

Ein Geschäftsbereich der
Kulturveranstaltungen des
Bundes in Berlin GmbH

Haus der Kulturen der Welt
John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10
10557 Berlin
Deutschland

T. +49 30 397 87 0
F. +49 30 394 86 79

info@hkw.de
www.hkw.de

**HAUS
DER
KULTUREN
DER
WELT**



Annika Kuhlmann
Projektbereich A - Literatur, Gesellschaft, Wissenschaft
Tel. +49 30 39787-224
Fax +49 30 3986-79
annika.kuhlmann@hkw.de
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Invitation to the 4th FORMER WEST Research Congress “Documents and Prospects” – “learning place”, at the House of World Cultures from 18 to 24 March 2013 in Berlin

We are very happy to invite you and your students to collaborate in the framework of the 4th FORMER WEST Research Congress: “Documents and Prospects” in a unique experimental education encounter — the “learning place”— taking place at the House of World Cultures in Berlin from 18 to 24 March 2013.

FORMER WEST curators Maria Hlavajova and Kathrin Rhomberg invited philosopher, cultural - theorist, and university docent Boris Buden to set up a learning place at the core of “Documents and Prospects”. For the span of one week through the involvement of high ranking contributors he will create an exceptional environment, a kind of camp, in which new knowledge will be comprised in a joint movement by destabilizing and taking into question pre-suppositions that were held granted for the last twenty years. The learning place will dissolve the common notion of an academic surrounding by merging workshops, lectures, film screenings, performance, seminars and symposiums in an ever changing dynamic process and an experimental dialogue between lecturers and students.

As a unique experimental arrangement the learning place draws all its critical potential from those actively involved. In this regard we are currently contacting European universities and academies whose programs innovatively engage with knowledge in areas that are of concern to the FORMER WEST project. Through these collaborations we strive to enable interested students from all across Europe to take part in “Documents and Prospects” and create the rich and dense atmosphere of mutual learning and experimental exchange for the learning place.

We would like to ask you to consider your collaboration in this project and would like to invite you to take part in the learning place. As we will assist you in planning the excursion to Berlin, we have already made all necessary arrangements to host you and your students during your stay. We are happy to have the opportunity to propose the following offer: Full participation in “Documents and Prospects” and the learning place including accommodation and subsistence for 8 days (March 17th – March 25th) at a rate of 100€ per student. In case you consider the option of applying for additional excursion funding at your university, we will provide you with any required documents.

Geschäftsführung:
Prof. Dr. Bernd M. Scherer
(Intendant)

Charlotte Sieben
(Kaufmännische Geschäftsführerin)
Prof. Dieter Kosslick
Dr. Thomas Oberender

Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:
Bernd Neumann

Amtsgericht Charlottenburg
Nr. 96 HRB 29357
UST ID DE 136 78 27 46

Finanzamt für Körperschaften I
Berlin 27/ 603/ 50673

Berliner Sparkasse
Konto 07 30 01 98 70
BLZ 100 500 00

On the following page you may find background information on FORMER WEST, the 4th FORMER WEST Research Congress. For further information please visit our extensive research archive at www.formerwest.org with collected documentation material on all previous events.

We really hope that we can turn this opportunity into an exciting and concrete instance of working together.

Sincerely yours,

Annika Kuhlmann
on behalf of Maria Hlavajova and Kathrin Rhomberg

The FORMER WEST learning place – ‘Imagined academics’

There is a meta-text of the contemporary knowledge and art production; a text on which most of those involved in both work continuously for a significant part of their life, expanding, complementing and improving. The thing is called “sivi” (CV) and denotes a self-presentation of one person’s own life digested into its commodity form.

A CV is made to compete on intellectual and aesthetic value and yet it expresses no more than the exchange value of a life it pretends to present. Even if it is not about life at all, it has a life of its own. Short and fragile when it is young, CV becomes corpulent and impressive when it comes into age. A true CV never dies. After the life, it was attached to, expires it becomes an archive, more or less interesting for other archives.

In the real life of the art system or the academy CV is a must, or nearly so. If you happen not to have it yet, you are nobody; if you no longer need one, you are either celebrity or you are already junked. In between stretches its reign. CV is the master text of knowledge and art production, it regulates its operation, standardizes its selection procedures, unifies its field, guards its boundaries, maintains its hierarchies and disciplines its workers.

A CV is always more than a personal canon of works and events, for it is already teleologically inscribed in these works and events. Many of texts and artworks that have never reached the audience still fulfil their mission in a CV-line. Every time you have submitted a term paper, published an essay, given a lecture or displayed an artwork at an exhibition you have also sexed up your CV. It is the work of works, the measure of measures of your career. But what really does it tell about your life and the life of the society you live in? What does it tell about the conditions of production of the contemporary knowledge and art?

The students participating in the “learning place” of the 4th FW congress will be invited to draft a CV of an imagined academic applying for a job at the “Academy of World Cultures”. To do so they will first take part in an educational program – a series of lectures, workshops, panel discussions covering the topics of: commodification of knowledge, functioning of the edu-industries within the logic of today’s cognitive capitalism, critique of creativity, hegemonic narratives in theory, exhibition making and art critique, inclusion and exclusion procedures that inform today the global art system, the notion of “life” as opposed to its abstract reduction in the commodified form of CV, cognitive values of a life that is obscured by CV, its political, historical, existential, sexual meanings, translational processes in the proliferation of knowledge, the problem of plagiarism, etc

Detailed Information on “FORMER WEST”

FORMER WEST has been initiated and developed by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht between 2008 and 2014 and is being realized in 2013 in a main partnership with the House of World Cultures in Berlin. FORMER WEST is a research, education, exhibition, and publication project geared towards creating a new understanding of the position of the so-called West within post-1989 global histories, and in so doing placing existent structures of domination under pressure. From within the field of art, FORMER WEST attempts to rethink the last 20-odd years and engage in speculating about and imagining other global futures.

The term FORMER WEST serves as an intellectual tool challenging omnipresent hegemonies. We assume that the "Former West" was created in 1989. The year brought not only the end of the communist rule in the "former East", but also massive upheavals of global reach. But though the world had entered a new era after 1989, the so-called "West" consistently kept ignoring the consequences of these massive changes. Meanwhile, there have appeared decisive ruptures that have altered the self-perception of the West dramatically. To name only a few, 9/11 in 2001 and the dramatic events of September 15 in 2008 (Lehman Brothers default) are evidence to rethink the position of the West. Recently, there are the Arab spring and similar political protest movements in Europe that generate significant shifts of meaning. These events suggest that the "Formerness" of the West can no longer be denied.

We argue that simultaneously to the "Former West" a particular system, the system of "Contemporary Art" came into being. Only after 1989, Contemporary art—with large C—did gain its full rights as a historical epoch and merged with the logic of the neoliberal system. With the growing number of international biennials, the explosive expansion of the curatorial field, the overproduction of art as a spectacle, Contemporary Art is revealed as a product and / or tool of "Western" propaganda and is associated with the hegemonic forms of neoliberal globalization.

The 4th FORMER WEST Research Congress: “Documents and Prospects” aims at symbolically “collapsing” the various forms we became accustomed to in the field of contemporary art—exhibitions, conferences, seminars, etc.—into one whole, seeking the possibilities of inspiration beyond formal boundaries. In a performative way, “Documents and Prospects” will look both, “back” and “forward”—into global histories from 1989 on and at the same time speculate about the possibilities ahead of us—in order to recompose our own recent past into a collective understanding of the prospects for art at a moment in history when hegemonies of the past are being dismantled. Some of the key “documents” of the last 20 years will be pointed out in the form of artworks, texts, lectures, exhibitions, and events by means of “rereading” even “reenacting” them, or offering “counter narratives” at times, seeking their meaning and inspiration for the current moment and beyond. While most of these activities will be public, the starting point for us is to engage a group of students in these negotiations.