

MAPPING OUR DENIALS
views on the political d.i.y.



—Introduction—

The Ypoga K94 team is located at Kallidromiou 94 st. in Exarchia, Athens, and operates on a collective basis. The central assembly makes any decisions relevant to the management of the space and discusses with any group or individuals when they need to organize something collectively, in a horizontal, fair and unmediated way. Any fascist, racist, sexist or similar ideas and behaviours, do not belong in any of our team's processes or events, nor do they belong in the d.i.y. scene in general. There is no entry fee to our events, and we operate on voluntary contribution basis rather than any specific price transaction, (when it comes to our part), to cover any expenses. We promote self-organized expression and practises through the organization of musical events, film screenings, lessons, workshops, distro, bookstro, bars etc. All the above take place in an effort to empower and support the political d.i.y., aiming at spreading these values as well as strengthening and increasing the activities and places this encloses, always standing against the mainstream culture norms.

This text aims to present our group's positions, which are the final distillate of our relative internal, theoretical fermentation. It also serves as a general redefinition, which we considered necessary due to various changes in the composition of the group but mainly due to the large volume of our empirical observations on the current state of d. i. y. Scene. This does not mean that we erase achievements that we have made in so many years of operation. We use them as a basis to structure our discourse and positions in order to clearly reflect the perspective we now have. Our intense involvement in the self-organized scenes that take place in Athens and our contact with many people and other groups, played a catalytic role in the formulation of these positions. We don't talk as d. i. y. pundits, but as active subjects, aiming for the constant development and expansion of the self-organized scene and the constant sharpening of criticism of the aspects of sovereignty related to our activity. Still, it is not a holistic "manifesto of ideas", but a condensation of our basic positions as a collective. Whenever we deem it necessary, we will come back either to update our word, or to delve deeper into individual issues that we deem important. Finally, this text also functions as a code of communication with the groups, bands, collectives and individualities that we approach or that want to approach us, without of course replacing the living process of assembly and co-formation with them.

State Bodies

The arts are another field where state bodies (ministry of culture, municipalities, etc.) choose, either practically or theoretically, to enforce their sovereignty, with the aim of either transforming them into a cultural product, or by reproducing the dominant narrative. Most of the times, by holding anniversary fiestas of their core agenda and sometimes by giving public space to individuals who organize events, where they reproduce commercial relations, regardless of whether sometimes they mask them with an alternative profile, presenting them with “unconventional” vocabulary or including different cultures.

Institutions

At the same time, the various cultural institutions intertwine with the state using art as a vehicle for assimilation. These institutions, in close relation with the private capital, methodically promote the agenda of the respective groups to which they belong. They are clearly linked to the state bodies, establishing stable and mutually beneficial economic and political relations with them. Through the constant reading of the social status of each period, they incorporate every alternative form of expression, shrinking it into yet another aesthetic proposition for consumption. Apart from the management and the use of the cultural product as they see fit, the above mechanisms aim at the assimilation of any seemingly threatening or foreign culture. In this way, they distort its contents and incorporate only its wrapping into the dominant narrative, in the context of normality (e.g. organizing graffiti festivals under the supervision of the municipality, in a controlled public or private space). At the same time, instrumental use of art is also made in political festivals of any coloring, which, by reproducing the vertical/hierarchical ideology, promote their agenda, with the main objective which is, apart from the fun and ideological indoctrination of their voters, the proselytizing of new people in their ranks.

Public Space

The place of performance of all the above spectacles is primarily the public space. This is by definition not free, it is designed and constructed by the state and is given on its own terms and under its own supervision. It is therefore yet another field of territorialisation and consolidation of sovereignty, where expression is permitted under certain conditions, in harmony with legality. When these are challenged, it becomes a place of confrontation and takes on the characteristics of those who claim it. Consequently, by getting the respective collective / initiative permission from the state bodies to hold events, even if the purpose and content of the event aspire to stand aggressively against the dominant culture, in essence validates their ownership monopoly in the public space. We, as a collective, oppose to the above the self-organization and the horizontal structures of co-formation, which respect and highlight the expression with its contents, contribute to the building of an informal network of unmediated relations and do not aim at the acquisition of political surplus value. We choose not to converse with any body, private or state, nor to ask their permission for our events, temporarily freeing spaces from sovereignty, giving them our own characteristics.

—The Music Industry—

Venues & Music Scenes

For us, all kinds of venues are also targeted, which expand the exploitation of art in the commercial field, as a business activity. Operating on the basis of the law of commerce, they price the expression by putting an entrance fee, intertwine with sponsors and recruit henchmen to protect their business, with the aim of maximum profit. The natural consequence is that they choose well-known bands, thus perpetuating competitiveness and cultivating exclusionary logics based on popularity criteria, ultimately consolidating the hierarchy of the billboard.

On top of that, alternative venues, following a different strategy based on appropriation, adopt d.i.y. practices, that range from free entry and political buzzwords, to the free financial contribution box, always through the distorting lens of merchandise and spectacle.

In the context that all of the above work, there are specific roles. The boss, employees, artists and spectators interact and develop interpersonal contacts

and relationships, which are largely defined by trade and spectacle. Therefore, the scenes that may be formed are not communities of equal people who create and have fun, but markets for economic exploitation.

For the above reasons, we do not collaborate with those who consciously choose these venues as places for the presentation of their expression. We also do not co-shape with those who, despite their presence on the d.i.y. stage, use it opportunistically or as a stepping stone to fulfill their ambitions. However, we take into account that there are people from areas in the province in which there are no d.i.y. structures or frequent friction with the wider idea of self-organization. In this case we create a communication channel about our possible partnership. Moreover, we believe that foreign bands are impossible to examine according to domestic data, as the foreign d.i.y. scene has been structured in a different way from ours. They bear other characteristics, corresponding to the societies that contain them and certainly have not (or have lost) the d.i.y. ethics as we understand them here. So our criterion for our collaboration with them, is that they agree with the political minimums that we mentioned at the beginning of the text, as well as the events in which they participate in.

Record & Distribution Companies

Using same practices as venues, record and distribution companies operate in a commercial way - with advertisements, "exclusive content" and media campaigns, with the aim of maximum profit. This also applies to underground labels, even when they disguise marketing purposes with political content.

We also recognize the key role that the various commercial labels / distros undertake in the feedback of the process, through which music is transformed into a cultural product, industrialized, standardized and integrated into the rules of supply and demand. The questioning of the dominant practice of capitalism, presupposes an attitude that does not place you alongside the cultural industry, as underground/independent companies do, but against it.

According to this perspective, we created the Ypoga distro for the distribution of releases, by people we have collaborated in the past or would like to collaborate in the future, which are close to the ideas of self-organization and anti-commodity that we put forward. The proceeds of the distro are used to (co)finance new releases of the d. i. y. scene and the enrichment of its releases. It is a component of our action to support individuals and bands that

move towards the above direction, in an effort to eliminate the commodity logics from our space.

—Purpose of Support—

Our team's long-standing understanding is that self-organized events, in addition to their value as the present realization of our precepts, must also have a purpose of support. In addition to the practical necessity of the team's survival (operating expenses, band transportation expenses etc.), a culture of solidarity and mutual support is cultivated through these purposes, among those who participate in such events. In addition, it is possible to support other similar teams and initiatives. So, understandably, the need arises to clarify what purposes we support as a group and why. Our team consists of people with relative but different starting viewpoints, who collaborate on a political agreement that concerns exclusively the political d.i.y. Thus, we now choose objectives related to this theme and concern the support and development of anti-commercial and self-organized expression, that is, the d.i.y. scene and its structures, projects and people.

In our own analysis, supporting any purpose whose political content is not in our assembly's collective "expertise", would be superficial, unbalanced and imposed by the perverse logic of 'everyone does so' or worse, in fear of 'whoever is not with us, is against us'. We perceive all political imperatives, even those that are considered fundamental, as positions that require serious collective analysis and fermentation in order to be truly embedded in a general political perspective.

We choose to focus on those of the political d. i. y., which we have analyzed and continue to analyze both methodically and in depth, which are our *raison d'être* as a collective.

Within this framework of operation, we connect and ultimately cooperate only with groups or even individuals with who we find common ground in the aforementioned and not with those that act exclusively against other aspects of domination.

—Free Contribution—

In the context of the continuous development and sharpening of our word and deed, we have decided to operate the bar with free contribution, thus

strengthening the importance of the contribution's box financial support. Expelling as much of the commodity relations as possible from our space and activities is one of the most enduring and difficult bets for the d.i.y. scene. The practice of free contribution tests both the endurance of the groups that adopt it, as well as the power of conscious support of the scene, which due to the nature of this practice, now plays a decisive role in the very existence of d.i.y. structures and events. We hope that this effort of ours will find the necessary response and that it will help to rekindle the dialogue around this issue.

—Other music genres and types of creation—

Another aspect we are focused on, is the enlargement of d. i. y. culture but also the consolidation of self-organization in other activities, where possible. It is generally accepted how “traditionally” d. i. y. events involve very specific kinds of expression. Possibly, this is the result of both aesthetics and other rigidities of the past and the fact that d. i. y. ethics are not applicable in most forms of expression. Our own experience has shown that there is an increasing number of cases where the above case is invalid and therefore the conditions to collaborate with people are met, that the type of music they play or the form of creation through which they are expressed, is not what we are used to in our spaces. So, we propose cultivating a culture that allows d. i. y. spaces to be receptive to such people and collectives, provided of course that they and they have a clear d. i. y. orientation and agree with the general political rationale of the space they wish to host

—Other Activities—

Apart from music gigs, we believe that it is equally important to develop the background of our other activities in theory. Again through our own experience, we have come to the conclusion that lessons, screenings, cafes/bars, etc., are not enough just to take place in d. i. y. spaces to be part of our team's values. Without the necessary political culmination and without

a well-thought-out purpose, they are not exempt from the mentality and characteristics that we are fighting against and are just free versions of institutions and shops, where one normally finds them as commodities. A self-organized lesson, which does not aim at the search for knowledge beyond the dictates and needs of institutions, can become a free-of-cost tutorial for ob-

taining their qualifications. A self-organized screening, which is not a horizontal, collective effort to get to know, enjoy and criticize cinema, remains a spectacle with no entrance fee. A self-organized café/bar, which does not create the conditions for a space-time of entertainment, communication and fermentation of people, beyond the limitations and regularity of any shop, can end up as a thrashy, “lets-get-wasted”, uncritical, “for fun” consumption of a bottom-of-the-barrel, cultural product.

—Regarding the d.i.y scene of today—

Our group’s many years of presence and participation in self-organised events has given us the opportunity to engage, meet and discuss with a large number of people who in their own way are or have been involved in the wider d.i.y. scene. This dialectic process has helped us (quite a bit), both practically and theoretically, to the point where we now consider it vital that there be a continuous and public exchange of views between the individuals and collectives who organize such events and produce corresponding discourse.

In line with this reasoning, we would like, through this text to present some of our concerns, which relate to the interior of the scene, not in the style of an infallible judge, but in an attempt to revive the dialogue we mentioned above. Our aim is to contribute both to making the gains of self-organization even sharper and to constantly finding new fields of refusal to the dictates of the entertainment industry. A key reason why we stand so firmly on the importance of self-critique of the scene is that we do not consider d.i.y. a flawless solution with a ready-made agenda, but a theoretical and practical field of constant growth that is influenced by many factors and shaped by how, where and by whom it is realized. More specifically, we want to refer to problems that we identify in issues that have traditionally been of concern to political d.i.y. and in what we believe to be the distortion of parts or whole propositions of the d.i.y.

We often notice that d.i.y. is sometimes used simply as a label. Individuals and collectives who carry libertarian notions use in their events, practices that are not in line with the precepts of self-organization. In analysing this phenomenon, we have come to the conclusion that this is due to what we consider to be a distorted ‘prioritisation’. What is often argued in such cases is that the need for monetary/political support of an individual or collective outweighs the d.i.y. precepts.

Leaving aside the fact that this view is partly rooted in the steady de-

valuation of political d.i.y. and treating it simply as a libertarian mode of entertainment and relegating it to a fund-raising tool, the above logic creates a confusion as a basic argument. This practice is not necessitated by a conjunctural need to focus attention on a particular aspect of the overall critique of sovereignty. This would also be reasonable and acceptable to us on occasion. Instead, we believe that what we are describing is the logic of “the end justifies the means”.

It is not a prioritization choice that anyone is forced to make by circumstance, but a settled logic whereby the end goal justifies instrumental treatment of means and the incorporation of logics that for us have nothing to do not only with political d.i.y., but with a libertarian way of thinking in general. This, in the case of d.i.y., is reinforced by the disparagement mentioned above. To put it bluntly, it's easy to set aside premises that you consider secondary from the start and just use their name because “that's the way it's done”. Furthermore, the logic of “imposed necessity” is also refuted by reality itself, as many times d.i.y. collectives have successfully set up gigs for similar purposes without having discounts on their values.

For us, as long as the political contents of d.i.y., which theoretically shield it and practically arm it against the logic of the dominant culture, are absent, it becomes vulnerable and eroded by it. This results in phenomena where participants are used as a ‘name’ by an organisation, which exploits their resonance, as the logic of the ‘headliner’ dictates. This situation creates a music scene which is divided between those who ‘bring the money’ and everyone else. Horizontal relations are transformed from a project to an assumption and anti-commercial logic goes out the window (or in the trash). In conclusion, then, for us it is not a question of “priorities” but a question of pairing the words with the deeds.

A share of the responsibility also lies with those bands who settle for this role of the “headliner”, thus perpetuating their presence in the scene. Ultimately, by acquiescing in this mentality, they are willingly or unwittingly reproducing phenomena of toxic ‘idolisation’. Also, parts of the world that move around the periphery of the self-organized scene wholly adopt the dictates of consumerism and incorporate them into spaces of anti-commercialism. They embrace the passive role of the customer and are indifferent to the characteristics of the organisation, treating the various self-organised events as another night out bar hopping, expecting only cheap alcohol and relaxed entertainment. In the end, a vicious cycle of the organiser, the bands

and the people is created where the appeal of a band is similar, if not identical, to its commercial success and becomes a way of financial gain for the organiser, whenever money is money. The public, (from their perspective,) already systemically nurtured in the role of a consumer, often behave the same way in self-organised events. Thus, instead of challenging the ideological and practical hegemony of the entertainment industry over the creative process, these events perpetuate and normalize it within d.i.y. circles. In these cases, labels and roles within the political movement, aggressive political slogans and a general 'underground' aesthetic are simply an alternative wrapping for an otherwise normal commercial activity centred on profit, where the precepts of self-organisation are reduced to ideological "toppings". In this way, the perception is fostered that solidarity is synonymous with economic transaction and that support for a cause is measured by the amount of alcohol consumed and ultimately redeemed by the corresponding amount of revenue. That is why the donation boxes are empty and the bar tills are full.

—D.i.y. and Collectivisation—

Another issue, which has occupied a very large part of our discussions, is how we build and establish relationships. From the 'easy' case of relations with music bands both with us and with the wider scene, to the more complex case of general political relations, on which basis they are built, the way that they are reproduced, which purposes they support, etc.

From a combination of our personal and collective experiences, we realize that there is often a convenient but completely arbitrary notion that all people with avowed libertarian views are necessarily politically related, which underestimates and bypasses as self-evident all those processes which are pre-requisites for establishing relations of political affinity, let alone conditions of partnership.

In our opinion, political relations are created within collective processes and require time to develop and take root. They cannot be substituted or replaced by networks of interpersonal relations, regardless of whether the same individuals also associate outside of assemblies. Recognizing that a significant part of d.i.y. events are the result of such social contacts, we believe that it would be good to give more emphasis to the creation of collective political processes with the aim not only of better organizing the settings but also of the necessary analysis of the concepts and propositions realized in them.

—Epilogue—

In conclusion, we believe that despite the chronic problems of the scene, there are individual and collective efforts that promote not only theoretically but also practically the contents of self-organization and perceive political d.i.y. as a political project and not as a hobby that fills their free time. Nevertheless, since the number of relevant groups today is tragically small in proportion to the size of the scene, we consider it very important to create and support new collectives, teams that deal with political d.i.y. The direct involvement of more and more people in active processes multiplies and enriches our practical possibilities, with more creativity and imagination, and potentially expands the fields of our theoretical analysis.

**SELF-ORGANIZING TEAMS AGAINST THE
DOMINATION OF THE COMMODITY**

DIY FRACTURES TO ALTERNATIVE NORMALITY

—Ypoga K94, September of 2021—

Printed in june 2023 in 50 copies
by the anarchist printing structure Pyco Nero.





Ypoga K94 - September of 2021
<https://ypogak94.noblogs.org>