There has been much talk of DIY culture and ‘post-media’ operators over recent years and yet one of the facets of such cultural production that gets overlooked is the means of organisation, the institutional creativity that arises to generate and sustains such cultural work ‘social doing’. In many ways the creative dynamic of co-operation and mutual influence has the added effect of producing the substantive participation of individuals and exposing the individual ‘as a social being’ are dependent upon social: modes of thought and action, norms and institutions. This internalisation... is anything but superficial, they are by absorbing and internalising institutions as creative, constituting the ‘public sphere’, a linking-up of dispersed ‘public spheres’ This would raise many questions, not least of which would be the status of the ‘political’ in this society: our cultural production, our ‘social experience in the process of organising itself’ through a variety of means, represents a social force, a power to create new social relations, that should no longer be separated from us in the form of political force, as the glare of representative politics that reflects back to blind us from our own power.

It is with such notions as these in mind that the Ourganisation project ( http://docs.ourganisation.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/SecBackground ) was developed. It is an open-access web site through which it is hoped that, by means of your participation, we can, together, build up an ongoing resource, archive and tool of collective investigation into the issues of self-institution. This process was initiated by an ‘exchange situation’ ( http://docs.ourganisation.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ExchangSituation ) held at the Copenhagen Free University ( http://www.copenhagenfreesullivan. dy.dk/ ) and from this it was decided to offer other institutions and self-organisations the opportunity to self-interview and post the result to us in whatever format is most suitable (if it is in tape format, we will do the transcription and liaise with you before posting; if it is written out in longhand we will do likewise). It was decided not to offer up a set of questions to participants as it was felt this could overdetermine response as well as foreclose areas that we haven’t thought about. We will obviously respect the wishes of those groups and participants who wish to remain anonymous.

comradely greetings,
Howard Slater
http://www.ourganisation.org

**Flaxman Lodge**

Flaxman Lodge is a transitional space currently located at Flaxman Terrace, London WC1 (020 7692 1603) and online at http://flaxmanlodge.omweb.org

This [the website] is where registered users can post articles, comments, suggest research, discussion topics and events. Users can also upload images, create, move or edit forums, open wiki’s and alter the overall look of the site.

It is also a key administrative motor for the space: with all decisions regarding content, organisation and economy passing through the forums and then into the public domain.

The forums have been set up to facilitate exchange on all matters related to FL—users can post and respond in the Events (proposals) forum for example, set up open or closed meetings in the Meetings (proposals) forum, or discuss general issues by creating topics of their own.

The space runs adjacent to the website; here anything proposed and discussed in the forums can be further played out—in meetings, presentations or any other use the space can be put to.

There are no defined roles, no administrators, moderators, managers, directors, curators, editors, committees, consultancies or funding bodies attached to FL and whatever happens here will be the result of negotiation between users (on the site, on the phone, in the space). See FlaxmanLodge/Invitation于一体的网上wiki.

• There are also no salaries or programming budgets. After the intitial six month period, which is secure, the space will operate on a self-financing model or die. Proposals under consideration combine ideas of shadow, parallel and gift economies (eg. via irregular subscriptions, drinks sales, redirected resources/money/grants, events etc.). See April1stMinutes.

• At present there are 30 registered users and this is now open to anyone who would like to participate.

**Ourganisation**

There is an open-access web site through which it is hoped that, by means of your participation, we can, together, build up an ongoing resource, archive and tool of collective investigation into the issues of self-institution. This process was initiated by an ‘exchange situation’ ( http://docs.ourganisation.org/twiki/bin/view/Main/ExchangSituation ) held at the Copenhagen Free University ( http://www.copenhagenfreesullivan.dy.dk/ ) and from this it was decided to offer other institutions and self-organisations the opportunity to self-interview and post the result to us in whatever format is most suitable (if it is in tape format, we will do the transcription and liaise with you before posting; if it is written out in longhand we will do likewise). It was decided not to offer up a set of questions to participants as it was felt this could overdetermine response as well as foreclose areas that we haven’t thought about. We will obviously respect the wishes of those groups and participants who wish to remain anonymous.

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Fedz Unable to Distinguish Art from Bioterrorism

Steve Kurtz was already suffering from one tragedy when he called 911 early in the morning to tell them his wife had suffered a cardiac arrest and died in her sleep. The police arrived, and, to crack up the rhetoric of the “War on Terror”, decided Kurtz’s art supplies were actually bioterrorism weapons.

Thus began an Orwellian stream of events in which FBI agents abducted Kurtz without charges, sealed off his entire block, and confiscated his computers, manuscripts, art supplies... and even his wife’s body.
Like the case of Brandon Mayfield, the Muslim lawyer from Portland imprisoned for two weeks on the flimsiest of false evidence, Kurtz’s case amply demonstrates the dangers posed by the USA Patriot Act coupled with government-nurtured terrorism hysteria.

**Fear Run Amok**

Steve Kurtz is Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the State University of New York’s University at Buffalo, and a member of the internationally-acclaimed Critical Art Ensemble.

Kurtz’s wife, Hope Kurtz, died in her sleep of cardiac arrest in the early morning hours of May 11. Police arrived, became suspicious of Kurtz’s art supplies and called the FBI. Within hours, FBI agents had “detained” Kurtz as a suspected bioterrorist and cordoned off the entire block around his house. (Kurtz walked away as a suspected bioterrorist and cordoned off the next day on the advice of a lawyer, his “detention” having proved to be illegal.) Over the next few days, dozens of agents in hazmat suits, from a number of law enforcement agencies, sifted through Kurtz’s work, analyzing it on-site and imputing computers, manuscripts, books, equipment, and even his wife’s body for further analysis. Meanwhile, the Buffalo Health Department condemned his house as a health risk.

Kurtz, a member of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), makes art which addresses the politics of biotechnology. “Free Range Grains,” CAE’s latest project, included a mobile DNA extraction laboratory for testing food products for possible transgenic contamination. It was this equipment which triggered the Kafkaesque chain of events.

FBI field and laboratory tests have shown that Kurtz’s equipment was not used for any illegal purpose. In fact, it is not even possible to use this equipment for the production or weaponization of dangerous germs. Furthermore, any person in the US may legally obtain and possess such equipment.

Today, there is no legal way to stop huge corporations from putting genetically altered material in our food,” said Defense Fund spokeswoman Carla Mendes. “Yet owning the equipment required to test for the presence of ‘Frankenfood’ will get you accused of ‘terrorism’. You can be illegally detained by shadowy government agents, lose access to your home, work, and belongings, and find that your recently deceased spouse’s body has been taken away for ‘analysis’.²⁴

Though Kurtz has finally been able to return to his home and recover his wife’s body, the FBI has still not returned any of his equipment, computers or manuscripts, nor given any indication of when they will. The case remains open.

**Artists Subpoenaed in USA Patriot Act Case (May 25, 2004)**

Four artists have been served subpoenas to appear before a federal grand jury that will consider bioterrorism charges against a university professor whose art involves the use of simple biology equipment. The subpoenas are the latest installment in a bizarre investigation in which members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force have mistaken an art project for a biological weapons laboratory. While most observers have assumed that the Task Force would realize the absurd error of its initial investigation of Steve Kurtz, the subpoenas indicate that the feds have instead chosen to press their “case” against the baffled professor. Two of the subpoenaed artists—Beatriz da Costa and Steve Barnes—are, like Kurtz, members of the internationally-acclaimed Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), an artists’ collective that produces artwork to educate the public about the politics of biotechnology. They were served the subpoenas by federal agents who called them to an art show at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. The third artist, Paul Vanouse, is, like Kurtz, an art professor at the University at Buffalo. He has worked with CAE in the past. The fourth, Dorian Burr, is a founding member of CAE.

The artists involved are at a loss to explain the increasingly bizarre case. “I have no idea why they’re pursuing this,” said Beatriz da Costa, one of those subpoenaed. “It was shocking that this investigation was even launched. That it is continuing is positively frightening, and shows how vulnerable the Patriot Act has made freedom of speech in this country.” Da Costa is an art professor at the University of California at Irvine.

According to the subpoena, the FBI is seeking charges under Section 175 of the US Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989, which has been expanded by the USA Patriot Act. As expanded, this law prohibits the possession of “any biological agent, toxin, or delivery system” without the justification of “prophylactic, protective, bona fide research, or other peaceful purpose.” See http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/18/175.html for the 1989 law and http://www.ehrs.upenn.edu/protocole/patriot/sec187.html for its USA Patriot Act expansion.

Even under the expanded powers of the USA Patriot Act, it is difficult to understand how anyone could view CAE’s art as anything other than a “peaceful purpose”. The equipment seized by the FBI consisted mainly of CAE’s most recent project, a mobile DNA extraction laboratory to test store-bought food for possible contamination by genetically modified grains and organisms; such equipment can be found in any university’s basic biology lab and even in many high schools (see “Lab Tour” at http://www.criticalart.net/biotech/free/ for more details).

The grand jury in the case is scheduled to convene June 15 in Buffalo, New York. Here, the jury will decide whether or not to indict Steve Kurtz on the charges brought by the FBI. A protest is being planned at 9 a.m. on June 15 outside the courthouse at 138 Delaware Ave. in Buffalo.

**Six Subpoenaed in FBI Case Against Artist (June 4th, 2004)**

Yesterday two more individuals were subpoenaed to appear before a Federal Grand Jury on June 15th. Thus far subpoenas have been issued to: Adele Henderson, Chair of the Art Department at UR; Andrew Johnson, Professor of Art at UR; Paul Vanouse, Professor of Art at UB; Beatriz da Costa, Professor of Art at UCI; Steven Barnes, PSU; and Dorian Burr.

**Help Urgently Needed**

A small fortune has already been spent on lawyers for Kurtz and other Critical Art Ensemble members. A defense fund has been established at http://www.rtmark.com/CAEdenefense/ to help defray the legal costs which will continue to mount so long as the investigation continues. Donations go directly to the legal defense of Kurtz and other Critical Art Ensemble members. Should the funds raised exceed the cost of the legal defense, any remaining money will be used to help other artists in need.

To make a donation, please visit: http://www.rtmark.com/CAEdenefense/

For more information on the Critical Art Ensemble, please visit: http://www.critical-art.net/

On advice of counsel, Steve Kurtz is unable to answer questions regarding his case. Please direct questions or comments to Carla Mendes: CAEdenefense@rtmark.com