

ading could discern in the shift
endency to prioritize the “real” over
strumental impact over symbolic
cible, the traumatic, the chaotic)

Between

Not Everything

Institutions of negation, however, need the affirmative
moment that is infrastructure both the technological
and the social infrastructures, situated as they are
within a global crisis of infrastructures for life, which
are ecological and political.

Broadside, Ivory Tars

21.09–26.10.25

and

Not Nothing

Critique is just a cutting tool, not the price of admission.
A device for making little breathing holes in the
suffocating fabric of reality.
—Marina Vishmidt

This exhibition responds to the work of the theorist Marina Vishmidt (1976–2024) on the subject of infrastructural critique. It does not attempt a direct explication of her far-ranging thoughts on the subject, and is in no way able to address the subject on the scale that this would require. Rather, it is intended as a proposition, and a way of presenting several operative contradictions around which these theories revolve. Central to Vishmidt's thinking was the need to remain with such contradictions, and to resist simplistic solutions to them. Accordingly, there can be no formal style or procedural approach that can be applied to these theories, as they are inimical to any overarching form of visual representation. Infrastructural critique is instead a call to reject such 'false totalisations' as 'rejection' or 'complicity', in favour of what was referred to as 'a self-relating negativity'. The task then is to identify vessels capable of articulating aspects of their own fraught autonomy, or subversive enmeshment, so as to create immanent responses to the material conditions we currently inhabit.

In the most basic terms, infrastructure can be understood both as a concrete setting and abstract schema. It surrounds us both visibly and invisibly, the prosaic hardware of late stage capitalism. A category so expansive as to encompass everything in our material environment, or so ubiquitous as to be 'too obvious to be estranged'.¹ Equally, however, the concept of infrastructure contains tremendous ideological potency, as a way of envisaging the integration of disparate systems. Such a vision is crucial to the idea of a globalised economy, the apparent totality of which requires a logistical armature across which to operate. As such, infrastructure is more than which already exists. It is a self-fulfilling programme that is continually reproducing the conditions upon which further infrastructure will be created, *ad infinitum*. It is, according to Vishmidt, 'that which repeats', a temporal phenomenon that is not reducible to a mere inventory of physical things that at any point come to represent it.²

Beyond this, and as a way of speaking more directly to how artistic practices relate to Vishmidt's formulation, infrastructure is a way of understanding how various forms of 'institution' might be interconnected, or seen beyond. In the visual arts, a historical succession of 'generations', 'phases' or 'waves' of institutional critique sought to analyse the gallery and latterly the museum as a site of cultural production, so as to expose the underlying mechanics of those spaces.³ Responding to an 'institutional theory of art', the artwork was presented as a single element in a wider ecosystem, one that relied on the labour of a supporting cast of personnel ranging from curators and technicians, to critics, dealers and collectors, in order to take on the auratic properties that it is assumed to contain.⁴ Looking to the stage upon which this artwork is presented was deemed a method of apprehending the

performative codes of authorial production, so as to better understand the social hierarchies and forms of tacit consensus upon which it relies.

A turning point in these discussions however was the realisation that it was not actually possible to establish a position exterior to the institution under scrutiny.⁵ All critique is, in this sense, capable of being absorbed and instrumentalised. Much like a vaccine, institutions can willingly invite lower doses of critical interrogation to inoculate themselves against a more severe affliction at a later stage.⁶ Similarly, self-organised activity carried out under the banner of ‘instituting’ cannot achieve a satisfactory degree of autonomy, as the alternative it offers continues to operate in oppositional dialogue to that which already exists.⁷ Artistic projects that style themselves as ambivalent to both state-subsidy and commercial enterprise — such the ones issuing this text — are no less subject to this foundational paradox; continually at risk of ‘amplifying’ the very conditions they set out to ‘undermine’.⁸

Infrastructural critique was envisaged as a way of responding to this impasse, by ‘highlighting the structural conditions for the possibility of critique and its objects alike’.⁹ Its genealogical roots are heterogeneous, melding the DIY ethos of zine culture with the detailed value-form analysis of the Frankfurt School, borne out of a commitment to political organising and direct action while remaining committed to art’s potential as a site of ‘speculative praxis’ (although as a site still subject to the divisive conditions of labour at play in society more broadly).¹⁰ At the same time, the ‘drift’ Vishmidt identified from institutional to infrastructural critique — a phrasing chosen to deliberately frustrate the reductive causality of a temporal ‘shift’ from the institutional to infrastructural — also requires the identification of alternative artistic legacies from which to draw upon.¹¹

This provides us with an opportunity to revisit examples regarded as extraneous to the doctrinaire, enclosed histories of institutional critique currently available, and to consider how their militancy, humour or archaic complexity could extend our understanding of contemporary art’s political valence. In the wealth of writing she produced, Vishmidt’s own points of reference were eclectic and resist aesthetic categorisation. As her collaborator Kerstin Stakemeier noted, this ‘pinball materialism’ relied on not ‘dropping’ objects of study, but rather allowing them to accumulate and collide in ever more expansive ways.¹² This observation begs a further question, one actively addressed here, of whether the select group of examples Vishmidt herself used should be strictly adhered to. Or whether this selection might be supplemented, and in turn the principles that would govern such a process of addition.

The operational reality of our institutions of art do not stand apart

from those of schools, hospitals or prisons; instead they share and frequently compete for the same state-allocated resources. In many instances these spaces of cultural activity entrench asymmetrical property relations through the gentrification they contribute to. The precarity long familiar to creative practitioners now serves as a template for a gig economy in which increasing amounts of lower income workers find themselves confined. Any claim of contemporary art's detachment from the world around it elides these self-evident facts. And the expansion from institutional to infrastructural critique proposed by Vishmidt is a means of reflecting upon that daunting actuality. The infrastructural reality we inhabit is capable of extracting value from cultural workers, just as it does the privatizing dynamics of neoliberal governance, the carceral complex, and the criminal actions of genocidal regimes. The same logic would suggest that any gesture towards self-determination made in the artistic sphere harbours a potential to forge connections with other, more overtly abolitionist frameworks by traversing, albeit against the current, that same labyrinthine circuitry.

This point can be developed to encompass a broader understanding of how the spaces of art themselves function on an infrastructural level. These are sites through which capital flows, affording a juncture when it might be momentarily arrested, so as to be placed under scrutiny. Or possibly even 'siphoned off' from its intended trajectory.¹³ Likewise, the appearance of artistic gestures in the public sphere can serve to expose both the commonalities and distinctive material differences between artistic labour and its waged counterpart. It is only at moments like these, when the functionality of infrastructure is temporarily compromised or 'cut', that its contours become visible, and apertures are created that permit 'air' to enter. It would be overly optimistic to think that a strategy as straight-forward as transposition — for example, parachuting artistic gestures into locations not designated as sites of cultural activity, or using the gallery as a Trojan Horse through which social justice might be enacted — is a durable solution.¹⁴ Cuts made in infrastructure will anneal soon enough. Nonetheless, in certain circumstances these actions can constitute 'contingent ruptures', points where the numerous, complex interactions between these supposedly separate domains become apparent, and can be subject to deformations Vishmidt would refer to in spatial terms as 'torsion'.¹⁵

Infrastructure is something that is both self-generated and imposed upon us. Vishmidt's meditations on social reproduction — unpaid domestic work carried out in order that a capitalist economy can continue to function — informed her subsequent thoughts on the infrastructural, as she regarded this too as a reproductive form.¹⁶ Infrastructure begets more infrastructure, a cycle that seeks at every opportunity to replicate itself. Just as

a mother's devotion is offered without expectation of a financial return, there is an extent to which we all contribute to a reinforcement of the current order through our very attempts to mediate our place within it. Sociality then, is double-edged: at once emancipatory and disciplinary. Every collective gathering carries with it that dual potential. Crucially in this respect, for Vishmidt our ability to support one another and adopt critical stances are not oppositional categories, but rather are capable of being combined in productive ways. It is possible to conjoin care and critique, so long as we 'approach care rather as a species of infrastructure, as a condition of possibility that persists, that can be appropriated, manipulated and destroyed for specific political and classed, gendered and racialised ends.'¹⁷

Vishmidt's critical framework asks a great deal of art, a faith that may well not be rewarded. Repurposing or constructing alternatives to infrastructures that expend huge amounts of energy ensuring that nothing changes is no easy task. If, as she suggests, much of our understanding of aesthetic freedom is just alienation cloaked in another 'guise' — valorised through the entrepreneurial, self-exploiting spirit of creatives — the only way forward is to face this head on.¹⁸ So as to, in her words, 'locate a core of negativity and refusal in the generally ameliorative and frictionless roles art is called upon to play.'¹⁹ Responses proposed under the aegis of infrastructural critique then take these isolating conditions as a given, but can do so in the knowledge that they are a set of shared coordinates. The collation of differing positions that this exhibition undertakes is intended as a reflection of that principle: that it is possible to fashion 'a material practice of antagonism whose subject, if it has one, is dispersive, uncategorisable and collective.'²⁰

¹ Marina Vishmidt, 'A Short Introduction to Reproductive Realism', *Materials* special issue launch, 'Economic Ophelia', 6th February (2015), n.pag. <https://library.memoryoftheworld.org/#/book/fa0cd3d2-744b-4047-95ca-d193b8694dc1>

² Marina Vishmidt, 'Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Towards Infrastructural Critique', in Maria Hlavajova and Simon Shiekh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017), p.265.

³ For a description of the periodisation of institutional critique see Gerald Raunig, 'Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming', in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds.), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: Mayfly, 2009), pp.3–11; Karen Archey, *After Institutions* (London: Floating Opera Press, 2022).

⁴ For a selection of theoretical models of this kind see Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Howard Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

⁵ Vishmidt would on several occasions credit the artist Andrea Fraser with this paradigmatic shift in thinking. See Andrea Fraser, 'From a Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, September (2005), pp.100–106. It should however be noted that a related set of conclusions had been arrived at around the same time by several of Fraser's contemporaries, but framed around the role 'publicity' played in such conversations. See Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003); Frazer Ward, 'The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity', *October*, Volume 73, Summer (1995), pp.71–89.

⁶ A paraphrasing of an observation offered by the artist Ghislaine Leung, as part of a presentation delivered at The Glasgow School of Art, 18th March 2022. A similar point had been offered two years earlier by Vishmidt, in relation to institutional 'hygiene' and the management of contagion during the COVID 19 pandemic. See Andreas Petrossians and Marina Vishmidt, 'Spaces of Infrastructure: Movement Politics in the Infrastructure', *Historical Materialism*, November (2020). <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/spaces-of-speculation-movement-politics-in-the-infrastructure/>

⁷ For a description of instituting see Simon Shiekh, 'The Magmas: On Institutions and Instituting', in Paul O'Neill, Simon Shiekh, Lucy Steeds (eds.), *How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press), pp.126–133.

⁸ Marina Vishmidt, 'Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural', in Tom Holert, Maria Hlavajova (eds.), *Marion Von Osten: Once We Were Artists* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017), p.219

⁹ Vishmidt, 'Between Not Everything and Not Nothing', p.267.

¹⁰ Marina Vishmidt, *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital* (London: Haymarket Books, 2019) pp.113–114. Vishmidt's work on speculation and its relation to art would play an important part in her subsequent thinking on the infrastructural, as it posits an instrumental role for artistic production in wider financial systems. See also Marina Vishmidt (ed.), *Speculation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2023).

¹¹ Vishmidt, 'Beneath the Atelier', p.222

¹² Kerstin Stakemeier, 'Marina's Cues', *e-Flux Notes*, May 31st (2024). <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/611821/marina-s-cues>

¹³ 'Beneath the Atelier', p.228

¹⁴ For an expanded problematisation of the 'border' between inside and outside, one formed in direct dialogue with the concept of infrastructural critique, see Andreas Petrossians, 'Inside and Out: The Edges to Critique', *e-Flux Journal* Issue 110, May (2020). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/110/335739/inside-and-out-the-edges-to-critique>

¹⁵ Marina Vishmidt, 'Only as Self-Relating Negativity: Infrastructure and Critique', *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts*, Vol.13, No.3 (2021), p.15.

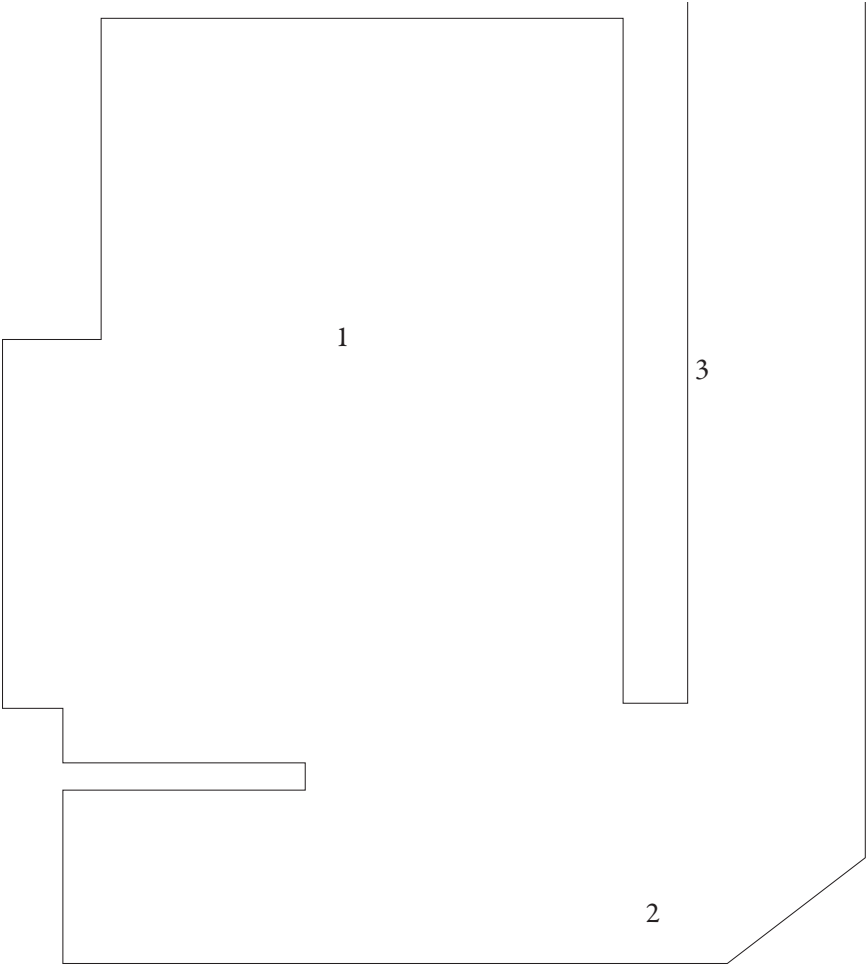
¹⁶ For a discussion of social reproduction and its bearing on contemporary art see Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art* (London: Mute, 2016); Marina Vishmidt, 'The Two Reproductions in (Feminist) Art and Theory Since the 1970s', *Third Text* Vol.31, No.1 (2017), pp.49–66. For a more general discussion of social reproduction see Zoe Sutherland and Marina Vishmidt, 'Social Reproduction: New Questions for the Gender, Substance and Affect of Value', in Jennfier Cooke (ed.), *The New Feminist Literary Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) pp.143–154.

¹⁷ Vishmidt, 'Only as Self-Relating Negativity', p.18.

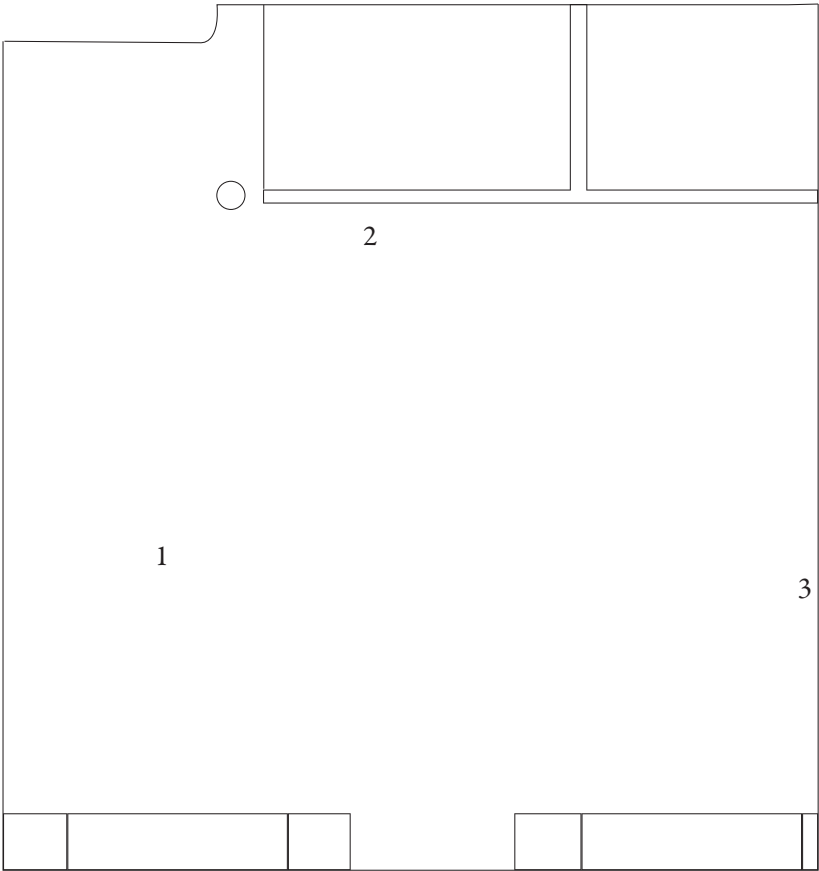
¹⁸ Marina Vishmidt, 'Relatable Alienation', in Eleanor Weber and Camilla Wills (eds.), *What the Fire Sees* (Brussels: Divided Publishing, 2020), p.84.

¹⁹ *Speculation as a Mode of Production*, p.37.

²⁰ Vishmidt, 'Only as Self-Relating Negativity', p.22. For a thorough account of how this point relates to Vishmidt's work more generally see Zoe Sutherland, 'Against Running in Place: The Speculative Thought of Marina Vishmidt', *Radical Philosophy*, Vol.2, No.18, Spring (2025), pp.44–52.



- 1 Paul Sullivan *Noodle Bar* 2008–ongoing
Mixed Media Installation
- 2 Poster Film Collective *Whose World is the
World?* 1979
3 Colour Screen Printed Posters and related ephemera
- 3 Channels *This is a Window* 2015
Video



- 1 Barbara Bloom *A Birthday Party for Everything* 1999
Unlimited Edition. Mixed Media
- 2 Park McArthur *Day* 2023
Video
- 3 Dora Budor *Inner Vampire* 2025
Cardboard box, Fresnel lens, portable monitor, electronics

Between

A preliminary reading
a pervasive tendency
the delimited, insular
action, (the irreducible)

It is infrastructure's transitive character between the material and the possible, between machines and working drawings, between cognitive maps and what is pictured on them that enables it to ask political questions that can no longer be replied to in the abstract, with the false totalizations of rejection or complicity

25.01.05-09.10.25

Broadside, Ivory Tars

Hypostasized in various perspectives around the "commons" and "social reproduction," which sideline the "cut" of political subjectivation from their account of social change, relying exclusively on an idealist organizational framework of "need"; elided in liberal political theory, which, in turn, does not see the economic and the social as appropriate terrain for political prescription.

Not
Nothing