The City as a University

Panta Rhei Collaborative

'The City as a University', credit: Panta Rhei Collaborative

The pandemic has further emphasized the ongoing crisis of the commons – a valuable right that has been under threat for some time from the forces of capitalist urbanization. With reduced access to institutions' facilities, even the wealthy have struggled to justify such an expensive road to becoming an architect. This has offered an opportunity to rethink the notion of the commons as a truly accessible pedagogical space. What could we learn if we look beyond the institutions, allowing the City to become our University?

In autumn 2021, PRC were given the chance to reflect on this question through a workshop in Berlin. With our participants, we immersed ourselves in the countless stories that each of our home cities produce at any given moment. Like strings running in parallel, we selected moments when they seemed most apparent, most poignant, most hidden, most important to spread beyond their immediate contexts. For some time, we were intensely interwoven with our urban environments, taking the many struggles and seeds of hope that were shared and discussed in the group back home.

Almost a year later, we witness the fact that what surrounds us physically becomes increasingly less apparent. Living is an active practice of learning and sharing, with the commons as a means of mediating how we want to live together – in cities beyond institutions.

Editors note: the video essay can be watched on www.carthamagazine.com/issue/6-1/

Panta Rhei Collaborative (PRC) is a spatial agency founded in 2020 and currently based between Berlin, London and Zurich. The group emerged from the common desire to investigate the role of spatial practitioners in their contemporary ecological and social responsibilities. In proposing work methodologies as a model of internal and external collaboration, PRC locates spatial practice at the intersection of several creative disciplines. The group is interested in topics such as decentralising and opening up access to spatial discourse and regaining control of the public commons, giving value to the virtual realm as much as the physical one.