

A Model of Possible Action

An Unfinished Protocol

Krüger & Pardeller

2011

Following the change of director at the MAK (Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art), Vienna, we are invited to develop a display for an exhibition on the future of the institution. Our attempt to include the participants in effective institutional decision-making processes by means of artistic procedures is successful on one hand, but also demonstrates the limits of artistic influence. It also shows us the limits of our professional expertise; after all, the supervision of organizational transformation processes also requires other skills from outside the art world.

We observe that large art institutions, parallel to their programmatic critique of neoliberal practices, themselves engage professional coaching firms in order to implement internal organizational development processes.

Institutional critique has become an adept chess move made by decision makers to prove their criticality to the art scene—just as the processes of organizational development now function as a tactical justification of the institution to policy makers. The reverse is also true: policy demands these processes in order to be able to justify itself. A mutual safeguard of this kind does not lead to assumption of responsibility, but rather to its being passed along to workshops that promise efficiency.

We wish to set an artistic format against the increasing use of these practices in arts and cultural institutions. We want to learn more about coaching strategies, and investigate the overlap between methods of institutional critique and the techniques of organizational development.

Early 2012

The Austrian Frederick Kiesler Foundation is on its last legs. Policies offer no assurance of funding the institution in the future. The director, Monika Pessler, adds a course on organizational development to her existing duties in order to strengthen her negotiating ability. As artists we feel obliged to speak up for the maintenance of the institution: what can our contribution be?

We arrive at the idea of submitting an artistic research project together with the Kiesler Foundation, which would partially co-finance the foundation. *A Model of Possible Action. An Experiment to Develop a New Methodology of Institutional Cooperation* is to consist of the following team: a coach for organizational development, the artists (our-

selves—Krüger & Pardeller), and the director of the Kiesler Foundation. The initiative to set this up is ours.

At first the ambivalent social utopias of Frederick Kiesler serve as a theoretical foil, but soon it becomes clear that we wish not only to work out this model theoretically, but also to find an opportunity for putting it into practice. Monika Pessler, however, is reluctant to turn the Kiesler Foundation into a case study or a place of experimentation.

Spring 2012

We actively seek an institution that is undergoing a process of transformation and is interested in doing so within an artistic framework, and with the involvement of a professional organizational developer.

The experiences of cooperation are to culminate in an exhibition. The modular setting used in the coaching workshops—which, tellingly, is reminiscent of institution-critical exhibition design—is to be repurposed as a display. Finally, a symposium and a publication shall support public discussion about *A Model of Possible Action*.

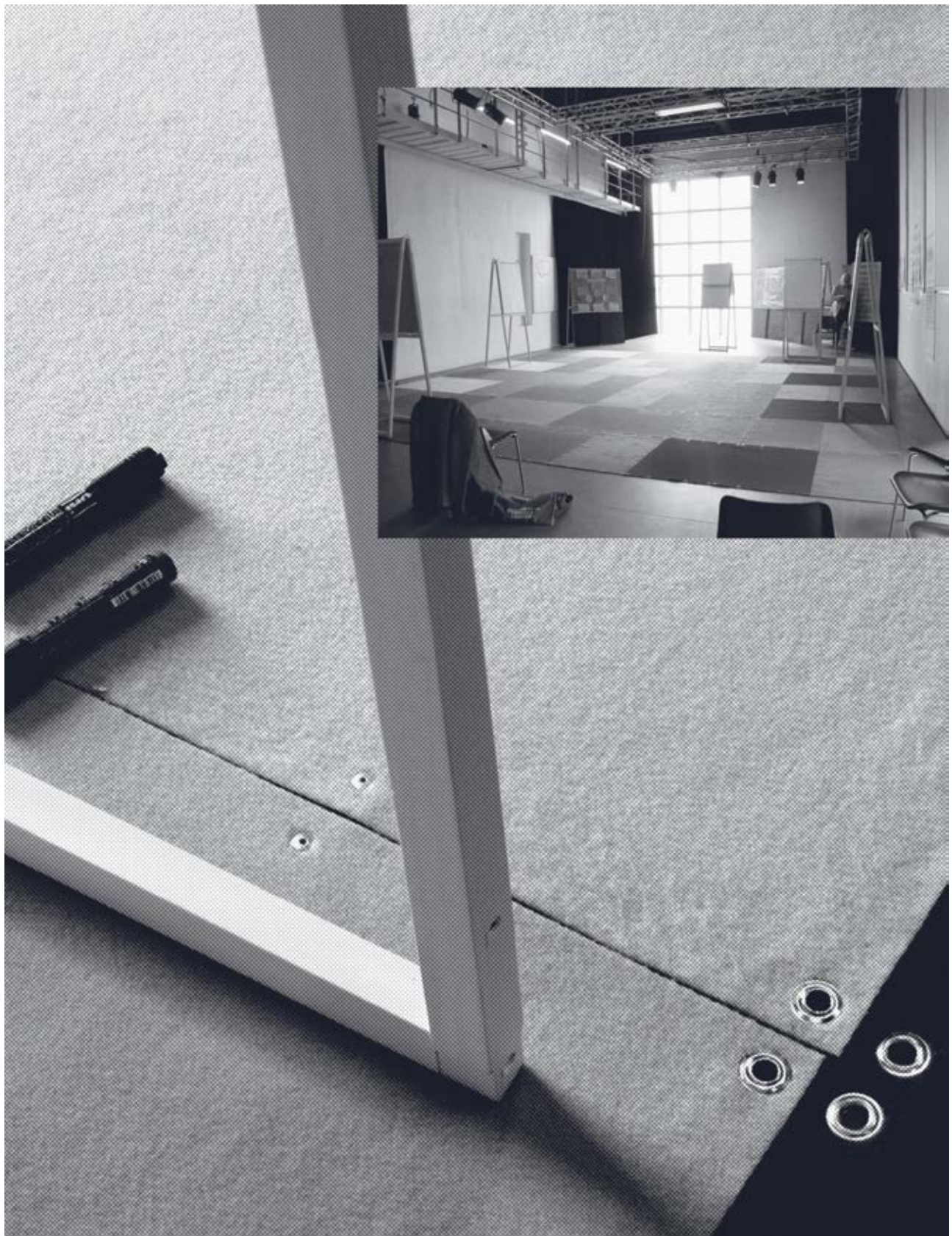
Independently of this, the institution is to benefit from the results of the coaching workshops. This particularly applies to smaller institutions, which cannot afford a transformation process with this kind of input under their current conditions.

August 2012

We get to know the Norwegian curator Geir Haraldseth, who was to become director of the Rogaland Kunstsenter (RKS) the following year. He is interested in our approach. Later in 2012 he invites us to begin the project shortly after taking up the position of director in Stavanger.

Geir Haraldseth describes the situation at the beginning of the project as follows: the Kunstsenter is an association formed by regional artists and designers who administer it themselves. Together with the board, he is responsible for the program. Problems can arise from the interaction of the two professional groups, as well as from the geographical location in the South of Norway. The town of Stavanger was limited to very few cultural institutions until the discovery of oil in the 1960s near the Norwegian coast substantially improved the region's economic situation. Currently, Stavanger is an important town for petrochemicals, but there is still little cultural engagement; a newly constructed opera house mainly serves passengers from the cruise ships that dock there.

The director wishes to transform the Kunstsenter into an internationally well-connected institution. He is interested in a theoretical, discursive program, but he lacks



Krüger & Pardeller, *A Model of Possible Action: An Experiment to Develop a New Methodology of Institutional Cooperation / Constellation Work*, 2013/2016. 8 Duplex-Prints. Image courtesy the artists.



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the money and the support of municipal and regional political bodies or economic leaders. He wishes to spend the first phase of his new position sounding out the needs of local artists and designers in order to engage in conversations with representatives of the town, the region, and the economy about the future of the institution.

Working with a professional organizational developer enables the director to address local policy makers and administrators, and invite them to joint meetings that take place within a format (coaching workshops) that seems familiar and trustworthy to them.

Krüger & Pardeller's artistic framing embeds the whole process in a self-reflective critical discourse. This fulfills the director's requirement for criticality and aesthetic transformation. He can only gain the participation of local artists and other art institutions on the basis of the artistic format.

December 2012

We meet Karl Prammer, a coach for organizational development and transformation processes. He teaches the educating/curating/managing course at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and brings a solid foundation of theoretical knowledge about organizational development to the table.

With him an experiment seems to be possible that plays out on two levels: one being the level of the concrete situation of the RKS, the other being the meta level, an alternative model for development in which the paradigmatic "opponents" join to make common cause.

The critical question being asked by all: who is working for whom?

January 2013

Together with the coach, we develop a model of cooperation and division of work. The first step is to learn the methodology of each discipline.

We organize an introductory talk on institutional critique in the studio. We wish to make our critical attitude clear to the coach from the very beginning.

For his part, he invites us to his company and gives us a presentation with hand-prepared flip charts showing the structural procedure of an organizational development process.

A development and transformation coach is primarily interested in the systemic structure of organizations. Whether he works for a concern, an NGO, or an art institution is not at first relevant for his work; neither is the nature of the products or contents produced there. The structural complexity to be integrated or represented can vary. Accordingly, different formats and grammars are available.

First an inquiry is made into “core targets” of the client, and the content carriers are determined.

A list of the relevant participants is drawn up, in combination with their hierarchical position. Decision-makers should be identified and grouped within the “decision-making body.” They should be integrated into the development process from the beginning as their power ensures a future realization.

The first task of the “decision-making body” is to determine the “cases for action” and to decide which other institutions should be involved in order to guarantee a successful transformation process.

This determines which people will be invited to the “project team.” The “project team” consists of representatives of all relevant groups, and works through the details of how the “core targets” are to be implemented. It identifies “hot potatoes” and “taboos” at an early stage that could hinder future realization.

A “project coordinator” is appointed who coordinates all activities, provides the necessary infrastructure, and keeps information flowing among all participants.

In the course of the first workshops two other “bodies” are formed: an “internal sounding board” and an “external sounding board.”

The “internal sounding board” consists of additional people from the institutions already cooperating on the project. Their job is to point out new approaches and other social aspects that the “project team” has overlooked, and to contribute by anchoring the process on a broader basis.

The “external sounding board” represents the idea and the involvement of the public: representatives of relevant public bodies are invited to a collective event so that their feedback can be obtained, or their cooperation gained.

This general design calls for five workshops over the course of a year. Each of these workshop modules has its own specific structure, which is dealt with in prepared “scenes.”

While the contents and results of the process are fully open-ended at first, the structure is, in contrast, concisely planned and determined in order to guarantee a successful transformation process for the client.

February 2013

We wish to learn more about the scenic organization and choreography of the individual workshop modules. It begins with a greeting to the seated participants, and continues in a closed circle of chairs. Subsequently, flip charts are set up and some initial keywords and formulaic sentences are written down.

The entire structural side of the organizational development process is laid out, anticipating at the same time the dynamic of the group process itself: the “phases of transition” from the “old reality” into the “new reality” have to be run through step-by-step: “denial,” “anger,” and “fear” are transformed through the process of “mourning” into positive feelings such as “curiosity” and finally “happiness.”

A systemic structural setup follows. In a “constellation work,” the participants are asked to position themselves in a coordinate system marked on the floor in accordance with the questions being asked. Emotional and content levels are combined with each other. Linguistic metaphors are employed. “The one” and “the other” are translated into spatial zones within the context of sociometric exercises. There is talk of “the sinking ship” and “the safe harbour.”

Using the coach’s descriptions, we develop a modular setting that enables real spatial settlements alongside the linguistic spatial metaphors. It involves a system of frameworks from which flipcharts, bulletin boards, “corner- and milestones” can be generated as well as “walls of separation,” “open gates,” or a “totem of taboos.” Modular fields on the floor made of two-sided carpet squares create a way to mark out emotional zones within the coordinate grid. On the flip chart paper, group memberships shaded with different colors are transferred directly into the space. Hanging walls create discrete spaces; symbolic arrangements are translated into tangible forms.

March 2013

We project the planned workshops in a space normally used for theatre and performance art. Here the coaching modules’ scenic choreography itself is to appear staged. Black curtains, theatre lighting, and a balcony that enables observation from above are meant to underline the relationship between organizational development and the practices of psychodrama.

May 2013

The existing team is joined by Elisabeth Fritz, a sociologist and art historian who is to alternate as supervisor with Monika Pessler.

June 2013 As “project coordinator,” the director of the RKS informs us of the following participants in the “decision-making body”:

- an artist from the RKS Art Association
- a designer from the RKS Art Association
- a representative of the state government, culture department
- a representative of the municipal government, culture department
- a local representative of the Chamber of Commerce

July 2013 Krüger & Pardeller produce the setting: 40 lacquered frame elements, 98 double-sided carpet elements with grommets, aluminum bars, hanging rails, MDF slabs, rope hoists, silkscreen posters, etc. We drill over 1000 holes and send seven transport crates to Norway.

September 2013 The pre-kickoff workshop takes place. The team, consisting of Krüger & Pardeller, Karl Prammer, and Monika Pessler, travels to Stavanger.

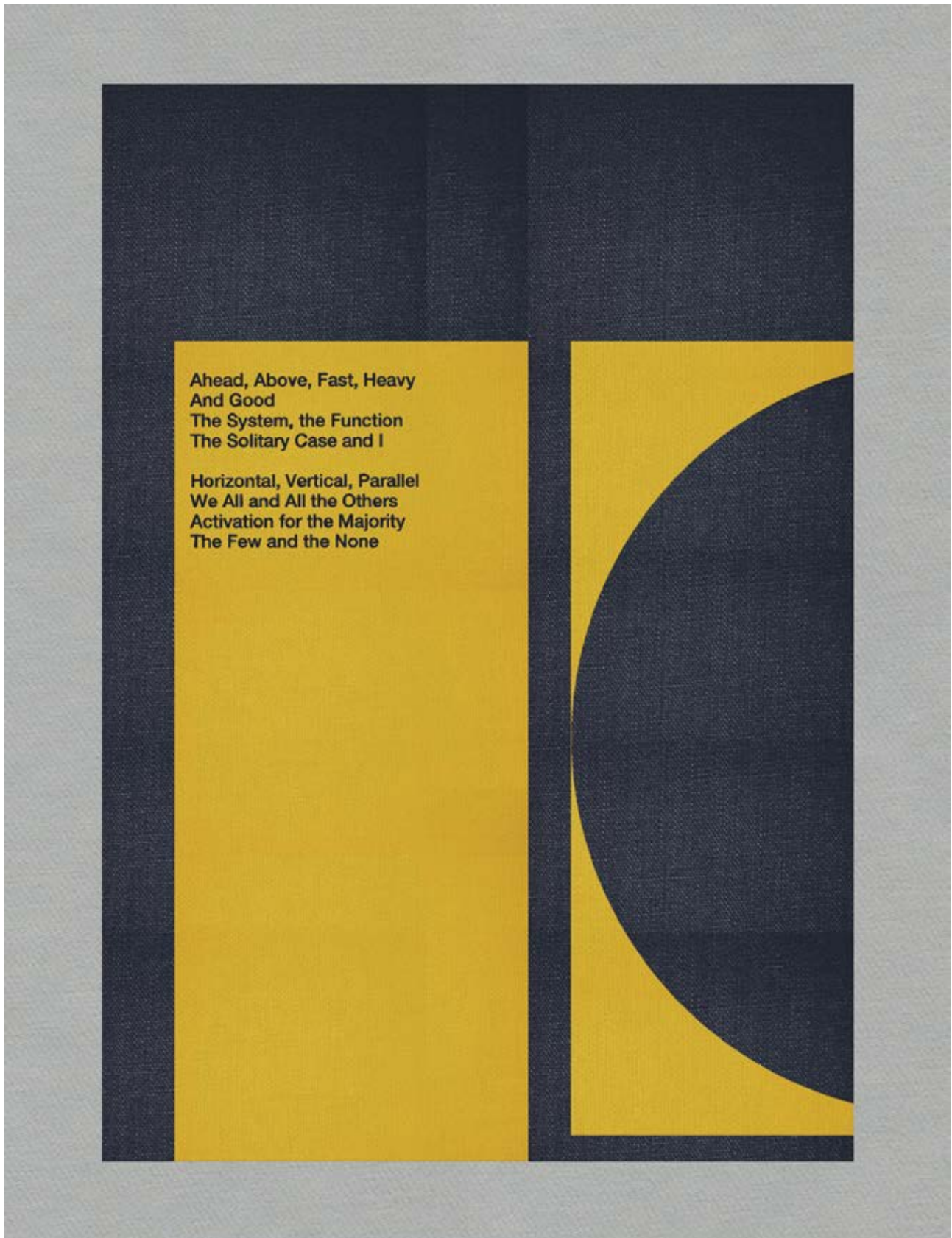
As an artist duo, we are on one hand participants in the workshop and so bring our viewpoint into the process. During interim phases we leave the stage and this role behind in order to document the proceedings, create new spatial settings, or carry on individual conversations with the participants. In doing so, we are careful to consider the group dynamics initiated by the coach.

The coach’s technical competence in organizational development is complemented and expanded by a corresponding artistic competence. This relates to the level of artistic objects in their aesthetic as well as their functional quality in the same way as the involvement and critical distance of the artist duo.

After the workshop, a collective feedback round takes place for the team. The observations and suggestions are meant to flow into the coming workshop module, especially in light of the fact that the city official has cancelled at the last minute.

We get the news that the municipal government employee now has other priorities due to a right-wing conservative alliance’s victory in the parliamentary elections held shortly before our workshop. Subsequently, the state government employee also gets an order to withdraw from the project.

We return to Vienna. The director of the Kunstsenter tries to restore contact with the local cultural policymakers. He does not succeed. He had not thought it necessary to get contractual agreement for their participation.



Krüger & Pardeller, *A Model of Possible Action: An Experiment to Develop a New Methodology of Institutional Cooperation / Rehearsal of Conditions*, 2013/2016. 8 Duplex-Prints. Image courtesy the artists.



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The foundation of our artistic project on organizational development, which had been seen by both the policymakers and the institution as an adequate means for guaranteeing regional cultural development from an economic, structural, and content standpoint, is shown to be too fragile. Under the changing political conditions, it is precisely the security and sustainability itself that no longer seem desirable.

October 2013 We discontinue the project.

December 2013 We receive compensation that covers the production costs.

2014 The art historian Sabeth Buchmann takes up the project and describes it in her text “Rehearsing the Rules,” in *Krüger & Pardeller, Aesthetic Basic Chronicle, Vol.1* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

“If rehearsal formats are understood, not least of all, as an expression of a willingness to fail as well, then *A Model of Possible Action* is also undoubtedly productive, because as an experimental arrangement it is conscious of its own (self-) entanglement. This ultimately shows that process and product are no longer opposites in light of modular methods and rules, but rather two mutually conditional sides of the same coin. Whether these kinds of further developments of institutional critique consequently hold an analytical and resistive potential in the sense of a practice that is not subsumed in contemporary logics of exploitation or does not act as a seamless supplier to entrepreneurial interests, can only be—as Krüger & Pardeller’s project shows—‘situation-specifically’ tested and decided.”

2015 Sabeth Buchmann, curator Ilse Lafer, and artist Constanze Ruhm invite us to transform the project for an exhibition around the theme of “rehearsal.”

August 2016 *Putting Rehearsals to the Test*, an exhibition with three chapters at three locations—Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, VOX, Centre de l’image contemporaine, and the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art—opens in Montréal.

Our work fluctuates between a documentary approach and the formal translation of our workshop experiences.

Eight double-sided posters show a continuous text, based on the language of organizational development used by the coach. It is underlaid with abstract symbols and colors that come from the coaching process. They denote role disposi-

tives and group memberships. On the other side the “scenes” of the workshop are documented. The “take away” posters end up lying on a pedestal, embedded between Harun Farocki’s film *Die Schulung/ The Training* (1987) and Rashid Masharawi’s *Waiting* (2002) in the SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art.

At the initiative of Ilse Lafer, a scenario from the workshop is integrated into the exhibition room of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery as a large-format wall piece and placed in relationship to a workshop situation conceived by Achim Lengerer for the exhibition.

Between the two locations our project can be seen as an unfinished “*Model for Possible Action*.”

- September 2016 The continuation of our project as “*Unfinished Protocol*” is based on discussions with Ilse Lafer.
- March 2017 The poster series “*Constellation Work*” and “*Rehearsal of Conditions*” travel from Montreal to Stavanger to return to RKS. They are shown in the exhibition *Collective Good/Collaborative Effort*.
- December 2017 RKS - Rogaland Kunstsenter publishes the book *Collective Good/Collaborative Effort*, with texts by Geir Haraldseth, Michael Birchall, Marc James Léger, Charlotte Bik Bandlien, Gregory Sholette, and Harry Weeks, featuring exhibitions like *HAIK* (designkollektive HAIK), *It Could Go Either Way* (Mariam Ghani/Erin Ellen Kelly), *Model of Possible Action* (Krüger & Pardeller), or *Jenny Say Qua* (Anna-Sophie Berger, Halvor Rønning, Martyn Reynolds, Christophe Hamaide, and Philip Kleinmichel).

KRÜGER & PARDELLER (AT/IT)

The Austrian/Italian artist-duo aligns itself with a socially activated, political understanding of aesthetics. Working predominantly with sculpture and installation, a concept of production emerges—in the words of Krüger & Pardeller, “concrete openness.” Crucially, this openness does not only stand for a transgression of the traditional concept of work, but also brings the concrete rules and conditions of a participative practice into play, a work form invested with continuation and completion. Krüger & Pardeller recently published *AESTHETIC BASIC CHRONICLE, VOL. 1* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).