

kneading,  
resting,  
assembling:  
a cookbook  
for minor  
institutions

# bi-

*As in works and in words and in waitings with eyes,  
And in weenings and in wishings and with idle thoughts*

*William Langland, Piers Plowman, c. 1370–90*

## 0/ hodgepodge

**bi-** started as a self-organised residency in two family houses, often vacant, in the countryside.

**bi-** has a parasitic approach, sharing what it has at hand. Our laziness combined with the lack of resources led us to a minimal definition of an art residency, that gets rid of the notion of art production: we stated that gathering a few artists in a given place for a certain period of time was enough to call it an artist residency. «No predetermined aim was needed, things just happened», we said. Two years later **bi-** is still broke, but has exaggerated the (informal) use of friends', family or institutions' properties.

**bi-** issues [performative open calls](#). Since we cannot offer any financial support, we demand minimal work for the application, taking into account the labour it requires. In doing so we baffle the usual process of applying, be selected and then «get invited». It is enough to express interest in order to be considered. Being an art worker is not mandatory either. All this leads to a series of odd, empty, unsigned, sometimes fictive email addresses (thank you, tiredofaskingmoney@gmail.com).

A few days of questionable selection process follows, at the completion of which we systematically end up with selecting more people than we can host. Knowing that former residents can (also) always come back, this leads us to compile a list of comrades that will be welcomed in the residencies to come. This fuzzy ecology, saves work from the future selections, and bars the consumption of disposable applications.

During the residency, we find ourselves in a vacant house after changing a few buses, [trains](#), cars, boats, planes. None of us is expected to work: we, all together, mostly cook, eat, drink, [sing](#), walk, discuss, play cards, [steal fruit](#), foot massage, [dance](#), pétanque, make flower juice, etc.

By inventing this entity called **bi-**, we tried to dodge as much work as possible in seeking validation from institutions, but still benefit from meeting people. Being our own institution allowed us to avoid what we consider their drawbacks and burdens: long term planning, audience engagement, (state) funding, fixed hierarchical structures and [invisible reproductive labour](#). Opening and sharing a

house with strangers and residing together for a long week is also a way to blurry the usual binaries between guest/host, organisers/invitees, artists/audience. We all reside under the same roof.

We advocate for multiplicity: «**bi-** is collective, as it harbours many individuals. It is a temporary group whose number is neither fixed, limited nor relevant.» Maybe this is a long shot but **bi-** could be considered performative in the ways we work: “it is a collection of discussions, gestures, thoughts and deeds. Every formulated idea has a closure and at the same time is a forecast and a hope for the future.” Back in 2018, we used to write open calls in our kitchen in the suburbs of Paris, drinking beers. But quickly things changed: other people offered to host new residencies, and among them Angeliki invited herself to join while living in Amsterdam. Afterward, we lost the common kitchen, the closest thing to an office, fact that made this organisation collapse.

A slanted attempt to acquire recognition in the art field, was to create an archaic and user-aggressive website, squatting Enrico’s personal web hosting<sup>1</sup>, and a Facebook page with a wobbly communication strategy. A common place where sharing images with participants became also open to anyone who was curious and had tons of time to pass on it.

## 1/ hairsplitting

This text was commissioned to one person to write *about* something, from her perspective, but we like to redirect personal invitations towards **bi-**. Doing things with friends rather than alone, in this case, is a way to write not *about bi-*, but *from bi-*, or *within* it.

If **bi-** is this “temporary group whose number is neither fixed, limited nor relevant”, then who typed the words that you are reading now? What is the remuneration covering? Who actually organises the residencies? On whose account will the money go? How many people should share this fee and what should it be used for?

According to our CV, 49 persons constitute **bi-**. The *we* that is used alternatively with “**bi-**” in this text is quite undecided. Sometimes it encompasses people in a residency, sometimes everyone that took part, or people active beyond it and gathers many levels of involvement: proposing a new house, hosting a residency, joining the selection process, or expressing desires about the possibilities of **bi-**.

There is, finally, a *we* counting three people now that meet often on long (video) chats, write the open calls, have access to **bi-**’s email account, send invitations and technical details to join the residencies. To put it simply, a *we* that assumes the organisational and curatorial work that needs to be done. Enrico, Kiki or Jérôme, can write “on behalf of **bi-**” at the end of emails. In this sense, **bi-** does operate as an institution.

1 After the decision to create a website, we finally did not purchase a hosting service for lack of a legal entity. By squatting someone else’s, we saved a little bit of money; it also meant not having more than one email address. Moreover, for now only one person can access to the website’s backend, which also prevents it from being an open-fed archive for instance. After nine chapters and tons of sound and video piling up in this archaic archive, space is becoming an issue too.

We work in a small scale, based on geographical proximity, existing relationships and kinships. Each one of us can end up with an overload of work or be absent for some time. We go along with our personal practices, jobs, studies or fellowships. We need to pay our rent, make money to pay for our food, find time to read and still be able to dedicate time to **bi-** without being too exhausted, working late in the weekends, taking time from sleep. We are not a legal entity; we don't have a bank account (it would probably be empty) and we can't pay taxes—which until now was superfluous. We are neither employed nor self-employed: we still lack words that make us able to talk about it.

Having to allocate the fee for this text is a tricky question that fails to recognise the complexities involved. One person has to invoice the whole amount, informally share it and pay more taxes than she should. Moreover, to split it equally among the three of us would be inadequate: we have different financial situations, non-monetary resources, diverse scales of precarity. This also highlights what being structureless implies: inviting more people doesn't divide the workload by three, but rather multiplies it.

As opposed to a structured organisation, where someone is hired to better distribute the work, another person brings in distinct questions and perspectives, new propositions to be discussed and carried out collectively. This becomes more obvious when such commissions are extended by the inviting people from the broader group that constitutes **bi-**. Therefore, these commissions funded by institutions show all the complexities of a mechanism from which we tried to escape, but that wants to be confronted. While looking for solutions, we fell in the traps that we designed.

## 2/ scrounging

When trying to fund **bi-** residencies in alternative ways, we figured that one way would be to present **bi-** as an artist collective, and apply to other art residencies: in other terms, to parasite them, and redistribute their budget to our residents. We hoped that this would give us more resources to share, without having to worry about obtaining public funding and be accountable for it.

This is what we tried last fall, at PARADISE AIR. Their “long stay program”, happening once a year (now spread over two years), was designed for one artist, with travel and accommodation covered, a good production budget, and a daily allowance covering food expenses for two months. They decided to take the risk to select three people, proposing to share all the above to gather fifteen more into their residency—a former love hotel—to do nothing: no work to be expected, no art to be seen. Being in this in-between position, we were hosts of the guests and guests of the hosts. With the complicity of their accountant, we transformed all the production budget into groceries. To make this possible, the institution had to detour from its focus, and reconsider what a budget should support in a production-oriented residency.

As one person became three, that became 18, the same budget could only cover accommodation, food and drinks. We realised that sharing in this case probably extended our precarity to others. We wonder: what game are we playing when doing such tricks? Are we being the ideal workers of late capitalism, enjoying to

share their precarity without claiming better condition? Every time we were to work with an institution, we had to find a way around these contradictions.

This is also the residency for which we worked the most:

Ensuring that the PARADISE production budget was sufficient to cover food expenses and give talks in public events, or lectures to a few bored art students; Applying for ASEA funding and getting rejected, bothering embassy employees to get support (being ignored by the French Institute; setting up a [retrospective exhibition](#) about **bi-** at the Italian Institute of Culture on the National Day for Contemporary Art Institutions, in exchange for a plane ticket that allowed more collective dinners covered by PARADISE's travel budget; being provided with a brand new wireless-compatible printer and a flat in Tokyo by the Goethe Institute to organise dinners); writing an [open call](#) and working with [Kanoko Tamura](#) to translate it and with [Futoshi Hoshino](#) to select the applicants; thinking of a week-long occupation of a museum lobby with Matsudo residents, that was transformed into a QR code-newspaper insert, that became a [workshop on self-publishing](#) with the Goethe's printer that ended up in an [exhibition](#) by **bi-**resident Albert Allgaier that was already a resident of the Austrian Chancellery in Tokyo; writing a text with eight hands for the annual publication.

This highlights all the non-financial aspects of **bi-**'s economy, with or without institutions. We try to value resources that do not create more precarity when shared. We have space, we share it because we find it more valuable this way.

### 3/ harrowing

Accessibility has always been another tricky question, whatever the available budget. So far, we always opted for covering food expenses rather than travel, but we still wonder how much this shapes access. How much class issues intervene here? Who can afford to cross Europe, the Atlantic Ocean or Siberia? And who can take one week off-work? Who can obtain a visa to attend a residency that does not exist on paper? Until now we haven't found a way to intervene in these processes, but some residents themselves find temporary, chancy ways to get around these issues that cannot be summarised only under one common denominator:

*Sara who lives in Amsterdam, was already in Rome when **bi-** took place in Milo; Iivi was planning to go from Bergen to Seoul when **bi-** landed in Matsudo; Yuiko lives in Tokyo, and escaped from her hairdressing work to join us; Amsterdam-based Mio, visited her family in Japan because she joined the residency; Danbi, living in Seoul, couldn't afford to join the previous chapter in Brittany, but was able to reach Japan, Husam managed to exploit the end of his EU visa before going back to Palestine, etc. However, Tarek was finally not able to travel due to his political activism; Eliot renounced because it would jeopardise his long-stay visa situation; [Maurits](#) and Stefan were ashamed of flying, and invented remote participations techniques<sup>2</sup>.*

2 More specifically, they told us that this feeling, most common in Northern-European countries, is called *Flugscham*. As for the remote participation techniques, Stefan Klein sent a Trojan-horse-pictured-postcard to the empty house of the residency before we arrived, and Maurits Böttger created an app so we could listen to his heart-beats in real-time.

## 4/ mirthful

Once, as we mentioned before, **bi-** was functioning from a kitchen in a shared flat. Currently all of us live in different countries. As today's art workers, we often change dwellings, move from residency to residency, try to avoid paying rent in overestimated expensive cities, and therefore this impossibility to settle has a strong impact on **bi-**.

Being geographically scattered, plus having this informal and blurry structureless organisation, creates a new kind of bureaucracy: long *jitsi* meetings, overtime work, endless email threads and sometimes ping-pongs of misunderstandings. Since our experience in Japan, we decided that we preferred to work only when we meet and discuss our disagreements face-to-face-to-face. Without physical presence indeed, the main part of **bi-** is absent from our talks: maintenance and care constitute the reproductive side of the art work. These become merely abstracted topics that we try to address, rather than enacting them from *within*<sup>3</sup>.

As Gibson-Graham discussed, reframing diverse economies allows for a wider spectrum of relations to be seen as economic practices: that be cooperation, trust, guilt, care, self-exploitation, solidarity or reciprocity. These non-monetised transactions are largely ignored in capitalist economies and can hardly be petrified either in texts or in museums where they remain frozen in time and space. These would rather belong to a process of what Boaventoura de Sousa Santos calls "contemporary world-making<sup>4</sup>": for **bi-**, that would be spending unreasonable time, effort and money to get together, either for a loitering residency, or for a 10-hour-long dinner among friends with the excuse of "meeting to prepare the next residencies". Of course, we work to make this happen, but do you really think we don't cook great dinners and breakfasts when it's the three of us<sup>5</sup>?! . One of the most intrinsic elements of **bi-** is forming friendships, and being able to navigate the world through them.

We want to associate people that expressed a will to take part –in one way or another– in the discussions about **bi-** and therefore decided to do a series of assemblies: temporary places where matters of food, labour, economy, cooking and sharing meals, cleaning, etc., are discussed and carried out together. We have been part of assemblies before, at schools, squats, squares and sometimes in art institutions. In our case, rather than reclaiming public space, we wish to open up private spheres.

Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery quote Spinoza or Federici: "*it is not about creating self-contained units, but about participating in complex, shifting, relational processes. We always begin in the middle, amid our situations, in our neighbourhoods, with our penchants, habits, loves, complicities, and connections.*" And they go on asking: "*What are we capable of here and now, together, at this time, in this place, amid the relations in which we are embedded?*"

3 Of course, this beautiful dream-organisation was completely knocked-out by the lock-down imposed by a virus, now we're even (smart)working on the 1st of May, through shared documents and videocalls.

4 Thank you, Vassilis Ntouros for mentioning [this article](#) during a meeting in Athens, just before the lockdown.

5 That would be nuts!