

Rog is a Symptom

Notes on the History of Art Production in Autonomous Factory Rog

Povzetek

Rog je simptom

Zapiski o zgodovini umetniške produkcije v Avtonomni tovarni Rog

V prispevku obravnavamo serijo vprašanj in problemov, povezanih z umetniškim delovanjem v Rogu kot prostoru (objekti nekdanje tovarne koles Rog) in v Rogu kot instituciji (Avtonomna tovarna Rog – ATR) med letoma 2006 in 2016. V ta namen bomo najprej na kratko orisali zgodovino tega umetniškega delovanja, pri čemer se bomo omejili na posameznike in kolektive, ki se dojemajo kot umetniki, umetniške skupine, umetniška združenja ali producenti. Ker ni organiziranih arhivov, bomo kot glavni vir informacij uporabili pričevanja, intervjuje in razpršeno dokumentacijo, zato bo ta oris zgolj okviren in nepopoln. Kljub temu pa nas bo oskrbel z osnovnimi orodji za predstavitev umetniške produkcije v Rogu. K njej bomo pristopili kot h kompleksnemu, odprtemu procesu, ki ima svoje posebnosti in dinamiko, je pa hkrati vpet v lokalno in regionalno tradicijo. Odnosi, ki jih (ali pa tudi ne) rogovski umetniki vzpostavljajo drug z drugim, z lokalnimi umetniškimi institucijami, z drugimi deli skupnosti ATR ter z Rogom kot formalnim in konceptualnim projektom, nam bodo pomagali pri boljšem razumevanju celote ATR in logike njene (samo)prezentacije v različnih obdobjih. Tako je prvi del prispevka namenjen vprašanju umetniške produkcije v skvoterski kulturi in splošnim problemom, povezanim s tem. Te težave bodo temelj naše analize, ki se v drugem delu posveča nekaterim posebnostim ATR, še zlasti v povezavi z ljubljansko in slovensko kulturno politiko, ki pomembno vpliva na načine umetniške produkcije. Tretji del besedila se osredini na historizacijo umetniških praks v ATR; opisana sta dinamika rogovskega umetniškega življenja in način, kako na produkcijo vplivajo strukturni vidiki in materialne razmere. Analiza bo pokazala, da so umetniške prakse v ATR simptom družbenih konfliktov in splošnejših razmer, ki vladajo v kulturi in umetnosti.

Ključne besede: Avtonomna tovarna Rog (ATR), institucija, umetniška produkcija, skvotiranje, uporabniki

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Abstract

This essay will address a series of issues and problems related to art practices based in and settled in Rog as a space (the facilities of the former Rog bicycle factory) as well as related to Rog as an institution (Autonomous factory Rog – ATR) between 2006 and 2016. In order to do so, it will be necessary to sketch a short history of this art production, as restricted to individual and collectives that consider themselves as artists, art groups, association of artists and/or art producers. Due to the lack of organized archives, this narrative will be making use of testimonies, interviews and dispersed documents as main sources and as such must be considered provisional and incomplete. It will, however, provide us some preliminary tools for studying art production in Rog in its own context, addressing it as a complex open process that has its own specificities and dynamics and it is at the same time inscribed in local and regional traditions. The relationship (or absence thereof) that artists working in Rog establish among themselves as a group, with local art institutions, with the rest of the community of ATR's users and with ATR as a project in formal and conceptual terms, will help us toward a better understanding of ATR as a whole and the logic of its (self-)representation in different moments of its history. The first part of this essay deals with the issue of art production in squat culture and the general problems it usually poses. These problems will lie at the base of the rest of the analysis, which looks in its second part at some specificities of ATR in the context of Ljubljana and Slovenian culture that in a large way affect the way art is produced there. The historization of art practices in the context of ATR is the main focus of the third part of this text. I describe there some dynamics of Rog's artistic life in this framework, and how structural aspects and material conditions of production determine and influence the kind of art that is and has been made in Rog. The sum of all these aspects will speak about how art practices of ATR function as very symptoms of more general cultural diseases, artistic conditions and social conflicts.

Keywords: Autonomous factory Rog (ATR), institution, art production, squatting, users

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Art Production and Squatting Culture

Cultural production from squatting culture in Western Europe has been widely analysed and discussed; however, there still lacks a framework of comparative cases to help us in delving into the specificities of that issue in Eastern European countries. The growing attention paid to it in recent years on the part of international networks such as Squatting Europe Kollektive (see <https://sqek.squat.net/>) and the importance of certain study cases (including one of Autonomous factory Rog¹) in the repertoire of theoretical approaches from Gerald Raunig and his circle of collaborators in the seminal years of the EIPCP (see <http://eipcp.net>) barely compensate for the absence of similar projects native to Eastern Europe. We need these in order to start visualising specific models of actuation related to the dynamics of cultural production in squats ("cycles, contexts, identities"²),

¹ I use the acronym to distinguish the *project* ATR, initiated in March 2006, from the facilities where it is located and operates, the premises of the former Rog bicycle factory (Trubarjeva 72, Ljubljana, Slovenia).

² Three of the main topics that, together with "institutionalisation", were focused on by the

their characteristic relation with the mainstream and counter-culture, their particular models of political organization and their historical roots and how all these aspects contribute to distinct ways of understanding the main questions of (non-)institutionality, (monster-³)institutionalism, institutionalization and “instituent practices” (Raunig, 2009) from a dialectical point of view. This perspective should embrace the apparent contradictions of self-pretended autonomy, the differences between creation and standardization of “creativity” (Buchholz, 2015), and the blurry distinction between art creation and cultural industry in Eastern European squatting culture. Squats in this region are places where a particular, long-standing but threatened social genetic survives, expands and reconfigures itself in the very praxis, and this fact affects to a great deal the way art is created and how culture is understood.

Visual arts production is one of the least studied facets of squatting culture, both in Eastern Europe as well as in the rest of the world. There are many factors contributing to this deficiency, and the very volatility of art creation is one of them. What this means is that art happens, but is not always pretended, documented, framed or historized. Squats, which are ideal places for art to happen in, are usually very bad places for it to be framed and contextualized. This also means that artists are often quite reluctant to openly compromise themselves by identifying with political groups and sects, and they tend to avoid what they perceive as an excessive discursivity of political practice, and that makes them suspicious to the eyes of some activists and social workers, whose understandings of political commitment can be very divergent. We have seen how important it is to recognize, understand and overcome this gap, but it does not always happen. On the other side, squatting is a collective situation, and artists’ groups are, by definition, fragile or ephemeral, and they can contribute with equal passion to the processes of identity creation of squats as well as to the dissolution of the communities within them. So, it is sometimes easy to periodize the artistic life of squats, yet not so simple to relate it with the tensions between the art creation “inside” them and the art institutions “outside”. At the same time, it is difficult yet unavoidable to analyse art production in squats, having in mind the complementary but dissimilar magnetic fields of local traditions, international trends and specific material conditions of production operating “inside” as well as “outside” the occupied/liberated⁴ space as the territory where all these phenomena occur. To conclude this enumeration of complexities, it bears mentioning another “gap”,

MOVOKEUR project, a “comparative study of squatting in some of the major Western European cities” (Martínez López, 2015: 8).

³ The term “*monster institution*” (Universidad Nómada, 2009: 244–245) is highly operative in this context of analysis and underpins all these notes.

⁴ As Žiga Piliš, an artist working in ATR, has pointed out in an interview with the author, the use of the term “occupied space” refers to the point of view of the power holders. We should talk in terms of *liberated space* instead.

noticed by Alan W. Moore in his essays on art and squatting—the gap between squatting-as-such and

[...] self-identified art squats, that is, buildings that are occupied by artists for explicitly cultural purposes. [...] Because of the relatively friendly reception given to artist squatters by some city governments [...], the squatting movement has often been divided. The split between “good” squatters who are allowed to stay and “bad” ones who are evicted has created animosity and mistrust. (Moore, 2012: 11)

I will not analyse this latter problem in detail here (the others will be with us for the remainder of this text), but it must be noticed and remarked upon, even if it has been minimized by the fact that ATR started as an intervention led by architects and artists as well as activists and social workers, all of them constrained by the publicly manifested urgency of creating a venue for cultural events, a working space for artists and activists and a transitory urban/architectonic experiment. Even if some people were or are living in the facilities of the former industry, they are not recognized as fulfilling a necessary role, and are sometimes even ignored as inhabitants of the place, a politics that can be beneficial or not but is rooted in ATR's very origins as a temporary base for cultural purposes. The mentioned gap is present in any case, since the Municipality of Ljubljana (MOL) has used it as a *divide-et-impera* tool, tempting artists with the possibility of getting studios “outside of Rog”, or actually facilitating working spaces for them in order to avoid scandals and excessive publicity of certain problematic cases.⁵ Since “art” (in the sense the cultural industry understands it) is an operative part of MOL's plans for the future use of the former bicycle factory, artists are in a way more “protected” than activists and social workers, and a certain commonplace that considers artists as outsiders (at least in their youth) contributes to this kind of “privileged” position as well. So, the problem remains, even if I think that it is not such an important issue at the present moment. It could very well prove to be a very crucial one in some of the possible futures of ATR in its fight for surviving as a community of “users”, which includes and has included artists from different fields and backgrounds, professional as well as amateur, with different levels of engagement with activism, politics and social work. Working in Rog as an artist is already a political position, but the way artists from different generations understand and articulate it can be very divergent.

I will be speaking here only of individuals and collectives that consider themselves artists, art groups, association of artists or art producers, whose

⁵ Such was the case of the art studio Samorog in the summer of 2016.

main specific activities are the production of artworks, the organization of art exhibitions and performance events and collaboration with different groups and initiatives in the fields of illustration, decoration, signage and so on. They share with all ATR's users the right to participate in the assemblies and decision-making meetings, the obligation of accepting the decisions of the general assembly, the responsibility for the maintenance, cleaning and safe-keeping of the spaces they use and some basic tacit agreements, such as to effectively use the space they occupy, to not rent it and to not produce disturbances or engage in activities that could damage the structure of the squat or its fragile position with the authorities, its neighbours or the media. Due to the peculiar political organization of ATR, there are times when the general assembly is weaker than certain individuals or groups of users. These times usually coincide with periods of deceleration and distension of the never-ending conflict between Rog's users and the city government. On the contrary, the periods of open conflict (2006 and the summer of 2016 being paradigmatic cases) are far richer in public events, political actions, conjunctions and mergings of different groups and individuals. From the point of view of art production considered as a whole, these latter periods are connected with an increased frequency of public activities, exhibition-making and collective work, while the former are characterised by studio work and creation.

ATR in Context: The Local Tradition and Archives

"To speak about the relation between academic institutions—in particular, art schools—and squatting, is not to say so much that one ignores the other," writes Alan W. Moore (Moore, 2015: 15). However, this observation does not apply so easily to the case of ATR or, in more general terms, to the context of Ljubljana. Due to the scale of the city, and the scale of Slovenian culture, in general, ATR could not go unnoticed by media, analysts or academic circles, and it has always embodied or represented opposed points of view about the use of public space, patrimony, political organization, culture-making and the role of the state, especially in terms of fulfilling the necessities of certain minorities or taking responsibility for some tasks that Rog's Social Centre has been taking in its hands for years. Speaking in terms of art practices, the alliance between Ljubljana's Academy of Fine Arts and Design and ATR has been very clear from the beginning, as has also been the case between ATR and the students of the Faculty of Architecture and the Faculty of Arts who have developed different kinds of activities there (courses, round tables, debates, symposia, film screenings, discussions, presentations of books and research projects, organization, cleaning and maintenance actions, etc.). The first generation of architects involved in ATR did not produce a large corpus of theoretical works about the experience they contributed fundamentally to create, but the young students who have started to work in Rog over the last three years

are perhaps beginning to do so.⁶ In talking about the artists, it must be said that some of them, those who were part of the first generation of Rog liberators, came directly from the Academy or other art schools and were supported by their teachers—and the same is happening with the younger ones. Meanwhile, some of the artists of the first generation are now teachers in the Academy or have gained recognition in the parallel mainstream institutional art system. In July 2016, at the highest peak of the renewed confrontation with the city government, Galerija Zelenica,⁷ an artist-run art gallery on the first floor of Rog's main building, organised an exhibition in support of ATR,⁸ asking for and putting together a large group of works from artists of different generations and backgrounds, including some from the Academy as well as representatives from the mainstream Slovenian art world. It demonstrated to what extent the entire system of visual arts in the country, including the main official institutions, is committed to the existence of Rog, *at least as a place for artistic production*. The best example of this apparently contradictory (and sometimes hysterical) position of Rog as a recognized cultural venue is the attention dedicated to it on Slovenia's Ministry of Culture's website: http://www.culture.si/en/Tovarna_Rog. There, the reader can find a short history of Rog/ATR, which emphasizes the culture-production facet of it, with some (not exhaustive) references to specific art projects developed in ATR, such as Galerija Zelenica, Boris Plac⁹ and Cirkulacija, a trans-disciplinary association of artists that was working in Rog for some time and is still active, albeit now based elsewhere.¹⁰ This scarcity, in any case, can also be related to the question of archives and names, two difficulties I have also encountered while writing this article.¹¹ The bibliography on ATR¹² is not large (although it is growing), and it lacks any kind of

⁶ The year 2016 brought with it the appearance of many *projects* (documentary films, research plans, thesis and articles) surrounding Rog, some of which are currently being finished and published.

⁷ Galerija Zelenica (<https://www.facebook.com/zelenicarog/>) was inaugurated in October 2015.

⁸ *Decentralizacija sodobnih umetnostih*, 16th–24th July 2016. See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/zelenica/dsu-rog/1155785617774932/>.

⁹ An artist-run social space, bar and gallery on the second floor of Rog's main building. Active since 2014.

¹⁰ Cirkulacija's official website is <http://www.cirkulacija2.org/>. The conditions of production, in order to work and develop, required by Cirkulacija, a highly technologized collective of musicians, technicians, scientists and artists, exceeded the possibilities and resources of Rog, which was left without basic public services (water, sewage, electricity) as early as 2007.

¹¹ I visited Rog for the first time in October 2007, and worked intensively there as an artist between November 2014 and August 2016. See <https://oekf.wordpress.com/2017/01/10/rog-an-unfinished-portrait/>.

¹² The existent bibliography is focused on issues related to architecture, social sciences, institutional critique and critical theory. Many articles and manifestos have been written in support of ATR since 2006/2007, and media coverage in Slovenia include, among many others, frequent

narrative. As noted above, the question of (self-)historization is doubly intricate as regards processes of artistic production. Stories about art and artists in ATR's early years are confusing and contradictory and marked by myths, legends and rumours. Some of the initiators are reluctant to tell their versions of the story, names blur and documents and sources are dispersed, even though there are some significant ones to be found and deciphered.¹³ The cycles of rise and retraction of ATR also represent periods of migration and renewals of art studios and working artists who sometimes leave not a trace behind them but interventions in the building's structure and remains of works that only a few can recognize and identify. This makes of ATR an unintended museum for Ljubljana's visual culture of the last 11 or more years, which is how long the materials, styles, urban trends' lost fetishes, graffiti layers, rubbish, unfinished artworks and hand-made structures have been superposing and forming and reforming a fragile subject for visual archaeologists;¹⁴ and this also applies for the official website of ATR: tovarna.org,¹⁵ a tangled but beautiful and extensive archive of ATR's history and a collective work of art in itself.

There is another issue related to the relatively exotic for Western European eyes, solid position of ATR as a cultural venue having a large degree of institutional recognition,¹⁶ and this is the local tradition of squatting "for cultural use towards commons" (Tosics, 2016), a tradition basically embodied in the extraordinary case of Metelkova Mesto (Autonomous Cultural Center Metelkova City: <http://www.metelkovamesto.org/>), a former Yugoslavian military barracks zone that was squatted in September 1993 by a large group of artists and cultural workers that still remains today, though it has changed a lot in all the time that has passed since then. It was precisely a certain disappointment with Metelkova's course and current position in the city culture that was one of the reasons why a segment of the group of people who liberated Rog in 2006 felt the necessity for creating an alternative place for social work and cultural production. It was not their only impulse,

Radio Študent broadcasts (<http://radiostudent.si/>) and analytic texts published by the magazine *Mladina* (for example: <http://www.mladina.si/174729/rog-nas-najboljsi-sosed/>).

¹³ Such as the seminal short documentary film *TOVARNA ROG – Smo Začasni – We are Temporary*, produced in 2006 "by the temporary users of the factory Rog premises." The documentary is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52DijOdH3N4>.

¹⁴ A very interesting case is the studio of artist Dejan Knez (on the third floor of Rog's main building), a small museum on its own and a unique way to visually connect the actual Rog and the local art scene of the 80s and 90s.

¹⁵ The autonomous server started to operate in 2006. First published posts are available here: <http://tovarna.org/node?from=1079> and <http://tovarna.org/node/13>.

¹⁶ Beyond the open and sometimes almost bellic conflict between ATR and MOL, a foreign observer cannot stop noticing that the city government has neither the tools nor the authoritarianism to evict Rog with the violence and despotism we are used to witness in other national contexts. We cannot forget that dialogue between both institutions, even if unfair and manipulative due to the disproportion between their respective powers, has been always present and publicly recognized.

but it was an important one, and Metelkova has always been a reference for Rog users, just as Rog in turn has become “a benchmark” (Babić, 2015: 307) for some of those who feel the urgency or necessity of critiquing and transforming Metelkova’s model of actuation. Nevertheless, the differences between both squats are huge, and this is not the place to discuss that issue. What matters rather is how artists can produce reactions to what Jasna Babić calls “the loss of memory” linked to “the lack of common values and rules” that leads to the fact that, “with each generation, a certain segment of Metelkova’s history falls into oblivion, increasingly putting Metelkova on an equal footing with for-profit cultural institutions and event venues, and not defining it as a separate political subject” (Babić, 2015: 305). The example I would like to refer to here happened in July 2016, at the time when Rog was facing a siege on the part of city government bulldozers and making an extraordinary effort to reunite all the supporting forces around it through the production of countless public activities, from guided visits for the neighbours to art festivals, demonstrations and public calls for support.¹⁷ The collective Meta City Symptoms (<http://metacitysymptoms.tumblr.com>), initiated by artists associated to ATR, invited the artist Tina Drčar, historically linked to Metelkova, where she has a studio, to create an artwork in the framework of their public interventions program, and the artist answered, producing a mural painting on a wall in the stairwell of Rog’s main building, at the entrance to



ČRNI ČASI – ČRN ZID, mural painting by Tina Drčar in the stairwell of Rog’s main building. The unpainted rectangle was used for the projection of the film *Rušenje Male šole – AKC Metelkova Mesto, 2. 8. 06 ob 04:50*. Photo: Meta City Symptoms.

¹⁷ The events, manifestos, media coverage and activities held in Rog from that period on can be followed via <https://www.facebook.com/ohranimorog/>.

the third floor. The mural, named *ČRNI ČASI – ČRN ZID* (Black Times, Black Wall), was publicly inaugurated on 8 July and called for the screening of an artistic video piece *Rušenje Male šole – AKC Metelkova Mesto, 2. 8. 06 ob 04:50* (*Demolition of Mala Šola – AKC Metelkova Mesto, 2 August, 2006 at 4:50 AM*), which depicted the demolition of one sector of Metelkova by the Municipality of Ljubljana 10 years prior to the then-current siege of Rog, and just few months after the liberation of Rog in March 2006. Apart from linking both institutions on the levels of organized resistance and political subjectivity, Tina Drčar's gesture emphasized the parallelisms between MOL's attempts to demolish and evict segments of Metelkova and Rog (both of which were carried out in the middle of the night during the week, using similar strategies, posing similar problems and producing similar reactions). This simple but extremely useful operation reacts against oblivion, mutual mistrust and depoliticization of the existence and fight of both Metelkova and Rog, and links the past and present in order to produce a sensorial experience of a common project, a very clear and articulated concept of future.

The Dynamics of Art Production in Rog

The only reference to Rog in Jasna Babić's quoted article on Metelkova leads to a footnote that references a classic article by first-generation Rog activists Andrej Kurnik and Barbara Beznec (Kurnik and Beznec, 2008) focused on the history and works of Rog's Social Center, and then reads: "The social center Rog is just one small part of the Tovarna Rog squat. Nowadays, Rog is more like a social and sport squat basically run by skaters, with yoga and kung-fu practices there and so on." (Babić, 2015: 310) This description, published in 2015, is quite unfair, whether if it is inspired by mistrust (very characteristic in Ljubljana's culture and art circles, by the way) or simply reflects a generation gap, but, at the same time, it is justified by the dynamics of Rog's cycles of public visibility. It is important to go deeper into this issue in order to understand the conditions of artistic production in Rog in the frame of ATR.

Art creation, production and exhibition had a central role in the beginnings of ATR, and the framework of this effervescence was what we can call a *utopian collective experiment on the use of space*, led fundamentally by architects/artists. The praxis of this project was focused on the communal, open and inter-/trans-/non-disciplinary use of Rog's main building. Each huge floor of the building was intended to function as a single, non-divided room for working. The distribution of working space was carried out according to affinities, common interests and specific already existent or *ad hoc* art groups and projects. Technology (video, computers, sound systems) was widely used. While this period did not last long, it still relies as Rog's founding meta-project, a utopian horizon of ideal work environment. Its functionality was also assured by the possibility of getting access

to its power supply through the mediation of the film director Franci Slak,¹⁸ who was shooting on Rog's premises at the time his film *Kakor v nebesih, tako na zemlji*, produced by Radio-Television Slovenia. It is hard to say when this seminal period of Rog's life concluded, but its gradual end can be dated back approximatively to the winter¹⁹ of 2007. Many things happened in the sphere of art production during this time, most of them lacking any kind of documentation. Rog attracted many individuals and groups from the Slovenian art scene who experimented there, and some of them formed new associations that kept going even after they stopped working in the former factory.²⁰ It is interesting to note that, unlike with Metelkova, Rog's early users were not so interested in popular music and clubbing. On the other hand, the respective number of those who started squatting projects is 10 times lower in the case of Rog. This latter aspect had strong consequences on a very structural level in terms of organization, distribution of spaces and openness to newcomers, especially when the first generation of artists and architects started to leave or slip away, either disappointed with the course of events or annoyed by failures and interpersonal disputes. The lack of an agreement with the city government, which left users with no hope of obtaining basic public services, also contributed to this process of dissolution as well as did the demands such a huge space required in order to be kept organised and liveable, clean and safe (burglary was an important problem in this context back then, as it is now as well).

The second period of ATR's artistic life was heavily influenced and shaped by a double general movement of its structural premises: the physical core for public activities moved out to the surrounding buildings of the industrial complex, and the main building suffered an important transformation, from ghettoization to the privatization of space. The first aspect was connected to the development of Social Center Rog, and probably also to the users' common necessity for finding smaller, more affordable spaces to work. These surrounding buildings are also closer to Rog's main entrance on Trubarjeva Street, making them more accessible and visible from the outside. Following the closing of Cirkulacija's venue and Tranzentrala,²¹ this process led to a clear distribution of quite isolated territories and roles, a kind of welcoming landscape that remains today, even if it

¹⁸ Franci Slak died in October 2007. See <http://tovarna.org/node/1282>.

¹⁹ The seasonal cycle, due to working conditions in Rog since then, acquires here a superlative importance.

²⁰ Rog also hosted in 2006–2007 projects and events organised by already existing institutions and groups, such as the Radical Education Collective (<http://radical.tmp.si/>) and SCCA – Center for Contemporary Art Ljubljana (<http://www.scca-ljubljana.si/>).

²¹ A "collective ambience for artists and an artists' net" curated by artist Žiga Piliš and active between March and October 2007. See http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4kdbo_reco-n-ljubljana-tranzentrala_travel.

did face important changes in 2016. This includes a concert hall, a skate-park,²² the Social Center facilities, Cirkusarna, Galerija Kl(j)ub Vsemu, Studio Samorog,²³ and different spaces, some where some people lived and others which various individuals and collectives used for certain periods of time. All of these spaces are linked visually and connected to the big main courtyard, which gradually adopted the form and aspect it has nowadays, functioning as a kind of institutional public area and primary intermediary space between ATR's venues and visitors, tourists, temporary users and the general public. This is the landscape in which some initiatives focused in or directly related to visual arts started to operate after 2008, notably the Transforma (<https://www.facebook.com/tabortransforma/>) festival and some events held in the framework of the women's festival Rdeče Zore (<http://rdecezore.org/>).

Rog's artists (old and new) confronted the emptiness and danger of ghettoization of the main building by occupying segments of space as collective or (most often) individual rooms to work in, subdividing each floor following a more or less fixed (and not very imaginative) pattern.²⁴ The third floor was the most divided one, and it is used almost exclusively for the purposes of artists' studios.²⁵ The second floor was divided into four dissimilar spaces, one of them used as the base of a graffiti artists' community. The first floor was also subdivided into various spaces,²⁶ and it is traditionally considered an artists' place, even if it hosts the central room for sport practices as well. The result was a set of studios, which was undoubtedly easier to handle (and to heat), but at the same time led to the progressive privatization of the space.²⁷ Each studio and floor had now its own locked door, and the assembly's jurisdiction over the use of

²² The skate-park and the concert hall are located on the ground floor of Rog's main building, traditionally separated from the upper floors and accessed from a different entrance door. This independence also reflects political and aesthetic differences between the community of skaters and a big portion of Rog's users.

²³ Cirkusarna is one of the most active sections of ATR since its beginnings (see <http://tovarna.org/node/9389#comment-2674>). Galerija Kl(j)ub Vsemu was founded in 2008 and remains to this day. It functions as a club where art exhibitions from local and international young artists are held on a regular basis (see <http://tovarna.org/node/9389#comment-2676>). Studio Samorog was an atelier of artist Breda Pivk, active until the summer of 2016.

²⁴ A critical analysis of these *forms* could be a first step in producing another kind of deep questioning of this process and propose a dialectical alternative model to it.

²⁵ Some of these studios are collective and have hosted exhibitions, events and meetings, such as Atelje 10 (<http://tovarna.org/node/9389#comment-2724>) and Ambasada RGB (<http://tovarna.org/node/9389#comment-2692>), both of them founded in 2011 and still active today.

²⁶ Since 2015, it has also been hosting the Zelenica Gallery, which is gradually achieving the status of a "projects-space" for artists.

²⁷ It is tempting to analyse this phenomenon in the framework of a wider political, social and economic context, understanding Rog as a repertoire of symptoms of more general cultural diseases, artistic conditions and social conflicts.

the space and the possibility for newcomers to get a place to work was clearly undermined. This process had led to a very unreasonable use of space, which is nowadays one of the most important issues the community of users must resolve. Meanwhile, the consequences for the artistic practice of this non-politics of making room are huge, greatly limiting the emergence of new collective projects and initiatives. This latter aspect was noticed and faced by the emergence of a new generation, which started to acquire some public visibility in 2014–2015. By then, the separation between the main building as a venue for artists' studios and the surrounding facilities as mainly social-oriented places was evident.

It is in speaking about this third period of ATR's artistic life (probably already passed) when Babić's reckless assertion about Rog as "basically run by skaters" starts to be interesting, insofar as it points to a generational question, since skating culture is usually connected, in older squatting circles (and not without basis), with trivialization, commercialization and depoliticization. Young artists who started to work in Rog after 2010 shared many things with skating urban culture, and some of them are effectively involved in it, but there's also a difference between them and the effectively depoliticized and self-concerned (to the extent its frequent antagonism and boycott of the general assembly's decisions and actions) Skatepark. This fact was demonstrated during the events of May–August 2016, when ATR faced a re-enactment of the conflict with the city government of unprecedented levels of tension and public exposure. Even if this context did not make very much to change the physical structure of Rog's facilities for artists, it was very important in order to produce a series of exchanges and alliances between different studios and groups, and to prove the commitment of the youngest artists with ATR's project. The political contradictions that one could perceive in the artists' community mirrored and distilled the disparity of opposite positions at ATR's general assembly; yet despite not being a self-pretended coherent group, Rog's artists contributed in a substantial degree to support ATR's struggle, not always sharing or joining in the strategies and methods of activists and political and social workers,²⁸ but creating their own ways. Open studio events, exhibitions, participation in festivals, calls for support in local and international art circles and performances brought a breath of fresh air on all levels of Rog's artistic life and to ATR's image in general. On the other side, these months of intense efforts oriented toward the exterior (the media, the art world, social networks) gave to the majority of Rog's artists a revitalized sense of being part of a community (a meta-association, and a monster institution). For the youngest artists working in Rog, this also could mean identifying the aesthetical foundations of their work and the importance of sharing certain values, preferences and methods with their peers, and this is

²⁸ Yet also, not only participating in demonstrations or organizational and political meetings, but producing signage, designs, mural paintings, public installations and so on.

something not always easy to achieve. It is interesting to quote here some considerations from Tatiana Kocmur, a young artist currently studying at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design of Ljubljana and founder of Atelje 10 (Studio 10) in Rog, where she works together with an international (and always changing) group of artists:

Does Rog affect what you do as an artist? Yes, absolutely. I think that all the artists working there have, despite our differences, a common style. The space itself affects the way we work, and this aspect is very important in art creation. There is something related to the materials we use, there is a lot of recycling... [...] My friend from Austria who is currently working there, for example, is making a lot of art. Looking at him, who is staying in Rog for just a short time, I could see this "Rog's influence". All what he is doing is recycling. He draws on cardboard, he uses what remains from food, from a piece of dry bread he makes an object. These creative processes reflect how we work in Rog. We must put a lot of energy into the space itself if we want to make art there, we must take care of the space. And this heavily influences the artistic process. (Interview with the author, 8 May 2017)

The recognition of emblematic methods, materials and models of actuation is the first step in the process of creating a common language, and this analysis, which must stop here for now, could be followed by an attempt to go deeper into this question and risk some thoughts on the specificities of art production in Rog in the framework of ATR that make it unique, even in the concert of local, regional and international squatting culture. However, this possibility is too far beyond our reach at present, and we need more complex tools to launch such a study.

On the other hand, all these aspects referring to the material conditions of production that Rog imposes on those artists who want to work there could lead to the question as to whether ATR as a project is possible without Rog. Or, in other words, if ATR is contingent on Rog. This question, in the face of the current course of events, which threaten the very existence of both as we know it, is not trivial. To pose it is also to question and maybe overcome those conditions and achieve a wider perspective, one based on a dialectical attitude towards projects, functions and models of actuation. Visual arts practices are an exemplary laboratory for that purpose.

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