

# INTRODUCTION

## Unpacking Residencies: Situating the Production of Cultural Relations

Art residencies can be seen as sites where mobility and displacement are employed as conditions for nurturing artistic productivity. The number of artist-in-residence programmes is expanding globally, and they are becoming an increasingly important factor in what is often being called ‘the art ecology’ — roughly meaning the field that unfolds between agents responsible for producing, discussing, marketing, trading, transporting, keeping, conserving, and seeing art. As managing editors for this thematic issue of *Kunstlicht*, we, Nikos Doulos and Herbert Ploegman, aimed to unpack a number of processes that are more or less tacitly underpinning contemporary art residencies as a concept and as a practice.

The art residency, and by extension this thematic issue, is literally and metaphorically a meeting ground for our practices. Nikos as an artist and thus a cultural worker who has taken part in various art residencies and is involved in the coordination of a roaming art educational programme.<sup>1</sup> He also participated in Capacete Athens, a nine-month residency parallel to documenta 14 in the Greek capital. Herbert in the first place as an anthropologist looking into how artistic practices intersect with the urban fabric in the aftermath of the economic crisis in Athens, and secondly as involved with the arts through writing, and curating in the context of a residency.

To mention this is not simply to spot an incidental convergence, but rather to point to the wider field in which art residencies attain meaning, and to display how understandings of the concept of an art residency programme in our case took shape between fields, with their respective bodies of knowledge, codes, habits, and cultural particularities.

Delineating art and anthropology in detail is an impossible and probably also outmoded task. In fact, artistic and anthropological practices have become highly intertwined where, increasingly, they are borrowing and drawing from each other’s methods, theories, and purposes.<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork as a condition of displacement has been an integral element of most of anthropology’s history, and experiencing the field considered indispensable for understanding what social life entails.<sup>3</sup> Art residencies, while ostensibly doing quite the same, also follow some different logics.

These logics are connected to what was outlined at the beginning of this text: the nurturing of artistic practices. Simultaneously, distinguishable vocabularies and cultures also constitute artists’ and anthropologists’ scenes. These, in turn, relate of course to the different modes of instituting and operating of art and anthropology. As editors, we have tried to acknowledge these different approaches to thinking about residencies and to make them productive in the conception of this issue. Traces of these differences may indeed appear from our editorial; partly as deliberate choice to include them in the equation; and partly because this is an inevitable result of our differing dispositions. The same goes for the contributions on the pages that follow, that vary in their

<sup>1</sup> DAI. Roaming Assembly. ‘Welcome to DAI’. Accessed through: <https://dutchartinstitute.eu/program/about>, on 7 December 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive discussion of recent debates, see the special issue of *Field on the art of research practices*. Elpidia Rikou and Eleana Yalouri, ‘The Art of Research Practices Between Art and Anthropology’, in: *Field* 11 (2018). Accessed through: <http://field-journal.com/editorial/introduction-the-art-of-research-practices-between-art-and-anthropology>, on 25 November 2018.

<sup>3</sup> John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 3. One should take into account here the relativity and malleability of ‘displacement’ in our complex world.

modes of writing—some more, and some less close to the academic tradition this journal derives from.

‘Unpacking’ residencies for us meant closely investigating a number of fundamental issues that we see arising across contemporary art residencies. Processes such as production and labour, mobility, displacement and privilege, research and pedagogy, locality, reciprocity, and gentrification had our interest. These cannot be seen separately from art residencies’ entanglement in broader institutional frameworks such as galleries, museums, private and state funding bodies and the neoliberal logics infusing the art world today (the latter implying the commercialization of artistic practices as shown from the international art market, artistic production and mobility as cultural capital, and the overall understanding of the artist as a professional and entrepreneurial figure).<sup>4</sup> This is to say that in this publication we are not presenting a bouquet representative of the diversity in art residencies as found across the world. Neither have we necessarily been interested in the operations of individual residencies per se. Rather, specific cases of residency programmes in the articles included serve as contextual sites where the various processes mentioned above come to the fore.

By critically examining the entanglement of residency programmes in all these forces at play, we wish to deal with the complexity of, on the one hand, sustaining our belief in the potency of art residencies to devise and nurture in practice alternative forms of co-habiting, co-creating and co-learning; and on the other hand giving space to our concerns with regards to the ways artist residencies develop meaningful affinities with the territories and respective cultural contexts they embed themselves in.

Additionally, the enclosed contributions shed light on the relational dynamics between art residencies and the artists-in-residence. That is to claim that apart from their evident co-dependency (they both need each other for their sustenance in the cultural field) they also both (the programmes as operatives, and their participants as facilitated bodies and critical subjects to this facilitation) have the potency and perhaps indeed should negotiate their agency in shaping and questioning the identity and role of each other.

With this thematic issue, the selection of contributors (artists, academics, researchers, art historians, and curators), and their often empirical relation to the topics at hand, we have wished to create a space that serves as a mobile ‘think tank’ of sorts: one that can intervene in global contexts where art residencies are multiplying and mutating—testing new forms of operation in the process—and as a result are also speaking to the makeup of the cultural field(s) at large.

We have thus chosen to begin with two strong statements that serve as an access point to this space envisioned. Iarose’s ‘Feminist Sweepstakes’ draws on feminist thinking to problematize the precarious conditions that frame artistic labour and they offer their perspective on “practicing a better ethics in artistic residencies”. Formulating the claim that the persona of the ‘nomadic artist’ is nothing more than a problematic mutation of the ‘Genius artist’, Iarose calls for the abolition of the “tacit exceptionalism that differentiates artists as a category distinct from other workers participating in the same economy” and proposes to avoid internalizing our worker identity as a natural category, and rather organize around it as a political one.<sup>5</sup>

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This also opens the door to problematizing whether, with all these paradoxical relations, one so-called art world can even be said to exist.

The text by Lise Soskolne for W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) offers additional thoughts on artistic labour. When characterizing the work done in art residencies as often 'open-ended and process-based', a difficulty arises as to who should pay for the services provided to artists by the residencies. W.A.G.E. argues that it is not the artist who should pay for it. Artists are faced with multiple obstacles when it comes to earning money in general, and time spent in a residency even disrupts other means of reproduction, such as a paid job. Advocating for more equity, and for lower barriers to participating in the art field, W.A.G.E. states that artists should be taken care for through the non-profit sector, so as to be paid for being unproductive in the context of a residency. First presented in 2015, we are honoured to be able to re-publish this text in our issue.

The two subsequent contributions deal with the tension that arises between art residencies and the localities which they find themselves embedded in. Ines Linke and Cristina Llanos in 'A Southern Perspective on Brazilian Residencies' problematize the role that residency programmes play in the production and distribution of artists' social and cultural capital. Following a critical analysis of residencies as agents that facilitate the production of art through deterritorialization, Linke and Llanos question the dynamics at play in various programmes for site-specific work in Brazil. With most artists coming in from the global North and finding in Brazil a place for inspiration, the authors observe a disparity between the *in situ* operation of residencies in the form of local ties and exchanges, and the *ex situ* circulation of artworks and economic capital. Furthermore, despite a global upsurge in decolonizing practices by artists, and even despite good intentions with which residency projects are set up, structural inequalities between North and South, and a neoliberal model of art production and consumption inherent to residencies, keep sustaining this disparity.

Alex Burchmore, in turn, critically examines how two art residencies operate within the context of Jingdezhen, China, a former centre of ceramics. The author contrasts the recent biographies of these residency programmes with the social conditions developing in the centuries old 'Porcelain Capital'. In doing so, he is able to shed light on the ways a split is being maintained between the international audience of artists these residencies cater to in exchange of high fees, and local artisans that serve the needs of the visiting artists in often low salary job constructions while being disenfranchised from the right to their work, their cultural heritage, and skills. This raises questions as to the role these programmes play within local and global politics, and as to what kind of artishood they produce.

The issue closes with a succession of two articles that rethink the notion of productivity within the cultural field, and the art residency as a topos where this rethinking can be set in motion. Taking her cue from Jan Verwoert's plea to finding alternative ways of dealing with the 'high performance society', Mariska van den Berg in her article 'Art Residencies: Performing the Margins' argues that residency programmes pre-eminently are sites where such alternatives can be practiced—as instances of 'performing the margins'. By both responding to and critically reflecting on 'the centre', the residency can be made into a space that responds to the artists' needs and simultaneously protects them from the unceasing demands coming from society. She turns to two study cases to illustrate ways in which this can be done.

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Iarose, 'Feminist Sweepstakes: Materialist Thoughts on Hyper(mobility) and the Work Ethics', this issue, p. 17; p. 16.

Angela Serino rethinks the dimension of time as perceived within artist residencies through a mode of ‘thinking through time’ and an escape from an exclusive visible ‘now’ that often urges these programs to a specific mode of documenting and making their activities public. Expanding on Laura Wiedijk’s lecture-performance *YIELD*, her article titled ‘Cultivating Time’ proposes to look at art residencies as spaces of potentially acknowledging various degrees of visibility and different timelines in the production of artistic works, and thus as safeguards of “the existence of a value that is not yet there, that remains hidden, or at least does not manifest right away”.<sup>6</sup> Drawing inspiration from the writings of theoretical physicist and philosopher Carlo Rovelli as well as from two artistic projects, she wishes to steer us away from the perception of time as one continuum, a homogeneous dimension, and “resist the risk of a residency as a tool of mere reproduction of already existing ways of being and working”.<sup>7</sup>

All throughout the issue runs an art contribution by Dimitra Kondylatou titled *THE BOX expanded*. This work stems from her long research in the relation between art and tourism, critically questioning the position and agency of the art worker in sites where art, tourism and business converge. Mobility, field research, leisure, gentrification and their ties with neoliberal structures of production and profit become nodes in a (social, symbolic, and economic) value network concerning places, services and culture. Her contribution hovers above articles as a symbolic gesture of illustrating the complex nature of these relations.

All of this is contained within the cover image *Video Still from YIELD*—an adaptation of a video frame by Laura Wiedijk’s *YIELD*, generously offered to *Kunstlicht* by the artist. As also discussed in Angela Serino’s article, Wiedijk’s work touches upon the multiple (time) dimensions that make up art residencies. The cover renders this visible through the 2D and 3D elements of the image, as well as through the representational and the abstract, the visible and the invisible, and through the double, manually achieved, disruption of a landscape.

While not covering every single aspect relating to our topic, we believe that this issue forms a good enough starting point for a continued discussion on the dominant forces at play in art residencies today. In reference to the former, we wish to make an annotation with respect to matters such as displacement as privilege, reciprocity as a method of encountering, and wider concerns around artistic mobility and its ecological footprint which, although significantly relevant to our initial inquiry on residency programmes, barely surface in our issue. That being said, we hope that the texts brought together on these pages will be as inspiring to the reader as they were to us.

On a last note, we wish to express our gratitude to everyone who has been involved in the making of this issue.

Nikos Doulos & Herbert Ploegman

<sup>6</sup>  
Angela Serino, ‘Cultivating Time’,  
this issue, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup>  
Ibid, p. 69.