Cahier on Art and the Public Domain

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Art as a Public Issue

How Art and Its Institutions Reinvent the Public Dimension

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editorial

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ART AS A PUBLIC ISSUE

How Art and Its Institutions Reinvent the Public Dimension

For a long time, the public sphere as a space in which rational debates are conducted, free of prescriptive forces, and public space as a common world were guiding concepts in the discourse on publicness defined by such thinkers as Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. These enlightened forms of 'civilized publicness' seem far removed from either the theory or the practice of the present day. Neoliberal forces, such as privatization and commercialization, are torpedoing the idealized modern concepts of the public sphere, which is being increasingly defined, in terms of a practical project, by acute expectations concerning security and threat. At the same time, public space is being claimed by groups and audiences such as illegal aliens, refugees and migrants, who are not accounted for, or only minimally, in official policy dealing with this space.

Indeed, current thinking about the public sphere and publicness is no longer based on models of harmony in which consensus predominates. Repeated references are made to Jacques Rancière or Chantal Mouffe, who emphasize the political dimension of public space and its fragmentation into different spaces, audiences and spheres and in whose view forms of conflict, dissensus, differences of opinion or 'agonism' are in fact constructive and do justice to many. This means public space has once more become an urgent topic in the debate on liberal democracy, a debate which, supported by radical-leftist philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben or Alain Badiou, is increasingly focusing on the relationship between politics and life, in which 'the political' often runs counter to politics itself.

In the wake of these developments, the artistic space of art and its institutions is also repeatedly considered as a social or even political space, as a public issue. The aesthetic and the political are played off against each other, and new questions are being formulated about autonomy and serviceability. This issue of *Open* examines how art and its institutions are reinventing, reformulating or re-legitimizing their public dimension and involvement. A neutral position, after all, seems at the very least naïve here: both art and art institutions still manifest themselves at the sufferance of the public, the audience. They cannot avoid re-

examining what is public (or not) and why, who the audience is and how they want to relate to it. Do they dare become part of 'the political', or do they let themselves become instruments of market players and party politics?

Chantal Mouffe postulates her 'agonist' model of space and the role she sees for the artist within it. Nina Möntmann outlines how small art institutions can play the role of the 'wild child' and adopt a meaningful (counter)position in public space. Simon Sheikh observes that the erosion of the nation-state has produced a post-public situation, in which the public sphere or 'the public' can no longer be precisely localized.

The controversy sparked in Germany by Gerhard Richter's stained-glass windows for Cologne Cathedral inspires Sven Lütticken to reflect on the cathedral, the museum and the mosque as public space. Sjoerd van Tuinen argues for a Sloterdijk-esque perspective on the public sphere, in which the intimate is taken seriously and art actualizes concrete forms of 'conviviality'. Artists Bik Van der Pol have produced a contribution about a spot in the Park of Friendship in Belgrade that was once the planned site of the Museum of Revolution.

Jan Verwoert rejects the idea that artists and exhibition makers should be required to identify their audience. To him, this reeks of an economic legitimization of culture, and he sees anonymity, on the contrary, as a pre-requisite to meaningful encounters in the cultural domain. In its column, 16Beaver denounces the reduction of the world, of art and of its institutions to numbers, because 'the stakes are immeasurable'. BAVO calls on artists to link radical artistic activism with radical political activism.

As curator of the Dutch pavilion at the last Venice Biennale, Maria Hlavajova, artistic director of BAK in Utrecht, worked with Aernout Mik, who produced the video installation *Citizens and Subjects*. This led her to consider the relationship between art and society, as well as such concepts as community and nationalism. Florian Waldvogel questions Kasper König about his experiences with 'Skulptur Projekte Münster', which König organized from 1977 to 2007, and in the process outlines the evolution of the relationship between art, public space and the urban environment. Max Bruinsma spoke with Jeroen Boomgaard, professor of Art in the Public Space at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, and Tom van Gestel, artistic director of SKOR, about the role of art in a public space where public-private partnerships dominate and where public interests are mixed with economic and managerial interests.

Chantal Mouffe

Art and Democracy

Art as an Agnostic Intervention in Public Space

The Belgian political philosopher Chantal Mouffe defines the public space as a battleground on which different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation. According to Mouffe, critical artistic practices can play an important role in subverting the dominant hegemony in this so-called 'agonistic' model of public space, visualizing that which is repressed and destroyed by the consensus of post-political democracy.

Can artistic practices still play a critical role in a society where the difference between art and advertising have become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production? Scrutinizing the 'new spirit of capitalism', Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have shown how the demands for autonomy of the new movements of the 1960s had been harnessed in the development of the post-Fordist networked economy and transformed into new forms of control.[1] The aesthetic strategies of the counterculture: the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical exigency, are now used in order to promote the conditions required by the current mode of capitalist regulation, replacing the disciplinary framework characteristic of the Fordist period. Nowadays, artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorisation and, through 'neo-management', artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist productivity.

1. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

This has led some people to claim that art had lost its critical power because any form of critique is automatically recuperated and neutralized by capitalism. Others, however, offer a different view and see the new situation as opening the way for different strategies of opposition. Such a view is supported by insights from Andre Gorz: 'When self-exploitation acquires a central role in the process of valorisation, the production of subjectivity becomes a terrain of the central conflict . . . Social relations that elude the grasp of value, competitive individualism and market exchange make the latter appear by contrast in their political dimension, as extensions of the power of capital. A front of total resistance to this power is made possible. It necessarily overflows the terrain of production of knowledge towards new practices of living, consuming and collective appropriation of common spaces and everyday culture.'[2] Certainly, the modernist idea of the avant-garde has to be abandoned, but that does not mean that any form of critique has become impossible. What is needed to widen the field of artistic intervention, by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the programme of total social mobilization of capitalism. The objective should be to undermine the imaginary environment necessary for its reproduction. As Brian Holmes puts it: 'Art can offer a chance for society to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon for its very consistency, its self-understanding.'[3]

2. Interview with André Gorz, *Multitudes*, No. 15 (2004), 209.

3. Brian Holmes, 'Artistic Autonomy', www.u-tangente.org.

I personally think that artistic practices can play a role in the struggle against capitalist domination, but to envisage how an effective intervention can be made requires understanding of the dynamics of democratic politics; an understanding which I contend can only be obtained by acknowledging the political in its antagonistic dimension as well as the contingent nature of any type of social order. It is only within such a perspective that one can grasp the

hegemonic struggle which characterizes democratic politics, the hegemonic struggle in which artistic practices can play a crucial role.

The Political as Antagonism

The point of departure of the theoretical reflections that I am going to present is the difficulty that we currently have in our post-political age for envisaging the problems facing our societies in a *political* way. Contrary to what neoliberal ideologists would like us to believe, political questions are not mere technical issues to be solved by experts. Properly political questions always involve decisions which require making a choice between conflicting alternatives. This incapacity to think politically is to a great extent due to the uncontested hegemony of liberalism. Let me specify in order to avoid any misunderstanding that 'liberalism', in the way I use the term in the present context, refers to a philosophical discourse with many variants, united not by a common essence but by a multiplicity of what Wittgenstein calls 'family resemblances'. There are many liberalisms, some more progressive than others, but save a few exceptions, the dominant tendency in liberal thought is characterized by a rationalist and individualist approach which is unable to adequately grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world, with the conflicts that pluralism entails; conflicts for which no rational solution could ever exist, hence the dimension of antagonism that characterizes human societies. The typical liberal understanding of pluralism is that we live in a world in which there are indeed many perspectives and values and that, due to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt them all, but that, when put together, they constitute an harmonious ensemble. This is why this type of liberalism must negate the political in its antagonistic dimension and is thereby unable to grasp the challenge facing democratic politics. Indeed, one of the main tenets of this liberalism is the rationalist belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason. No wonder that the political constitutes its blind spot. Liberalism has to negate antagonism since, by bringing to the fore the inescapable moment of decision – in the strong sense of having to decide in an undecidable terrain – antagonism reveals the very limit of any rational consensus.

Politics as Hegemony

Next to antagonism, the concept of hegemony is, in my approach, the other key notion for addressing the question of 'the political'. To acknowledge the dimension of 'the political' as the ever-present possibility of antagonism requires coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the undecidability which pervades every order. In other words, it requires the recognition of the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and the fact that every society is the product of a series of practices that attempt to establish order in a context of contingency. The political is linked to the acts of hegemonic institution. It is in this sense that one has to differentiate the social from the political. The social is the realm of sedimented prac-

tices, that is, practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted, as if they were self-grounded. Sedimented social practices are a constitutive part of any possible society; not all social bonds are questioned at the same time. The social and the political thus have the status of what Heidegger called *existentials*, or the necessary dimensions of any societal life. The political – understood in its hegemonic sense – involves the visibility of the acts of social institution. This reveals that society is not to be seen as the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself, whatever the source of this logic might be: forces of production, development of the Spirit, laws of history, etcetera. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. The frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. Things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called 'political', since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations. Power is therefore constitutive of the social because the social could not exist without the power relations through which it is given shape. What is at a given moment considered to be the 'natural' order – together with the 'common sense' that accompanies it – is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity outside the practices that bring it into being. Every order is therefore political and based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are 'hegemonic practices'. Every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices – practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony.

Once those theoretical points have been acknowledged, it is possible to understand the nature of what I call the 'agonistic' struggle, which I see as the core of a vibrant democracy.[4] What is at stake in the agonistic struggle is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured. It is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally. An agonistic conception of democracy requires coming to terms with the contingent character of the hegemonic politicoeconomic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and pragmatic constructions which can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle among the adversaries. Contrary to the various liberal models, the agonistic approach that I am advocating recognizes that society is always politically instituted and never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic

4. For a development of this 'agonistic' approach, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), chapter 4.

practices and that it is never a neutral one. This is why it denies the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics and criticizes those who, by ignoring the dimension of 'the political', reduce politics to a set of supposedly technical moves and neutral procedures.

The Public Space

To bring to the fore the relevance of the agonistic model of democratic politics for artistic practices, I want to examine its consequences for visualizing the public space. The most important consequence is that it challenges the widespread conception that, albeit in different ways, informs most visions of the public space, conceived as the terrain where consensus can emerge. For the agonistic model, on the contrary, the public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation. I have spoken so far of the public space, but I need to specify straight away that we are not dealing here with one single space. According to the agonistic approach, public spaces are always plural and the agonistic confrontation takes place on a multiplicity of discursive surfaces. I also want to insist on a second important point. While there is no underlying principle of unity, no predetermined centre to this diversity of spaces, diverse forms of articulation always exist among them and we are not faced with the kind of dispersion envisaged by some postmodernist thinkers. Nor are we dealing with the kind of 'smooth' space found in Deleuze and his followers. Public spaces are always striated and hegemonically structured. A given hegemony results from a specific articulation of a diversity of spaces and this means that the hegemonic struggle also consists of the attempt to create a different form of articulation among public spaces.

My approach is therefore clearly very different from the one defended by Jürgen Habermas, who, when he envisages the political public space (which he calls the 'public sphere'), presents it as the place where deliberation aimed at a rational consensus takes place. To be sure, Habermas now accepts that it is improbable, given the limitations of social life, that such a consensus could effectively be reached and he sees his ideal situation of communication as a 'regulative idea'. However, according to the perspective that I am advocating, the impediments to the Habermasian ideal speech situation are not empirical but ontological and the rational consensus that he presents as a regulative idea is in fact a conceptual impossibility. Indeed, this would require the availability of a consensus without exclusion, which is precisely what the agonistic approach reveals to be impossible.

I also want indicate that, despite the similar terminology, my conception of the agonistic public space also differs from that of Hannah Arendt, which has become so popular recently. In my view the main problem with the Arendtian understanding of 'agonism', is, to put it in a nutshell, that it is an 'agonism without antagonism'. What I mean is that, while Arendt puts great emphasis on human plurality and insists that politics deals with the community and

reciprocity of human beings which are different, she never acknowledges that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts. According to her to think politically is to develop the ability to see things from a multiplicity of perspectives. As her reference to Kant and his idea of 'enlarged thought' testifies, her pluralism is not fundamentally different from the liberal one, because it is inscribed in the horizon of an inter-subjective agreement. Indeed, what she looks for in Kant's doctrine of the aesthetic judgment is a procedure for ascertaining inter-subjective agreement in the public space. Despite significant differences between their respective approaches, Arendt, like Habermas, ends up envisaging the public space in a consensual way. It is true, as Linda Zerilli has pointed out, that in her case the consensus results from the exchange of voices and opinions (in the Greek sense of *doxa*) not from a rational *Diskurs* like in Habermas.[5] While for Habermas consensus emerges through what Kant calls *disputieren*, an exchange of arguments constrained by logical rules, for Arendt it is a question of *streiten*, where agreement is produced through persuasion, not irrefutable proofs. However, neither of them is able to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the ineradicability of antagonism, the moment of *Wiederstreit*, what Lyotard refers to as 'the differend'. It is symptomatic that, despite finding their inspiration in different aspects of Kant's philosophy, both Arendt and Habermas have in common that they privilege the aspect of the beautiful in Kant's aesthetic and ignore his reflection on the sublime. This is no doubt related to their avoidance of 'the differend'.

5. Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), chapter 4.

Critical Artistic Practices and Hegemony

We are now in a condition to understand the relevance of the hegemonic conception of politics for the field of artistic practices. However, before addressing this question, I would like to stress that according to the approach I am advocating, one should not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields, art on one side and politics on the other, between which a relation would need to be established. There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art. This is why I have argued that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension. The political, for its part, concerns the symbolic ordering of social relations, what Claude Lefort calls 'the mise en scène', 'the mise en forme' of human coexistence and this is where lies its aesthetic dimension.

The real issue concerns the possible forms of *critical* art, the different ways in which artistic practices can contribute to questioning the dominant hegemony. Once we accept that identities are never pre-given but that they are always the result of processes of identification,

that they are discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at fostering. Clearly those who advocate the creation of agonistic public spaces, where the objective is to unveil all that is repressed by the dominant consensus, are going to envisage the relation between artistic practices and their public in a very different way than those whose objective is the creation of consensus, even if this consensus is seen as a critical one. According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.

In my view, this agonistic approach is particularly suited to grasp the nature of the new forms of artistic activism that have emerged recently and that, in a great variety of ways, aim at challenging the existing consensus. Those artistico-activist practices are of very different types, from a variety of new urban struggles like 'Reclaim the Streets' in Britain or the 'Tute Bianche' in Italy to the 'Stop Advertising' campaigns in France and the 'Nike Ground-Rethinking Space' in Austria. We can find another example in the strategy of 'identity correction' of the Yes Men who appearing under different identities – for instance as representatives of the World Trade Organization – develop a very effective satire of neoliberal ideology.[6] Their aim is to target institutions fostering neoliberalism at the expense of people's wellbeing and to assume their identities in order to offer correctives. For instance the following text appeared in 1999 in a parody of the WTO website: 'The World Trade Organization is a giant international bureaucracy whose goal is to help businesses by enforcing 'free trade': the freedom of transnationals to do business however they see fit. The WTO places this freedom above all other freedoms, including the freedom to eat, drink water, not eat certain things, treat the sick, protect the environment, grow your own crops, organize a trade union, maintain social services, govern, have a foreign policy. Al those freedoms are under attack by huge corporations working under the veil of "free trade", that mysterious right that we are told must trump all others.'[7] Some people mistook this false website for the real one and the Yes Men even managed to appear as WTO representatives in several international conferences where one of their satirical interventions consisted of proposing a telematic worker-surveillance device in the shape of a yard-long golden phallus.

6. See for instance their book *The Yes Men. The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization* published by The Disinformation Company Ltd, 2004.

7. Theyesmen Group website, http://www.theyesmen.org.

Of course those forms of artistic activism represent only one possible form of political intervention for artists and there are many other ways in which artists can play a critical role. Following Richard Noble we can distinguish four distinct ways of making critical art. There is the kind of work that more or less directly engages critically with political reality, such as that of Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke or Santiago Sierra. Then there

are artworks exploring subject positions or identities defined by otherness, marginality, oppression or victimization. This has been the dominant mode of making critical art in recent years: feminist art, queer art, art made by ethnic or religious minorities. But one should also include here the work of Kryzstof Wodiczko. Thirdly, there is the type of critical art which investigates its own political condition of production and circulation such as that of Andrea Fraser, Christian Phillipp Mueller or Mark Dion. We can also distinguish art as utopian experimentation, attempts to imagine alternative ways of living: societies or communities built around values in opposition to the ethos of late capitalism. Here we find for instance the names of Thomas Hirschhorn (*Bataille Monument*), Jeremy Deller (*Battle of Orgreaves*) or Antony Gormley (*Asian Field*).[8]

8. Richard Noble, 'Some Provisional Remarks on Art and Politics', in: *The Showroom Annual 2003/2004.*

What makes all of these very diverse artistic practices critical ones is that, albeit in different ways, they can be seen as agonistic interventions in the public space. To be sure, their aim is not making a total break with the existing state of affairs in order to create something absolutely new. Today artists can no longer pretend to constitute an avant-garde offering a radical critique, but this is not a reason to proclaim that their political role has ended. What needs to be relinquished is precisely the idea that to be political means to offer such a radical critique. This is why some people claim that today it is not possible any more for art to play a critical role because it is always recuperated and neutralized. We find a similar mistake among those who believe that radicality means transgression and that the more transgressive practices are the more radical they are. Then when they realize that there is no transgression that cannot be recuperated, they also conclude that art can no longer play a critical political role. There are also those who envisage critical art in moralistic terms and see its role as one of moral condemnation. In fact, given that we find ourselves today in what Danto calls the 'condition of pluralism', lacking generally agreed criteria by which to judge art productions, there is a marked tendency to replace aesthetic judgments by moral ones, pretending that those moral judgments are also political ones. In my view all those approaches are in fact anti-political because they are unable to grasp the specificity of the political. On the contrary, once political struggle is envisaged according to the hegemonic approach that I have been delineating it becomes possible to understand the crucial place of the cultural dimension in the establishment of a hegemony and to see why artists can play an important role in subverting the dominant hegemony. In our post-democracies where a post-political consensus is being celebrated as a great advance for democracy, critical artistic practices can disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character. And, in many ways, they can also contribute to the construction of new subjectivities. This is why I see them as a crucial dimension of the radical democratic project.

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument,* Documenta 11, Kassel 2002.
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Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument,* Documenta 11, Kassel 2002.
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Nina Möntmann

Playing the Wild Child

Art Institutions in a Situation of Changed Public Interest

German curator and art theoretician Nina Möntmann believes that small art institutions, because of their subversive potential, offer possibilities to escape the pressure of having to attract a mass public. By experimenting with interaction between diverse interest groups and by creating international platforms, they can break away from dominant corporate strategies and redefine their public significance.

Currently, art institutions are concerned in many ways about their publics. On the economic plane there is pressure to attract a mass public and to deliver a visitors' count to both sponsors and politicians. This concept of the public as an anonymous mass of consumers is contradicted by the need to produce new publics and to cater to these newly emerging groups with the institution's programme, a need shared by many curators and directors. Institutions, as well as artists and the arrests, still relate to an old concept of public domains which follows an ideal of coming together and communicating. Even when conflicts are tolerated or are regarded both as the essence and the consequence of the democratic ethos, fundamental changes in the public realm in the age of neocapitalism put this value of communication into question.

Institutions, and therefore of course also art institutions, are by definition instruments or platforms for a prevailing order of social values. The language philosopher John Searle prefaces his ontological investigation of institutions by the following basic assumption: 'An institution is any collectively accepted system of rules (procedures, practices) that enables us to create institutional facts.'[1] The concepts of the collective and the system of rules provide the basic parameters for an institution. From this it can be concluded that, conversely, society, when it acts through its institutions, follows a logical structure. Ideally, society and institutions therefore give each other a kind of structural grip and thus open up for each other a mutual potential for action which, however, is accompanied by the side effects of bureaucracy, hierarchical paternalism, exclusion and generalization. So much for the official part of this pragmatic relationship. What is the case, however, when the 'institution', in this case its staff, make their own agenda that deviates from the governmental line?

Elsewhere I have already drawn attention to the fact that art institutions, as distinct from other institutions such as state authorities, parties and trade unions, are not given any direct participation in political processes.[2] Instead, they are given the (indirect) commission to produce images of realities which make them easier to consume, or to design parallel universes in which people can lose themselves for a time and in which everything is more beautiful and better – a parallel universe which either appears as spiritually separated or is supposed to entertain visitors. The fulfilment of this (tacit) commission is generally accompanied by the reward of simplified fund raising. Art institutions, however, in contrast to other institutions, have an individual, changeable profile which gives their actors a relatively large amout of room to manoeuvre in. Thus, for instance, the director of an art institution, while keeping to certain boundary

1. John R. Searle, 'What is an Institution?', in: John C. Welchman (ed.), *Institutional Critique and After* (Zurich/ Los Angeles: Ringier, 2006), 21-51, cit. 50.

2. 'Whereas other institutions, like civil services, parties and unions, have a direct mandate for political action – which is also socially accepted as such – an art institution is expected to deliver and produce images or rather an "image" of what is happening outside; to transform social and subjective realities into a format in which we can handle and conserve it, but not to interfere and take an active part in the production of social and political realities. The question is, how do art institutions deal with these expectations, how do they develop room for manoeuvre, and how do they relate their work to the political contexts they are confronted with and thus also to the activities of other institutions?' Nina Möntmann, 'Art and its Institutions', in: Möntmann (ed.), *Art and its Institutions* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 8-16, cit. 8.

conditions, can adopt a new programmatic direction, in this way addressing or producing new publics. Because of the difficulty of controlling them, in this process, art institutions also have a certain subversive social potential not enjoyed by other institutions which, indeed, exist in order to regulate and legitimate a certain hegemonic social form. The question is, however, which art institutions take advantage of this potential, and with what results? It is a question of temptation: what is more enticing; broad social recognition including reviews in the arts editorials of large newspapers, accompanied by a secure budget, or the pioneering achievements of proposing experimental social change and producing alternative publics? Those refractory 'wild children' among the institutions thus develop an institutional avant-garde whose potential resides in maintaining a closer proximity to artistic practice and operating more closely with social problematics, instead of being merely the executive organ of direct governmental instructions and regulations. One must be satisfied with this opposition; it would be naive to believe that there could be a critical institution at the centre of attention with a reliable economic basis. This is inconceivable, and perhaps even a necessary antithesis in the age of global capitalism.

Now, there is a multitude of different art institutions, and it can be noted that the more 'official' an institution is, the more public it has in the sense of broad and diverse attention, and conversely, the further it is removed from an official institutional status, the more independent it is, and the smaller are the public groups which feel themselves addressed by them and as belonging to them.

Institutions and the Public Sphere

An art institution constitutes itself to a certain degree from its position in the public sphere, especially in its relationships with those public groups which visit the public art gallery or museum, talk about it, criticize it, take part in events and discussions, support the institution and its activities on various levels, associate their names with the institution's programme, feel themselves part of a social group associated with the museum, or contribute and participate in other, informal ways.

Their participants assume an important standpoint in the critical stock-taking of institutions, and Searle emphasizes this by drawing attention to the fact that this view can only be performed from the inside.[3] It is, in a certain sense, a mapping of the institution which serves as the first step in a critical practice. Hence projects of 'institutional critique' always arise from a parasitic perspective through the artist transgressing his or her usual, largely transparent position as a producer for the (semi-)public sphere of the exhibition space, risking a step behind the scenes and becoming a direct participant in the institution. Apart from the staff of an institution, and its guests and co-producers, the participation of certain public groups in institutional processes is extraordinarily important and, accordingly, the interest in the composition of these groups is fundamental. Hence, today, it is one of the most urgent tasks of contemporary art institutions to generate a peer group which keeps the hardware running and uses the software.

3. 'Institutional facts only exist from the point of view of the participants.' Searle, 'What is an Institution?', op. cit (note 1), 50.

At present, however, many curators and directors regard these vital relationships between the institution and its publics as fragile and awkward. In the economic area they experience the pressure of attracting as many people as possible with a populist programme to serve the profile of requirements demanded by sponsors and politicians. Consequently, the representatives of art institutions are worried in many ways about their publics.

How does this essential relationship between art institution and its publics shape up under the changed conditions of increasing privatization of both the institutions and the public realm? Today, the plans of art institutions are determined, or at least influenced, by the dependency on external and increasingly private resources. This implies the commission of attracting a mass public and delivering visitor numbers. If we compare the influence of ratings on television programmes, the fatal effects of this principle become all too apparent. Because institutions, as described above, have a close relationship with the general value system of a society, it can be said that the 'corporate turn' in the institutional landscape mirrors the general power relations in a late-capitalist, neoliberal social constitution. Today, art institutions are becoming branded spaces, and the private financiers are, as a rule, not so much interested in visiting and taking part in the programme of the museum, which they possibly support, but in deploying it as an instrument for the production of corporate image and ultimately corporate profit. Their ideal public is the anonymous mass of global consumers. This corporate model of an art institution – among which we can count as the most public the huge museums such as the Guggenheim and the Tate, which are spreading according to the principle of franchising, and even the MoMA, but also increasingly medium-sized public art galleries, and even smaller institutions – has a peer group of speculators who potentially identify more with the Guggenheim brand than with its programme, and a non-specific public measured in numbers. Hence it may be rightly claimed that one million visitors will turn up annually at the Guggenheim Bilbao, no matter what exhibition is on show. Apart from the privatization of the budget, the corporate turn includes also a changed profile for the curators and directors, who are increasingly appointed for their management qualities as well as their abilities for marketing, as populist politicians, their institution's programme from the viewpoint of profitability. If, therefore, in neocapitalism, there is a general social tendency to superimpose private interests on the public interest, as a consequence, the profiles for action of public positions change accordingly, including the duties of the institution's employees.

New Qualities of the Public Sphere

In the mid-1990s, the relationship between art and the public went through a reorientation which Suzan Lacy described by the term, 'New Genre Public Art'. She recognized in the artistic practices being played out outside the institutions a step from 'art in the public realm' to a 'public art'.[4] The essential quality of New Genre Public

4 Suzanne Lacy, 'Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys', in: *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 20: 'such artists adopt "public" as their operative concept and quest.'

Art is the participation of groups and communities, where the projects are constituted in their relationship between art and the public sphere or a public group.[5] Lacy grounds this observation on a conception of the public sphere in conformity with a democratic model of communication based on participation.[6]

5. 'The inclusion of the public connects theories of art to the broader population: what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may *itself* become the artwork.' In: Ibid.

6. See also: Miwon Kwon, 'Public Art as Publicity', in: Simon Sheikh (ed.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* (Berlin: b_books, 2005), 22-33. esp. 29.

To the present day, this corresponds largely to a general conception of the quality of the public sphere as democratic in the sense of communicative and participatory. Thereby, observations of the shaping of the public sphere have shifted from Habermas's non-existent ideal of an harmonious and homogeneous whole to a space structured by diversity in which parallel, differing interests have a highly conflictual relationship with one another. This understanding provides the basis for the theories of democracy of Claude Lefort, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. Mouffe, for instance, describes this space as the 'agonistic public sphere'.[7] With the current trend towards privatization, monitoring, security, rivalry and exclusion in public realms, a homogeneous democratic space in which the most diverse interests can be lived and acted out next to one another in an harmonious relationship is inconceivable. Instead, the 'agonistic' model describes a plurality of different public realms emerging through a process of dissension. In the meantime, the recognition of the concept of an agonistic public can be found as a guiding thread in observations in art theory on the status of the public sphere.[8]

7. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, 2000). See also Claude Lefort, 'The Question of Democracy', first chapter of: *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minesota Press, 1988).

8. The by far earliest references are certainly to be found in Rosalyn Deutsche, who wrote already in 1996, 'Social space is produced and structured by conflicts. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins.' Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions. Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996), xxiv.

If the art institution is regarded as part of the public sphere, the acceptance of the dissonances arising within it as productive forces implies a new challenge consisting of generating a diversity of democratic public spheres which emerge in dissent against the hegemonic interests within society, and possibly also among each other.

In this process it can become manifest in which way the art institution is determined by a public sphere bearing the stamp of the prevailing social order, and conversely, to what extent an art institution can define the public sphere. The role and responsibility of the institution lies in recognizing its public competence and deploying its authority in a positive sense. Since the public sphere is constituted in a collective process, the participation of the public represents a central function in any view of the public realm. For Nancy Fraser, participation is the basic factor for the production of public spheres: 'Taken together, these two ideas – the validity of public opinion and the empowerment of citizens vis-à-vis the state – are indispensable for the concept of the public sphere within the framework of a theory of democracy. Without them, the concept loses its critical force and its political frame of reference.'[9]

No matter whether democracy is defined as harmoniously idealistic and or as diverse and conflictual, the conception of the public sphere corresponding to these models is always based upon the ideals of a democratic, communicative exchange, of critical debate, of people coming together. But these values have long since become much less self-determined than they once were. Communication is the constant coercion permeating the neoliberal working world. People sit in endless meetings and video conferences, send and receive information, use new tools and media which are supposed to facilitate communication, and can be contacted at any time. These forms of constant exchange necessarily devalue communication and make it an end in itself. When nobody has time to do research and to adequately prepare meetings, communication is felt to be a restriction and a stress factor. Moreover, constant contactability functions as a control mechanism for hierarchical relations. Managers and directors have long since allowed themselves to be out of reach, whereas constantly being on the mobile phone is now regarded as socially inferior behaviour.

These changes in communication in the neoliberal working world with its specific value system put its democratic value into question, which to date was always regarded as the highest good of a public realm. The revaluation of communication is a part of what Negri and Hardt write about the regime of the empire and its effects. 'It not only guides human interaction, but also tries to rule directly over human nature. Social life becomes the object of domination.'[10] Paolo Virno also speaks with less pathos about communication and co-operation which in post-Fordism have become the motor of capitalist relations of production and thereby in their execution mean the 'social adaptation' of the subject.[11] The decoupling of the concepts of democratic public sphere and communication is thus an essential basis for developing new models of the public sphere with the aim of making space for necessary communication which establishes meaning, instead of endless meetings, talks and appointments which in many cases merely raise the stress levels of those involved.

Transferred to the programme of an art institution, this would mean replacing a continually rising number of events on offer, resembling an entertainment programme, with a concentrated programme giving visitors the option of positioning themselves, beyond mere consumption, as active participants in the institution.

Against this background, the art institution can be conceived as a place where discourses arise which also include, in a self-reflective way, the contemporary potential of social relationships – as they are produced precisely in these institutions – their social relevance and the potential for action of communities in general. The philosopher Charles Taylor speaks in an article in *Public Culture* of institutions as places where people can imagine their existence as part of a large social structure, also fashioning their

9. Nancy Fraser, 'Die Transnationalisierung der Öffentlichkeit' (orig. 'Transnationalizing the Public Sphere'), in: Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.), *Publicum. Theorien der Öffentlichkeit* (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2005).

10. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire.* (Cambridge/Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

11. Paolo Virno, *Grammatik der Multitude* (Berlin: ID Verlag, 2005).

social relationships, what they expect from them and also which normative pressures these relationships are subjected to.[12] The institution is therefore not only a place for social events where a public receives and appraises, but also offers a place for public thinking and acting which is shaped not only by the institution's staff but also by its guests and its publics.

12. 'I am thinking rather of the ways in which people imagine the whole of their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions that underlie these expectations.' Charles Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', *Public Culture* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002), 91-124, cit. 92.

The art institution steers these discourses by selecting themes and inviting certain guests. By selecting artists, art works, theorists, catalogue article writers, etcetera, the museum, art gallery or any other form of art institution automatically includes certain artistic, theoretical and political positions and excludes others, thereby building up the profile of its position in the public sphere. Because the physical spaces of the art institution with all their social thresholds and restrictions can only be viewed as semi-official spaces, one task of the institution is to transgress these restrictions and to confront them with democratically organized public spheres. In this sense, artists and theorists appear in their function as 'public intellectuals' who, in the institution, have a public platform for their work, on the one hand, and, on the other, through their specific work and in collaboration with the institution, can potentially produce alternative publics which deviate from the hegemonic social groups.

Profiling via Relations

In this context, the central question is how an art institution is shaped by present ideas about the public sphere and how, in turn, it can have an effect on the structure of the public sphere. Here, the special status of the art institution as a 'wild child' among the institutions comes into play and hence the thesis that the status of an institution as an instrument of the prevailing neoliberal social order of values can only be subverted by the *art* institution. How can the art institution, therefore, on the one hand, employ its general status as an institution in the sense of a socially relevant platform and, on the other, extend its special status as a marginal existence within the institutional landscape which operates at arm's length from the governmental constellation of power? It can try to set up an antithesis to the neoliberal idea of the public sphere, that is of consumption and constant, senseless communication, and to produce a non-branded space.

Since, as I have said, a stocktaking can only be achieved from the inside, the attempts begin with the structure of the institution's own institutional and institutionalized work, its positioning vis-à-vis private and public sponsors as well as the orientation of its programme and its formats. In this context the question is posed concerning the alternatives to the dependent art institution which constantly develops new fund-raising strategies, which is understaffed and overworked, has internalized the mechanisms of the free job market, without adequately profiting from it, but rather ultimately is forced to be satisfied with 'peanuts'.

Several smaller, medium-sized, and even a few larger institutions are currently occupied with the question concerning who can be the peer group for a new, transgressive art institution, and how the institution can involve diverse public groups, thus assuming an active agency within the public realm which can assert itself in society and defend a new institutional model.

In this connection, the model of a 'relational institution' currently seems to be attractive for some curators and directors. It means that the institution defines itself via its relations with various public groups, their interests and participatory potential.

MACBA in Barcelona, a museum which conceives itself, under Manuel Borja-Villel, as a pioneer in these efforts, and therefore has several times been cited by me as a fine example for experimental institutional practice in the public domain, has developed various projects in recent years which proposed new models for how art can exist in the public sphere. Thus, for instance, in its announcement for a conference under the title of 'Another Relationality. Rethinking Art as Experience' in 2005 and 2006, MACBA made its own position in this process manifest: 'Relationality is a concept that enables us to intervene controversially in the debate on art institutions and their audiences. . . . From the standpoint of the museum, we understand the relational as a space for art that temporarily suspends institutional autonomy and explores new forms of interaction with the social. . . . We seek ways in which art can make a meaningful contribution, through its specific nature, to multiplying public spheres. And this process can be defined in terms of relations between different subjects, different forms, different spaces.' With this, MACBA opened up the discussion of its own position in the public sphere and announced that it would temporarily put its institutional autonomy on the back burner in order to open itself up to new, experimental social structures.

Furthermore, MACBA shifted the responsibility of the department for public programmes from a purely communicative campaign for existing exhibitions to an active post for shaping the programme and the public. The department has 'ceased to play a purely exegetic role and to restrict itself to the contents of the museum's programme, and its activities have become constitutive for the production of public spheres'.[13] This became manifest, for instance, in the planning of seminars and symposia which targeted and involved certain local public groups. One much discussed case is the collaboration with groups of activists critical of capitalism which plunged the museum into a public controversy.[14] As Carles Guerra elaborates, the 'production of a public counter-sphere' in collaboration with activists suffered under the 'fetishization' of communicative structures. These structures became visible and celebrated as aesthetic production which, however, was determined by an authorship regarded on all sides as counter-productive. Suddenly those responsible within the museum saw how a structure which had arisen under

13. Carles Guerra, 'Das MACBA – Ein unter Widrigkeiten entstandenes Museum', in: Barbara Steiner and Charles Esche (eds.), *Mögliche Museen, Jahresring 54* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung König, 2007), 149-158, cit. 155.

14. Ibid., 156-157.

the protection of the museum operated in real-time but simultaneously outside any control.[15] Here a general problem of the public sphere is addressed which has to do with visibility, the distribution of power and control. It shows also the possible weak points in transferring the 'agonistic' model to the art institution. These lie in the question concerning the automatic legitimation also of interests which really can no longer be tolerated within the institutional profile.

15. Ibid.

Temporary Retreat

The specific experiences of MACBA suggest an extended model which adds to the relational component a strategic one of temporary retreat. The institution which finds itself in a diplomatic position between a broad public responsibility and the particular interests of the group it has invited, must mediate between the two camps. It provides the platform for formulating and publishing particular interests, and the selection of these interests and interest groups shapes the institution's profile. Because the ramifications of the project evaded institutional control from a certain point on, the museum published an agenda with a general direction and thrust that it had underwritten, which, however, in its decoupled continuation, went against the institutional profile. To stand up to public pressure and maintain one's own profile, an invisibility of certain processes, at least temporarily, is an important factor. To avoid instrumentalization from below and also censorship from above, it is necessary to especially protect the institution itself. It may seem paradoxical, but a concentrated non-public phase ultimately serves the success of a public programme. Projects that represent only the interests of a certain public group require a close, undisturbed productive phase before opening up to discussion in a larger public sphere. In this connection Brian Holmes speaks of a 'tactical necessity of disappearance'.[16]

16. Brian Holmes, 'Transparency & Exodus. On Political Process in the Mediated Democracies', *Open* No. 8 (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/SKOR, 2005).

I have tried out this element of temporary retreat within the framework of a project called *Opacity*.[17] In close collaboration with artists and curators from various institutions, and in a combination of public and non-public events, it was a matter of involving artists (whose participation in institutional processes is normally restricted to presenting the results of their work to a public in the exhibition space) in the institutional processes of planning and decision-making which, indeed, in fact corresponds to their position as active co-producers in the art industry. The phase of spatial and temporal retreat serves to balance out the interests of artists and curators who in this project transgress their status as representatives of certain positions within the art industry. At the same time, the new question cropped up concerning how hidden spaces for action can be established and legitimated behind the scenes because, outside the art institution, which

17. I curated the *Opacity* project in 2005 for NIFCA, the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art. The artists participating were Kajsa Dahlberg, Danger Museum, Markus Degerman, Stephan Dillemuth, Gardar Eide Einarsson and Sophie Thorsen, the institutions Index in Stockholm, UKS in Oslo, Secession in Vienna and NIFCA itself. Apart from internal workshops we realized an exhibition at UKS, a fanzine and a panel discussion at Secession.

The exhibition project ‘How do we want to be governed’ was presented in 2004 in various public locations in Barcelona, showing a continuous process of change.
IES Barri Besòs (22 September – 7 October 2004) © MACBA

Centre Civic de la Mina (21 October – 7 November, 2004) © MACBA

is calibrated to a constant, visible output, no one is interested in these opaque projects because they can only be viewed indirectly as a function within a value-creation process.

This retreat is distinguished from efforts in the 1990s, for instance, the New Institutionalism, which propagated a general opening-up of the building and the programme, developed the idea of the museum as a 'laboratory' and strove for curatorial innovation and the spawning of the most diverse events. Today, a tendency can already be made out of operating more behind the scenes; current efforts are increasingly directed at practising a certain retreat which provides the institution with the necessary space to involve certain definite groups, to find allies for interventions in the public domain and to build up more permanent relations with certain publics who have sympathy with the institution's approach. One example is the long-term project, *Be(com)ing Dutch* in 2006-2007, initiated by the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, which combined closed thematic workshops with other formats and institutional collaborations.[18]

18. http://becomingdutch.com/events/.

The present interest of some curators in the academy and in theory, too, goes in the same direction, whether it be manifest in exhibition projects or in the fact that many curators have switched over to the academic side or have a foothold in academia and curate from this position.[19] The academy represents the last refuge where work as regards content can still be done under legitimized circumstances and where one can devote oneself without distraction to theoretical reflection without having to cut oneself off completely from practice.

19. See, for instance, the project A.K.A.D.E.M.I.E., a collaboration between the Siemens Art Program and the Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven, MuHKA Antwerpen, Kunstverein Hamburg, Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmith College in London, 2005.

I see the options for contemporary art institutions to assume a relevant (counter) position within a public realm which is reconstituting itself to lie in a combination of precisely these relational concepts and an interplay with opacity. This would be a transgressive institution positioning itself in its relations to various publics, including minorities, against the populist conception of a public in consumer society with its neoliberal politicians. It would be an institution oriented towards various disciplines, thus creating alternatives to the event economy, involving its local publics and networking internationally with other platforms inside and outside the art world, temporarily retreating in order to have sensible communication in closed thematic workshops and to establish discourses, thus not enclosing its staff within the flexible management of creative industries.

This would also be an institution closer to research-based and artistic strategies than to corporate strategies, which would produce publics no longer based on the principle of prestige, but which would emerge from constant exchange among diverse interest groups. As with all institutional models, here, too, the question is posed concerning adequate financing. There is no question that the financing of art institutions everywhere represents a growing problem. But it cannot be the only solution to consume oneself in permanent fund raising and to develop ever new strategies for how to keep playing

in the great game. It is apparent that an institution casting emancipatory ideas for the use of the public realm cannot fall back on the general strategies for fund raising. The question concerning how such models are to be financed coincides with the question concerning who is at all interested in supporting art institutions which do not give back what counts in the dominant contemporary social forms, namely an effective production of mass image and the revenue from a paying mass public. Private and public, thematically oriented foundations whose interests are freed from a Western standard of exhibition policy and which try to establish self-determined transnational structures, provide a ray of hope for future financing models. Even if the major financial sources keep a distance, it is nevertheless rewarding for the sake of emancipatory publics to exploit the special status of the art institution and to play the wild child among all the other institutions.

Simon Sheikh

Publics and Post-Publics

The Production of the Social

According to Simon Sheikh, the erosion of the nation-state has led to a post-public situation, in which the public sphere of 'the public' can no longer be specifically located. The answer is not a nostalgic return to outmoded notions of the public and its spaces, but an analysis of the relations between publicness, consumption and production, culminating in new public formations where action can be taken.

How is a notion such as 'the public', be it as a people, a space or a notion, produced? And how is it actualized? Are these three products interchangeable and synonymous with each other and the term public, and, if so, how can they be entangled from the production process itself – linguistically, conceptually and socially – and are they the only emergent forms of this production?

Part of my position has already been given by the title, 'Publics and Post-Publics: The Production of the Social', indicating that the public is something that cannot only be pluralized and perhaps deconstructed, but also that it is something that produces – a construction, and not a given. It is not a fixed entity we can enter or exit at will, but rather something that has constitutive effects on the social, on how we socialize, and are indeed socialized. Secondly, I must add that the notion of publics and post-publics indicates how the public – again, be it a people, space or notion – is a mainly historical notion, a nineteenth-century concept based on specific ideas of subjectivity and citizenship, that cannot be so easily translated into the modular and hybrid societies of late global capital, into the postmodern as opposed to emerging modern era. Indeed, in can be argued that the public sphere may not even be an adequate term to describe contemporary forms of representational politics (in art and culture) and political democracy (in democracy and its others). The question then becomes, what can be put in the place of the public?

In the place of the public sphere? was also the title of a symposium, later published in book form, that I organized in 2002. Here, we took our point of departure in the connection between the public as a political construct and public artworks as representations and interventions within this spatial formation, and in how changes within both the conception of the public and the production of contemporary art has radically altered the possibilities for art works in terms of articulation, intervention and participation. We asked: How does one perceive and/or construct a specific public sphere and positional and/or participatory model for spectatorship as opposed to (modernist) generalized ones? Does this entail a reconfiguration of the (bourgeois) notion of the public sphere into a different arena and/or into a mass of different, overlapping spheres? Or, put in other terms, what can be put in the place of the public sphere?

The last question, as Miwon Kwon accurately pointed out in her contribution, must be read in two ways: both as what objects and acts could be placed in so-called public spaces, but also what kind of spatial formation that could replace the public sphere as designated and imagined in the historical, bourgeois model?[1] Here I shall attempt to address both questions in turn, and not least how they are connected in a continuous process of articulation as constitution, since the idea of the public and its doubles, *the private*, obviously, but also *the counterpublic*, is simultaneously something imaginary *and* localizable – its condition is *always* being *and* becoming in one movement, a double meaning and a double bind.

1. See Miwon Kwon's essay 'Public Art and Publicity', in: Simon Sheikh (dd.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* (Berlin: b_books, 2005).

Thus, any attempts at answering the sweeping question of an *instead*, of *replacement*, has to go precisely through *placement*, through the condition of the connection between imagination and implementation.

The Metaphor of the Blueprint

It is perhaps, then, no coincidence that the main theorist of the bourgeois notion of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas, used the metaphor of a 'blueprint' to describe this historical model.[2] In discussing the public sphere's social structures, Habermas outlines what he calls the basic blueprint, by which he means a sketch of the new public sphere that was set up in between the private realm and state power in early bourgeois societies. But the phrase is very telling; a blueprint is not (only) a sketch, but rather a matrix from which forms are produced, such as in the printing of a book. It is moulding, setting into practice. The blueprint is, thus, that which is set in motion not to describe society, or a category here of such as the public sphere, but in order to produce specific social relations, ways of doing and thinking socially, culturally and politically. Moreover, a blueprint does not emerge organically from social structures, but is imposed upon them in order to configure or, possibly, reconfigure them.

2. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989). [German original appeared in 1962].

However, of what exactly does this blueprint consist? According to Habermas, the public sphere is principally a sphere in-between individuals and the state, a kind of buffer zone, and is made up of three basic features: political deliberation, culture and the market place. These features, or spaces, if you will, are not clearly demarcated, but nonetheless placed inside a given society, in the sense that they are strategically placed in between the private realm of economic exchange and family relations on the one side, and sovereign state power and police actions on the other. It is thus a space that mediates between these two more clearly demarcated entities, and is as such the space for public debate in a political sense. In this way, the bourgeois public sphere is modelled on the ancient Greek polis, where only those who where exempt from the struggle of daily life and labour could be understood as free and thus capable of political speech for the common good, not just self interest. Public speech is always, then, outside individual concern, outside economy and family in the sense that it is above it. Only the father of the household can participate in public matters. In the modern version, however, this meant an exclusion of specific concerns rather than subjects from public debate, as well as a focus on rational argument. Excluded from politics, was, in effect, economy in the form of labour relations, and by extension class struggle, as well as family relations that were confined to the private realm, basically gender relations, domestic work, sexuality and childrearing.

Included in the public sphere, was, as mentioned, culture, and not only artistic expressions and forms, but also art institutions played a crucial role in the establishment of the bourgeois public sphere

and its separateness from daily life. Early art institutions were indeed self-organized spaces, such as the German *kunstverein* – that is spaces run and funded by enlightened citizens of the city, as both a representation of their values and an authorization, as Frazer Ward has aptly coined it.[3] The emergent bourgeoisie reflected its values and ideals in such spaces, making them into representational spaces in more senses then one, artistic as well as culturally class based. Secondly, the art institution was – crucially – a place for aesthetic debate and judgment, on what was beautiful and true, valuable and significant in art, and by extension in the world. It was not only a cultural space, but also cultivating, and had as such an educational role.

3. Frazer Ward, 'The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity', *October* 73, Summer 1995.

The aesthetic debate, however, also played a significant political role, since aesthetic judgment and debate worked as a rhetorical rehearsal of more proper political speech in the public realm and its role in the emerging bourgeois political hegemony, where state institutions became, principally, objects for public scrutiny and debate. This could take place through the employment of rational argument as the privileged mode of speech: knowledge about art, and soon the quaint discipline that is art criticism, became a rational way of speaking about the fundamentally irrational objects (and statements) from artistic production itself. And this is why there still today is this division of labour between subject and object, between analyst and analysand, and, importantly, a crisis in the system of representation that is the bourgeois art institution when the artist/producer refuses his or her historical role, and actually takes on the role of analysis and argument in any politically coherent – seemingly rational – way of speaking, although that is a whole other story . . .

Buffer Zone

For now, the important issue is one of spatial formation, namely, the in-between-ness of the public sphere and its mediation between the political, matters of state, and the non-political, labour and gender. What I have called its status of a buffer zone. Additionally, there is the issue of the placement of this spatialization of the concept, as inside, never outside society, either suggesting an emergence from within the social, or, more accurately, that the social is framed by certain boundaries, both real and symbolic. First, the notion of the buffer zone: in geopolitical terms, a buffer zone indicates a zonal area designed to separate two other, opposing areas, such as nations or tribes. The buffer zone may even itself be a nation, but its purpose is to alleviate tension, or war, between irreconcilable forces or interests – the same way Habermas views state power as opposed to private being. It is for this reason that the public sphere – as the buffer zone – by definition must strive towards consensus and equilibrium, as well as towards preventing the two areas from blurring or merging.

Indeed, within this way of thinking, the apparent 'crisis' of the public sphere, as it is seen by Habermas and his followers, has exactly to do with

either side of the equation dominating too much, as in the case of too much privacy become public (from feminism to tabloid celebrity culture!), and with the diminishment of the buffer zone itself (as in the loss of the bourgeois public sphere, from communism to commercialization). Only certain spaces and certain experiences can be formulated as political, regardless of *how* they are experienced. Rather, it is a question of *when* and *where*: not at home and after work. Commonplaces are, then, not public spaces.

In any case, the notion of the buffer is always to separate, never to bring the different spheres closer, and as such the buffer is not only a location for politics, but rather for rendering certain things, emotions and economies, *political* and others decidedly *non-political*. It thus not only enables political speech, but also hinders it, blocking it from becoming public. And this was precisely the point of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's critique of the Habermasian model, tellingly entitled *Public Sphere and Experience*.[4] Their claim was that the exclusion of the private and the spaces of production (work and school and so on) from the term public, was in fact an act of blockage of experiences, of de-politicization of certain areas from the sphere of politics that was public space. Instead, they tried to posit spaces of production and reproduction as political, as discursive spaces of experience, and thus as in public spaces, in the sense that they are organizing collective experience. By placing the emphasis on the notion of experience, Negt and Kluge do not only point to the inequality of access to the public sphere in Habermasian terms, it also allows them to analyze modes of behaviour and possibilities for speech and action in different spaces. And they argue for a specific, but plural, public sphere that can be termed 'proletarian' in opposition to the normative 'bourgeois' public sphere, where common places become public spaces.

4. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience – Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). [German original: 1972].

Counterpublics

This proliferation of spaces to be considered public, or to be publicized, so to speak, not only brings antagonisms into the light that the bourgeois public sphere tried to shade and even hide, but also leads to a fragmentation of the very idea of public space as one kind of place, as one specific location (even when it exists in a limited number of forms). In opposition to the normative, and very exclusionary, stand a number of other public formations, or what has also been termed counterpublics. That is, spaces that share some of the same organizational features as classic public formations, such as clubs, groupings, publications, but for other or opposite aims: other spaces for other subjectivities.[5] Historically, these were of course the public formations of the counterculture and new social movements. We can therefore only use the notion of public in a plural sense, as multiple, co-existent publics – historical (residues), actual (present) and potential (emerging).

5. For a magisterial account of the concept of counterpublics, and its realtionality to the normative public, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

This obviously has some quite wide-ranging effects and affects on the different ways in which the public is imagined actualized as an entity along the lines mentioned at the outset of this essay: people, space, notion. A people can thus no longer be understood as one, as uniform, but as fragmented in terms of identity, ethnicity, class, gender and so on. Furthermore, this fragmentation cannot be understood only as (cultural) diversity, but also as oppositionality, radical difference. The same goes for the spatial actualization, with publics and counterpublics, we can first of all not only talk about one space, or a number of related spaces separated completely from others, but rather about a number of possible and impossible spaces with different discourses and modes of address, and, ultimately, the dematerialization of public spaces altogether, in both a positive and negative sense: expansion and disappearance at the same time. And for the more abstract concept of the public as a notion, it means that we must talk about it as an empty signifier, constantly filled with signifying content, with a forming of the social, production of subjectivity and distribution of economy. And in each case we are dealing with a concept where the descriptive and the prescriptive elements cannot be separated chronologically or politically.

The Conflation of Public Spaces

The so-called in-between-ness of the public sphere not only has to do with its placement, but precisely also with its spatialization, and thus institutionalization (both real and imaginary). Again, taking up the line of production and fragmentation from Negt and Kluge, we must understand public spaces not only in the public/private divide, but also in relations to spaces of production. That is, how public spaces emerge *through* production, as ideological constructions, and through economic development. However, today, we would not describe public spaces only in dialectics of class struggle, but rather as a multiplicity of struggles, among them struggles for recognition, partly in shape of access to the public space, as well as the struggle for the right to struggle itself, for dissent. Secondly, as not only critics of the Habermasian model have pointed out, but certainly also Habermasians have publicly bemoaned, we are now witnessing the conflation of public spaces with modes of consumption rather than participation, where consumption becomes the main form of social communication.

The art institution, once an exemplary bourgeois public space, is nowadays finding itself in a difficult transformative phase, where its historical role has become obsolete – the caterer of taste and reason – without another critical role being apparent, or without another constituency emerging, other than commodity exchange within the experience economy (sic) and the society of spectacle.[6] However, it will not suffice to claim that commercialization has contaminated

6. See my essays, 'Anstelle der öffentlichkeit? Oder: Die Welt in Fragmenten', in: Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig (eds.), *Publicum – Theorien der öffentlichkeit* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2005), 80-88; and 'The Trouble with Institutions, or, Art and Its Publics', in: Nina Möntmann (ed.), *Art and its Institutions* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 142-149.

the 'good, old' public space, instead we must examine the contradictions of the concept in its historical genesis as well as its later developments and possible demise. For instance, the strange separation between the market as a social place, the marketplace, and economy and labour as private matters, taking place in non-public places and outside the political. We must replace separation with fragmentation, and as such look at the relations between different spaces of discursive production, in its many forms from knowledge production to the production of consumer goods and back again, leading to another hierarchical relationship between spaces of production and public spaces, a hierarchy that is also geopolitical. We must, then, ask which institutions – which ways of instituting – produce these hierarchies, these uneven global developments? And we must ask: what are the current relationships between publicness, consumption and production, and how can these categories be disentangled, locally as well as globally?

The End of the Public-as-Nation

The spatialization of the concept of the public, had not only to do with its state of in-between-ness of other spheres, but also with its state of being *inside* the social as such, or what we could call its state of being a state. That is, not only a people, but always a *specific* people of *sameness*, of a unity that could surpass differences of gender, class and even interest, namely the modern nation-state. The public sphere is always inside the nation, and the state form becomes the agora, supported by national economy and taxation, education, language and culture, and so on. The social becomes instituted through the nation, and the inside is always defined as essential, in direct contrast to others; other peoples and nations, regardless of the fact that other nations may be structured around a similar principle of nationality, national institutions and cultures. The bourgeois nation-state was, after all, not only founded upon the democratic paradox of liberty and equality, but also on *brotherhood*, which, besides its masculinist overtones, also implies bloodlines and kinship. Ethnic kinship and its others are a basic feature of the establishment of the public as the people, and as a national space. The public sphere is part and parcel of the nation-state, established along similar lines of exclusion, of interiority and radical exteriority, and can as such not so easily be disentangled from nationality, or, indeed, from nationalism.

However, if the public sphere does not emerge organically from the ground of the social, but rather is seen as a means of grounding the social within society, then the social cannot have any positive content, any essence to express or basis to return to. The public sphere is thus an increasingly empty category, obsolete even, which has not so much to do with the blurring between private and public, or with the conflation between public deliberation and commodity exchange, but rather with the fact that the centre of the *public-as-nation* simply cannot hold, neither as an identitarian, economic nor political concept. Obviously, we were dealing with a projection that intended to produce the social in a specific way

within the emerging bourgeois society, as national citizens, first and foremost, a projection that has been shattered by counterpublic articulations, and alternative ways of socializing, of produced social relations. Moreover, we are now witnessing the withering away of the nation-state itself in the later stages of global capital. And this is what we must call the post-public situation, where there is no longer any unity or even fixable locality to the public sphere (in plural).

To talk about any international, or even global, public sphere is, then, quite a contradiction in terms. To exemplify for the public sphere of the art world, we can now say that any national artist is also an international artist. So, when a country selects their participant(s) for their national pavilions in Venice for the biennale, which was historically an international competition, and still is actually, they do not only, or mainly, select the most nationally representative artists, as in a folkloristic approach, but rather the ones with the biggest international renown or possibility. The jury is international, of course, and artists of an international calibre give the single nation a higher chance of winning the grand prize as a nation. A nation's grandeur can be measured in its international stature, within culture as well as within economy and military power – with the combination of all three naturally supplying moral world leadership as well! We do not see this merger of the national and the international only in Venice, though, but pretty much in any major art event, where the artists represented are not only required to be from all over the world, and as such attest to the globalism of (high) culture, but also their individual nation. Just notice how country codes are always indicated behind the artists' names on press releases and invites, as if they were the stickers on the back of a car or participants in a major sports competition.[7] In the post-public art world, perhaps, a national artist is always international.

7. Staying within this metaphor, it is interesting how some TV stations have been indicating the club of the football players in the world cup, when leaving or entering the pitch, probably as some indicator of the skills and quality. Perhaps it would then be more telling if art exhibitions started listing the gallery names in parenthesis after the artist's name rather than the country he or she is from? It would certainly seem more in line with the current state of global capital and its more complex flows.

Post-Publics

Perhaps any trans-national, or post-national concept of the public sphere can only be understood in terms of being (a) post-public, not in the sense of being after or beyond publicness as such, that we are somehow *un*public, or even returning to clandestine *pre*publics states, but rather a double movement of dematerialization and expansion of what could be considered public, affecting both our most local concerns and private senses of being, as well as trans-national economic flows and spaces of production and the geopolitical. Post-publics are also post-colonial spaces. Indeed, I would suggest that the post-public can be understood as parallel to terms such as post-colonial, post-communist and post-feminist, in the sense of not being a radical break or departure, but rather a critical re-examination of its leitmotifs and basic modalities, where the bourgeois notion of the public, and its adjacent counterpublics, appear to us in the

form of a phantom, as Bruce Robbins has suggested.[8] That the public does not have any solid ground or placement, but rather an *afterlife*, a spectre-like presence.

How can the post-public then materialize, and which ways of instituting can take place within something so seemingly groundless and ephemeral? How can power be challenged without an agora, without fixed boundaries, but with growing social control and surveillance? How can common ground be found when common places are groundless, we could also say? What must be established, then, are public formations that can exist without the state, even in opposition to it. The post-public condition is not to be dismissed in any nostalgic returns to bygone conceptions of the public and spaces of production, but needs to be addressed in critical terms, with new questions emerging, corresponding to the new problematics we are facing. Just as in the absence of the public sphere as we know it, as in a return to a superstructure without basis, there lies the danger of having all the visibility of publicness, but none of the possibilities for action and none of the rights of citizenry. In the words of Paolo Virno the main problem is as follows: 'If the publicness of the intellect does not yield to the realm of a public sphere, of a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs, then it produces terrifying effects. *A publicness without a public sphere*.'[9]

The post-public condition is not to be celebrated then, but to seen as an analytic mode through which we can understand our actuality in order to act in it, obviously, but also in order to reconfigure it, to imagine it anew, and produce new institutions and ways of instituting the social rather than reproducing the old and the existent ones.

8. Bruce Robbins (ed.), *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

9. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 40.

Sven Lütticken

Exhibiting Cult Value

On Sacred Spaces as Public Spaces and Vice Versa

Using as a point of reference the window that Gerhard Richter designed for Cologne Cathedral and works by Thomas Struth, Lidwien van de Ven and De Rijke/De Rooy, Sven Lütticken analyses concepts such as 'sacralization' and 'profanity'. Delving into the shifting and interlocking import of institutions like the cathedral, the museum and the mosque, Lütticken lends nuance to prevailing views on art and public space.

Cathedral

In the summer of 2007, the German media were awash with articles on Gerhard Richter's new window for Cologne Cathedral, and even more so on controversial remarks aimed at said window by Cologne's Cardinal Meisner. After fruitless experiments with figurative motifs, Richter had decided to adapt the principle of earlier works consisting of grids of rectangular colour fields. Since the 1960s, Richter has devised a number of strategies to cope with what he sees as the absence of valid forms in modernity. After the demise of the 'time of kings' and its God-given hierarchy and social structures, art became literally informal, formless; the putative absolute nature of the squares and grids employed by modernists is as arbitrary as the chance that Dadaists and Fluxus artists put in the service of art.[1] In works such as *4096 Colours* (1974), Richter submitted the rigour of the grid to the laws of chance: the distribution of the 4096 unique tones across the structure is aleatory. To the cardinal's dismay, Richter adopted this strategy for the cathedral, placing squares of coloured glass in a grid that is held together by silicone (rather than the traditional lead).

1. 'Interview mit Hans-Ulrich Obrist 1993', in: Gerhard Richter, *Text. Schriften und Interviews*, edited by Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel, 1993), 245.

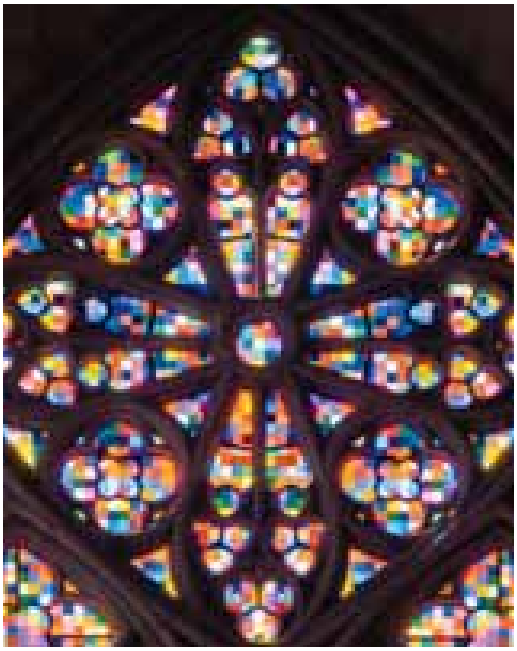
For Meisner, the abstract window was misplaced in his cathedral, because Catholicism is a religion of the Incarnation, not of transcendence. Christ, Meisner explained in a newspaper article, had descended 'as a mediator into the centre of our world' (*als Mittler in die Mitte unserer Welt*), and therefore churches belong in the centre of the city.[2] However, although the great cathedrals are still in the geographical centres of their respective cities, are they still in the spiritual centres? In his article, Meisner claims that societies which 'banish God from their centre' become 'inhuman' – his proof being the 'two forms of dictatorship' that the last century produced. 'Man's dignity is jeopardized when God is abolished and man is put in his place as sole measure; human life then loses its worth.'[3] Any institutionalized secularism, then, leads to the gulag. This is the voice of reactionary Catholic *Kulturkritik*, which happily reduces National Socialism to the desire to place 'man' (*den Menschen*) in the centre. The Holocaust, then, had little to do with an ideology that wanted to purify the collective *Volkskörper* from alien elements; it was simply the logical consequence of the modern rebellion against God, which must necessarily reduce man to the level of beasts. This cynical ideological instrumentalization of Nazism conveniently forgets the links between Nazism and the very discourse espoused by Meisner.

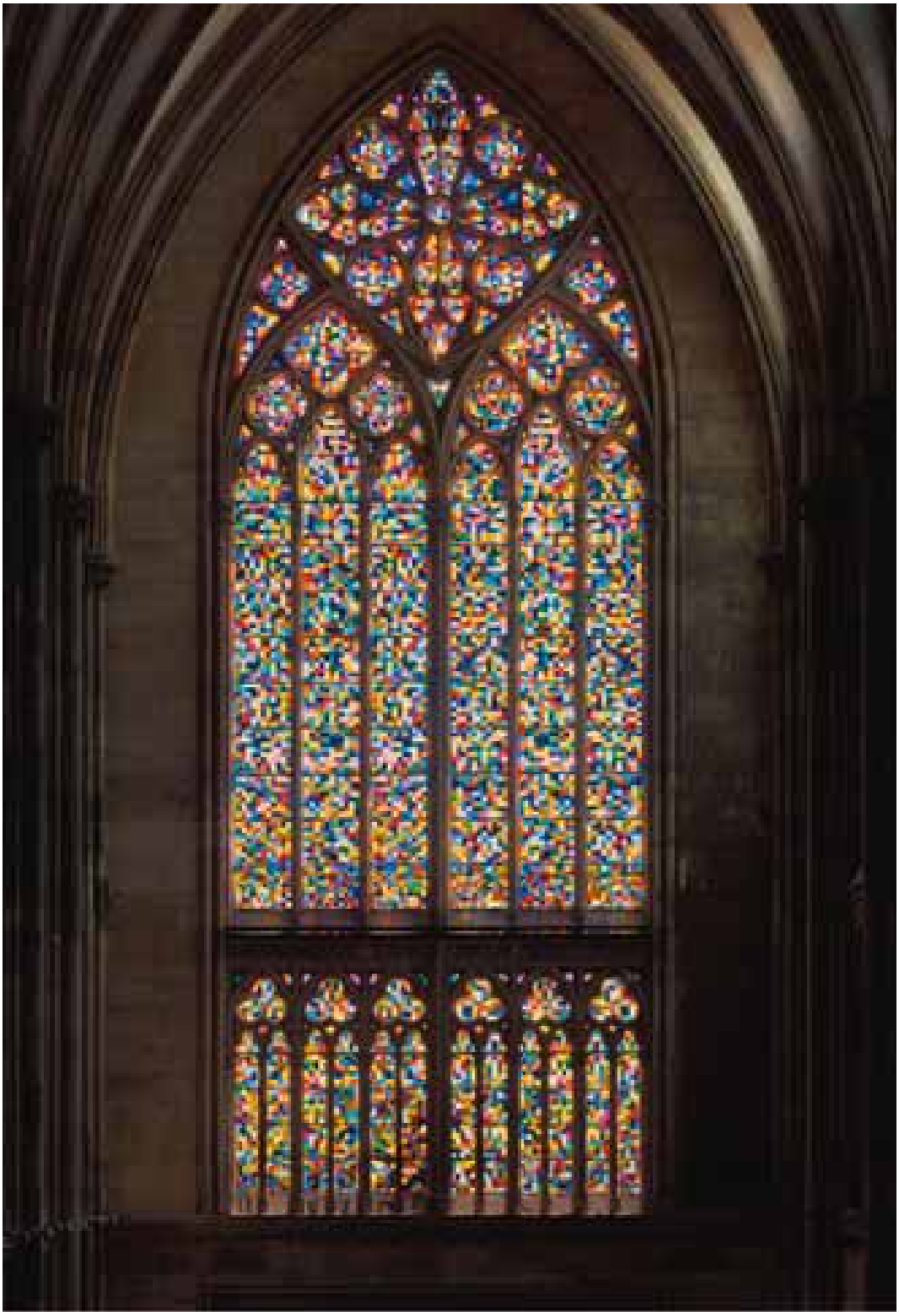
2. Kardinal Meisner, 'Wenn Gott nicht mehr in der Mitte steht', *faz.net*, 18 September 2007, http://www.faz.net/s/RubC4DEC11C0081429591 99A04A6FD8EC44/Doc~E7D0461E2A59D493A8DCD0395688841F9~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html

3. 'Sobald sie Gott abschaffen und den Menschen als Mass in ihre Mitte stellen, ist der Mensch in seiner Würde gefährdet und ein Menschenleben nicht mehr viel wert.' Meisner, 'Wenn Gott nicht mehr in der Mitte steht'.

Meisner's article, with its almost obsessive use of the term 'centre', was

Gerhard Richter, Cologne Cathedral, south transept window.
© Gerhard Richter, Cologne/Dombauarchiv, Matz und Schenk





a response to the controversy that had arisen because of his sermon during the Mass at the inauguration of his archdiocese's new museum of Christian art, which in turn took place when Meisner's negative opinion concerning Richter's window had already attracted a great deal of publicity. During this Mass, Meisner intoned: 'Where culture is severed from worship, cult becomes rigid ritualism and culture degenerates. It loses its centre.'[4] Predictably, the German press had a field day; one paper called Meisner 'the Caliph of Cologne', a sobriquet formerly held by an Islamist hate-preacher who used to operate from the city.[5] While most polemic attacks focused on the German verb *entartet*, which is now linked forever to the Nazi's repression of 'degenerate art' (*entartete Kunst*), Meisner's reference to the phrase 'loss of the centre' is perhaps more interesting. Art historian Hans Sedlmayr, who coined the term, was a member of the Nazi party in the 1930s, and at the time of the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938, he rhapsodized about southern Germany's baroque style, which he saw as completely distinct from Italian baroque – the former being a purely German *Reichsstil* that created 'a new, German centre' for Europe.[6] During and after the war, Sedlmayr would reformulate the question of the centre – and its loss – in Catholic rather than fascist terms; his best-selling book *Verlust der Mitte* (*The Loss of the Centre*) argued that the Enlightenment – culminating in that traumatic event, the French Revolution – saw man rebel against God and his place in creation; man put himself in the place of God, which meant that the great *Gesamtkunstwerke* of the past, the great churches and palaces with their decorations, were no longer possible.[7] The arts disintegrated, and in visual art the image of man, created in God's own image, was horribly distorted or effaced altogether. In presenting modernity as being intrinsically satanic, Sedlmayr silently suggested that Nazism was a trifle, no doubt soothing his readers' souls. What is Auschwitz compared to the horrors of a Mondrian?

The success of *Verlust der Mitte* and its sequel, *Die Revolution der modernen Kunst,* in post-war Germany suggests that Sedlmayr sounded a reassuringly familiar note. This was, as it were, sugar-free *Entartete Kunst*. In 1951 Sedlmayr was appointed as professor of art history in Munich, where Benjamin Buchloh would be among his – reluctant – students. Ironically, an artist who is crucial to Buchloh's critical-historical project has long professed his allegiance to Sedlmayr's analysis: from the 1960s to the present, Gerhard Richter has repeatedly stated that Sedlmayr

4. 'Dort, wo die Kultur von der Gottesverehrung abgekoppelt wird, erstarrt der Kultus im Ritualismus und die Kultur entartet. Sie verliert ihre Mitte.' 'Meisner warnt vor Entartung der Kultur', *Focus online*, 14 September 2007, http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/koeln_aid_132896.html.

5. Dirk Knipphals, 'Der Kalif von Köln', *die tageszeitung*, 17 September 2007, http://www.taz.de/1/leben/koepfe/artikel/1/der-kalif-von-koeln/?src=HL&cHash=8c054bd1aa.

6. See the third part of Albert Ottenbacher, 'Kunstgeschichte in ihrer Zeit. Hand Sedlmayr', http://www.albert-ottenbacher.de/sedlmayr/seite3.html.

7. Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte. Die bildende Kunst des 19. Und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1948). Selmayr doesn't speak of '*Gesamtkunstwerke*' but of '*Gesamtaufgaben*' (pages 17-19).

had been correct in diagnosing a loss of centre. The time of kings and of a God-ordained hierarchy was indeed over. However, the artist should affirm and explore this situation, rather than be seduced by reactionary nostalgia.[8] Richter detourned Sedlmayr's discourse by pressing it into the service of a sceptical and questioning artistic practice, one that informs his various colour-chart paintings and their extension in the cathedral.

8. Richter first encountered Sedlmayr's *Verlust der Mitte* in the 1950s, when he was still studying at the academy in Dresden (letter to the author, 9 September 1999). See as references to Sedlmayr, including one in the course of a conversation with Buchloh, in: *Text*, 72, 120, 139.

In his design for the cathedral's south transept, Richter mirrored some parts of his chance-based 'composition', allowing symmetries to emerge; these remain mostly in the viewer's optical unconsciousness, however, being only truly apparent in the designs and in reproductions. Apart from the scale of the window and the number of squares, the 'hidden' nature of the symmetries is also caused by the surprising intensity of the colours, especially when the sun is shining. Above all else, this is what sets Richter's window apart from the older abstract windows in its vicinity. In spite of the cardinal's protestations, an abstract window in itself is hardly an alien element in a Gothic church, and besides the usual saint-studded windows, both medieval and nineteenth-century, Cologne Cathedral contains numerous abstract examples with ornamental patterns and subtle and muted colours. Compared with these, Richter's window is almost aggressive, refusing to be mere background and looking – as many critics have noted – somewhat like a pixellated flatscreen. Abstraction is thus unmoored from the canvas and seemingly digitized; however, the quasi-industrial colour charts in Richter's painterly production already hint at such a development, and it is they and Richter's practice in general that provide the primary context for the piece.

To mark the window's inauguration, some of these works were shown at the Museum Ludwig, immediately next to the cathedral.[9] This complex and contradictory connection between church and museum has to be taken into account when discussing the church window. After all, Richter's museum status tends to turn the window into a mere entry in the catalogue of Richter's *oeuvre*. Meisner, perhaps all too aware of this, seems to have little faith in the transformative function of the cathedral as a context for Richter's work. Whereas Meisner attempted to impose a rather impoverished and ahistorical Catholic aesthetic, critics writing for various newspapers and magazines subjected the sacred context to intense scrutiny, measuring it with the historical yardstick provided by the museum. The cathedral has indeed been decentred – by the essential institutions of the bourgeois public sphere that is the museum. Meisner's own museum of Christian art, Kolumba, can only attempt to ape this institution and give it a specific slant.

9. *Gerhard Richter - Zufall: '4900 Farben' und Entwürfe zum Kölner Domfenster* was on view from 25 August 2007 to 6 January 2008, showcasing a new work, *4900 Colours*, in combination with *4096 Colours* from 1974.

But then, is the museum as such not a cathedral for the religion of art?

Museum

Since the nineteenth century, increasingly visitors to Europe's major cathedrals and churches have been drawn to these destinations more for art-historical than for religious reasons. This mode of behaviour was immortalized by E.M. Forster in 'Santa Croce with No Baedeker', a chapter from *A Room with a View*, and recently in certain photographs of Italian churches by Thomas Struth, in which the colourful clothes of tourists enter into a dialogue with the altarpieces. Tellingly, Struth's photos are part of his series of *Museum Photographs,* thus acknowledging the fact that major historical churches and cathedrals are now museums as well as places of worship, and often more so. One structure in Struth's series, the Pantheon, has known three incarnations: the original Roman temple became a Christian church and is now, above all, a monument – a 'museified' version of itself. (The Pantheon is still officially a church, in which services are occasionally held, but its religious function is rather marginal.) On the other hand, as some authors keep repeating, the museum itself has become a temple or church; the seemingly secular can be secretly sacred.

Heroic nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives on the intransigent iconoclasm of modern art are now often seen as exercises in myth-making; Hans Belting is not alone in characterizing modern art as a 'myth', and as a 'fetish' that is 'idolized'.[10] Such a 'debunking' discourse, which claims to unveil the mythical or idolized status of art, seems to have become the new consensus. In the Netherlands, Dutch economist Hans Abbing likes to complain that the 'myths' surrounding the status of the artist lead large numbers of youngsters to enrol in art schools, even though practising a creative profession means they are likely to live in poverty.[11] There is nothing more offensive to bourgeois economics than a refusal of wealth and a regular career – the impending global ecological collapse is small fry compared with the shocking phenomenon of people who willingly risk poverty, making art a sphere of radical otherness. This otherness manifests itself physically in the museum, habitually referred to as a 'temple' of art. Increasingly, the otherness of the museum has come to be seen as problematic. German art historian Wolfgang Ullrich has considerable success with writings that argue for a less 'religious' and more down-to-earth approach to contemporary art, and that praise the rise of event culture in museums – think of the nocturnal openings or 'museum nights' that have become popular in Europe, or of the 'spectacular' Turbine Hall commissions of Tate Modern – as a phenomenon that breaks with art's striving for transcendence and that celebrates the 'ephemeral and profane'.[12] In support of Ullrich's thesis that

10. Hans Belting, *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk. Die modernen Mythen der Kunst*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), 9, 19, 25, etc.

11. See, for instance, Hans Abbing, 'De uitzonderlijke economie van de kunst' (2003), www.xs4all.nl/~abbing/DOCeconomist/DeGroene-essayHansAbbing3.doc.

museums have long had a sacred status they should now abandon, the cover of his book boasts an installation view of three of Mark Rothko's *Seagram Murals* from the Tate Gallery's collection. Rothko, of course, had a particularly charged, romantic, quasi-religious conception of art, and the installation view of the *Seagram Murals* almost automatically conjures up that other Rothko space: the nondenominational Rothko Chapel in Houston, a shrine for an abstract spirituality.

12. Wolfgang Ullrich, *Tiefer Hängen. Über den Umgang mit der Kunst* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2003), 56. For Ullrichs response to the controversy surrounding Richter's cathedral window, see Wolfgang Ullrich, 'Religion gegen Kunstreligion. Zum Kölner Domfensterstreit', www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-02-04-ullrich-de.html

From Caspar David Friedrich via Gauguin to Rothko, modern artists often dreamed of making work for – or designing – small churches or chapels, as a more intimate and folksy stand-in for the Gothic cathedrals that were idealized as the ultimate total works of art. With the exception of the Rothko Chapel, those plans came to nought; the museum imposed itself as the destiny of the modern work of art, indeed taking on characteristics of sacred spaces in the process. But is this as remarkable and objectionable as some would have us believe? The opposition of sacred and profane came to the fore in modern theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when religious scholars and anthropologists moved from a focus on beliefs and on myths to a focus on religious practice, on behaviour, on the enactment of myth, on the ritualistic and social dimensions of religion – a development associated with names such as Robertson Smith and Émile Durkheim and his school. Both time and space now came to be seen as being radically split: profane time finds its opposite in the sacred time of myth, actualized in rituals; and profane space finds its complement in the sacred space of cult sites.[13] Authors such as Durkheim realized that seemingly secular modern institutions can still have a sacred function, and Durkheim for one did not think this to be reprehensible; the sacred will always reappear in new guises. By contrast, those critics and art historians who complain about the museum's sacred status cling to a rather impoverished, one-dimensional secularism, according to which public space must be necessarily and completely profane; while attacking institutions for being insufficiently profane, they themselves turn 'the sacred' as such into a fetish. On the other hand, the photos of Thomas Struth are suggestive of a more nuanced and more dialectical approach. When Struth, a former student of Richter's, depicts artfully composed groups of visitors in front of the massive Hellenistic altar that is the centrepiece of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, clichés about contemplation and the worship of art seem irrelevant; we are dealing with complex and varied modes of behaviour.

13. After the Second World War, Mircea Eliade would reduce this approach to a rather schematic but influential model.

The self-proclaimed myth busters are correct in stating that, from Romanticism onwards, art often adopted the trappings of religion. It is also true that this sacralization of art

Thomas Struth, *Pergamon Museum 1*, Berlin 2001 (C-print mounted on Plexiglas, 197 x 248 cm). © 2008 Thomas Struth

proved to be a way of branding art as a mysterious, auratic and expensive commodity. In Walter Benjamin's terms, the limited 'exhibition value' of modern art, which was predicated on unique or at least exclusive artefacts, created plentiful 'cult value', returning art to its roots in religion.[14] But if the modern museum celebrates the cult of art, the art it worshipped was already a dead god: as Douglas Crimp has shown, Schinkel's design for the Altes Museum in Berlin was contested by Alois Hirt precisely because it did not present past masterpieces as normative and timeless works of art, to be studied and emulated by students. Its Pantheon-style rotunda presented a circle of 'timeless' ancient-classical sculptures as a cultural high that can never be regained, because, as the *parcours* surrounding this rotunda showed, art moved on from classical Greek sculpture's perfect equilibrium between the real and the ideal to the predominance of the ideal in post-antiquity, 'romantic' art. This programme was distinctly Hegelian. For Hegel, of course, Spirit in its progress eventually left behind the sensuous realm altogether, finding fulfilment in (his) philosophy. Thus from the Hegelian perspective that the Altes Museum seems to embrace, the museum represents 'not the possibility of art's rejuvenation but the irrevocability of art's end'.[15]

14. Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in: Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds.), *Gesammelte Schriften I.2: Abhandlungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 482-485.

15. Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1993), 302.

Cologne Cathedral is a museum to the same degree that the Ludwig is a museum. One may well argue that the former has been a museified version of itself since the first half of the nineteenth century, when the Romantic idealization of the Middle Ages instigated a movement to complete the building (which had remained a fragment for centuries).[16] Neo-Catholic Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel may have attempted to resacralize art, but they ended up aestheticizing religion, as did Sedlmayr with his take on the 'total work of art'. While they may have tried to put the Middle Ages as a new ideal and norm in the place of antiquity, the process of museification – of transforming objects into art history – neutralized the cult of the Middle Ages. As Sedlmayr remarked, even if the early nineteenth century sacralized art, in the museum Christ and Heracles share the same space, as defunct gods.[17] From the centre of a cult they have become questionable objects, constantly interrogated and redefined. One sacred being is different from the next; church and museum may take on each other's characteristics, but in doing so these are transformed.

16. In his *Lettres à Miranda* from 1796, Quatremère de Quincy already realized that museification does not always need an actual museum; he argued that the whole of Italy is one big museum and that Italian art treasures should be left in this museum rather than be transported to the Musée Napoleón in Paris.

17. Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte*, op. cit. (note 7), 31-32. (The remark on Heracles and Christ is a quotation that Sedlmayr attributes to Nazi architecture historian Hubert Schrade.)

In the words of Jacques Rancière, art in the early nineteenth century became *une chose de pensée*, the site of

a perpetual tussle between thought and its other, between logos and pathos.[18] In this respect, art is indeed not purely secular, incompletely enlightened. However, often the real enemy of those who attack art's 'idolized' status seems to be the potential for thought and dissent that is implicit in this very status. Even if it is complicit with the market, the cult of art may actually be more enlightening than its abolition. At its best, the mythical logic of idolized art points beyond the instrumental reason of the market that enables it, as well as beyond the rhetoric of free art and free words that positions it in today's culture wars. The task is to activate art's implicit logos and to use it – not least against art itself.

18. Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000).

Mosque

In his remarks on Richter's window – the comments that first attracted attention – Meisner opined that the window would be more suitable for 'a mosque or a house of prayer'.[19] The latter term, *Gebetshaus* in German, is often used to refer to synagogues and to Protestant spaces, but it was mainly the m-word that drew public interest. Islam has long been seen as the religion of abstraction *par excellence*. Hegel considered Muslims to be 'ruled by abstraction'; their religion is based on a fanatical devotion to an abstract thought, an abstract deity that is merely a negation of existence.[20] With their aniconic interiors, mosques seem to exemplify this abstract otherness of Islam.[21] For Sedlmayr, abstraction was one symptom of the loss of centre; the collapse of hierarchy and tradition led to meaningless forms, or non-forms. Everything in the cardinal's discourse suggests that he is not averse to this interpretation. But how can abstraction be a sign of man's rebellion against God and tradition and at the same time be considered Islamic? Perhaps in the cardinal's mind these opposites meet. Perhaps for Meisner, Islam with its non-incarnated God is but thinly veiled atheism, the purveyor of a spurious form of sacrality and, as such, not dissimilar to the cult of modern art. Both are bad copies, misleading simulacra of the true church, and neither has warm and humane saints, merely confronting the viewer/believer with meaningless patterns. If for Cardinal Meisner mosque and museum seem to be strangely continuous, both being sites of abstraction that are opposed to the Catholic cathedral as spiritual centre, for others mosque and museum could not be more different.

19. For Richter's response to the mosque comparison, see Georg Imdahl, 'Meisner irrt sich ein bisschen', *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 31 augustus 2007, http://www.ksta.de/html/artikel/1187344877397.shtml.

20. 'Die Abstraktion beherrschte die Mohammedaner: ihr Ziel war, den abstrakten Dienst geltend zu machen, und danach haben sie mit dergrössten Begeisterung gestrebt. Diese Begeisterung war *Fanatismus*, d.i. eine Begeisterung für ein abstraktes, für einen abstrakten Gedanken, der negierend sich zum Bestehenden verhält.' G.W.F. Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, in: *Werke 12* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 431.

21. In Europe, mosques are often highly contested, especially when very large mosques are planned, giving physical form to the expansion of Islam in Europe. In Cologne, there had been massive protests against such a mega-mosque (competition for the cathedral) during the preceding period.

Lidwien van de Ven, *Islamic Center*, Vienna 2000 (gelatin silver print on paper, 200 x 250 cm). Courtesy Galerie Paul Andriesse

In today's media, Islam-bashing 'Enlightenment fundamentalists' such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali reiterate over and over again that Islam has proved immune to reform; their Islam, which thus strangely mirrors that of their Islamist opponents, is timeless and unchanging. As Talal Asad puts it: 'A magical quality is attributed to Islamic religious texts, for they are said to be both essentially univocal (their meaning *cannot* be subject to dispute, just as "fundamentalists" insist), and infectious.'[22] For Enlightenment fundamentalists, this timeless Islam is the perfect Professor Moriarty – an unyielding, tenacious, omnipresent threat, which has sworn to bring down the West. The opposition of sacred and profane is plotted not onto one society but identified with those opposing social forms: the West is secular, whereas Islam is a totalizing form of the sacred that aims to colonize the whole of life. Its most undiluted manifestation can be found in mosques – spaces dedicated to the book, the *Qur'an*, which right-wing populists denounce as being incompatible with the 'free word', as represented by Western media. Regarded as sinister and non-transparent sites in which hate-preachers reveal what the Enlightenment fundamentalists consider to be the true face of Islam, mosques are seen as spaces of pure otherness that are incompatible with the – allegedly – purely secular nature of Western cities.

22. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003), 11.

For Enlightenment fundamentalists, mosque and museum are radically opposed to each other, whereas the cathedral is politely or opportunistically ignored.[23] If the *Qur'an* is seen as the enemy of the 'free word' of the West and its media, the mosque stands in similar opposition to the museum, the home of 'free art' that is under threat from sinister fundamentalists. As a result, the mosque comes to be opposed to the museum as representative of the secular public sphere. Recently, when the Gemeente Museum in The Hague refused to exhibit photographs that showed gay men wearing masks representing Muhammad and Ali, his son-in-law, the museum was attacked for betraying its mission as a space of secular freedom in the struggle against theocratic tyranny.[24] What we have are two opposing interpretations of the museum: in contrast to the authors who argue that the museum is too sacred, that it is insufficiently profane, others idealize the museum as a prototypal space for Western secularism, for free words and images. Both positions are militantly secularist. In both cases, the sacred as such is seen as ominous.

23. Many Enlightenment fundamentalists seem completely untroubled by Christian fundamentalism, suggesting that in the end what matters is not whether the West is secular or not, but whether it dominates – by whatever means.

24. The artist in question, Sooreh Hera, publicized her work in advance of her participation at the Gemeente Museum in the newspaper *De Pers* (29 November 2007), stressing its 'dangerous' nature. After museum director Wim van Krimpen decided not to exhibit it, the usual stream of articles about freedom kicked in.

Émile Durkheim noted that 'there are two kinds of sacred, one auspicious, the other inauspicious'; for Enlightenment fundamentalists, there seems to be only bad sacrality.[25] But does not the concept of the secular itself

come to play the part of the 'good' sacrality? After all, Enlightenment fundamentalists effectively sacralize 'the Enlightenment', 'the West', 'free speech', 'free art' – while using such slogans to avoid any discussion of Western complicity in the situations they denounce, in the Middle East and elsewhere. If secularization means the questioning of dogmas and the stifling of celestial and earthly hierarchies, a revolt against a culture of fear and taboo, then secularization is indeed crucial, but many secularists seem intent on sabotaging this process by nurturing manicheistic dichotomies. This goes for art-bashers as well as for Islam-bashers; while the latter use the bogeyman of Evil Islam to prevent a serious contestation of Western neoliberal policies and economic imperialism, the former seem intent on disabling whatever potential for dissent art may still have. Yes, the museum needs to be critiqued, but Ullrich's 'profane' museum, which is no longer distinct from the surrounding culture, would itself be as critical as Fox News.

25. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), translated by Carol Cosman (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 306.

Perhaps the museum's insufficient secularization, its elitist and mystifying form of publicness, also enables critical practices that would not be possible otherwise. And did not churches, at various moments in history, function as public places that enabled the articulation of dissenting practices and forms of resistance, from both a Christian and a post-Christian perspective? No doubt some mosques deserve to be eyed with suspicion, and there are many obstacles to be overcome, but one can give a positive twist to the mosque's difference from (and in) the current order, as in the case of the museum.[26] Some works of art stage a tentative dialogue between art context and mosque. Lidwien van de Ven's photo of a Viennese mosque, in which men are seen from behind, praying with their faces to the wall, is pasted directly on the wall of the white cube; thus one space of concentration, however myth-ridden, is presented as an extension of the next.

26. However well-intentioned it may have been, Günther Wallraff's recent proposal to stage a public reading from Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in a Cologne mosque risked being linked with the culture of staged hysteria surrounding Islam in today's media. Note, however, that Wallraff planned to do this not in the 'sacred space' of the mosque but in its community centre. See http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-469/_nr-730/_p-1/i.html.

De Rijke/De Rooij's 1998 film, *Of Three Men*, is also a montage of different *espèces d'espaces*. *Of Three Men* shows the interior of an Amsterdam mosque that was formerly a Catholic church built in the 1920s. The space has been stripped of its Catholic paraphernalia; chandeliers and an empty floor complete the visual transformation. The film focuses mainly on the changing effects of light entering through the windows; the light is largely artificial, and changes quickly. The association with seventeenth-century church interiors by Saenredam and others is inevitable; these, of course, used to be Catholic as well. By treating the mosque in a formal way, as a receptacle for a light show, filmmakers De Rijke and De Rooij suggest that a mosque is a potential place of enlighten-

ment – or Enlightenment – and reflection, just like those seventeenth-century Dutch churches, many of which have been transformed into cultural centres or arenas of debate, arguably making them more vital spaces than the most central of cathedrals.

Yes, De Rijke/De Rooij's piece is itself mystifying – an example of rarefied art that is shown under conditions which make viewing it a quasi-sacred experience. The film cannot be seen on *YouTube*; its limited exhibition value increases its cult value and thereby its exchange value. De Rijke/De Rooij's extremely auratic use of the gallery space is indeed problematic, but in this case the filmmakers' complicity pays off. Doing away with various ossified oppositions between sacred and profane, or between good and bad sacrality, such a work begins to explore the functional value of various types of space, and of possible intersections linking such spaces. In introducing the church/mosque into the exhibition space, De Rijke and De Rooij create a montage space that delineates an as-yet hypothetical publicness, whose potential remains to be tapped.

Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooy, *Fatih Mosque*, Amsterdam, November 1998.
Courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne

Sjoerd van Tuinen

From Theatrum Mundi to Experimentum Mundi

A Constructivist Perspective on Public Intimacy

Philosopher Sjoerd van Tuinen calls for a perspective on publicness he derives from Peter Sloterdijk and his 'critical awareness of atmospheres'. In this, intimacy is not seen as something obscene that excludes public interaction, but rather as something that actually needs to be taken seriously on a public level. For the visual arts this implies balancing exercises between observation and participation: a socializing art that is not made for an audience but instead creates an audience.

Although public space is usually seen as the stage for the arts, art is increasingly the stage for publicness. Not only has it been a long time since art in the Netherlands and Belgium has been as prominent in the public sphere as it is now, but it is taking on tasks that were formerly ascribed to another public domain, such as politics, science or philosophy. Everywhere one finds artists' debates, street theatre and political engagement in which art, to cite just one quote, 'examines and critically questions our ideas about national identity and the current processes of inclusion and exclusion in the Netherlands.'[1] These attempts to aestheticize shared existence are not isolated. They are part and parcel of an evolution that has been identified by various thinkers, from Richard Sennett to Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek, as the end of the age of representation. In their view, a structural transformation of the contemporary public sphere has taken place – from the classic republican spectacle of detached and critical interaction to intimate and obscene forms of communication. Are these developments in art and the public sphere at odds with one another? In this essay I shall examine their connections. I shall begin by tracing the pessimistic analyses of the aforementioned writers and proceed to supplement these with the more affirmative work of Peter Sloterdijk. What is at stake is a non-classical concept of publicness as theatre. The Baroque theatre, with its water displays, trompe-l'oeil and mechanical inventions, was primarily centred on illusory effects that had to compete with reality. Since the French Revolution, this has made way for critical theatre, in which the dialectic interaction between staging and reality and between social and psychological conflicts are instead the focus. It is this form of theatre that is the basis for the present interpretation of the public as drama and that is increasingly the subject of debate.

1. From the programme description for the project 'Be[com]ing Dutch', for which the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven received no less than 500,000 euros from the Mondriaan Foundation.

Ideology of Intimacy and Cult of Distance

In his classic 1977 study, *The Fall of Public Man,* Sennett describes how Western societies have experienced a shift, since the 1960s, from the aesthetic ideal of a *theatrum mundi*, with its actors (those who play a social role), its stage (institutions and media) and its audience (society), to a psychological ideal he labels with the psychoanalytical term narcissism. A narcissist, out of fear of alienation, cannot play a public role; he can only 'be himself'. Neither is he interested in the carefully maintained appearance of other people, only in the authentic and therefore credible self underneath. The result is that while there used to be a possibility of a private/public double life, today we are less and less capable of adopting an impersonal role or even of simply being polite. From head scarves to Moroccan boys and from bike-shed sex to goat shaggers: an ideology of intimacy has deprived us of the possibility of role playing and its requisite detachment by

flooding the public with the private. The expansion of television in particular has played a significant role in this. In his later writings, the increasingly left-leaning Sennett adds that the public in turn increasingly capitalizes on and corrodes the private in the form of flex time, telecommuting and overtime, as well as the constant alternation of different 'roles' within the intimate non-theatre of the soul itself.

More recently and with a similar grounding in psychoanalysis, Žižek has also demonstrated how our narcissist emphasis on self-expression leads in fact to self-repression. A 'shared, collective privacy' implies a lack of subjective detachment from the other and makes intersubjective articulation of self-interest increasingly impossible. The democratic struggle towards emancipation has been perverted into subjugation. We are no longer interactive, but *interpassive*: our emotional engagement is greater than ever, but it is paradoxically coupled with an unprecedented sense of powerlessness. We only meekly take part in the public spectacle. Interpassivity creates indifference and generates resentment, expressed for instance in a chronic distrust of the institutionalized political theatre. False antagonisms between consensus politics on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other obscure what Žižek calls 'the obscene object of postmodernity': the dichotomy of the Saudis and Pakistanis between McWorld and Jihad, or, closer to home, of Pim Fortuyn between right and left.[2] They represent an intimate supplement that itself cannot be adequately represented on a political stage but through which that stage is increasingly defined.

Žižek's diagnosis is not new. At about the same time as Sennett, Baudrillard – a writer who, undeservedly in my view, is hardly read today – was already describing how, after the stage, or scene, of the public play had first turned into a 'spectacle society' (Debord), it would be more appropriate to speak of an *ob-scene* instead of a society: the intimate transparency of contemporary mass-media communication takes the entire society hostage, at the private as well as the public level, by negating the theatrical difference between appearance and reality. Our much-discussed constitutional crisis of democracy, for instance, is not a matter of a so-called gap between citizen and political establishment, but rather of the lack of such a gap. Populist politicians share with terrorists the fact that they operate beyond any representation. That means that – before we can resist – they have already 'seduced' us. It is impossible to distance oneself publicly from them without reinforcing their effect. The moment the presiding speaker of the Dutch parliament asks Geert Wilders to moderate his offensive language, this creates the impression of censorship, which gives Wilders credence. According to the same principle, attention from the news media or a 'political' response only reinforces a terrorist attack. An excess of communication causes the critical distance to 'implode' in the hyperreality of an indifferent intimacy.[3]

2. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso Publishers, 2001), 82.

What does all this have to with art? First, according to the psychoanalytical framework within which Sennett, Žižek and ultimately Baudrillard argue, a public, impersonal life is only possible on the basis of role playing. While the narcissist shuts himself off from his audience and prefers to wallow in resentment and indifference, an actor instead operates in full awareness of the presence of an audience. Second, intimacy can best be symbolized and, as it were, placed at a remove from the inside out in the theatre. From this perspective it seems evident to fall back on this when something that has nothing to do with art needs to be 'examined' and 'critically questioned' on a public platform. Žižek's interest in art and film can be traced back, for instance, to his interest in political-economic conflicts. To him, art has the militant task of creating new, non-governmental platforms and symbols for 'genuine' antagonisms and thereby guaranteeing a critical difference between semblance and being. In spite of all the appeals for more tolerance, these conflicts can not be resolved through the neoliberal farce of a dialogue.[4] For they are taking place among parties who are excluded from the classic theatre of politics. Indeed Žižek's theatre or cinema is more akin to an arena. The inhuman freedom fighter Lenin is a better stage actor than the obscene Pim.

3. Jean Baudrillard, *De fatale strategieën* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Duizend & Een, 1983), 76-106.

4. See also Chantal Mouffe's contribution to this issue.

But is such a distinction still viable? According to Žižek, who bases his argument on the work of the father of psychoanalytical cultural criticism, Lacan, art confronts us with 'the excess of the real' and so offers an opportunity to 'resist'. But Wilders does this too. Our problem is in fact that, when theatre moves into the street, the dialectic interaction between theatre and reality is eliminated. We no longer live in the semi-open transcendence of the theatre of Greek republican democracy, but in the total immanence of the Roman amphitheatre. This arena, furthermore, coincides with mass culture as a whole, a 'culture' that immediately absorbs and neutralizes all differences. As far as Baudrillard is concerned, this explains why any attempt to break through the symbolic order by means of a symbolic guerrilla war will only reinforce the unleashing of the obscene. In his view we are doomed to 'aesthetic indifference'. Is another conclusion possible?

Whereas Baudrillard writes from a perspective *following* what he himself called 'the apocalypse of the real', Žižek adopts a perspective situated just *prior* to it. Both, however, adhere normatively to a conflict between being and seeming, of which the opposition of scene and obscenity is a modern variant. Critical communication either takes place through symbolic performance or it does not take place. This reduces the public, however, to a typically modern cult of distance, at the cost of a culture of intimacy itself. In looking for an alternative to the militancy of Žižek and the nihilism of Baudrillard, we might draw a critical distinction between a negative appreciation of

the obscene and an affirmative appreciation of the intimate. Psychoanalytical cultural criticism is based on a personal or familial energetics, reined in by a socially and politically charged semantics or scenography. An inversion of this arrangement would instead offer an ontology of sociopolitical relationships in which intimacy would be the most natural thing in the world. The intimate is that from which we can achieve critical distance only with difficulty, because it does not lend itself to unequivocal representation. Yet that is precisely why not all intimacy is obscene. Neither can the intimate be made equal to the personal or the private. On the contrary, the modernist division between private and public is now itself a function of the intimate. It is precisely this intimacy with which we must play without alienating ourselves once again. The question is whether a concept of theatre exists that suits this game better than the critical theatre of modernity.

'What One Has No Distance From, One Must Play With'

One art and media philosopher in whose work all aspects of the diagnoses I have just described is Sloterdijk. Žižek's interpassivity, in his writings, is called 'cynicism', Baudrillard's indifference becomes 'contempt', and distrust, resentment, obscenity and the apocalypse of the real are all key themes in his oeuvre. He reaches entirely different conclusions, however. As early as in *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) he made a radical break with the modern representation paradigm: 'The secret is intimacy, not distance: one achieves a non-analytical, convivial knowing of things.'[5] Shortly thereafter it becomes 'What one has no distance from, one must play with.'[6] And more recently, in his *Spheres* trilogy (1998, 1999, 2004) – under the motto 'what was despair must become media performance'[7] – he demonstrated like no other that intimacy is the greatest unexpected product of modernity. According to Sloterdijk, intimacy is an anthropological constant that must be taken seriously as such. On the one hand he subscribes in this to Baudrillard's view that symbolic warfare only leads to greater evil; on the other hand he is now concerned instead with a revaluation, in terms of a pathos of distance, of the ontological and political status of presymbolic forms of communication. To this end he initially relies, rather than on psychoanalysis, on its prehistory: in particular, in addition to the magical Neo-Platonism of Ficino and Bruno, the animal magnetism of eighteenth-century Austrian psychiatrist Franz Anton Mesmer and the magnetic sleep discovered by his disciple, the French Marquis de Puységur. Later would come, via Deleuze, Gabriel Tarde's mimetic microsociology as well.

Animal magnetism – to use an important concept by Deleuze and Guattari from *Mille Plateaux* – is a sort

5. Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritiek van de cynische rede*, translated by T. Davids (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1992), 235.

6. Peter Sloterdijk, *Der Denker auf der Bühne. Nietzsches Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 80.

7. Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären I: Blasen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998), 478.

of *science mineure* of immediate, affective communication via magnetic fields and hypnotic suggestion. The advent of Freudian psychoanalysis replaced its attendant problematization with that of indirect communication through symbolic transference. The concept of transference purified analysis from the influence of the more physicalistically oriented psychiatry and was better suited to the humanist ideology of the autonomous subject.[8] In his 1984 novel *The Magic Tree: The Birth of Psychoanalysis in 1785*, Sloterdijk describes how, under the pressure of nineteenth-century standards of civic and scientific-positivist distance, the emancipatory aspects of the selfless and immersive experiments in group hypnosis and collective erotic energies – the 'subversive effects of the sweet, the sticky'[9] – were abandoned. The magnetists in the theatre investigated not the semantic aspects, but the energetic aspects of social existence. As on the stage of modern mass-media communication, fascination is the rule and symbolic interaction is the exception. What matters is not what symbols mean or even whether they mean anything at all, but only what they *do* and how they *affect* us. To the magnetists, therefore, the theatre is more an immunological play with publicness and impenetrability. It is a platform for pre-subjective and pre-symbolic forms of communication. Whereas to psychoanalysts only a lack of intimacy constitutes an individual public role, the pre-individual, that is to say the collective as well as intimate theatre of the magnetists itself is constitutive. The intimacy between the magnetizer and the magnetized – an affective, literal interest in and with the other – constitutes not a representation of shared reality but rather that reality itself.

8. Compare Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers, *A Critique of Psychoanalytical Reason. Hypnosis as a Scientific Problem from Lavoisier to Lacan*, translated by M. N. Evans (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

9. Sloterdijk, *Sphären I*, op. cit. (note 7), 92.

Based on this magnetic psychology, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) also later argued that no distinction can be made between being and semblance. Although Baudrillard argues that both the public and the private have evaporated in the unbridled proliferation of obscene simulacra – signs without content or copies without an original – to which we are irresistibly subjected, he does not say whether simulation replaces a reality that genuinely used to exist or whether there was always nothing but simulation. Tarde, on the other hand, defends the affirmative view that it is precisely the infinite series of reciprocal simulations without originals that constitute reality. Social and political reality is an illusion, which is 'effectuated' by hypnotizing and infectious streams of simulation facilitated by mass media. Social actors are not actors, but sleepwalkers. They do not play a public role in the classical sense, but they are not narcissists either. Their agency or subjectivity is literally distributed among and constituted by pre- and trans-subjective, network-like and affectively embodied entanglements. Tarde thus shifts our attention from a performative understanding of drama to the formation processes of political

collectives. Even before there is such a thing as symbols or performance, there exists something like a *con*-figuration of actors, in which it is not actors but shared hypes, issues or events that are in the limelight and define social reality.[10] To describe these configuration processes he harks back, in *Monadology and Sociology* (1895), to Leibniz's typically seventeenth-century, Baroque 'theatre of nature and art'. For Leibniz both physical and psychological reality – which includes, for the sake of convenience, sociocultural reality as well – consists of an infinite number of atoms or 'monads', each of which reproduces for itself the same common world as a whole according to its own, largely unconscious 'programme'. Although Leibniz repeatedly insisted that there can be no such thing as direct intersubjective communication, there is an affective or unconscious communication in the form of the global theatre that is present in its entirety within each individual and that in fact constitutes his individuality.[11] As in a hypnotic state, an autonomous experience of the self and the world is for the most part determined by the collective unconscious and there is an active individual contribution only to an extremely limited degree. In an analogy to this, for Tarde society exists only in the mirror of each separate individual. Structure and identity, audience and actor are one: every individual is actually a 'dividual' product of an immanent, 'constitutive theatre'[12] in which simulation is the collective but unconscious production process of social reality. The spatial character of modern representative democracy is nothing more than a self-generating fiction, which derives its effectiveness solely from its presence in time. 'Society' has never been anything more than a continuum of resonances and echoes, a 'programme' of affections and simulacra that is continually re-effectuated through the analogous sequences of self-actualization by its participants.

10. For a comparable shift from *actor-oriented* drama to *issue-oriented* drama, see Noortje Marres, 'There Is Drama In Networks', in: Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder, *Interact or Die!* (Rotterdam: V2-Publishing/NAi Publishers, 2007), 174-187.

11. It is revealing that Žižek compares our collective privacy with the impossibility of inter-monadic communication to show the obscene 'zombification' of our political non-theatre, and thereby ignores the fundamental communal philosophy of Leibniz. http://www.gazette.de/Archiv/Gazette-August2001/Zizek1.html.

12. Concept taken from Gilbert Simondon's *L'individuation psychique et collective: A la lumière des notions de Forme, Information, Potentiel et Métastabilité* (Paris: Aubier, 2007).

Art as a Relay within Intimate Communication Networks

If we start out from these parapsychoanalytical and parasociological interpretations of theatre rescued from oblivion, it is no surprise that, according to Sloterdijk, there is 'today not a crisis of publicness, but, on the contrary, a crisis of our stage awareness'.[13] In *Critique of Cynical Reason* he already defined Enlightenment as a form of consciousness hygiene.[14] *Spheres* ultimately aims to develop not only a physical but also a social and mental ecology. In a mass-media society, the

13. Peter Sloterdijk, *Zur Welt kommen – zur Sprache kommen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), 138.

14. Sloterdijk, *Kritiek van de cynische rede*, op. cit. (note 5), 487.

public (atmo)sphere may be the most endangered, but it is simultaneously the new vector of power. Ecology and bio-politics therefore converge in the reflective intercourse with the intimate, in *Psychopolitik*, as it is called in Sloterdijk's later book, *Anger and Time*. Psycho-politics explicates (literally 'folds apart') the affective relationships in which symbolic forms of sociality are implicated. Its leitmotif is air conditioning: maintaining the presumably requisite conditions for intimate forms of togetherness. From the psycho-political perspective, the public sphere is not an indifferent, transparent platform upon which or a backdrop against which public life unfolds, but a symbiotic stage within which this takes place. 'The old ecology of stage and performance is out of joint.'[15]

15. Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoïsme*, translated by W. Hansen (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1991), 316.

A critical atmospheric consciousness, in an era in which everyone claims the right to back up a private opinion about the weather through the mass media, is more urgently needed than ever. In the total immanence of today's cultural arena, a journalist can be as vulgar an air polluter as a terrorist; symbols can be as toxic as poison gases. Our habitat, from television to Web 2.0, is constantly endangered by tsunamis of emotions, cynicism, contempt, hysteria and delusions of participation. A mentally and socially ecological consciousness faces the task of making the intimate public without lapsing into obscenity. This explication can take place through an appropriate symbolism, but that is not required. The artificial *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a spaceship is also an explication of a previously implicitly assumed habitat. For Sloterdijk, this is the challenge of contemporary art. From biomorphic architecture to the interactive theatre of Christoph Schlingensief and from Ilya Kabakov's installations to the relatively new immersion art:[16] they are each balance exercises between observation and participation. As in the theatre, this art – because the audience watches itself watching – is a natural and communal reflection. The audience turns its own subjectivity inside out; it is immanent to the theatre because it operates not only as a spectator but also – usually unconsciously as an interpassive extra and only very occasionally interactively – as an actor. The audience takes part in the work of art and produces itself as a work of art: *eine Extraversion der Spieler zu ihrer Bühne hin*.[17] You could also call this the Natascha Kampusch strategy: if your whole life has been made public, you start a talk show. Or like Sloterdijk, who, after a whole army of journalists and Habermasians had drawn him into a public scandal, started a philosophical discussion programme on the ZDF.[18] A critical ecology is no longer based on the critical-revolutionary

16. On 11 October 2007, under the evocative title 'Immersion – The Art of the True Illusion', a symposium on this theme was held at Vooruit in Ghent, with such participants as Christa Sommerer, Oliver Grau and Marnix de Nijs.

17. Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoïsmus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 243.

18. For the 'Human Zoo Scandal' of 1999, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Regels voor het mensenpark. Kroniek van een debat* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2000). Since 2001 Sloterdijk and Rüdiger Safranski have presented *Das philosophische Quartett* once a month on German television.

theatre of modernity. It is a theatrical constructivism that represents nothing, only actualizes concrete forms of 'conviviality'. Art is not militarizing, but socializing: it is not made for an audience, but creates an audience. To put it atmospherically, art breathes life into the public space by inspiring it with *Luft an unerwarterter Stelle*[19] (air in an unexpected place) or an *Atem des Freispruchs*[20] (breath of relief). By breaking with the coercive resentment and the disinhibiting logic of an obscene common sense, or at the very least by diverting or channelling it, it creates breathing room and a breathing pause – necessary conditions for any cohabitation, since sometimes nothing stinks like home. A new audience is created when art functions as a relay within intimate communication networks. This makes it possible to experiment with new potential connections and new social syntheses. From that point on, the *theatrum mundi* – to quote Sloterdijk one last time – becomes the equivalent the *experimentum mundi*.

19. Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III: Schäume* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004), 27.

20. Sloterdijk, *Zur Welt kommen – zur Sprache kommen*, op. cit. (note 13), 165.

Jan Verwoert

Lying Freely to the Public

And Other, Maybe Better, Ways to Survive

More and more often, artists, critics and intermediaries are expected to know whom they are addressing. Critic Jan Verwoert holds an ardent plea for a practice in which the public is anonymous. Only if we don't know who our audience is do we become curious, can meaningful encounters take place and communities be formed.

People expect a lot from artists, curators, educators and intellectuals. We are expected to always have something to offer, something exciting, beautiful or true. Increasingly, we are also expected to know *to whom* exactly we offer what we provide. Which audience are we addressing? What are the needs of the community that we respond to? What is the composition of the constituency we are representing? How can we identify that community and constituency? It seems natural that we ask ourselves these questions. Who wouldn't want to know whom they are talking to when they speak? Of course we get curious about who consumes the culture that we produce. Still, there is something dubious about the demand to identify your public. The inquiry into the composition of our audience has a peculiar aftertaste. It smacks of the ill logic of authoritative demands for the economic legitimation of culture. So, what is all this talk of serving your community about if not strategic product placement through target group marketing? It seems that the instrumental logic of strategic marketing has invaded the discourse on the legitimation of culture, disguised as a conscientious concern with social justice. Communities and constituencies, these words seem to come out of the mouth of a true Social Democrat, when the speaker, in fact, may be a hard-nosed cultural bureaucrat or marketing executive. We should ask ourselves to which degree our conscientious concerns about serving the public are in fact symptoms of us internalizing the petty power play of imposed justification rituals.

What do you reply then, when you are asked why what you do should be in the interest of the public? We all know that what we do and desire lacks ulterior justifications and that all the arguments that have been put forth over the centuries to corroborate why art is a common good and why it should be in the interest of the public to support it, were lies. In the end, what is the enlightenment but a success story of artists, educators and intellectuals tricking the public into buying the biggest lie of all: that art and thinking are good for you because they make you a better human being. It's ridiculous and we know it. Still, it's the smokescreen that, until now, has guaranteed our economic survival over the centuries. The irony is, it still works, and it works best with conservative politicians of the old school, not because they believe it, but because they are used to lying so they expect nothing else. It is rather the politicians of the left, most prominently the Social Democrats, who are naive enough to expect to hear the truth. So traditionally, they have been the most unyielding in their demands to know what *exactly* art is good for. If they have a clear understanding of the common good, however, we're in trouble, as this will likely be defined in terms of greater financial support for healthcare, childcare, education and sports. And who would want to deny that they are sensible people?

The Fallacy of Believing in Standards of Legitimation

To respect our audience and understand our own practice as embedded

in a particular social environment is, no doubt, a necessity if we want to develop an even halfway emancipated approach to what we do. At the same time, however, it seems that within the institutional apparatus of cultural administration – as well as in the minds of all who believe that culture must be justified in the sight of society's demands – our readiness to question the basics of our practice is turned against us. The modernist desire to critically probe the foundations of cultural production then prepares the grounds for those who secure their power by exploiting the notorious anxiety of the modern artist and intellectual to lack palpable reasons for what they do and want. Especially in the institutionalist community of righteous critics, despite years of education in social theory, people fail to see the obvious: that by exposing the illegitimacy of art to the light of the demands of society, morally zealous critics enforce the pressure that the dominant social order puts on art anyway. Taking the position of the public prosecutor is easy and convenient; ironically, it is precisely those who never tire of denouncing the collusion of art (with the market, for instance) who in fact most forcefully collude with the powers that be.

Power structures need public prosecutors because they invest belief into the reality of these structures. Whether the prosecutors defend or criticize the structures makes no difference in this regard. On the contrary, it is precisely the critic of institutional power structures, for instance, who does these structures the invaluable service of making the public *believe* that the institutional apparatus is the most, if not only, important force that determines the production of art. Converting to this belief, however, means to renounce your faith in the idea that art practice could actually make a difference. One prominent fallacy of political art criticism has therefore always been to ground their critique in a serious belief in the exclusive power of power structures. A criticism that sought to empower resistance, however, would have to analyse the structures, but deny them the service of believing, and instead invest the power of belief into the possibility of change through (art) practice.

A second major fallacy of modern criticism is equally tied to the investment of belief: while the right to call the legitimacy of anything and anyone into question is the *conditio sine qua non* of all criticism, the *belief* that positive standards of legitimacy actually existed is the death of criticism and the prime source of ideology. In the face of the public, criticism therefore exists in the same state of limbo that art finds itself in. It is free to question anything and anyone, but no mandate and no law ensures the legitimacy of that freedom. The challenge then is to perform criticism publicly without a mandate, exposed to the question of legitimacy and resistant to the urge of aligning oneself with the ideological standards of righteousness supported by particular communities.

If we had all retained a baroque sense of grandness, genius and divine vocation, to deal with the public would, of course, be much easier. A mere

glance of indignation would suffice to silence the *ignoranti* and make them fell wretched about their prosaic intentions to talk about what the people want. "If they have no bread why they eat cake?" as Marie Antoinette would have graciously retorted. Naturally, this position is impossible to take for any true modernist. It's a farce (as we don't have any cake to offer and are dying to have some ourselves). But it should be added that in political negotiations of the legitimation and funding of art, this farce continues to be a success story. Just look at how everybody in the city of Düsseldorf respects a character like Markus Lüppertz and willingly funds his academy because he gives the people what they want: the perfect impersonation of a grandiose court painter from a different century. It's unreal, but it fulfils the people's expectation that great art can and should not be understood – and his audience is willing to pay more for it.

The trouble is that this role traditionally only works for those who happen to be white, male and charismatic. It also presupposes a love for spectacle and the intuitive capacity to freely deal with double standards. If you are not white, male and charismatic, you have to find other ways to make people believe in you. Hard work, high standards and moral righteousness seem to function well as an alternative, but, in the wrong context, they may also raise suspicions of philistinism. If you indeed happen to be – or at least manage to pass as – white, male and charismatic, the question is still how you want to handle that privilege. If you see the conditions of how the public works clear enough to loathe them, to engage with the public under these conditions will inevitably make you loose all self-respect and in the long run turn you into just another sad cynic. Success and alienation are then bound to increase in direct proportion to each other. Just remember the iconic moment in recent pop history when, at the apex of their success and verge of breakdown, Johnny Rotten faces the audience at the end of what was to become the Sex Pistols' final gig with the words: "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?" 'You' is him. But 'you' is also the public. It's always both.

Ethics

So even if it should turn out that *morals* are neither helpful nor required, really, when it comes to dealing with the public, *ethics* remain indispensable. Ethics are about the practical knowledge of how to live a good life, yourself and with others. If you end up living the life of an over-worked philistine or a charming cynic cheat with an alcohol problem in order to survive in the public realm, that can't possibly qualify as a good life. So, from the point of view of an existential ethics, or an emancipated, syndicalist hedonism, if you will, the most far-reaching question is a deeply pragmatic one: how do we want to live and survive in the public realm as public persona when the public wants what we don't have to offer – spectacular revelations of truth and beauty – but tacitly expects to get what we are not willing to give – lies, myths and ideologies?

If, from the point of view of an emancipated hedonism, we agree that we want to live a good life, in public, as public persona, we need to find out where things start to go wrong. Maybe, this is when we start lying to ourselves about why we do and want what we do and want. Of course, the desire to be honest with yourself is a bit of a romantic disease in itself and, from a pragmatic perspective, the source of many misunderstandings. But, then you don't have to be romantic about honesty. To be hedonist about honesty makes much more sense. True hedonists have learned through experience that, in the long run, it simply makes life better for everyone because it takes the venom out of human relations that sooner or later poison your life as much as that of others when you spread it. The poison of the public sphere is intrigue and gossip. Art people know that because, as public persona, they are exceptionally vulnerable to it. So, from a hedonist point of view, there is a simple answer to intrigue and gossip: If you want to have a better life for yourself and others, don't practice it, don't spread it; have some courtesy, have some taste.

Gossip means making lies and half-truths about others circulate. But the lying starts, first of all, when we talk to ourselves in voices that are not our own. Again, of course, the desire to eliminate the voices in your head that are not your own, an unfortunate fallacy, because whose voices would you find in your mind if not those of others, people you have been exposed to, listened to, read and loved? The point of departure for any kind of ideology critique, or 'emancipation' if you are so inclined, however, has always been to single out those voices that tell the lies that make you accept the legitimacy of power structures as they are – and exorcise them. So, we are back to the beginning, back to the question: Who speaks when we ask ourselves tacitly, routinely or in anger and desperation: 'For whom am I doing what I do? For whom do I want to do what I want to do?' We should be wary of the voice that asks for legitimation. It may simply be the internalized voice of the dominant social order; a sardonic paternal voice, unrelenting in its requests for a justification that cannot be given because it is known to be lacking, and merciless in its assertion of a guilt that cannot be overcome because, for want of plausible legitimations for what we do and want, our innocence has been irretrievably lost anyway. So, when we mull over the question of our legitimate public, are we not unwittingly ventriloquizing the discourse of the dominant social order?

Lying to the Right People

Now, even if it should turn out that we have to lie to the public and the representatives of the cultural administration to receive the support that we need to survive, there is no reason for us to lie to ourselves! We should beware of *believing* in the things that we say when we lie to the public. A sure sign of this happening is when the promotional rhetoric used in advertising and funding applications spills over into art professionals' critical writing. As a reader I can't help feeling treated like a fool. Only a

while ago the pitch for justifying why it should be in the interest of the public to support art usually was that art helps to 'promote cultural diversity' (and not just to entertain the educated middle classes). The latest spin seems to be that it is because art is 'a form of knowledge production' (as if we really ever knew what we were doing and desiring). I don't mind that people write such things to lure sponsors, government funding bodies or university deans into giving them money. But it upsets me when critical essays and academic publications are produced in a desperate attempt to breathe meaning into the empty shells of such phrases. Whom are such publications addressing? As a reader I feel it can't be me because the language they employ is the language for addressing funding bodies or sponsors. They should reserve the space of their writing for reflecting on what would really be worth talking about.

But which language could we use to talk frankly? Maybe we should re-invent the genre of the *manual*. Manuals have always been a good medium for formulating practical ethics. They represent a form of writing dedicated to the sharing of advice and experience concerning the pursuit of happiness and how to approach politics and act in the public realm. From Epicurus via Machiavelli to Crowley there is a long tradition of manuals on the practical principles, social techniques and magic tricks that may be useful to consider when you want to have a free and happy life together with those who are your friends. So, instead of wasting intellectual energy on fleshing out the latest spin and ideologeme, we'd do better to use that time and media space to write about how we want to survive when we decide to commit ourselves to art, education and thinking.

No doubt, you could hold against the resolution to lie to the sponsors and authorities and reserve the truth for your friends that you may be preaching to the converted and, on top of that, effectively giving up on the claim to have anything to say to a wider public – and especially those in the wider public who may become your friends (or your enemies) once they have read what you might have to say to them. So, in a sense, we are back to square one, to the nagging question: How can you know what public it is that you are addressing and what mode of address (lying or being truthful) would therefore be adequate? Obviously there are occasions when you know the people you negotiate with over funds would appreciate it if you lied to them and gave them a pitch that they could file your request under and thereby make it easier for them to process it. And of course, there are other occasions when lying is clearly not required since the people you are talking or writing to are in the same position as you are. But there are still numerous situations in which it will remain difficult if not impossible to say what would be the right thing to do, quite simply because you cannot, or at least not really and fully, determine whom you are addressing and what the right mode of address would be. As readers, would you want me lie to you now?

Yet, maybe it is also precisely by acknowledging that on numerous occasions when we address the public we cannot really or fully tell whom we are talking to, that we actually arrive at one of the strongest objections against the demand to know your audience and identify the community or constituency you are supposed to legitimately serve: this objection is grounded in the simple realization that, despite all the demographical study and customer research that is being conducted, it is the nature of the modern urban public that it remains largely anonymous. Anonymity is in fact a key condition for the modern urban public as such. If you participate in culture and want to associate with other people and see what they have to say or show you, suspending your prior assumptions about people is a prerequisite; not to be moralist but quite simply to be able to listen and see what they have to say and show. If we really knew each other, we wouldn't be curious to encounter anyone or anything new, or be willing to allow people to reinvent themselves and be what they would like to be rather than what the social institutions that govern them (their families or communities, for instance) tell them to be. For sure, the anonymity of modern culture is also the condition for isolation, alienation and exclusion and therefore the very thing that we seek to overcome when we create and participate in culture. Yet, paradoxically, the very same thing that we try hard to dissolve through cultural communication, anonymity, is the very condition of the possibility of our attempts to create something worth sharing.

The anonymity of modern social life is in a sense therefore the condition both for the impossibility and the possibility of meaningful encounters between people in the sphere of culture. The point is not to glorify this anonymity but, maybe, to beat the spin doctors, target group researchers and cultural bureaucrats to the punch by demonstrating that, while yes, we want to create possibilities for meaningful encounters to happen and communities to form, what we do and want is only possible when we presuppose that the insurmountable precondition for attracting and initiating the public is the anonymity of the modern public sphere. In the end, what we say only makes sense because we don't know whom we are talking to, even though what we do is deeply motivated by the desire to get to know (or be) someone else, someone other. Does this sound true? I believe it does. But, then again, I might be lying to you, to end on a high and justify the time you have spent reading this pamphlet by arriving at an uplifting conclusion that makes what we do and want seem a bit more justified and justifiable. As if there were any justifications for what we do and want except for the fact that we do and want it! Or not?

column

16BEAVER

DOWN BY NUMBERS

By the time you have finished reading this, it will have been 750 or more words, the space allotted to us by the editors with a going rate of 0.45 euro a word. We have been asked to write a short and polemic column-like text in which we formulate 16beaver's vision on the public mission of art and its institutions.

Of course we are scripted into schedules and deadlines which need numbers. Yes, numbers were calculated to consider the space available in this publication, the budget for printing, the fees, the salaries, and so forth. Numbers... what started as zeros and ones will soon enough lead to a more complex and flexible equation, bearing with it millions of combinatory numbers, a set for each person on earth... mirroring and tracking us inside and along the peripheries of the camp. We are assigned numbers on boarding, with each seat we take, each meal we charge, we are statistics, analysed, located, identified, placed into groups, numbers, we are pedestrian number x, customer x times, we are worth x, we are weighed, measured, ranked, even speculated upon, hell, we speculate upon ourselves. We are a credit rating. We are supply, we are demand? And yet, we are weightless and measureless. So we take a minute to measure just exactly how much we are worth and in this same logic, we argue, we demand more.

250 or so words in, we are seemingly no closer to addressing our subject of the public mission of art and its institutions. And the task is getting more difficult. We will ask the editors to improve our pay from this point forward. They agree, and raise the price to 0.47 euro per word.

We think about proposing that art's role today and the role of the institutions (which take on the mandate to protect, house, teach, care for, consider and nurture art) is to wage a war against these numbers. Art, which once took the poetic device – through language, images, diverse forms and behaviours, the task of thinking, elaborating and outlining humankind's place on earth – has reached an impasse. It has ridden on this impasse for the last century. A century in which the product entered into art as the readymade and art (later the artist) entered into the market as a product. Even if artists long ago left behind these legacies, we nonetheless

remain in the vicinity of this intersection today.[1]

1. Please see Giorgio Agamben's *Man Without Contents* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Moreover, a growing *number* of the existing institutions today, whether universities, museums, or even smaller non-profit spaces, are governed and often directed by the bureaucrats, the accountants, the crunchers of numbers, the trustees, the corporations (the sponsors), the investors, the speculators, the head counters, the grant givers, the generous donors, the infinite ways and means available to distribute and hold us all captive in/to the world of numbers.

Numbers which may aid us in understanding, for instance, the infinite complexity of genetic information residing in our bodies, or to investigate the wondrous textures of our cosmos, and estimate the number of years humans will need to destroy themselves, or how to increase the number of years we live. But they do not go very far in determining how one could live or organize society differently, for instance without creating false scarcity, without engineering and fostering fear, without rampant dispossession, without so much inequity or war. How to rethink our relation to the earth and all the other living and non-living matter? Growing our bank accounts will not address these necessary and quite pragmatic questions.

Some of us, meanwhile, naively await a cry or a whimper, as the marches to various disasters proceed on schedule . . . cries to break banks open, to free the detainees, to end all occupations, to end the wars, but instead we hear the roar of bulls, the hurried thunder of a euphoric albeit confused stampede, running to cash the checks, counting the number of heads, speculating on the next big product launch, noting all the while that bills and salaries have to be paid, in fact, first of the month and a small pssst, 'you know, since these budget cuts'... You get the picture?!

Liquidity analysts, asset managers, resource administrators, endowment officers, treasury chiefs, grant clerks, donor strategists, corporate liaisons – these are key figures in our coming art institutions.

But this is not about a shortage; on the contrary, art may be entering the greatest period of financialization it has ever known as it gains further and further traction as an investment tool, a marker of status for the newly minted wealthy elite (the few beneficiaries of globalization) and gets increasingly mobilized as a powerful agent for tourism, for redevelopment, regeneration and city re-branding schemes.

47 words past our limit, and we are just scratching at the surface of an idea. What could this call against *the becoming-numbers of the world* have to do with the possible public role of art and its institutions? To continue we could distinguish (for instance) and disentangle the word *public* from *audience* (a word not implicitly negative but too often linked to passivity, numbers, market research and spectacle)?[2] To insist that art is not after a marked and predicted audience (much to the dismay of the marketing and publicity departments of many museums), but instead is seeking a public, to call forth a public which has yet to exist. Here calling forth this public would be part of a process called democracy: since we would reject the reduction of democracy to a mode of governance based upon counting votes, tallying numbers, etcetera...[3] This process of constructing or calling forth or creating a public would also require some struggle, some disagreement...[4] It would require fighting for ground lost and ground which has yet to be imagined. On another front, it would require some effort to link this discourse on numbers to the neoliberal values being taken on increasingly throughout the world – an irrational drive which hides under the seeming rationality of numbers – resting on the world's greatest selling fiction (money), yet referring to itself as realistic or pragmatic. Furthermore, it would require understanding the constructivist project of neoliberalism: its harsh process of imbuing its logic and values within existing and emergent institutions of government, education, social economic policy and culture.[5]

2. We are using *becoming* in the ordinary sense of the word, not in the philosophical sense espoused by Deleuze-Guattari.

3. See Jacques Rancière's writings on democracy.

4. See the writings of Chantal Mouffe and Rosalyn Deutsche.

5. See recent texts by Brian Holmes and David Harvey.

And it would come back to art and ask how it might be possible to question and argue against the becoming-numbers of the world, and then to argue for the measureless, infinite, incalculable, uncountable, unheard and unseen futures, which would require an explicit struggle and fight. And if the existing artists and institutions do not exist to wage this fight, then we would have to speculate upon how to shape the space and way for them to exist. The stakes are immeasurable.[6]

6. 'Are we claiming that no value, no justice, and indeed no virtue can exist? No, in contrast to those who have long claimed that value can be affirmed only in the figure of measure and order, we argue that value and justice can live in and be nourished by an immeasurable world.' From: Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Florian Waldvogel

The Snowman

Interview with Kasper König

Art critic and curator Florian Waldvogel asks Kasper König about his experiences with ‘Skulptur Projekte Münster’, which König has organized from 1977 to 2007. This interview outlines a glimpse of the changing relationship of art, public space and the urban environment. What impact does art have on publicness and public space and how can it influence our view of these?

Florian Waldvogel: What was the first sculpture you consciously encountered?

Kasper König : A snowman. The snowman is the ideal sculpture for the public exterior space: he's not in the way, everyone knows him, he melts – and then he's gone.

At the World's Fair in Brussels – you were 13 years old – you saw Oswald Wenckebach's sculpture, Monsieur Jacques, *from 1956. This figure pops up in Catalogue II of the sculpture exhibition in Münster in 1977.*

Yes, it was a harmless, ordinary little man in bronze, holding his hat behind his back and looking into the distance. Its inclusion in the second catalogue of 'Skulptur Projekte Münster' had no artistic pretensions. It is a photo of a bronze statue, a passer-by, a representation of the potential visitor. This reproduction in the advert section of the catalogue was a souvenir, a reminder of the trip my mother had given me. And of course it also had something to do with the theme of the exhibition; it was the kind of humour I shared with my mother. The statue now stands, a little lost, in Rotterdam, wedged in between two snack bars.

The intense controversies and discussions within the art commission of the city of Münster concerning the acquisition of a sculpture by George Rickey in 1976 led the Landesmuseum to do some serious thinking about the city's unique opportunities and structures. The sculpture was ultimately purchased by the Westfälische Landesbank and donated to the city. People in Münster had traditionally been rather hostile towards modern sculpture. Klaus Bußmann, of the Westfälische Landesmuseum Münster, asked you to serve as curator of the project section involving contemporary artists. In addition to the art history retrospective exhibition 'Skulptur' in the museum and in the park, there was a free, conceptual component, within which various projects could be realized.

Well, yes, the whole thing was a productive misunderstanding. Klaus Bu mann was a member of the selection committee and there was a big commotion in the local press. He saw it as his job to inform the public about the history of modern sculpture. Bußmann had got the idea to set up a retrospective exhibition about the history of modern sculpture, from Rodin to the present, and asked me if I wanted to participate. I submitted a proposal for the project section and was also responsible for its implementation.

But there's a back story to this back story: there was the collector Otto Dobermann, who had an art collection not far from Münster and loved to create art projects. He'd asked me to select a number of artists for this. Oldenburg, for instance, wanted to dig a hole in the ground – he'd done a similar project with a gravedigger in Central Park in New York. Christo's idea was to wrap an uprooted tree and display it on a giant pedestal on a small hill on the edge of a wood. There were also project proposals by Carl Andre, Ulrich Rückriem and other artists. The plans never got off the ground, because Müller, an art dealer from Stuttgart, who had close contacts with Dobermann, found it all too risky. Since I had already been concretely involved in this kind of project, I was able to quickly develop a concept for Bußmann. Firstly I knew the city well, and secondly, I was in touch with the artists.

Wasn't there public irritation when it became known which artists you had invited?

No, because the names of the artists were completely unknown. The innovative aspect of the concept was that the artists were allowed to choose the locations themselves, and these were inextricably linked to the works.

Why didn't you invite any land-art artists at the time?

The first exhibition was expressly about concrete objects.

In your trial project, a clear distinction was made for the first time between autonomous sculptures and site-specific works.

The term 'autonomous sculpture' was very clearly defined in an article by Laszlo Glozer. I had got to know Glozer via Claes Oldenburg's Mouse Museum, in which he was particularly interested. He'd written a fantastic article in [the newspaper] *Süddeutsche Zeitung* about Documenta V, and the context of the Mouse Museum played a significant part in his thesis. At my request he wrote a piece for the Münster project catalogue. In this text the concept of autonomous sculpture was consciously defined, in order to differentiate it from the next step in the evolution of sculpture. The exhibition of autonomous sculptures in 1977 in Münster was divided into three sections: first a retrospective of modern sculptures in the museum, second the autonomous sculptures in the castle gardens, and finally the site-specific projects, in which the sites, with their specific possibilities and limitations, played an important role.

It was the very first time that artists were invited to create site-specific projects. Weren't the invited artists sceptical about this challenge? Joseph Beuys, for instance, spoke of 'aesthetic environmental pollution'.

Beuys was initially very sceptical, but he was also someone who was immensely motivated, and of course the presence of American artists was a challenge. The invited artists were incredibly motivated. I was amazed by their enthusiasm and dedication. And there was a point to their work, as well! There were no explicit political objectives, but the project did have social pretensions.

The term 'project' was also used consistently for site-specific works in the public space, for the first time, in order not to confuse them with conventional plastic works in particular.

Yes, ten years later, in 1987, the projects complemented the exhibitions. It was a fortunate circumstance that significant representatives of a new generation were able to make this credible based on their own artistic practice. The fact that I invited Jeff Koons unleashed a storm of protest. Katja Fritsch, for instance, was surprised that Koons had a lot more to do with her than she perhaps wanted. While the work is intended to be sophisticated and speculative and was based on an entirely different premise, it does clearly come from the same period. One artist that was recommended by Jean-Christoph Ammann and Maja Oeri was Stephan Balkenhol, and this brought figurative trends into the picture. Fritsch's Madonna, the steel copy of the *Kiepenkerl* (hawker) by Koons, and Balkenhol's mezzo-relievo on a façade. The 1987 edition was much broader in scope, and the diverse artistic premises brought out certain issues more clearly as well.

Andre, Asher, Beuys, Judd, Long, Nauman, Oldenburg, Rückriem and Serra were presented outside the exhibition spaces specially reserved for art and placed in a different context.

The artists picked the locations themselves. I did take the lead, because I knew the city well – I went to school in Münster for several years – but ultimately the decision was up to the artists. Sometimes a project was abandoned for financial reasons, but essentially there was a great deal of freedom. We didn't have clearly defined works in mind for which we looked for locations; we preferred to create conditions for experimentation.

The artists were also presented in the Landesmuseum itself.

Yes, with models, drawings and documentation.

Michael Asher, *Installation Münster (Caravan)*, 1977, Skulptur Projekte Münster. © Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte

Michael Asher, *Installation Münster (Caravan)*, 1987, Skulptur Projekte Münster. © Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte

Michael Asher, *Installation Münster (Caravan)*, 2007, Skulptur Projekte Münster. Photo Robert Mensing (www.artdoc.de)

Oldenburg's contribution was originally supposed to be much larger.

That's right. His work was placed beside the Aasee, an artificial lake in a park that was a marshy area until 1928 and was drained during the economic crisis, as a job creation programme. The workers were paid only in bread, pea soup and warm clothing, so that they could just manage to subsist. The Aasee was expanded after the Second World War, and Oldenburg was anthropologically interested in the growth of the city. The lake is situated outside the city walls, but very near the city centre. Oldenburg saw the Aasee as a plane of projection. He developed the whimsical idea of an American pool table with 18 balls, a project that harked back to a sculpture of plastic balls and a triangle. The water was supposed to represent the pool table, and there were three concrete balls – the number three already suggests quantity.

How did the project come to be concentrated around the Aasee?

Carl Andre installed a project on the spot where the Aasee had been expanded and the traces of that excavation were still visible. The excavated earth had been formed into a hillock, the positive of the negative of the lake, as it were. On this hillock Andre placed a line of steel plates: *A Line for Professor Landois*. Landois was a Münster excentric, a biology professor, initially also a priest who was excommunicated for his Darwinist views. He also founded a zoo. Andre played on the life line with his title, literally and figuratively. Donald Judd elaborated on the sculpture he had designed in Yokohama for the architect Philipp Johnson, which consisted of a triangular wall whose inner and outer sides were oriented to the topography. Judd interpreted the surface of the water as a spirit level, perfectly flat and objective. The hillock slopes down toward the lake, and he connected the two as a sort of topographic correction. For a long time the concrete rings were not noticed as sculpture. Many passers-by thought the work had a practical purpose. Neither of these projects had any kind of unusual 'skin' you would associate with sculpture.

Did the inhabitants of Münster acquire a new perspective on art as a result of these aesthetic interventions?

That's hard to say. At some point something changed, and everyone was surprised that such a discussion flared up in Münster, of all places. The situation changed – suddenly people wanted the exhibition to be held more often. At the 1997 'Skulptur Projekte' it was fortunate that Documenta X had been postponed a year, so that

the two exhibitions took place simultaneously. The 1997 edition of 'Skulptur Projekte' got a lot of international attention and became a hot tip for insiders.

Can you say something about the response to Michael Asher's work?

Asher's position was rather exceptional. Until 1977 his work was almost universally ignored – except for a small group of people who followed it intensely – or it was not understood. His project was repeated in 1987 and 1997, but by then it was perceived as an anachronism. At the first edition of 'Skulptur Projekte' Michael Asher was one of the youngest participants. In his proposal he had explicitly explained that the caravan, which was positioned in a different location each week, was meant as a metaphor for a city undergoing change. It made sense, but it couldn't be understood if you just saw the caravan.

And Bruce Nauman?

That unfortunately was not executed. Bruce Nauman's project did not get off the ground because there wasn't enough money. It would only have made sense if the upside-down pyramid were given a permanent site, specifically alongside the new facilities of the Chemistry and Natural Sciences Faculty, between the organic chemistry and inorganic physics and chemistry buildings, where the geometric, sunken plaza would have totally altered the perception of the piece. At the time there were conflicts with the public works department about the construction of a basketball court, which incidentally was never built. There was absolutely no understanding of the execution of the project. It would have been pointless to realize the project only to take it down again.

There was also little understanding of other projects. Why did the management of the Landesmuseum refuse to accept the work by Joseph Beuys, for example?

The director of the Landesmuseum at the time was a numismatist. When he refused the donation, Klaus Bußmann, the head curator, decided to resign. Bußmann went to the university and later became director of the Landesmuseum after all. Marks, the collector, was prepared to donate Beuys's *Unschlitt* (Talk) to the museum without stipulating that the work had to remain there permanently. *Unschlitt* was later moved to the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach and is not in the Hamburg train station.

The university did not want Rückriem's works on its grounds either.

That's right. There were partnership agreements between the invited artists and the city of Münster, which owned the land. Both partners were given the option, within two years, of leaving a sculpture where it was, and of purchasing it. If this did not happen, it was our job to remove the work. Richard Long had made it clear that his work was not intended as a permanent installation: it was dismantled after the exhibition. In Judd's case, the city had agreed in advance to let the statue stand; otherwise the costs would have been out of all proportion. There is also, theoretically, always the option to execute Bruce Nauman's work, as well. In 1997, there was an opportunity to realize this work: Flick, another collector, was prepared to pay for it. Flick had come to Münster twice, and I had persuaded him to sponsor the work. Bruce Nauman was prepared to settle for the honorarium of 50,000 DM from 1977. Flick was willing to spend double if Nauman made a work for Münster that was transportable, a concrete object of which Flick would be the owner. Ultimately, however, this didn't happen.

In 1977 there was a conventional sculpture exhibition in the Landesmuseum and a project section in the urban space; for the 1987 edition the presentation in the museum was a supplement to the project contributions. In 1977 there were nine artists; ten years later there were 64. How did this large increase come about?

The 1977 exhibition consisted of three parts: a historic retrospective of modern sculpture in the museum, autonomous works in the castle gardens, and finally the project section, which I was responsible for and which I had initiated. Ten years later the whole exhibition revolved around this project section. All the artists who had participated in the first 'Skulptur Projekte' were also invited for the second and third editions.

And why only seven women artists?

That is unquestionably due to the fact that sculpture is dominated by men.

Another difference from the 1977 exhibition was the great number of figurative works.

They were not in the majority. It was *one* aspect that came out that way.

Bruce Nauman, *Square Depression*, 2007, Skulptur Projekte Münster.
Photo Robert Mensing (www.artdoc.de)

Jeff Koons, *Der Kiepenkerl in Edelstahl*, 1987, Skulpur Projekte Münster. © Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte

Jeff Koons, Katharina Fritsch, Thomas Schütte, Stephan Balkenhol . . .

There just happened to be a number of projects that suddenly went back to the figure or the figurative. If certain trends come up, you follow that track, and then those works become credible as individual contributions as well.

Not all the invited artists were able to execute their projects. Hans Haacke's Hippokratie *proposal for the city's buses was never implemented. Why was that?*

Public transport is a service of the city of Münster, and it is required to refrain from disseminating political messages.

Ulrich Rückriem's work, which was removed under protest in 1977, is back; why was that?

In Rückriem's case we had always hoped that the university would buy the sculpture, and we even had financial support from Westphalia. But the university didn't want the work.

The university didn't even want the sculpture as a gift!

That's right. Ulrich Rückriem then sold the work to the Grässlin family. But on their estate in the Black Forest it stood forlorn on a mountain meadow and actually had no meaning anymore. The sculpture has a direct connection to the church, and it is back in Münster.

In Claes Oldenburg's project, the three Giant Pool Balls *were supposed to be supplemented by two extra balls. Were the production costs too high? Why was the work not expanded?*

Firstly it was too expensive, secondly this work essentially already existed. I believe that you should not focus too much on your own history, that it is sometimes more meaningful to start new projects.

Michael Asher was also back. With the same caravan?

Yes, it was the same caravan. Except the hubcaps had disappeared. It took a lot of trouble to realize this project.

Because of the hubcaps?

Yes. We advertised in every possible camping magazine and searched for those hubcaps forever. We finally found them at a wrecking yard.

The labels 'art in the public space' and 'site-specific sculpture' have become generally accepted concepts, and were considered synonymous.

That's true, but 'site-specific sculpture' was an existing expression we never used.

Initially the sculptures were supposed to remain in place for a year. Sol LeWitt's work Black Form Dedicated to Missing Jews *was removed with a power shovel by order of the university rector's office. It's disturbing to see representatives of 'intellectual Münster' protesting such a sculpture. Why did the second edition of 'Skulptur Projekte Münster' still not succeed in dispelling the prejudices of the public?*

There had already been a great deal of controversy in advance of this project. The most prominent argument of its opponents was the work's black colour. The caretaker might collide with it in his van, and other similarly dubious arguments. In reality there were all sorts of aesthetic and human motives at play. We didn't back down, because there was a binding contract. Then someone did crash into it. The safety argument was brought up again, and the work was removed after all. Those are just the democratic rules of the game. The sculpture now stands in Hamburg-Altona, on the site where the synagogue once stood. This fantastic work finally found its place. A few days before the catalogue was due to be printed, Sol LeWitt had the idea of giving his sculpture a title, something he had never done before. With it he clearly alludes to Münster's past, even *before* the era of Nazi terror and mass murder. In fact it was a very modest gesture, but it aroused intense hostility among the city's inhabitants. Keep in mind these were proposals, and a proposal is considered and then accepted or rejected. I remember, for instance, a sculpture by Richard Serra on the Friedrichsplatz for Documenta VI. The idea was that the work would remain there, but because the buildings standard commission protested and the city of Kassel was not prepared to buy it, it had to be removed. The piece was then placed in front of the train station in Bochum. During a discussion with the city council, its sponsor, Galerie M, had pressured the various parties with arguments about censorship and repressive policies. The claim was that it would be fascistic if this important work of art was not acquired immediately. The sculpture, which had originally been designed for Kassel, subsequently ended up on a traffic island in front of the central station in Bochum. But they should have realized that people who worked in the steelworks there would now be confronted by the

same material that they produced, without being able to appreciate its quality. What's more, people with baby strollers were no longer able to walk straight across to the station. It's all very well to fight for a cause, but then you have to accept when the public, in the form of the elected city council, doesn't agree. Until now this has gone well in Münster, without mutual recriminations.

Why did Jeff Koons's Kiepenkerl not remain in Münster? The [insurance company] Provinzial Versicherung wanted to buy the work, didn't it?

Yes, but to replace the traditional *Kiepenkerl* with a stainless steel version – that's unthinkable in a city so proud of its traditions! The figure had been donated to the city by merchants after the war, and they were not prepared to replace the bronze *Kiepenkerl* with the new one. The sculpture now stands in Los Angeles, and local papers have reported a few instances of tourists from Westphalia visiting the museum there and being flabbergasted to find a symbol from their home region.

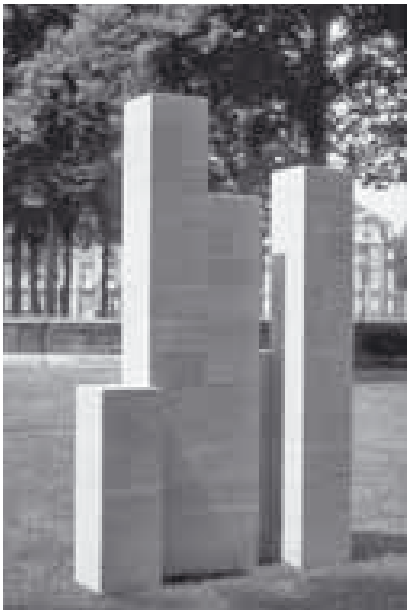
The dialogue between history and contemporary art was also continued in Münster in 1997. The project concentrated on three places: the Landesmuseum as a central public space, the Promenade and finally the Aasee, so that it was incorporated into the urban setting.

We didn't want the whole thing to get out of control. The 1987 exhibition inspired many imitations, and I was concerned that the popular entertainment of an Easter egg hunt would distract from the essential point. So Klaus Bußmann and I thought it sensible to provide certain guidelines for the many contributions, without subjecting the invited artists to too many restrictions. We proposed certain routes we had in mind. And when other possibilities presented themselves, we tried to be open to alternatives and even plan a different route. Or we said to certain proposals: come up with an alternative for a different location, and maybe that way a different work will emerge. But eventually you reach the point when you have to make a decision. I was very attentive to that, so that it would not get too disorganized.

To what extent did the concept of 'publicness' in Münster change for you after the second edition? For you personally?

The concrete working conditions in 1977 and 1987 were great; at the time I was living at my mother's house in Münster. My mother

Sol LeWitt, *Concrete Blocks/Six Vertical Rows*, 1997, Skulptur Projekte Münster. Photo Robert Mensing (www.artdoc.de)



Nam June Paik, *32 cars for the 20th century: play Mozart's Requiem quietly*, 1997, Skulptur Projekte Münster.
Photo Robert Mensing (www.artdoc.de)

died after a grave illness just before the 1997 edition, and that created a certain detachment. My personal relationship with Münster underwent a major change, and I incorporated that experience in my exhibition. I came to the realization that the 1997 edition had to have a certain open-mindedness and quality, with less emphasis on the overall organization of the contributions.

With Nam June Paik's contribution, art freed itself of the duty to challenge expectations and gave itself over to festivalization with total abandon.

Paik's work made one thing very clear: the more money you spend, the more success in the media. He used that grandiose Baroque decor for his fleet of cars. The series started with a limousine from the year his father was born, and Mozart's music poured out of that Cadillac. The theme of this work is the festivalization of society. Paik communicated this in a highly unconventional, witty way. That's what I meant when I used the word open-minded. In 1987 Paik had placed his TV Buddha alongside the moat. A dilettantish, home-made bronze Buddha statue sat in front of an empty television. Ducks swam around it, quacking. This installation was a Buddhist simulation and a perfect poetic image to make a clear statement about the world.

Ten years, later, on the other hand, Paik went all out, and I thought it was great. Those silver cars seemed to dissolve when the sun hit them, and then you only heard the *Little Night Music* against the backdrop of the Baroque castle. This ingeniously conceived festival work was a kind of trip through time. The question of correct proportions has nothing to do with big or small – the criterion always has to be how you use them.

In 1997 there was friction between the church and 'Skulptur Projekte' again.

Yes. The church authorities demanded that Ayse Erkmen's helicopter take a different route on Sundays.

And Tobias Rehberger . . .

Yes, the *Zölibad*. At the Aasee, there is a swimming pool for seminary students, which belongs to the diocese. This bathing pool, which is near Judd's sculpture, is nicknamed *Zölibad* (*Zölibat* = celibacy) and is not open to the public. Rehberger wanted to open the swimming pool to everyone during the 'Skulptur Projekte', but the bishop refused. He undoubtedly had good reasons to say no.

Can you tell me something about the parameters of the fourth edition of 'Skulptur Projekte'?

In 2007 we again posed the question of the relationship of art, public space and urban environment. We invited international artists to delve into the changing conceptions and current perspectives of these issues. Münster, as a city, in all its clear organization and with its specific demographics, is a fantastic field for this kind of long-term study. You might say Münster is the prototype of a medium-sized, European university town – in other words, simultaneously exemplary and atypical for a big city. As in Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt, we can detect here the social as well as the structural changes taking place in Germany, in an expanding Europe, against the backdrop of economic and social globalization. The title 'Skulptur Projekte' should be understood in a programmatic sense. We have delved into the question of what contemporary sculpture can signify at this time, how it manifests itself in the media, in society and at the artistic level, as well as how it can influence our conception of publicness and public space.

Why did Klaus Bußmann not take part this time?

Klaus Bußmann resigned prematurely as museum director following an intense controversy in cultural politics in Münster. I get along well with Bußmann; he was of invaluable counsel and assistance to me throughout the preparation phase. He was and is the *spiritus rector* of the 'Skulptur Projekte'.

How was the void left by Bußmann filled?

The museum post has been filled. I had outstanding cooperation from Brigitte Franzen of the Landesmuseum and Carina Plath of the Westfälische Kunstverein [art society].

The number of invited artists is far lower than for the third edition. Is it over for large-scale, culturally directional exhibitions?

No, it's to do with the fact that many works from the previous editions are still in place, and they now form the backdrop for the new works.

Thanks to this new, open approach, we were also able to open up the exhibition thematically.

Bruce Nauman's work has now finally been executed. Did he get his 1977 honorarium?

Silke Wagner, *The History of Münster from Below*, 2007, Skulptur Projekte Münster. Photo Robert Mensing (www.artdoc.de)

His honorarium was adjusted for inflation, and it was very modest.

Why did the city not acquire the works by Martha Rosler and Silke Wagner?

After the 'Skulptur Projekte', a special art commission was appointed and recommended that the city acquire nine of the projects. But the culture commission of the city of Münster refused to purchase the projects by Silke Wagner and Martha Rosler. Silke Wagner had designed the work *Münsters Geschichte von unten* (Münster's history from below), a monument to the social and political activist Paul Wulf, who was sterilized by the Nazis in 1938 and fought his entire life for the compensation to which he was entitled. The American artist Martha Rosler also examined Münster's political past with her work, *Unsettling the Fragments*. For 'Skulptur Projekte 07' she placed existing architectural elements in a different context. The art commission had recommended the city acquire Rosler's relief of a 1930s eagle, which she had placed in front of the Münster Arkaden – a shopping complex in the city centre. The acquisition of these two works was rejected due to pressure from the political parties CDU and FDP, which hold the majority in the city council. Those are just the rules of the democratic game.

Both works deal critically with the Nazi past and Münster's history during the Third Reich. Do you not see a connection?

As I said, those are the rules of the game in a democracy.

Do you still believe, after the debates over the works of Rosler and Wagner, that critical art in public space can generate a renewed interest among the public for visual art, not as aestheticism but as a conversation with objects available to everyone without limitations, not as merchandise but as a communal social experience?

We should not place too much value on this debate; this discussion is a political process and the battle is far from over.

Does the public space still really have a function as a platform for societal conflicts?

Definitely. Obviously conflicts were brought up for discussion, even though that was not necessarily the premise – not in 1977, not in 1987 and not in 1997 either. A good exhibition has coherence; certain things become understandable in relation to other contributions. The challenge is to create something that does not happen

inside a museum space, where you expect nothing else. Art must be credible, and at least one unbiased person must be able to understand it.

Did you succeed in giving the conservative citizenry a different perspective on art?

It has never been our intention to be didactic. I would also not wish to characterize Münster as a conservative city. People think Münster is an old city, but actually it was utterly devastated during the war and rebuilt in the old style. The patina of reconstruction creates the illusion that it really is an old city, but it isn't at all. It's easier to combat certain cliché assumptions when they are clearly defined than when they remain vague. The citizens of Münster may be stubborn and sometimes a bit complacent, perhaps, but what makes the 'Skulptur Projekte' so appealing for Münster is that the city gets a lot of international attention. In my opinion, this has contributed to a certain openness.

How does your personal CV look, after four 'Skulptur Projekte'?

My balance sheet is very positive. In the end we managed to have more than 30 sculptures remain in the urban space. The most important aspect, however, is that these are quality works, and that they continually prove that they can reinvent themselves.

Will there be a fifth edition in 2017? And with you as curator?

I think so. But it's hard to say what the situation will be like in ten years. I'll have some sort of function, if only to maintain a certain level.

Is the snowman still the ideal sculpture in public space?

As a metaphor, yes. When something has substance, that's always an exception, not the rule.

Bik Van der Pol

Art Is either Plagiarism or Revolution, or: Something Is Definitely Going to Happen Here

There was once a plan to build a Museum of Revolution in the Park of Friendship in Belgrade: but only the foundations were ever laid. As part of the Differentiated Neighbourhoods project, initiated by Zoran Eric, curator of the Centre of Visual Culture of the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade, the artists Bik Van der Pol researched this area. They developed a scenario that imbues the location with meaning and questions art, the museum, revolution, the public and the way the media work. Their contribution to *Open* stems from this project.

1789

Scenery

The Museum of Revolution, located in the Park of Friendship in New Belgrade, Serbia.

1917

Location

The Museum of Revolution in New Belgrade was founded as an institution in 1959. The Yugoslav architectural competition for its new building in New Belgrade was held in 1961. No first prize was awarded, but Croatian architect Vjenceslav Richter, who received second prize ex aequo, was chosen to realize the museum.

Initially, the plan was to locate the museum in the complex of cultural institutions near the Sava River, but later it was moved to block 13 in the Park of Friendship, between the buildings of the former Palace of the Federation (now empty) and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (now a bank). Its main entrance was planned on the Boulevard of Lenin (now Mihaljo Pupin).

The park is full of historic connotations. The first Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which former Yugoslavian President Tito was one of the initiators and at which 25 countries were represented, was convened in Belgrade in September 1961. On the occasion of this first summit, each of the leaders who were present planted a tree in the Park of Friendship, marked by a stone with their name engraved on it. Since then, this has become a

tradition. Today there are more than 150 of these stones with a tree accompanying them in the park.

Hotel Yugoslavia, situated at the edge of the park and once the most luxurious hotel in Serbia, where celebrities and high officials visiting Belgrade stayed, stood empty for many years. The hotel was heavily damaged during the NATO bombing that also hit the Chinese Embassy.

The Museum of Revolution was supposed to open in 1981, but only the foundations were laid. The construction was stopped at some point in the 1970s and since then left unchanged. All that can be seen today is a huge concrete platform with iron poles sticking out of it.

1933

Dramatis Personae

Four film crews, consisting of a cameraman, soundman and an assistant
An unknown amount of people and passers-by
Some dogs
The catering girl
The lavatory attendant
The guards
The cherry picker guys
The technicians
Local and international artists and critics
Filmmaker and architects
Era Milivojevic, a well-known and significant Serbian conceptual artist
Curators of the Museum of Contemporary Art
Two police officers
Photographers
Press

1936

Action

The Museum of Revolution that never materialized was activated on Saturday 1 December 2007. The public was invited to be part of this event at the Museum of Revolution, Park Usce, New Belgrade. At noon, trucks with film equipment arrive. 25 KW of lighting, spotlights, tripods, dolly and cherry pickers are unloaded and installed, cables are unreeled and connected. Catering and toilet services arrive. Yellow ribbons mark the scene. Four camera teams prepare themselves to record all actions. Soundmen install the microphones and audio-recording equipment. Passers-by with or without dogs and others come and go and become part of the action.

The event - starting from nothing, ending in nothing - slowly reaches its end when the sun sets and it becomes dark. Something happened here.

1939

On Revolution

Few know about revolution, its causes and its consequences. It has become a print on T-shirts, icons have become fashion. Is there a new type of revolution in the Gaps of society? With new rules, new presences?

Today, New Belgrade is changing rapidly. Capital is moving in. Banks are being built, prices of real estate are rising tremendously, and Casino Austria recently opened its doors in the empty

Hotel Yugoslavia. Seen in the scope of history, New Belgrade is, like many other cities in Central and East Europe, undergoing a major turnover. Is this what we should understand today as 'revolution'? Should we accept this understanding?

1957

Event

Any event is, when represented in the media, flirting with the possibility and impossibility to present, show or exhibit, conserve an experience. It tiptoes on different levels of communication, such as excitement, boredom and the wish to recall. It deals with what can be implied, instead of wanting to be explicit.

1968

Happening

By stating something, naming it, you've already made it happen, whatever it is that happens. Even if nothing happens, that would still be something. Maybe it is already happening.
Paul Gaugain's quote 'art is either plagiarism or revolution' not only emphasizes the possible role of art, but also what 'fake' and what 'real' experiences might be. Gatherings, whether they are demonstrations, revolutions, parties or events, are all highly mediated events. (Being) (the) public seems to be of more importance than what is at stake.
Revolutions and demonstrations are staged as media events: hope, glory and a cry for change

accompany them and are used as the tools of either inevitability, political pressure, or urgency, but somehow it seems that getting used to events that are spectacularized also means getting used to the fact that they do not bring that much of a change.

1979

Entertainment

Entertainment is a factor as well. We do not want to play down the issues at stake, but gatherings most definitely create a sense of belonging. And so it can happen that sometimes even revolutions - or rather, the sparks or ideas that set them off - also appear to happen from a desperate yearning for excitement, a media-driven presence, performed. They almost become classical theater plays. With very real outcomes, however.

1989

Public

The role and acting of the public - is it large, or not?? - the continuous shift between the role of actor, of participant, of observer, expresses and questions the ambiguity of the event.

The public is important in a democracy, since democracy is built on the public. But who and what is (the) public? The size of the public does not necessarily create truth, justice, value or engagement. Politicians love numbers; numbers are necessary as a justification. Huge masses justify the claim of contemporary art, just like huge

masses justify the claim of revolution. Still, and in all cases, there is a lot of wobbly ground to walk on. Do the events that establish (temporary) communities have enough 'gravity' to become a catalyst for change? Are they able to generate another insight, a sense of urgency?

2004

Museum
The Museum of Revolution. It is a paradox in itself, built or not built. What is a museum? The international Council of Museums defines a museum as 'a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.'
The unfinished state of the Museum of Revolution might actually be the perfect museum, since it is inhabited by expectation.

Insert: Museum of Revolution, a blueprint.

1789 Révolution Française
1917 October Revolution
1933 Revoluzione Fascista
1936 Revolución Española
1939 Revoluzione Futurista
1957 Revolución Cubana
1968 Mai 1968
1979 Revolución Sandinista
1989 Revolutie Romana
2004 Orange Revolution

BAVO

How Much Politics Can Art Take?

BAVO, a collaboration of architects/philosophers Gideon Booie and Matthies Pauwels, conducts research in the political realm of art, architecture and planning. According to them, art that aims to be politically relevant has reached an impasse. To break through this impasse, they call on artists to link radical artistic activism with radical political activism. Only then might art that engages with politics genuinely 'make a difference'.

In the early 1990s, Francis Fukuyama, in the context of his thesis of the end of history, was also able to announce, without much resistance, the end of 'all art that could be considered socially useful'.[1] Recent history, however, contradicts him. The past decade has seen a genuine regeneration of socially engaged art. Instead of the end of history, we have undergone a resurgence of all kinds of movements that had seemed, after a long struggle and many human sacrifices, to have been vanquished. The many 'neo-movements' that dominate the present political climate, such as neoliberalism, neoconservatism, neotribalism and neoracism, attest to this.

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), translated as *Het einde van de geschiedenis en de laatste mens* (Amsterdam: Olympos, 1999), 344.

A notable aspect of this revival of engagement in art is the shift in emphasis from classical art criteria such as meaning or form to criteria such as result, performativity or even utility value. For a growing group of artists, art has long ceased to be about what it says, represents or reflects, but is about what the work 'does', effects or generates in the social context in which it operates. The central question is how a particular artistic action 'makes a difference'. This 'making a difference' is interpreted in the most pragmatic of ways, out of the conviction that, given the urgency of often harrowing social injustices, there is no need for high art statements, preachy manifestos or sublime expressions of moral outrage. On the contrary, there is a perceived imperative to produce concrete interventions that immediately improve the fate of certain groups in society, that help them survive in their day-to-day existence or that break through a particular social impasse. Again, the emphasis here is not so much on symbolic expressions of sympathy or the visualization of a certain critique of the injustices in question: the point is to present solutions, create toolkits and do-it-yourself guides that allow disadvantaged social groups to better their situation. A hallmark of this form of engaged art is its no-nonsense attitude, its realism: if you are not striving for immediate improvement in the fate of the victims, you have no right as an artist to produce great art. In short, the slogan is 'less high art, more pragmatism please!'

Examples of such pragmatic art are legion. They can range from establishing an alternative hotel in a multicultural, disadvantaged neighbourhood in order to create employment for and empower local residents, to setting up a project through which children, in the midst of the neoliberal restructuring of their neighbourhood, are given the opportunity to design their own park facilities, to designing innovative outbuildings to alleviate space shortages in under-subsidized schools, to creating a collective monument for the residents

of a neighbourhood who have to make way for a new project development.

Art, in these cases, is seen as a highly effective and innovative means to fulfil traditional activist tasks, comparable with creating an awareness, among disadvantaged social groups, of the injustice to which they are subjected on a daily basis, harnessing their dissatisfaction, coming up with strategies to influence politicians, attracting the attention of the media, etcetera. Nevertheless, these artists often explicitly distance themselves from 'real' activists. They fault the latter for a lack of creativity or accuse them of favouring their own political interests or ideological preferences above the interests of the people. The shortcomings of the language of activism are often emphasized as well, as leading only to polarization and completely wrapped up in the bargaining game between the citizen and the political establishment. The reasoning is that it is better to realize a few small, modest goals than to aim too high and ultimately, after a long process, end up disappointed, with the population in question remaining empty-handed.

NGO Art

It is noble and necessary that artists undertake direct action against the often harrowing injustices peculiar to the present time. When it comes to gauge the effectiveness of these socially engaged practices in tackling the current malaise in a more fundamental sense, however, they are often found lacking. One of the reasons for this lies in the preoccupation with direct action, with wanting to immediately 'do what can be done within the realms of possibility'. Unlike traditional activism, these artists are not interested in initiating long-term political processes in which 'the impossible is demanded' and of which no one knows whether they will ultimately produce a concrete improvement for the social groups in question. They reason and operate like humanitarian organizations or NGOs: rather than addressing the larger, political issues, they focus on what they can do immediately within the limitations of the feasible, for instance relieving the urgent needs of an afflicted population (shelter, food, medicine, etcetera). Like humanitarian organizations, this 'NGO art' entails a measure of self-censorship. Humanitarian organizations deliberately avoid speaking out about political issues, for fear that the relief effort might be compromised, as the local authorities could refuse the organization access to the country for political reasons, for instance. If the motto of humanitarian organizations is 'first the victims, then politics', the motto of these artists is 'no politics please, only the victims'.

NGO art in fact is characterized by a denial of politics: it concerns itself, above everything else, with the practical feasibility of a given action. These artists deliberately avoid confrontations with authorities or investors, because this could compromise their ability to obtain the permits or funding they need to implement their actions. The question of what can be done here and now and how this can be achieved most efficiently is more important than exposing and combating more underlying structures – which is after all the essence of politics.

It is precisely this compulsion to achieve immediate results that prevents NGO artists from contesting the crisis in which the public now finds itself in a more fundamental way, and condemns them to political neutrality in order to realize their actions. This also makes them extremely vulnerable. Because they suppress any fundamental political critique in order to achieve their actions, these actions can be easily co-opted by the system as a sign that things are not so bad in the world after all. The NGO artist can easily be co-opted by the system, to give the victims of increasingly structural injustices the feeling that their voices still count. It is already standard practice for governmental authorities or market players to recruit artists or curators at an early stage in societal processes and in setting up artistic programmes, sometimes in interaction with the victims, that document the negative side-effects of the policy. In such cases, artists are manoeuvred into the same dubious position as that of the 'embedded' journalists in the Iraq war.

Making Art 'Political'

In addition, critics will rightly point out that we are dealing here with mediocre art, or worse still, with a form of activism that uses art or cultural instruments to achieve its aims. Despite the aversion of NGO artists toward traditional, political activism, it is difficult not to classify them as activists, albeit of a more humanitarian-pragmatic kind. Instead of offering fierce political resistance to the status quo, they concentrate on achieving 'small but real' improvements in people's lives.

Many will counter that the artist cannot forget that he is an artist before anything else, that art is his most important domain of action and expertise, and that this is therefore where his priorities must lie. If, on the contrary, you consider art an effective instrument to achieve political ends, it logically follows that it is difficult, if not impossible, for an artist to practise a personal, autonomous politics and not be co-opted into dubious government schemes or market operations. The flaw, in this view, lies in the NGO artists themselves and in the exces-

sively literal, instrumental uses of art. If the artist wants to be politically engaged, the contention goes, he must do so within his own, artistic medium.

Thomas Hirschhorn, in the context of the work *Swiss Swiss Democracy*, famously said that he does not make political art: he 'make[s] art political'. As a protest against the shift to the right in the political climate of Switzerland, which he says has been effectively camouflaged by democratic processes, he occupied the Swiss cultural centre in Paris for eight weeks. Using all kinds of media – collages, a daily newspaper, philosophical lectures, theatre performances – he exposed the obscene underbelly of Swiss democracy.[2] This action was specifically directed towards a concrete political situation, and its political character is evident. Yet this action should not be seen as a form of activism, with the aim of organizing opposition to the rise of extreme-right ideology in Swiss politics. As Hirschhorn constantly emphasizes, his primary preoccupation as an artist is the form and not the politics. Of foremost importance to him is the two-part question of how you give shape to resistance and what its artistic quality is. Indeed, in public, Hirschhorn categorically refuses to discuss his political motivations or the social and political issues he broaches in his work. He is only willing to discuss his artistic choices and motivations – for instance the specific use of material and colour in the decoration of the space. Nevertheless, his work is clearly an indictment of a particular political development, and this is explicit in his work. He does not shy, for example, from including political pronouncements in his work or directing insults at politicians. However, he consistently insists that he is an artist first, that his intervention is primarily artistic. Only in this capacity can he be judged.

2. The action took place from 4 December 2004 to 30 January 2005. The philosophical lectures were handled by Markus Steinweg; the theatre performances took place under the direction of Gwenaël Morin.

Isn't this ambiguous position the core of Jacques Rancière's view of the relationship between art and politics – a view that is steadily gaining in influence today? Rancière defines political art as, on the one hand, a politics of 'autonomy' (this is the struggle of artists to be recognized as practitioners of an autonomous discipline with the right to a distinct, independent place in society) and, on the other, a politics of 'heteronomy' (the struggle of art to, instead, fuse with social reality, to use society as material that can be organized according to artistic rules). Or as he puts it himself, 'a critical art is . . . a specific negotiation . . . [t]his negotiation must keep something of the tension that pushes aesthetic experience towards the reconfiguration of collective life and something of the tension that withdraws the power of aesthetic sensi-

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Swiss-Swiss Democracy*, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, 2004 © Thomas Hirschhorn

bility from the other spheres of experience.'[3] In this way, a long-lasting struggle within modern art between various avant-gardes is ingeniously resolved – think, for instance, of the conflict between constructivists and formalists, or the continually recurring debate about whether art should leave the safe bounds of the museum and go out into the street or instead choose the museum as one of the last sanctuaries in society. Rancière's ingenuity lies in that he does not decide in favour of one of the two parties, but instead elevates the conflict or the tension between the two camps to the level of a solution in order to confront the vexed issue of the relationship between art and politics.

3. Jacques Rancière, 'The Politics of Aesthetics', see www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001877.php.

Rancière's solution has strategic advantages. One could see it as a 'third way'. On the one hand, it enables the artist to intervene in political issues without compromise and to transcend the boundaries of art. This coincides with Rancière's artistic politics of heteronomy. Yet at the same time, this takes place in a way (through aesthetics) or from a place (an arts centre) that is outside politics. This is its autonomous dimension. Finding this grey zone – which Rancière calls the 'zone of indistinction of art and life' – thus has a dual advantage. On the one hand, it is difficult for the politicians involved to 'aestheticize away' the accusations expressed by the artist, dismiss them as 'merely art', as the opinion of just one eccentric artist: the political accusations are too direct for this. On the other hand, it denies politicians the opportunity to defuse the indictment in the usual way, with familiar political arguments: it is too artistic for that. This third way prevents the confrontation with the artist becoming a home match for the political establishment. It creates an alienation in politics, and that is undoubtedly its power.

Emphasis on the Artistic

It is tempting to see *Swiss Swiss Democracy* in terms of Rancière's concept of political art, balancing, as it were, on a tightrope between autonomy and heteronomy. However, Hirschhorn remains too much within the safe boundaries of art, that is to say, on the autonomy side of the tension arc.[4] In spite of all of Hirschhorn's rhetoric in the context of *Swiss Swiss Democracy* about artistic courage – he said, for instance, that 'an artist needs to be able to make a wild

4. With this we expressly do not mean that artistic, aesthetic or formal aspects are entirely irrelevant to a political struggle. On the contrary, the aesthetic pleasure that a work like Hirschhorn's *Swiss Swiss Democracy* generates in the conception of powerful ways of ridiculing what one opposes or in the expression of anger of social or political abuses must be judged in a positive way. It is a valuable weapon in a political struggle. Activists often lack it. This can make the artist of inestimable value. However, art must be framed in a more generalized struggle with many more dimensions than just artistic quality!

gesture, be courageous'[5] – one might wonder how much courage it took to organize, in a cultural centre in Paris (albeit Switzerland's), an art event that explicitly does not want to define itself as political. Would it not have been more daring to act, on the contrary, in a more explicitly, deliberately political way and to devote attention, in addition to the artistic programme, to activist matters such as organizing opposition to the extreme right in Switzerland? Even when we evaluate Hirschhorn's 'making art political' using criteria such as those presented by Rancière, namely in terms of a tension-filled negotiation between autonomy and heteronomy, does his 'method' ultimately not come up short? Through the constant emphasis on the artistic character of the event – with the emphasis on non-participation, the rejection of any political-strategic calculation, etcetera – does the discussion about the tension between art and politics, between autonomy and heteronomy, not come out too much in favour of autonomy? In short, does Hirschhorn not stay on the safe side of the line between art and politics, instead of pushing this envelope, crossing the line or questioning it, which would have been a much 'wilder gesture'?

5. The quotation continues: 'Art provides resistance. Art is neither active nor passive, art attacks – through my artistic work I will grapple with reality in all its complexity, massiveness and incomprehensibility . . . I will be brave, I will not be lulled into sleep, I will work on and be happy.'

After all, Hirschhorn's constant emphasis on the artistic made it relatively easy for the political establishment to criticize his action as art (indeed as 'bad art') and dismiss it as a one-man action by an eccentric, media-obsessed artist. Had he anchored the action in a political movement, this would have been much more difficult already. Had the illusion simply been created that this action was merely the top of the iceberg of a widespread, popular resistance against the extreme right in Switzerland – a strategy that the Slovenian avant-garde group Laibach, for instance, successfully employed in 1980s communist Yugoslavia[6] – it could not have been so easily ignored or dismissed as 'harmless art'.

6. See Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

Hirschhorn's emphasis on the artistic character of his protest action meant that he primarily reached an art audience. This marked the whole action as 'preaching to the choir'. Nor did Hirschhorn push the envelope in terms of his audience. Christoph Schlingensiefs, for instance, as a form of resistance against the rise of the extreme right in Austria, organized a 'Big Brother' show in Vienna in 2000 with his action *Bitte liebt Österreich*. Because of its populist genre and its presence in the public space, he reached an audience that did *not* automatically identify 'the right' as the ultimate evil that must be eliminated.

But is Rancière's sophisticated solution to the problem of the relationship between art and politics in terms of a tension of conflict between autonomous and heteronomous strategies not excessively marked by the trauma that art suffered in the twentieth century? Should his theory not be read against the backdrop of the now dominant view that art under communism and fascism got too close to politics, that with its political passion and enthusiasm it transgressed a critical line that led to the death of art? To maintain the tension between art and politics, between autonomy and heteronomy, could then be seen as a defence mechanism, to prevent its political enthusiasm leading to another catastrophe. When Rancière reproaches certain contemporary art practices such as relational art for no longer believing in a radical transformation of the status quo – he speaks here of a post-utopian condition – does this criticism not apply to Rancière himself?[7] Is his sophisticated definition of political art not equally motivated (as in the work of his great opponent, Jean-François Lyotard) by a defensive reaction to the various experimental hybrids of art and emancipatory, utopian politics in the twentieth century?

7. See Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000).

A crucial point, however, is that for Rancière the negotiation between autonomous and heteronomous trends has not always been the essence of political art. For him it is merely inherent to the current dominant regime of art. The definition of art is historically determined, which means that it is 'not politically neutral'. And the same holds for political art defined in terms of a tension between autonomy and heteronomy, the latter too is expressly not outside every discussion or outside history. It is not a dogma or set concept, nor a set prescription that can be absorbed or dissolved by the political establishment. It can therefore be questioned or found wanting because of its ineffectiveness to generate political effects through art.

An even more radical questioning of the established definitions of what art – especially in its relation to politics – is therefore more imperative than ever. We must once more experiment freely with new hybrids of art and politics.

Our analysis of the limitations of the positions of NGO art and of 'making art political' shows that what the one has too little of, the other has in excess. The anger, arrogance and outrage, as well as the radicalism, expressed by Hirschhorn's *Swiss Swiss Democracy* – which we judged to be too artistic – is exactly what the NGO artists censor. They try at all costs to avoid this 'aesthetics' of anger, this 'artistic'

expression of outrage, in order to achieve the small artistic actions with which they hope to improve the lives of the victims of present-day neoliberalism. They refrain from expressing anger about the structural injustice done to these people in order to be able to anchor their actions in the existing order. In doing so they make themselves politically harmless. On the other hand, Hirschhorn's confrontational style generates little effect because he categorically rejects any anchoring of his actions in real, social, political processes – something the NGO artists are perhaps too good at, or too naïve about – in the name of the autonomy of art. This results in his actions being isolated and dismissed as 'merely art'.

To break out of this impasse, we argue that art should enter into alliances with radical social resistance movements (and therefore not with government authorities, developers, etcetera), with social movements that demand a radical transformation of the existing order. Art must take care not to be a cosmetic operation that merely assuages structural injustices temporarily for a specific group. This hot-wiring of radical artistic activism and radical political activism is still a relatively unexplored area today. We therefore want to issue the following call to socially engaged artists: 'Artists . . . one more effort to be really political!'

Maria Hlavajova

From Emergency to Emergence

Notes on Citizens and Subjects *by Aernout Mik*

In 2007, Maria Hlavajova was the curator of the Dutch Pavilion of the Venice Biennale. She worked with visual artist Aernout Mik, who compiled the three-part video-installation Citizens and Subjects for the Biennale.[1] Their collaboration led to a number of reflections on the relationship between art and society, and on terms such as communality and nationalism in relation to Mik's work.

1. *Citizens and Subjects: Aernout Mik*, a video- and architectural installation in the Dutch Pavilion in Venice, was part of the three-part project *Citizens and Subjects*, the Dutch contribution to the 52nd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2007. The project also included a critical reader – *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example* – co-edited by Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and myself, as well as *Citizens and Subjects: Practices and Debates*, a series of lectures, seminars, conversations, and a master course at Utrecht University.

I've mentioned previously that the international project of the Venice Biennale – and here I am, writing as curator of the Dutch contribution to its last edition – likely represents everything that I have always worked against as a curator and a director of an art institution. Faced with this contradiction, I addressed the conflictious terrain of *critical* artistic, curatorial, and theoretical labour vis-à-vis the traditional art sphere on one hand, and on the other, the relation to the neoliberalist currents wherein critical voices are considered mere products to consume.[2] The Venice Biennale is traditionally based 'on the very ideas of centrality and dominance on which spectacular, imperial displays were originally founded',[3] and although these principles and the Biennale's authoritarian position have undergone scrutiny through some attendance to other types of practices and discourses, it nevertheless remains an 'exercise of hegemony', as Henri Lefebvre would put it. The dilemma I faced, then, was how to weigh this reality against my belief that if art has a role to play in society, it is to question (and not to participate in) the prevailing consensus about how things are, to question centrality and dominance if you will, and employ art's most powerful tool at hand – imagination – to speculate about how things might be otherwise. Can art that is speculative and propositional find its place within the framework of the current capitalist agenda, materialized in Venice through the spectacle, entertainment and ideology of consumerism on display? And does it at all matter if – and what – art imagines?

2. In lieu of notions of the 'traditional' sphere of art – based on the Enlightenment ideals of display of knowledge, power, spectatorship and the bourgeois public – I propose understanding art as a uniquely open field of possibilities *inside* society, in which imaginative speculation, experimentation, and the articulation of alternatives, proposals, and models of 'what might be' takes place. Envisioning art in the 'broadest sense' of the word, we see a field in which diverse discourses (ethical, cultural, political, social, economic, and so on) intersect and exchange.

3. Bruce Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne, 'Mapping International Exhibitions,' in: Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Roommade and MIT Press, 2005), 48.

Amid these questions, the Venice Biennale itself (historically and by convention a large celebration of 'achievements' in the art of the day – a parade of a world that, despite its global condition, insists on the tradition of national representation) provided an impetus to the project, which became a dynamic study of how one may attempt to address these considerations and introduce a set of beliefs about the possibility of art. As a starting point, I wanted to turn the Biennale's somewhat contradictory form of 'nationalism' into a subject of study, thus acknowledging that the pavilion is not simply a neutral and indifferent exhibition site, but a *national* pavilion. More than discussing the concrete Dutch situation, I was interested in looking at the notion or concept of the

4. One platform was the critical reader *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*, which – unlike Mik's work in the Dutch Pavilion – takes the state of the Netherlands as an 'example' of the contemporary Western condition and engages in thinking about emanci-

nation-state in general and addressing the tensions this brings about in our times.

Artist Aernout Mik's two-channel video installation *Training Ground* (2007) developed independently from these considerations yet engaged a strikingly similar family of concerns about the idea of the nation-state in current conditions. The work was so full of potentialities that it very quickly became a starting point for our collaboration, and a rousing, vital foundation from which to develop a large multifaceted work. This process not only determined what would be exhibited in the Dutch Pavilion, but rather evolved into a complex undertaking that would later reach out to and activate various artistic, theoretical and institutional fields and forms of thinking about the relationship of art to society, and vice versa.[4]

patory political imaginary through contributions by artists, philosophers and social scientists based in the Netherlands. The third part of the project, *Citizens and Subjects: Practices and Debates* was envisioned as an extension of the Dutch Pavilion 'back' to the Netherlands in order to provide a forum for other discourses and activities invested in the urgent task of contributing to a new imaginary about the world. The extension, organized by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in collaboration with Utrecht University, emanated in various directions: not only in time, pace and space, but also towards other (art) institutions engaged with comparable urgencies, such as the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and Witte de With in Rotterdam, but also to Utrecht University and its Studium Generale, and to various fields of knowledge production exploring similar domains of social and political concerns, including history, sociology, religious studies and philosophy. (The lectures and seminars that took place in the context of *Citizens and Subjects: Practices and Debates* are available for viewing in BAK's video archive: www.bak-utrecht.nl.)

Training and Staging

Training Ground depicts policemen 'somewhere in the West' in the midst of a training exercise. The work seemingly reconstructs the procedures of the training, in which participants are taught different strategies of how to protect the citizenry from an influx of illegal immigrants. The 'refugees', 'police' and even 'truck drivers' playing a role in the training are clearly stand-ins hired for the job. In the beginning, the atmosphere is fluid, with the hierarchies of power clearly defined. At some point however, the pace of the training gains a different dynamic, and progressively the distinctions between the protagonists become blurred as the roles they perform no longer correspond to conventions we know: some 'refugees' take over power temporarily; the 'policemen' exercise arrest techniques on each other; and some of the 'drivers' are captured. Some of the 'refugees' and 'policemen' even

5. Here Mik smuggles in a citation of sorts from a well-known 1950s ethnographic film by Jean Rouch entitled *Les Maitres Fous* (Mad Masters). This anthropological study investigates a concrete case of a response to colonial repression in Africa, pointing to a religious sect, known as the Hauka cult, whose members claim to be possessed by colonial figures of power. In an annual ceremony, the group of men engages in a confrontation with the past by means of re-enactment and mimicking the ways in which they have been treated by the colonizers. The Hauka is known as one of the critical instances of cultural resistance in colonial Africa, and at the same time it is an example that contains a strong critique of modern Europe. Mik's *Training Ground* rests on similar principles of critique of what we, in a somewhat simplified way, call the 'West' by means of bringing to the fore an issue of major social and political consequence today – immigration – acknowledging this issue as a riddle difficult to resolve yet defining for our age.

Aernout Mik, *Training Ground*, 2007, 2-channel video installation, video stills. Courtesy carlier / gebauer, Berlin and The Project, New York

enter a (seemingly inexplicable) state of trance or delirium,[5] while others continue to perform their roles and predictable patterns of behaviour.

It is of particular interest that the method Mik chooses to articulate these concerns is to stage a fictional training or exercise. Per definition, 'training' is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies to establish or improve performance in particular areas. Although aimed at acquiring the ability to perform (and in military or police use, to survive), a training situation is not for real . . . it is just 'as if'. Yet in *Training Ground*, Mik actually goes further; what he stages is not only a training, it is *playing out* a training. Through numerous shifts, the artist distances himself from the representation of what we know as reality. Through infecting the scenes with irrationality, bringing in the idea of spirit possession, and dissolving clear lines between who is who, it soon becomes clear that the work enacts a non-existent situation. Yet the possible scenario that plays out in our minds is precisely what Mik hints at, asking the disturbing question as to how we actually conceive of this world and the power relations that govern it.

In 1994, philosopher Giorgio Agamben wrote a brief study titled 'We Refugees',[6] expanding on an essay that Hannah Arendt wrote in the early 1940s under the same title. He takes as a starting point Arendt's statement that 'refugees expelled from one country to the next represent the avant-garde of their people', as well as her suggestion that the condition of the refugee or the individual without a country is the paradigm of a new historical consciousness and writes: 'At least until the process of the dissolution of the nation-state and its sovereignty has come to an end, the refugee is the sole category in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community to come. Indeed, it may be that if we want to be equal to the absolutely novel tasks that face us, we will have to abandon without misgivings the basic concepts in which we have represented political subjects up to now (man and citizen with their rights, but also the sovereign people, the worker, etc.) and to reconstruct our political philosophy beginning with this unique figure.' The main message that Agamben articulates is that 'refugees no longer represent individual cases but rather a mass phenomenon' and that the refugee – man *par excellence* – is he or she who needs to be recognized in every citizen: it is only when 'the citizen will have learned to acknowledge the refugee that he himself is, that man's political survival today is imaginable'. That Mik's *Training Ground* and Agamben's 'We Refugees' ask to be read as parallel texts is confirmed by Agamben's remark that, 'single states have

6. The full text of this essay is available online at: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-we-refugees.html.

proven . . . to be absolutely incapable not only of resolving the problem [of refugees] but also simply of dealing with it adequately. In this way the entire question was transferred into the hands of the police and of humanitarian organizations.'

Now, to complicate matters: in a public lecture given at BAK in 2007,[7] art theorist Sarat Maharaj engaged in a dispute with Agamben's statement about the refugee as the paradigmatic figure of our age. 'Today,' he said, 'it no longer is the refugee but rather the figure of the terrorist that is emblematic for our times.' While Arendt and Agamben draw on the experience of the twentieth century that is caught in a particular model of migration, of difference, and of the production of consciousness, according to Maharaj, as of today we have largely proven ourselves unable to live with difference, and that is precisely where our position mirrors that of a terrorist. The question if one can at all empathize or identify with the figure of the terrorist in a similar way it is possible with Arendt's and Agamben's refugee will have to remain open for now, yet we can return to Mik's work to see how similar considerations play out in the second piece in the installation *Citizens and Subjects*: the two-channel video *Convergencies* (2007).

7. A revised transcript of this lecture is forthcoming in *Concerning 'Knowledge Production'*, part of the BAK Critical Reader series.

Disorder and Confusion

Convergencies consists of edited existing footage Mik collected from commercial media agencies and various other sources. He first attempted to locate documentary footage from situations depicting the training of policemen for dealing with refugees. When consulting the available material, however, he soon changed his mind and had the idea to make training reappear as an element in this work, but within the much larger field that opened before him: the field of preparation for disasters or crises of various kinds. This is when questions of immigration (legal or illegal) began to mingle with issues of terrorism in Mik's work.

In numerous archives, the artist sought out film material that in various ways showed how we, members of Western society, prepare ourselves for the potential dangers to come. The footage originates from different sources such as antiterrorist or riot exercises, as well as from unclear, ambiguous situations from military to police to public transport to detention centres to public parks to schools, and so forth, but mostly spreading from one situation to another so that they become blurred and begin to overlap. Yet Mik selects images just 'before' or 'after' the central account of activity. Their slow pace requires patience,

Aernout Mik, *Convergencies*, 2007, 2-channel video installation, video stills (images from found documentary material, ITN/ Reuters at ITN Source, and various other sources). Courtesy carlier / gebauer, Berlin

their repetition asks for forbearance. Due to the insistent endurance of these 'non-happenings' or 'non-events', one cannot avoid the realization of how 'normal' this all has become, and that all this is undertaken on our behalf, that is to say, in our name. That becomes even more apparent when Mik now-and-then smuggles in footage from real situations, situations in which the skills acquired through training and exercise are put into the service of our 'safety'. In these moments, we as viewers seem to have no other option but to watch, perplexed at how far it all went with our (silent) approval. This is a kind of approval we have extended through fear – mainly of immigration and terrorism – and it is readily seized upon in political discourses that perpetuate the very anxiety they claim to combat in the name of our 'protection'. In return, we are presented this state as our inevitable new normal, our new everyday.

All throughout the work *Convergencies*, the architectural element of a 'portocabin', or prefabricated container used for the deportation or detention of illegal refugees, repeatedly reappears; a place – as Agamben has suggested on the subject of the detention centre or camp – where a violent act of stripping, an act of the removal of basic human rights, is performed. In the third work in the Pavilion, the video installation *Mock Up* (2007), Mik brought this particular architectural mainstay of the documentary scene onto a film set. Amid the military exercise landscape of the largest European urban defence training village (located in the north of the Netherlands) – something of a ghost town containing over a hundred 'exercise objects': a school, a bakery, a station, a city council, even recycling bins and telephone booths – Mik constructed a detention centre from prefabricated, furnished container units. This is where a large group of actors – some dressed as detainees, some as guards, policemen, firemen, members of medical teams, and so forth – rehearse time and time again how to evacuate the building in case of fire. What appears as an exercise, or training (again) enfolds through repetition, the drill of the same line of action and customized response to the danger, creating a groove, developing a convention, establishing a habit. It is a process of normalization that Mik enacts, or, in his own words, an 'over-intensification of the same',[8] so that what appeared exceptional and peculiar before becomes ordinary, customary and even banal.

8. Aernout Mik and Maria Hlavajova, 'Of Training, Imitation and Fiction', in: Rosi Braidotti, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova (eds.), *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example* (Utrecht/Zurich: BAK and JRP Ringier, 2007), 36.

Yet, this 'excess' of sameness also 'clears the ground for potential difference',[9] as Mik says. In the particular case of *Mock Up*, approximately half of the cast consists of disobedient youngsters, who at some point discover the ridiculousness of it all and

9. Ibid.

Aernout Mik, view of the installation *Citizens and Subjects* in the Dutch Pavilion, 2007. Photo Victor Nieuwenhuijs

Aernout Mik, view of the installation *Citizens and Subjects* in the Dutch Pavilion, 2007. Photo Victor Nieuwenhuijs

begin to break the rules. They do this first by carefully testing the possibilities, and then by openly disturbing the rehearsal, infecting it with a refusal to comply with the way things are. They move away from routine and towards something more complicated, filling the scenes with the irrational, the foolish, bizarre, spontaneous, some would say irresponsible or risky even; these interventions, which cause implosions, disruptions and confusions, affect – or should I say inspire – the rest of the cast to do the same. As Mik has said about such moments: 'By the virtue of having this excess implode or transgress onto another level, it no longer coincides with the possibilities we know or can rationally account for. In this newly created field there is no other option left for us but to speculate about what else this all could become, and start again.'[10]

Yet, if by describing sequences of events I seem to suggest that there is a clear narrative employed in these works, this is only due to the limitations of writing when it comes to art. In fact, we're mostly uncertain as to what we are watching, as Mik's videos enfold rather as disquieting movements 'stripped of the comforting and logic-providing features of narrative, dialogue, and characterization'.[11] These works could be described as a flow of inaction, of insignificant images that through repetition, mimesis, re-enactment, ritual and irrational excess gain a disturbing quality that throws reasonable doubt not upon the figures on the screen, but upon ourselves.

10. Ibid., 43.

11. Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick, 'Ambient communities and Association Complexes: Aernout Mik's Awry Socialities', in: Aernout Mik and Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.), *Dispersions, Aernout Mik* (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2004), 78.

In his films, Mik works with large numbers of both professional and amateur actors, who are assigned roles on the performance or film set, but are provided with neither a script nor scenario, nor are they given a possibility to rehearse the scenes. What precedes filming is a presentation of the plan Mik has in mind and a brief discussion about the distinct roles groups of people have – groups that are distinguished mainly by the clothing they are provided with. What strikingly comes to the fore in Mik's work is that there aren't individuals, but rather, the actors in their groups are presented as 'generic figures' or 'broad social types'[12] signified by dress code, physiognomy and behaviour.

12. Ralph Rugoff, 'A Man of the Crowd,' in: ibid., 76.

Communality Instead of Individuality

One thing to underline in this discussion is a shift that takes place in Mik's work having to do with the individual fading from view, replaced in a sense by the dynamic of a group. As critic and curator Ralph Rugoff has written: 'Mik's work . . . presents images of groups and packs of

people, and in some instances, animals as well. None of these mute figures is ever delineated as a distinct character or a psychological subject. Instead, Mik's camera regards them all with a leveling gaze that diminishes and blurs their differences, leaving us to consider the collective identity of those who, under different conditions, might appear as discrete individuals. . . . Everything about his work, in fact – its formal language, temporal structure, and installation strategy – appears to be intimately, if indirectly, connected with the aesthetic character of crowds, in such a way that it reflects back on and addresses the viewer's own status as a member of a multitude. On numerous levels, in other words, Mik's art engages us through the lens of a communal subjectivity – a perspective that most presentations of contemporary art seem calculated to render invisible, if not to obliterate.'[13]

13. Ibid.

To support this idea of communality – or sociality if you will – let's remind ourselves of the aesthetic means Mik employs: while the documentary material in *Convergencies* is installed off the ground, his fictional works – both *Training Ground* and *Mock Up* – are presented on the floor in almost human scale and in such a way that one feels included, involved even, in the work and thus also directly implicated in the critique that the works make about our world.

The three video works – *Training Ground*, *Convergencies*, and *Mock Up* – are installed next to each other in the Pavilion. However autonomous they are, they revolve around similar issues on an abstract level; according to Mik: 'Embedded in the spatial installation, they together have a capacity to form a continuous loop: a cyclical pattern of fear and violence, constantly feeding each other, but brought to a point where it either exhausts itself or transgresses into other directions.'[14] The 'spatial installation' the artist speaks about is the detention centre he transformed the Pavilion into. The experience of partaking in the world in a 'state of exception', as Agamben calls it, thus begins at the point of entering the building by Gerrit Rietveld, extended as it is through prefabricated and furnished containers. It at once becomes clear that this project is not necessarily about the singularities of issues such as migration, terrorism, or detention, but rather about the complex situation we find ourselves in in the so-called West: it addresses the contemporary world as a place in which the 'detention centre' is no longer a 'mere' device for the production and containment of illegality in the West, but is rather emblematic of the alarming condition we have ensnared ourselves in. The work shows that the logic of domination that functions in the camp de facto operates in other social spaces and that it is really diffused throughout the comprehensive structure of our Western society. Yet,

14. Mik and Hlavajova, 'Of Training, Imitation and Fiction', op. cit. (note 8), 40.

besides articulating a precise analysis of this condition throughout the installation, Mik simultaneously suggests that it is in art where 'subjection' to such conditions can be confronted with (at times joyous) moments of liberation, and where the borders between confinement and freedom are not as fixed as we have to come to believe. Nevertheless, Mik also says: 'It is of utmost importance to me that an art work deepens one's doubt about and within the situation under discussion – especially when entering the realm of the social or the political – and that it by no means offers a false pretence that it "knows" where the problems reside, who is to blame for them, or how to resolve them. What my work does suggest, however, is that solutions *do* exist.'[15]

15. Ibid., 36.

Stimulating Option

If earlier I mentioned my belief in the capacity of art to imagine things otherwise than they are, then what Mik proposes is a more nuanced articulation of this possibility of art in the current democratic-capitalist condition. Contemporary reality is not only marked by the fear touched upon in Mik's works. It is also monopolized by myriad economic, political, and (increasingly) religious interests that barricade public space and silence other voices. Many of those other voices are not prepared or trained to speak; they haven't developed a language, or are simply petrified by disbelief of any probable change. Yet this is not the case in art. And if the field of art is seen by many as a harmless outlet of easily co-opted or even welcome criticism, and oppositional voices are consumed as just another commodity, then, as Mik says, imagining that 'solutions *do* exists' is a modest yet empowering option from which we might begin to counter signs of resignation, disillusion and even cynicism.

Let me clarify: if art 'imagines' it is not that it attempts to be moralistic, perpetuate clichés, or offer clear-cut solutions. This is precisely where the discussions about art that is 'political' and 'engaged' became imprisoned by sheer misunderstanding grounded in a misreading and mechanical application of some philosophical writings touching on these subjects, and a lack of theories developed from close readings of works of art. In a move to open up this ground once more, why not dismiss the terms 'political art' and 'engaged art'? They have polluted our talks and confused our arguments with mistaken and vague interpretations that devalue art, rendering it subservient to, or at best illustrative of, politics. After all, there is no work genuinely free from political bias, as George Orwell put it, and even 'the opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude'.[16]

What if we instead take up the proposition of political thinker and theorist Chantal Mouffe and speak about these practices as 'critical art practices', [17] understanding it not as a 'criticism' or 'critique' but as 'criticality' towards the assumed truth about who we are and what our place in the public sphere is. What I mean by criticality is close to what Irit Rogoff has suggested,[18] namely that it means inhabiting a problem rather than analysing it from a distance, and doing so from an unstable ground of actual embeddedness. As there is no position outside of the situation we are critiquing, criticality involves continuous articulation and disclosure, confrontation with the prevailing consensus about the state of things while acknowledging our part in its constitution, as well as tireless efforts to call this consensus – and thus ourselves as well – into question. To return to Mik's work: it is like the manner in which his works explore collectivity or sociality, from staging groups to installing works, such that we the viewers – willingly or not – become the works' (and ergo, consciously also the worlds') participants. The way Mik chooses to undermine the status quo is to contaminate his work with the irrational, undermining the logical foundations of the current system and thus deviating from what appears to be a statement about the level of emergency towards a suggestion of the possibility of change – if we only open ourselves to that possibility. By admitting that we are taking part in the creation of this gruesome picture of the world, we might actually want to alter our attitudes, and if not entirely abandon our disbelief in the possibility of fundamental change and the role of art within it, then at least react by moving in a dialectics between scepticism and idealism. For if, as Homi Bhabha has said, 'In every emergency, there is also an emergence', the chances are not all exhausted.

16. George Orwell, 'why i write', published in various places, for instance: http://www.george-orwell.org/Why_I_Write/0.html.

17. Public lecture within the framework of the *Klartext!* conference, 16 January 2005, Berlin.

18. Irit Rogoff, 'Academy as Potentiality', in: Angelika Nollert, Bart De Baere, Charles Esche, et al. (eds.), *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006), 16.

This text is a shortened and slightly adapted version of Citizens and Subjects, the opening lecture by Maria Hlavajova and Aernout Mik of *Citizens and Subjects: Practices and Debates*, a series of lectures, seminars, conversations and a master course developed as an extension of the Dutch Pavilion 'back' to the Netherlands and to other sites of 'practices' and 'debates' invested in the urgent task of contributing to a new imaginary about the world. Maria Hlavajova would like to thank artist Aernout Mik and BAK's curator of publications Jill Winder for their readings of the text.

Aernout Mik, *Mock Up*, 2007, 4-channel video installation, view of the set.

Photo Florian Braun, courtesy carlier / gebauer, Berlin

Aernout Mik, *Mock Up*, 2007, 4-channel video installation, view of the set.

Photo Florian Braun, courtesy carlier / gebauer, Berlin

Max Bruinsma

Autonomous Community Art in Private-Public Space

Max Bruinsma in Conversation with Jeroen Boomgaard and Tom van Gestel

What role is there for art to play in a public space that is increasingly marked by public-private partnerships and in which public interests are more than ever mixed with economical and security concerns? A conversation with Jeroen Boomgaard, lecturer on Art in Public Space of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, and Tom van Gestel, artistic leader of SKOR.

According to the editorial concept of this issue of *Open*, there is a 'crisis of the public sphere, of public institutions, spaces and tasks'. The question is how art and its institutions should react to this crisis. Indeed, public space has become more and more contested, particularly when it comes to defining what 'public' actually means. Freedom and safety, once two concepts that were, if not synonymous at least intimately linked, seem to have grown into two opposite poles in the struggle for arranging public space. The freedom of someone to say and do what he or she wants can jeopardize the safety of another. And the need of political and economical stakeholders for a safely predictable and controllable environment, warranted by public and privatized surveillance agencies, is often at odds with the need for freedom and individuality felt by independent and responsible citizens.

Where does art stand in this debate? As of old, on the side of the 'most individual expression'? Or on that of symbolizing whatever there remains of collectivity in today's atomized society? Certainly when looking at art in public space, that question is not so easy to answer. 'Community art' is in vogue these days, but it is still often based on the subjective concepts and interventions of one independent and autonomous person: the artist. And cultural institutions are assessed on the basis of a paradoxical combination of demands: they have to enlarge their audience (read: please more people), and at the same time mediate between art and society (read: protect the artist's idiosyncratic position as a tolerated anomalous individual). This does not transpire without friction. But is this clash of opposing interests and concerns a sign of crisis, or is it the icing on the cake of a society and culture that develop by fits and starts?

I asked two insiders in the field of art in public space, an art historian and a facilitator. One, Jeroen Boomgaard, is lecturer on Art in Public Space, connected to the Rietveld Academy and the University of Amsterdam, and focuses on the Zuidas area, where the Virtual Museum Zuidas is developing a new condition for art in public space. The Virtual Museum's supervisor, Simon den Hartog, works there alongside project developers in a mega-business quarter, which is now being built by a massive public-private partnership on the South axis (Zuidas) of Amsterdam.[1] The other is Tom van Gestel, artistic leader of SKOR and chairman of the Artistic Team of Beyond, the organization that is developing a programme for art in the public space of another mega-building project, the expansion of the city of Utrecht in Leidsche

1. For more information on the lectorate Art in Public Space, see: *www.lkpr.nl*. For more information on the Virtual Museum Zuidas, see: *www.virtueel-museum.nl*.

Rijn.[2] To both I put the question of the possibilities and role of art in such partly privatized public spaces, in which enormous economical interests are at play. In such areas, is there a crisis in the relationship between art and its public surroundings?

2. SKOR is the national organization in the Netherlands that realizes art projects in the public domain. See: *www.skor.nl*. For more information on Beyond Leidsche Rijn, see: *www.beyondutrecht.nl*.

Jeroen Boomgaard: 'More and more, I believe in autonomous art in public space.'

Jeroen Boomgaard: Crisis? That is a necessary condition for art! Adorno says that art, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, has been in crisis, and that that is its foundation. Through that, it can fulfil its promise of a better future – without crisis, there can't be a better future. The question is whether it goes in a direction that one can be happy with. Does it provide a counter balance?

Max Bruinsma: In the context of your lectorate and the Zuidas, the principal question seems to be: is it possible at all, art in a public space which is governed by the interests of private economy? There are those who say: it is impossible, because the basic conditions there are organized in a way that the only thing that can come out of it is an illustration of the capitalist processes which are taking place there anyway.

Without any doubt, the Zuidas is a place where neoliberal capitalism rules, which is inclined to think everything, not merely in terms of investment and revenue, but also in terms of group interests, group identities and interactivity, in terms of subdivision. My conclusion, also based on Jacques Rancière's theory, is that neoliberalism may seem to reflect an 'every man for himself' position, but that it ultimately falls back on stereotype categories, interest groups and so on. The fundamentally individual, the anomalous, that which cannot be reduced to a collective interest, has in today's society become all but invisible. If you take notice, it is shocking to see how everything in public, political and social debates is about group identities. The basis of the new neoliberal ideology, of the market, is not so much freedom of individual expression, but interactivity, playing along, consuming collectively. It only superficially looks like we are all in an individual cocoon, with our iPods and cell phones, but all of these technical means, which seem to substantiate our individuality, are there to continually maintain a form of group communication – the contact between like minds.

The ultimate village mentality: us, locals, versus them outsiders . . .

Yes, that atmosphere of inclusion and exclusion . . . That is not a favourable condition for autonomous art. There should remain an area which has not been subdivided into separate interests, an area that can remain somewhat contested – public, therefore, because it *is* contested. I believe that here, on the Zuidas, we shouldn't totally rely on grand-scale projects. I think you can circumvent the iron laws of investment and return by organizing things that attract only ten people.

The original idea behind upgrading this large-scale area seemed to be rather more grandiose . . . One could imagine mega-sculptures standing in the shadow of mega-buildings . . .

In my view, the Virtual Museum Zuidas operates quite serenely in this matter. They do not put their money on mega-sculptures. And I thought the design Jennifer Tee made, an artwork that is now being debated, was wonderful, if only for its title: *Boundless Desire*. I like that, because on the one hand it suggests an ironic commentary on the ambition of the area, but at the same time it indicates what is missing there. Not desire itself is missing – it is present, but it's a calculated desire. Tee, however, is concerned with the incalculable, the unpredictable, the insatiable desire. Her proposal introduces a utopian dimension into a space where it is lacking. Yes, some may say that it is being realized there, but a realized utopia is banal. That is why I like this idea of boundlessness so much, there. Groups don't have boundless desires. Collective desires don't have that idea of infinity – they want to be fulfilled. Tee's 'boundless desire' is something which you cannot name, something personal. Making visible what Rancière calls 'individuation', the moment of the anomalous, of that which completely falls outside of group thinking, can be a very powerful image in such an environment. Whether it is an artwork, or an action, or a small cultural institution crying in the wilderness – it would benefit the area. I believe in that.

In art, however, especially art in public space, there can be seen a growing tendency towards organizing group experiences, in stead of 'individuations'. . .

Yes, now that doesn't mean that I think art should be about the expression of self, about solipsistic works by artists who only speak about themselves. That doesn't interest me much. What interests me is the devious view of the world, and that is by definition personal. The problem with organizing group activities in more or less socially

Jennifer Tee with Richard Niessen and Joost Vermeulen, *Oeverloos verlangen*, 2007, design for the Gershwinplein at the Zuidas in Amsterdam. © Jennifer Tee and Virtueel Museum Zuidas

inspired artworks is precisely that they fit seamlessly into current practice. But there are certainly opportunities for a kind of infiltration with a completely different culture than that which is mentioned in the plans. A cultural infiltration by temporary things and workshops – simply talking about the area *as* cultural area. It is also an ideological confrontation . . .

Confrontation insofar that the space in which this should take place has principally been filled in beforehand, in the ideological and institutional sense, as you already suggested in your first report on the Zuidas . . .

That is absolutely true. Which does not mean that therefore all space has been taken or been filled in. One of the interesting aspects of neoliberal power, particularly in the Netherlands, is that it partly denies itself. That is a very Dutch thing. There exist all kinds of gaps and blanks, interstitial spaces, where one can indeed do things. Where smart artists and designers can make things one wouldn't expect.

Well, and when they do, it ends up being discarded. The new supervisor of Urban Development of the Zuidas, Bob van Reeth, has rejected Jennifer Tee's plan without discussion, after it was commissioned by his colleague, supervisor of Art Simon den Hartog, and after it had been accepted by all parties involved. Doesn't that demonstrate that a powerful figure in this process is stronger than all good intentions about collaboratively developing art and real estate?

It also demonstrates that the whole concept of the area has been a rather elitist affair from the beginning. The concern for art is rather relative and marginal in this kind of projects. The art has simply been swept away in the gesture of someone who cleaned up his predecessor's desk. I can imagine that the supervisor of Art is furious about that, and rightly so, but you do have to see it in perspective.

What does that say about the reliability of such environments? Of the institutions which devote so many nice phrases – and a seemingly reliable institutional infrastructure – to safeguarding the role of art in this area?

I have never believed in the reliability of this environment. The story that real estate developers would be seriously interested in good art in public space – sorry, but that is complete rubbish. You can only confront this arena from the standpoint of conflict, of crisis, yes. The municipal government should be more aware of that, and realize that they have relinquished control of that area when it comes to public space. Because, even in a public-private partnership

construction, public space still remains the responsibility of the City of Amsterdam. Since we are not talking about a completely privatized area, the city should claim a decisive role in arranging public space in that area. In this case, the municipality is not taking its responsibility. Again, this has to do with the wavering character of public power in the Netherlands, which asserts its presence by being absent. Like: we should all work together, we exert power by offering space, our power is your space. That's all nice and democratic, but the opposite holds true too: defining public space as a realm where a higher power, which rises above private interests, calls the shots.

In so many large urban developments one sees that municipalities have effectively given over power to the developers, which in their turn bend things to their will, not in terms of responsibility, but in terms of power and profitability. I think that is the ruin of public government. Jennifer Tee's example is revealing in this respect. It all hinges on the idea of responsibility. The government may be dependent on the market for financing, but it can state its conditions. Conditions which you can warrant with procedures. And if public government doesn't secure and maintain such procedures, then it is spineless.

You are an intimate observer of the advancement of art in the Zuidas . . . Do you have any influence on what takes place there?

According to the Virtual Museum Zuidas I'm aloud to 'provoke'. So I'm not just an observer, but I try to be an 'actor' in that I invite artists and designers to formulate their observations on the Zuidas in the book I'm preparing at the moment, *High-Rise and Common Ground - Art and the Amsterdam Zuidas Area*.[3] That is, if you will, a cultural intervention on the Zuidas in the form of a book. 'Speaking about it' is a way of appropriating an area. But as far as my influence is concerned . . . The Virtual Museum's clout is already small, mine is minuscule.

3. Jeroen Boomgaard (ed.), *High-Rise and Common Ground. Art and the Amsterdam Zuidas Area* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

What is your analysis of the process you witnessed the past five years?

I have grown more pessimistic about the institutional possibilities of art in public space, but more optimistic when it comes to the potential of nonconforming voices. What I can do is provide elements which can play a role in reflection. There are these residences at Platform 21, in which the lectorate partakes, together with Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam. Bik Van der Pol are

there now. I'm curious to see what their vision on the Zuidas is. They often provoke an interesting reversal of the conditions at play in certain environments. That incorporates a reflective level that intrigues me. Interventions by artists like Bik Van der Pol can help in better understanding that rather complicated area, or see it from a different angle.

What is so fascinating about this area for you, as scientific researcher of the arts?

I'm not a scientist in the strict sense – I'm intensely focused on current issues and my main interest is the social functioning of art. The field of art in public space interests me because of all the paradoxes it contains. I am quite critical towards art which employs social processes, but that does not mean that you shouldn't think about that. Not just about the quality of the art, but about the quality of the processes involved as well. There are always the same basic questions: Who wants it? For whom is it intended? What's going on? An artists should realize that he functions within public space, and thus within various agendas. His role has changed considerably over the past decade and a half. But meanwhile I more and more believe in the potential of autonomous artworks in public space – more than I used to. I said it before, in an article in *Open*: I believe in a radical autonomous art, which is aware of its own position.[4] Of course you cannot just do as you please. But art in public space always entails an unsolicited, and sometimes unwanted, confrontation with art.

4. Jeroen Boomgaard, 'Radical autonomy. Art in times of process management', *Open*, *Cahier on art and the public domain*, no.10 (In) tolerance (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/SKOR, 2006).

Art in public space has a different rapport with its surroundings than art in the 'neutral' environment of the gallery . . .

Well, insofar that the viewer, who one would call a 'visitor' in the context of a gallery, is much more a 'user' in public space. Artists should be aware of that. Still, a good artist will always make something, also in public space, which may appeal to the user, but which in a sense shuts him out as well. A successful artwork in public space excludes any though of usage – that is its autonomy. It resists instrumentalization. It can be a counterforce, and I believe that force is necessary. Simply because society needs to go back to another, less cliché, idea of the individual, which now dissolves into collective models. A bit of anarchy doesn't hurt, you know . . .

Luna Maurer and Roel Wouters, *De jubilator*. Opening performance CASZuidas, projection screen on the Zuidas in Amsterdam.

Films by artists are shown here daily.
Photo Roel Wouters © Virtueel Museum Zuidas/SKOR

The Virtual Museum Zuidas is an institution between art, the city and real estate developers. Not a good point of departure for anarchy.

It's stuck. I applaud their efforts – as an institution – to nail things down. At the same time, its organizers are involved in temporary projects and events, in occupying spaces . . . they have remained quite flexible. In my view, they could speak out in public more often in order to denounce things that are not right. If Jennifer Tee's work is not realized, they should certainly do that, because in that case they are being steamrolled. But as far as I'm concerned, the role of the Virtual Museum has not ended yet. Considering how slow these processes go, how much effort it takes to develop this whole area, they should absolutely be given the chance to develop something for the long run. For me, it's important that in this vast project there is an organization that continually says: So what about culture? What about art? What culture do you mean? What about it? That is crucial. Otherwise you'll end up with a square with a monument in the centre and that's it. That's Bob van Reeth's idea. That is not the idea of the Virtual Museum Zuidas. That is why it's good they are there.

Tom van Gestel: 'Art is not meant to dance to someone-else's tune.'

I don't know about that crisis thing. I do know there are problems when it comes to realizing good art projects in public space – I prefer to call them projects rather than artworks. You can question the notion of 'public' in art in public space. It has been privatized in two ways. In the first place, it has been privatized institutionally, because there is less and less space in public hands. And it is increasingly becoming a controlled space – you feel rather less comfortable when there are a bunch of cameras pointed at you. And secondly, public space has become more private in that people behave differently in public. Everyone carries a cell phone, which means when you are on the street, you are bound to hear what someone's going to have for dinner tonight. I still find that an awkward experience, this confrontation with someone else's private sphere. In any case, the character of public space has changed dramatically. But maybe that is less a crisis than a challenge. You know it's a well-known fact that art flourishes in times of crisis.

So you are in agreement with Jeroen Boomgaard, who quotes Adorno in saying that 'crisis is a fundamental condition of art'. No shine without friction.

Exactly. But it has become more complicated to realize good projects. That is not just caused by the fact that public space has become more controlled, but also because less and less people take responsibility for it. Gijs van Oenen wrote a few good things about that in his article for *Open*, on fear and security.[5] He talks about a kind of 'interpassivity', meaning that everyone thinks that things should change, but refuses to take responsibility. The result is that you have to spend disproportionate amounts of time when organizing projects.

5. Gijs van Oenen, 'Het nieuwe veiligdom. De interpassieve transformatie van de publieke sfeer', *Open, Cahier on art and the public domain*, no. 6 (In)security (Rotterdam/Amsterdam: NAi Publishers/SKOR, 2004).

Isn't that also due to the kind of projects artists want to realize? Artists increasingly want to organize collective experiences, bring people together. The artist as a kind of social therapist . . .

That has really become a topic. There is indeed an increase in projects which expect the user of public space to participate. And the user does not always comply. It also has to do with individualization – there is less community spirit. I have strongly felt that with certain attempts of 'Beyond, Leidsche Rijn' to involve the local population in projects. That is extremely complicated.

We have been developing projects there since 2000 on the basis of a manifestation model. So you introduce a programme by means of a manifestation and then the manifestation never stops. You start up a development. I find that interesting, I don't like events that open and close on specific dates. That's slightly weird – there should be something going on. You look where the boundaries are, within which you can still speak of art and of what artists can manage. If you succeed, the manifestation will provide a wealth of material you can continue with. 'Parasite Paradise', for instance, was a collection of strange objects that were being used and still managed to tilt your view of reality. A kind of reconstructed village, that had everything that Leidsche Rijn did not have. The somewhat weird title indicates that it was actually about light forms of urbanism and architecture, about temporary urbanism.

A slightly anarchistic approach?

Yes, and it was closely connected to a critique on the iron laws of urban planning. In the context of an urban development plan like Utrecht's expansion, you are stuck with market parties. And market parties are not going to build shopping centres when there are no people and no roads. So there is an extended period of time when nothing happens is such a new district. Also, these parties aren't

happy when you do develop an infrastructure of facilities in such an area, since that can compete with existing or planned facilities. They are afraid that it can't be controlled and that a future shopping mall will be undermined by a kind of tolerance policy that allows Turkish bakers and butchers to set up shop in their own homes. The idea of 'Parasite Paradise' was to show that there's an alternative. Not in order to solve problems, or to be genuinely facilitating, but to break through standard ideas and take tolerance as a norm. That was the game, the atmosphere, more or less.

Was it also meant to show the kind of creativity that is unleashed when real estate developers and the municipality don't mingle in the affairs of citizens?

Yes, exactly. There was a high degree of coincidence – creating conditions without knowing exactly what the outcome would be. There was Joep van Lieshout's hotel, Kevin van Braak's camping flat, a theatre made of crates by Wolfgang Winter and Berthold Hörbelt, an architectural office, 2012 Architecten, that worked *in situ* with recycled materials for a few months, an artists in residence programme with Bik van der Pol, a huge restaurant by Maurer United Architects that could easily seat 200 people. All in all a nice collection of strange objects, but all meant to be used, to be programmed. So we had an art-cook programme for which Maxime Ansiau developed a mobile kitchen set, a theatre programme, and so forth. In short, there were things going on. But it still had to be conceived and work as an art programme. Therefore it was in my view crucial to have Vito Acconci's Mobile Linear City there; a completely useless thing, but still an image of a society in which all that matters is technology and usability. So, more about meaning than about use. I wanted to show that balance and that difference – between functionality and meaning. On the other hand it shouldn't be about sacred objects; the essence of Parasites was that it should be used as well.

Which brings us back to the question of the boundaries of art . . .

For me, it's essential that an artwork always provides a different view to reality. It should evoke an experience that allows you to see everyday life in a different light. It doesn't solve any problem, but provokes the question: 'Why not, really?' So it is not about instrumentalization, about problem solving. That's the limit for me. When Sjaak Langenberg imagines a project for the Mastenbroek Polder in which he pretends that he and a farmer are real estate developers – and proposes that the farmer is going to develop a housing project on

'Parasite Paradise', Maurer United Architects, *Boerenwereld-keukenrestaurant*, 2003, (originally developed for the manifestation 'Het Jaar van de Boerderij').
Photo Ralph Kämena © Beyond/SKOR

'Parasite Paradise', main street with the *Mobile Linear City* of 1991 by Vito Acconci in the foreground.
Photo Ralph Kämena © Beyond/SKOR

his own land himself, instead of the realtors, in which case the farmer would have to leave – then it's obvious that Langenberg will not actually do that. That's where the artist's responsibility stops. He has provided a different view to reality and it is up to others to do something with that, or not. Perhaps the farmer will think: I won't sell my land, I won't go along with this!

That is an almost social-democratic idea of art: fostering the citizen's independence . . .

Yes, by indicating that you don't have to accept everything you see around you as a matter of fact. When you read a good book, the same happens.

It's an ideology you also encounter in policies of art in public space: integrate the development of art and urban renewal and expansion, as a means to better involve citizens. In this context, the forces to instrumentalize art are quite strong . . .

The Zuidas is a typical example of that, and one that I was not eager to become involved in. It is a weird force field that deals with square meters and real estate, in which art can easily end up in a subordinate position. That big TV screen in front of the new railway station – the one thing I was involved in – is an attempt to do something relatively uncensored in that environment. You may hope that a lawyer from one of the adjacent firms, when he crosses the square and sees that screen, thinks: wow, what's going on there? But apart from that, I think that the conditions for good art in the public space of the Zuidas are not perfect. In this kind of environment, before you know it, it's all about representation. A place can be intrinsically interesting for art, but this one is not. If you look at all those buildings on the Zuidas, you notice one thing: that they all dissociate themselves from their environment, they create distance. Even that nice, funny thing by Meyer en Van Schooten, the shoe-like ING-bank headquarters, as a building has no meaning for its surroundings. It doesn't provoke behaviour, it just sits there. You can like it or not, and that's it. Therefore, I think it is hard to develop a good art programme on the Zuidas. Look at the exhibition of sculptures that is going on there now: principally, there are good artists involved with good artworks, but they are all very much on their own, a bit sad. They emanate an intense longing for the place they originated from. They don't feel at home there . . .

A 'boundless desire', to use the title of Jennifer Tee's proposal . . .

Ha, yes! If you think about it, I suppose the Virtual Museum should have been organized differently. In Leidsche Rijn, we had a sharp scenario, which was accepted by various partners who were then tied to a plan with which they were not allowed to interfere in detail. But they did share the responsibility for its realization. Of course, in the long run that becomes harder and harder to maintain, but it did make things possible that could not have been done, had this deal not been made. It doesn't just happen, even if there's an art supervisor who can co-develop a programme. The forces there are simply too strong for a programme that has no fixed status within the whole . . .

Wasn't the art supervisor explicitly intended to give the art programme that kind of status?

I respect Simon den Hartog's and the Virtual Museum Zuidas's attempts, but in my view they have not entirely succeeded. I still hope that some good things will come out of it, and of course I'm happy with that video screen, but the thing is, with projects that don't succeed, like Mark Manders', or Jennifer Tee's, of which we don't now if it will be realized . . . it is not only the Zuidas that suffers from this kind of business – we suffer the consequences as well. Artists who have experienced that, having made a proposal that has been accepted and that seemed ready to go, until a party in the process suddenly changed their mind, will think twice before they ever let themselves get involved again. These are often not the worst artists and we need them. But they don't think about it, that is a dire effect. As far as this is concerned, the gloves could come off more often.

You are often in situations in which you think: I didn't trust them from the start, and it turns out I'm right, too. Why on earth did I get into this in the first place? Well, because a situation fitted the idea, because you thought something should happen. And then you fight the windmills, like some sort of Don Quixote. But, hey, there are things that succeed, surprisingly sometimes, but they do. An example is a project we are currently working on in a small community, Sint-Oedenrode, where we were requested to advise on making monumental markings of a route along seven old castles or manor houses, or what's left of them now. Three of them are still recognizable, but the others have disappeared, although their locations are known. In itself, that was not such an interesting question: seven artistic markings, so these seven houses would exist

again. So you start pondering what the real origin of that village is, and that is Saint Oda, the daughter of a Scottish king who travelled to Liege in the eighth century to be cured of her blindness, and returning homeward decided to settle down as a hermit in the village which is now named after her, Sint-Oedenrode. This doesn't have to be true, but it is something artists can deal with. Something between fiction and fact. I asked landscape architect Paul Roncken, who came up with an 'architectural spatial framework' in which he showed how the layout of that village, including its seven manor houses, has been determined by history. But he also started imagining.
Sint-Oedenrode could have been Holland's Capital city if only the bishop of so-and-so or the duke of here-to-there had done or not done this or that. That spawned a vast project, which far surpassed the imagination of the people who originally came to us with the simple question of monumental markings. And it led to an approach that has subsequently been applied to the A50 highway between Oss and Eindhoven. New Arcadian routes are now being created, which link to existing hiking paths on which wondrous things are happening . . .

A new local mythology is designed . . .

Exactly. And it takes a while before people realize that art can also be a completely different source of inspiration. That suddenly, a few weeks ago, there are people walking through that village, blind-folded and with earphones, who follow the journey of the blind Saint Oda. You are adding stories to what already goes around. You should be aware of that when you develop a project: not so much what the place is like, but what the situation is like. And can you work with that, within an art context? Are there topics there, which I can associate with what's happening in art?

In the situation you outline, your role is that of an editor . . .

Yes, sometimes it works like that. You research possible themes and look for artists whom you think might be interested in them. But I have hardly any influence on what comes out of that, on the work itself. If that were the case, they would simply fill in my plan, and that's not the idea. Artists should never fulfil expectations.

You wrote in an earlier article in Open: 'More and more, artists feel the need to break through their isolation and play down their ego. They feel involved and are genuinely interested in the stories of individuals. They function as mediator between the settled, civilized, thriving, careless, self-centred and

Cilia Erens, *In het voetspoor van Oda*, audio excursion through St. Oedenrode.
Photo's Bob van der Vlis © Kunststichting St. Oedenrode/SKOR

uncritical society and its reverse side.'[6] *The artists as mediator . . . Do you, too, see a shift from artists making monumental things to artists that design processes?*

6. Tom van Gestel, 'Kunst in de vergeethoek', *Open*, *Cahier on art and the public domain*, no. 3 Kunst in psychogeriatrische verpleeghuizen (Amsterdam: SKOR in collaboration with Artimo, 2002).

That's what we are talking about in the new policy plan for SKOR. It's not something you make up; there are developments, which take place and you want to facilitate them as they happen. As an institution, we have a bias that changes with time, and should change too, if we pretend that we are setting an example, which is what we are officially supposed to do. You sense what is going on in the arts in terms of practical approaches and fields of interest. And in certain situations you see possibilities for facilitating these approaches. In that sense you foster art. Of course, this is done on the basis of our own analysis of what is interesting or not. You want to find out things: Is it true? Is it really interesting what is being said about certain new directions in art? Okay, well let's see it.

What changes do you see in government policies concerning the arts?

To be honest, I have never cared much about that. You feel that there are developments in the arts and in policies, and you react to them. If you look at the instructions from the powers that be, from the Ministry of Culture, for instance, then it's clear that these too are not without background. They too receive signals from society. Ideally, we are ahead of these. Take something like 'community art'. That is something which is stimulated by a government that is politically interested in social cohesion. A number of works in 'Beyond, Leidsche Rijn', could be described as 'community art', but they have never been initiated within that framework. A much more important framework for us was to research forms of urbanism – to me that is as topical, if not more topical. If you look at Parasite Paradise as the hardware – we were talking about building there – then we dealt with what I call 'life, love and death' in the exhibition 'Pursuit of Happiness'. You can see a community art aspect in that; we wanted to reach out to the community. I still think it was a great exhibition, but it failed in its intentions. We were really interested in the feelings of the local population – the software, so to speak – more than in building and habitation. We have experienced how difficult that is – hardly anybody from the neighbourhood visited the show. And the attempts at breaking out of the exhibition area failed. We wanted to extend our tentacles into the neighbourhood. Esra Ersen, for instance, wanted to give a voice to the local gang kids – you see, it's becoming a real neighbourhood: they have gangs. The idea was

to make black leather jackets with their statements printed on the back. And then the kids would roam the neighbourhood dressed in these jackets, after which a set of the same jackets would be displayed in the exhibition. With that, a relation is constructed between the show and the neighbourhood. But three days before the opening these kids flatly refused to wear them – they would not wear those fag jackets, over their dead bodies! Ersen had made an image of these kids that didn't fit them. These boys had no intention at all of looking like a kind of West Side Story gang. So I made them a proposal: if we can exhibit the jackets as they are, with your statements on them, I'll give each of you 120 euros and you can go and buy jackets you consider cool. Deal! On Saturday the exhibition opens and on Sunday the jacks are gone. 'Artwork Stolen', the local newspaper reports the next day. So I'm called by the press and asked how shocked I am. I say I'm not shocked at all – we wanted social interaction, didn't we? Well then! Whether it was a rivalling gang that took the jackets or the boys themselves is irrelevant. I thought it was a great socially engaged project!

‘Pursuit of Happiness’, leather jackets by Esra Ersen (2005), exhibited and stolen from the pavilion by Stanley Brouwn and Bertus Mulder. Photo SKOR © Beyond/SKOR

book reviews

Jacques Rancière
Het esthetische denken
Solange de Boer (ed.)
Grensganger tussen disciplines. Over Jacques Rancière

Frederik Le Roy and Kathleen Vandeputte

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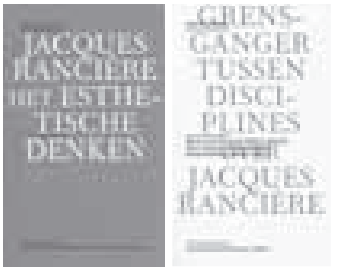


Rancière is everywhere – not just at colloquia, lectures and seminars but also in many places in the thinking of philosophers, art theorists and artists. As of a few months ago, his work is finally available in Dutch. After Jan Masschelein's translation of the staggering astonishing *Le Maître ignorant* (*De onwetende meester*, with an introduction by Masschelein, Acco, 2007), Walter van der Sar has translated *Le Partage du sensible* and *L'Inconscient esthétique* for Valiz, both texts collected together in *Het esthetische denken* ('Tekst'). This and *Grensganger tussen disciplines* ('Context'), which includes an interview with and three essays about Rancière, form a handsomely produced diptych that is the first publication in the series 'Tekst & Context'. This new book series, edited by Solange de Boer, has the ambitious aim of bringing greater breadth as well as greater depth to debates about art and art criticism in Dutch-speaking countries. A key element of this effort will be translations of key international texts and reflective essays accompanying them.

It goes without saying that Rancière's oeuvre has elicited a great deal of response in contemporary art criticism. The answer to *why* this disciple of Althusser has become so influential in today's debate on art and politics is as complex as it is significant. In many regards, after all, Rancière is an anachronistic philosopher averse to philosophical trends or disciplines who writes only indirectly about current aesthetic or political issues. A straddler of boundaries, he primarily conducts 'archaeological' research into the way art practices are conceptualized and made visible, and by doing so he identifies the symptoms of the contemporary art discourse. The power of his oeuvre lies in the fact that this research, rather than describe a static past, consistently emphasizes the potential of art and aesthetics. The selection of Rancière to launch this series is fully justified by the mere fact that this emphasis makes him anything but a defeatist. He rejects the 'paltry dramaturgy of ends and recurrences' ('Tekst', page 13) that dominates the contemporary discourse on art and politics and turns art critics into pathologists whose job it is to probe into the life and death of art in eloquent fashion. When he addresses the bankruptcy of such oft-used categories as modernity, modernism, postmodernism or avant-garde, he does so mainly to introduce a number of historical and conceptual premises of his own, intended to place art history and art criticism in a different light. The crux is what he calls 'the aesthetic regime of the arts', and it is precisely this regime that both *Le Partage du sensible* (*The Distribution of the Sensible*) and *L'inconscient esthétique* (*The Aesthetic Unconscious*) examine in detail. This aesthetic regime, according to Rancière, came into force in the early nineteenth century, when art was acknowledged as an autonomous and discrete mode of being that is 'filled with a heterogenous power, the power of thinking that is alienated from itself' ('Tekst', page 32). Once art is no longer defined by conventions of taste or by the hierarchy of subjects, genres or arts, it was able to become a reflection of a project of political emancipation, in

which what was not observable within the existing order of sensory experience (the *sans-part*, the meaningless and voiceless) became recognizable through an 'aesthetic revolution'.

Despite what this all too simplified outline of Rancière's thinking might suggest, his alternative approach does not lead to unjustified simplifications. On the contrary, he meticulously analyses the various and often conflicting plot lines of the 'aesthetic regime' (for example, Balzac's view of 'the prose of the world', whereby every object, no matter how trivial, possesses a capacity for poetry and meaning, and Maeterlinck's contention that every stage dialogue conceals an inaccessible, incomprehensible and pointless drumming that expresses the anonymous, meaningless forces of life, turn out to be two sides of the same coin). He elaborates these in compact and finely crafted theoretical facets that constantly mirror one another throughout all of his writings – a hall of mirrors the reader is glad to get lost in. In the lucid essay that concludes the 'Tekst' volume, Sudeep Dasgupta calls this method 'spiral-shaped'. Rancière's contrarian way of working embodies the dislocation of the traditional orders and the shifts in the concepts of politics and aesthetics he has in mind. To Dasgupta, the fact that Rancière's thinking has been called a misplaced philosophy (*une philosophie déplacée*) has anything but negative connotations. On the contrary, Rancière's oeuvre calls for a creative potential to transform forms of sensory experience into new spaces, so that a common stage can be created.

The greatest virtue of 'Context' is its clarification of several of the twists in Rancière's spiral thinking that are developed in 'Tekst'. This is accomplished first by contextualizing Rancière's texts within his oeuvre, with a key role played by 1987's *Le maître ignorant* (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster*) in both Pablo Lafuente's and Mireille Rosello's essays – not surprisingly, given that it deals with two leitmotifs, 'emancipation' and 'equality'. Rosello tests the pedagogical experiment of the nineteenth-century Jacotot against the topicality of a multicultural society, while Lafuente traces the Romantic roots of Rancière's ideas about emancipation. The most explicit answer to Rancière's call to recalibrate the discourse of art history and art criticism is provided by Sven Lütticken. His highly critical text argues that today's art regime is no longer 'aesthetic' (à la Rancière) but logocentric or transparent.

A recurring criticism of Rancière is that his ideas on politics has nothing to do with actual political practice, that his aesthetics are too abstract and this emancipation project is nothing more than a utopian conceptual exercise. However divergently constructed the essays in 'Context' may be, each challenges this criticism in its own way. They demonstrate that his thinking, like his concept of emancipation or equality, has a performative character: the translation of knowledge into practice should not take place in the theory of the schoolmaster-author but in the practice of the reader who grapples with this theory. Through his work, Rancière wants to dismiss 'scenarios of historical necessity' and concentrate on 'the archaeology of our time as a topography of possibilities that retain their quality of possibility'. ('Context', page 85) The first instalment of 'Tekst & Context' certainly represents a worthy introduction to that project.

BAVO (eds.)
Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification

Episode Publishers,
Rotterdam, 2007,
ISBN 978-90-5973-061-8,
128 pp., € 21,50

Eva Fotiadi

Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification is a book edited by the research team BAVO and with contributions by BAVO, Alexei Monroe, Brenda Hofmeyr, Dieter Lesage and Boris Groys.[1] It touches upon questions of the activist potentials of over-identification as an alternative to critical and utopian artistic strategies. The editors regard over-identification as 'a certain tendency in contemporary art, in which artists, faced with a world that is more than ever ruled by a calculating cynicism, strategically give up their will to resist, capitulate to the status quo and apply the latter's rules even more consistently and scrupulously than the rest of society' (page 6). Thus, by manifestly aligning their art with market interests or neoliberal logics, artists-activists can cause, according to BAVO, the public's outrage about things that the latter disapprove of, but would otherwise not bother reacting against.[2]

Exploring new approaches to art as resistance is an extremely timely and complex task. Additionally, the selection of authors makes this volume a worthwhile pick among an overwhelming production of literature on contemporary critical art practices. However, here I will focus almost exclusively on BAVO's own texts, in which they theorize and advocate over-identification as artistic activism strategy. Because unlike in the analyses by the other authors, in Bavo's texts one is faced with some striking presumptions and sweeping generalizations. Consequently, the editors-authors' initial credible endeavours run the risk of being subverted by their own argumentation. Slightly perverse, as this is what over-identification is supposed to do . . .

To be more precise, there are some noticeable presumptions about art and its functions. The considering of over-identification as a more effective strategy compared to other strategies of artistic resistance seems to take for granted that art *can* effectively *and* recognizably reach activist goals, provided the correct strategy is found. This appears to further imply that, firstly, engaged artists should prioritize effectiveness – though the content of ultimate outcomes is nowhere specified. Secondly, that there exist criteria of measuring and judging art's activist effectiveness or efficiency.

The texts contain certain presumptions about the subjects behind the strategies. Actually, while the departure point of BAVO's consideration of over-identification lies with outcomes – effectiveness of the strategy – of certain ways of cultural activism over others, they constantly discuss over-identification at the level of conscious intentions. However, in the examples they provide, they conspicuously bypass the question whether activism is part of, for instance, Santiago Sierra's intention, or art part of the Yes Men's intention. As a strategy, over-identification cannot be accidental but deliberate activism. As Brenda Hofmeyr also accentuates, intention is prominent: 'Over-identification as such is intrinsically invested with political purport. It cannot be dissociated from a certain deliberate and determined activism . . .' (page 77). Which is why Hofmeyr concludes with scepticism about Atelier van Lieshout's over-identification strategies as activism: 'Behind their creative flirtations with capitalism, communism and anarchism, there is no clear position recoverable, no unambiguous desire, just a certain lingering immaturity' (page 78).

From another point of view, by accepting over-identification as a conscious strategy, at least some artists-activists will hardly be able to escape schizophrenia. Because even if an activist-artist adopts his 'opponent's' point of view and strategically over-identifies with a position in order to subvert it from within, how can he then build up a character and career out of this practice?[3] Unless, after performing a position as a role, masks are ripped off, revealing the artist to be a good guy. But that would no longer be over-identification as position-taking, but performance as role-playing. Actually, BAVO's

example of activist theatre-maker Christopher Schlingensief matches this perfectly. It remains unclear where and how theatre practices, which by their nature are characterized as role-playing, are transformed into over-identification.

BAVO makes use of sweeping generalizations. For instance, 'free market' or 'capitalism' are placed next to 'representative democracy' as equivalent and mutually feeding evils of our times! (pages 7,27) Is representative democracy really so bad? And if so, ideologically speaking, as a political system, or in the ways it is applied?

BAVO are quite critical of 'NGO art', using as exemplary case the artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, known for projects in neighbourhoods considered problematic to Dutch society's standards (pages 23-27). But what exactly is understood as 'NGO art' here? Historically, the 1990s growth of Non Governmental Organisations came in the aftermath of political and social rights movements in the developing world from the 1960s onwards, and the promotion by the United Nations of a normative framework for internationally accepted human and civil rights.[4] NGO art refers formally to artistic interventions as part of human or development aid in areas suffering deprivations or human rights violations such as in Latin America's slums or in the Middle East. What do these have to do with the largely stated-funded (even if indirectly) Dutch institutional apparatus supporting art in neighbourhoods, apart from some artists' good social intentions? Is this not simply sweeping away an abundance of aesthetic, social and other differentiations disrespectfully onto a heap, treating different artistic interventions and sociopolitical situations as equivalent, whether they are interventions in Rotterdam neighbourhoods or art in Cairo?

As a consequence of such inaccuracies, simplifications and of inattention to detail and differentiation between juxtaposed examples, BAVO's argumentation, for all its good intentions, runs the risk of operating counterproductively in the reader's response. Even for a reader in search of cultural resistance strategies to adapt and models to identify with. To paraphrase Alexei Monroe explaining how the subversion of nationalist symbols works in *Neue Slowenishe Kunst*, one could claim that with their argumentation BAVO might eventually 'in the process alienate' activist strategies of over-identification 'from those who normally wield them' (page 56).

1. BAVO is comprised of the architect-philosophers Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels. The book is the outcome of the symposium C*ultural Activism Now. Strategies of Over-Identification* organised by BAVO with the support of the Jan van Eyck Academy at the Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam, January 2006. For further activities and publications see www.bavo.biz.
2. A known example from the Netherlands is the project *Regoned* (short for Registratie Orgaan Nederland) by artist Martijn Engelbregt. The artist distributed pseudo-governmental inquiries in Amsterdam, asking people to report information on illegal residents they were aware of. The project caused outrage. Several people did not at first recognize the action as art. It stirred memories of informing against Jewish people during the Second World War, as well as confronting people with the fact that virtually everyone in Amsterdam knows people who rent illegally.
3. This point about the necessity to first identify with a position in order to even strategically over-identify with it and the question of an individual's capacity and willingness to constantly present oneself in a reverse – to its 'true' – ideological position , was already raised by artist Jonas Staal during the book launch at Witte de With, Rotterdam, 3 November 2007.
4. For NGOs see, for instance, *Middle East Report*, no. 214: Critiquing NGOs. Assessing the Last Decade (spring 2004).

BAVO (eds.)
Urban Politics Now. Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City

NAi Uitgevers, Rotterdam, 2007, ISBN 978-90-5662-616-7, 224 pp., € 22,50

Wouter Davidts

There has been a lot of moaning about the contemporary city in recent years. Pessimism dominates virtually every book published about the urban condition. The public space of the city is dead; it is controlled by neoliberal market economics and it is being inexorably privatized. Urban development is only rarely guided by social, political or societal considerations anymore; instead it is the product of market and consumer logic: the cold laws of supply and demand. Now that today's cities are ever more seldom treated as a social and societal project but as a mere economic given, there is scarcely any such thing as 'urban politics' anymore. In critical thinking, pessimism even gives way to cynicism. Any critique of the current condition or 'the system' is deemed pointless and impossible, as it fated to be absorbed and co-opted by that very system. *Urban Politics Now* is a stinging indictment of this fatalistic and apolitical attitude towards the contemporary urban condition. The book is more than just another anthology of texts about the contemporary city, in which the various teething troubles of the contemporary urban condition are conveniently dissected and writers wallow in the by now all too familiar discourse and rhetoric of loss; instead it is a collection of essays that are all marked by an engagement that is sometimes infectious.

The BAVO editors make clear from the introduction that this book does not simply offer critical reflections on the inexorable depoliticization of the city, but seeks to formulate concrete alternative strategies for new forms of urban politics and democratic action. To this end they have brought together a heterogeneous selection of authors, with backgrounds in geography, urban planning, political philosophy and psychoanalysis. This last discipline, in fact, provides the book's conceptual foundation. The current approach to the city, BAVO asserts, is one of suppression or repression. In the neoliberal concept and management of the city, everything has to flow neatly and streamlined, and above all be profitable. There is no room for excess, marginality, unrest, or 'dissensus', or phenomena such as poverty, exclusion, illegality or crime. Problematic areas do not fit in the picture of a clean, attractive and culturally dynamic city. They are decisively cleaned up, redesigned and made attractive. Yet of course this radical suppression of characteristics and features inherent to any contemporary city does not resolve any problems. They eventually resurface – as psychoanalysis has taught us about psychological ailments – at a different time and in a different place, and often in a much more severe, sometimes even more violent form.

This idea forms the starting point of Slavoj Žižek's comparison of the riots in the peripheral housing estates of Paris in 2005 with the catastrophic events that followed Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In both instances, a segment of the population that for years had been ignored, even been made invisible, erupted into the forefront with uncontrolled violence. Neil Smith goes a step further and analyses the 'revanchist' strategies that lie at the basis of the invisibility of certain minorities in the city. Drawing on the example of Mayor Rudy Giuliani's zero-tolerance policy on the homeless in the streets of New York, Smith shows that vulnerable minorities are increasingly hounded out of the city, or simply deleted from the cityscape. They do not fit in the image of the city that is essential for new investment and development. The homeless problem is far from solved, but at least it generates the necessary pretence of having done so. Guy Baeten pursues this analysis in relation to deprived neighbourhoods, which he aptly dubs 'Neoliberalism's Other'. By claiming that impoverished areas are the visible legacy of decades of social-democratic urban politics, neoliberalism exacts its sweet revenge. After all,

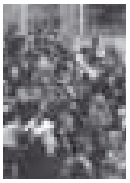
one of neoliberal philosophy's most powerful mantras is that poverty is your own fault and responsibility, just like that other slogan, that if you want a job, you'll find a job.

Neglected neighbourhoods, from this standpoint, are a cherished target for lucrative and often unscrupulous processes of urban regeneration in which the genuine problem – pervasive poverty – is suppressed. The most vulnerable segment of the population is again hit first, as affordable housing is replaced by more expensive, often prohibitively costly dwellings for the wealthy middle class or other economic elites. In their respective essays about the city branding of Amsterdam and about the Comme des Garçons fashion brand's 'Guerrilla Stores', Merijn Oudampsen, on the one hand, and Friedrich von Borries and Matthias Böttger, on the other, pose critical questions about the role and responsibility of the designer. The 'creative class' is not simply one of the favoured new groups of residents within urban regeneration projects; all too often they become part, under the guise of creative regeneration, of highly problematic processes and enterprises, of what BAVO calls 'machinations with a human face'. Cultural activists of all sorts are increasingly recruited to mediate in the redevelopment of a neighbourhood. Artistically motivated interventions serve as the lubricant for large-scale conversion plans, or as compensation for the inevitable struggles, unrest and dissatisfaction among local residents.

But just what are the alternative strategies presented by BAVO and the authors they have mobilized? For this most of the authors, and BAVO in particular, seek counsel from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Thinking about urban politics should focus its attention, BAVO argues, on that group of urban residents Rancière calls *la part des sans-part*, or that segment of the urban population contemporary city policies do not take into account. An important part of the city's population is responsible for the wealth and welfare of a society, but is not acknowledged as a valid part of that society, let alone accorded a voice. For example, it is no secret that in big cities, a significant but often invisible portion of the economic workforce – dishwashers, cleaners, pizza deliverers, child minders, and so forth – lives and works in illegal and often precarious conditions. It is this group of 'second-class citizens' that Rancière sees as the heart and the driving force of democratic politics and whose recognition he advocates. Following his example, BAVO argues that it is the task of planners, architects, designers and urban sociologists – that group of professionals they feel 'ought to be passionately committed to the fate of the contemporary city and its many victims' – to offer radical countersolutions to the omnipresent processes of exclusion and negation in urban policy. The alternative for the post-political and anti-democratic approach of urban decision-making processes, according to BAVO, consists in no longer masking the democratic struggles that inevitably go along with them, but instead making them visible, visualizing them. The essential repoliticization of the city requires a dramatization of urban inequalities and injustices. This is not followed, however, by concrete ideas for a translation into urbanistic and architectural design strategies, and they are not directly provided in the subsequent texts either. It remains essentially abstract advice. While in this regard the book does not fully live up to its own ambitions, it nevertheless makes for highly inspiring reading. In terms of the ambition to instil a political consciousness and conscience in the contemporary designers of the city and its spaces, the book succeeds brilliantly. And to be honest, the latter cannot happen too often.

Margriet Schavemaker &
Mischa Rakier (eds.)
Right about Now. Art & Theory since the 1990s

Amsterdam, Valiz, 2007,
ISBN 978-90-78088-17-2,
180 pp., € 19,50



Ilse van Rijn

Art theory has been hardly willing or able to formulate a coherent picture of visual art since the 1990s. While practitioners like the Young British Artists have resisted any theoretical embedding of their works, theorists, such as the curators of the biennales and documentas, have for their part failed to reflect on the art that has been exhibited. This, at any rate, is the contention of editors Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier in their introduction to *Right about Now. Art & Theory since the 1990s*, published in the wake of the 2006 lecture series of that name, organized jointly by SMBA, the University of Amsterdam and W139. According to Schavemaker and Rakier, art and theory have parted company since the 1990s and become separate disciplines once again. The title of the book, in which the edited lectures are arranged under six themes, flirts a little with the hefty 2004 art-historical survey, *Art since 1900*. As does the organization of the anthology. But whereas *Art since 1900* can be read as a chronological narrative, in *Right about Now* that possibility is denied the reader. The compilers profess themselves unwilling to fill the perceived gap left by the lack of coherent analyses with a comprehensive linear tale. The question is whether they have succeeded in their purpose.

The six themes – 'The Body', 'Interactivity', 'Engagement', 'Documentary Strategies', 'Money' and 'Curating' – constitute an equivalent number of chapters in the book. What these topics have in common is that in recent years they have been the subject of discussion by theorists endeavouring 'to swim against the tide'. In each chapter, at least two authors, mostly academics, give their take on the theme. In 'The Body', for example, Deborah Cherry wonders how Felix Gonzalez-Torres's 'candy pieces' should be interpreted today. A work like *'Untitled' (Placebo – Landscape – for Roni)* from 1993, where the individual sweets that make up the work can be picked up, unwrapped, eaten or taken away, turns perception into a multisensory experience rather than the modernists' much-vaunted purely visual one. Moreover, *'Untitled' (Placebo – Landscape – for Roni)* evokes personal as well as collective memories in the observer. But how does Gonzales-Torres's work relate to today's globalized world in which the public is infiltrating the private domain and vice versa, and in which synaesthetic experiences appear to be generally accepted? Also writing on the topic of 'The Body', Maaike Bleeker focuses on the changing relation between the cognitive perception of the observer and the physical presence of the performer. 'Representation' and 'presentness' are no longer contradictory concepts according to Bleeker. By way of example she cites the 2005 performance, *Who's Afraid of Representation?* by Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, a work that not only provides an incisive riposte to Amelia Jones and Tracey Warr's book, *The Artist's Body*, but also redefines the physical presence of the public.

The idea that the observer has become a partner in the artwork and, even more than previously, an indispensable part of it, is floated in several of the essays. Many authors feel obliged to clarify their position vis-à-vis the ideas of Nicolas Bourriaud. They include Bleeker and Claire Bishop, a well-known critic of Bourriaud's ideas, but also Hal Foster and, to a lesser degree, Jeroen Boomgaard and Beatrice von Bismarck. This not only tends to blur the strict division between the themes, but also results in an overlap in content. One cannot help wondering whether *Relational Aesthetics* (2002/1998) by Bourriaud (who took the easy option by submitting a chapter from that book for inclusion in *Right about Now*) is the only theoretical touchstone since the 1990s. It is odd that artist Liam Gillick was not sounded out on this theme. Gillick, one of the artists whose work inspired Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, wrote a fierce re-

sponse to Bishop's article in the magazine *October* ('Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', *October 115*, Winter 2005). Gillick would appear to satisfy the editors' desire to reunite art and theory. Or could it be that the theoretically versed artist actually undermines their contention that art and theory have been separate disciplines since the 1990s?

The same question crops up when we look at the essays in the chapter entitled 'Documentary Strategies'. Whereas Vit Havránek and Sophie Berrebi seek an ontological (Havránek) or historical (Berrebi) definition of 'the documentary', Kitty Zijlmans attempts to arrive at a better understanding of documentary strategies in contemporary art practice by way of a few examples. However interesting their respective ideas may be, the artist-philosopher Hito Steyerl writing in *A Prior*, summarily dismisses all the theorizing about 'the documentary', calling it 'as blurred as the picture' ('Documentary Uncertainty', *A Prior* no. 15, 2007, 303-310). Is it not high time that artists were brought into the debate, in the same way that the public has become an essential aspect of art? Surely the bringing together of diverse perspectives would serve to sharpen the discussion?

After 'Money', in which the changing art market is viewed from a socioeconomic perspective, there are two final essays under the heading 'Curating'. The author of 'Care for Hire', art critic Jennifer Allen, is one of the few contributors to set out her own position very precisely. When writing on the subject of this chapter – the tasks of the exhibition maker – she can, she claims, be regarded as a relative outsider because she is not herself a curator. As such, she remains an observer. And no, unlike many of her colleagues in recent years, she has not become a 'critic'/'curator'. For according to Allen, the lines between the different professions have become blurred and this does not make it any easier to form a clear picture of the curator. Moreover, the 'freelance curator' who once upon a time, following the example of Harald Szeemann, proposed alternative, experimental exhibition models, is often institutionalized nowadays. There is no consensus as to what a curator does or how he or she does it. Making an exhibition is a bit like 'rainmaking', Allen opines: 'Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not; but you always hope that it will; and you know when it does.'

As *Right about Now. Art & Theory since the 1900s* demonstrates, Allen's somewhat resigned conclusion about exhibition making does not hold true for the making of a book. The publication sketches a very readable picture of recent art-theoretical thinking. The anthology of essays inspires, but also raises questions, in particular about the place of theory, inside and outside the institutions. Theory is no longer the preserve of academics, it transpires. The dividing line between theory and practice has become a fiction. Was the exciting collaboration between UvA, SMBA and W139 exhaustively exploited in *Right about Now*, one wonders? Perhaps with the second volume of *Right about Now* lectures, now in the pipeline, it will be possible to take the next step in the process of thinking about the place of theory.

Camiel van Winkel
De mythe van het kunstenaarschap

Jorinde Seijdel

Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam, 2007, 96 pp., ISBN 978-90-76936-19-2, 96 pp., € 15,00

De mythe van het kunstenaarschap (The myth of the artist) is the second instalment in a series of essays initiated by the Fonds BKVB (The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, responsible for making grants to individual visual artists), intended to stimulate thinking about art and what it is to be an artist. 'What is an artist, and what is he expected to be able to do?' are the questions Camiel van Winkel was asked. This art historian and theorist, who previously published *Moderne Leegte* (Modern emptiness, 1999) and *Het primaat van de zichtbaarheid* (The regime of visibility, 2005), is a fine arts lecturer at the AKV-St. Joost Art and Design Academy, 's-Hertogenbosch. The subject of his lectureship is 'the changing cultural and societal position of the visual artist'. Van Winkel doesn't consider being an artist as a natural given, but as a cultural construction, which he submits in this essay to a critical analysis as a *myth*.

Van Winkel's premise is that the visual arts as a discipline no longer represent a general expertise upon which artists can rely: the substance of its discipline has become indescribable and general criteria for a successful work of art no longer exist. He blames this on the avant-garde artists of the twentieth century, who systemically rejected the idea that being an artist could be conditioned by a standard of technique, skill and tradition, and who appropriated domains that had hitherto been outside the realm of art. Now, however, there is growing societal and political pressure to submit art to standards of professionalism and competence, says Van Winkel. His essay relates to this development and partly derives its urgency from it.

In order to meet these general demands for professionalism, identification as an artist today feeds on old artist myths and thus manifests itself as a myth also. 'Being an artist is the imaginary centre of a nebulous universe of ideas, fantasies and beliefs. It seems no exaggeration to state that this nebula consists for the most part of clichés that are constantly repeated and reproduced by artists, spectators, fans and other parties involved.' This hybrid and incoherent mix of propositions does, however, have a structural effect, Van Winkel observes, entirely in keeping with Roland Barthes, resulting in that which is historically and ideologically defined, the state of being an artist, being presented as a timeless natural phenomenon.

The idea that identification as an artist is currently deriving its most valid definition and the assumption that the artist is driven by a sovereign drive to create are, according to Van Winkel, the core of the myth of being an artist. The method he uses to dissect this myth is that of research into discourse: what has been thought and written about the modern idea of the artist? He has studied, along various contemporary writings, texts by Mallarmé, Balzac, Sylvester, Merleau-Ponty and Lauwaert, among others. From this he has distilled three historical ideal models, which form the components of the unstable myth of today: the classical Beaux-Arts model, a romantic model and the avant-garde/modernist model. The artist as a craftsman, inventor, visionary, (unrecognized) genius, autonomous creator, investigator, innovator or businessman – these are old clichés that now exist alongside and are mixed with one another, detached from their historical context.

Although artists have tried to dismantle the myth of the idea of the artist – demystification is part of modern art – they have succeeded only in reaffirming it in a roundabout way. There have been attempts to imbue the condition of the artist with a function and a task, by reformulating it as 'artistic research' for instance, but this cannot hide the fact that the artist, in social terms, is left empty-handed. Individual expertise, a canon or set system of values about technique, skill or mission dissolve in a practice in which art can be anything and in which anything can be art.

The sociological importance of this mythical discourse is that identification as an art-

ist is being assigned a model function. In this context, Van Winkel cites the Flemish essayist Dirk Lauwaert, who argues that the function of being an artist lies in creating an empty zone in society, a place in which nothing is prescribed or established, in which non-artists can find their reflection. Agreeing with Lauwaert, Van Winkel observes that this 'calling', however, has become devoid of content: '*It* must be done, but no one knows *what* must be done anymore.'

Van Winkel also points out signs of an apparently demystified artistic practice: artistic attitudes (such as creativity, imagination, unorthodoxy) are increasingly exploited by business, the media and politics as part of contemporary demands for self-fulfilment. This probably leads to the double phenomenon of 'artwork without an artist' and 'artist without an artwork', he states. The first is a commercial phenomenon in digital culture, in which it is possible 'to obtain an "artwork" without an artist: send a photo to a company and get it back as an artwork in the style and dimensions you want on real painting canvas'. The artist without an artwork is the 'post-artist' whose artistic practice consists mainly of adapting and recycling existing cultural material and imitating all manner of non-artistic activities (therapy, community work, anthropology, teaching), in which the making of a concrete work of art has receded to the background. The 'post-artist' represents the end of the last remnant of the artist's function as a social model. However, Van Winkel concludes that these current developments are probably nothing more than a little chop on the surface of the ocean of cultural history, which scarcely influences the mythical undertow.

This ends this clear and eloquent essay on a somewhat defeatist note: the myth of being an artist can probably be dismantled and reconstructed with elements from the same models ad infinitum, in an almost mechanical way. Who knows, another model may come along in a few years, but it remains a Catch-22. This perception comes from the fact that Van Winkel consistently remains detached in his analyses. He is not out to prove that one myth is sociologically, politically or artistically better than another. Nor does he want to totally demystify the myth in favour of a new proposition – a genuine demystification, according to his reasoning, is virtually impossible – or to radicalize the perspective of the 'post-artist', for instance. Or even to consider the myth itself as the specific expertise of the artist.

Van Winkel's engagement lies primarily with the discourse as a system in itself. While this is legitimate enough, forestalls fashionable twaddle and has a revelatory effect in regard to such hollow concepts as artistic research, its critical potential seems to founder there. He himself concludes that 'the myth of being an artist has grown into a dominant sociological and cultural reality, towards which people direct their lives, for which institutions have been established and which involves a huge quantity of cultural and symbolic capital'. For a genuine understanding of this, exposing the mythical structure of what it is to be an artist seems inescapable, he seems to suggest. But does his reading of the myth politicize this reality? Or does it add an easily absorbable layer to the myth?

Van Winkel's myth of the artist is of course itself a myth, constructed out of the myths he describes. The premise, for instance – or is it a myth? – that the avant-garde is responsible for the lack of definition of the contemporary idea of the artist comes out of a reductionist modernist philosophy. In it there is little room for less visible forces, representations or counter-myths (sociological, historical or technological) that eat away at dominant paradigms. And yet the 'myth of the myth' should be unravelled – but perhaps this is asking too much of an essay that is part of a research project 'in progress'; we will have to wait for more. It would be nice, though, if Van Winkel would put his own position as a 'mythologist' – however much this, according to Barthes, can be nothing other than that of an outsider – into play, or even at stake.

Jeroen Boomgaard (ed.)*Highrise – Common Ground. Art and the Amsterdam Zuidas Area*

Amsterdam, Valiz, 2008,
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384 pp., € 19,50

Ilse van Rijn

'Art – Has it tough all over' says Barbara Visser in her fictitious 'Zuidas ABC' in the recently published *Highrise – Common Ground: Art and the Amsterdam Zuidas Area*. Visser's definition is a lamentation that, after reading *Highrise – Common Ground*, proves typical of the genesis of the art projects along the former 'fringe of green between the Amstel and the Schinkel'.

The construction of the Zuidas, an urban expansion zone for a commercial centre on the south side of Amsterdam that is scheduled to be completed in 2030, has reached a crucial phase, says Jeroen Boomgaard, professor of Art and Public Space at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and editor of the book. He asserts that it is now not only possible to assess the future success of the Zuidas, but also to determine the role that art might play in it. Is this moment not somewhat premature? In the book, each of the artists involved in the Zuidas expresses scepticism about the virtually impossible task of creating a sketch design for a place that does not yet exist. They resort to scenarios (sometimes of doom) and futuristic models. To theorists, on the contrary, the partly virtual space that the Zuidas still is for the moment offers the opportunity to explore their ideas 'without inhibition'. The different voices come together in *Highrise – Common Ground*.

The contradictory interests of the parties involved in the Zuidas result in visible incoherence – on that point virtually all authors are in agreement. The Zuidas is progress turned into design, within which art is a staged accident (Visser), a computer-generated model for the layout of a space (Daniel van der Velden), an artificial structure (Joost Zonneveld) in which art is the destabilizing factor, or the instinctive link with everyday life that the master plan lacks (Roemer van Toorn). Anthropologist and journalist Joost Zonneveld, for example, is perplexed that the varied functions the Zuidas is supposed to accommodate have been thought about, but not its busting vitality. The commercial enterprises are located next to knowledge centres and cultural institutions, but the planners of the Zuidas have not considered the diversity of people responsible for what is being labelled a city centre. Publicly subsidized housing, for instance, is almost entirely absent. A city grows in an organic and dynamic way; it cannot be constructed in advance. If changes are to avoid turning into failures in the long run, they must neither be dissociated from the social context nor mixed up with politics, argues Stan Majoor.

Conflicting socioeconomic, political and artistic interests should not be avoided, says the oft-quoted political scientist Chantal Mouffe in another copious text. Mouffe separates the domain of conventional politics (empirical, ontic) from 'the political' (philosophical, ontological), which she views as a 'common ground', the symbolic space we share. In this her ideas are not necessarily contrary to those of Majoor. Our public space is not neutral, she continues. Opponents (not 'enemies') must acknowledge controversies on the one hand and tame them on the other. This causes a confrontation Mouffe calls 'agonistic'. Only critical art can once more make visible the struggle that the dominant consensus model tends to obscure. Critical art, according to Mouffe, is not staged art ('mise-en-scène'); critical gives shape to controversy ('mise-en-forme'). Political scientist Gerard Drosterij has doubts about Mouffe's 'agonistic' approach. Doesn't the power of art lie in the aesthetic experience it generates in the viewer? To interpret art as politics, as an element of a social network and imbedded in power relations, is antithetical to this.

The fact that Mouffe's 'agonistic approach' is a brilliant but difficult to use instrument is also demonstrated by BAVO's questions. Does art not become politics the moment artists take a seat at the negotiations table at an early stage? Is the new alliance between capital and culture not a reason to refuse the commission? Political issues

are being foisted onto art. In order to submit this process itself to a critical analysis, art must adopt an intermediate position, for which BAVO has coined the term *extimate*. The cultural actor BAVO champions is firmly grounded in the process itself and at the same time is not part of it. This demands the incorruptible position of the artist in relation to his own expertise. Today's artist is an idealist with an uncompromising attitude. Only then can art play a role in a public space that to a large extent has been colonized by the market.

Daniel van der Velden/ Logo Parc deny art any possibility of changing society. Artists are flies and mosquitoes, circling around the head of the elephant that is the Zuidas. 'They can funkify the fringes of the heterotopia (the globally oriented business centre that is the Zuidas, in Van der Velden's words), but that is actually all they can do.' The Zuidas can not be realized in a work of art, says van der Velden, but the Zuidas itself cannot be realized either. The Zuidas can be presented as a non-actualized three-dimensional model that stands between the present and the future, equivalent to the model the project developer uses to vouchsafe the future. Any work of art in the public space that does not openly call the conditions under which it is made into question endorses these very conditions. Is that what Mouffe means by 'critical art'?

The only contributor that unabashedly and enthusiastically characterizes the art projects planned for the Zuidas as part of a fascinating and exciting process is Henk de Vroom. It must have something to do with his position in the commission of the Zuidas Virtual Museum (VMZ). He presents the 'artistic sites' that will link the shops, office buildings and theatres of the Zuidas together as oases where freedom and imagination are inextricably connected with the city. De Vroom's vision has elements of utopia. After the critical viewpoints of the other authors, it is impossible to read his words without cynicism.

The question of the suppressed autonomy of the artist in general and of art in particular, already posed by BAVO, is placed in an art-historical context in a final essay by Jeroen Boomgaard. When art is incorporated into the prevailing order and therefore silenced, it must return to its previously overcome autonomy. It is this very autonomy that enables art to reveal the limits of the system. Only radically autonomous art can reach beyond what has been planned. And therefore expected.

A literally 'unreal' Zuidas seems a meagre starting point for a book. *Highrise – Common Ground* proves the opposite. It is a dynamic, sometimes cheeky and hilarious, not always equally balanced and vulnerable publication. Above all, the book proves to be a democratic consultation with the reader. The future visitor to the Zuidas is invited to take part in the discussion about art in the public space, which he shares, according to Mouffe, with the authors, artists and theorists, but also with the government and other investors in the Zuidas. The future will tell whether the Zuidas manages to surpass expectations. *Highrise – Common Ground* at least enables one to reflect on it. Definitive answers to the question of the role of art in the public space are not given, but a first step towards a historic discussion about it has been taken.