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# Partizaning: Strategical art of urban living

Talk with Shirya Malhotra and Make Make from PARTIZANING, moderated by Ruta Vimba and Tau Pibernat.



On a possibly sunny afternoon we hang out in the project space of Kulturlabor Trial&Error in the heart of Neukölln, a rapidly changing neighbourhood in Berlin. We are sorting clothes which an Arab lady just brought us for our D.I.Y. swap-shop, and preparing water with fresh mint and lemon, which we bought on our way here at the weekly market. Chilling out on a dark green sofa borrowed from the neighbours, nibbling some sweets from the vegan shop around the corner and chatting about the past weekend. We are now waiting for guests from far away, seemingly another universe for us on this sofa in our project space, similar to all the project spaces around the neighbourhood, full of vintage and good intentions - we are getting a visit from PARTIZANING - a Moscow based collective of artists, researchers and writers who maintain a vibrant online

platform and are responsible for some beautiful self made trouble here and there around Russia and beyond its borders.

About half an hour or later, we notice through our dusty window, full of plants and kitchy treasures, a dark haired girl and a slightly taller guy with a baseball cap and duct-taped glasses looking at their smartphone and the house, and their smartphone, and the house ... we decide to stop their confusion and welcome them inside.

Our guests - Shirya Malhotra, passionate urban researcher and Make Make, street-rebel, activist and writer - are collaborating as artists as well as taking an active role in the PARTIZANING core team: writing, editing, documenting and organising events and workshops which contributes to something more than a single website. "Partizaning is not only a collective, it is more like a movement," says Make, explaining the open and cross-disciplinary nature of the project. "For us it's important to create a platform where people can interact, get ideas and then use art as a tool to share these ideas with direct actions." Rather than as a label for self expression, art in this case is seen as a tool of research and transformation.

PARTIZANING has gone viral - the facebook site and the website has a growing number of followers. They are organising themselves in a kind of moderated meritocracy, leaving the door open for conference speakers and workshop participants from any field. "For example about urban activism, people come and see how to organize a small protest to protect their neighbourhood from building a highway. And they perceive Partizaning as a strategy, idea or selection of tactics they can use. This meaning of Partizaning is the most important. We work more or less as journalists, experts who try to analyse and teach people how to use all these tactics. For us it is important to have our own media, avoiding explicitly explaining the media situation in their city, Moscow. "What we are searching for are not only beautiful and powerful examples of actions but also people who can teach something. They maybe don't perceive it as their own action but as some tactic other people can use. Not all the artists perceive their art as something that is ready to share with other people," shares Make.

PARTIZANING is united by love towards urban environment, the dynamic processes of sharing in inhabited areas which is especially challenging in the post-soviet environment and in a place like Russia. Though stereotypes that it's impossible to do anything because of a militant state are a bit of a myth, reveals PARTIZANING. "I mean we can use it in a way - wow there it is so dangerous,

but we did something there anyway, we're such heroes." Make laughs about it, but then suddenly gets serious: "So, on one hand there is a lot of chaotic violence in Russia, you can face something horrible in a hospital, school, army or jail and sometimes horrible stuff is happening in the courts, the system is totally corrupted. But at the same time you have space for action, you can do whatever you want, people don't care, especially about the city. You can always just give some money to someone and they let you go or to the police, you explain what you're doing and they can even let you finish it." Staying away from political issues though doesn't ensure immunity, because "you can still get in trouble for doing something silly but at the same time you can do something really controversial, especially in Moscow and you are safe."

As way more challenging they see the shifting paradigms in society from post-soviet denial towards something they call "new collectivism"- whilst elder generations are getting wild with practices of capitalism and individualism, younger people are rediscovering forgotten public spaces. For Make the main obstacle is the apparent resistance towards the idea of self-organisation as well as lack of the belief that people "can take the city back".

It seems like PARTIZANING is on the wave of emerging urban movements around the globe and it is indeed time for urban partisans to come out from the underground to collaborate with people living in the neighbourhoods as well as similar collectives and share their practices. Shirya, though, sees PARTIZANING as a strategical way-out: "one of the ways we convince people to do these actions or to be involved or engage with their city is through organising workshops, discussions, sharing exactly how you can do something so people can just replicate it, do it themselves without having to wonder how or when or why." For example, there was a graffiti workshop at a school to paint a building in its courtyard, encouraged by its headmaster, who said "kids do graffiti anyway, there's no sense in stopping them, let's just show them how to do it." And it works, especially when they see that after some workshops in schools, kids continue to do graffiti and guerilla interventions on their own.

PARTIZANING is not only a collective or a platform, it is the entire strategy of how to tackle problems of urban life, and being open to learning and sharing are the most important values. That's why at the moment "it is really interesting to travel, to see and compare different cities and tactics and see how they work in different contexts," says Shirya, talking about the possible residencies they could do as artists, maybe also in Berlin.

They wish the Mašta handbook readers to skip-over seriousness, keep a playful

attitude and bury the ownership of their thoughts. "And tell them not to be afraid to copy," adds Make. We finish the talk with possible future plans for sharing content between Mašta and PARTIZANING, they gather their things, a short moment of confusion and our guests are gone - off the traditional tourist track: they went to look for a green area that was a former railway park.



**Visuals by:**

Shriya Malhotra, Partizaning

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