loránt that is ongoing since 2011 and consists of drawings, prints, images and other visual aids as well as texts and objects that serve the purpose of showing useful information about edibles that can be collected or produced in times of need. 'Wild plants are invaluable during time of famine or crisis' writes Richard Mabey, the author of seminal seventies bestseller *Food for Free*, explaining that they are 'quickly available, tough, resilient, resistant to disease, indifferent for the most part to climate and soil condition', in other words, they thrive 'under conditions that our pampered cultivated plants would find intolerable', while also voicing a warning that at the same time they are 'in danger of vanishing from popular knowledge'.³⁹

For his 2009 solo exhibition in Open Space in Vienna the artist presented *Forest-school* and published a small guide which is an assemblage of writings, drawings and slogans that disclose ideas of living in close proximity to the natural world (Fig. 3).⁴⁰ The artist's attention is caught by apples, which 'fall down from the trees so slowly and that is the most perfect drum music', a poem to nettle that is 'paradox coincidence', and a warning that for survival it is not enough to learn 'some hunter's tricks' but 'forest's poetry has to be studied as well.'

³⁴ Jared DIAMOND: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York, Penguin, 2005. 6.

³⁵ Ibid. 23.

³⁶ Hakim BEY: *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. New York, Autonomedia, 2003. 126.

³⁷ Franco BERARDI BIFO: Exhaustion and Senile Utopia of the Coming European Insurrection. *e-flux journal*, 21, December 2010.

³⁸ Interview recorded on 11 December 2012. <http://artycok.tv/lang/en-us/16885/tamas-kaszas>. (Last accessed June 2013).

³⁹ Richard MABEY: *Food for Free: A Guide to the Edible Wild Plants of Britain*. London, William Collins and Sons, 1972. 14.

⁴⁰ Tamás KASZÁS: *Waldschule/Forestschool Guide*. Nr. 1. Budapest, n. d.

This work references pioneers of modern transcendental naturalism, such as Henry David Thoreau, who poetically exclaims that in 'short, all good things are wild and free'.⁴¹

The notion of shelter as a building that provides protection and a refuge also regularly occurs in the work of Kaszás, while one of the earliest instances was the *Children Squat Model*, built with Anikó Lorant in Studio Gallery in 2003. The idea of shelter is especially relevant from the survivalist point of view and several such structures have been envisioned including *Mega-shelter* from 2011, in which Kaszás combined inherent knowledge of making shelter from folk-science with modernist architectural superstructures and aesthetics of recycled materials. It is a flexible composition as 'there are no finalised fundamental principles, everything can be developed, discarded or carried on any time'.⁴²



Fig. 3. Ex-artist's collective (Anikó Loránt–Kaszás Tamás): Waldschule (Forest school), 2010, installation (mixed media materials installed on wood construction) and slide show: 2x80 of slides projected parallel without synchronisation, variable size of a bulletin-board (vertical: 1 m horizontal: ~7-12m) built from 3x5cm diameter roof slats

For the installation *Amphibian (bulletin-board/yurt or theory/practice)* from 2011, Kaszás and Loránt transformed the bulletin-board that was used as an exhibition display structure, and therefore symbolizing theory, into a yurt, a practical traditional dwelling, while keeping the option of reversing the process, while the yurt itself can take on the function of display. Their interest in turning theory into practice is related to learning survivalist skills, as preparedness is a pre-condition for successful transformation in challenging times, but also

⁴¹ Henry David THOREAU: *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. New York, Dover Publications, 1993. 66.

⁴² József MÉLYI: Összeomlás után (After the Collapse). *Élet és Irodalom*, 55. 44. 4. (November 2011.) 22.

the awareness that only once (green) theory is turned into a practical lifestyle does it become truly emancipatory.

The interconnectedness of art and life forms the core of the *Pangaea* section labelled *As We Live It*, interestingly turning their working motto into a proclamation 'Never Work' and 'Contemplate', which can be found inscribed on posters and waved on flags (Fig. 4). These ideas also appeared on the starting pages of their self-published *Self-Orientation Book* on the occasion of the joint exhibition in Liget Gallery in 2007. A watercolour depicts a solitary figure sitting



Fig. 4. Tamás Kaszás: *Contemplatio X Never work*, 2007, water color and pencil on paper installed on a wood stick, ~35×45cm

on top of a green hill, while the dialogue goes: 'What are you doing? – Nothing. – That's the best. Teach me how to do it!'⁴³ Having to learn not to work is also an illustration of the understanding that 'we have been working too much over the last five centuries', as Bifo explained, which resulted in 'abandonment of vital social functions' and therefore 'we need a massive reduction in work time [...] in order to reweave the fabric of the social relation'. Furthermore, he states: 'linking survival and subordination to the process of exploitation was a necessity of capitalist growth', while 'misery and war will be the norm of the social relationship' until 'the majority of mankind is free from the connection between income and work.'⁴⁴

Seen from this perspective, Kaszás and Loránt's invitation not to work brings us back to the potent idea of strike, refusal, disappearance and exit as critical strategies for combating the post-Fordist condition in contemporary art, a diagnosis of which was palely pictured by sociologist Pascal Gielen in *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post Fordism*. Immaterial labourers are especially exposed to post-Fordist conditions of mobility, flexible working hours and adaptability that tend towards the hybridization of 'the spheres of private and working life'⁴⁵ in the interests of economic productivity, of which artists can be considered a proto-type. A much sharper vision is expressed by Bifo's *The Soul at Work*, in which voluntary over-time work as a form of contemporary slavery, aggravated by constant connectivity to digital devices, triggers the widespread estrangement of cognitive labourers and gives rise to 'an entire range of collective pathologies' from panics attacks to mass depression.⁴⁶ In that sense, exiting the rules of the art world and the norms of the social system, applying the tactics of disappearance and refusal of work, can be considered vital strategies of resistance to the threat to human subjectivities posed by the spread of post-Fordism in contemporary life.

The inner part of *Pangaea* is devoted to a *Memorial Centre* that contains chalk drawings depicting the posters for the uprisings, revolutions and social movements that erupted in the past,

⁴³ *The Self-Orientation Book*, no authors, no publishers, no page numbers.

⁴⁴ BERARDI BIFO 2009. op. cit. 213–214.

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A globalizáció és az antikapitalista kritika válogatott magyar nyelvű irodalma

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Kaszás Tamás művészeti laboratóriuma.

Az összeomlás előszele és a túlélés gyakorlata

A tanulmány az ökológia és az antikapitalista kritika egymással összefüggő elméletei felől vizsgálja Kaszás Tamás experimentális alkotói praxisát. A művek elemzése során a művész saját teóriájának elemeit is felhasználjuk, így többek között olyan kifejezésekkel is élünk, mint kollapszizmus, népi bölcsélet és permakultúra, valamint tekintetbe vesszük, hogy Kaszást erőteljesen foglalkoztatja a politikai szimbólumok eltérítése, és munkássága erős affinitást mutat a mezőgazdasági munka forradalmi hagyományai, illetve a túlélési technikák művészi felhasználása iránt. Részletesen tárgyaljuk a Pangaea című komplex installációját, amelyet – Ex-Artist’s Collective név alatt – közösen alkotott Loránd Anikóval a 2011-es Isztambuli Biennáléra. Ennek során rámutatunk Kaszás tevékenységében a kollaboratív munka fontosságára, és elemezzük, hogy miért hasznosítja újra és értelmezi át állandóan a különféle ideákat, rajzokat és anyagokat. Kaszás laboratóriumi gyakorlatában felismerhető a neoavantgárd helyi hagyománya is, amely a hivatalos művészeti rendszerrel szemben szkeptikus és hajlamos önmagát historizálni. Úgy gondoljuk, hogy az 1970-es évek óta formálódó ökológiai elméletek, és különösen Félix Guattari írásai szolgáltatathatják azt az elméleti keretet, amelynek segítségével a legátfogóbban leírható Kaszás kollaboratív munkára épülő, környezettudatos alkotói tevékenysége. A kollektivitás elvének fontossága Kaszás művészetében összecseng a hálózati kultúra fogalmával és a mai protesztmozgalmak mozgatórugóival is. Ebből adódóan olyan antikapitalista teoretikusok elméleti reflexióit is felhasználhatjuk a globális gazdaságot és annak hatalmi struktúráit kritizáló művek interpretációja során, mint Michael Hardt és Antonio Negri, illetve a korábban szintén „autonomista” gondolkodóként ténykedő Franco Berardi Bifo, akik a mai új típusú társadalmi folyamatok leírására törekuszenek. Innen nézve válik igazán plasztikussá Kaszás műveiben a globalizáció és a jelenlegi hatalmi struktúra kritikája. A művész „készülődése” a közelgő gazdasági, politikai és ökológiai katasztrófára az eltűnés, a visszautasítás és a kilépés radikális posztfordista taktikáival is párhuzamba állítható.

Kulcsszavak: ökológia, antikapitalista kritika, posztfordizmus, kollaboratív munka, kollektivitás, intézménykritika, globalizáció, ellen-globalizáció