

shifting. However, the identity of a person who has been psychiatrically diagnosed remains absorbed by their pathology; they are nothing more than what they have been named by the clinic. They become defined by an 'absolute illness' (3). Nikosia is a space in which the participants can escape the semantics of diagnosis, in which new meanings and identities are generated. It is a territory of fracture that constitutes a habitable limit or, in the terms of Eugenio Trias (4), a threshold that exists on the margin of the official grammars of mental health. This happens precisely because the project is structured like an assembly, in which collective construction and participation is horizontal. It is an appropriated space. 'It is not possible for someone to liberate another person and yet no one liberates themselves alone', says Paulo Freire.(5)

It is common to speak of Nikosia as a 'radical' experience, which is another way of trying to de-legitimise those collectives who question things and don't fit into the mold. There is not one unifying theory about madness, there is not only one discourse possible. There are people who identify with anti-psychiatry, others who try to re-conceptualise the tradition, others who love their psychiatrists and enjoy attending mental health institutions. Perhaps it is a radical space if radicality itself materializes as a drastic opening towards the diverse.

Nikosia was initiated using the basic structure of La Colifata in Argentina: a radio station broadcast from a psychiatric hospital that has been running since 1991. La Colifata radio station was created to build an alternative space inside the mental health services, however on occasions they ended up reproducing the old logic of control, the punitive welfare system and excessive assistance. Nikosia, as an autonomous space that acts further away from clinical practices and spaces, breaks into the communal; it occurs in synch with the madness and chaos of the public plaza— its tone is human, lucid, flexible, creative and social. It reminds us that all of us carry madness inside of us covertly or not. 'Let your madness out', says a sign in the corner of the room.

In the assembly there is talking, arguing and debate. Dolores explains that the radio station is an encounter with an alternative identity, 'a means of taking off the rules of my illness and believing in my possibilities again'. She is the president of the association. Fran says that there should be a coat stand in the doorway, one that says 'hang your diagnosis here'. The assembly goes into debate for a while: other topics are closed, others remain invariably open. Another day there will be another assembly that will be as chaotic, harmonious, peaceful and anxious as the one today. Diverse, like the keys on the piano in the hall.

Notes

(1) Eduardo Galeano, *El Libro de los Abrazos*, Siglo XXI. 1993

(2) Amin Maalouf, *Identidades Asesinas*, Alianza editorial. 2005

(3) Martín Correa-Urquiza, *La rebelión de los saberes profanos. Otras prácticas otros territorios para la locura*, Phd Thesis, URV. 2010.

(4) Eugenio Trias, *La Razón Fronteriza*, Destino S.A. 1999.

(5) Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del Oprimido*, Buenos Aires: SigloXXI. 1970.

Critical Pedagogies Seeking Self-determination in Today's Beirut

Ashkal Alwan: Home Workspace Program, Beirut

Liane Al Ghusain

Ashkal Alwan originated as a group of friends that performed and exhibited in the early 1990s in Beirut. Their artistic interventions helped to mark a new post civil war era— a cultural moment that was wholly theirs as a generation. Practitioners like Rabih Mroue, Lina Saneh, Walid Raad, Jalal Toufic, Akram Zaatari, Marwan Rechmaoui, Ghassan Salhab, Mohammad Soueid, Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, Walid Sadik and Ziad Abi Lama had all lived through fifteen years of war, spending their childhoods and adolescences as witnesses to sectarian strife. Lebanon was an amalgamation of resolved and unresolved conflicts, contradictions and misrepresentations, abandoned ruins and new skyscrapers. By the early nineties they began intervening in the debates about Lebanon, the Arab region and the artistic moment. From within the group that began performing and exhibiting in Sanayah Gardens, the Beirut Corniche and the Hamra district, Christine Tohme stepped forward as a curator and producer to give them a platform for expression. It was from this context that the Lebanese Association for the Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan, was established in 1994.

In 2011 the Ashkal Alwan space added to its many functions the Home Workspace Program: a 2000m² multipurpose facility in Beirut dedicated to contemporary artistic practices, research, production and education. The space provides an array of services and educational platforms, production and editing studios, performance spaces, auditoriums and Lebanon's first multimedia library for contemporary arts. The program began with a syllabus focused around an exploration of the thematic of post-colonial history and identity with visiting professors Alfredo Jaar, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Hassan Khan and Hito Steyerl giving theoretical and practical framing for the pedagogical exercise. Funded by the Ford Foundation and Phillipe Jabre Foundation, as well as a handful of individual donors, Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace Program made it a point to open up their school programs to the general public and their call for students has become increasingly inclusive. The first two years, led by Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir and German theatre producer Matthias Lilienthal, each accepted fourteen students who were chosen through a selective application process that only accepted university graduates on the grounds that the course is composed of postgraduate work for artists, writers, curators and academics. The upcoming third year (which has been postponed for two months due to Barack Obama's threat of 'intervening' in Syria), led by Jalal Toufic and Anton Vidokle in tandem with eflux journal, will allow any and all students who register to attend the courses. The downside to this inclusive new approach is that the students participating will not receive a living stipend or accommodation in Beirut, which they received for the first two years. Almost 200 people have registered to attend Home Workspace Program courses in the next eight months.

The second year of the program running between 2012 and 2013, which I attended with a diverse group of thirteen fellow students, was organised around the theme