

22

A



BY
JEANNETTE PETRIK

CATEGORY
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ACTIVE-ISM, AGENCY, DIY,
DUMPSTER DIVING,
EXTREMISM, FREEGANISM,
MEDIATIONS

WWW
traderstalk.org/contribution/a-parasitical-breed-of-consumer-3

A PARASITICAL BREED OF CONSUMER

'A Parasitical Breed of Consumers' is a self-initiated project that takes advantage of openly accessible urban structures of consumption. Those 'loopholes' enable users to step out of the role of solely being consumers to becoming producing actors. The project looks at freeganism as an expression of personal convictions and individual subjectivity.

A Parasitical Breed of Consumer revolves around food as a basic human need commonly embedded into capitalist structures and explores distribution systems of supermarkets to make unsold produce accessible. Participating individuals are enabled to take advantage of freely accessible materials with help of strategies and techniques that educate about sourcing materials, transforming found materials into tools and extending the life-cycle of previously discarded materials.

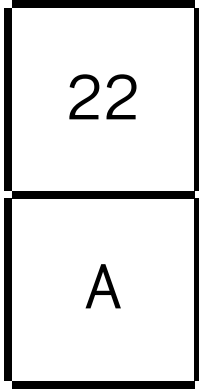
Through the discovery of value in often discarded 'low quality materials' this project counters the economic logic we, as consumers, producers and distributors have gotten used to and, instead, shows alternative solutions that would enable for individuals to become more active and conscious in relation to their behaviours of consumption.

The project was developed in the context of the Master studies in Contextual Design at the Design Academy in Eindhoven and was completed as a graduation project in 2013. As a research project relating to theories of Extremism, it surely was essential to my personal development as a writer, researcher and social human being. This project marked the beginning of an ongoing exploration of convictions that form the basis of a personal active-ism.

The project was shown at the Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, NL) in the context of the exhibition 'The Museum of Arte Util' from 7 December 2013 – 30 March 2014, under the creative direction of artist Tania Bruguera.

<https://jeannettepetrik.com>

TRADERS TALK

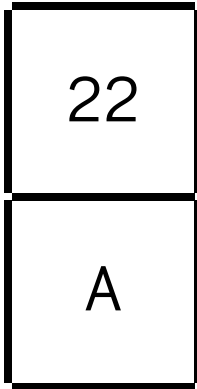


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DISCUSSION

A PARASITICAL BREED OF CONSUMER

PABLO CALDERÓN SALAZAR

Thank you for this contribution, Jeannette, which brings forth a valuable reflection on the potential of art & design as activism. I find your project revolves around two 'spheres': a personal one which, as you said, has served to mark your position "as a writer, researcher and social human being"; and a collective one, where you want to allow others "to take advantage of freely accessible materials with help of strategies and techniques that educate about sourcing materials, transforming found materials into tools and extending the life-cycle of previously discarded materials". I wonder if you could describe further how you move from one sphere to the other; meaning, how do you move from making certain reflections for yourself -and learning in the process- and transferring these ideas?

15.02.2016 — 14:59 YES (0) NO (0)

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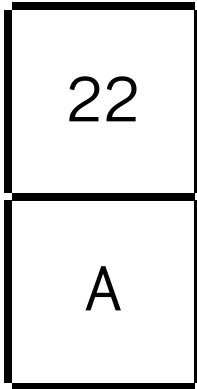
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JEANNETTE PETRIK

Dear Pablo, this has been one of the central issues within the project - choosing appropriate means of communication not only to share my own findings but to help empower others to live according to their own convictions. Within the project, this has taken the shape of a booklet entitled "The Parasite's Cookbook" (referring to the Anarchist's Cookbook), which you can see in one of the images above. Furthermore, I've organised a series of workshops held at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the context of the exhibition 'Museum of Arte Util' and a few talks on related topics. Actually, the other products of this project (home-made utensils such as knives which enabled me to act upon my desire to counter the wasting of food) seem less valuable than the ones described above, although they have been featured in the 'Museum of Arte Util' and have served as conversation pieces in this context. I speak about the discovery of myself as a social human being without necessarily pointing at the hippie-esque notion this might make you think of. What I mean is that this project has helped me to discover my own true convictions because I challenged myself to act according to what I believe in. This implied a necessity to reflect thoroughly about what kind of world I wanted to live in and it directly relates to understanding myself as a social being. Therefore, it seemed highly relevant to consider how to share my thoughts through design or other means. I consider 'A Parasitical Breed of Consumer' as a completed project while my current practice as a writer, researcher and activist is highly influenced by the lessons I've learned from the above project. Just a few examples: I've initiated a people's kitchen which uses food waste almost exclusively as ingredients to feed around 50 people twice a month. I'm active in a newly formed collective of squatters and artist who regularly organise events - we're running a freeshop and will host a freeschool in the end of this month. I'm currently living in a squatted building and am working on converting a 12t truck that I'll move into soon to travel Europe and to experience life from perspectives more autonomous from common urban structures. Actually, these are just a few examples of what 'my practice' encompasses. I'm actively engaged in a number of 'projects' all of which



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relate to what I've identified as my convictions rendering collaboration, skill sharing and social awareness as a central theme. Actually, the private sphere you point out is prerequisite to any action I perform. Without personal reflections none of the projects I'm engaged in would benefit from my input. Moving from the personal sphere to the collective one has become very natural as my practice thrives on a general critical attitude and collectivity. Therefore, organising things and being active as a member of a social environment that is centred around doing things and making things happen makes the border between personal reflection and collective action a very easy one to cross. I feel like mentioning the relevance of affinity groups. It's important to note that while developing 'A Parasitical Breed of Consumer', I was studying at a design school. At the time, my peers were all involved in the field of design and it didn't feel natural to start collective projects while everyone was involved with their personal practice, primarily. Now, that my social environment consists of people that I share different interests with, my practice has come to evolve on more than just a personal level. I understand 'A Parasitical Breed of Consumer' as a bit of a clumsy attempt to collective action. Maybe it's the lack of institutionalism that currently allows me to think outside of institutionalising frames and to engage with others more intuitively and openly. I felt like a more extensive and contextualising answer was needed to frame the project as the 'stepping stone' that I consider it to be. Although my answer goes a bit far, did it answer your question sufficiently?

05.03.2016 — 14:27 YES (0) NO (0)

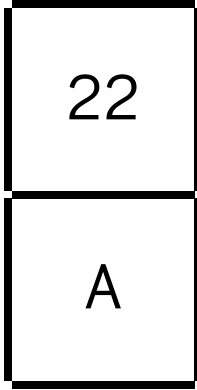
PABLO CALDERÓN SALAZAR

It definitely does, Jeannette, and it takes me back to a discussion I had on the project of Thomas Verbal (Some.Where: <http://www.traderstalk.org/contribution/some-where/>), in which we spoke about "designing yourself as the 'ultimate design'". I can also definitely understand (relate to?) your experience of engaging (or not) on collective projects within a design school -specially the DAE, which has a strong focus on formation of author-designers and how going out of that context allows to discover new levels of conviviality. But would you then say that design schools are doomed to be isolated from 'everyday life' and 'society'? Do you think there would be a way of bridging these two worlds?

07.03.2016 — 10:53 YES (0) NO (0)

JEANNETTE PETRIK

I understand design schools, as educational institutions in general, as spaces for the creation of potential realities. Experimentation, self-exploration and reflection should be central elements in what I consider good educational structures, while social interactions, empathy and dialogue are just as invaluable. I believe in education as an event which deeply influences individuals and shapes identities by providing tools which allow individuals to empower their own selves. Therefore, education needs to involve a certain degree of self-reflection and self-exploration, aka. 'egocentrism'. Nevertheless, an education which is purely forming egocentric individuals is a limited one. Besides the identification of one's interests, strengths and weaknesses studentship needs to involve elements of collaboration, social inclusion and empathy



in order to bring forward individuals who consider themselves as socially responsible actors. If an educational system fails to provide such a basis an interesting question comes up: Will the 'Everyday' fill the gap and challenge individuals to responsible actions? I believe that education should become a wide-spread practice for all those who consider themselves socially responsible. Providing stimulating environments of criticality would take the disproportional power away from educational institutions and allow for individuals to shape each other socially based on principles of collaboration and conviviality. I have recently conducted an interview with Tania Bruguera on the subject of Radical Pedagogy. I'll post a link to it after it's publication in the end of October.

06.10.2016 – 16:46 YES (0) NO (0)

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