
Actions

Here you find a collection of action reports. You can find reports written by the collectives themselves or summarised by the editors of Masta collective. Here you find first hand narrations about how an idea for an action was born and put in practice, and what kind of effects it did have.

This chapter will never be closed. We started it with a selection of actions and you are invited to join us expanding it by submitting actions. Rather than collecting an encyclopedic amount of data about creative acts around the globe, we wish to find a representative selection, including examples of creative activism from every corner of this lovely planet - from small rural villages to metropolises, from people of all ages and backgrounds.

ACTIONS



Butt x Better Festival - We wanted a party and all we got was activism!

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The Butt x Better Festival and the synergies between bohemia and protest by Thomas Scheele



The Butt x Better (BxB, formerly “But & Better”) is a counter-fashion festival in Berlin that takes place each year parallell to the massive fashion trade fair „Bread & Butter“. It forms a counterpart to the glorification of consumption, elitist design, body cult and unsustainable conditions of production evident in fashion culture. The critique of Butt x Better, however, is expressed in diverse, undogmatic and humoristic ways. Its main elements include upcycling workshops, music shows, exhibitions of room and light installations as well as a

colourful demonstration and rave through the city center. Lastly, BxB's centre-piece is a two hour long, highly curated and bizarre catwalk show staging a wild mix of costume designers, sustainable clothing designers, performance artists and artistic acts. While collaborating with Upcycling groups throughout the last year, we have concentrated on garbage as the prime material for creative works and thus, somewhat coined the term „Trashion“-Festival for BxB.

The festival is organized by our collective Findus' Geburtstag, or Findus' Birthday; a name based on a Swedish comic book about the cat Findus who one day decides to celebrate birthdays many times each year, whenever he feels like it, randomly creating beautiful moments from his repetitious daily life routine. Doesn't sound very much like activism, does it?

Well, in the first place Findus' Geburtstag isn't a group of activists and this is where the exciting part of this article should begin. Because the story of Findus' Geburtstag and the BxB festival is that in December 2010 eight people were sitting together in a flat planning just another house party. The later the night got the more exuberant the visions became. Eventually, someone threw in the idea that we should hold the party in the basement of our building, where a former supermarket had been left abandoned for years. More curious than hopeful we contacted the landlord. Our first unspecified request to rent the space was answered with a humongous price. With one of the usual accidents of fate occurring, a friend told us about the Bread & Butter which was to take place across the road from our building in one month's time. He came up with the idea to disguise our party as a non-profit fashion exhibition lasting for two days; the first day a vernisage, the second day the finnisage. We sketched a concept, headlined it with something Dada like „But & Better“, sent it off, waited - and got the keys!

We were shocked. Now we had three weeks left to prepare a huge, unique and disastrous location for something that was to be loud and somewhat connected to fashion, maybe. We invited everyone we knew to participate in the project and told them about the exciting trick we played on our landlord. Many didn't quite catch the irony of the story, though. So word spread and suddenly we received about 15 requests from real newcomer fashion designers. The parody was perfect. There really would be a catwalk inside this worn down, old supermarket.

The first BxB was a major success. The house was packed with about 700 guests, we had formed a network of 100 artists and helpers and created an unseen hilarious scenario. It also was a disaster. The police came as expected, did not

care much about art, kicked out the whole raving lot and fined us. We made out just even and with bad press. But proud we were.

Our second edition took place only six months later in July 2011. The venue was a very new club project that was starting in a formerly abandoned dog food factory. We had planned to go the whole way non stop from Friday to Sunday with open air parties during daytime. But then, only days before the festival, the club got into a legal dispute and was temporarily forbidden to play outdoor music. This was an emergency. We had learned not to ignore the rules, we needed to play by them. So as respected citizens of Berlin we registered a demonstration under the title „Stop Fashion Terror!“, had it approved in the last moment and celebrated a glorious morning march from the club through the streets of Berlin escorted by, indeed, the blue authorities blocking cars to have us pass and allow us to spread our profound message to the sounds of bass.

It sounds funny but it was actually a milestone for our development. Firstly, we coincidentally got to know new designers who dedicate their work to environmentalism, sustainability and community projects. Thus, we learned new ways in which fashion acts as an agent in the global society and discovered new potentials for our project to become a useful platform for activism. And secondly, we got good press! Now don't underestimate this because our festival without having, at that time, a very coherent message itself, offered a great story and exciting images for politically committed journalists to inform the public about the dark sides of fashion production-- and have people read this! So Butt x Better #2 became a tool for activism. And, to make a long story short, in the course of two more editions which have since followed, each one of us has become more of an activist him- or herself.

Nowadays, all designers who participate in the BxB Show produce in sustainable ways, mostly through upcycling techniques. BxB offers a wide network for finding new collaborators, and it opens a fascinating stage to creatively promote a change in consumption to a diverse audience that has, to a wide extent, not been responsive to traditional forms of activism. Forms of activism which, if you will allow a personal comment, often demonstrate a strength in combining super-abstract academia with dull slogans: „Crush Capitalism“ - fantastic but how, what after, and optionally: why?! If you sell change as something that can be achieved only by asceticism, long discussions and great suffering - you won't sell much.

BxB is openly more in tune with lines like „If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution.“ There are many who criticise this approach for apparently reducing

topics of violence, oppression and misery to mere entertainment for middle class urban hippies. But we stand to it, because our actions may be imperfect but they are not deceiving. We went from house party to Trashion-Festival. We create small change. We create it in many ways and people. And it's truly enjoyable.

CREW

Eight people, loosely organized as the arts collective „Findus Geburtstag“. Many of us are also engaged in the upcycling project house „Funkhaus Grünau“ in Berlin where synergies between art and environmentalism are explored.

STASH (materials needed)

90% trash, 10% screws.

IT ALL STARTED, BECAUSE ... (what was the topic, problem, etc)

...we wanted a very large house party.

WE WANTED TO SAY THAT (message of the action)

Complicated ideas are bad ideas. Make it easy to make a change.

BIG BROTHER ... (media reaction)

Articles and reportages by: Spiegel Online, rbb Abendschau, Tip Berlin, Zitty Berlin, Flux FM (former Motor FM), Twen FM, The Telegraph (UK, newspaper), Canal + (F, TV), KBS (South Korea, TV)

CAN BE REPEATED, IF ... (useful tips)

...we ignite enthusiasm for the project, form a strong team and get going. That's all.





Visuals by:
Roland Pretz, Tau Pibernat

Occupy the National Dance Centre



Confused people, perpetual noise, general indecision, voices, music, steps, big ravaged rooms. In one of the corners, a saxophonist improvises on jazz while a kid is running around on all fours, babbling and playing with his mother. Some of the people are just watching the show, resigned, some are talking fervently, gesticulating, losing their temper every now and then. Others are painting and writing activist messages on the ground and on the walls. "Your last chance to dance...the dance of the revolution", "Don't stand still, occupy!", "It's not over yet". Others are still dancing, rehearsing for a performance, which they don't know if and when is going to take place. Others are doing physical exercise, interacting with the contents of the room - pieces of plastic, of dry cement, clothes, random objects. Outside, the sun is shining, the spring is calling them but they don't go unless they have another protest to make. They mostly stay inside, in this place which was their life for the past 5 years; willingly trapped in

here, creating, dancing and sharing these rather rough moments that were just described.

It used to look different. Over the the last five years it had been a creative, alternative place where beautiful people danced, acted and laughed at their own and our problems in the way that we, the Romanians, usually do - laugh at the government, laugh at the politics, at the ministers and laugh at our poverty and humility. And among all the very strict, institutionalized, old-fashioned theaters and art spaces this was one of the only alternative, innovative, modern and 'with a voice' performance venues in Romania; the only one which actually dealt only with contemporary dance with the quality of a public institution. Even as a public institution, financed with government funds, the people who were representing it were very free in expressing their general dissatisfaction concerning ministries, laws, politics, the overall situation and the way in which they were doing it was very incisive, straight, obvious and after all, courageous. Their name: The National Dance Centre - Bucharest.

Ever since its founding, it was financed by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and hosted on the last floor of the Romanian National Theatre building. The space was perfect for everything they needed, many rehearsal rooms, space for offices and a big hall where performances took place. After 4 years of activity, time in which they started to become well known, to have a number of people who were constantly attending their performances and events, to make their mark on the place in which they were working, the decision of the Ministry of Culture came down: the renovation of the National Theatre was scheduled to start in the spring of 2011 and this meant that by that date, the last floor had to be evacuated and moreover, that it would be demolished; so the National Dance Centre had to move with no other option of a place where they could carry on with their activities. They tried numerous times to make the authorities reconsider their choice as well as to find another place, but in the end nothing worked.

Under the circumstances, they came up with this idea: when the workers are deprived of their working space, it's their right to occupy it. So this is what they did. They decided not to leave the place anymore until somebody did something for them. This is why in these weeks while the place was occupied, there was always, at any time during night or day, something going on, as everybody there started to do what they are best at: dancers rehearsing or creating new pieces, artists painting or drawing on the walls, musicians playing, journalists writing. At first everything was perfect; people were swept up by the 'herd mentality' as it usually happens in the beginning - someone just said: 'let's occupy it!' and this

is what they did, they all agreed with no doubts. But then, the days passed by, the place started to get more and more dirty, some people became impatient, the general conditions got worse. So suddenly they realized they didn't have the same goal anymore. Some were asking themselves why it was necessary to occupy the place, some didn't agree with the way the occupation movement had evolved and many more disagreements which were not coming to any conclusion. In the end, after many days of creativity mixed with doubt, misery, protests, uncertainty, the occupy movement ended. They all went home, hoping that they would soon find a solution or that somebody else would find it for them.

Why didn't it work? I have often asked myself this question, after seeing their action and meeting some members of the group and I think the answer lies in the nature of contemporary man. Lately, in the era that we're living in, the emphasis is put much more on the individual than before. We're not used to thinking and acting as a unitary group or of being convinced by the group's ideologies and of taking them as our own. At first it often happens that people feel the same impulse and go for a moment in the same direction, but after a while they always start confronting their own interests with the ones of the group and realise that, actually, some things don't fit perfectly. Then, the projection of how things should be doesn't fit with the way things are in reality anymore. This is the point where conflicts appear. This is why the revolution in 1989 in Romania was so confusing and caused so many deaths and this is why some revolutions and revolts don't succeed: people want different things and they are not able to find common points anymore.

Listening to other people's needs, understanding, giving up your own strict ideas in order to meet with some else's ideas, sharing, communicating, these all are things that we less and less know how to do and yet, they are probably the key to effective creative activism.



Visuals by:

<http://mappingromanianart.blogspot.de>

G.I.L.A. - “Our revenge will be happy”

Grupo de Intervención Gila (Gila Intervention Group) is the risen zombie of the stand-up comedian Miguel Gila. During Franco's dictatorship, Miguel Gila was known as speaking about something nobody spoke about; the war. Was this permitted because humour appears harmless?



G.I.L.A. comes from Lavapiés, Madrid, and defines itself as an activist “makeshift joker” group. It is a collective heteronym that comes from “15M” movement, also known as the Spanish Revolution. It is located in one of the more characteristic activist neighbourhoods of Madrid, a neighbourhood that oozes of multiculturalism, creativity and provides a platform for activist opportunities. Spin-off groups are starting in other places of Spain inside the “15M” context where actions are welcome. The group uses humour as a tool to dissect reality and to reach 99% of the people. G.I.L.A. want to open the cracks in the system using laughter, and for that, one of their motto's are “Our revenge will be be

happy”

The actions, interventions and campaigns that the group develop are performed on the street with a large social media presence. G.I.L.A look toward interaction with the audience in these actions, a viral effect that produces a continuous flow between the internet and the street.

A successful action was #LunaresparaMerkel, which called for the citizens to sarcastically go dressed in polka dots for Angela Merkel, as in the Spanish film “Welcome Mr. Marshall”; a critique about the homage that Spanish leaders paid to the Americans who came to enslave Spain with Marshall Plan debt. For weeks the hoard of advertising in the centre of Madrid appeared to change into folkloric characters, with a huge amount of hair combs and polka dots. The action was really successful and the “indignants” appeared dressed with polka dots and hair combs, singing their rejection to the plump German leader with grace. The protest managed to skirt media censorship by using humour and being visually powerful.

Another interesting intervention was the #Porrablock. After the highly violent scenes against citizens on 25S, when hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens surrounded the Spanish Parliament asking for politicians to resign, G.I.L.A convened citizens to use their baton against the police: an edible baton (in Spanish “porras-churros” a typical Spanish food). The police were shocked looking at dozens of citizens brandishing “porras-churros” against them, they had no idea what to do because this was not in their manuals.

Their current plans are to declare war on capitalism and bankrupt the banks.

Contact:

Blog:<http://gila.noblogs.org/>

Facebook:<http://www.facebook.com/gila.grupodeintervencion>

Twitter: @IntervieneGila

Email:gila.intervenciones@gmail.com



Solfónica - armed with instruments



Between the compact mass of protesters, a minor disturbance starts; a small group of people moving in the crowd until they form a circle. Slowly, as soldiers thoroughly prepare their weapons, violins, flutes and other instruments appear from their bags and they start doing musical chores. The crowd falls silent and listen. Touched. Solfónica is playing. If you've been lucky enough to witness this scene it is not necessary to explain who they are. Solfónica will probably be there at a moment in your life that you'll never forget.

Solfónica emerged during the magical moment of "Camping Sun" (or "The Sun campground, which takes the name of the Plaza del Sol, Madrid, Spain). "Camping Sun" was the spontaneous occupation of the square by citizens as a social protest against the Spanish crisis. As part of the thousands of citizens who went out on the streets, they started using the skills they have. In this case, it's music. They did it so well that they became one of the most powerful 15M

movement symbols. They became an imperative icon in all the special moments; from manifestations to the opening of free spaces.

Music and culture are tools to liberate human beings. With their music, they are able to transmit deep messages, move our longings and make us all feel a sensation of belonging to the collective. Always through music. They yell “these are our weapons” whilst raising their violins, flutes and voices to the wind; and teach us new ways to fight against the power.

<https://sites.google.com/site/lasolfonica//@solfonica>



Escape censorship with Los Ayuntañecos

"Are you sick of being manipulated like a puppet? Create your own marionette!"



In this way "Ayuntañecos" (Spanish, which joins: "City Council" and "Puppet") present themselves. They rediscover the historical use of puppets as a conduit for social criticism, using the characters to say what is prohibited for the people.

With their political characters, the group emerged from the assembly of "15M Mahadahonda" (15-M Movement) and make straightforward criticisms about current political and economic issues through humour and parody. The puppets are used to inform and give content to such actions as squatting banks, conferences on illegitimate Debt ... As reality itself has become a parody, creativity must show what is real.

"Camping in Majadahonda Bankia", 16 and November 17, 2012.

The popular assembly of Majadahonda organised a camp in front of a Bankia (a Spanish bank) branch on the night of 16 to 17 November 2012, to raise awareness of unjust home evictions, for which Bankia is particularly infamous, in solidarity with those affected. Bankia is in the spotlight of social anger, and has had a triggering role in the Spanish crisis.

The puppet group "Los Ayuntañecos" decided not only support this action, but also to participate in it with a performance focused on the subject of evictions, with a script full of allusions to the corruption cases that flood our town.

The next morning, barely having slept, the star performance was scheduled featuring the characters: Narciso de Trapo, Esperanza Telita and Sánchez GordHilo. Although the weather was against us the whole weekend and we had neither permission to camp nor to conduct a public performance, we learned how to deal with the disproportionate deployment of police and stay overnight with success and we also managed to do our street performance against the bank in the town's main pedestrian street without being identified or fined.

We were lucky that a media reporter was interested in the whole project and decided to share the experience with "Los Ayuntañecos" on a TV Channel. She decided to do a mini-reportage about us, covering these three days, in which she explained how we prepared everything for the action and the subsequent developments. This reporter was identified by police, but not sanctioned. The reach we had in this action was extensive since it was broadcasted via the streaming service "Bambuser" by the Assembly and the next day we were on a half day's news.



Visuals by:
Los Ayuntañecos

Reclaim the countryside - Re.Colectivo Project



Re.colectivo is a rural revitalization project based in Cabranes, Asturias, Spain. The project is composed of a group of creatives who share living and work space. Its intention is to consider the relationship between man and nature and to decentralize the culture of cities and redirect it to the rural world. Our interests are focused on the research of the ecology, design, contemporary art and agriculture.

We share creativity through:

- Personal artistic activities: each group member produces ideas, objects and actions through different means of expression (illustration, mural painting, programming, sculpture ...). We put it all together and share it in collective exhibitions such as "Ideas for a planetary garden" in Lola Space in Oviedo or individually in our own circles.

- Collective creations: the common space implies the application of creative ideas on energetic, organizational levels for productive use of space and time (Construction of the “Rocket” wood stove, building a triangular chicken coop out of recycled material and other practical design objects).
- Critical Pedagogy: running workshops and activities for children and teenagers on issues related to art, design and agriculture and critical thinking. We work in rural schools, urban and suburban municipalities.
- Psychosocial work: actions like Re.galo point (collection of second hand objects and creation of a free shop space for neighbours), participation in local festivals, Ecolab collaboration (Ecology laboratory in Arts Centre Laboral, Gijón, Asturias).

Re.colectivo Re.ma en un Re.condito Re.fugio.

Somos un Re.ctangulo de Re.cursos en Re.d.

De los Restos Re.cuperamos: Re.tales, Re.fracciones, re.franes, re.galos y re.laciones.

Re.ciclamos: Reliquias, Re.lampagos, Re.tinas y Re.inversiones.

No fué Re.pentinamente el Re.nunciar a Re.signarnos.

Nuestro Re.sonar Re.sponde al Re.linchar de la Vida.

Porque sólo Re.uniéndonos Re.creamos Re.alidades.

Porque no son Re.tos sino Re.evoluciones.

More info about Re.Colectivo:

<http://www.recolectivo.net>

Link to the personal pages and projects of the members of Re.Colectivo:

Joaquín:

<http://www.joaquinvila.blogspot.com.es/>

Regina:

<http://www.reginadejimenez.net/>

Akvilé:

<http://www.magicdust.molestar.org/>

Edu:

<http://www.difusor.org/>



Visuals by:
Taken from their website
