http://youalright.otdac.org

Opening Times: What sort of deficit is there between the need for access and actual access?

Nicolas O'Brien: It depends a bit on what access really means to artists. For some, that's studio space; for others that means private collectors financially supporting artists; for others it means classes and education to develop critical thinking and contemporary rhetoric. I tend to think that the most important part of this lies in gaining actual access to space. This is mostly because I think that once gaining access to space, artists are able to create and provide other means of access based on the necessities that a given community desires.

OT: And by 'space' you mean what?

NO'B: Space can be reshaped to suit the need of an artist once it has been initially acquired - be that a showroom, a studio, a community centre, a classroom, or a bedroom.

That being said, there's a fairly big gap between want/desire and what can be offered. A lot of that gap, in my opinion, has to do with issues at the state level regarding funding, zoning, permits, and other bureaucratic issues (problems, nevertheless, that artists should not shy away from). I think that access can really make or break an artist community. This deficit is even more substantial considering the amount of space (and therefore the access to it) that is left unfulfilled or underused by various forms of property management - land, capital, information.

OT: Does this, then, make the idea of a virtual space more important?

NO'B: The idea is important, but so is its implementation. Although representations of the virtual are appealing in their own right, finding ways of manifesting the virtual into actual is a very pressing concern with regards to gaining access.

This kind of thinking is closely aligned with sentiments expressed in McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto*, a document celebrating its 10 year anniversary in 2014. In the time since its original publication, not much advancement has been made by Wark's hacker class, and as a result, this work/essay - or more

generally my use of virtual simulation - is a way of working towards hacking out the real.

OT: Can the Internet fill the void left from the lack of access to physical space?

NO'B: Yes, certainly. But it comes with it's own price and problems. Perhaps some of that problem is that voids don't need to be filled necessarily, but occupied. An artist can live within a void - wedge out some space in there amidst all the darkness or what-have-you. In doing so, that occupation doesn't replace or supplant the void, but contributes to it. The hope then becomes that that co-existence doesn't commodify or else corrupt what was there prior to an artist's occupation. Both the artist and the void can become neighbours, capable of sharing cups of sugar and salt.

OT: If you are lucky enough to gain access, how long do you have?

NO'B: Time is such a crucial part of the equation for developing progressive communities. Sometimes you need years, other times all you need is an afternoon. I think that artists should start to invest in longer-term timescales, and to really consider the ways in which the so-called "alternative" model of productivity and temporary-ness shouldn't be the only option. There's a lot that artists can learn from existing models of long term development of a project. That being said, the end goal of those models shouldn't be too similar. In some ways I've been thinking about how artists can use development strategies from start-ups and venture capitalism, but work towards very different results.

I'd say, though, that we don't have much time, and that a sense of urgency is definitely in the air.

OT: What's causing this urgency?

NO'B: There are many things, really: global finance, wealth inequity, political unrest, emerging police states. But I think the urgency is coming from the fact that many across the globe are collectively seeing the world change without knowing how to voice their frustrations and concerns. The Internet gives people a place and community to voice these concerns, but few get a chance to act. The urgency then comes from feeling helpless in the face of oppression and bigotry.

OT: You alright?

NO'B: I'm OK.