



Eastside Projects, Birmingham, 2025

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SPACEX Townhall Meeting Empathetic Exchange - How to take action?

24.10.25, 17:00-20:00
AIL/ Postsparkasse Wien

[Spatial practices in art
and architecture for
empathetic exchange]



SPACEX [spatial practices in art and architecture for empathetic exchange]

The research project SPACEX responds to the troubling rise of populist nationalism and conflict in European societies by engaging new publics and forging a culture that embraces diversity, difference, and discursive exchange within cities, towns and urban sites.

SPACEX proposes that inventing new and inclusive ways of living together, requires the implementation of new transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral practices and methods, that connect spatial practice with cultural sociology, cultural policy, critical pedagogies and behavioural economics.

The SPACEX Townhall Meeting in Vienna is a major public event at the final stage of SPACEX and focusses on Empathetic Exchange as vital topic of SPACEX: To discuss and make the goals of SPACEX tangible, for counteracting right wing demagogies in Europe and enhancing democratic values through artistic and socially engaged strategies and projects of art and architecture. Especially in the perspective of our turmoiled political situation in Europe, this event — and the engagement of SPACEX altogether — is more relevant than ever.

Empathetic Exchange will produce performative situations for engaging and addressing the public as active participants.

In addition projects developed by SPACEX partners will be presented in various media. The event will create an overlay of actions based on an experimental choreography, enhancing unexpected encounters and direct experience. The originally preserved counters of the Otto Wagner Postsparkasse in the former cashier hall will serve as spaces for creating a dialogue on 'empathetic exchange' across the counters. Whereas the counters of the bank served for economic exchange, the SPACEX Townhall Meeting will use the counters for encouraging and envisioning an exchange of non-commercial values.

Rather than promoting protest in a direct way, Empathetic Exchange will produce small moments, modest gestures, ambivalence, silence, moments of reflection for offering an exchange, also on a personal level, for creating an awareness of taking care - of one's own interests in relation to respecting the others.

Programme

17:00-17:15: Welcome:

Barbara Putz-Plecko (former professor Art and Communicative Practice, University of Applied Arts, Vienna)
Annette Krauss (professor, Art and Communicative Practice, University of Applied Arts Vienna)

+++ performative moments start

17:15-17:30: Introduction

Barbara Holub (artist, transparadiso, lecturer and principal investigator of SPACEX, University of Applied Arts Vienna)

18:00-19:00: Panel discussion with:

Mel Jordan (professor, Coventry University, initiator and lead of SPACEX)
Julienne Lorz (professor, Expanded Museum Studies, University of Applied Arts Vienna)
Cornelia Offergeld (artistic director, Public Art Vienna)
Barbara Putz-Plecko (former professor, Art and Communicative Practice, University of Applied Arts, Vienna)
Paul Rajakovics (architect and urbanist, transparadiso, partner of SPACEX, Vienna)

Moderated by:

Kathrin Wildner (urban ethnologist, metroZones, Berlin)

18:45-20:00: Performative moments continue

Drinks and snacks.

The event is convened by Barbara Holub and Paul Rajakovics and will be presented at the SPACEX conference at the Coventry Biennial on Nov. 13-14, 2025.

Performative Moments

Referring to John Cage's „untitled performance“ overlapping time slots of different durations will be attributed to the interventions/ performances. In this way the notion of „empathetic exchange“ will be offered as direct experience by raising the question, how visitors and performers will react in relation to the moments of other performances.

At which moment will we withdraw in order to make space for the other or how important is it to insist in a certain moment?

Experiment Agora – Space for Empathetic Deliberation

Jitka Hlavačková

curator, GHMP/ Prague City Gallery

The Agora project is based on the idea that democracy is not just a set of institutions and electoral procedures, but above all a living process of communication and encounter. As Zygmunt Bauman writes:

„The path to true democracy leads through a populous and lively agora, where people meet daily to translate between the language of private interests and the public good.“

Jürgen Habermas also builds on this tradition, for whom democracy is a process of public deliberation—an open dialogue in which every voice can be heard and legitimate decisions arise from a reasoned exchange of views.

Jacques Rancière, however, points out that every such „agora“ also carries with it inequalities of power and visibility. According to him, politics only arises when those who have been excluded from public negotiation enter the scene and demand that their voices be heard. Democracy, he argues, is an act of dissent, not mere consensus.

The historical agora was a place where the free men of the ancient city made decisions. So today's question is: Whose voices should be heard today—and whose are still missing?



Dance the Right Down

- Slogan Scarves for Empathetic Exchange, and performance with tap dance

Partisan Social Club

Mel Jordan, artist, professor, Coventry University; Andrew Hewitt, artist, professor, University of Northampton

Dance the Right Down is a participatory work developed within the spacex commitment to empathetic exchange (spacex-rise.org) – the principle that understanding, transformation, and collectivity arise through situated encounters. The work positions dance as an act of agency: a bodily response beyond the limits of language. It proposes dance as both resistance and affirmation – choosing love over hate, and creating a shared space where participants can lose themselves together in the moment. Collective movement becomes a form of embodied solidarity: a counter to divisive ideologies, and a practice of empathy and togetherness. Specially produced textile scarves will function as prompt, invitation, disruption, and dialogue. Their slogans act as triggers for debate and as means of co-publishing ideas on contemporary society and culture.

The work extends Partisan Social Club's ongoing research into the social function of art: Its role in shaping opinion and enacting publics. At AIL, the artists will perform and display the scarves, accompanied by a newly choreographed tap dance by dance researcher Karen Wood.

Silver Doubt

Susanne Prinz

curator, director, Kunstverein Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin

Silver Doubt conceptually ties in with Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds* (1966), whose floating objects oscillate between artwork, spatial installation and social event. The silver balloons pose questions to art students – some personal, others general – that are difficult to reach: through a leap, through patience, or only when the helium escapes and the balloons gradually sink. This process refers to the connection between knowledge, patience and physical experience.

In the context of *SPACEX*, *Silver Doubt* sees itself as an experimental spatial practice that stimulates empathy and reflection in the communal space of an art college. The backs of the labels offer space for answers or counter-questions, a gestural exchange that links thinking, space and movement and invites reflection and exchange.

Unlearning Exercises: 2.1 Off-Balancing Chairs

Aline Hernandez/ Marianna Takou and Annette Krauss

Aline Hernandez/ Marianna Takou: artistic directors, Casco Art Institute, Utrecht; Annette Krauss: artist, professor, University of Applied Arts Vienna)

This intervention revisits and reactivates *Off-Balancing Chairs*, one of the exercises featured in *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organisations as Sites for Unlearning* (Casco Art Institute, 2018, 2025). Conceived as an experiment in questioning spatial and bodily arrangements—including the implications that a culture of non-physicality bears on daily routines of working, behaving, and thinking—the exercise invites the act of tilting chairs on two legs and supporting one another in the gesture. Through this shared moment of imbalance, *Off-Balancing Chairs* opens up reflections on mutual trust and body language, while testing other ways of being in conversation with one another. In this re-enactment, the exercise returns as a setting for collective reflection around the question: What are you silent about?

Unlearning Exercises is a collaborative research project dedicated to unlearning specific organisational habits, behaviours, and ways of thinking. It is co-developed by the Casco team and artist Annette Krauss.

2.1 Off-Balancing Chairs

Unlearning Exercise

While having a meeting, we sit in our (office) chairs balancing on two legs by holding each other.

What to Unlearn

Non-physicality of meetings that tend to be focused on the verbal and in which we remain in the same standard posture; taking for granted the horizontality of roundtable discussions; and routines of “meeting culture.”

