

Friedrich von Borries
Frieder Bohaumilitzky
Anne Wilhelm

Practice Space for Criticism

Building Instructions
and Methodical
Teaching Concept

Impressum

The *Practice Room for Criticism DIY* is a cooperation of the *HFBK Hamburg* with the *Kursbuch Kulturstiftung* and the *Goethe Institut*. For the cooperation a DIY kit of the Exercise Room for Criticism was developed, interested parties are provided with a construction manual, the necessary texts as well as a mediation program. The *Practice Room for Criticism DIY* is curated by Friedrich von Borries. The exhibition design is by Frieder Bohaumilitzky, the graphics of the exhibition by Anne Stiefel and the mediation program by Anne Wilhelm.

The idea of the exhibition *Kritik üben* was developed in a seminar of the *AG Gesellschaftsdesign* at the *HFBK Hamburg* under the direction of Friedrich von Borries and Jesko Fezer, with the students Nike Auer, Konstanze Essmann, Fynn-Morten Heyer, Anna Lena Cychy, Christian Pietschmann, Anna Maria Resei, Torben Spieker, Jakob Taranowski, Maxi Schmid, Anne Stiefel, Maria Weis and the tutors Frieder Bohaumilitzky and Helena Kersting.

Intro

The exhibition *Practice Space for Criticism* is an experiment which actively tests out the concept of criticism. It addresses the following questions: how can we master the practice of criticism, which tools do we need to do so and how can we also prepare ourselves for situations in which we wish to express and receive criticism, whether positive or negative?

The ability to accept criticism is a key social skill when it comes to coexisting democratically with others, given the importance of entering into exchanges with others and negotiating different viewpoints. In order to strengthen this social skill, you need to have the courage to listen and understand your own viewpoint. The art to practising criticism is to tell another person how you see them or where you stand on a topic without offending them in the process – and, conversely, to be able to accept the opinions and insights of others without taking offense.

In the form of a circuit training exercise, the practice space encourages participants to hone their critical abilities. Each station focuses on an area of critical practice, allowing participants to develop specific skills which can be applied to everyday situations.

Building Instructions

1

Practice Space for Criticism DIY

What is criticism? How does criticism work? What counts as criticism? And what is its purpose? Is another, better world possible? And, if so, how? *Practice Space for Criticism* tackles questions such as these.

DIY-Kit

A DIY kit is available for interested exhibition spaces, including building instructions, the required texts and a handout for tours and workshops for visitors. The building instructions included in the DIY kit are based around semi-finished products such as tension belts, cable ties, and beverage crates. They are easy to assemble. The very 'German,' ecologically sustainable beverage crates will be delivered to countries that don't offer refunds for returned crates and bottles, ideally with the world-renowned national drink 'beer,' which can then be drunk at a nice closing party.

Adapting to the Local Environment

Practice Space for Criticism can and should be adapted to its local environment. For example, a specific colour index colour should be selected and applied. We've developed some of the exercises with this in mind so that they can be adapted to local topics and issues. We've also added a new station, the 'Criticism Kiosk,' focused on local issues.

Stations

1. Meeting Point for Criticism

A standing desk is a good place to enter into conversation and reflect on one's own viewpoints. Have a discussion! Are you privileged, do you represent the norm or are you discriminated against?

2. Mat for Adaptability

Criticism isn't just an internal thing: it also manifests itself physically. Test out your individual attitude to criticism on the gym mat! Is your behaviour open or closed, active or passive?

3. Mirror of Self-Recognition

The mirror never lies: it exposes you to your own standards. Think about it! How does your criticism of others relate to yourself?

4. Weight Bench of Theory

Awareness of the subject of one's criticism is best practised sat down. Read a text on the weight bench of theory!

5. Loudspeaker of Utopia

Alternatives must be heard too. Listen to utopias from the past fifty years over the loudspeaker! What are your utopias?

The local curators have compiled ten extracts from utopic texts from the country/culture of the exhibition venue.

6. Criticism Pulpit

The cockpit is the place to gather courage and articulate criticism. Speak from the pulpit! What do you have to say?

7. Loudspeaker of Dystopia

Criticism must highlight problems, meaning it can also be quite dark. Play some dystopias from the past fifty years! What is your dystopia?

The local curators have compiled ten extracts from dystopic texts from the country/culture of the exhibition venue.

8. Strife Seesaw

A good discussion is like a seesaw – it reaches great highs and is loads of fun. Find a criticism partner and argue with them on the seesaw! Who do you want to argue with?

9. Criticism for All

In the previous stations, you've practised giving out and receiving criticism. Keep practising! The books from the Goethe Institute Library might be helpful here.

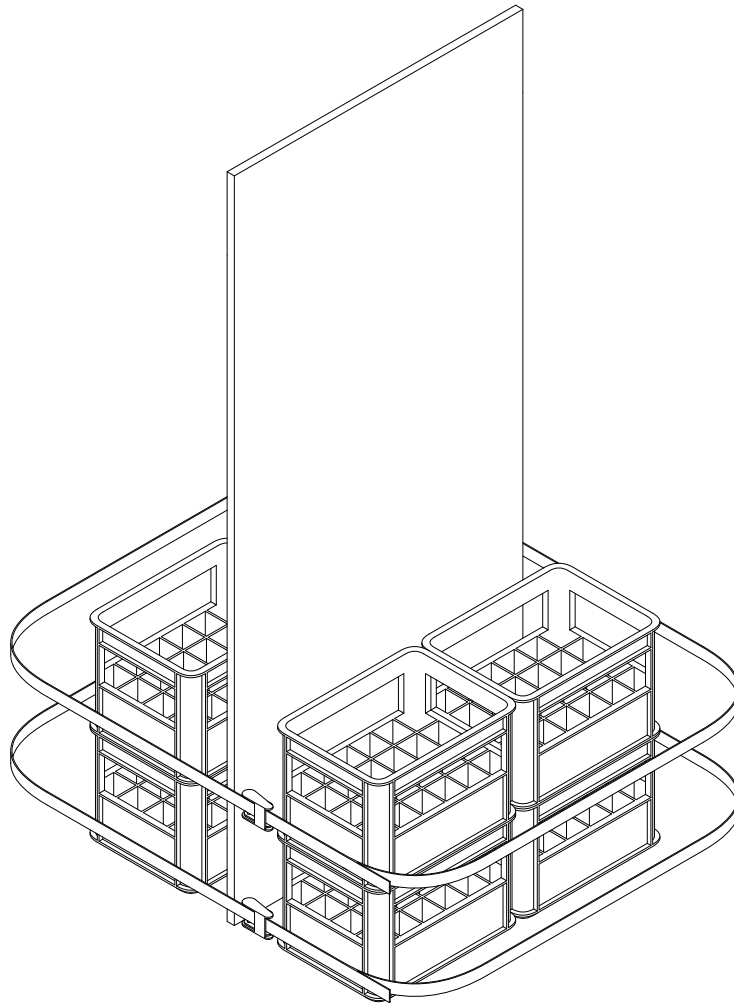
The local curators have selected recent books from the library of the Goethe-Institut.

10. Criticism Kiosk

Local groups will be able to present themselves at the 'kiosk,' which will also serve as a drinks stand during events/celebrations/openings.

Installations (x11)

For all stations and for
the Intro/Imprint

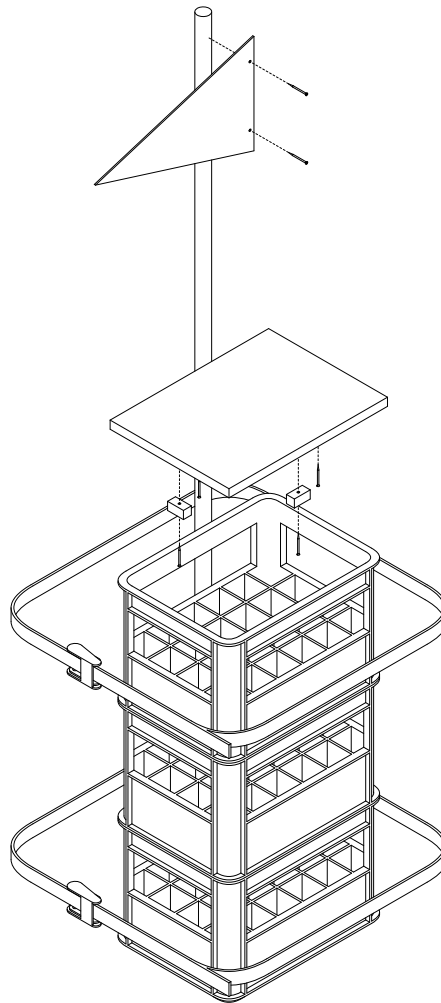


Stand the board upright and stabilize it with beverage crates. Leave the bottom crates filled. Secure the construction with tension belts.

Semi-finisheproducts

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheets of wood

Tools



Stack three crates on top of each other. Leave the bottom crate filled for stabilization. Stand the broom handle upright against the beverage crates. Screw and glue small blocks under the sheets of wood so that they can't fall into the crates. Saw a small pointed flag from a thin sheet of wood and screw it onto the top of the broom handle.

Semi-finishproducts

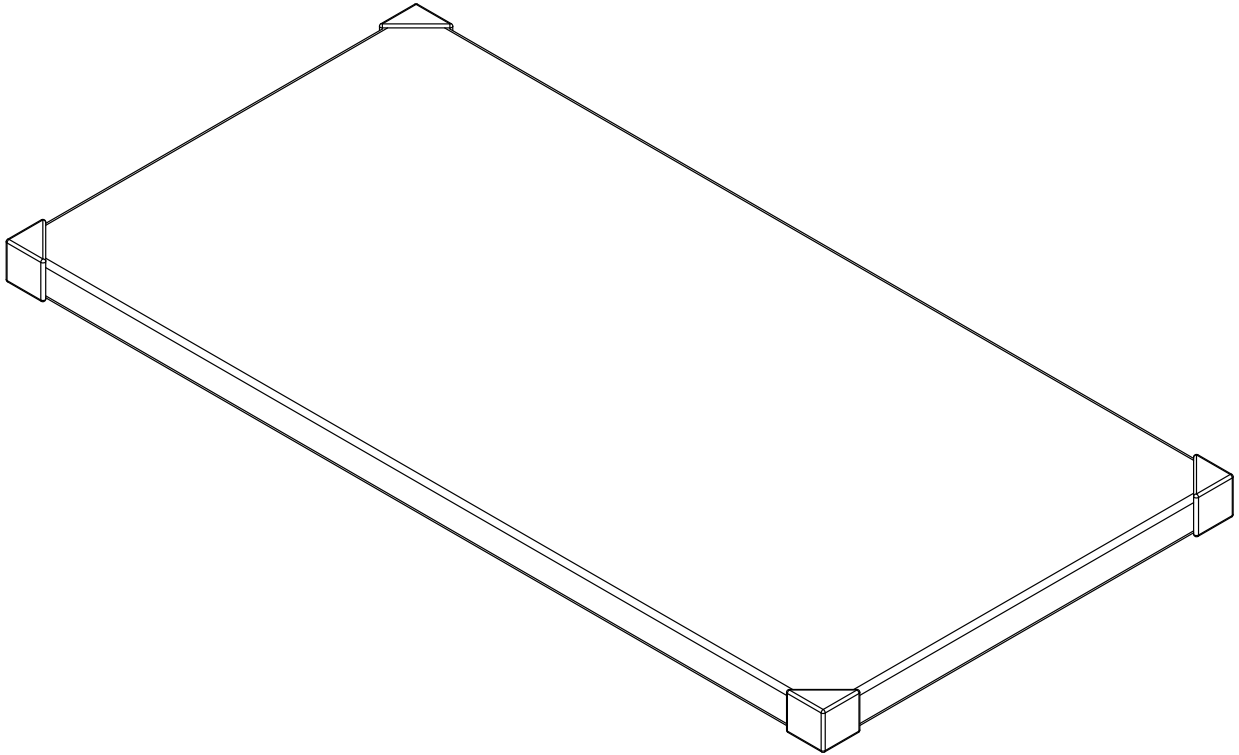
- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheets of wood
- Wooden blocks
- Screws
- Broom handle

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Glue

Mat for Adaptability

Station 2

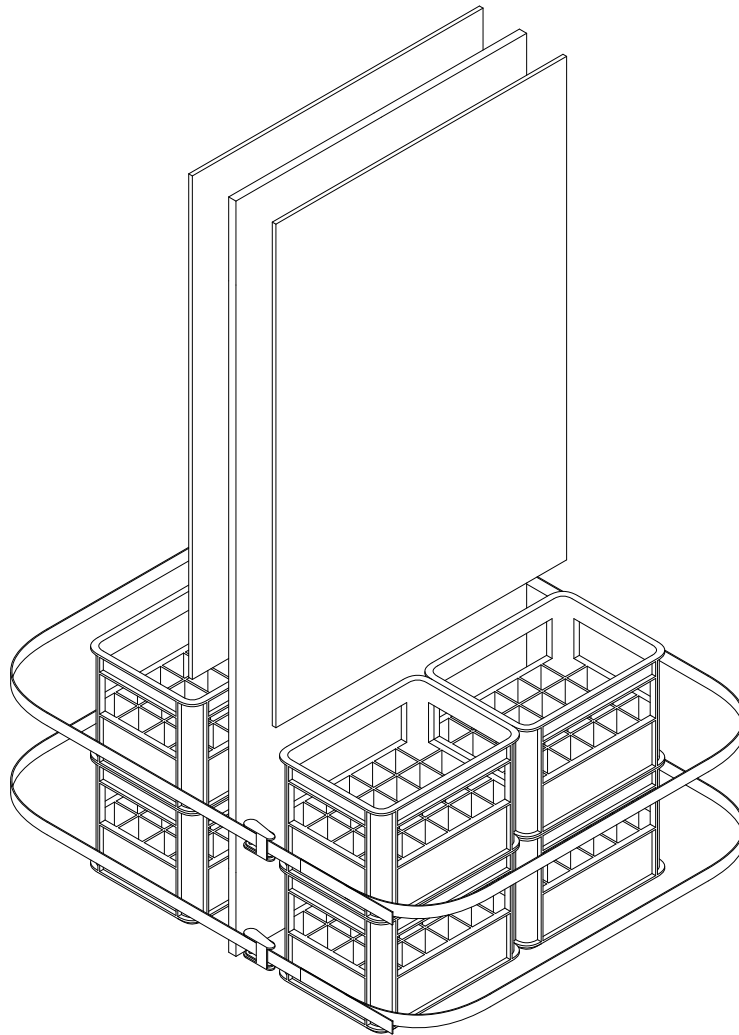


Source a suitable gym mat.

Semi-finished products

→ Gym mat

Tools



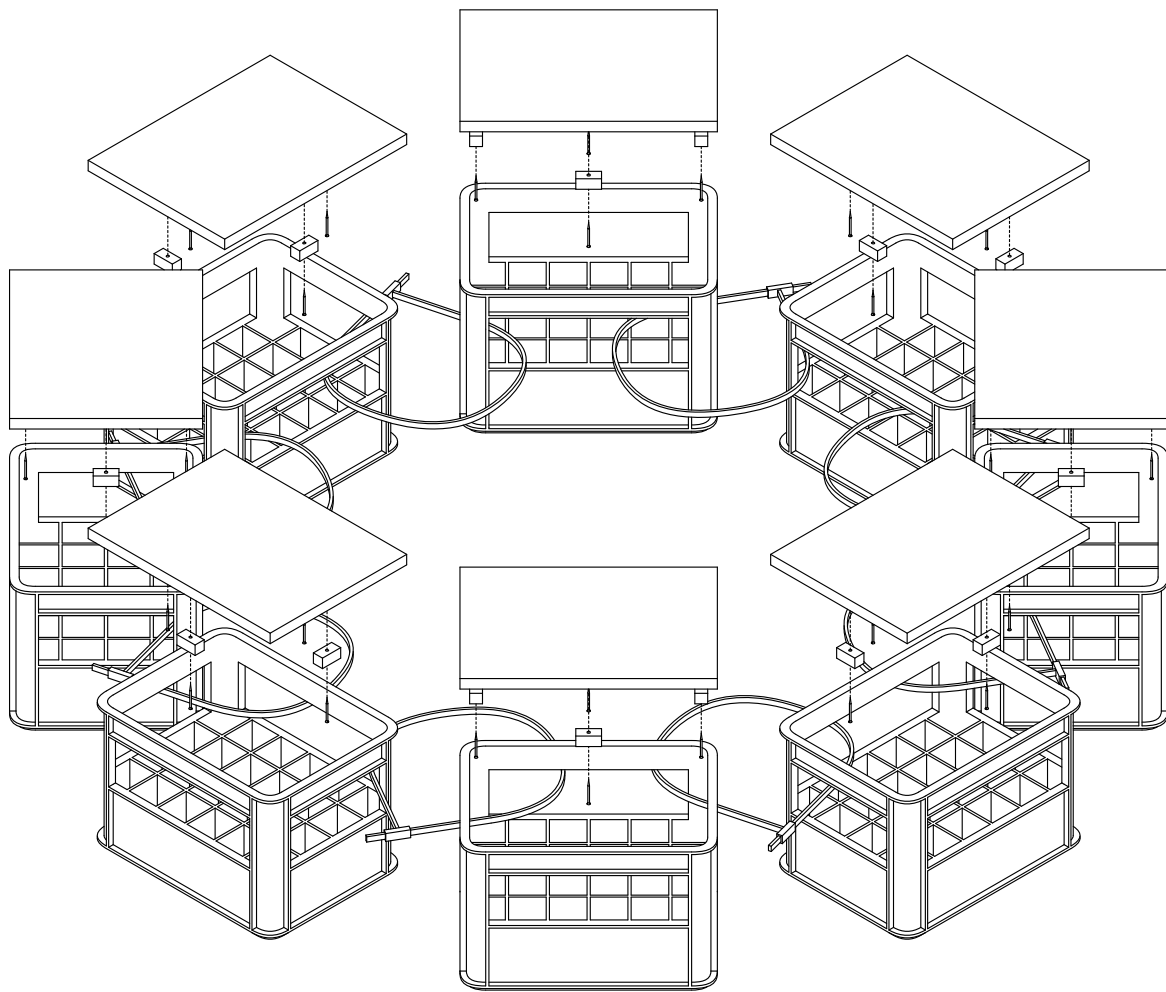
Have two mirrors cut so that they are level with the sheet of wood on three sides but finish above the crates. Adhere the mirrors to the sheet of wood. Stand the sheet of wood upright and stabilize it with beverage crates. Leave the bottom crates filled. Secure the construction with tension belts.

Semi-finisheproducts

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheets of wood
- Mirror

Tools

- Industrial adhesive



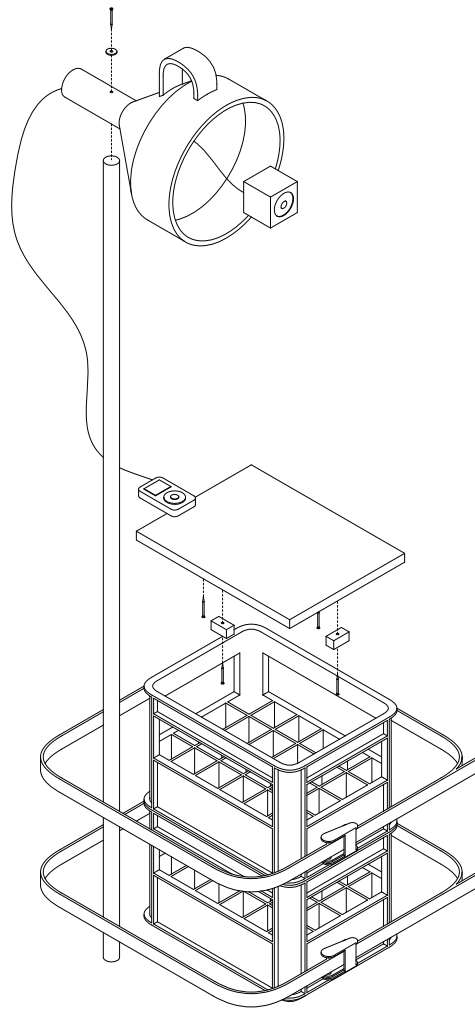
Arrange crates to form a circle that seems large enough for the group. Screw and glue small blocks under the sheets of wood so that they can't fall into the crates. Use cable ties to join the crates together.

Semi-finisheproducts

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheets of wood
- Wooden blocks
- Screws

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Glue



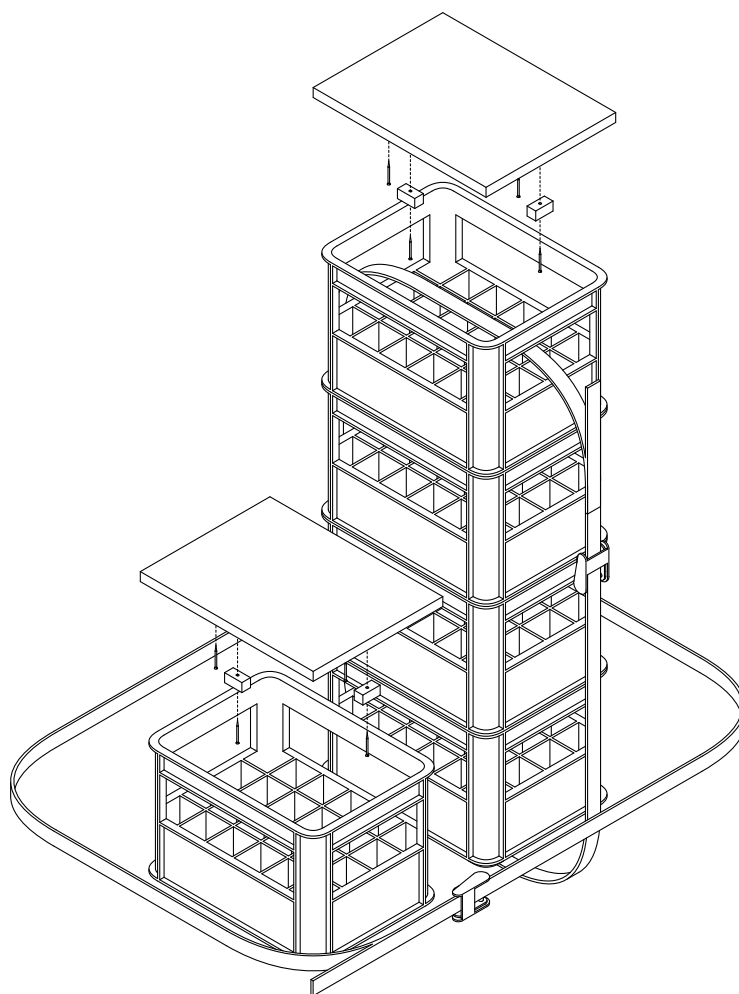
Roll the sheet into a funnel shape and weld it together with the spot welder. Use a flat washer to screw the funnel onto the broom handle. Stand the broom handle up against the beverage crates and secure it with two tension belts. Place a sheet of wood on top that is large enough to cover the beverage crates. Screw and glue wooden blocks under the sheet of wood. Place the PC active speaker inside the funnel and feed the cables out through the bottom. Connect the cables to the MP3-player.

Semi-finishproducts

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| → Beverage crates | → Steel sheet |
| → Tension belts | → Wooden blocks |
| → Board | → MP3-Player |
| → Broom handle | → PC active speaker |
| → Screws | → Cables |
| → Flat washer | |

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Spot welder
- Glue



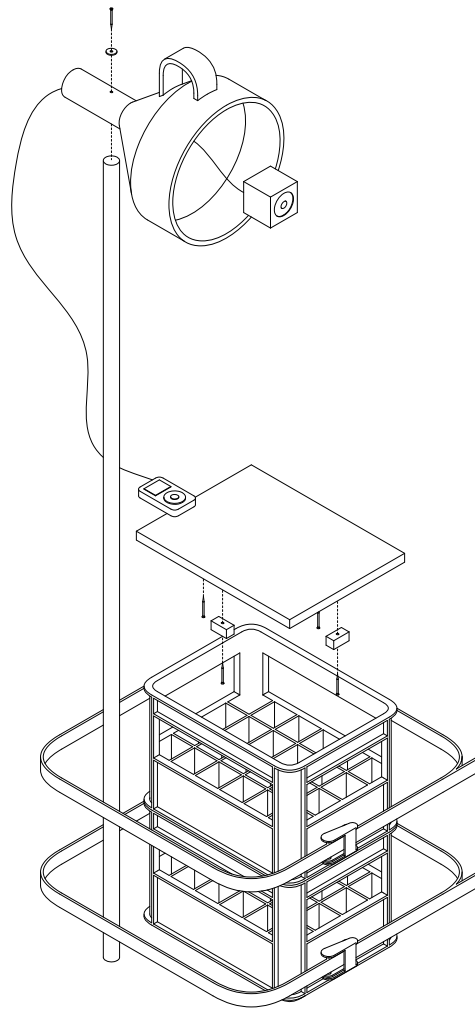
Stack four beverage crates on top of each other and secure them with a tension belt. Feed the tension belt through the handles of the top crate. Leave the bottom crate filled for stabilisation. Attach another crate to the side of the existing tower with another tension belt. Saw sheets of wood so that they can lie flat on top of the crates. Glue and screw little wooden blocks onto the sheets so that they can't fall into the crates.

Semi-finished products

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Wooden board
- Wooden blocks
- Screws

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Glue



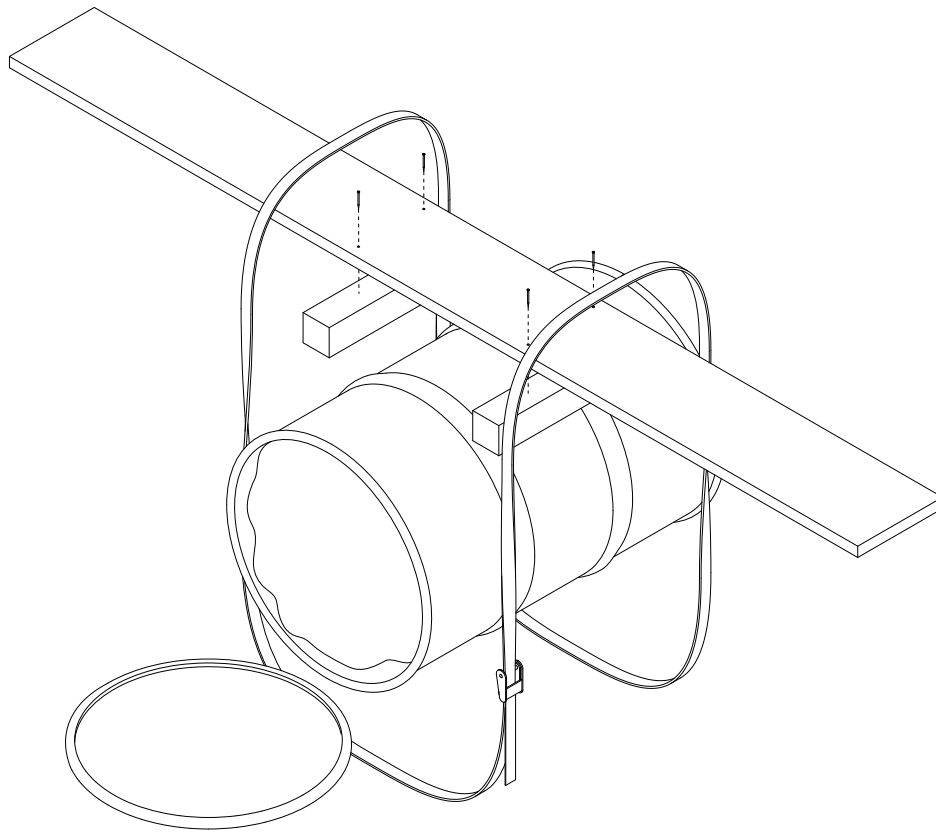
Source the biggest funnel you can find, or craft one of your own. Use a flat washer to screw the funnel onto the broom handle. Stand the broom handle up against the beverage crates and secure it with two tension belts. Place a large enough sheet of wood on top of the beverage crates. Screw and glue wooden blocks under the sheet of wood. Place the PC active speaker inside the funnel and feed the cables out through the bottom. Connect the cables to the MP3-player.

Semi-finishproducts

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| → Beverage crates | → Steel sheet |
| → Tension belts | → Wooden blocks |
| → Sheet of wood | → MP3-player |
| → Broom handle | → PC active speaker |
| → Screws | → Cable |
| → Flat washer | |

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Glue



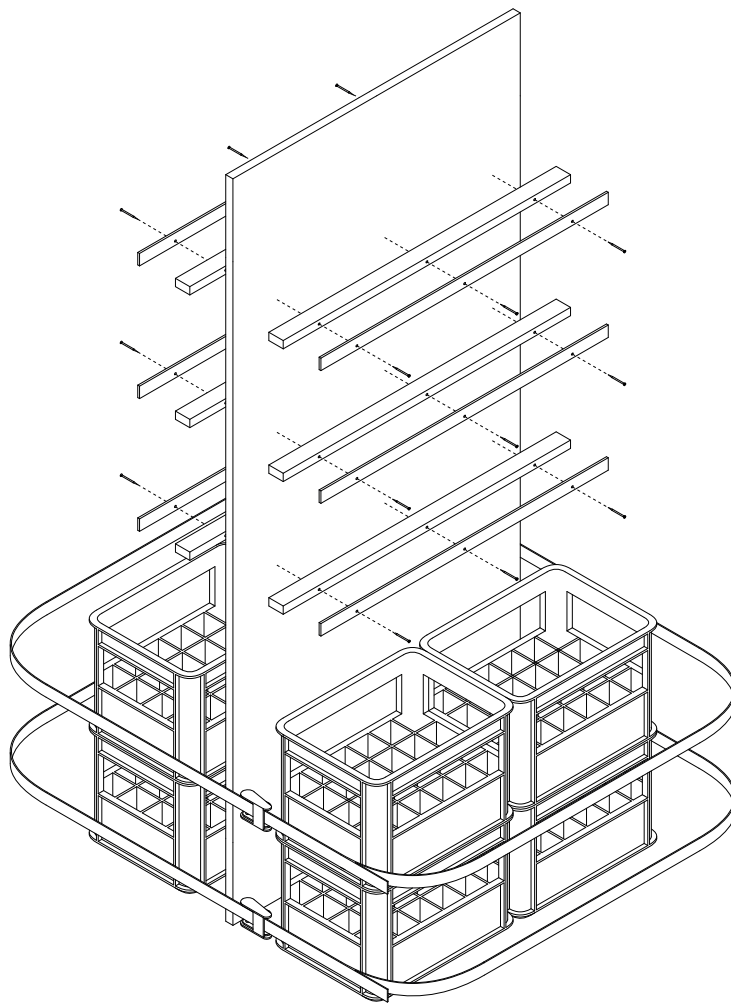
Fill the barrel with construction foam and allow it to harden. Pre-drill the board for the square timber posts. Screw and glue two square timber posts onto the board to keep it in place. Secure the board to the top of the barrel with the strap.

Semi-finishproducts

- Wide-neck steel barrel
- Construction foam
- Lashing strap
- Board
- Square timber posts
- Screws

Tools

- Electric screwdriver
- Drill
- Foam gun
- Glue



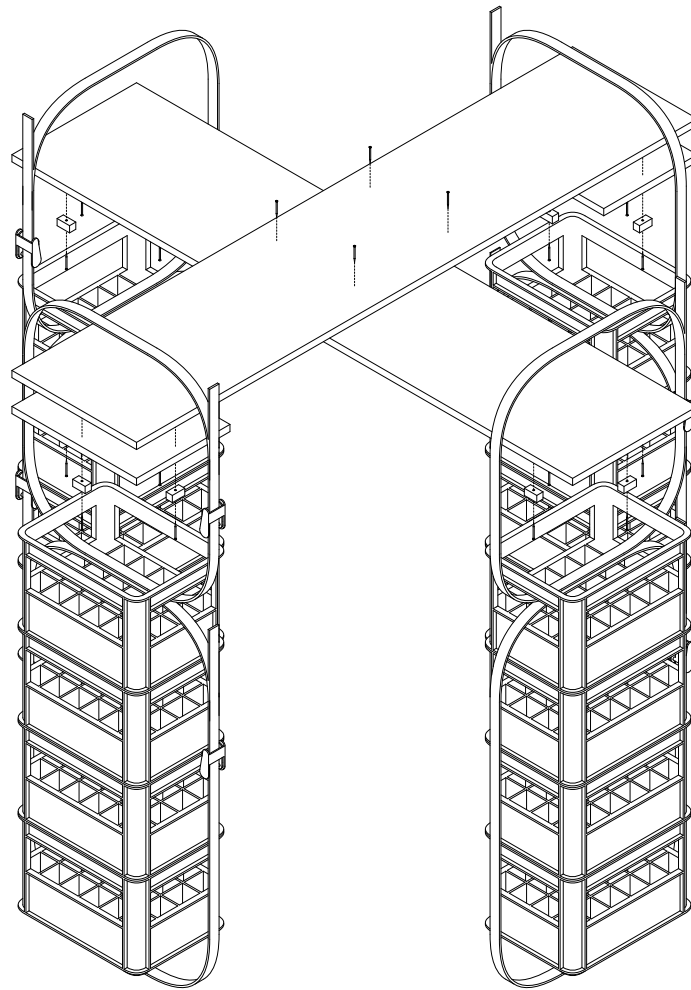
Glue together the panels for the display. Pre-drill the glued panels. Glue and screw the display panels onto the board. Stand the sheet of wood upright and stabilize it with beverage crates. Leave the bottom crates filled. Secure the construction with tension belts.

Semi-finished products

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheet of wood
- Wooden panels
- Screws

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Clamps
- Glue



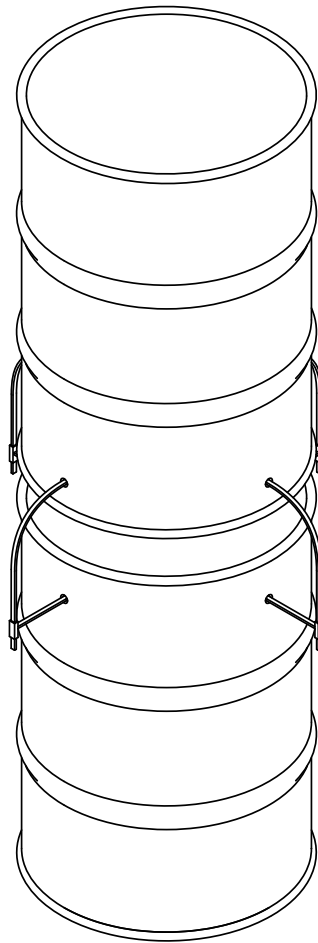
Make four stacks of beverage crates (each four crates high) and leave the two bottom ones of each stack filled for stabilization. Secure each tower with a tension belt. Screw the sheets of wood into a cross formation and then screw another sheet underneath each of the upper sides for balance. Screw and glue wooden blocks under the sheets of wood to keep them in place. Secure the cross to the crate towers with tension belts.

Semi-finishproducts

- Beverage crates
- Tension belts
- Sheets of wood
- Wooden blocks
- Screws

Tools

- Drill
- Electric screwdriver
- Clamps
- Glue



Open the lids of the barrels. Fill the bottom barrel with sand for stabilisation. Drill four holes into the top of the bottom barrel on the side and four more in the lid. Drill four holes into the bottom of the upper barrel on the side and four more in the bottom. Stack the barrels on top of each other so that the holes are aligned. Feed cable ties through the holes and pull the upper barrel tight.

Semi-finisheproducts

- Wide-neck steel barrel
- Cable ties
- Sand

Tools

- Drill

Methodical Teaching Concept

②

Methodical Teaching Concept

Requirements for local curators

Practice Space for Criticism can and should be adapted to its local environment, not only through the physical design of the stations, but also through the content programming.

Local curators should choose one or more core themes to be debated as demonstration examples in *Practice Space for Criticism*. It is worth choosing themes with local relevance, from minority rights and equal rights to racism or climate change. Individual stations (*'Loudspeaker for Dystopia'*, *'Criticism for All'* and *'Criticism Kiosk'*) will further reflect these themes. To do so, local curators and trainers will upload texts onto the sound stations, select books for the display from libraries, and invite local organisations to try out the criticism kiosk. In this way, the core themes also help the trainers to tie the content of the visitor programme to local discourses.

Challenges for the trainers

The trainers' task is to lead groups of visitors through the circuit training, providing assistance at individual stations.

They should openly engage in conversation with the visitors, supporting them in their debates by sparking ideas and highlighting the theme of critical practice. The trainers will know which target group they are engaging with and can adapt accordingly – e.g. by modifying their approach for younger or less educated visitors.

They can use their expert knowledge to help visitors at the individual stations or engage with them by actively participating in the stations themselves, which will help them recognize how much input and support the visitors need to engage with the theme, and they can take a step back when the group develops its own productive dynamic.

At the same time, they will act as mediators, intervening and moderating discussions within the visitor group as appropriate. For example, if one person is doing most of the speaking, the trainer should try to involve the rest of the group so that all members can actively participate in the circuit training exercise.

The trainers will oppose discrimination in all its forms. Racism and other forms of discrimination are not valid opinions and are not welcome in the *Practice Space for Criticism*. Trainers must speak appropriately to visitors at all times.

- Don't make accusations against your counterparts.
- Under no circumstances should you swear or make offensive slurs or gestures.
- Phrase your comments in such a way that they stem from yourself and how you feel. If you explain the feelings that another group member triggers in you, it is more likely that they will take on your criticism and change their behaviour. Aim to use phrases like: 'I feel like...' or 'I think that...'

If the trainers are booked for a fixed group, it is up to them to decide how they want to initiate the experience. We find that starting with an open question appeals to all participants and encourages them to reflect upon the theme.

- What is criticism?
- What does criticism mean to you?
- When do we practise criticism? Can you think of an example?

If these questions don't provoke any reaction from the listeners, you can ask specific follow-up questions. Examples include:

- Did you practice criticism at school through roleplay or discussion, for example? How did you find it?
- How does criticism play out in your workplace? In your family?

To encourage more conversation within the group, you can make a provocative statement to evoke a reaction. This could be taken from one of the core themes set by the curators.

Circuit training

Exercise 1: Meeting Point for Criticism

Station: Three standing desks, each labelled with a flag. One flag reads 'privileged', one 'marginalized' and one 'standard'.

Sequence: The trainers introduce one of the core themes selected by the local curators and invite the participants to position themselves – according to the three groups – at one of the standing desks. Next, the trainers invite the participants to behave in a way that shows solidarity for another category by moving to a different standing desk

and, once there, expressing how members of that group represent norms, are discriminated against, or experience privilege.

Note: The trainers must be careful that the positions are not taken literally. If any actual discrimination occurs, they need to intervene!

Objective: The purpose of this exercise is to convey how one takes a stance and demonstrates their position.

Exercise 2: Mat for Adaptability

Station: Gym mats laid on the floor.

Sequence: The trainers introduce a scenario that relates to one of the core themes selected by the local curators (e.g. a man doesn't participate in household chores, members of a minority group experience discrimination, etc.). Together, group members develop possible lines of reasoning to constructively criticize each behaviour. Ideally this will link back to Exercise 1.

Secondly, the trainers select two volunteers who position themselves on the gym mats. The volunteers now express the arguments developed previously in three different positions: first they stand opposite each other without moving, then they hold hands, and finally, they turn away from each other and stand back-to-back. The aim is to test how the body can be used actively and passively.

Note: The trainers must point out that the volunteers will need to be in physical contact during the exercise.

Objective: The purpose of this exercise is to encourage awareness of one's body language. The exercise should help to support the act of criticism through gestures.

Exercise 3: Mirror of Self-Recognition

Station: A mirror.

Sequence: The trainers ask the participants about one of the themes set by the local curators (e.g. 'What is your view on child labour?'). They compile the participants' statements and in a second round, the participants reflect on their own involvement in the topic area (e.g. 'Can I rule out the possibility that any children were involved in the production of my item of clothing?'). The group will discuss the results together. (If the possibility of child labour cannot be ruled out, ask: 'What should happen to the item of clothing now?' and 'How can I change my consumerist habits?').

Objective: The purpose of this exercise is self-reflection. It should help participants not only to receive criticism but also to understand how the criticism they provide relates to themselves.

Exercise 4: Weight Bench of Theory

Station: Stools aligned in a circle.

Sequence: The participants engage in roleplay by re-enacting a talk show in which each participant takes on the role of a talk show guest, with the trainers acting as the hosts. The theme of the talk show is selected by the local curators. The talk show guests are an economic

politician, an activist, an influencer, a businessperson, and a student. The invitees try to argue from their imaginary perspectives. (e.g. the politician justifies their past political decisions; the environmental activist demands that everyone take radical, compulsory measures; the influencer tries to promote sustainable products; the pupil demands a commitment to their future; the automobile businessperson argues against all the measures suggested and for the market as regulator). After ten minutes, all participants will for the most assertive character and for the character possessing the best arguments by a show of hands.

Objective: The aim of the exercise is to perceive hierarchies, raising participants' awareness of said hierarchies and training their assertiveness.

Exercise 5: Loudspeaker of Utopia/ Exercise 7: Loudspeaker of Dystopia

Stations: A loudspeaker with MP3-player.

Sequence: The trainers split the group into two. Inspired by one of the themes selected by the local curators, the first group designs a utopian scenario, the second group a dystopian one. The key question is: How will the world develop in the next fifty years in relation to the theme (e.g. school for pupils, work for employees and employers or the city for its residents)? If nothing occurs to the visitors, they can listen to the files on the MP3-player for inspiration. Next, the trainers ask the visitors about the implications of these utopias and dystopias on their own behaviour in the present.

Objective: The aim of this exercise is to imagine different futures and break free from habitual thought patterns.

Exercise 6: Criticism Pulpit

Station: A lectern and a pulpit.

Sequence: The trainers suggest a simple, everyday criticism scenario (e.g. food doesn't taste good, payment hasn't gone through or someone has been wronged). The participants climb into the pulpit one after another and deliver the same criticism out loud, first gently, then arguing factually, and finally aggressively. At the end, they vote on which intonation is the best way to deliver criticism.

Objective: The aim of the exercise is to find the intonation suited to each piece of criticism. The exercise should illustrate that each piece of criticism needs to be adapted in order to be received.

Exercise 8: Seesaw of Debate

Station: A seesaw.

Sequence: The trainers pick two visitors who are prepared to go on the seesaw together. What happens when one of the duo shifts their weight so that the other person can no longer reach the floor? How does that affect mutual trust? Afterwards, the trainers ask the visitors to suggest verbal and physical rules that could be applied from this scenario to an argument situation. What does it take to argue productively?

Objective: The aim of the exercise is to overcome the negative connotations of conflict. To that end, the exercise should help participants to acknowledge legitimate antagonism and clarify that shared rules are necessary for discussion and criticism.

Exercise 9: Criticism for All

Station: A double-sided display for books

Sequence: At this station, it is the curators and trainers who come in for questioning. Before the exhibition opening, they choose a book that they find relevant to the themes selected by the local curators and briefly introduce it to the visitors. They may select diverse presentation methods (from pithy quotes to performative renditions of the content).

Objective: This exercise encourages knowledge acquisition. The exercise should illustrate that criticism is improved when the critic is aware of and is able to relate to different positions.

Exercise 10: Criticism Kiosk

Station: A cruciform table and advertising columns

Sequence: This exercise promotes exchange: visitors should discuss whether and how their standpoint on the themes selected by the local curators has changed, practice criticism about the exhibition itself, and consider what they will take away. For moderation purposes, the trainers can be guided by the following questions:

- What did I like about the practice space for criticism?
- Which stations did I find difficult?
- Is there another object that you think would have fitted well here?
- Would you have designed/selected different objects for certain stations?

At the end, all visitors write a note for themselves to take home:

- Which parts of the training I have just received do I want to incorporate into my daily life in the future?

Objective: This exercise is intended to close the circle with the introduction given by the trainers to the exercises. Visitors should be encouraged here to reflect on the workshop and establish their own position.