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Another Art World, Part 3: Policing and Symbolic Order

Continued from Part 1 and Part 2.

> The earth is a museum of humanity,
> traveling through the universe.
> – Nikolai Fyodorov

In the first two parts of this essay, we analyzed the contemporary art world less in terms of how it works than in terms of what it does, in what is at stake in its existence. One of the most powerful and insidious roles the art world (at least as it is currently organized) plays is in the creation and maintenance of a larger symbolic order hierarchizing what are called "the arts," creating a kind of artificial scarcity that subordinates most forms of cultural creativity. In doing so, the art world has powerful effects on many who are not even aware of its existence.

Other ways of organizing human creativity are possible. In analyzing the artificial production of scarcity, the strategic adoption of only half of the Romantic conception of creativity – or what the Romantics themselves called "genius" – we also wanted to identify exactly what made it possible for the art world to play this role, so as to imagine a different one. What if we spent half the creativity we spend on producing new works of art on reimagining the institutional structure of the art world itself? We set out to examine the matter historically, and cross-culturally, and also take inspiration from our own daydreams and nightmares, to produce a Borges-like catalogue of possible art worlds, based on different principles of value:

· What if there were an art world with the explicit aim of producing gossip?

· What if there were an art world in which art is an extremely sophisticated form of personal insult directed at those the artist hates (such as other artists)?

· What if there were an art world in which humans were not allowed to participate, but only observe the interactions of animals and machines?

· What if there were an art world in which works are meant to express feelings of shame and remorse (art as apology)?

· What if the art world were organized by the government to design previously unimaginable forms of sin, or just beautiful pornography, then sell carnal indulgences provided by the government to absolve consumers?

This was a great deal of fun, and could easily have grown to hundreds, even thousands of possible other art worlds. But after the global pandemic and the veritable mass uprisings that followed, it seemed a trifle flippant. We decided to reconsider our approach.

Inter anna silent Musae – the Muses all fall

silent when cannons talk. But perhaps this is true of only a certain kind of muse. We came to realize that the ideas we were developing, however imaginative, were ultimately reformist. Perhaps, as Black Lives Matter has argued so cogently of the police and prison-industrial complex, the art world can't be reformed. What would it mean to take an abolitionist position?

On Monuments and the Rules of Engagement

Before the global pandemic, much of the world was already in a state of revolt. 2019 had already seen (mostly nonviolent) insurrections everywhere from Haiti to Hong Kong to Lebanon to Réunion, although these were largely isolated, with very little communication between them, or even much mutual awareness of the others' existence. In the wake of the pandemic, and the killing of George Floyd, the global uprising of spring and summer 2020 found a common inspiration in Black Lives Matter in the United States, and a common language as a generalized rebellion against the police state in many local manifestations.

By summer 2020, at least two shared themes in this global movement had emerged. The first is a process of mutual communication, starting from a shared desire to dismantle existing structures of state violence in solidarity with the population that bore the brunt of it (Romany in Serbia, migrants in Italy, for instance), but also to simultaneously begin to imagine the kind of institutions that would have to be created in their stead. The second is the destruction of monuments. There have been some incidents of looting, but significantly, they are not celebrated by protestors, and are often assumed to have been intentionally staged by police. The attacks on monuments, even if destructive, are completely unrelated to looting. Monuments, like museums – or more precisely, along with museums – are mechanisms for the production and dissemination of public meaning. It would seem that they are the machinery being at least temporarily suspended and systematically thrown into question with public gatherings in so many towns and cities, not only in the US.

One might put it this way: those who broke out of lockdown directly into mass mobilization moved directly to take over the means of production of the symbolic order, expressed above all in the reorganization of (violent and cruel) public space through the destruction and alteration of monuments. Some people bemoan the destruction of monuments as an attack on history (though almost no one, interestingly, has seen it as an attack on art). Some distinguish between good and bad monuments. *We, however, take the side of Nicholas Mirzoeff, who wrote a few years ago that "all monuments must fall."*

What is a monument anyway? After actions like N30 in Seattle against the WTO in 1999, the principal images that seemed to remain in public memory were: 1) anarchists dressed in black smashing Starbucks windows; and 2) colorful giant papier-mâché puppets.[1] But why, between the two, did the police seem to hate the puppets more? The police incessantly tried in subsequent actions to arrest the puppets, destroy the puppets, and organize preemptive strikes against the places where the puppets were being made. It got to the point where puppets had to be made in hiding, and the Black Bloc often had to organize its deployment largely to protect the puppets and their accompanying "carnival bloc" of musicians, clowns, belly dancers, stilt walkers, and so forth.

Why did the police object so violently to the "carnival bloc?" Part of the reason was that using art was seen as cheating. The Black Blocs were effectively combatants in a war. Mass actions involved classic military-style maneuvers aimed at ambushing, outflanking, surrounding, or breaking through the lines of adversaries. As in any war, there were limits on what weapons and tactics could be deployed, and though these limits varied from country to country, in general the police weren't allowed to use deadly force, and the other side couldn't use anything likely to cause serious physical harm. It is important to emphasize that these rules always exist – even in what seems like total war, such as the Russian front in World War II, where neither side used poison gas or tried to assassinate the other's leader.

But how are those rules negotiated? This takes place at the level of symbolic warfare, and the police, at least, feel strongly that the creation of powerful imagery to sway the public – and regulate who can use what sort of force in what circumstances – should be carried out through the media. Certainly, police representatives did this assiduously, almost invariably telling outrageous lies about "protestor violence" to justify more extreme repressive measures. From the perspective of the police, however, the Black Bloc appearing to organize a military-style confrontation, and then "defusing" or "deescalating" the situation by sending in puppets and clowns, was obviously cheating. The anarchists were demanding the right to change the rules of engagement on the field of battle. Puppets became the symbol for this demand.

But why specifically puppets? Here a further level of analysis is required. Black Bloc communiqués spoke of "breaking the spell" – we are surrounded, they said, by glittering palaces

Photo: Victor Bulla.

of consumerism, which seem like permanent monuments to a corrupt and fallen human nature. Yet with a simple monkey wrench, the whole facade can dissolve away into shards of glass. At the same time, giant puppets – which could represent anything from gods and dragons to caricatures of politicians and corporate bureaucrats – were simultaneously divine and ridiculous. These were objects that took days, even weeks to assemble, and were put together collectively by very large numbers of people. They were gigantic but fragile, and after a day's use, almost invariably crumbled away. In other words, they mocked the very idea of a monument. They represented the permanent power to bring the monumental into being as something very large that dominates public space, and by doing so seems to make real an abstraction. Such a constant kaleidoscope of possible monuments evoked the sacred in a form so powerful that it effectively had to be made silly. Otherwise, its power would be too terrifying.

In their self-satire, the giant puppets were also the most honest of monuments, because any monument that proclaims the eternity of what it represents – a sculpture, a mausoleum, a stolen Egyptian obelisk – is by definition a fraud. The things they represent are not really eternal. If they were, there would be no need to raise a monument. No one ever built a monument to the principle of gravity, or winter, or the sea. (Indeed, one could even argue that there is a slight danger involved in creating a monument to something like "Justice" or the nation, because by doing so one is subtly suggesting it may well *not* be eternal.)

Recent images of masked, heavily armed police surrounding the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC are not, perhaps, as ironic as they might seem. Police are, essentially, the guardians of the very principle of monumentality – the ability to turn control over violence into truth. Even the language police use to describe what they do (force, law, power) suggests that the ability to threaten others with sticks and guns, lock them in cages, or to place one's knee on their neck until they stop breathing, should be considered analogous to the principles that govern the universe.

On Politics, Policy, Politeness, and Police

During the uprisings, art institutions largely played a (sometimes surprisingly) supportive role, providing food and shelter for those fleeing or recovering from encounters with police, for example. So it might seem ungracious to take an abolitionist position in relation to the art world. We should make clear that we do not intend this as a moral critique of individuals or individual complicity. In the same way that shifting the focus from "racism" (which can easily be turned into a moral language of endless self-examination, at the expense of action) to opposing "white supremacy" (as a set of institutional structures producing a concrete outcome that needs to be reversed, through action), we want to shift our own question "is another art world possible?" to focus on the very existence of "the art world" as an institutional power hierarchizing symbolic relations that extend far beyond its own reach. When protestors say, "The police are beyond reform; they must be defunded and dismantled," they are obviously not rejecting the idea of public safety. On the contrary, they are insisting that police institutions as they currently exist are detrimental to public safety, and for reasons running too deep for any reform to alleviate; that we have to understand what cops actually do, figure out which elements (if any) are actually desirable, and develop *other* ways, and other institutions, to do it. It's the same with the art world as an institution that restricts the distribution of sacred or symbolic meaning, the making real of abstractions.

But what do police actually do? In order to understand this, we need to understand the history of how police came into existence, as well as how they came to take the form – and crucially, the symbolic role – they have today. This history is not what we are taught to expect. The idea of something called "the state" only really came into currency in the seventeenth century, and modern European states were always police states in some sense, in that the creation of what were called police functions was a key part of extending sovereign authority to the entire population. But there is also a reason for "politics," "policy," and "police" (and for that matter, "politeness") all sharing the same root. Police at their inception had almost nothing to do with public safety, let alone "fighting crime" (which was still handled by constables and the local watch); police were there to enforce regulations, licensing, guaranteeing the food supply to cities to prevent riots, monitoring rootless populations, and, crucially, too, acting as spies. (Antoine de Sartine, Louis XV's chief of police, boasted that if there were three men talking on the street, one of them almost certainly worked for him.) Modern policing was born in the early nineteenth century in England, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The new, uniformed police, while now advertising themselves as crime fighters, mainly had the dual function of protecting the rich and "prevention" – which largely meant forcing able-bodied vagrants into respectable labor.

Politicians back then were often refreshingly honest about their motives. Many

were quite explicit that they had no interest in eliminating poverty: Patrick Colquhoun, the first great theorist of British policing, wrote that poverty was necessary to drive people to industry, and industry was necessary to produce wealth (just not for the poor). They were concerned with that section of the poor who were *not* producing wealth, or threatening to take that wealth away, whether by pickpocketing or insurrection. In this sense, police were always political. In the US, for instance, police in the southern states were largely commissioned to enforce the segregation of former slaves, while in northern cities, one important motive for creating professional police forces was fear that the army would prove unreliable if called out against strikers during industrial disputes.

In this sense, police were, from the very beginning, concerned with social welfare, but of an intentionally limited kind. What we have come to know as the welfare state, in contrast, is quite different in its origins. It is not derived from the apparatus of state at all: from Sweden to Brazil, everything from social insurance to kindergartens to public libraries were originally the product of social movements: labor unions, neighborhood groups, bunds, political parties, and so forth. The state merely coopted them, and insisted they be run by top-down bureaucracies. For a while – mainly when capitalist states were still faced with the threat of the socialist bloc – this compromise did produce widespread prosperity. But what the state seizes the state can also lock away. As a result, since the 1970s and '80s, as revolutionary threats faded, the power of unions was broken, community groups began to be broken up, and the welfare state began to be dismantled, the police began increasingly to take over the provision of social services once again.

Just like in the 1820s, the transformation was mediated by a symbolic offensive claiming the real role of police was "fighting crime" – it's hard to remember that, prior to the 1970s, there were almost no movies, in America or perhaps anywhere in the world, where policemen were the heroes. Suddenly heroic, "maverick" cops were on screens everywhere, just as actual cops, "security professionals," surveillance systems, and the like began appearing in places where they would once have been unheard of: schools, hospitals, beaches, playgrounds. All the while, the actual function of police remained much as it had been in the 1600s: police sociologists have long noted that real cops spend perhaps 6–11 percent of their time on matters that have anything to do with "crime," much less violent crime; the overwhelming majority of their time and energy is spent enforcing the endless municipal regulations on who can drink, walk, sell, smoke, eat, drive what, where, and under what conditions. Police are still bureaucrats with weapons, bringing the possibility of violence, even death, into situations where it would never otherwise exist (for instance, the sale of unlicensed cigarettes). The main difference is that, as capitalism has financialized itself during this same period, police have added an additional administrative function: revenue collection. Many city governments are entirely dependent on money coming in from police enforcement of fines in order to balance their books and pay their creditors. Just as police in the industrial age were deployed to guarantee the continued existence of (useful) poverty, in a financial age they ensure that not just minority or marginal populations, but increasingly, anyone who is not a creditor, is treated as a criminal.

Clearly none of this has much, if anything, to do with public safety. In fact, at this point, the yearly death rate in America from mass shootings alone is parallel to what one would expect in a country undergoing a minor civil war. As abolitionists point out, Americans would be far safer if they eliminated police entirely, returned to largely self-organized social services, stopped employing trained killers to inform them of a broken tail light, and created a completely different organization to deal with violent crime.

What Does This Have to Do with the Art World?

Our argument is that just as police ultimately operate to maintain poverty and white supremacy, what we call "the art world" ultimately exists to maintain a structure of hierarchy. What happens inside the bubble makes little difference. The issue is the existence of the bubble itself. Or to put it slightly differently, "the arts" are organized the way they are because "art" sits on top of them. A poor child growing up in a shantytown in Brazil or Pakistan has likely never heard of any of the names featured at the latest Documenta, but whatever she might dream of becoming – a rapper, a movie star, a fashion designer, a comedian (basically anything other than a tycoon, athlete, or politician) – it is already ranked on a scale in which "artist" is the pinnacle. The fact that most people have little or no idea who contemporary artists are or what they do contributes to the mystery.

This may help to explain otherwise puzzling contradictions. In trying to explain why it would be a bad thing if our troublesome human species became extinct, "art and culture" is often evoked as one of the few self-evident justifications for our existence. On the other hand, most people find artists rather useless. A recent *Sunday*

Photo: Victor Bulla.

Times poll challenged a thousand people to name the most essential and least essential professions. The five most important turned out to be doctor/nurses, cleaners, garbage collectors, vendors, and deliverymen. But the real headline news was that the least essential turned out to be artists (telemarketers came in second).

There's no reason to believe this reflects hostility towards artists, or a feeling that they would be better off collecting trash. Rather, it seems to reflect a feeling that "artist" isn't really a job at all. Or perhaps that it shouldn't be. It should be a reward. It's as if artists are seen as people who insist that they, and they alone, already exist under communism. Put this way, it's not unreasonable to then ask: Why should nurses and cleaners have to pay for artists? It's almost as if the contingencies of race, class, and national origin sort us all out into different historical epochs, wherein some of us toil away under capitalism, some are reduced to feudal retainers, others are even living under de facto slavery, while a chosen few are allowed to inhabit a communist future that might otherwise (perhaps) never come into being. Should we be surprised that nurses and cleaners look slightly annoyed as the artists wave from their communist starcruiser floating past?

Obviously, most artists don't see it that way. Some feel they are still blazing the trail to a utopian future in good avant-garde fashion. But by now it's just as obvious a pretext as someone telling himself his cushy job in brand management isn't really hurting anyone, since he doesn't actually do much more than spend his time updating his Facebook profile and playing computer games. Maybe this is true of his particular job, but then we also have to admit that the existence of brand management is clearly a disaster. The same goes for the art world, since to enter this communist tomorrow you need resources (and the art world's attempts to foreground more women, people of color, and so forth does little to undercut this); to be recognized as an artist, you need to support a certain structure of recognition. To take an obvious example, you need to show in museums, those temples of our civilization, where reigning symbolic codes are formed, assigned, and archived.

After all, the same is true of cops. "All cops are bastards" is a structural statement; there have always been individual cops who have been well-meaning, even idealistic (Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek*, spent seven years working for the LAPD). The point is that their personal character or even personal politics are mostly irrelevant; they are operating within an institutional structure that does inestimable harm, and whether any particular benevolent act does more harm by validating that structure, or good by mitigating it, is a secondary consideration.

Museums Are to the Art World as Prisons Are to the Police State

If we were to tell the history of the art world in the same way we just told the (very abbreviated) history of police, we would have to begin with the role of the museum. Of course, the French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille (a prison), but it culminated in the seizure of the Louvre Palace, which became the first national museum, effectively initiating a new secular conception of the sacred to break the remaining power of the Church.

Of course, museums do not produce art; neither do they distribute art. They sacralize it. It's important to underline the connection between property and the sacred. To sacralize is to exclude; it's to set something apart from the world, whether because it is sacred to an individual ("private property") or sacred to something more abstract ("art" "God," "humanity," "the nation"). Any revolutionary regime changes existing forms of property, and the organization or reorganization of museums plays a crucial role in this process, since the forms of property that exist within museums represent the summit of the pyramid. They are the ultimate wealth that police protect, and that the industrious poor can only see on weekends.

Virtually all museums today operate in a way that produces and maintains hierarchy. By archiving, cataloging, and reorganizing the museum's space, they draw a line between "museum" quality and "non-museum" quality objects. But there is no ultimate contradiction between commoditized art and art considered inalienable and not to be sold, because they are simply two variations of the sacred as radical exclusion. The fact that these objects are surrounded by armed security and high-tech surveillance simply serves to underline to any visitor how much their own creative acts (songs, jokes, hobbies, diary entries, care for loved ones, and precious mementos) are of no particular significance, and therefore, that visitor will need to return to their non-museum life and continue to carry on their "non-inessential" job producing and maintaining the structure of relations that makes museums possible. Much like the cathedrals they were meant to replace, museums are there to teach one one's place.

In the same way, the art world – as the apparatus for the production of objects, performances, or ideas that might someday merit being sacralized – is based on the artificial creation of scarcity. In the way that police

guarantee material poverty, the existence of the art world – in its current form – could be said to guarantee spiritual poverty. What, then, would an abolitionist project directed at the art world actually look like?

Ways Out?

The Russian parallel to the storming of the Bastille was of course the storming of the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, and the Winter Palace was itself duly converted into a national museum, the Hermitage. The Hermitage Museum survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and continues to this day to operate almost exactly as it had under Stalin and Brezhnev. This in itself might be worth a moment's reflection, since it suggests that property relations, and therefore conceptions of the sacred, have changed a lot less than we imagined between Soviet state capitalism, Yeltsin's wild liberalism, and the current right-wing nationalist regime. (Those running the Hermitage are, in fact, rather proud of this. They see it as proof that they represent a kind of beacon of eternity.)

There is a great deal of discussion today about the possibility of removing public monuments and relegating them to museums, but at the same time, and in a rather contradictory fashion, of turning museums themselves into places of care, love, and social transformation. There is a general sense that the art world needs to get on board with the movement against the police state, perhaps even that art could be one means of restoring the social fabric torn apart by the financialization and security culture that has spread from the United States to almost everywhere. Some seek to explore the connections between art, money, and securitization itself.

Many argue that we should stop the movement of hundreds of thousands of art tourists around the globe, stop building pointless new offices, stop hosting so many exclusive presentations and dinners that serve no purpose other than self-celebration, and imagine how art could be one of many forms of care that contributes to the reproduction of human life (education, medicine, safety, different forms of knowledge, etc.). How else could it be possible for everyone to cultivate local artistic communities as ends in themselves? These are sensible proposals, but they lack the coherence and urgency of the demands being made to defund or abolish the police. What would any of this actually mean in practice? As a thought experiment, if we were to storm the Louvre or Hermitage again, what would we do with it? Anything? It's also possible that palaces simply don't lend themselves to democratic purposes.

Perhaps there is more inspiration to be found in another revolutionary artistic institution – or, better said, revolutionary artistic infrastructure – created in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century, which could be said to have entirely different implications than the Hermitage. Unlike Soviet museums, it only existed as a state-recognized institution for a few years, from 1917 to 1920, before being formally dismantled. Despite this, the infrastructure was so well-founded that it also, in a certain sense, survives to this day. It was the brainchild of Alexander Bogdanov, an immensely popular revolutionary who, despite being expelled from the Communist Party well before 1917, was briefly given free rein to enact his vision of art communism: Proletkult.

Proletkult aimed quite explicitly to realize Novalis's dream that everyone should be an artist. It aimed to dismantle the infrastructure for the creation of heroic, monumental figures to allow for direct, unmediated relations between producers, and to redirect social investment towards what had previously been dismissed as "amateurs," essentially reversing the values claiming that art should be anything like a job. Part of the aim, too, was to reimagine the very notions of "museum" and "archive" nonhierarchically.

There has been a kind of rediscovery of Proletkult in artistic, activist, and academic circles of late. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering that what Bogdanov and his allies were trying to accomplish, on the artistic level, is remarkably similar to the attempt to create alternative institutions currently being put forward by opponents of the police state. It may be surprising that it took so long. After all, revolutionaries have been arguing for over a century now about the Soviet grassroots popular assemblies and the experiments in worker self-management that flourished around the same time, and their ultimate suppression by the "Soviet" regime. Proletkult was in its origin simply the cultural manifestation of the same democratic movement. It was also more massive in its scale than the organization of popular assemblies and self-managed industries, and more lasting in its effects. To give a sense of its size: in 1920, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had roughly 150,000 members. Proletkult had 400,000, and was growing when the CPSU was actually shrinking during the period of civil war. During the period of 1917 to 1920 – when the movement was self-organized – artistic production concentrated above all on theater (since theater brought together visual art, design, poetry, and music – effectively all branches of art in a single collective product), and participation was so widespread that even a relatively small city might have dozens of

different theatrical collectives operating at a given time. There was also, critically, an active educational component to the movement, which attempted to collapse the boundaries between academia, popular education, science, and the arts.

Long before the creation of Wikipedia, Bogdanov and his comrades also imagined and began to build a new infrastructure for the reproduction of knowledge, one that aimed to destroy the traditional hierarchies between students and teachers, and supplant them with horizontal networks in which anyone could find themselves in every role in a different situation: readers become writers, spectators become artists, producers, consumers, and so on. For Bogdanov, at least, the realization of a world where everyone could become an artist *was* communism. This destruction of hierarchies was precisely the end that the Revolution aimed to achieve.

The participatory nature of the project clashed directly with both the hierarchy of arts as it existed at the time, and the new Bolshevik project of creating an efficient police state. In fact, Lenin's reaction to Proletkult lays bare the connection between the two. In 1920, Lenin imposed state control over the project, insisting that the proletariat had a right to be "enriched" by the highest forms of what he called "classical culture" – the reimposition of the values of the Hermitage, and of museums in general, corresponded exactly to the transfer of power to the secret police (large statues of Lenin were to begin going up slightly later). Popular theater and education did continue, but under the control of Lunacharsky's Ministry of Culture it was either censored or reduced to propaganda.

Meanwhile, as avant-garde art was removed from existing museums (and many of the artists were shot), in almost every city of the Soviet Union a world heritage museum (a local version of the Hermitage) sprang up, and alongside it a museum of contemporary Soviet art and a deeply conservative educational system designed to produce a body of technically proficient cultural specialists, whether socialist-realist painters or ballerinas. One might say that the creation of bottom-up social welfare and cultural institutions, and their gradual replacement by police functions, which took almost a century to accomplish elsewhere, took place over the course of about three years in the Soviet Union.

There is still a great deal of debate over the long-term significance of Proletkult. What's really striking today is how Proletkult, despite its focus on art, offers remarkable parallels with some of the proposals for the creation of a new infrastructure to replace our current police state. Remember here that "police" originally refers to the imposition of "policy," of centralized initiatives (think of all those declarations of war – on crime, drugs, terror, and so forth). The emphasis in Proletkult was the direct inverse:

· Artistic priorities were not imposed by any "center," but responded to the specific needs of people – education, health, equality, poverty, and existing networks.

· All artistic institutions were to be local, decentralized, human-controlled, created by and existing for real people as they actually exist (not some utopian ideal of how they should exist) in a specific neighborhood of the city, or even a specific street, and capable of being changed by them.

· Localism was combined with internationalism through immediate horizontal networks of artistic solidarity around the world. There was no talk of creating a national culture, but rather, an art of the oppressed, or a proletarian culture.

Remarkably, much of this is still in place in Russia. While Proletkult as a self-organized movement ceased to exist after Lenin had Bogdanov removed and placed the institutions under the control of the Party's Central Committee, the infrastructure itself was not disbanded. Even now, thirty years after the destruction and privatization following Perestroika in all Eastern Bloc countries in the 1990s, almost every small town in Russia and much of the former Eastern Bloc still has a so-called "House of Culture" where anyone can spend their free time on anything from Go clubs to drawing and singing lessons, from puppet theater to painting classes. The professionalization of the arts and reimposition of hierarchies simply meant that the network of Houses of Culture were reduced to "amateur" status, with participants expected to act as unpaid propagandists for the Party, creating theatrical productions celebrating increased productivity, for example.

The teachers at the Houses of Culture were paid, though not much, and their symbolic capital was minimal enough for them to attract little attention, which allowed the remains of Proletkult to become a primary enclave for Soviet dissidents, or simply those seeking alternatives to official culture. Yoga, for example, was formally forbidden in the USSR, but underground yoga teachers might work there, even if they were being paid to teach something else. A place equidistant from both fame and influence, the Houses of Culture were also about as far as one could get from police control. Meanwhile, "professional" institutions like universities, artist unions, academies, and so on became gateways to privilege, "feeding troughs" for an elite with access to exclusive hospitals and

resorts. Unsurprisingly, recruitment soon came to be based less on talent, and certainly creativity, than on conformity and connections. As a result, a huge number of real Soviet intellectuals actually emerged from the remains of Proletkult, from chess players to poets to Pavel Filonov's artistic pupils to mathematicians like Grigori Perelman (originally a participant in the mathematics circle at the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers). L*ike well-written computer code or beautiful urban planning,* Proletkult *turned out to be so tightly sewn into the social body that it is almost impossible to unravel it.*

We write this at a moment when many expect governments to soon begin pouring money into the arts, perhaps as part of a Green New Deal similar to what the Roosevelt administration did as part of the original New Deal in the 1930s. This may or may not happen, but if the money is directed through the existing infrastructure of the art world, it will surely reproduce a similar professionalized elite. What if we were to redirect these funds elsewhere, along with the billion dollars the New York City Council shifted from the NYPD, and the hundreds of millions of dollars circulating in offshore and private investments and art world coffers?

What if we were to create a House of Culture in every district, every street, along with a Palace of Children, a Palace of Pensioners, a Palace of Refugees, but according the original, self-organized plan? What if we didn't judge what anyone did with the resources, and simply provided the means for anyone wishing to participate in cultural activities to sustain themselves and find others interested in the same projects – to gossip, insult each other, apologize, sell indulgences, or create a waterpark or miniature golf course out of former monuments? What if we didn't organize biennials with tiered admissions, but monthly carnivals with costumes and dances in every district and every city, as we see erupting seemingly spontaneously in any "occupation" from Zuccotti Park to Seattle, from Christiania to Rojava? Except this time, without all the cops.

These are just opening salvos. In this essay, we want to suggest that what is usually presented as a decline in social welfare spending, and consequent greater reliance on the police, is actually a clash between two entirely different concepts of social welfare. On the one hand, there is what might be termed the police model of social welfare, which uses the threat of violence to maintain a regime of artificial scarcity, yet also carefully regulates and ameliorates its worst effects to maintain social order. At one time this threat of violence was largely organized around disciplining labor, but today it has shifted to becoming itself the principle means for the extraction of profits, which are increasingly derived from rents – capitalism sustaining itself not so much by selling us cars as distributing parking tickets and traffic tickets. But the forms of the sacred appropriate to the police order remain the same: public monuments, museums, and the art world.

On the other hand, there are the self-organized forms of social welfare that are effectively extensions of communal care, conviviality, or the expectation of help from a neighbor in an emergency. Essentially, this is the form of communism that always exists in any community worthy of the name, if only in our lack of desire to hurt each other and the fact that most pleasures aren't very pleasurable unless they're shared. This communal notion of social welfare invariably, as Kurdish activists point out, generates its own notion of security and self-defense.

The question that remains unanswered is: What precisely are the forms of the sacred appropriate to the communal notion of social welfare? We have no intention of ending with ringing declarations. Perhaps we are just offering a challenge to respond to this question. We can't help recalling that Alexander Bogdanov himself thought he had a solution. He was not only the founder of Proletkult, but of the Soviet Institute for Hemotology, which was convinced that transfusing blood within communities could extend human life indefinitely. In this was the Russian cosmist belief that what is ultimately sacred is human life itself. "The earth," according to Nikolai Fyodorov, "is a museum of humanity," with the emphasis on "humanity" more than "museum." Everyone deserves the same care and attention that we direct towards monuments and masterpieces, and should for all eternity.

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Further Reading on Proletkult

· Alexander Bogdanov, "Proletarian Poetry" (1923)
· Alexander Bogdanov, "The Workers' Artistic Inheritance" (1924)
· Sergei Treti'akov, "Art in the Revolution and the Revolution in Art (Aesthetic Consumption and Production)" (1923)
· Report on the First Proletkult Congress (1920)
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See David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New Left Review*, no. 13 (January–February 2002): 61–73 https://newleftreview.org/issues/II13/articles/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists.