

## The Autonomous Fabric – Researching Self-Organization as Contemporary Art

<http://autonomousfabric.org>

collective, autonomy, collaboration,

HOME INITIATIVES ABOUT

Roodkapje SUB  
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Institute for the Unstable Media  
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Vers beton  
Upominki  
Performance Bar

Extraextra m

**Living Organisation – That Is, Self-Organisation**  
*Binna Choi*  
Some words and readings for #AutonomousFabric  
As we redefine our perspective on autonomy and self-organisation, and distance ourselves from the notion of autonomy as the establishment of a small, free enclave, let us first consider this passage from On Complexity by the philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin:

**Ceci n'est pas une école d'art?**  
*Catherine Somzé*  
Since its origins in the 19th century, Western **avant-garde culture** has been based on the development of

**What is Autonomy?**  
*Florian Cramer*  
Autonomy is a position under attack, a question rather than an answer, an idea that is constantly in a process of being redefined and reinvented. This essay attempts to survey and decipher the

In this project, we have been mapping more than 100 self-organized spaces and initiatives run in Rotterdam by artists, designers and activists since 2016. The website allows to view and cluster initiatives according to overlapping themes and keywords that have been retrieved from their self-descriptions, see their current and past projects and public programs and get pointers to their addresses and websites. On top of that, the site also includes critical essays written by artists, researchers and theorists on shifting notion of “autonomy” in times where founding and running such initiatives often has become an artistic practice by itself.

The project is based on the observation that since the economic crisis of 2008, a growing number of contemporary artists/creatives has shifted from classical studio practice towards running experimental self-organized initiatives that operate in informal settings, largely without institutional support and that are often no longer recognizable as art projects. Breaking with the artist as a central figure, these projects rarely produce objects for the art or design market. Examples include experimental schools, restaurants, radio stations and libraries run as art projects. These initiatives engage with a public to which established cultural institutions have little or no access.

Since these growing forms of artistic practice are no longer based on established notions of artwork, authorship and ownership, how does the existing creative sector - including art schools - need to change in order to reflect and represent them? To which extent do they indicate a larger transformation of artistic autonomy towards collective organization? And, with Rotterdam as a case study, how are they related to processes of urban gentrification and to the place of marginalized groups in culture?

The Autonomous Fabric is a research project on self-organization and collective participation in artistic practices, and its consequences for art education. It has been initiated by the Willem de Kooning Academy in 2016, resulted in two symposia organized at and in collaboration with self-organized initiatives in 2017 and 2019. The project has been supported by SIA/KIEM and Pictoright Fonds, with a research consortium consisting of Willem de Kooning Academy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Codarts, Leeszaal West, HipHopHuis, Showroom MAMA, and Stager BV.