

Home Workspace Program Participants Chapter Zero

01/04

This issue of e-flux journal is developed in parallel with Ashkal Alwan's Home Workspace Program in Beirut, led this coming year by Jalal Toufic and Anton Vidokle as an experimental school open to all. The program's opening in September was postponed due to the anticipated US strike against Assad's forces in Syria and the deterioration of security in Lebanon that would have followed. However, the strike never materialized and a number of local and international students arrived in Beirut despite the postponement, starting their own program they call Chapter Zero. We invited them to contribute a letter to this issue the journal.

– Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

We are a group of people who have gathered in Beirut despite the postponement, due to the political situation in Lebanon, of the program in which we were supposed to participate. Some of us are based here, and some chose to come with no regard for the sudden changes in the school's schedule.

The activity we have conceived and are about to discuss – a self-proclaimed and self-organized “Chapter Zero” of Home Workspace Program 2013-14 – is not only *for* those but also implemented *by* those who are willing to participate. It seems that we've already found ourselves in a utopia of education: the school is empty, the professors did not show up, but we did, and what we do next is up to us. And it seems that there's at least one more thing we have in common: an urge, a necessity, to do things with others. Where does this urge come from? (Oleksiy)

This is a crisis we are in. The latest events in the Arab world cannot but be establishing a sort of new era, one furrowed with horror never seen before. But how can we live today, knowing that this is happening? This is the feeling that each one of us seems to have – of being in an urgent situation requiring immediate action. Why art? Because art seems to be the only possible way of resisting death. Why an art school? Because it is a place of coexistence, of sharing, and of communion. To quote Plato, “The dialectical method is discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject, who wish to establish the truth of the matter guided by reasoned arguments.” Only here and now, there is no truth to be established. (Lynn)

I'd like to present a short intervention.

*Before the first school, before the first academy,
there was a sacred grove of olive trees under*

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Participants of Chapter Zero of *Home Workspace Program* in Ashkal Alwan's space, Beirut.

which Plato guided the first students of wisdom. The name of the place was Hekademia. Later, after that, there were walls built around it, and it became an institution, if it wasn't already one. (Stefan)

Chapter One was cancelled, and we have Chapter Zero partly because “the peace in the Middle East has never been so fragile,” yet by being here we disperse the whole idea. Chapter Zero diffuses postponing Chapter One. Therefore just by being here, by being together, by anything we do – any common action, by taking advantage of the situation we show that we can both create and disperse something at the same time. (Natalia)

In the context of Chapter Zero I am thinking of Arabic numerals, in which zero is marked with a dot, a period – the same period that usually punctuates the end of a sentence. In European numerals zero is written as a circle. For quite a long time the idea of ‘zero’ divided Western ideologies from Eastern ones. In the East, zero was accepted, while in the West zero did not exist. There’s an idea of a zero as an empty system. When another culture was introduced to this idea of zero, it in a way rejected it. (Jessika)

There are a lot of thoughts that can come out of creating a universe that works without working. For instance, what does “without working” mean? What does the universe we are creating relate to? What is “work without working,” and what kind of work is it? How can this be achieved? The challenge to create an immortal universe in this concept leads to two options: first to produce this universe which has its own energy to keep on working but without really working on it and to let it renew itself all the way. This movement will be like an endless circle. Number Zero usually signifies death, nothing, the beginning or the end, and this leads to the second option of creation. That is to create this universe; dysfunctional, dead, or fallen apart ... it is up to us to do. (Fadi) Is this the beginning of an end? The end of a beginning? Or are we in a never-ending loop? (Raymond)

But, at the same time, there seems to be a kind of urgency to do something. Do. Something. Whatever it is. Take advantage of the situation. Certainly, things are possible: the school is open, we are in touch with each other, there is an interest to understand and acknowledge the situation. But, that does not have to be an imperative to do something. (Miguel)

We are living in an increasingly unequal environment, where the hierarchies present in the art world are just miniscule models of greater inequalities that exist outside. So any attempt at reclaiming equality, even if by sacrificing the idea of ‘quality’ and occupying the online pages of an art journal with the exchange of our humble

opinions, is somehow politically important. But, in fact, what we see is the return of the repressed hierarchies that plague virtually all egalitarian projects. They all have a blind spot: equality is never total; it has a kind of lack inscribed into its structure, and we should try to work with this very lack rather than pretend that it’s not there. (Oleksiy)

A main concern for any autonomous group without a predetermined agenda, is how to build a structure where the desire to make decisions together doesn't take away the participants’ power to act. A space in which all are equally powerless is the tyranny of no one. Perhaps a way to avoid this could be to invent a form of meeting that takes shape as an inactive activity, where the people involved feel part of something dynamic while still allowing themselves to dwell on whichever topics might come up. (Philip)

– Nora Adwan, Rewa Baassiri, Stefan Bakmand, Miguel Fernandez de Castro, Raymond Gemayel, Natalia Gumenyuk, Fadi Hennawi, Jessika Khazrik, Lynn Kodeih, Philip Pilekjær, and Oleksiy Radynski on October 3, 2013 at Ashkal Alwan, Lebanese Association of Plastic Arts, Beirut

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Nora Adwan, Rewa Baassiri, Stefan Bakmand, Miguel Fernandez de Castro, Raymond Gemayel, Natalia Gumenyuk, Fadi Hennawi, Jessika Khazrik, Lynn Kodeih, Philip Pilekjær, and Oleksiy Radynski are participants in the Home Workspace Program, which will be led by resident professors (RPs) Jalal Toufic and Anton Vidokle under the title *Creating and Dispersing Universes that Work without Working*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, 2013-14.

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