

Moment no.1 : Lukas Heistingering

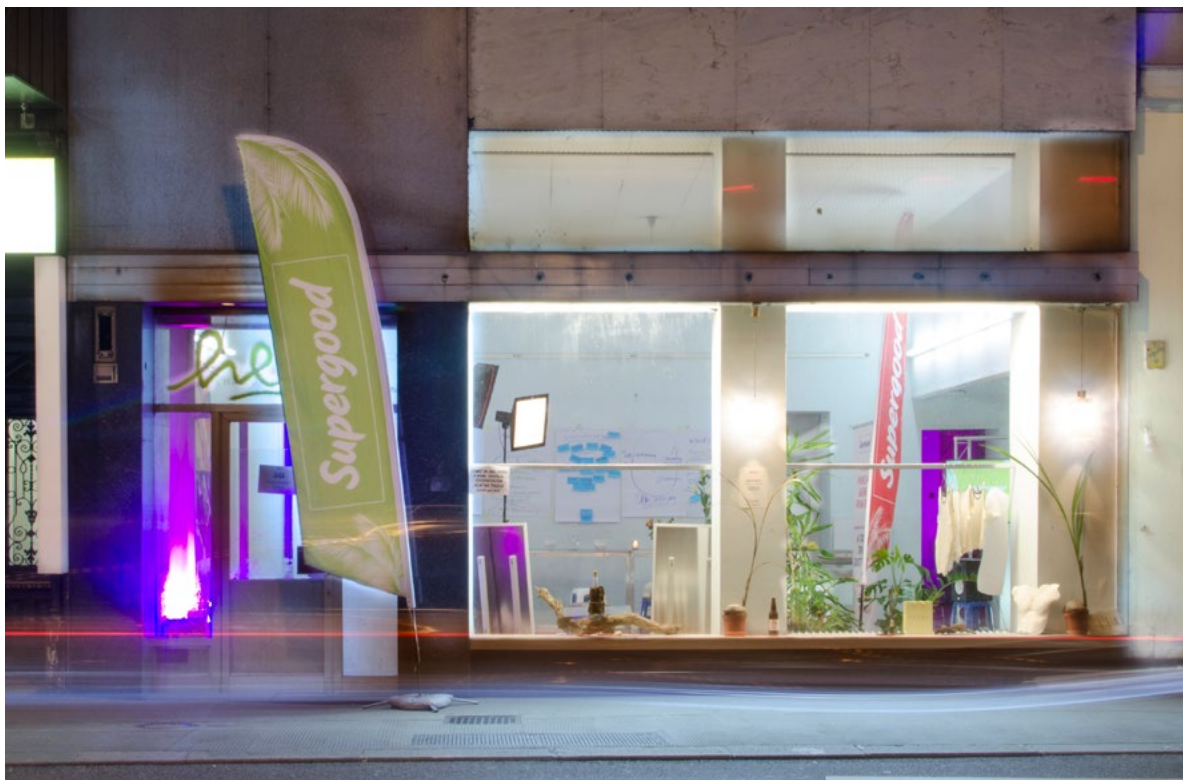
As part of the exhibition *27DAGE (27DAYS)*, f.eks.'s organizer Scott William Raby initiated a discussion with artist Lukas Heistingering about his artistic practice and upcoming work, particularly about his collaborative project on the "artist as consultant".

The first in three "publishing moments" activating f.eks.'s past, present, and upcoming work, this initial text marks the occasion of the exhibition opening and the beginning of f.eks.'s month-long presence at Art Hub Copenhagen in February 2022.

Scott William Raby: Let's look back on some of your work from the near past that informs your current practice, particularly in relation to the *Artist Project Group (APG)*.¹ Former projects such as *Supergood* and *AAAA* inform and anchor your current APG work around the "artist as consultant". As the *Supergood* project is in a more mature phase, perhaps it's nice to reflect upon what *Supergood* means now.

Lukas Heistingering: *Supergood* started in 2015 as a project initiated by Bernhard Garnicnig and myself, where we opened a concept store close to the city center of Vienna. The idea was to use the format of the concept store – a commercial retail format mainly used by large companies and global multinational corporations.

The concept store goes beyond normal merchandising, and we found it very interesting as a format in opposition to a typical artistic project space. Obviously, this *Supergood* concept store fulfilled many of the criteria of an artistic project space though. At the core of the *Supergood* project was not the concept store itself – that was one realization of *Supergood* – but rather to repurpose commercial and business formats and use the corporate reality we're living in as a material and substance for artistic practice. It's not as if other artists aren't doing this – many are dealing with corporate realities in the day-to-day business within the practice of being an artist. Some artists are – knowingly or unknowingly – at the forefront of developing certain branding or marketing mechanisms.



Supergood concept store installed in Vienna, 2015. Photo credit: Supergood

However, Supergood was a demand to acknowledge and deal with the realities of branding and marketing in a more direct way. The first realization was utilizing the concept store, which was important not to position it as such, but rather to think of artistic practice as something happening within the framework of a broader economy. For example, there are different artistic markets – there's the gallery art market, the academic art market, a.o. We were interested in creating a new “artistic object” that would be positioned outside of these art markets and would exist within the bounds of general commerce. By doing so, it allowed us to experiment, position, and play with the dispositif of artistic autonomy. In relation to autonomy, everything that can be recognized as art as such also loses its critical potential to an extent.²

SWR: We can think about art related conversation from the near past by the likes of Grant Kester or Claire Bishop on the relationship between autonomous and instrumentalized practices and the effects of such.

LH: To be clear, I don't think Supergood was ever autonomous. It was presented within a unique framing device “outside” normative boundaries of art, but never really existed independently of the contemporary art market. However, there were certain aspects of Supergood that were important to its initial creation. It was vital Supergood took the shape of a company that presented and sold products. Instead of having an artistic collective producing artistic objects, there is a company producing products, and these products were very important to understand the performativity of the shift from artistic production to explicitly focusing on branding. It made evident questions around the performative aspects related to producing, marketing, and selling products. Artists do this everyday, so it became important for the Supergood project to have clear framing and contextualization around it. The concept store was basically a three-month performance piece where we were playing with certain aspects of providing a product, and recontextualizing it. Specifically, we used proxy products in order to create discussion, and make evident the conversations we wanted to have around art in relation to different neoliberal devices (e.g. marketing, branding, etc.) and how they relate to broader forms of institutionalization and expressions of power.



(Left image) Supergood co-initiator Bernhard Garnicnig making an açai smoothie inside the Supergood Concept Store, Vienna, 2015. (Right image) The core element was a bar designed by Lukas Heistingner placed in the center of the room. Throughout the project period it was activated by affiliated artists, e.g. the *Franchise Painting* by Phelim McConigly. Photo credit: Supergood

People would enter the concept store, experience, and consume the branding around açai, which was a hyped Amazonian berry positioned as a new “superfood” being pushed by the likes of Oprah Winfrey. It was not well known in Europe at the time, but we fell in love with it working on a project in Brazil, and realized this is the perfect product for Supergood. Firstly, because it is food – there is a certain egalitarian aspect to food – everyone can talk about food, give an opinion about taste with food, knows something about food – you don’t need any previous cultural language. Secondly, not only was it food, but it was considered “superfood”. This was an interesting category because it really means nothing – it’s an invention of marketing.

Relatedly, companies “supercharge” their products with value, and we wanted to change this perspective, put some attention toward, and problematize this “supercharging”. We are constantly surrounded by new technological products that largely provide only incremental technical improvement, but don’t radically change anything despite the marketing language that indicates otherwise. Basically the last important technical invention was arguably the internet, and since then there was nothing – one could argue. There is a lot of rhetoric about technology as a driver for innovation, when technology isn’t a driver for innovation – innovation is driven by creating new economic models.³



Artists and practitioners created performances, workshops, dj-nights, and talks as part of the Supergood concept store. Body + Freedom (Florentina Holzinger, Nils Amadeus Lange, Manuel Scheiwiller, Annina Machaz and Vincent Riebeck) recorded a special Supergood themed episode of their TV-series during the opening of the store, Vienna, 2015. Photo credit: Supergood.

As Supergood evolved, we began using the format of the campaign – much like a product launch campaign. The way *Supergood* interacted with art institutions was that we partnered with them as sponsors. We slipped into the role of the sponsor – sometimes they’re publicly funded or private foundations – but we altered, modified, and experimented with this role. The specific proposition was that we would take everything just a step further, which is a sponsor simply demanding to be inside of an art exhibition – perhaps you can imagine instead of Redbull sponsoring an art exhibition, Redbull itself becoming an artist.



(Left image) Main entrance to MAAT (Museum for Art, Architecture, and Technology) surrounded by Supergood beach flags as part of the exhibition *Supergood - Dialogues with Ernesto de Sousa*, Lisbon, 2018. (Right image) Entrance to the main exhibition space inside MAAT featuring the Supergood logo, a selfie-wall, and various signs, Lisbon, 2018. Photo credit: Supergood

SWR: What's funny about this meta-position contained within the notion of the “sponsor-as-artist” is that it doesn't seem that far from reality with the power donors, sponsors, and foundations have on artistic practice as gatekeepers.

LH: Indeed, this is similar to how we positioned Supergood – as a company that demands a very extravagant return for their sponsorship agreement. In 2016 at Premierentage, an art festival in Innsbruck, Austria that Supergood took part in, the product was still the core element – we were marketing the proxy product, but we were moving more towards providing something like a service to an art institution.



Framed as the newly established sponsor of art festival Premierentage in Innsbruck Austria, Supergood served product samples to the audience during their *FREE BETTER YOU!* project, Innsbruck, 2016. Photo credit: Supergood

This culminated in a project we did in 2018, for the the Museum for Art, Architecture, and Technology (MAAT) in Lisbon. We collaborated with artists, and curators, in this case Hugo Canoilas on an exhibition about Ernesto De Sousa – a foundational figure in Portuguese contemporary art. Also a very important revolutionary during the military dictatorship and the political resistance against it in Portugal. We were invited to create a public interface for this exhibition which related to Ernesto De Sousa’s work, and one of the things we found resonance with was his utilization of posters in relation to resistance against the dictatorship as both artistic and activistic mediums. We could find resonance here because posters are a corporate commercial medium for promoting companies and services now, but were also used during the revolution, in order to communicate anonymously.



At the *Supergood - Dialogues with Ernesto de Sousa* opening, visitors were invited to pose in front of an overscaled selfie-wall with slogan signs of Supergood marketing language mixed with titles of De Sousa’s performances, Lisbon, 2018. Photo: Pedro Sacadura

Based on this invitation, we suddenly found ourselves working for the museum as service providers. The proxy products – namely the Amazonian berry superfood - were not important anymore, because we were now providing a service to the institution by creating an artistic interface using the museum’s marketing channels instead of putting something inside the exhibition. The mediums and the formats changed – we were dealing with social media and other digital marketing channels that an institution uses, so the attempt was to utilize these channels to create a new interface for the exhibition. That was a very important step because the proxy product suddenly wasn’t important anymore.



(Top) Supergood promo image. (Left) Supergood “merch” positioned in the MAAT gift shop. (Right) Supergood banner positioned outside of the MAAT gift shop, Lisbon, 2018. Photo credit: Supergood

That’s the status of Supergood – we moved beyond the brand and started thinking about what other artistic interactions and interfaces we could create, because the “brand” didn’t provide us with what we needed anymore.

SWR: This evolution from the proxy product to providing a service, and thinking about that in the context of dealing with a campaign and how that can unfold seems to highlight the transition into the AAAA project – *The Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* – doesn’t it?

LH: Exactly.

SWR: Isn’t that a key element of the artistic progression of your work to think about how new projects unfold the “service provider” role in the form of a campaign? How that role is articulated, nuanced, or highlighted can be seen in the AAAA project, right?



Bernhard Garnicig in dialogue about art washing, gentrification, and art's role in urban transformation processes as part of the *Aalborg Anti-Art Washing Agreement (AAAA)* project, Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk

LH: AAAA started with a question Bernhard and I were thinking about – what would be necessary for local artists – and, not only artists, but also politicians, businesses, and other actors – to capitalize on local artistic work? I think the term “capitalize” is very important here. We knew that local businesses and the municipality needed to capitalize on Aalborg becoming a tourist destination.⁴ For example, there was a lot of investment already into the necessary harbor infrastructure for large cruise ships to anchor in the city.

SWR: So the tourists can walk off into the new cultural institutions that are located on the waterfront – the new architecture museum, concert hall, the kunsthall, even a second kunsthall at the former spirit factory...

LH: Precisely, there is a physical infrastructure that is supporting consumption of culture – obviously culture is very important to market the “local” character of Aalborg. However, it's not actually supporting local character and culture – there are some motifs, formulas, or very simple concepts that are repeated in different tourist destinations. A typical example is a local brewery – regardless if there is a beer culture or not, there will typically be a local brewery that will be used to attract activity, tourists, and create a version of “local” character. Other examples are pottery and other handi-crafts. What is important to recognize is that these products perhaps existed at some point locally in pre-industrial times, but this “locality” was often eventually lost to mass production. These products now return as infrastructures for providing a “local identity”, but more often than not act primarily as touristic drivers.

SWR: “Street food” and “food trucks” or these informal, yet instagrammable, hip, reviewable food and eating experiences are also part of this...

LH: Indeed. Another, very important aspect is obviously the need for blockbuster art institutions. One example of this is the Guggenheim in Bilbao.⁵ They were on the forefront of this movement where cultural institutions drive so-called “urban renewal”. What does this signify? Essentially, a town that knows that it needs to transform socio-economically, move into the information age, and to enter the information age you need certain drivers.

This is necessary to develop from an industrial to a cultural city, and one of those drivers are large, prominent cultural institutions. As such, cultural institutions have nothing to do with art in this context. The reason they exist is not for the love of art, they exist because cities in transition need these content providers in order to exist as cultural cities, and being seen as a “cultural city” is important economically. It has nothing to do with artistic production or any local character, but more to sustain the drivers in order to maintain an image that can be capitalized on.

Now the question is what is necessary for those political and economic players to capitalize on, and which drivers do you need to create for them to capitalize on a local art scene? Essentially, how do you market local artists and get them involved in this conversation? It is a very political game. You have to provide local politicians with the arguments on why this is necessary, needed, and deemed positive for a city to support local artists. Assuming artists should be involved in cultural policies – there is a significant difference between art and culture. Culture is an economic field, an industry, and art is something else.⁶ Among other things, art is about contemplation and creating identity, and it’s not obviously the only thing that provides this, but it is a significant quality of art. A similar important driver is sport. We know for example, in many countries sport and art are actually in the same government ministries. Art and culture are important to produce, reproduce and in the best case negotiate who we are. This could happen in a football stadium as it does in an art exhibition.

SWR: What’s notable when thinking about this approach to artistic policy, is what you came up with to call attention to these relationships in the AAAA project, which was the anti-gentrification campaign. As a “service provider”, you and Bernhard created a campaign for the local arts milieu – *The Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement*, which put into play all of these forces. It seems like a significant step if we’re going back to the autonomy/instrumentalization conversation – as AAAA was a wonderful aesthetic proposition and performance, but it was also a very political, and socially-engaged moment. Once the performance finished, you also gave the logo graphic and “brand” to local artists, and the visual identity of this campaign is now being used by local artists to activate an identity around art in the city.



Audience enjoying the view of Aalborg during the sailing cruise aboard the temporarily renamed “SV Policy Transformation” sail boat during the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* performance organized by f.eks. platform. Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk

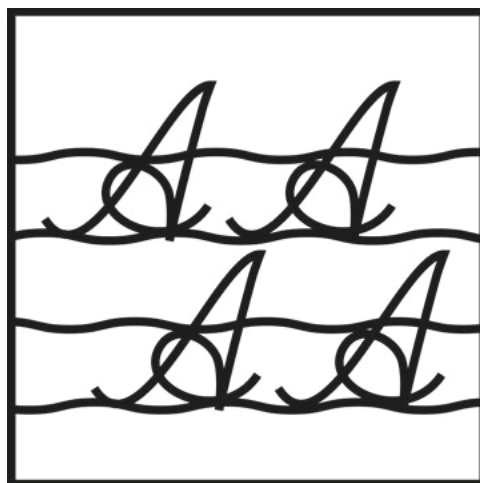
LH: It's not ours anymore, it's theirs. This was only possible because we were closely conversing with local artists and were in dialogue with them throughout the project period, which was only possible because of f.eks., and because they were already so closely involved with the local arts milieu in Aalborg. This allowed us to partake in conversations, and listen to what people were dealing with. The brand lives off of those artists, including obviously f.eks., and the people involved with f.eks. that are using it. We just provided, or created a brand that was based on a political demand to get artists involved in creating cultural policy, and the idea was to create a very strong, or easily identifiable, artistic/activistic intervention. This became the sailing trip which was based on nautical culture, sport sailing, and the industrial heritage of Aalborg as a provider of industrial goods in the maritime industries. Picking up on all these original aspects of the character of Aalborg and putting them into a performance piece that everyone can be proud of was the aim. Everyone could recognize a sailing ship as it is considered an identifiable symbol in Aalborg. We rented a beautiful, old three mast ship and created a performance around it that was very banal in a way. On the boat we invited local politicians, artists, and the public to join in this sailing trip across the Limfjord – this economically and historically very important waterway, where even the vikings were anchoring hundreds of years ago. We went for a short sailing trip, and then anchored in Aalborg where the cruise ships normally dock in front of the architecture museum to present *The Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement*. From a branding perspective, we were very careful to also play with the double AA's – people in Denmark often call Aalborg "double AA" so we thought we would utilize that familiarity. What seemed important was to underscore aspects of artwashing, the public conversation around gentrification, and the tension between art washing and white washing, and the Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement aimed to provide political capital to local artists in relation to these issues.

SWR: Artwashing essentially equates to companies with bad reputations – oil, pharmaceutical, banking companies, etc. supporting art, culture, ecology, or other ethical or good aspects of society to appropriate the sign value of cultural goodness, to "offset" their often unethical business activity within the eyes of general public...

LH: It's a phenomenon in neoliberal society.

SWR: Precisely.

LH: Therefore, we created a brand for *AAAA* – four A's that look like sails, positioned within a box of waves. We used some very simple corporate elements - the boxy logo - similar to Supergood, utilizing a design strategy about making a logo look more technical. The *AAAA* logo is also a very classy logo, it is identifiable with sailing, and it became the logo of this entire performance piece, these conversations we had, and the people we spoke to in the project used the logo, which helped initiate the visual identity of *The Aalborg Artist's Association* – we only created a framework and a brand and everything else only happened because of the engagement of the artists that we were in touch had supported this – sometimes it doesn't take more than that.



The Aalborg Anti-Art Washing logo designed by Lukas Heistingner as part of the *AAAA* project by Lukas Heistingner and Bernhard Garnicig, Aalborg, 2019. Now in use by the Aalborg Artist's Association. Photo credit: Lukas Heistingner

SWR: Since I'm also a part of the Aalborg Artist's Association and looking at all of the different policy initiatives, activism, and actual arts policy transformation AAAA has been able to accomplish, from my perspective your generosity in letting the logo be used has been a phenomenal part of establishing this strong brand which we've used to not only "market", but literally create more progressive art policy in Aalborg. Of course, it's the organization of the people involved, it's our labor that has carried it, but from my perspective being apart of AAAA, it was very inspiring to actually have this readymade identity that was so easy to then encapsulate all of the conversations, markers, and context to meet politicians more easily. The public could now recognize the Aalborg Artist's Association – there was an identity, a logo, an officialization that was lacking before this gift. Because of the usage of the logo and identity, along with our labor into the process, it facilitated a resonance that a "political brand" can accomplish.⁷

LH: Yes, it seems like it. All of our projects, starting with Supergood, were experimental – we didn't precisely know where they were going to lead us. It's a really fortunate example in this case – some are more successful than others, but they were always experimental. The concert with Juiceboxxx was an experimental set up, so was the format of a campaign as an artistic format, utilizing start-up culture, and developing a mobile phone App, which we're working on now. All of these set ups are prototypes, and sometimes in order to facilitate these experimental set-ups it's important to create certain infrastructures. In Aalborg, everything was already there, we only created a branding infrastructure that was then used, since "the logo" is an infrastructure to exist within a neoliberal society, something is only recognized when you brand it or put a logo on it.



Supergood orchestrated the closing event of the festival and invited New York rapper Juiceboxxx8 to perform. He played the same 15-minute musical performance multiple times throughout the night to an audience that was served with product 'tasters' by performers dressed in Supergood merch. Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen, Innsbruck, 2016. Photo credit: Supergood

SWR: This is apparent if we think of what you're working on now with Bernhard Garnicig and Andrea Steves in terms of the "artist as a consultant" to invent new infrastructures, rethink existing frameworks, processes, and protocols that are necessary to imagine new possibilities for artists, artistic practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration for artists, but also to add the layers of branding, marketing, and managerial approaches – all of this kind of comes together in the "artist as consultant" project.



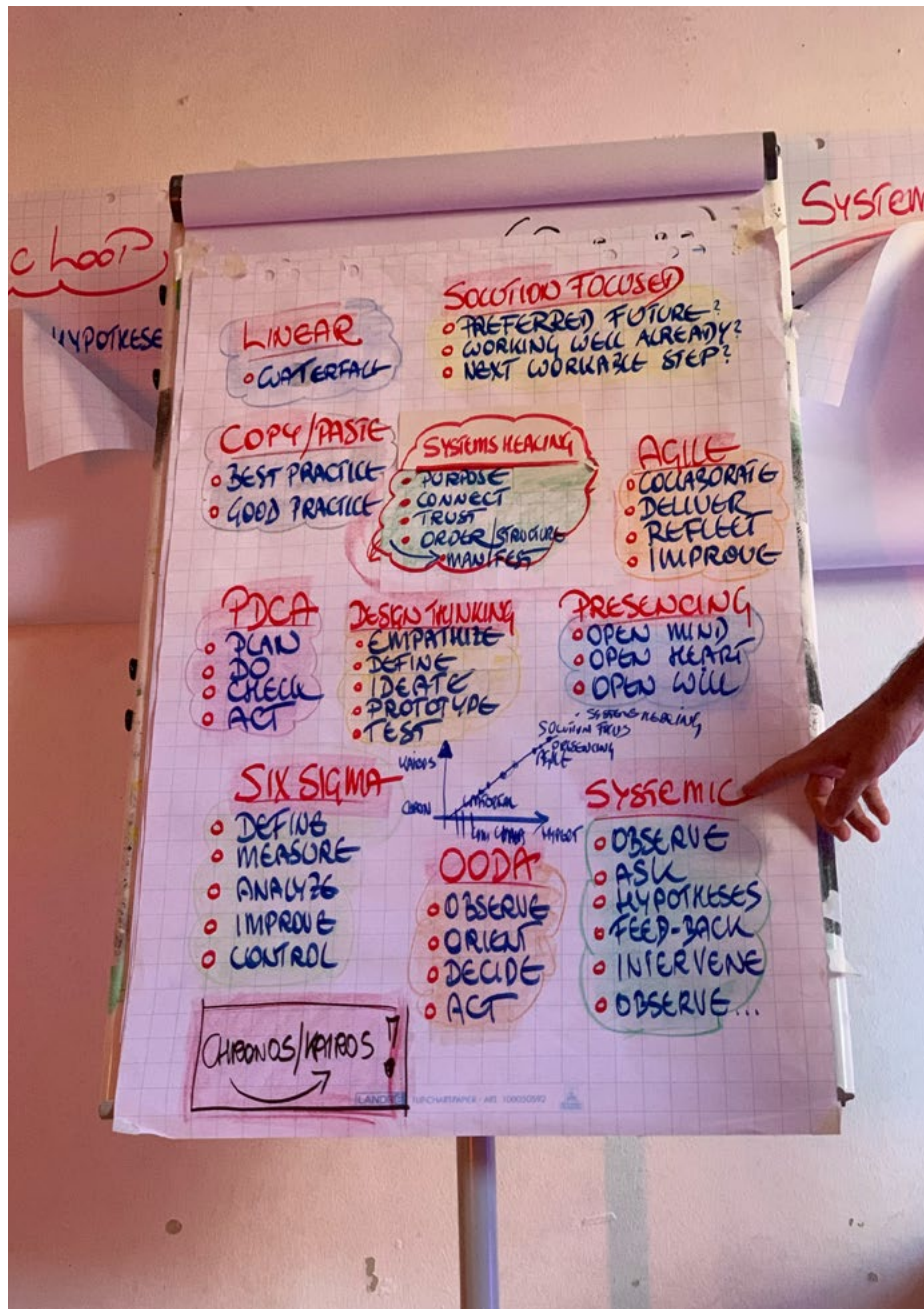
Consultant Georg Russegger in conversation with a live/digital audience initiating exercises on consultant and artist stereotypes as part of *Artists Have the Answers?* at Impact Academy - Villa Shapira, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Vienna, 2021. Photo credit: Artist Project Group

LH: The “artist as a consultant” is a bit of a catchy expression, but beyond this, we’re trying to create new frames and configurations for artistic interactions. Consultants are interesting and examining consulting work is fascinating because there are so many different strategies and methodologies for providing consulting work. Consultants have experience going into organizations previously unknown to them and providing a service, an expertise, or creating new perspectives for people within institutions. There are many similarities between consulting and artistic work, but they exist within very different economic and social spheres.

During a recent workshop we invited different consultants who were interested in sharing their work with artists. The idea was to examine their work, understand better how they’re operating, and identify the core of their practice as consultants. As part of that workshop, one of the consultants Robert Strohmaier showed us his work during the first covid lockdown where he mapped out different types of consulting techniques he has worked with or was aware of in order to make comparisons and study them side by side.

The consulting methods he mapped are taught in training programs for consultants, in business schools, and then are applied within different industries or governments. Some techniques start with defining, measuring, and analyzing a problem in order to understand an environment, a situation, control people, production mechanisms, etc. For example, the German auto industry famously uses the six sigma technique quite regularly. One of the consulting approaches that resonated with many in this workshop was the systemic approach that is very much based on observing and asking people in the company different questions. It would be difficult to create a methodology for artistic practice - you could eventually create certain categories for artistic approaches, but a

diagram as such for a certain artistic procedure doesn't exist. The reason is because artists have manifold ways of working, a multitude of skills, and combining them into individual approaches would make it difficult to come up with one consulting approach for artistic practice.



Vienna-based consultant Robert Strohmaier presenting different consulting techniques during his workshop in *Artists Have The Answers?* at Impact Academy - Villa Schapira, Akademie der Bildenden Künste Wien, Vienna, 2021. Photo credit: Artist Project Group


Similarly, art education is a very open discipline as we know within art schools students are able to build multitudes of expertise, perspectives, and skills, which range from practical skills like wood working to stone masonry to media skills – camera work, programming, video editing, etc. – but also critical skills – critical thinking and culturally critical skills. This allows artists the ability to work in many different fields. In practice, this is what artists are doing, since only very few artists make an income from their work through traditional gallery and academic markets, so most artists live precariously. One aspect of looking at artists as consultants is that we want to create new frames for artistic interactions, and looking at consultants provides us with exactly that, and additionally it could be an important input for developing new configurations. The second perspective is the necessity of thinking of new economic pathways – artists are actually very capable of surviving because they have such a multitude of skills, but are nonetheless often quite impoverished.

SWR: Not thriving, surviving.

LH: Surviving, yes. The question is how could new configurations allow artists to also create new incomes without necessarily compromising on their artistic integrity?

SWR: One of my initial reads on your “artist as consultant” project is that it gives artists not only a new opportunity to intervene within the infrastructure you’re proposing, but they can also enact a new socio-economic framework, because consultants – or the artist as consultant – is entering a different economic terrain or negotiation space within consultancy that is so much different than the gallery and academic art markets you previously described. The “artist as consultant” could act in a space of negotiation as a service provider, which transitions art from a “piece-work economy” to a “time-work model” potentially opening up new economic possibilities in relation to how artistic labor could be valued. The project is very symbolic, but simultaneously also very useful. The use value becomes sign value – one semiotic quality of the project is the creation of a new set of frameworks and references in which artists can produce novel collaborations within.

LH: We don’t know that precisely, but we are working with a group of artists who we invited to help develop a draft concept to provide an artistic “service” and develop a project as “a service provider.” As an initial input we created the workshop inviting consultants as “study objects” I mentioned earlier. Clearly, we can appropriate certain aspects of consulting work and reflect on certain aspects of consulting, but we shouldn’t forget consulting work is fundamental to contemporary decision making. There are literally no important decision making processes happening socially, politically, economically, without the involvement of consultants. Also, there’s a certain performativity to involving external advisors into decision making processes and we asked ourselves “what are the implications of this?”



**This is a work
in progress logo
for a speculative
consulting agency that
positions the **Artist as
Consultant** in an effort to
critically contribute to the
discussion of the
impact of artists
practices in the
public sphere**

For example when we go back to Aalborg, you can see how specific concepts on urban development have been rolled out by an urban development agency, or a location agency in a very generic approach - the idea in which urban development decisions are so obviously orientated toward a certain function – e.g. commerce, tourism, etc. are implemented, and that is the reality. Also, there is going to be a massive sculpture erected by a very famous artist...

SWR: Thomas Saraceno’s proposed “cloud city” is what you’re thinking of – a monumental thirty meter tall sculpture of brightly colored orbs at the new Kunsthal Spritten on the waterfront.

LH: There’s no artistic meaning whatsoever in this proposition, but it’s very important economically for this sculpture to exist. This is an economic concept, again, where culture is being used to improve the brand of Aalborg, and a massive sculpture helps create blockbuster architecture that is recognizable – it is talking about sign value – one key element of this concept. Another place we worked at where this concept was used was in Lisbon, where we did an exhibition for the newly opened museum for Art, Architecture, and Technology. This museum was formerly a technology museum, but was rebranded as an art institution, and they opened a new wing, a very beautiful building, but it is completely useless as an art exhibition space. It is an important landmark in the former harbor area of Lisbon and is being used to redevelop this place – it’s a clear gentrification engine. The art museum as such is only important for urban development, it’s not important for the local arts milieu, or for artists to show their work there. This is really a very generic concept that is used in many places, and it is being used in Lisbon and Aalborg – this is the sign value of architecture and art institutions.



Pedestrians walking along the river Tagus waterfront wearing Supergood merch at MAAT’s new Amanda Leveté building during the exhibition *Supergood - Dialogues with Ernesto de Sousa*, Lisbon, 2018. Photo credit: Supergood

SWR: It's also important to think about this on both macro and micro scales, in which marketing and branding influence our lives, and how they relate to artistic practice in a way. Something I find artists often overlook, is that by simply being an artist and going to get an art education, and maintaining a practice - even if they don't necessarily claim the space of "branding" or identify as such, they are inadvertently producing a brand and operating a "business" anyway.

LH: Can you actively influence this though? This is a question our work is seeking to answer.

SWR: That's what I find so crucial is that your practice directly takes on the idea of the artist as a brand, meanwhile creating different brands, and putting those forces into play to be publicly interrogated. As such, I'm wondering what you think is the potential limit for recuperating the tools of capitalism in different ways that don't necessarily produce profit, but could create different agencies, social processes, or political movements? Could this be seen in your re-purposing of brands or branding?

LH: We don't have any choice but to utilize them, do we?⁹ I would love not to use these tools, but these are the tools that are used in order to make things recognizable in a neoliberal society. We could very well choose to do things differently. We're in a very fortunate situation, we can be free to determine our lives to an extent, we could open a farm together in Denmark.

SWR: We could go "country" and become off-the-grid hobbyists.

LH: Exactly, we could start a farm and exchange our watermelons for tomatoes from the farmer next door, we can build our own furniture, and live in an alternative way that works for us. That is very possible, but I think working artistically also means to engage with contemporary culture and how it shapes our lives. Sometimes you have to open up a can of worms.

We are trying to enter the space where the basic conception of the art institution – what it does and what it provides - is rethought in how we can create other artistic interactions, practices, and configurations for artists to work in that do not exist within those previously mentioned generic master plans. The reason we created a brand for AAAA is that it was necessary for people to understand this concept so they could capitalize on the cultural institution as an important economic driver and what is necessary for the cultural institution to be an economic driver is the brand and the marketing of that very institution. There is a certain performativity and public interaction that is necessary, so we are utilizing these techniques. In the AAAA project – as in others – we provided a brand, for a certain performative action to become recognizable, and in this way allowed other people to capitalize on the project. There is no clear, clean, radical intervention – that simply doesn't exist.

SWR: I had mentioned this in the previous essay I had written about Supergood using a hybrid affirmative critique – in that Supergood uses an affirmative critique to tell us what we already know is problematic about capitalism through emulation and highlighting those tendencies, but it also allows for interventions within that structure to create new social and political possibilities – hence its hybridity.¹⁰ Further, I think some of the consultancy projects are moving more toward left-accelerationism, where the ideas of Mark Fisher, Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, Paul Mason with post-capitalist strategies¹¹ thinking about how we can repurpose the tools of capitalism, but toward new outcomes, becomes an interesting framework to contextualize your practice.

LH: I don't go along with certain aspects of accelerationist theory, because I don't think that this is how people operate in practice, as it is difficult to always be rational. It's a bit of a misconception that we can sit together with the best plan to do things, and just follow through. The best evidence of this is the pandemic that we are still living through. This is the flaw of accelerationism from the first moment it was becoming visible, which was also understood obviously from many critical thinkers. Mark Fisher in that sense I think is more important because he perfectly describes the systemic aspects of depression, and he also became a victim of precisely that. We should never forget we do not suffer individual incidents of depression, it's a systemic problem. It's a systemic aspect of the society we live in, as is xenophobia and racism. It is difficult to come up with great plans to change these issues, and simply follow through with them.

SWR: Also, there are a lot of projects and practices that use, appropriate, or think about business practices – e.g. management, finance, marketing, or consulting as an aesthetic practice – artists like Simon Denny who work with managerialism and organization – but more as subject matter in and of itself.¹² What I find compelling is the way you’re applying tools in relation to management, business, or marketing, which are “scientific” or “organized” toward infrastructure making, so artists can create bespoke collaborations with different institutions. Many art projects are working within and alongside different non-art institutions in fields like ecology, health, law, etc. but what I find important with your, or APG’s “artist as consultancy” project, is that it tries to unfurl ways in which artists can produce new collaborations with other institutions itself – essentially, creating new strategies, protocols, and methodologies for artists to produce new collaborations from a scientific perspective and put them into practice.

LH: Artists already collaborate with different companies and institutions all the time. There are examples where artists-in-residency at a municipality became part of the city council – these are the projects we’re very interested in. There are many artists currently trying to create a more involved approach for artistic practice – this is what we are working on at the moment. Similar to what you called hybrid affirmatively critical work – this applies to Supergood because we were creating a brand, selling a proxy product, and using that in order to have certain conversations. However, with the artist-as-consultant project it’s a more involved approach. The Artist’s Project Group managing the artist-as-consultant project is working on a new branding workshop that started from the workshop that you were involved in around consultancy. This more involved approach takes the experience and knowledge that artists bring to the table and poses the question – *how can this be used to provide a service?* Sometimes artists are already providing a service, but we’re trying to make this conversation more explicit and develop it further.

SWR: What is compelling is that these critical approaches have a style, a mood, or an energy in which the criticality of the project unfolds. I remember in the AAAA project, you had said that it was important to have a “hype man”, which was essential to get people excited about the project and its aims. I saw all of the dynamic elements of the AAAA performance – the infinite handshake, the rebranding of the boat into the SV policy transformation, and its communication as part of a particular mood to produce a critique.



Lukas Heisteringer greeting the public as the “SV Policy Transformation” anchors in front of the Utzon Architecture Center near the city center during the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* performance, Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk



Audience initiating an infinite handshake at the request of artists Lukas Heistering and Bernhard Garnicig at the conclusion of the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* performance, Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk

LH: We didn't go out of our way to create something new that was difficult for people to recognize, we used what was obvious and banal - the sailing "voyage". There were important details that were not banal, had history to them, a long development process, and were only possible through meticulous work done by the people who helped us to produce this project, in particular f.eks., the other people working with f.eks., and the community partners involved.



(Left image) Scott William Raby inviting the public aboard the "SV Policy Transformation". (Right image) Audience members enjoying the sailing trip with the AAAA logo featured on the sail above during the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* performance, Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Rikke Ehlers Nilsson



f.e.s. platform organizer Scott William Raby, Lukas Heisting, along with others pull the “SV Policy Transformation” sails into the wind on the Limfjord during the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* performance. Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk

LH: Everything I do artistically is based on political thinking, as there is hardly a decision I make as an artist that I don't conceive of as political. Generally speaking, I think everything is political, but the way that I am operating is that I'm consciously making political decisions, and this is what gives me orientation. When I don't know what to do, then I think about the political implications, but I don't separate them from artistic conceptions. Every artistic conception for me has a political connotation, and I use those to orientate different projects. In relation to how this unfolds in a project – fashionability, to make things fashionable, or attractive is very important because we are dealing with a neoliberal society. You need to make things attractive in order to be visible.

Supergood was a brand that positioned itself as an entrepreneurial hipster project and for many it was conceived as such, and this is exactly what we wanted it to be understood as. This allowed us to create a narrative that positioned us outside of the gallery art market. Everyone understands this story, but what happened in the background were a lot of discursive events where we often had this hybrid affirmatively critical spin and this was particular to Supergood. When you look at *AAAA* there was a brand created, the performance, the sailing trip, and the performative intervention – by the way something consultants do all the time. That is basically the last aspect of the systemic loop according to Robert's description of systemic consulting - you intervene.



Presentation from the cabin of the “SV Policy Transformation” during the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement performance*. Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Niels Fabæk



Artists in conversation as part of the *Aalborg Anti-Artwashing Agreement* project, Aalborg, 2019. Photo credit: Lukas Heistingner

LH: However, what we did most of the time was sit in the garden of a supporter of f.eks. and BBQ with local artists while having conversations. In this respect there's always "a front" – we are using positioning, and we are not afraid to use corporate methods to produce that front.

SWR: If we focus on what you're working on now with the Artist's Project Group and the artist consultancy, it brings collaboration and scalability together in different ways – both the idea of reinventing how artists can collaborate with other actors, institutions, etc. in society, but also to imagine it at a scale that is quite beyond what most artists are doing. As such, the idea of scale and collaboration seem to be key ingredients and important in the upcoming work.

LH: What we would like to do is develop projects with other artists that can be considered services, develop tools and methods needed to get artists involved in more decision-making processes, and create collaborative conversations in a viable way, meaning artists can actually live off the labor they put into their work and the experience they put into creating those services – these are the primary aims of the artist as consultant project. The work we are doing now is working toward producing these outcomes – then we can imagine how this can be scaled. If we successfully develop tools and methods for other artists to use as models, then I think the scale is infinite.

The truth is only very few artists who have an artistic education do become professional artists and live off of their artistic work.¹³ The question is – can we change that? Obviously artists are highly capable, trained, have practical as well as critical skills, and this gives them a very good position in the labor market. Can we bring more people into widening the understanding of artistic practice and the impact it can have? Furthermore, how can this feed into art education? This reimagining of the model of what it means to work artistically changes when artists become more integrated into other fields, thereby potentially creating more successful configurations for artists as well.

Notes

¹ The Artist Project Group (APG) takes its namesake with inspiration from Artist's Placement Group (APG) established by Barbara Stevini in 1965 in the UK as a broader artistic project that aimed to create collaborations with companies, university departments, and municipalities to insert artists into these institutions as “any other engaged specialist”. See <http://flattimeho.org.uk/apg/>

² In an essay about ‘Post-art’ artist and theorist Armin Medosch contextualized this development by looking at relations to Pop-art, Viennese Actionism, the Situationist International, and appropriation art. Mythos Kunst (Teil 6): Post-Art oder in der Endlosschleife des Zeitgenössischen, Armin Medosch, Versorgerin #111, September 2016, <http://versorgerin.stwst.at/artikel/sep-2-2016-1331/mythos-kunst-teil-6-post-art-oder-der-endlosschleife-des-zeitgen%C3%B6ssischen>

³ See *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff, Profile Books, 2019.

⁴ As highlighted by the New York Times as the 8th most interesting destination on their annual *52 Places Traveler*. Sebastian Modak, *Skål! A Danish City Makes You Feel Like a Member of the Club*, New York Times, May 28, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/travel/places-to-go-aalborg-denmark.html>

⁵ Joe Day, *Hubris Space: Personal Museums and the Architectures of Self-Deification*. *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, eds. Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk. (New York: The New Press, 2007) p. 239.

⁶ Arguments on the differences between the culture industry and artistic practice span from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* written in 1947 to Pascal Gielen's recent research on *Reframing European Cultural Production: From Creative Industries to Cultural Commons*. See http://beta.reshape.network/uploads/article/document/111/Pascal_Gielen_-_Reframing_European_Cultural_Production_From_Creative_Industries_Towards_Cultural_Commons.pdf

⁷ See the Aalborg Artist's Association's Homepage for more details about their work. <https://aaaa.network/ABOUT>

⁸ Journalist Leon Neyfakh portrayed Juiceboxxx in his celebrated semi-autobiography about the “dissonance between loving art and being an artist” (Chuck Klosterman). *The Next Next Level*, Leon Neyfakh, Melville House, 2015.

⁹ Further elaborations on this question in Michel Feher's 2009 essay ‘Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital’, *Public Culture*, *Public Culture* (2009) 21 (1): 21–41.

¹⁰ Scott William Raby, *“Mmmm, Supergood... Branding Business, and Political Strategy as Artistic Practice”* (Vienna: Supergood, 2018), 1-2.

¹¹ See the “Accelerationist Manifesto”. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, *#ACCELERATE Manifesto, for an Accelerationist Politics*, *Critical Legal Thinking*, May, 2013. <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>

¹² This can be seen in projects such as *New Management* at Portikus, Frankfurt in 2014 or *Products for Organizing* at Serpentine Gallery, London in 2016 in which Denny makes elaborate spectacular installations about institutions such as GCHQ or Samsung.

¹³ Ben Davis, *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013) p 85.