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(IN)TOLERANCE

Freedom of Expression in Art and Culture



editorial

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(IN)TOLERANCE

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ART AND CULTURE

No discourse seems more hollow at the present moment than that about tolerance and freedom of expression: in Western culture, and not least the Dutch, enlightened ideas are scarcely capable any longer of generating meanings that apply and appeal to all of us. Through all political groupings, controversies great and small are wreaking havoc on democracy's traditional consensus model and cutting across the public domain. The formal and informal codes, rules, agreements and symbols that determine our freedoms and rights within that domain have ceased to function effectively. One would be tempted to call some of the results cartoonish, were it not for the fact that they have entailed so many real deaths.

Leaving cynicism and nihilism behind, the politico-philosophical concept of the public sphere needs to be articulated anew. The desire for this is projected not just onto politics, but also onto art as the most obvious domain of freedom of expression and symbol formation. Architecture and the city

also present themselves as projection screens for experimental ideas about the communal, the heterogeneous and the autonomous.

Open 10 brings together analyses, stances and proposals of theoreticians, artists and designers who examine questions concerning contemporary symbolism and freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, in relation to the Western notion of tolerance and forms of extremism. The failure of consensus thinking and acting finds expression at various levels. It is no accident that the ideas of philosopher Jacques Rancière – author of *The Politics of Aesthetic: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004) – concerning the possibilities of a political aesthetic and the perspective of the 'dissensus' are cited with increasing frequency in cultural and art theory discourse. Rancière argues that a true democracy should be founded on a productive 'dissensus', whereby two worlds are located within one and the same world. The radical nature of this proposition appears more stimulating in the present situation than the whiny and exhausted harmony model.

The 'dissensus' possibility does not exclude an appeal to idealism and engagement. In his *Atmosphere* trilogy, Peter Sloterdijk describes how the macro-atmospheres ('Globes'), homogeneous spaces

where everyone is equal and secure, are 'frothing away' to nothing. Modern pluralism and individualism give rise to an infinity of foam bubbles, to micro-atmospheres ('Bubbles') that are both connected to and separated from one another. Sloterdijk believes in the positive power of such foam and argues that we must learn to think 'inside out' in order to be able to deal with the increasingly blurred distinction between inside and outside.

In the essay 'Citizens in a Vat of Dye' Sloterdijk examines the premises for a democratic society and the importance to it of written and representational media. The roots of democracy also feature in Tom McCarthy's interview with architect Maurice Nio and artist Paul Perry about their *Amsterdam 2.0* project, which provides a constitutional framework that allows 400 cities to inhabit the same territory and which is based on a system of 'radical tolerance' whereby the citizens of one city are constitutionally prevented from imposing their will on the others.

In their open letter, Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan emphasize the importance of a 'reflective interchange' between the institutional interior of art and the 'exterior' where it is installed. *Open* also includes textual and visual excerpts from Van Brummelen's publication *The Formal Trajectory* which recounts the long application process that preceded her *Grossraum* film project.

Roemer van Toorn points to aesthetics as politics in the architecture of Wiel Arets and Rem Koolhaas. Jeroen Boomgaard argues for a radical autonomy in the visual arts in order to free them from the disastrous planning processes of the market economy. Lex ter Braak opposes the call for art to design new symbols for the Netherlands. The column by The Buggers deals with repressive tolerance, while Gijs van Oenen reflects on the souring of Dutch tolerance in the new culture of assertion. Apropos of Paul McCarthy's controversial butt plug gnome sculpture in Rotterdam, Max Bruinsma explores the revenge of the symbols and challenges the artist to step beyond provocation and assume social responsibility. Martijn Engelbregt, known for controversial projects like *Regoned* and *De Dienst*, which push democratic instruments to their limits, produced a special contribution for *Open*. Joke Hermes considers Engelbregt's work from the perspective of her position as lecturer in Public Opinion Formation. Designer Ben Laloua/Didier Pascal contributed a series of drawings in which she interprets the printed media's reporting of a number of current events such as the recent revolt in the French suburbs. Jorinde Seijdel wrote about Koolhaas and Google in China in the light of contemporary notions of censorship.

Peter Sloterdijk

Citizens in a Vat
of Dye

*The Birth of
Democracy from
the Spirit of
Disarmament*

The following text is a shortened version of a lecture delivered by philosopher Peter Sloterdijk during the conference ‘Atmospheres for Freedom. Towards an Ecology of Good Government’ in

Venice in 2004.¹

In this lecture, Sloterdijk addresses the premises of a democratic society and the importance therein of written and representational media.

1. Under the title ‘Atmospheric Politics’, this lecture is also included in the catalogue: Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy* (Karlsruhe, ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie; Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2005).

I would like to present a few informal considerations that focus on the atmospheric premises for a democratic community. In other words, I am talking about the conditions that make democracy possible, but I am not addressing the subject in Kantian terms, according to which this political life form should be regarded as a by-product of citizens exercising their powers of judgement. Instead, I would claim that the conditions are an effect of ‘waiting power’ – meaning both the ability to wait and to let others wait. Furthermore, democracy is based on the proto-architectonic ability to build waiting rooms, not to mention the proto-political ability to disarm citizens. I would like in what follows to intimate how these two abilities are interrelated. With a view to the swordless George hanging over us, the question must surely be whether there are other ways of persuading citizens to lay down their swords and under what conditions such a *procedere* can be carried out. In fact, such procedures do indeed exist, and I would like to remind you of them by way of reminiscing first on the history of architecture and then on the logic of the media.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, English garden architects started creating houses that were hybrids of glass and cast iron dedicated exclusively to housing a population of extremely sensitive plants. It is a well-known fact that this marked a clear caesura in the history of building. The first so-called hothouses initially obeyed only the principle of whim, because the prosperous inhabitants of the British Isles indulged in the imperialist caprice

of declaring their country a place to which plants that were sensitive to the climate could immigrate. And I beg your indulgence if here I am politicizing the fate of plants, as it were, a language game that can at least lay claim to being based on Bruno Latour’s concept of an expanded collective. The immigration of plants to Europe in the nineteenth century can be read as a pattern for a new politics of trans-human symbiosis. The engineers concerned themselves with the problem of climatic structures in light of the conditions of solar radiation quite some way north of the equator. The invention of bent glass helped them decisively in this regard, as did the introduction of prefabrication based on standardized elements. The latter was a technology eminently suited to enabling the erection of large ensembles in a very short space of time; consider the adventure of Crystal Palace in 1851, which (although it was to emerge as by far the largest edifice in the history of architecture to that date) was built in the amazingly short time of only 10 months.

Only gradually did nineteenth-century minds grasp the paradigmatic significance of constructing glass houses. Such edifices took into account that organisms and climate zones reference each other as it were a priori and that the random uprooting of organisms to plant them elsewhere could only occur if the climatic conditions were transposed along with them. The imperial Englishmen had of course noticed that some of the most beautiful plants had the irritating habit of only wanting to flourish under non-British skies, and some creative thinking was necessary if one wished to

welcome these guests to the British Isles. If, for example, you really want to make a palm tree feel unhappy, then force it to spend a winter in England without the protection of an artificial skin that shrouds it in its native climate. British politeness excluded this ugly hypothesis and instead enabled the mass immigration of palms from an early date by creating a new type of building, namely the palm house – something that to this very day can be considered one of the most beautiful achievements of world architecture. Wherever we now encounter such buildings (be they the classical palm houses or orchid houses or camellia houses or, finally, the greenhouses for *Victoria regia*, that most famous of water lilies), we likewise encounter the materialization of a new view of building by virtue of which climatic factors were taken into account in the very structures made. Modernism in architecture has always also implied the transition of the climatic into the age of its explicit presentation and production. Architecture responds with its means to a new form of mobility that now includes not only human and animal movement but also plant migration. For reasons of space, for further details on this complex swath of phenomena, allow me simply to refer you to Alfred W. Crosby's well-known study, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe*.²

2. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Following the initial breakthroughs in devising an elaborate system for harbouring plants alien to the local climate, it was to be another two or

three generations before theoretical biology responded at the conceptual level to the new practices of uprooting plants. It bears considering that it was the afore-mentioned exercise of granting plants hospitality that first created the conditions under which it became possible to formulate a concept of environment. I can of course forgo providing any detailed explanation of how and why the concept of 'environment' as coined by biologist Jacob von Uexküll in 1909 (in his book *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*, second edition, 1921)³ was one of those twentieth-century innovations in logic that was to have the greatest impact. Not only do large stretches of modern biology depend on it, but also both ecology as a whole and systems theory. If post-Uexküll the talk was of 'environment', then this meant thinking not just of the natural habitat of exotic animals and plants but also of the procedures for the technical reproduction of that habitat in alien surroundings. It was initially this reconstructive imperative that we have to thank for the fact that a general concept of the environment was formulated. From the historical viewpoint, the destructive imperative was no less significant, because modern warfare (such as commenced with the introduction of gas as a weapon in Ypres in April 1915) was likewise based on the insight that the enemy's environment, the space occupied by him, could be destroyed.

Among the first to respond to the provocation innate in the concept of the environment was Martin Heidegger, who as early as the mid-1920s grasped

3. Jacob von Uexküll, *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1921).

the ontological implications of the new biology. I would go so far as to say that his formulation of ‘being-in-the-world’ constitutes a philosophical response to the shock he felt when confronted by the biological concept of the environment. He intended the use of the preposition ‘in’ to distinguish ontologically between man’s ecstasy, in the original Greek sense, in the world and the animal’s ensnarement in a specific habitat. Now the experience of original displacement plays a decisive role here: When Heidegger speaks of the *Geworfenheit* (‘thrownness’) of being, this expression brings to mind the risk of a sudden dis-alignment of organism and environment, such as a palm tree of African origin faces if it were to unfortunately find itself in England prior to the invention of the greenhouse. The vegetative counterpart to *Geworfenheit* would then be ‘enracination’. In the one as in the other case, what we have is a situation in which the human or plant is surrounded or embraced by a circle of incompatibility. Assistance in such a case would be if the surrounding(s) were themselves to adjust to accommodate the entity projected into their midst. In the case of plants, such an adjustment ensues with a greenhouse geared to recreating the plant’s original conditions; in the case of humans, the solution would be to embed the newcomer in the host’s language as the ‘house of being’ – in other words in the ontological version of the greenhouse, an environment impregnated by mysteriousness and nothingness. Whereas for the organism the meaning of the ‘en’ in environment or the ‘sur’ in surrounding consists of the perfectly

calibrated dependence on the original stimuli, in the case of existence in the world they signify an abyss above which one hangs, or a transcendence into which one is suspended.

Now, in order to highlight the relevance of these considerations for political theory, allow me to show that the phenomenon of greenhouses in nineteenth-century architecture actually had a predecessor in older urbanist or polis theories. Thus, prior to its explicit formulation in the early twentieth century, the concept of environment has an implicit pre-history, which, as we shall see, stretches back as far as classical Greece. Thanks to Bruno Latour, we are familiar with the art of posing epistemologically bizarre questions, such as, ‘Where were the microbes prior to Pasteur?’ I wish to adopt this pattern and ask ‘Where in the world could the environment have been prior to Uexküll?’ I shall initially search for an answer among the post-Socratic Greek philosophers, who I believe I can show were in their own way already theorists of the greenhouse and ipso facto environmental theorists. In actual fact, the birth of ancient Greek political theory implied for them a doctrine of living in an artificial construct. What the early philosophers termed polis is in essence nothing other than an artificial construct ruled by *nomos* and amounts to the practical answer to the challenge posed by the improbability of bringing numerous strangers together to coexist behind shared walls. The word polis itself, if one listens carefully to it, has a certain ring to it reminiscent of greenhouse theory. Anyone using it professes

to believe that it is possible for strangers and persons who are not related to one another to come together in one place and naturalize in a shared climate. The Greek city was a greenhouse for people who agreed to be uprooted from the *modus vivendi* of living in separation and instead be planted in the disarming *modus vivendi* of living together. If the word polis always retains a certain astonishing ring to it, it's because those who first used it were never able to quite forget that the city as a form of life always stood out like a social wonder of the world against the background of pre-urban conditions.

Let us assume that the founders of classical philosophy would have responded to these problems conceptually. And let me simply imagine that Aristotle, that great technician, composed a dialogue entitled *Daedalus – or the Art of Building Cities*, a text that along with all his other dialogues has been lost because tradition in its barren selectivity did not wish to preserve any of them. After all, Aristotle is said to have authored as many such pieces as did Plato. And let us further assume that a team of archaeologists recently succeeded in unearthing a copy of the lost text inside a vase buried in the sand outside Alexandria. Let me also assume that I had the privilege, alongside a team of papyrologists, classical scholars, philosophers and security men, of gaining an initial impression of the newly-found document, putting me in the fortunate position of being able to present a few preliminary observations on the sensational object.

The initial decoding of the text led to a key finding that I can summarize:

Aristotle has the mythical builder of the Cretan labyrinth discuss the art of building cities with Hippodamos of Milet, the inventor of town planning by grid. Both attribute the history of the city to an event that is known by the name *synoikismós*. This expression designates the decisions by smaller village and fortress communities, originally scattered around the countryside and ruled by nobles, to place themselves under the protection of shared walls and in future subject themselves to shared laws. Unlike Plato, however, Aristotle does not feel it necessary to resort here to some diluvian myth, and he also knows nothing of some primordial assembly following the cataclysm. According to Aristotle, it was not the social drive of survivors of the great natural disaster that gave rise to the polis but the insight on the part of the prospective citizens that a cooperative constitution could be advantageous for them compared with the prior *modus vivendi*. What is interesting about these considerations is less their quasi proto-pragmatic thrust than Aristotle's expressing of a view otherwise seldom encountered in classical antiquity, namely that polis-like coexistence is fundamentally a very artificial way for people to live together. This does not, incidentally, contradict his renowned hypothesis that man is a *zoon politikón*, as in this context the epithet *politikós* specifically does not imply a reference to urban culture but quite simply pinpoints the biological fact that we live in groups or packs. Instead, what is striking is that Aristotle judges that the *synousía* of people in the city is the result of their special psycho-political

treatment. Humans are, he suggests, by no means urbanites by nature but have to be turned into such; they cannot simply be posited as city-dwellers, because a simple decision by individual will does not suffice to stabilize such an improbable state of affairs as the coexistence of the many in the polis. So there must logically be a third term that comes between nature and such an assumed act of will, one that would be strong enough to neutralize the powers people have to repel one another and to overcome their aversion to involuntary neighbourhoods. The moral enigma of the city is that it rests on the creation of people who turn away from a certain natural phobia of neighbours and instead champion a highly artificial xenophilia in the most confined of spaces; it is a metamorphosis that can be compared with the moral alchemy of Christendom, with the difference being that what we have here is love your neighbour not your next of kin.

Engineer Daedalus, after whom the dialogue is named, had various suggestions as regards the third term, and they will raise a few eyebrows among the theorists of democracy. To put it briefly, instead of nature or tyranny, the democratic psycho-politics is based on rituals that we must invariably consider the skilful application of anti-misanthropic procedures. In the dialogue, it is above all Daedalus who counters Hippodamos the rationalist by arguing that urban planning is necessary at two levels. As long as the two architects talk about the walls and gates, the piazzas, the temples and the buildings for the magistrates, the ideas of these first explicit city-makers remain more or less

conventional in thrust; the same is true when they tackle war, institutions and civil ethical behaviour. By contrast, the references to psychic urban planning are striking: instructions on the rituals that need to be established in order to generate or strengthen the citizens' sense of commonality. When describing these procedures of urbanization, the author of the dialogue almost turns into a poet. It is as if he wished to compete with Plato in the field the latter was so strong in. Aristotle introduces two allegories into the discussion of political issues that have good prospects of becoming established alongside the well-known Platonic parables. The first is the dyer's parable, which is evidently constructed to contrast deliberately with Plato's weaver's parable in the *Statesman* dialogue, while the second, the fountain parable, essentially contains the proposal for a political ritual.

With his dyer's parable, Aristotle moves into terrain occupied by Plato: Just as the latter in his *Politikós* had termed the 'royal technique' the capacity to meaningfully interweave the two socially beneficial, basic moods of masculinity (the courageous/aggressive and the self-controlled/harmonizing mindsets) as a weaver makes his fabric using woof and warp, so in the *Daedalus* Aristotle defines the 'democratic technique' as a procedure to immerse all citizens of the commonality in the same dyer's vat until they are impregnated down to the very innermost fibre of their being. He believes *synoikismós* will in this way penetrate the citizens' most basic emotional strands. This vat of dye

impregnates the citizens with a shared pride in the freedom of their own polis as well as with respect for the beautiful acts of *megalopsychía*, or, to couch it in modern terms, the generosity thanks to which some citizens stand out from others. This pride and respect must precede all other statements of a political nature in the city. Far from rendering the city monochromatic and reducing it to some one-dimensional consensus, it is these pre-political ‘undertones’ that enable those polychromatic layers to be added by dint of which each vibrant city can become a forum for debate, party foundations and rivalry among friends. The implicit argument in this parable is interesting because it points to the pre-logical or pre-discursive premises of the art of urban coexistence. To again resort to modern terms, we could say that here the philosopher for the first time gives voice to the climatic or psycho-political conditions for social synthesis.

The same is perhaps true of the fountain parable and possibly to an even greater extent. There, Daedalus recommends that all citizens of the polis bathe together once in spring and once in the autumn in a special pool that needs to be built for this purpose on the agora – the so-called city fountain. Now, while we can obviously imagine this to be something of an erotic group escapade or balneological carnival, quite as if Aristotle had already read Bakhtin, the key point in both procedures is the fact that there is no discernible direct reference to political dialogue, to logical argument and to an explicit political semantics. Rather, the allegories express procedures on how to direct the pre-symbolical

dimension of the coexistence of citizens.

Incidentally, we could be forgiven suspecting here that the fountain ritual also possesses a certain link to a competing Platonic text, because we should not forget that, in his own way, Plato is familiar with the myth of bathing in the fountain of democracy, although, if we ignore its metaphorical traits, there the font exhibits essentially aristocratic and cynical overtones: I am of course thinking of his doctrine of the noble lie as presented in the *Politeia*, according to which the pre-discursive unanimity of the citizens can only be upheld securely in a city riven by class differences thanks to a legend of their being related to one another. According to it, the great mother of the Athenian city gave birth to three types of children – the golden, the silver and the bronze – and expects of them that they fraternize with one another the way one would expect of siblings – the birth of *fraternité* from the spirit of inescapable deception. In this case, the joint bath with strangers is replaced by immersion in an imaginary family milieu.

The thrust of my deliberations should now be clear; there is no further reason to explain it further by detours through parables. So let me simply answer the question as to the atmospheric basis that first enables democracy in terms of spatial and media theory. The space of the polis is evidently a place of enhanced improbabilities. In order for politics to consolidate as the art of the improbable, procedures have to be developed from which citizens arise as the agents of coexistence in the improb-

able. The two ‘Aristotelian’ allegories were meant to allude to the fact that the polis as such constitutes a specific space that we would customarily term a ‘public’ space. I would like to stress the immersive character of staying in this space. The public sphere is not just the effect of people assembling but in fact goes back to the construction of a space to contain them and in which the assembled persons are first able to assemble. The agora is the manifest urban form thereof, but we can only gain an adequate notion of its function if we construe the coming together of persons in this space as an installation. Installations such as those with which we are familiar from contemporary art have the task of developing compromises between observation and participation. Their meaning is to transform the position of juxtaposed observation into an immersive relationship to the milieu that surrounds the erstwhile beholder. By means of installations, modern artists endeavour to strengthen the position of the work vis-à-vis the observer: If, in regard to conventional art objects, isolated sculptures or pictures hung on a wall, the beholder essentially holds a position of strength (to the extent that he can be satisfied with casting a fleeting glance in passing), the installation forces him to take a far less dominating role and compels him to enter the work. Thus, the opportunity to experience art shifts from the pole of the beholder to that of the participant.

In this process, we can discern an insight that is vaguely comparable with Platonic psycho-politics. No open commonality can be constructed on the

basis of a single affect – except that of tyrannical phobocracy, which functions only with the primary colour of fear (although as a rule ambition is assigned to it as a secondary colour). Instead, commonality presumes a compromise between at least two primary moods. Plato speaks with good reason of the fabric woven from courage and self-control (*andreía* and *sophrosyne*). We could in like manner say that the atmospheric premises of democracy must be formed from a parallelogram of observer’s virtues and participant’s virtues. The citizen as a highly improbable artificial figure of political anthropology would thus first become possible by a combination of actor and spectator in a single person, and that said, the entire public domain would have to consist of this type of agent. In this synthesis the more difficult half – and here we part company with the idea of the installation – without doubt involves the creation of the viewing or observing half, for if humans are beings that by nature have instincts, passions and interests, then only by more or less elaborate cultural techniques can they be persuaded to activate their possible analytical or theoretical intelligence. In order to do justice to the pre-political conditions of democracy, a deep link must be forged between the polis culture and theoretical behaviour. It is no coincidence that Athenian democracy appears to be the first literate collective on the stage of cultural history. Its features included the fact that the viewer virtues were not generated or strengthened by Dionysian theatre and the art of rhetoric alone but also by the invention of philosophy,

which, in terms of political significance, was nothing other than the development of a universal logic of the coexistence of humans in a double assembly room, whereby the first was called *Polis* and the second *Physis*.

The essence of the written and representational media is that they allow users to manipulate the temporal axis thanks to which diachronic sequences can be transformed into synchronic images. It is best to think here of the phenomenon of spoken speech. Since the very beginnings, members of the *Homo sapiens* species have been familiar with the experience of a stream of sounds flowing from a speaker's mouth only to disappear forever after an acoustic presence of a few fractions of a second. The inscription of the spoken word enables this flow to be halted so that the water level rises on the inner side of this symbolic dam. One must accept the idea that the art of writing (that is, of creating a reservoir or pool of language) is the cultural technique that has contributed most to the emergence of democracy. By giving the spoken word a spatial presence, it forces even the most fleeting thing in the world to tarry with us a while longer than would be possible in the purely oral world. The recorded or petrified world can then be repeated, and in this way new mental objects can be brought to life – of particular significance among them are, on the one hand, scholarly theorems and, on the other, political opinions. I would now claim that the art of polis building rests on expansions of this media factor. If the polis was the first historical answer to the question of

how to make things public, then the key means to render political objects public is surely the citizens' ability to capture the 'things' for posterity. The *res publica* arises from this act of capturing objects. If you do not possess suitable techniques for arresting them, then you cannot stabilize fleeting events and cannot give voice to them in the political domain. To this extent, democracy is preceded by a pre-political dimension in which the means to slow down the flow of speech/es is made available. It may be that philosophy in its Platonic variant so exaggerated the democracy-enabling effect in the face of transience that a new type of anti-democratic effects inevitably arose (Latour has uncovered it in his inexorable deconstruction of the Socratic techniques of silencing others by a 'surfeit of reason').⁴ Fundamentally, philosophy and democracy have their joint source in the same techniques for slowing language down, through the impact of which sufficiently stable theoretical and political objects can first arise that are viable for public use. In other words, the polis is a reservoir for symbolic objects that are to be given a longer presence in the shared community (*koínon*).

A psycho-political foundation for the city must be added to the media-based foundation of the polis by the urban media (writing, theatre, agora rhetoric, philosophy) that serve to prevent spoken utterances draining away into nothingness (or into the formlessness of memories). The psycho-political

4. Bruno Latour, 'A Politics Freed from Science. The Body Cosmopolitic', in: *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 236-265.

underpinnings function to spare the citizen's pride and to render the aristocratic impatience of the former landed gentry compatible with the slowness of democratic procedures. The significance of this care paid by the citizens to the pride of the greats is brought into focus if we remember that the city founders and agents of the *synoikismós* were by no means some poor settlers who closed ranks out of weakness; they were Attic *warlords* and lords of keeps who were fully in possession of their power to lay claim to respect. Such characters can only resolve to coexist on the condition that their standards as regards *thymos* are duly taken into account within the city, or, put differently, that they can continue to operate at a very high level as regards their claims to self-respect and public importance. This will evidently only succeed if rules are found thanks to which the standpoints of competing honour can be respected in dealings between citizens.

In my opinion, the introduction of a list of speakers at the agora marks the hour when democracy was truly born, because not until this simple and so influential aid was introduced was there any guarantee that all those wishing to speak would be able to speak. Even more important is the fact that with the list it was no longer important whether I spoke first, second, fifth, or tenth; there was no humiliation involved in stepping onto the rostrum last. The simple device of the list of speakers itself is based on a far less simple psycho-semiotic premise: the audience's ability to, as it were, lend the temporal sequence of speakers a spatial dimension, in the sense that

we have just indicated as regards the relationship between the spoken and written word, meaning that here, too, the temporal sequence is transformed into synchrony. It is easy to concede that such an exercise can probably only be achieved by a literate audience. This transposition into synchronicity lays the basis for weighing up the opposing political objects – the 'opinions' or proposals – against one another. The well-known anecdote of the Athenian negotiator in the Spartan camp shows the degree to which this is a fairly improbable achievement and must first be nurtured in its own right. In reply to the Athenian's rhetorically masterful petition, the Spartan leaders are said to have claimed: We cannot reply to your long speech, because now, at the end of it, we have forgotten what you said at the beginning. Now that is a reply that implies any number of possibilities but certainly does not attest to a democratic outlook or, to be more precise, democratic training.

Democracy depends on the ability to lend a spatial dimension to things said one after the other; it therefore implies constant training in patience. Only he will take this upon himself who can be sure that it will not impair his honour to wait for the moment when he is given the word. Ensuring that such waiting is not felt to entail humiliation can be considered an incomparable cultural achievement. To this day, populist and fascist uprisings can often be recognized by the fact that they commence with a revolt against the list of speakers.

Let me close with a remark of a more

general nature. Many have claimed that ancient Greek culture was primarily one of the eye, while old Israel stood out as a culture of the ear. Against the background of my above remarks, to my mind it becomes evident that this cliché can only be used with great restraint. It seems more advisable to typify cultures in terms of how they deal with the time of judgement and consequently distinguish between patient and impatient systems. In this respect, the Athenian culture of patience can probably lay claim to a quite singular position. What the Greeks meant by the expression *sophrosyne*, a term usually poorly translated as ‘self-control’ or ‘prudence,’ can in a broader sense be attributed to the impact of a written culture; in the practice of the polis this not only includes the ability to exercise the faculty of judgement, but, and more important, the ability to listen, the ability to wait and let others wait, indeed the resolve to compel others to wait to the extent that is needed in order to disarm any overly heady sentiments among the citizens.

Greek psychology, which hinged on the basic concept of *thymos*, takes note of the fact that real persons always constitute complexes of pride/rancour (more generally: of agitation) and of arguments. Now if you wish to establish democratic forms of living, you must ensure that if the *thymos* is agitated this does not directly result in action(s). This can only be achieved by establishing the virtues of observation – and the key notion here would not come into sight if we discuss this process simply in terms of catchwords such as self-control or dissimulation. An intelligentsia of

observers is fostered in a city only if this is preceded by the theatricalization of agitated feelings, or, put differently, it requires that a stage be erected for mutual observation by people who know that their respective opinions are in part defined by their *thymos*.

Anyone wanting democracy had to strengthen the observer, albeit not with the means of meditation such as were characteristic of Eastern spirituality but with the means of the urban agon and its specific performances. This includes the principle of the equal power of agents/arguments or *isosthenia*, and it was the early Nietzsche who pointed to the significance of this for the way the Greeks saw life. Only in a stabilized atmosphere conducive to isosthenia can agents practice the democratic virtue *kat exochen*, for which there is no completely adequate expression in our vocabulary: We could paraphrase it in light of the above to read as pride-infused inter-patience between powerful individuals. Now that is of course not a very seductive label, but it does have in its favour that it avoids the vapidness of expressions such as tolerance and cooperation. One of the pre-political premises of life in the polis was to put in place a matrix for a broader distribution of powers in which repeatedly new isosthenic situations could be practiced. Thanks to this focus on isosthenia, a creative liaison arises between power and opinion, as a consequence of which each agent (understood here as a local conglomerate of power and opinion) adjusts to the fact that he will encounter agents and observers who are his equal in this respect. It is not communication

or the freedom of speech as such that make democracy possible, but the ability of the agents to prevent themselves mutually from acting out unilateral pretensions.

This is the core of the anti-despotic affect in the citizen of a polis. *Despotes* is the man who wishes to comport himself in the city as if within his own four walls: He confuses public and private space and desires to act on the agora as does an owner on his own grounds. (Daedalus would say: The despot did not take part and bathe in the polis fountain; he has not been impregnated down to his innermost fibre by the dyer's tub of commonality.) The Greeks despised tyranny quite simply because they considered the tyrant to be an agent who lacked a worthy opponent, someone who possessed the same powers as he did. The shortfall in isosthenia robs the polis of its decisive atmospheric premise: Where there is no space for a countervailing power, there fear, constraint and slavish observation rule (in other words, pitiful theory from below). Tyranny is the success phase of a lack of opponents; after all, the Greeks believed they knew that such phases were by their very nature condemned to be short. By contrast, democracy hopes to enjoy a long life as the success phase of procedures that prevent the various sides from abusing their freedom of speech, without championing an absence of power. The atmospheric premises of liberty include the athletic love of effort, or *ponophilía*, and it was the polis culture of classical antiquity that offered it its first platforms on which to practice.

DON'T
EDGE
ME.

Gijs van Oenen

Soured Tolerance

*The Dutch are Losing
Their Way*

The trend towards ‘interpassive citizenship’ that legal philosopher Gijs van Oenen wrote about in *Open 6*, is leading to a radical change in the way we behave in the public domain.¹ Because of this, tolerance is in danger of sliding into an ever wider two-way

split between assertion and presence, in other words between citizens who emphatically demand their rights and citizens who avoid making a choice. An important task in the coming years will therefore be to halt this process and to look for alternatives.

1. Gijs van Oenen ‘Languishing in Securityscape. The Interpassive Transformation of the Public Sphere’, *Open 6*, 2004.

Like God, tolerance is never there when we need it most. Wherever and whenever tolerance is generally accepted, it attracts little attention and causes little commotion – and a good thing too. Tolerance is soured by too much attention, just as muscles are soured by overexertion. The more people write and talk about tolerance and forbearance, the less there is of it in practice. In fact, concern for tolerance is in itself a sign of intolerance.

‘We’ve Been Far Too Forbearing!’

This is the theme on which the ‘new radicals’ in Dutch politics and public opinion-making have been ringing the changes for some years now. From Pim Fortuyn to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the refrain is always the same: their radical, intolerant message must be accepted as inevitable, for just look where tolerance has got us. The so-called debate escalates rapidly because listening and considering are regarded as signs of weakness by the new radicals. The debate deteriorates into an inquisition in which the hardliners sit in judgement over the moderates.

What applies to tolerance, applies equally to ‘respect’. The more frequently it is invoked in public discussions, the less real evidence there is of it. From a duty, based on a consciousness of one’s own and other people’s dignity, it has become a virtue that is chiefly attributed to oneself. That’s to say: I think I’m pretty decent when I manage to show ‘respect’ for someone else, because that other person is actually a prick who is totally undeserving of respect. By the same token, anyone who fails to show me respect can expect to be thumped.

I’m really not such a bad chap, because I often restrain myself when irritating ‘others’ make me see red.

In this regard, the current discourses about ‘respect’ and ‘tolerance’ run parallel to one another and are expressions of the same phenomenon. Short-tempereness or, in more elitist terms, the sense of urgency, reigns supreme. There is no longer the time or inclination to convince the other party. To the extent that debate or dialogue still play a role here, it is mainly as a media show or a means of coercion.

This situation of recrimination and lack of understanding between parties makes any return to classic notions of tolerance, in particular those of the French philosopher Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), difficult or even impossible. Bayle’s idea was that reasonable people appreciate the limits of their own reason and (thus) also the inevitability of religious disputes; but at the same time, this insight was in his view no reason for distrusting one’s own faith.² For our hardliners, however, Bayle’s view is not the dream of Enlightenment thinking, but

2. Rainer Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt. Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2003), 334.

a veritable nightmare: it leads precisely to the sort of tolerance and passivity that we must abandon forthwith. The proper outcome of Enlightenment thinking is for prejudices and other deviations from rationality, such as religiosity, to melt in the scorching light of reason. *Écrasez l’infâme*, as Voltaire put it; religious conflicts are simply about nothing. For hardliners, using the power of the Enlightenment to safeguard the continued existence of stubborn irrationalities

is a perversion – a mockery of the Holy Scriptures, you might say.

The moderates in turn view this hard-line position as a prime example of ‘Enlightenment blackmail’.³ It forces people to make a radical choice: with me or against me. Though the ‘against me’ choice will be tolerated – as in the famous declaration attributed to Voltaire: ‘I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it’ – it will also be stigmatized as poorly thought-out, biased, absurd, and perhaps even as ‘feeble-minded’, or potentially dangerous. The contested opinion will be tolerated in order to be able to criticize it more severely. Tolerance here is in the service of scathing criticism rather than the reverse. When all’s said and done, the Enlightenment shines by the grace of prejudices, just as cosmopolitanism can only flourish by the grace of the particularism of local cultures.

We Are Worn Out by Our Concern with Social Norms

What is the reason for the current hot-temperedness, the lack of tolerance? According to the hardliners it is the inevitable but salutary reaction to the sustained domination of the moderates. Among ordinary people it finds expression in a ‘short fuse’ and among the elite in new radicalism, which is to say elitist intolerance of tolerant elites. Some (erstwhile) moderates feel driven into a corner by this and are apt to agree either partly or wholly with the hardliners. This is manifested, for example, in exhibitionist

3. Michel Foucault, ‘Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?’, in: Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris, Gallimard, 2001), 1390-1391.

self-criticism, or in acknowledgements that the right has now taken the lead in politico-philosophical thinking.⁴

My own explanation – although I would, if asked, identify myself as moderate – is of a more cultural-philosophical nature. Briefly put: we are living in a post-interactive age. We have become so accustomed to an interactive relationship with all manner of institutions, including the public administration, that we can no longer imagine any other kind of relationship with such institutions. The ability to enforce our own interests, to negotiate in order to get our own way and realize our own concerns, is taken for granted. Skilled in communication, we bombard both commercial and government organizations with our preferences and desires, complaints and frustrations. From pawns we have become players, no longer burger or housewife, but freeman and smart young woman prepared for the future.

This process is now nearing its physical and psychological limits. Ever more freedom of choice and participation do not lead to ever more self-fulfilment or autonomy. On the contrary, there is a sense of ‘interactive metal fatigue’.⁵ We have grown tired of the exponential growth of personal input and choice. Day after day, night after night, we are expected to be busy choosing the cheapest telecommunication provider, the most reliable utility company, the promptest taxi driver, the

4. The most recent example is the ‘Pietje Bell lecture’ by Hans Goedkoop: ‘De vernietigingsdrift van de overheid maakt het weefsel van de samenleving kapot’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 26-11-2005, 15-16.

5. Gijs van Oenen, ‘Interactivity fatigue’, *Happy Magazine*, September 2005, 73-75.

most competent care provider, and so on and so forth.

Thus, for the first time in history, people are starting to question the limits of interactivity. How much interactivity is desirable, advisable or bearable for citizens? Or for the public administration? To what extent can interactivity still be regarded as a manifestation of involvement or social engagement? Cultural philosopher René Boomkens recently argued that ‘A fundamental belief or trust in more far-reaching emancipation or democratization is practically nowhere to be found. . . Engagement. . . has taken on a defensive form.’⁶ So have interactivity and engagement become more a matter of ‘going through the motions’?

6. René Boomkens, ‘Engagement after progress’, *New Commitment* (Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2004), 25.

A good example of changing attitudes is a television ad against the ban on smoking that was broadcast some ten years ago. Its motto – ‘We’ll work it out together’ – marks the transition from interactive to post-interactive. On the one hand it expresses a classic faith in reasonable, ‘interactive’ dialogue leading to a rational consensus. But there is also a hint of a relativistic ‘we’ll see’, primarily prompted by weariness in the face of yet another new regulation that has to be internalized and actualized. So yes, we can work it out, but not through any kind of intrinsic conviction or commitment.

My thesis is that we are indeed increasingly just ‘going through the motions’. That is to say, we still deport ourselves in public space with a semblance of interactivity, but that interactivity has little practical significance any more. It no longer drives our public

conduct. We may still call for interactivity and appeal to our interactive status, but in fact we are no longer willing or able to live up to the consequences of that status.

In other words, we can still be fiercely engaged, but not with anything concrete. Only in the most literal sense do citizens still have a ‘standpoint’. Whereas a standpoint in the interactive era was still a stand taken for or against something, now it is simply a matter of being ‘there’. As such, involvement is turning into mere presence. Presence in public space is turning into ‘hanging around’, or ‘lingering’.⁷

7. Van Oenen, ‘Languishing in Securityscape’, op.cit., 6–16.

Something similar is happening to political ‘presence’: people are no longer especially ‘left’ or ‘right’, but simply ‘there’. Since the liberal-socialist coalitions of the 1990s, and the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to form a centre-left coalition which saw the Labour Party agree to nearly all the spending cuts and reform measures later adopted by the successful centre-right coalition, there has been scarcely any question of a clear left-right polarity in Dutch politics. Likewise, in a recent volume of essays published by the Green-Left party, one is hard put to find an identifiably ‘leftist’ ideal.⁸

What does this exposition of the ‘new intolerance’ from the viewpoint of interactive metal fatigue mean for the issue of tolerance? To begin with, it means that we should not simply interpret the current lack of tolerance as a consequence of successful internalization of the emancipation norms of the last thirty-odd years, or more bluntly put, ‘three decades of repudiating interfer-

8. Bart Snels (ed.), *Vrijheid als ideaal* (Amsterdam, SUN, 2005).



ence and abolishing morality'.⁹ That

would still to some

extent be an optimistic view: we have simply endorsed the wrong norms or done so for too long. But it is not a question of good versus bad social norms.

Rather, as already noted, it is a question of norm fatigue. As a result of the steady advance of the paradigm of interactivity, as a result of the insatiable demand for more 'democracy', 'greater freedom of choice' and 'self-determination', modern citizens have been interactively stupefied. They are the victims of normative overkill and they just can't take it any more.

The end result is an attitude I characterize as 'interpassivity'. Modern citizens are beyond interactivity. Increasingly, they are declaring themselves incompetent to act in accordance with the very norms they profess to endorse. In other words, they are exhibiting a Kantian incompetence.¹⁰ Their competency has been out-

sourced to a variety of authorities who undertake to keep 'watch' over our

undirected and undisciplined conduct.

This is an echo of the liberal logic of the 1980s and '90s whereby citizens are given 'leeway' to determine their own course while the government or some supervisory body monitors the limits of that freedom on their behalf. In other words, citizens are deliberately encouraged to develop what in Kantian terms could be called a heteronomous view of the self or, in free-market jargon, to become more or less successful 'market players'.

9. Bart van Oosterhout, 'Land van korte lontjes', *Intermediair* 17-11-05, 14-21.

10. Gijs van Oenen, *Onge- schikt recht. Anders denken over de rechtsstaat* (The Hague, Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2004), 151-156.

We've Lost Our Way

The implications of interpassivity for tolerance can be nicely illustrated by what at first sight might seem an odd analogy, between the aforementioned disappearance of the old left-right divide in political orientation, and a comparable tendency among road users. The fact is that there have been two striking developments on the roads in the past few years – all the more striking in that they seem to have been ignored by politicians, the media and the police. In the first place, motorists have become increasingly negligent about indicating direction. They make turns as and when they please without letting other road users know their intentions.

As to why, we can only guess. The fact is that indicating direction is chiefly in the interests of others, so some measure of indifference to other road users would seem to be involved at any rate. This is in line with the growing popularity of SUVs and, ultimately, Hummers – supposedly safe vehicles, but only for the passengers, not for everyone else. So to some extent this tendency is part of what Lieven de Cauter has called 'the capsularization of civilization', armouring oneself against the unsafe outside world.¹¹

But more important for my argument, is the

possibility that the decline of direction indicating is a manifestation of a more fundamental 'loss', namely of 'left' and 'right' as basic orientations in the public sphere. Might it not be that people no longer indicate direction because the left-right distinction has ceased to have

11. Lieven de Cauter, *The Capsular Civilization* (Rotterdam, NAi Publishers, 2004).

any clear meaning for modern citizens, citizens who have grown used to mapping out their own course, no longer having to worry about 'limits' and leaving questions of general interest to regulatory watch-dogs and domain managers?

The second striking development is that in the space of scarcely a year it has become more or less accepted practice to cycle on the left (that is the wrong) side of the road. Not as an exception, or only when and where it doesn't inconvenience anyone else, but without the least embarrassment and seemingly without the least idea that anyone might object to this. To take just one example from my own experience: on a dedicated cycle path in Amsterdam, an adult man cycling in the wrong direction tries to overtake two boys who are also cycling in the wrong direction. The boys ride too boisterously and fall. The man can't avoid them altogether and also falls. I approach from the other (correct) direction, am forced to brake hard, and fall half on the pavement. Fortunately nobody seems to be seriously hurt. I start to bawl the man out. He is neither aggressive nor contrite, more surprised and resigned. His attitude is one of: such things can happen, and we all came off OK didn't we?

Now one could ask whether this indifferent or 'jaded' road behaviour is not simply a reaction to the many dug-up streets, detours and delays that the travelling citizen has to put up with. There's some truth in that. Indeed, society's permanent state of being 'under construction' is a direct reflection of our increasingly interactive concept of self.¹²

A lot of things are 'under construction'

¹². Thanks to Elke Müller for this insight.

in our modern notion of society. Air-ports, roads, streets – but also, as we have seen, services, offices and public facilities: they are for ever being 'revamped' in order to supply our interactive lifestyle with more space and greater speed, but at the same time we are increasingly annoyed by all those revamps because they interfere with our interactivity.

Interestingly, these trends do not concern particular sub-cultures, such as groups that are naturally antipathetic to rules and regulations, or deviant individuals. They appear to apply to a cross-section of the population; you will find the oddest – and the most normal – people cycling on the left side of the road. Although they must have some awareness of being on the 'wrong side', this awareness does not lead to any adjustment of their behaviour. On the one hand this is an expression of interpassivity: an inability to adapt their behaviour to norms they themselves endorse. But on the other hand a conviction (if you can call it that) seems to be taking root that distinguishing left from right is no longer so important.

Left, right – we can still name and distinguish them, but the notion that this entails certain behavioural consequences appears to be fading. 'Why should I still keep to the right? It's not really so important, is it?' There is no open, explicit protest against the obligation to keep to the right – the kind of protest that was common in the politically and socially aware 1960s and '70s. No, the contemporary protest is more diffuse, vaguer, and much less focused on concrete social points of reference – such as left and right. Instead it takes

the form of a ‘forgetting’ or ‘forgetfulness’: people try to avoid the constant burden of the norms they have had to endorse in recent decades, including under the auspices of emancipation and interaction.

A good example of a faulty analysis of current traffic irritations is SIRE’s ‘short fuse’ ad.¹³ It shows a narrow Amsterdam street in which

various hot-headed locals shout abuse at one another over

minor traffic incidents. The punch line, delivered in a sultry, mocking female voice is: ‘Sometimes we have a rather short fuse in this little land of ours’. Then there are the ‘anti-lout courses’ (officially known as ‘compassionate confrontation’) conducted by Paula Gruben and Simone van Slooten, in which people can learn to tackle others tactfully about their asocial behaviour. Understandably, the course leaders are occasionally asked why their courses aren’t directed at the louts themselves. Gruben’s initial reaction was, ‘There’s something in that’. But then she realized this was not the right response:

‘We ourselves are those louts, of course’.¹⁴

13. SIRE is the Dutch acronym for the Foundation for Non-commercial Advertising; the ad in question can be viewed at <http://www.sire.nl/kort-lontje>.

14. Van Oosterhout, ‘Land van korte lontjes’, op. cit., 25.

The diagnosis in both cases boils down to: ‘it takes two to make a quarrel’. And of course people do often unjustly blame everything on others. There’s always something to be said for the classic dictum: ‘If you want to change the world, start with yourself’. For example, a recent survey found that the number one annoyance among motorists is tailgating – closely followed by unnecessarily driving in the left (the fast or passing) lane.

The loudest complainers are themselves often the worst offenders.

All the same, I think that these popular diagnoses of the problem will serve to strengthen rather than mitigate the trend of interactive metal fatigue and associated ‘disorientation’ and detachment. It will confirm citizens’ impression that in terms of reproachableness, there is not much to choose between their own failure to live according to self-endorsed norms, and the vituperation this elicits from others. In other words, that one cancels the other out.

In short, what the average, interpassively-inclined citizen will take away from the SIRE ad is not that you shouldn’t give offence to others, but – at best – that you should calm down after having giving offence. Or that you shouldn’t be too hard on people who offend you. In other words, understanding is requested for norm violations – not only for those on the receiving end, but also for the perpetrators. Or perhaps understanding is not the right word. It is more a case of acceptance or, better still, resignation.

This is not so much a solution to the current problem as an expression – both effective and unintended – of that problem. Both the SIRE ad and the anti-lout course tell us that the lout is within all of us and we can’t really do much about it. Lengthening our fuse is asking too much – on that score, the SIRE ad tends to sanction our own Kantian incompetence.

What we may still be able to do to our short fuse is to fit it with a silencer. We see this in road traffic today. Of course, there are still large numbers of ‘assertive’ citizens who vehemently and resolutely demand their ‘rights’ on the

principle that ‘society is other people’. But at the same time there appears to be a trend towards a more ‘passive’ experience of such social indifference. This is not aggressive but rather regressive. Such citizens, like the cyclist in my own example, seem to live in a little world of their own which makes them disoriented in society and traffic. In fireworks jargon, their problem is not so much a short fuse as a lack of direction or orientation. Like a firecracker, they zigzag through public space. You could say that they are actually looking for the norm, but are unable to adjust their haphazard course sufficiently. They have no expectation, either of themselves or of others, that a collision might be avoided by following the rules. They are on a regressive, rather than aggressive, collision course.

Tolerance’s Two-Way Split: How Can We Keep It All Together?

Here’s how I see the immediate future of tolerance in the Netherlands. Thanks to growing interpassivity, tolerance will come under pressure from two sides. On the one hand, citizens will make a point of ‘demanding their rights’, that is to say aggressively demanding that allowance be made for their desires. We could call this *assertion*: it is a perverted form of citizenship, because while people consider themselves emancipated, they simultaneously declare themselves incapable of acting in accordance with self-endorsed norms. On the other hand, citizens will increasingly tend to sink into a kind of oblivion. This too is a perverted form of citizenship, of the ‘not right now’ variety. Whenever the question of acting in

accordance with self-endorsed norms arises, people appear not to notice. We can characterize this as *presence*: unthinking involvement that is neither for nor against, neither left nor right, but simply present, ‘there’.

In traffic and in politics, many people nowadays have passed beyond left and right. They express their criticism of the culture of tolerance, the accursed legacy of the 1960s and ’70s, in the form of assertion or presence. If the new culture of assertion gets the upper hand, society and public administration will display more repressive and authoritarian traits in the (idle) hope of nipping social conflict and norm violation in the bud. Greater demands will be placed on the registering, detecting and punishing of norm violations. The problem of interactive overkill will be resolved by ‘discipline’: hammering away at the basic social norms that must be observed or there’ll be hell to pay. Society will be ruled by ‘punitive desires’.¹⁵ Insults, threats and inquisition will increasingly replace dialogue. Judges will enjoy greater confidence than politicians. ‘Zero tolerance’ and ‘tit for tat’ will be more highly valued than tolerance.

15. Gijss van Oenen, “‘Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick!’ De moderne burger vraagt om straf”, *Filosofie en Praktijk*, 25/5, 2004, 50–62.

If we incline more towards presence, a kind of ‘interpassive tolerance’ may well develop. That is to say, a tolerance based not on moral principles and on behavioural capacities like self-restraint, but on their very absence. Instead of punitive desires, there would be a sort of ineptitude. Or even an *affirmation* of interpassivity: why should we still expect anything – punitive or otherwise – from

a sense of standards? The problem of normative overkill is in effect adjourned. Why not just let ourselves drift and see where the ship runs aground? Theatrical skills become more important than moral or discretionary ones. Courtroom and parliament turn into forms of television. Volatility, whether of the 'hard' or 'soft' variety, is valued above consistency.

The most important task for the coming time will be to stop tolerance from sliding into an ever wider two-way split between assertion on the one hand and presence on the other. This is what Amsterdam's mayor Job Cohen and the minister of justice Piet Hein Donner are trying to do. It arouses a lot of resistance and incomprehension because it reminds citizens of the tradition of high-handedness that for centuries characterized Dutch public administration. The underlying non-partisanship or impartial benevolence sits just as poorly with the partisan belligerence of assertion, as with the democratic populism of presence.

So where a direct appeal to 'high-handed' values will not succeed in halting the widening two-way split, indirect methods may prove more appropriate – methods that are more in tune with prevailing interpassive practices but which also appeal to or recall the more classic values and powers of self-restraint, and which are themselves able to lay down the law. I am thinking here of forms of mediation which are not aimed purely at pragmatic conflict resolution ('We'll work it out together' – together with the mediator), but also at stimulating the self-regulating and self-correcting capacities of the participants. They must once again be able to call up the supra-individual

strength that is the essence of interactivity. That can sometimes be done very simply by taking a slightly longer breath before angrily stepping on the accelerator, or just by waiting a fraction longer at a (red) traffic light – literally in road traffic, metaphorically in social intercourse. That would already be a good start at 'keeping things together'.

Jeroen Boomgaard

Radical Autonomy

*Art in the Era of
Process Management*

Now that art is being deployed more and more in public/private development processes, people expect it to have a clearly described effect. The artist's autonomous position is seriously undermined by this requirement – which, in Jeroen

Boomgaard's view, is a bad thing. He argues the case for a radicalization of the autonomy of art. That alone will allow art to wrest itself free of processes where the law of the strongest holds sway, and so become truly effective.

At first sight, art seems to be doing quite well for itself, particularly outside its traditional spheres of action. There are plenty of commissions for work in the public domain and for the enhancement of new buildings, and artists regularly play a part in landscape and urban redevelopment projects. This erosion of boundaries between art, architecture and design seems like the accomplishment of a longstanding dream. Many avant-garde ideals are fulfilled in the progressive integration of art with society. But this goes along with new obligations and duties, and these tend to be projected almost blindly onto the whole field of the visual arts. The reduced autonomy of the artist in the field of publicly commissioned art results in problematizing the autonomy of art in general. Autonomous art is out of favour, and with it the widely held view that art, if quite important, is on the whole a dispensable frill.¹ This idea of mandatory inutility is an outworn idea. Art is now supposed to serve a purpose, to achieve an effect, to 'do something', much more than in the past.

A salient illustration of the new tendency is the demand for interactive art. Visual art that explicitly seeks interaction exists in many kinds and on many scales. They range from works of art that raise their roguish caps on command like pathetic circus chimps, to substantial projects that elicit public participation in various forms and at multiple levels. A much-favoured medium is currently the website, embodying as it does the ideal of endless and unbridled inter-

activity. What these forms of expression have in common is the intention to elicit an active interchange between the work of art or the artist on the one hand, and the spectator, target group or general public on the other. The work of art is no longer permitted simply to exist and be viewed or experienced; it demands a reaction and reacts in its own right. The significance of the work is placed more than ever within the spectator's sphere of responsibility. Without his presence or participation, there would seem to be no point in the work's existence.

Interactivity is nothing new. Twentieth-century avant-gardes, particularly those of the 1920s and of the '60s and '70s, sought to achieve direct contact with the spectator as a way of overcoming the existing boundaries of art. It was a form of interactivity that required patience on the part of the viewer, who often seemed more like a victim of the artist's imaginative whims than a participant with something of his own to contribute. A good illustration of this passive kind of interactivity is provided by Tinguely's mechanical objects. These typically consist of a big red button connected to a monstrous machine which flails wildly and makes a terrifying din. The public in this case serves as no more than an agent to activate the mechanism which then proceeds entirely in accordance with its own built-in logic. The work celebrates interactivity while at the same time taking it to the absurd. Yet more complex forms of interaction, such as the Happening, similarly roped the spectator into their own artistic scenario, rather than attempting to scan the wavelength of the audience. In the 1960s

1. An idea recently expressed once more by the departing head of the Council for Culture, Winnie Sorgdrager, in *de Volkskrant*, 29-12-2005.

and '70s, autonomy was more important than interaction.

The Equivocality of Autonomy

That rather half-hearted interactivity illustrates the ambiguity of the avant-gardes of those years. The autonomous status of art was upheld, although the goal was the transgression of both artistic and social frontiers. But this duality is inherent to autonomy itself. The belief in artistic independence arose in a period when it was seen as art's constant duty to draw attention to the prevailing shortcomings, to proclaim truth and beauty in a world that did not want to hear. Surrounded by a dishonest, unjust society, art stood for the Utopia of universal and total communication, although without being understood by more than a handful of insiders.² Art bore a heavy burden – or pretended to – and paid the price with poverty and isolation. Although the contemporary critique of autonomy might lead us to think otherwise, autonomy did not mean that art was supposed not to be about anything, or that its only subject matter could be the artist's own inner life. Autonomy meant above all that visual art tried to unify its form and content in such a way that it could no longer be treated as a handy means for illustrating a moral or a story. Autonomous art does

2. Yves Michaud uses the term 'communicative Utopia' in connection with the history of autonomy in 'Het einde van kunstutopie', *Yang*, volume 39, no. 3 (Ghent, November 2003), 259-381. Other primary texts on artistic autonomy and the attempts of the avant-garde to break away from it are Martin Damus, *Funktionen der Bildenden Kunst im Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973); Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974); Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1996).

not withdraw from the world but tries to comprehend it by artistic means. The communicative or even democratic ideal implicit in this aim is the notion that art's visual language not only touches on the essence of life, but is, precisely for that reason, universally understandable. However, since its reach and the comprehension it received fell short of expectations, the impression arose that art existed solely for art's sake. Autonomy changed from being the promise that art held out into the proof of its unwillingness or incapacity to fulfil that promise.

Autonomy was, and still is, seen by many artists as a self-imposed destiny, but like most things in life it is more a matter of fate than of free will. In bourgeois and generally democratic societies, art, as explained, fulfils the role of a conscience and a contemplative response, of a representative of those higher things which risk getting lost in an existence gauged to functionality. That role is the function of art, and the independence to which art lays claim is an essential component of Western society's self-legitimization. The bourgeois society can see itself in art's mirror as good and caring, because it fosters a highly appreciated area within itself (even while not spending a penny on it) where higher values are professed and where dependency on the market does not hold its normal sway. By placing an emphasis on individual choice, however, this ideology simultaneously underwrites the basic principle of market forces. This double illusion, of the freedom of the individual and of unimpeded universal communication, was the point on which the avant-

Thomas Hirschhorn, 'Swiss-Swiss Democracy', exhibition in the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris, 4 December 2004 – 30 January 2005.



gardes concentrated their attack. But because personal, autonomous freedom of choice remained uppermost for many artists, the duality was perpetuated and the avant-gardist output could still be unproblematically absorbed by the market. This tractable compliance meant, however, that the autonomous position of art still played an important ideological role.

Happiness – Right Now

Patience with autonomy seems to have run out. Autonomy has become a reproach and is considered one of the foremost reasons for art not functioning properly. Some people have placed it on a line with incomprehensibility, egocentricity and navel-gazing. Art is now called upon to make good its communicative pretensions, to fulfil its promise immediately and to cease hiding in a domain where it responds and is responsible only to itself. It must give up its aloofness and show genuine commitment in the form of reaction and interaction. Art, in other words, must play along.³ This new brief would at first sight seem to liberate art from the ideological shackles the bourgeois society has held it captive in. Art is no longer expected to proclaim higher values or hold out the promise of future happiness, but to pursue direct involvement in the realization of a better world here and now. The ideal of the avant-gardes of the past has at last some prospect of success, in a way that

3. There are far too many instances to name. Suffice it to note the appeal rising from the publication *Nieuw symbolen voor Nederland*, ed. Rutger Wolfson (Amsterdam, 2005) discussed by Lex ter Braak elsewhere in this issue of *Open*.

overshadows the achievements of those avant-gardes.

It is not immediately clear where this aversion to autonomy and explicit desire for interaction come from, or what their further implications are. One could after all argue that, as a symbolic system, art is always interactive, that it always communi-
cates.⁴ And precisely because art's role is not an entirely self-chosen one and because it has a clear relevance to society, there is an existing framework

4. I am not concerned here with claiming, in analogy with Bourriaud, a certain capacity for art. It is rather a fundamental aspect of symbolic systems, of which art, like language, is one. That the interpretation is sometimes extremely limited, understood by few, and possibly serves as a distinguishing feature in Bourdieu's sense, is another matter altogether.

within which it can be interpreted and it can enter into a dialogue with us. When we come across a work of art, we do not know exactly what to expect of it, but we do realize that it is something that demands a special effort of attention. The act of interpretation is part of the work itself, which is even changed as a result, for our interpretation is passed on within the institution of art quite independently of anything the artist wanted or intended. The rejection of this form of interaction and the demand for a more emphatic way of reacting implies that the symbolic meaning that art clearly used to have is no longer understood or no longer recognized. This gives rise to ironic situations, for example that the desire for art which proffers clearly unifying symbols proves the decline of art's symbolic value; or that this expectation hence fits seamlessly into the tendency discussed here to require art to have a definite repercussion or effect.

The confusion there has been about the nature of the new symbols art is required to provide, typifies the vagueness surrounding the desired interactivity. Despite a requirement of relevance, art still stands for the unconventional, the unexpected, the indefinable and the creative; in short, for everything we do not presume to encounter in everyday life. But the purpose is no longer an acute analysis of today's deficiencies or the promise of happiness in a future world. The deficiency must be compensated, and the promise must be fulfilled immediately. A wholly improved world is no longer the objective: a small contribution to local satisfaction is sufficient. But the modesty of the expectation should not be allowed to obscure the arduous character of the task. The dualism which art so long suffered and which it formerly tried to justify to itself in the form of autonomy, is, especially now that autonomy is no longer available as a buffer, more than ever a hallmark of art. The artist is required to provide originality and surprise, something that is not on the programme; but it must still meet our expectations, take account of our wishes and be grist to the mill of today's amusement economy – without appealing to autonomy or serving an agenda of its own. This has not made the artist's task any easier.

Two Birds with One Stone

The impact of the changed job description for art is conspicuous – not only in the upsurge of socially-involved, well-meaning projects 'for the people', but at a more fundamental level, in its relation

to time. Scarcely any work is still made in which the temporal dimension does not play some part or other. If the work does not simply move, then something inevitably grows or rots away; and if the spectator is not required to sit through it he must at least play along with it. Time, in the sense of a shared moment, is included in art's brief as an opportunity to connect with the public. Shared time is less permissive than a shared place. By engaging with the spectator for a little while, the work of art declares its solidarity: it can no longer be indifferent to the presence of the Other. The preference for a shared moment rather than a shared place not only enables art to offer its public an altered temporal experience, but subjects art to a regime of movement and change – a regime that may be considered revealing about our society.⁵

5. See for instance 'Kunstenplan Openbare Ruimte Tilburg 2002-2010' (Tilburg Plan for Arts in the Public Domain), published under the title *Kort* (Tilburg, 2001).

The crucial political trend of recent decades is the government's systematic withdrawal from the guiding and shaping of society. This has not only resulted in a new social model but in an entirely different dynamic. The discipline of process management which has laid claim to the relinquished territory places advancement of the process before all else. Principles and points of departure are seen as barriers to progress, and specific interests are the only thing that counts. The old participation model seems to have been radicalized, in the sense that everyone is now able to become involved. There is no longer a clear central authority which sets itself up as the mouthpiece and custodian

of the public interest; rather, there is a non-centrally governed process in which each player is free to stand up for his own rights. This ostensible consummation of democracy has side effects that achieve the exact opposite of what the model suggests. All the disparate interests are taken into account, but the linchpin on which the process turns is The Market. That linchpin is primary in controlling the continuing motion but is itself never at issue; it is the obscure point whose influence prevails at all levels but which never comes up for discussion as an interest to be defended. The consequence of this implicit dynamic is that the process tends to steer in the direction of those parties with the greatest market share; but, since everyone is implicated, the result may be portrayed as a natural outcome.⁶

6. See also BAVO (Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels), *De metropool of je leven!* (The Metropolis or Your Life!), private publication, undated.

The government's role nowadays seems reduced to the launching of absurd, impractical, electorate-serving efforts at palliating the symptoms, while major infrastructural decisions are left almost entirely at the mercy of market forces.⁷ But that is not the whole truth: the government also explicitly concerns itself with the progression and legitimization of the model. The demand, backed by subsidies, for interactive and often participatory art projects is a consequence of official concern about malfunctioning of the process model. Not participating in society

7. At the time of writing, the Dutch Minister for Integration and Immigration Rita Verdonk has just uttered the ridiculous proposal to make the Dutch language mandatory in the streets of the Netherlands. Presumably this idea will be long forgotten by publication time, but it is nonetheless typical of the present government.

has become more than ever a social sin. Here, too, it is not so much the outcome of taking part that matters as the participation itself; and reaction or interaction is considered proof of participation. By officially declaring everyone to be a participant and by condemning or even punishing non-participation in the name of public interest, the government manages to mask its abandonment of that public interest. Involving artists in this undertaking kills two birds with one stone. They are able to breathe new life into the exhausted participation models, and at the same time artists are stripped of their role as official outsiders and hence of their symbolic payload that once held out the promise of a better world.

It all seems so neat: art with a function, and artists included in the planning process. But this development robs art of much of its dissident potential. In the best case it may introduce an artistic dimension, although art will be the first to fall by the wayside in the drive towards the completion and budgetary discipline of the project under which it falls.⁸ In the worst case, art will form part of the end result, and will rightly be condemned for trading in the promise of a better world for a pragmatism that accepts the misery as the natural state of affairs.

8. This aspect comes out clearly in a dialogue among several leading players in the public-private collaborations. See Jaap Huisman, 'Kansen en risico's zijn getrouwd met elkaar', *Smaak*, vol. 5, no. 24 (December 2005), 6-11. It appears from this article that artistic (or 'soft', as the article calls them) values have little prospect of survival in collaborations of this kind.

Radical Autonomy

The requirement of effect and the impatience with autonomy may be seen

as symptoms of the decline of a traditional bourgeois society. Not much can be done about it, nor is it something we would wish to go back to. That does not mean that we must unthinkingly embrace all the phenomena that go along with this change. In a society that seems to have abandoned most of its values in favour of untrammelled market action, returning to artistic autonomy could have its merits. Especially now that the ideological implications of autonomy are fading, revival could bring its inherent contribution into play. The role imposed on art by the bourgeois ideology was, after all, more than a product of that society. Defining autonomy as the mere legitimization of a defective system would not only strip works of art of some of their critical potential, but would eliminate any prospect of changing the system from within. Autonomy allowed art to make the idea of a different and possibly better society seem credible. It also became possible for the avant-gardes to test the limits of that autonomy, and hence of the dominant system, by putting interactivity and direct involvement on the agenda.

The special position art once claimed is nowadays translated into the requirement for the amenable alternative. The indefinable and the unconventional, the surprising and the tongue-in-cheek, and even the critical and the subversive are all usable, because they do not stand in the way of the fundamental law of movement and progress. Indeed, the artistic alternative may succeed in furnishing the current state of affairs with a conscience, or in making it seem more light-hearted, without actually chang-

ing anything about it. Society proclaims its tolerance by allowing even the most dissonant expressions to thrive. The participation of the artist who has relinquished his autonomous position shifts the spotlight onto process management as a natural, unassailable process. In this situation art loses its visibility and its legitimacy. The huge artificial structures that define social life are not only capable of incorporating or even rewarding any form of rejection, but they leave no room for art, which is simply no match for the experience of economy's lavish excesses of artificiality.⁹ All art can do is counter these
 with something
 which is not born
 of our longings or which is not explicitly calculated to satisfy our wishes. When interactivity threatens to become obligatory, autonomy becomes useful again for probing the limits of the system. Only an autonomous work that relates to its context, but which chooses its own time and place within that context, is capable of leaving the world of artificiality and of revealing something that lies beyond the limits of our expectations.

9. See also Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III. Schäume* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 812-813.

Opting for autonomy may have another benefit. The requirement of effect and interaction which is placed on art conceals the facts that the effectiveness of process management primarily benefits the market, and that interaction with all the individual interests is little more than a diversionary tactic. The public interest that it claims to serve is nothing but shameless self-interest and a case of the right of the strongest prevailing. An autonomous work of art can, in this context, not only succeed in

unmasking self-interest as the dominant principle, but can impart new authority to the symbolic freedom that was formerly the hallmark of autonomy. Because the artist chooses of his own free will to create an entirely personal world, he shows that it is possible to choose radically. And because he places that out of self-interest-created world in the real world as a symbol of the possible, he succeeds in charging the idea of public interest with new energy.¹⁰

The power of that gesture lies in its real presence.

Even if the work is ephemeral, even if it is little more than the brief pleasure of a shared meal, it

differs fundamentally from the world of self-indulgence we create for ourselves because it adds something new. The work of art produces presence instead of consuming it.

Interactivity, process art, social involvement: all these things are possible. They only become truly effective, however, when they depend not on the calculated effect of process management but on a radicalized autonomy. The autonomous work of art meets the demand for the abnormal, for the different, which is capable of feeding the imagination once more while doing so in a way that contradicts expectations. Radical autonomy can play along with every process; the place, the public and the discourse are all factors that can be a part of it. But the radically autonomous work of art will always add something which transgresses the borders of the

context and adds a value that cannot simply be classified as a pragmatic benefit. The artist's symbolic act can consequently propagate the idea of freedom even more strongly than it could in the days when autonomy was still the hallmark of art – if only because that autonomy no longer has an ideological background. The autonomous action of the artist depicts the world as we do not yet know it. Interaction can only follow panting in its footsteps.

10. A good example of this is presented by the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, who rejects the notion of interactivity and instead emphasizes activity. His work never complies with external expectations or wishes. On this, see Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October 110* (Fall 2004), 51-80.

SET

ME

UP.

Roemer van Toorn

Aesthetics as Form
of Politics

*Arets and Koolhaas
Provide Architecture
with New Impulses*

Contemporary architecture is seldom political. Either it withdraws from reality because of its introverted body of ideas or it uncritically embraces reality in all its heterogeneity. According to the architecture critic Roemer van Toorn,

Wiel Arets's library and Rem Koolhaas's Casa-da-Música prove that it is indeed possible to develop what he calls a 'political aesthetics'.

A fierce academic debate has broken out in America and Europe about so-called ‘critical’ architects who resist the status quo and post-critical architects who deploy ‘projective practices’ in an attempt to resolutely engage with capitalist society. Architects like Tadao Ando and John Pawson resist our contemporary consumer culture by creating minimal, symmetrical and abstract compositions, employing a limited palette of materials and eliminating decoration. The problem with ‘critical architecture’ – like that of Peter Eisenman, Liz Diller & Ricardo Scofidio or Daniel Libeskind – is that it closes itself off in an isolated world where the only criteria that count are those inherent in the form, beauty or truth of the medium. Architecture wants to be architecture and nothing else. These architects are following the philosopher Theodor Adorno’s advice that, if the everyday world is corrupt, there is only one thing that aesthetic experience can do and that is to distance itself from reality so as to guarantee a pure aesthetic promise. The social function of art consists in having no function, as Adorno would say. Such a negation of reality is meant to arouse resistance and rebellion in the political field.

According to the architecture critics Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, we should no longer burn our fingers on ‘critical architecture’, but launch cool ‘projective practices’.¹ Instead of letting fly at reality with a priori attitudes the way critical architecture does, projective practices analyse the facts

1. For more information on ‘post-critical’ see: George Baird, “‘Criticality’ and Its Discontents” and Roemer van Toorn, ‘No More Dreams?’, *Harvard Design Magazine* 21, 2004; Sanford Kwinter, ‘Who is Afraid of Formalism?’, *ANY* 7/8, 1994; ‘Equipping the Ar-

chitect for Today’s Society: the Berlage Institute in the Educational Landscape’ (dialogue between Wiel Arets, Alejandro Zaera-Polo and Roemer van Toorn); Stan Allen, ‘Revising Our Expertise’, Sylvia Lavin, ‘In a Contemporary Mood’, and Michael Speaks, ‘Design Intelligence’, *Hunch*, 6/7, 2003; Jeffrey Kipnis, ‘On the Wild Side’ (1999), in: Farshid Moussavi, Alejandro Zaera-Polo, et al (eds.), *Phylogenesis, foa’s ark: foreign office architects* (Barcelona: Actar Editorial, 2004). For a strong debate on criticism among Hal Foster, Michael Speaks, Michael Hays, Sanford Kwinter and Felicity Scott see: *Praxis: Journal of Writing and Building 5: Architecture after Capitalism*, 2003.

2. Why the word projective? ‘Because it includes the term project Other Moods of Modernisms’, *Perspecta 33 Mining Autonomy: The Yale Architectural Journal*, 2002.

in the hope that the micro-decisions taken during a project’s creative process can transform a project in a very concrete and specific way.² The criterion here is a passion for extreme reality rather than a vision on reality. This architecture is driven not by an ideology, a presupposed idea, but by the data found in reality. The focus is hence on charting reality in the form of diagrams: ideology has been replaced by pragmatic actions. Being complicit within the system is not seen as a problem, then, but precisely as the only possible chance for success. A projective practice does not stand on the sideline, but right in the midst of mass culture, which we are all a part of and in which we find new possibilities anyway. A projective practice opts for direct involvement; it seeks contact with the user and prefers easy rather than difficult forms of communication. Textbooks or experts telling you how you should understand architecture are abhorred. It feels at home in the popular world of advertising and subcultures. Dogmas, established values and pompous stories are alien to it; it is open to sundry readings, as long as there is a rampant play of interpretations and debate.

chitect for Today’s Society: the Berlage Institute in the Educational Landscape’ (dialogue between Wiel Arets, Alejandro Zaera-Polo and Roemer van Toorn); Stan Allen, ‘Revising Our Expertise’, Sylvia Lavin, ‘In a Contemporary Mood’, and Michael Speaks, ‘Design Intelligence’, *Hunch*, 6/7, 2003; Jeffrey Kipnis, ‘On the Wild Side’ (1999), in: Farshid Moussavi, Alejandro Zaera-Polo, et al (eds.), *Phylogenesis, foa’s ark: foreign office architects* (Barcelona: Actar Editorial, 2004). For a strong debate on criticism among Hal Foster, Michael Speaks, Michael Hays, Sanford Kwinter and Felicity Scott see: *Praxis: Journal of Writing and Building 5: Architecture after Capitalism*, 2003.

2. Why the word projective? ‘Because it includes the term project Other Moods of Modernisms’, *Perspecta 33 Mining Autonomy: The Yale Architectural Journal*, 2002.

Peter Eisenman, Holocaust Monument in Berlin. Photo Roemer van Toorn



Advertisement for Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin.
Photo Roemer van Toorn



The Sixties

Projective practice is actually a typical 1960s movement. Like the theorist and hippy Gilles Deleuze and his colleague Felix Guattari, it abhors any form of totalitarianism. In accordance with this practice, the human mind and body may not be terrorized in any way at all by formal and institutional systems. It opts for open systems that are preferably in motion, experiments without preconceived norms. Any form of indoctrination, control or silencing has to be prevented. The dialectical logic of progress through opposition typical of the Modern Movement, which eliminated the past with its idea of a *tabula rasa*, is not its thing either. Linear processes holding out the promise of a definitive and pure truth have to be avoided. They all lead, after all, to totalitarianism.

Deleuze and Guattari propose instead a logic that takes the middle as its starting point, that operates through the middle, through a coming and going, concentrating on the in between, where the line (curve) prevails over the point. For this they use the image of the rhizome, the (non-hierarchical) rootstock of ferns, for example. Central to their theory is the optimistic reading of man as a positive, pleasure-seeking 'machine' capable of accomplishing the most positive connections possible in each unique situation. It is an appeal for active participation, a constant process of becoming without any form of discipline. Or, in the words of the Slovenian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek: '[T]he aim of Deleuze is to liberate the immanent force of Becoming from its self-enslave-

ment to the order of Being.³ Man must be a producer of unpredictable creations, full of differences, intensities and permanent interaction, all the while embracing the reality of the virtuality of Being.

Various critiques of the work of Deleuze make mention of the fact that celebrating infinite differences does not guarantee liberation. Contemporary capitalism has bid farewell to totalizing standardization; digital capitalism has itself become Deleuzian. The carnival-like quality of daily life now ensures high profits through the permanent revolution of its own order. Instead of differentiating between what is or is not important, we are saddled with a plurality of lifestyles coexisting happily and comfortably.

In embracing heterogeneity and the infinite relationships that an intelligent system can generate – afraid of choosing a wrong direction, as modernism, communism and Maoism did at the time – fewer and fewer designers are daring to put one particular antagonism or guiding alternative above another. There is a danger that searching for difference or inciting the unpredictable is made into an absolute, with the potentiality of difference being interpreted as a fetish.

This critique applies to Deleuze's body of thought, but it is equally applicable to that of the supporters of projective practices. They too run the risk of producing nothing but advanced entertainment, precisely because they do not declare themselves openly for or against anything, except that they want to be self-organizing and interactive. The

³ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies; Deleuze and Consequences* (New York, Routledge, 2004).

dilemma is that the once so progressive potential of the rhizome, the idea of heterogeneity – in contrast to what Deleuze and others were hoping – does not set people free in late capitalism but makes them actually dependent on the economically-correct rhizomatic system.

The problem with both critical architecture and projective practice is that both – each with its own aesthetics and method – generate consensus and hence in fact operate apolitically.⁴ I shall return to this later.

4. See also my essay 'No More Dreams?', *Harvard Design Magazine* 21, 2004. A shorter version can also be found in *Architectuur in Nederland, Jaarboek 2003-04* (Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, 2004).

Fresh Conservatism

In projective practice, and in contemporary architecture, art, music, film as well as in theatre in general, this embrace of heterogeneity often does not escape what I once described as 'fresh conservatism'.⁵ Both the philosopher Jacques Rancière and I have referred to the apolitical conflicts that bring about a lot of heterogeneous combinations. One way of bringing together heterogeneous elements as antagonistic elements is the joke. But the joke, as in the *Basketbar* by NL-architecten or *Heerlijkheid Hoogvliet* by the FAT group of architects, reveals no secret. The dialectic tension between the elements is reduced to a subversive game, as in the Benetton ads.

5. Roemer van Toorn, 'Fresh Conservatism, Landscapes of Normality', *Quaderns Re-activa* 219, Barcelona, 1998.

6. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible* (New York, Continuum, 2004).

A second way is to bring together heterogeneous elements in a collection, whereby all the parts exist next to

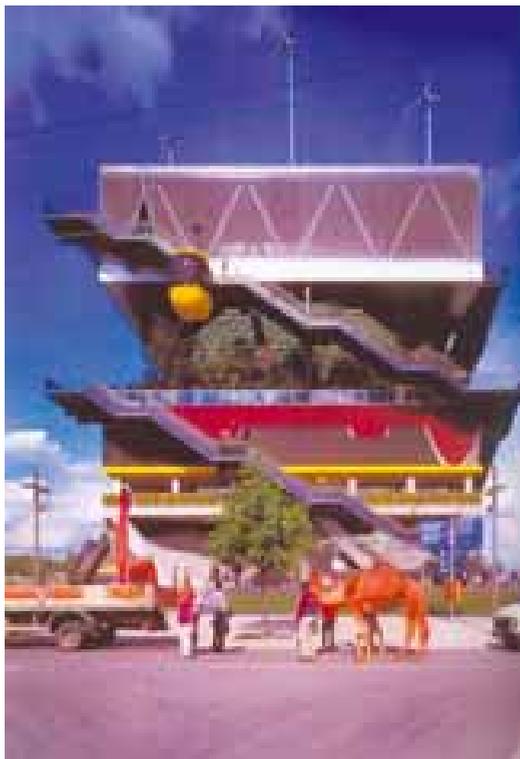
each with no hierarchical distinction. The collection is an attempt at charting the details of our collective world and its history. The equality of all the parts – political writings, economic facts, photographs, advertising, architecture, journalism, interviews, and so forth – in OMA/AMO's Content Catalogue or the Dutch pavilion in Hannover by MVRDV architects, for example, testifies to such a permissive heterogeneity. But this collection is not capable of inciting a conflict that unlocks a secret or new possibilities. Nor does it deal critically with the chance relations that arise between the different parts. No position is assumed, the arrangement of the material is not based on a particular directionality guiding thought or way of acting. There is no directionality conducted from a chosen point of view.

Thirdly, we have dialogue without direction; if the concept just stimulates discussion then everything is fine. A lot of new architecture and art is relational: it consists in generating interpersonal experiences and turns the visitor into a conversation partner, an active participant. This new form of art does not try to bring about contact with the user or beholder via a passive experience, but via active participation. It's no longer a question of objects, but of situations that cause new forms of relations to arise. Interactivity as a goal without the initiator taking the responsibility for choosing a position. Such an approach can be seen in the work of NOX architects (Lars Spuybroek), an eloquent example being the D-Tower in Doetinchem made in collaboration with the artist Q.S. Serafijn.

NL Architects, *Basketbar* in Utrecht. Photo Luuk Kramer



MVRDV, Dutch Pavilion in Hannover.



The fourth and final aspect of fresh conservatism that I would like to talk about is mystery. By this I don't mean an enigmatic mystery, a form of mysticism or trauma with a confrontational effect, but mystery as a familiar strangeness or affirmative analogy, like the Schaulager Museum in Basle designed by Herzog and De Meuron, a prototypical house as drawn by a child. Here again we discover attention to complex beauty, while heterogeneous elements are unnecessarily combined into an antagonism.

In my view, these four heterogeneous ways of working create a new form of consensus. Every collective situation is objectified and therefore no longer makes a difference, or lends itself to a polemic about our controversial reality. I think we have lost sight of the fact that a system replete with heterogeneity can also raise certain urgent matters without consensus, without already wanting or being able to provide the ultimate answer. What has happened to those experiments in which heterogeneous conflicts do have a guiding effect and a progressive directionality?

A Form that Thinks

For the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, cinema is a form that thinks. In contrast to television that only shows what is already defined. According to Godard, there is even 'nothing to see any longer: neither reality nor image'.⁷ People have forgotten how to look, so, Godard argues, as makers we have to hand the public a key so they can start seeing

7. Jean-Luc Godard in conversation with Youssef Ishaghpour, in: *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of A Century* (New York, Berg, 2005).

again. The method that Godard uses for this is the coexistence of juxtapositions – fascination and aversion, emptiness and love, freedom and consumption. These interrelated concepts are meant to challenge the viewer to establish new connections. They have to offer the viewer a key to actively interpret image and text. 'One should not create a world, but the prospects of a world,' says Godard. For him, then, the images are not what they are. The visible world is haunted by 'the prospects of another world . . . The possibility of a world.' Images can therefore not be called beautiful in terms of beauty, stability or perfection, but precisely in terms of transparency, fragility and potentiality. What Godard's work is essentially about is that space can be created for establishing connections in an infinite number of possible ways. It is not a question of the things themselves (the form) but of what happens between and through these things. This way of thinking also underlines Wiel Arets's university library on the Uithof in Utrecht and Rem Koolhaas's Casa-da-Música in Porto. These buildings are characterized by a spatial typology making for neighbourliness. All sorts of connections become possible in an open and unforced way, without any form of forced steering. The consequences of such a position in architecture are not to be sneered at. For architecture this means that you have to design in terms of plans and sections, that form and programme, elevation and interior, route (infrastructure) and volume, material and colour, seeing and feeling, rationality and subjectivity, representation and presentation, experience and object, the

NOX-architecten (Lars Spuybroek) and Q.S.Serafijn, D-Tower in Doetinchem.
Photo NOX/Lars Spuybroek



Herzog and De Meuron, Museum Schaulager in Basel. Photo Margherita Spiluttini



specific situation and universal principles, should not be conceived separately. What this architecture revolves around is not the object itself but the entirety of relations or ensembles.

Building Brecht

But in order to answer the question as to how you can use heterogeneous conflicts to create possibilities for another world and can activate freedom in use, it is illuminating to take a look at the ideas of Bertold Brecht. Brecht once said, 'Would it not be easier for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?' What he meant was that in the theatre it's a question of creating a different public. In order to be able to change ingrained habits it is essential to take up an external (and often also extreme) position. It is not enough to embrace the ordinary, the known, the everyday. Brecht does this by deploying various techniques of alienation. In order to nevertheless create a free space for the audience to reflect, he deemed it advisable to build in a certain distance. One of the techniques he uses is the 'free, indirect style' that keeps interrupting the plot of the story with asides, commentaries and other digressions. In contrast to classical drama, the narrative in Brecht's epic theatre does not develop linearly, but in a discontinuous and fragmented manner. This is also the reason why it has no climax or catharsis.

The aesthetic and spatial structures of the buildings by Koolhaas and Arets have no climax or catharsis either. They do not want to prescribe anything. Neither building can be classified in any way

by the spectator – they are strange and enigmatic buildings and yet everything functions as usual. It is not for nothing that in the Casa-da-Música in Porto we find all sorts of traces of the ordinary, the recognizably everyday, like the black and white tiles, the classical furniture in a Delft blue setting, a view across the city in the concert hall and many playful catwalks which are fantastic for parading over. That which we simply are, but actually never noticed in all its 'ordinariness', suddenly becomes visible, without our existence being tripped up the way it is in critical architecture. At the same time it has an alienating effect. It's almost as though the spectator has landed in a detective story where every random fact or object is a clue to a possible murder. The most ordinary things suddenly become signs, and each sign can lead to another sign, because of the desire to see and to know what is going on.

This psychoanalysis of seeing, as Walter Benjamin calls it in relation to film, also holds good for the Casa-da-Música and the library. In the library, for example, everyone is free to choose where he or she wants to sit: in small, private study cabins, on high open areas or in modest collective spaces. The architect does not explain how you should behave, but creates possibilities and encourages different usages. The interior of Arets's library is coloured black and it is this, rather than the non-hierarchically arranged space, that challenges the user. Even more so than in Arets's library, a complex system of relations is created in the Casa-da-Música, which ingeniously interact with, influence and constantly interrogate one another.

In the design methodology of Arets and Koolhaas, autonomy is not an aim in itself, as in critical architecture, but a method of dislocating commonplace clichés without wanting to destroy them. Reality can thus be experienced in a different way, consciously taking into account its plural quality. Everything in this architecture strikes one as familiar, but at the same time everything is completely different and the user becomes aware of new paths and possibilities. The term that Brecht used for this procedure was *umfunktionierung* (re-functioning):⁸ the deployment of autonomy creates a free space between what is and what is possible.

This exchange between critical architecture's idea of autonomy and the everyday experiences and sensations of projective practice could be called a third position in aesthetics. If we weave together these two different domains then we can no longer speak of a consensus; instead there arises a high degree of what Jacques Rancière calls 'dissensus'. Consensus is a matter for the police, says Rancière, since it's a question of drawing up and maintaining rules and normalizing situations that have gotten out of

8. Brecht's theatre created this strategy of feeling at home and alienation within a single system as a form of liberation with the aid of his *Gestus* method. In contrast to Method acting – where the actor becomes the person he or she is playing – Brecht demanded of his actors that they should always remain themselves. Like Pier Paolo Pasolini, Brecht preferred to work with amateurs, since in that way the tension between fiction and reality can be preserved. A good actor does not put himself in the character's shoes but colours the person he plays with his own personality. The actor thus tells as much about himself than about the character. The *Gestus* produces through this 'inter-personality' a constant dialogue or intermediality that forces the spectator to look further than the beguilement of Method acting. This method of the *Gestus* can be seen on many levels in the work of Koolhaas in particular.

hand as quickly as possible. Dissensus, on the other hand, is a political affair in which everyone is challenged to constantly position themselves in the arena of quotidian experience. The quality of such an antagonistic constellation consists in coalitions and antithetical terms, in a 'politics of aesthetics', precisely as described by Rancière. Architecture cannot, of course, conduct parliamentary politics. Spatial constellations can deliver no advice on how to vote or convey messages about social and political problems. Architecture is political precisely because of the distance it takes from these functions. Architecture can also be political in the way in which, as a space-time sensorium, it organizes being together or apart, and the way it defines outside or inside. Architecture is political in the manner in which it makes reality visible by means of its own aesthetic syntax, and giving it a direction. Architecture influences the sensorium of being, feeling, hearing and speaking that determines the atmosphere and experience of a spatial constellation. This aesthetics as a form of politics is realized in a continuous process of transgressing borders, as applied by Brecht in his Epic Theatre or in the films of Godard. The spectator's pathetic-emotional perception is broken up by a montage of contradictions, thereby enabling the spectator to fulfil, in a detached, self-reflective way, a process of what Brecht calls 'permanent education'. The primary procedure of aesthetics as a form of politics consists in the creation of possible encounters, which lead in their turn to a conflict between heterogeneous elements. This conflict can cause ruptures

OMA, Casa-da-Música in Porto. Photo Charlie Koolhaas (© Office for Metropolitan Architecture)





Interior of Casa-da-Música, OMA. Photo OMA (© Office for Metropolitan Architecture)



OMA, Casa-da-Música in Porto. Photo OMA (© Office for Metropolitan Architecture)



in our perception and reveal secret connections and new possibilities pertaining to everyday reality. In architecture, aesthetics as a form of politics is an order of dissensus which is not so much aimed at breaking the spell of reality, as in critical architecture, but at creating a free space between what we are accustomed to and what is possible. Object and form, then, are never finished, but keep generating other interpretations. The autonomous strength of this architectural concept provokes a 'dialogical transformation', or, as Godard typified it, 'a form that thinks'. It's not for nothing that Arets and Koolhaas are charmed by William Blake's *Proverbs of Hell*, in which he announced 'Opposition is True Friendship', and 'Without Contraries Is No Progression'.

Directionality

Surfing the waves of late-capitalism is not sufficient to achieve alternatives, not even if we play the heterogeneous contradictions against each other. That which is suppressed – what remains a secret – has to come to the surface and preferably call forth progressive solutions. This means that architects and clients must not neglect their social task. Architecture also implies developing progressive programmes. Purely projective projects generate – as explained above – heterogeneous conflicts that result in consensus. In fresh conservative works the cliché is not questioned or transformed, but confirmed, albeit in a reflective and subversive way.

In Arets's library and Koolhaas's Casa-da-Música consensus is avoided. The

dialogical transformations of Arets's and Koolhaas's buildings do something different: while sundry interpretations are possible, collide with each other, come to terms with or oppose one another, there is also an investment in what you could call a communal and public direction. Instead of falling apart in an endless cacophony of voices, both buildings reinvent the collective. Both the library and the Casa-da-Música invest in the creation of a public space. In both buildings the complex route through the space is held together by a strong urban form and an internal collective space: in the library it's the large communal hall with its many belvederes and in the Casa-da-Música it's a question of the communal concert hall, the square on which the meteorite has landed and the view of the city. Instead of representing the king or the people, these buildings contribute to the invention of a people.

Aesthetics as a form of politics does exist. Arets's university library and Koolhaas's Casa-da-Música offer exemplary starting points for further developing this other (third) political route – which can learn from both critical architecture and projective practice. In my opinion, these buildings derive their sensibility from the field of tension evoked by the autonomous in direct contact with the everyday environment. While the buildings manifest themselves autonomously in architectural terms, they invest in the everyday space-time sensorium. This apparently paradoxical combination – of aloofness with regard to the everyday and an embrace of the ordinary – produces inspiring conflicts and reinvents the public. Whereas critical and post-

Wiel Arets Architects, Interior of the University Library, de Uithof, Utrecht. Photo Jan Bitter



Wiel Arets Architects, University Library, de Uithof, Utrecht. Photo Jan Bitter



Wiel Arets Architects, Interior of the University Library, de Uithof, Utrecht. Photo Jan Bitter



critical projective architecture generate consensus, Arets and Koolhaas are trying to create a positive dissensus in their buildings, on the basis of an unsolvable conflict. In this sense their buildings are never finished.

LOOK

AT

ME.

Max Bruinsma

Revenge of
the Symbols

With works like ‘the butt plug gnome’ – the nickname given by the public to Paul McCarthy’s controversial sculpture – art in public space touches a sensitive nerve. The symbolic meaning of this sculpture is misunderstood ‘on the street’. According to Max Bruinsma, symbols are only meaningful within

their own codes.

That artists are looking for ways to provoke has become unsatisfactory, because the question of social responsibility is left unanswered.

Once, art served to connect the invisible to the visible world. You looked at a painting or sculpture and what you saw did not only resemble what was already there, but was also an image of something that could in no other way be represented so 'realistically'. Call it symbolism. Or think of the Greek word in 'metaphor': transport, transfer. Art could quite literally transfer substance from a world consisting purely of ideas and thoughts to the world as it optically presents itself to us.

To symbolize, it must be stressed, is not the same as 'making the invisible visible'. The symbol may be visible, but what the symbol represents remains unseen. We see an image of a candle which has just been snuffed out (by a breath? the wind?) and know, this is a symbol of life's vulnerable brevity. In the image of the dying candle we see something we cannot see: an idea. That is, at least, as it used to be.

When Frank Stella, asked what his work meant (in earlier days one would have asked: what does it symbolize?), answered: 'What you see is what you see', it could be interpreted as a banishment of any symbolism. Contemporary art, in this view, ads visibility to the visible world. In this apparently redundant operation the symbolic meaning of an artwork seems to vanish. A rose is a rose is a rose.

But still, symbolism will not have itself removed from the image without protest. The image may want to be 'a reality of and by itself', as in abstract art in the previous century, but we, viewers, read our own thoughts and ideas into it, even if the artist (or Clement Greenberg) would like to outlaw that.

Looking at the giant black garden-gnome-with-object-in-hand, now in the courtyard of the Boymans van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam, one can't help feeling that something is being symbolized here. This garden gnome, meanwhile popularly termed 'Kabouter buttplug' (the butt plug gnome), according to the artist, Paul McCarthy, represents a criticism on Western consumerism or the hypocrisy of Western civilization. It's not a gnome, but a representation of Santa Claus holding a giant anal dildo in his right hand as a Christmas tree and in his left Father Christmas's traditional bell. In contemporary language, you could interpret the work as: 'Father Christmas, up your ass!' Here, the butt plug is a symbol with the force and charge of a stretched middle finger.

The sculpture has intensely stirred Rotterdam's emotions in the past few years. Commissioned by the municipality, it was meant for placement in a prominent public place in the city. But after a storm of protests against what large sections of the public saw as an obscene, filthy, kitschy, banal and disrespectful provocation, the work finally found a place where it was tolerated, within the confines of Rotterdam's largest art sanctuary, Boymans van Beuningen. A temporary residential permit for an artwork seeking asylum. If all of this symbolizes anything, it is the fact that the codes for production and reception of art have evolved in radically different directions. For the artist, the work may represent a social criticism, the majority of his audience only sees in it an insult by someone mocking their values and standards – using community money, at that!

Embedded in History

It is not the only work in recent years in which symbolism seems to have returned – with a vengeance.

A recent artwork by Carlos Aires in Vienna's public space – part of an art project consisting of a series of billboards on the occasion of Austria's EU presidency – depicted three world leaders (queen Elizabeth of England and the presidents Bush and Chirac) in an obviously sexual encounter. Since it is equally obvious that there can't be any question of realism (if only because two of the masked figures are women), it must be intended symbolically. The question is: what kind of symbolism are we dealing with here?

In the same project there was another work that stood out: a reclining woman with her nightgown pulled up to just above her breasts, frontally exposing her knickers, in European blue-with-golden-stars. This image, in its turn, was a direct pastiche of a famous painting, Gustave Courbet's 1866 *l'Origine du Monde*, an artwork that may be termed the mother of all shock art.

Shocking as this painting was considered in the nineteenth century, it was clearly rooted in tradition, which connected the depiction of the nude body with symbolic references to encompassing philosophical and ideological concepts. The naked Fortune, symbol of abundance, Hermes, naked but for his winged sandals and hat, as the messenger between gods and men, the half-naked Marianne, symbol of the French revolution . . . Mother Earth (Demeter for the Greeks) was depicted naked as

well, with a scanty band of corn spikes around her waist. But to connect the 'origin of life' so unequivocally to a realistic rendering of a woman's sex, as Courbet did, was not just the ultimate consequence of the symbolic tradition; it was an obscene caricature of it. It was too literal.

Contemporary comments on Courbet's *Origine* can be summarized as an anticipation of Stella's dictum: 'What you see is what you see.' That was the problem: what Courbet's contemporaries saw was a 'beaver shot', not a noble symbol. The near photorealism of the image was an obstacle blocking the symbolic interpretation of the artwork. The canvas makes you face the fact that in earlier renderings of the naked body which were meant to be interpreted symbolically, 'the nude' was always employed differently: within a strict context of compositional and stylistic models aided by equally context-dependent aspects such as pose, attributes, background and expression.

What is the context of an image like Tanja Ostojic's, the Berlin based Serbian artist who paraphrased Courbet's *Origine*? An old-fashioned symbolic interpretation of her work results in connecting the idea of 'origin' to the idea of the European Union. Now we can go various ways: does the EU flag cover the origin? Or does it represent it? Or is the flag a fig leaf? Or an obscene sign? Does it cover or provoke? We can only think the latter if we recall the connection with the Courbet painting's reception history, in which the reclining woman's pose is seen as 'inviting', corporeal, and not symbolic. It is this interpretation that comes to

Paul McCarthy, *Santa Claus*, 2002 (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam).



Gustave Courbet, *l'Origine du monde*, 1866 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).
(C) Photo RMN



Tanja Ostojic, billboard, Vienna, 2005.



the contemporary viewer's mind most. It has been a while since our culture saw the female nude as representing 'beauty, truth and goodness'. Now we see 'sex'.

Under these conditions, can a work like Ostojic's be seen in a symbolical way at all? The artist thinks it can: the message can be interpreted in various ways, she says, but for her it is associated with Europe's strategy to shut out foreigners, which she herself has been closely confronted with. 'As the European Union states are sharpening the control over non-citizens, the immigration police even check the warmth of bed sheets in intermarriages between EU- and non-EU-partners.' The artist's intention is therefore to symbolize a sexual politics of exclusion: 'a world only accessible with this sign of approval.'

Provocation

Now as an art historian, I'm quite well versed in symbolic interpretations, and with the information the artist provides I can imagine what she means, but I can't help a feeling of arbitrariness. There is nothing in the image that makes her interpretation of it inescapable. The reference to an existing painting with a rowdy reception history, in particular, causes one to almost automatically take the billboard as a provocation, as a caricature. For those who do not know the artist's intention – and this knowledge cannot be presupposed, especially with regard to art in public space – the billboard connects the accusations of pornography, with which Courbet was confronted, with the plethora of sexually charged imagery spread through today's

media. Related to the EU symbol on the underpants, this connection almost inescapably leads to the most obvious interpretation: that the EU, that is its ideals, is pornographic, or obscene, and that the Union peddles its wares with raunchy methods similar to cheap groin-directed advertising. Symbolism can be literal.

The problem with symbolism these days is that, on the one hand, artists have given up any claim to universality – their symbolics is what *they* mean by it – while on the other hand the public interprets from what is or may be considered general knowledge. In this conflict between idiosyncrasy and public taste, only a rather specific form of symbolism seems to have survived, that of satire, caricature, ridicule. However one interprets Aires' nude threesome, it's clear that it's mockery. The means employed by Ostojic, Aires and McCarthy can almost without exception be called classically satirical. Already in ancient Rome, degrading sexual or animal symbolics were used for caustic criticism. A famous example is graffiti depicting a crucified donkey ridiculing the devotion of early Christians to their savior.

I am less interested here in the question of whether this is good or bad art, than in the question of the response these works provoke. For over a century and a half now – since Courbet, to summarize – art sees it as its task to provoke, to shock. Early avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dada, in particular, did not shun a bit of *épater le bourgeois*, outrage the middle-class. But although the stunned *bourgeois* in those days also cried 'they should be stopped', the net result of such actions and reac-

Carlos Aires, billboard, Vienna, 2005. (© Carlos Aires ARGE_PROJEKT 5 plus)



tions was the opposite: in art, one could increasingly do as one pleased.

Shift of Power

There is one important difference between the tolerated provocations of old and the artworks that rouse emotions today. Art around the turn of the pre-previous century was confined to ateliers, galleries and exhibitions, and at most stirred debates in the columns of newspapers and magazines; current provocative art spreads out over all the media, as soon as someone cries: 'Hurry up, come and see, they're being offensive!' This exclamation comes from a cartoon, commenting on the eagerness with which 'offended' parts of the population in 1970s Dutch culture followed provocative television programmes like *Hoepla* and the *Fred Haché Show* (the first tv shows in the Netherlands which featured nudity, to the fascinated outrage of decent citizens). This period represents a turning point in art's reception. At the beginning of the century, the debate mainly played between people who understood the accepted artistic codes, regardless of whether they were out to explode or preserve them. With the expansion of the audience for art, from the mid-twentieth century onward, the average knowledge of the principal artistic discourses is diminishing and reception codes from outside the arts are being introduced.

Or re-introduced. Over the past centuries, religious, social, political and ideological criteria may have been carefully filtered out of art, but it is good to realize that the 'autonomy' art thus acquired

not only knows an end, but once had a beginning as well. Before Courbet and his contemporaries rocked the foundations of accepted artistic reception with their personal, *allzumenschliche*, interpretation of established symbolics, art was not a mere cultural expression, but an instrument of culture in the hands of reigning political and religious powers. Now it appears that, once again, art is becoming instrumental, this time managed by popular culture and its agents, its vociferous representatives in media and politics.

There, art meets the boundaries of tolerance, which it could cross with impunity under the protection of its earlier autonomy. Many contemporary artists, among whom are undoubtedly the ones mentioned above, will agree with the idea that art should – once again – find a social relevance. But while artists tend to find this renewed relevance by extending the freedom attained within art's discourse to a broader social context, the public demands that this socially oriented art speaks not (only) for the artist, but (also) for them. The mere thought of such a popular voice position would never appear to the likes of Frank Stella, who reject any interpretation beyond the fact that an artist made something.

For 'what you see is what you see' also means 'take it or leave it'. It is a somewhat arrogant stance, but also a consistent one, directly related to the nineteenth-century idea of *l'art pour l'art*. Today, neither artists nor culture in general accept this isolated position of art anymore. But art's renewed confrontation with popular culture also has

its uneasy aspects. Artists who refer to a 'giving-the-finger' kind of symbolism – a time-honored mark of a rougher, lower-class culture – still rely on the subtle and multi-level interpretational models of 'high' culture for guidance in interpreting such 'corny' gestures.

It's the revenge of the symbols; they only work meaningfully within their own codes. Outside of these, they explode, with considerable collateral damage. Mixing different codes results in mixed metaphors which can be as multi-interpretable as they are 'in your face'. The 'butt plug gnome' and 'Courbet revisited' are prime examples: anal dildos and pantyhose are only marginally embedded in traditional symbolic codes, if at all – direct sexual symbolics have always been interpreted within art as pornographic or obscene. In this respect, the public outrage concerning such works is culturally speaking arch-consistent. As important as the question of a dwindling tolerance vis-à-vis the symbolic discourse of what art can or may express in public space, therefore, is the question of what art can or may want. Mere provocation is not an entirely sufficient answer anymore, because it leaves the question of the artist's social responsibility – which art itself has challenged – wide open.

Postscript

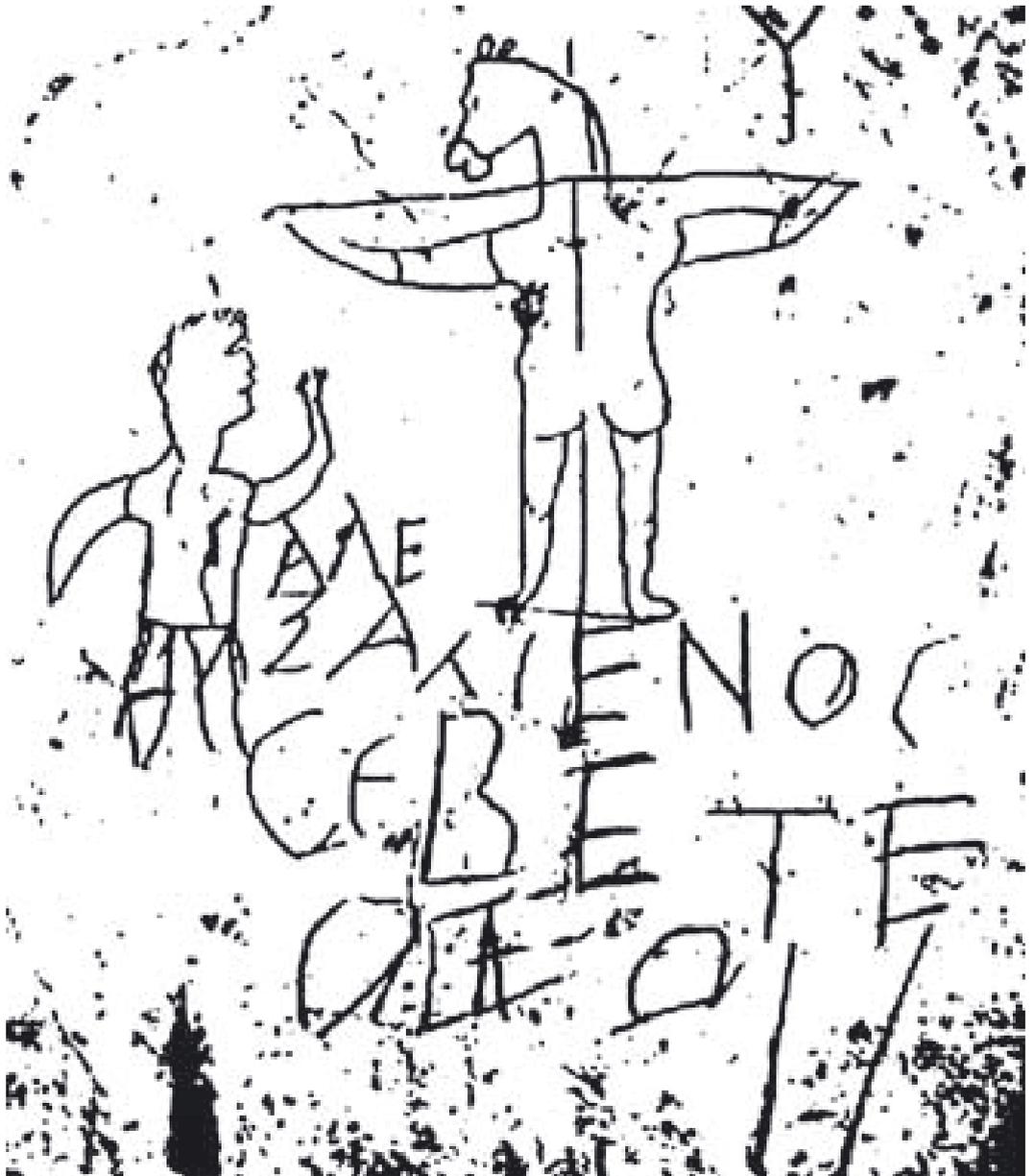
This essay was written at the beginning of January this year. Since then - it's February now - the 'revenge of the symbols' has taken a completely new turn, with 'collateral damage' few would have thought

possible: burning embassies, molested Europeans, dead protesters. In the light of the 'cartoon riots', my hypothesis of a clash between hardly compatible reception codes of the autonomous arts and public discourse sounds utterly academic. From this – academic – point of view one could hold that the events underline my idea that the caricature is the about the only culturally functioning symbolic category these days (apart from the brand, I must add), but that seems a rather cynical conclusion now. The international commotion surrounding the 'Allah cartoons' has, however, made the question of which cultural function exactly is exercised here, and what that means for the position of the artist, a very urgent one.

In the current debate 'freedom of expression' (read: autonomy) and 'respect for others' values' (read: politeness in the public discourse) are being confronted as two in fact irreconcilable cultural axioms. An axiom knows no 'on the one hand/on the other'. '1+1' can never result in 'okay, let's say a bit less than 2'. Once again, it appears that the axioms of art and free expression can fundamentally clash with those of the public discourse and (inter)cultural manners.

At such moments, the inescapable question becomes: where do you stand, on which values is your house built? If the history of Western art and culture of the past 4000 years has shown anything, it's the struggle between the autonomy and free will

Crucified donkey, anonymous, Capitol, Rome, second century AD.



of the individual versus the forces that strive to derail that free will, or to curb it, for the sake of redeeming individual souls or preserving the collective peace. That is what Europeans have come to term the condition humaine. It is often overlooked that the secular Western individuality and penchant for freedom au fond have a religious source too: the myth of the Fall of man, which granted man the (cursed) capacity to discern between good and evil, and the duty to choose between them in freedom. Seen this way, the real dilemma of the current crisis is not so much the question whether we should give in to the pressure to curb our freedom of expression out of respect for others, but whether we can tolerate that others want to take away our choice to decide for ourselves. Not only in the light of the two centuries old universal declaration of human rights, but on the basis of one of our oldest existential myths and its millennia of reception history in Europe, the answer to that question should axiomatically be: no, that is intolerable. Apart, therefore, from questions of whether the damned cartoons and the artworks mentioned above are good or bad, offensive or not, we can, on the basis of our own cultural values, say no other thing than: 'take you filthy hands off of our filthy artists!'¹ After that, we can talk quality and responsibility again.

1. Variation on a comment during the Second World War, protesting the deportations of Jews from Amsterdam, regardless of whether they were liked or not: 'Take your filthy hands off of our filthy Jews!'

HAVE

IT

MY

WAY.

Jorinde Seijdel

Koolhaas & Google
in China

*On the Perversion
of Censorship*

Rem Koolhaas and Google are doing business in China – along with countless others, of course. But the new promised land is still a dictatorship in which the Communist Party exercises censorship on a large scale. Both Koolhaas and Google appear to be

supporting and facilitating that censorship with their own particular projects. Censorship, it would seem, is no longer a categorical evil in the post-modern culture, but an integral force.

A familiar premise of Western culture is that the public media exist to help uphold democracy and to guarantee its openness. Sabotaging these media is considered a form of censorship. Censorship, in the sense of denial of information, is thus held to be a pre-eminent threat to the political or moral order. It is hardly surprising, in this light, that Rem Koolhaas's acceptance of a commission to design the new headquarters in Beijing for the Chinese state television company CCTV, while widely applauded, meets resistance from some quarters.¹ No less surprising is that Google's decision to launch a censored version of its search engine, Google.cn, is seen not only as an understandable business move but as an issue for debate.²

From what we may term a modernist critical viewpoint, Koolhaas and Google are both candidates for a 'department of lies' under whose aegis hot topics such as the Dalai Lama, Taiwan's aspirations for independence, the 1989 events on Tiananmen Square, the Falun Gong movement and Chinese human rights violations are not to

1. For the design and a description of the CCTV-building, see the OMA website: www.oma.nl. Ian Buruma on 30 July 2002 in *The Guardian*: 'Unless one takes the view that all business with China is evil, there is nothing reprehensible about building an opera house in Beijing, or indeed a hotel, a hospital, a university or even a corporate headquarters. But state television is something else. CCTV is the voice of the party, the centre of state propaganda, the organ which tells a billion people what to think.' Architecture critic Hans Ibelings compares Koolhaas and Herzog & De Meuron, who designed the Olympic Stadium in Beijing, with Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Ricardo Bofill, who accepted the Iraqi Ministry of Culture's invitation in 1982 to enter the closed competition for the State Mosque of Baghdad. 'Iraq had already been at war with Iran for two years. Nevertheless, these architects knowingly did Saddam's dirty work, helping him acquire the pro-Western image he desired at the time,' according to Ibelings. <http://www.bouwenwonen.net/architectuur/read.asp?id=5878>. See also the VPRO programme *RAM*, episode 20 of 29-02-2004, with an extensive piece on Koolhaas

be mentioned. From the same viewpoint, it is striking that Amnesty International reported as follows in early 2006, thirty years after the death of Mao: 'The human rights situation in China has deteriorated sharply over the last decade. Violations are widespread: torture and mistreatment by police and prison guards; arbitrary detention; biased courts; far-reaching restrictions on freedom of speech in all forms, especially with regard to dissidents and to religious or spiritual movements; the heavy repression of nationalistic activities and sympathies in the Tibet and Xinjiang regions. Executions take place on a wide scale, often consequence to arbitrary proceedings and/or political interference.'³

The Google Feeling

At the same time, however, people in cultural and commercial circles tend to gloss over or simply ignore criticisms such as these. The country whose new motto is 'To Get Rich is Glorious' acts as a beacon of economic development, and has so become irresistible to Western investors and consumers who cheerfully and post-critically see prosperity as a inextricably interwoven with freedom – an extremely rash con-

and the CCTV Building, which can again be viewed on the VPRO website, in which Koolhaas gives his opinion, as well as his proponents (Wouter van Stiphout, Aaron Betsky) and adversaries (Bernard Hulsman). <http://www.vpro.nl/programma/ram/afleveringen/16450074/items/16635095/>.

2. See, for instance: <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2006/01/google-in-china.html>. <http://www.nrc.nl/buitenland/article152138.ece>. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4647398.stm>. <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/01/332322.html>.

3. http://www.amnesty.nl/landeninfo/lan_chin.shtml, consulted on 20-02-2006.

nection to make, according to specialist commentators. The fact that everyone is getting involved in China, at least in business respects, is often posed as a counterargument to criticisms of Koolhaas and Google. But isn't that plain cynicism?

Those who are involved have other arguments, too. Google, whose slogan is 'Don't Be Evil', claims its decision to venture into China (admittedly on a path already beaten by Yahoo!, Microsoft and Cisco) was motivated by the thought that it would be even worse for the country if people lacked the facility of Googling. Google wouldn't really be deceiving the Chinese public anyway, because Google.cn would inform users with a message whenever a search action was blocked. What is more, according to Google, this would in itself have a gently subversive effect and encourage Chinese users to risk infiltrating through the Great Chinese Firewall, the nickname for the software which filters international web traffic into China and which has been designated by some as 'the most sophisticated effort of its kind in the world'. As the BBC observed, 'China is proof that the Net can be developed and strangled all at once.'⁴

However you look at it, Google is trying to conceal its pure market-mindedness. But what also becomes painfully clear is that people outside China, too, have surrendered en masse to a business venture which manages a lot of the wayfinding on the Internet, and which is prepared to perform censorship for com-

mercial motives if necessary – motives which are not immediately obvious to everyone. Is this the 'Google Feeling'?⁵

5. In *Dark Fiber*, media theoretician Geert Lovink convincingly states that the original values of Internet, including freedom of speech, are not so much threatened by government as by commerce. *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2002).

The Koolhaas Feeling

Architects often characterize China today as the world's biggest building site. The Olympic Games are programmed for Beijing 2008, and much work still has to be completed; first of all, the Olympic Stadium designed by Herzog

6. See Hans Ibelings' statement in note 1.

and De Meuron, and of course Koolhaas's CCTV Building. In an interview on the Dutch TV channel VPRO in 2004, Koolhaas stated: '[Our participation] is based on the estimation that forces are presently active in China who are going to develop Chinese politics in a certain direction that I can sympathize with and support. Firstly, there is a privatization process going on. They want to turn the state-run television authority into a kind of BBC. Secondly, I think that the influence of the digital revolution will eventually turn into a medium of liberation and information equality, particularly in China... If I had any doubts about it, I wouldn't do it. I'm convinced. And it wasn't a snap decision: I have been in China many times since as long ago as 1995, and I have observed and analysed which way things are heading... But I fully recognize that it's an estimate, for sure. I admit that there's a moral issue. And I also admit that we could be making a mistake... And I would find that

disastrous – with regard to myself, too.’⁷

7. See the reference to the vPRO programme *RAM* in note 1.

Now, in 2006, access to BBCChinese.com is still being blocked in China, and it seems extremely unlikely that the Communist Party’s repressive control will be any less rigorous a year from now. We may well wonder what kind of conclusions Koolhaas will draw if his estimate or feeling is not borne out. Koolhaas’s involvement in China is no doubt sincere, but in which China? The China which, according to Amnesty, is presently holding at least 64 cyber-dissidents in captivity? That is the Chinese digital revolution.

Still, it is interesting that defenders of Koolhaas, like those of Google, argue that the design of the medium – in this case, the CCTV Building – may well have a beneficial effect when built. ‘The character of the building can have a positive effect on the surroundings. It isn’t a hermetically sealed box but is partly open to the public. Besides housing the state television corporation, it contains a media park, a hotel and other public amenities.’⁸ A heartening modernist-utopian outlook, isn’t it?

8. A statement by Harm Tilman, editor-in-chief of *de Architect*, published on the website of the vPRO programme *RAM*, episode 20, 29-02-2004. <http://www.vpro.nl/programma/ram/afleveringen/16450074/items/16635095/>.

The Censorship Feeling

Before this essay risks descending into old-fashioned critical or moralizing evaluation, we must reconsider the question of why Koolhaas and Google are able to do what they are doing in China without losing a substantial amount of

credibility in the West. Aren’t their censorship-supporting activities the outcome of a changing attitude in Western societies toward censorship in general? Many social and political events or trends of recent times do indeed seem to suggest that the dictate of visibility and openness, in which censorship is taboo, has reached a turning point. The traditional conflict between freedom of speech and prohibition seems to be increasingly swept under the carpet.

It is the affirmative and rhetorical quality of the ongoing debates concerning visibility, openness and freedom of speech that itself betrays the increasing emptiness of these concepts. Their hidden, prohibited and secretive dimensions seem to be better at producing meaning and more eloquent about the contemporary condition of our culture than those things that are explicitly demonstrated, stated or depicted. The visible and ostensibly uncensored aspect has suffered inflation in a culture which has increasingly striven to reveal all, which has willingly surrendered its secrets and its privacy to the cameras and the internet.

New Normality

Censorship and self-censorship are becoming decisive forces, and they are doing so in an entirely new way: on a largely voluntary basis. All things considered, we surrender remarkably easily to the ascendant regime of censorship and control. Indeed, we increasingly insist on the imposition of censorship and confidentiality, on the development of watertight systems of supervision. Society raises scarcely any resistance to

OMA, design for the CCTV Building in Beijing. Photo Hans Werlemann/Hectic Pictures





the increasing powers of national and international secret services and other monitoring, surveillance and archiving agencies. These agencies garner information from society, usually without it becoming clear what they do with it, in a kind of inverse censorship. In this perverted logic of censorship, leaks of information are deplored more strongly than information suppression. The fossilized mechanisms of democracy inform us, usually perfunctorily, that they are keeping something secret, as hollow signs of a public sphere that no longer exists.

Our society's increasing obsession with national and personal security and with public order violates more and more taboos. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben refers, for example, to a new 'normality' of the relationship between citizens and the state which has developed as a reaction to the recent security policies of the Bush administration, and in which anyone wishing to venture onto us territory must be prepared to have fingerprints or iris scans taken. Surveillance practices, which have always been rightly regarded as inhuman and exceptional, are increasingly accepted as humane, normal dimensions of life, writes Agamben, who thus holds that the politico-legal status of democratic citizens is changing and that the room for political action is shrinking. 'What is at stake here is nothing less than the new "normal" bio-political relationship between citizens and the state. This relation no longer has anything to do with free and active participation in the public sphere, but concerns the enrolment and the filing away of the most private and incommunicable aspect of subjectivity:

I mean the body's biological life. These technological devices that register and identify naked life correspond to the media devices that control and manipulate public speech: between these two extremes of a body without words and words without a body, the space we once upon a time called politics is ever more scaled-down and tiny.'⁹

9. In an article published on the opinion pages of *Le Monde*, 10-01-2004. See also: http://www.biopolitiek.nl/art_bd_giorgio.html.

Allocation of Power

Censorship is no longer necessarily a categorical evil in post-modern culture, but an integral, amoral force of security societies. This perversion of censorship is not really all that new, but it has reached a new plane. As Michel Foucault observed, in his analyses of power, many expressions of our society are tolerated repressively, sapping them of their transgressive potential. He also holds that 'the Author' is a product of censorship. He regards the author figure as a kind of artificial construction for regulating the discourse of a community. Texts, books and discourses do not actually gain authors until the moment they are subjected to censorship.¹⁰

10. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in: Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1977), 113-139.

Returning to Koolhaas and Google in China, we may wonder whether Koolhaas is being accorded the status of Mega-Author by grace of the Chinese authorities, or, on the contrary, that in designing the CCTV Building he is relinquishing his authorship in a grandiloquent gesture. And is Google upgrading

the state of China to Author status, or vice versa? Koolhaas and Google, like true avant-gardists, both embrace (from a post-modernist standpoint, too, but then without having to accept what used to be the unavoidable consequences) the new paradigm of censorship, and so enter into a power swap.

column

THE BUGGERS – POSITION #14

THE FIRE, THE FIRE IS FALLING!*

With the formulation of his concept of 'repressive tolerance' Herbert Marcuse uncovered a key strategy of manipulation and control in our consumer societies. Repressive tolerance, Marcuse states in his controversial analysis from 1965,¹ is sham tolerance that only serves to maintain the status quo. A perversion of genuine tolerance. Its purpose is to draw the teeth of opposition by capturing it into political, economical, and cultural systems that are already fully controlled by the establishment. Democracy, free market, freedom of speech, and tolerance – once revolutionary goals themselves but now fronts for repressive, exploitative, and totalitarian systems – are the false denominators under which opposition is annexed and neutralized. And once absorbed by systems that are really run by large corporations, banks, investment companies, the military industrial complex, and their secret services, all opposition is ren-

1. Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance* (1965), in: Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, jr. and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969).

dered toothless and turns into a caricature of itself. In that way our democracies are no more than staged media spectacles that conceal and maintain true power relations, the free market principle serves as an excuse for monopolistic concentrations, and even the word 'revolutionary' has been adopted by the world of advertising to such an extent that it has become powerless and should be replaced by 'fuck' (at least, according to revolutionary Jerry Rubin² before he fell victim to repressive tolerance himself).

2. Jerry Rubin, *Do it! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1970).

With his analysis, Marcuse outlined implicitly how the counterculture,³ of which he was one of the leading figures and which still seemed very much alive in 1965, would come to its end. He was not thanked for that at the time. 'We didn't care for Marcuse's lectures on how the revolution was going to be co-opted,' remembers John Sinclair, former leader of the radical White Panther Party, 'We were too deeply involved in what we were doing and having a lot of fun doing it.' But Marcuse was proved right in

3. The term 'counterculture' was first used by the American historian Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1968), but is used in a broader, less academic and less pacifist sense here, and also includes the twentieth-century avant-garde and its predecessors.

* From *A Song of Liberty* by William Blake, 1792-1793.

his lifetime. At the time of his death in 1979 the counterculture had been absorbed almost fully by established culture through a process of repressive tolerance. A subjugated Iggy Pop sang in that year: 'O baby, what a place to be, in the service of the bourgeoisie. Where can my believers be? I want to jump into the endless sea.'⁴ Twenty-five years later this process was so complete that another prominent member of the counterculture, French artist and activist Jean-Jacques Lebel, observed: 'In the worst cases, all that is left is rotting cultural merchandise, as for all the productions and superproductions that enjoyed a certain success in the nineteen tens, twenties, thirties, fifties or sixties and which today have evaporated.'⁵

4. Iggy Pop, *The Endless Sea*, released on the album *New Values* (Arista, 1979).

5. Jean-Jacques Lebel, *Tempo van de oneindige onrust*, published as a postface to *Beroofd door de ruimte* by Henri Michaux (Rotterdam, Sea Urchin, 2004).

William Blake, Robert Desnos, William Burroughs, Sun Ra, The MC5 – rotting merchandise? Certainly, works, life, and thought of visionaries and revolutionaries are being sold as consumer goods. Plenty of examples. On the other hand, hardly anybody could have got acquainted with the works of William Blake or Sun Ra if their distribution had remained limited to the original small and handmade editions. So, it works both ways: with the incorporation and commercialization of countercultural

works material is spread on a large scale that carries the germs of subversion and attacks the system from within. After all, not everything will be incorporated. That goes for the obstinate core of truly visionary or revolutionary work, but, of course, in the first place for violence.

Repressive tolerance – in the guises of historicizing, aestheticizing, and romanticizing – may have incorporated revolutionaries like The Weather Underground, the Rote Armee Fraktion, and The Black Panthers in academic and artistic circles (which often perform pioneering work in that respect), the violence that they employed remains indigestible for the establishment. Violence is a radical break with any order. A trauma that refuses to be denied or converted and that will only be repeated until the underlying conflict has been settled. According to Andreas Baader, one of the revolutionaries who drew inspiration from Marcuse, breaking a state's monopoly of violence will expose the 'fascist-repressive' character of the legal order. Violence disrupts and unmasks. Let all who want to use it fill their bottles with gasoline and the others let their hands be sniffed at by policemen and security officers.⁶

6. This advanced investigation technique was used by the French police and secret service during the disturbances in the *banlieues* of October 2005.

'Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights,

and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory', writes Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*.⁷

Consequently, a first step in the reposition-

7. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1964).

ing of the counterculture is to inventory and analyse revolutionary and visionary works from the past. From that it will soon follow that the counterculture can only be viable if it contains both violent and non-violent elements: no revolution without violence and no alternative society without visionaries. From those elements only naked violence and visionary works that are truly capable of evoking other worlds have proved insensitive to repressive tolerance. The choice then to bring the establishment to its knees is that between a Molotov cocktail and Sun Ra's 'living blazing fire, so vital and alive...'⁸

8. From Sun Ra's poem *There*, printed on the sleeve of the album *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra II* (ESP, 1966).

**YOU
SHITTE .**

Tom McCarthy

The Radical Other

*A Conversation about
Amsterdam 2.0*

In the project *Amsterdam 2.0*, a political model is developed, in which the idea of democracy is once more given content and meaning. The key phrase here is ‘radical tolerance’: the co-existence of the absolutely sovereign and the radical other. British artist/writer Tom McCarthy interviews artist Paul Perry and architect Maurice Nio on the meaning and possible implications of this model.

Devised by a 'shadow city planning office' in Amsterdam, *Amsterdam 2.0* is a constitutional document outlining a future civic system. Rather than envisage an alternative city, *Amsterdam 2.0* provides a framework out of which many different cities can arise and inhabit the same territory. People become citizens of one or other city by subscribing to this city's rules. One city's rules are often entirely incompatible with another's. The only fundamental rule - set down in the *Amsterdam 2.0* constitution - is that the citizens of one city cannot impose their will on those of another.

An empty framework within which many different legal systems can be active at the same time and place, *Amsterdam 2.0* was conceived as a decentralized and polycentric constellation to create a space for the living experiments and survival strategies which an era of failing politics and compulsory political correctness have made necessary.

Although, once explained, nearly everyone can appreciate the theoretical beauty of polycentric jurisprudence, it is difficult to get an idea of how *Amsterdam 2.0* would work in practice without concrete examples. Once the shadow planners had devised their constitution, they therefore named 400 possible cities and invited five authors to write stories using the *Amsterdam 2.0* constitution as a framework. The stories (by Nick Barlay, Tim Etchells, Tom McCarthy, Arjen Mulder and Maaïke Post and Dirk van Weelden) paint pictures of life in the 400 different cities with their completely divergent rule systems.

Upon completion of the stories, five visual commissions were handed out based on the stories in order to test the practicability of the *Amsterdam 2.0* vision. These commissions (given to Kasper Andreasen and Tine Melzer, Henk Bultstra and Jaakko van 't Spijker (SPUTNIK), Elma van Boxel & Kristian Koreman (ZUS), Sung Hwan Kim & the Lady of the Sea, and Joke Robaard), resulted in five different projects that explore and interrogate the texts.

In spite of the fact that the projects differ strongly from each other, they have one thing in common: each portrays a personal journey of discovery through what for everyone is a situation unimaginable and yet real. This is probably the only manner of finding one's way around a city where the compass of routine and obviousness has been lost.

TOM MCCARTHY Talk me through the genesis of this project.

PAUL PERRY The project's initial impetus came in 1995 from Ronald van Tienhoven, an artist who was then working as an 'internal advisor' for the *Praktijkburo*, a national bureau for 'art in public space' (now called *SKOR*). At the time Ronald brought a team of four very different people together: the Rotterdam architect Maurice Nio who was then well known for his work under the name of *NOX*; an Amsterdam 'child of the sixties' by the name of Huib Schreurs, who

I understand established 'Paradiso' as an important cultural centre in Amsterdam; the Amsterdam artist and photographer Gerald van der Kaap, who was well known for his club work; and myself, a sculptor, who was living in Groningen at the time. The four of us were chosen to form a sort of shadow city planning office. We worked together 2.5 days a week for a period of 8 months. Our mission in a nutshell: 'to initiate ideas and realize projects' pertaining to the future of Amsterdam.

TMCC Is *Amsterdam 2.0* simply a left-field piece of urban planning, or would you situate it elsewhere in terms of its status as a project? It is so rife with fictions and metaphors that I wonder if it isn't less about harnessing art for the cause of civic thinking than about transforming or 'détourning' civic thinking into art practice.

PP If anything, *Amsterdam 2.0* is more 'right-field' than 'left-field', though I wouldn't put it that way myself... But yes in one sense... someone *was* trying to harness 'artists' for the cause of civic thinking. But I've never thought about the project as *situationist*. *Amsterdam 2.0*'s language is too serious, too real for that. . . though it is not an easy language. Nor is it the language of the *stadhuis* and its urban planners. But what do you mean by 'rife with fictions and metaphors'? Are you implying that fiction isn't true and therefore dismissible by the regents of the concrete world as a form of 'fantasy'?

MAURICE NIO I think there are two fundamental misunderstandings in Tom's question. The first misunderstanding - in my opinion - is that Paul and I don't think of the project as a fiction or metaphor but as a (future) reality. With this in mind we invited the participants of the most recent phase of the project to write narratives and produce visual artifacts documenting this reality. The fact that most of those invited wrote and produced SF-like narratives and visual pieces as if we were dealing with metaphors has been a big disappointment. Please understand: *Amsterdam 2.0* isn't a fiction. We aren't interested in fantasies and fairy tales unless we can take them literally. The second misunderstanding - again in my opinion - is to see art as an autonomous field and planning and lawmaking as another political and metaphysical domain. That simply isn't so. *Amsterdam 2.0* doesn't want to make some fictive opposition stronger or change their views to its own, but wants instead to 'prune'. Sometimes one must - like a gardener - cut away branches of plants and trees to make them more beautiful and to allow them to bloom - literally and figuratively. Planning and what is known as democratic lawmaking rely upon humanistic and moralist views and opinions, just as most public art does. With this in mind we found ourselves shortly after the project started adopting Paul Treanor's motto: 'Cities are for change, not for people.'

PP You know, the more I think about this 'reality' versus 'fiction' issue - the more confused I become. If you look at it from up close it seems that reality versus fiction is a false dichotomy. A dichotomy which every adult human being uses when they need to distinguish the 'serious' - acts and decisions which have repercussions for themselves and others - from the 'not serious'. Given this I'm often surprised how fast and how emphatically we who make our living exploiting our imaginative capabilities join the others in proclaiming such a false distinction. *Amsterdam 2.0* is definitely real. It is real not only because you and I believe in it but also because it is a system which doesn't fall apart five minutes later. As a world it is both consequent and consistent. It is also completely fantastic in the sense that it remains, for you and me, and for everyone who has worked on it - virtually unthinkable.

MN That's true. But there's a big difference between the unthinkability of *Amsterdam 2.0* and the presumed unthinkability of the world of the situationists. Where once Guy Debord, as a sort of spoiled dandy, believed we could escape the duality reality-fiction through methods and strategies such as *dérive* and *détournement* - by this point we've been totally conditioned by the same methods. The reality-fiction construct itself has become a monstrous 'drift' and *Amsterdam 2.0* is evidence of this. Thus the word 'unthinkable' doesn't mean that we collectively are unable to see the near future but rather that the near future is unable to see us. The present is blind or, at the very least, utterly short-sighted when it comes to the classical opposition between reality and fiction. That's why it's so damned difficult to produce a project which addresses life beyond this point. *Amsterdam 2.0* is unthinkable because we as human beings, as beings who live in different cultures, are no longer seen and recognized by the present. What I mean to say is this: all results of political, economic and cultural processes have become unthinkable because we are standing in the middle. We can't take a critical distance. Is this the reason why we are forced to take a 'scatter shot' approach? The City of 400 Blows: *Amsterdam 2.0* is a project for 400 possible cities.

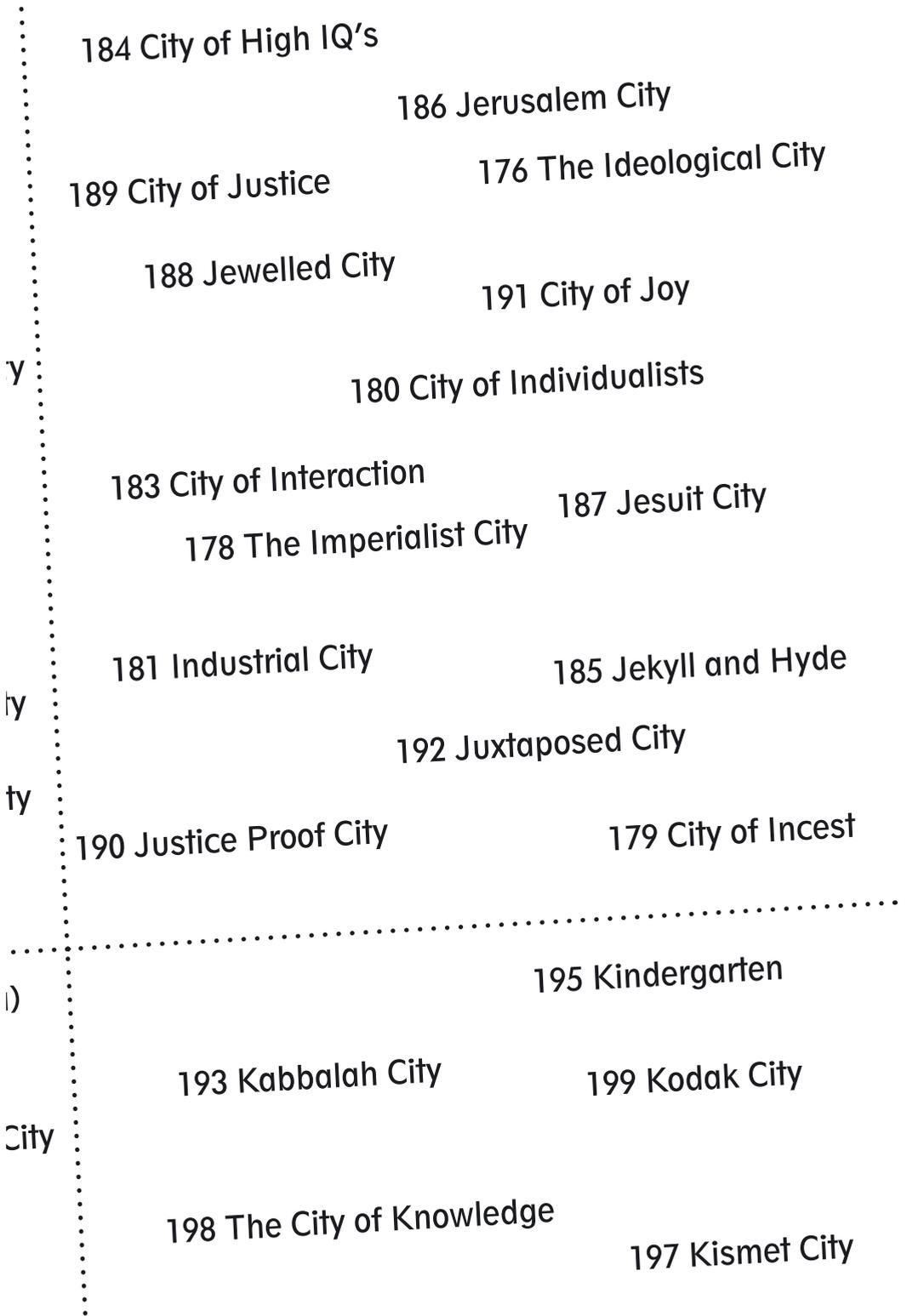
PP In that list we once made suggesting the names and corresponding *raison d'être* for 400 possible cities, wasn't there a City of Believers? At least now we can see how wrong that distinction was . . . As it is obvious that every city in *Amsterdam 2.0* must be a city of believers. Does this somewhat answer your question, Tom?

TMCC Yes. For me, fiction is not opposed to 'the real'. Both are constructs. Both are deeply intertwined with one another. I don't write to escape into fairy tales, but because of a belief (to use a term that came up a moment ago) in the power of the fictive to grasp and transform the world at every level. Still,

though, a distinction can be made between choosing a 'fictive' mode of discourse and a pragmatic one. When I say *Amsterdam 2.0* is 'rife with fictions' I mean that, rather than use a pragmatic language, it proposes an array of cities that could only be described as heavily 'figural', poetic: City of Bullfighters, City of Code, City of Anachronists and so on. Why choose those titles? Unless you actually intend for people who understand themselves as 'anachronists' to subscribe to this third city, the term must be a marker for a wider set of conditions or adherences. And the interesting question then is: what type? How interpreted? Executed? Experienced?

MN You've got a good point. I suppose it is due to Paul and me that the project appears as you say, 'heavily figural' and poetic. Even if it was possible to work out details without the help of an 'image', I doubt we would choose to do so or that such an approach would be effective. Images - the essence of poetry - transform and kidnap reason. This is why we've taken a somewhat indirect approach and didn't name the City of Bullfighters the City Where One is Allowed to Sacrifice Humans and Animals. The former name opens up more mental space. Space where others might experience some sort of recognition, and if they wished, enter the space and do something with it. The 400 'poetic' names also indicates another choice, which is to work from the bottom up, from a single detail, a detail that might inspire the soul of an entire city. In this way we hope to imagine a more interesting city. More interesting than if we imagined the city from the perspective of the whole.

PP Providing the cities with names was an impulse, an exercise without too much thought which we conducted many years ago. The fact that the names stuck isn't too surprising - given the power of names - but apart from what Maurice has just said, in my mind there has also been a serious downside to the list of names in relation to the entire project. When one sits down and reads such an 'a priori list' it is easy to think that we - the creator of the names - are either being facetious and filling in our own mad desires, or - and this in my opinion presents a more serious stumbling block to someone else entering the project - assume that we thought it possible to believe in 400 names and thus 400 different belief systems. This is not only preposterous but impossibly schizophrenic. If anarchy means doing away with a centralized government determining what is right and wrong for everyone - we aren't the only ones who feel that today's liberal and universal laws which are meant for everyone are in fact for no one - then *Amsterdam 2.0*, the entire safe haven that allows 400 different legal systems is anarchistic, not just the City of Anarchists. However, this does not mean that *Amsterdam 2.0* is lawless. It is anything but lawless. Each of the 400 different systems must determine 'what is right' and provide an equal number of determinations of 'what is wrong' and



AMSTERDAM 2.0 CONSTITUTION

Note: This early draft (version 1.2) of a constitution for AMSTERDAM 2.0 is based upon A Virtual-Canton Constitution, by Roderick T. Long, Mr. Long in turn acknowledges a number of sources to which his constitution is indebted including: Francis Kendall and Leon Louw's *Affer Apartheid*, Isabel Paterson's *God of the Machine*, Bernard Siegan's *Drafting a Constitution for a Nation or Republic Emerging into Freedom*, as well as the *Libertarian Party Platform*, the U.S. Constitution, and the medieval Icelandic constitution.

version 1.2

Part One: Provisions Subject to Amendment

1.1 The Government of AMSTERDAM 2.0

1.1.1 The Government of AMSTERDAM 2.0 shall consist of a Federal Administration and from 100 to 400 independent CITIES.

1.1.2 If any part of the territory of AMSTERDAM 2.0 is held on a long-term lease from another nation, the contracting lease shall be the Federal Administration.

1.2.5 The Negative Council shall have no power to initiate legislation, but shall have, in addition to the power of vetoing proposed Federal legislation, the power to repeal any already existing Federal legislation. A one-third-plus-one vote in favour of repeal shall be sufficient to repeal the legislation; no executive review is required. The Negative Council shall also have power to pass judgment on proposed Amendments to this Constitution as detailed in Section 2.1.

1.2.6 Each of the two houses of the Legislature shall regulate its own affairs, determine its own rules of procedure, and choose its own officers, including its Regent.

1.1.3 The Shareholders of AMSTERDAM 2.0 shall be any persons who, being competent, shall have signed and assented to this Constitution. Shareholding carries with it the right to vote and eligibility for public office, which are denied to non-Shareholders; it carries with it also the liability to taxation by the Federal Administration and by the Shareholder's CITY, from which liability non-Shareholders are exempt. Thus the Government of AMSTERDAM 2.0 is a voluntary cooperative association, with free exit and entry, and taxation is thus likewise voluntary, being conditional on Shareholdership. Shareholders may renounce their Shareholdership at any time, and reclaim it later as they choose. No competent person shall be barred from Shareholdership. Criminal conviction shall not remove the rights, nor public office the responsibilities, of Shareholdership.

1.1.4 Every Shareholder shall have the right to launch a popular initiative calling for a national referendum to recall the Regent of AMSTERDAM 2.0 or any member of the Negative Council; or to repeal any law, practice, or policy of the Government, exclusive of the provisions of this Constitution, by majority vote a petition by not fewer than 10 to be established number of Shareholders shall be sufficient to establish the referendum.

1.2.4 The Parliament shall have the power to initiate legislation by a two-thirds vote; such legislation must then be approved by a two-thirds vote of the Negative Council. Every bill which shall have passed the Parliament and the Negative Council shall, before it comes to a law, be presented to the Executive; if at least two of the Regents approve if they shall sign it and it shall become law, but if not the Executive shall return it with their objections to the Parliament, which shall proceed to reconsider it. If after such reconsideration four-fifths of the Parliament shall agree to pass the bill, it shall be sent, together with the objections, to the Negative Council, by which it shall likewise be reconsidered, and if approved by four-fifths of the Council, it shall become a law. Any bill, before it may become a law, must embrace no more than one subject, which shall be expressed in its title; appropriation bills shall concern only spending of monies and shall not mandate any other action or conduct, nor shall any bill except a general budget bill contain more than one item of appropriation, and that for one expressed purpose. In the case of bills that contain spending appropriations, the Executive may exercise a line-item veto, signing some provisions into law and sending others back with objections to the Parliament. If any bill shall not be returned by the Executive within fourteen days after it shall have been presented to them, the same shall be a law, in like manner as if they had signed it, unless the Legislature by their adjournment prevent its return, in which case it shall not be a law. The Parliament shall also have power to propose Amendments to this Constitution as detailed in Section 2.1.

1.3 The Federal Executive

1.3.1 The Federal Executive shall be composed of three Shareholders: The Regent of the Parliament, elected by majority (or plurality) vote of the Parliament; the Regent of the Negative Council, elected by majority (or plurality) vote of the Negative Council; and the Regent of AMSTERDAM 2.0, to be elected by majority (or plurality) vote of the Shareholders. The will of the Executive is to be determined by a two-thirds vote of the Regents. Each Regent shall serve a term of no longer than five years; no Regent may serve more than one such term consecutively or three such terms non-consecutively. The Executive term of the Regent of either house of the Legislature shall terminate prematurely on the expiration without renewal of said Regent's Legislative term. The Regent of the Parliament may be recalled as the Parliament's rules of procedure may direct; the Regent of the Negative Council may be recalled as the Negative Council's rules of procedure may direct; the Regent of AMSTERDAM 2.0 may be recalled by national referendum as detailed in 1.1.4.

1.4.3 Cases brought before the Federal Judiciary shall first be heard by the independent Judiciary; the Supreme Court shall serve as the final court of appeal, but may refuse to hear any appeal.

1.4.5 Fees for Federal court services shall be determined by Federal legislation.

1.4.3 The independent Judiciary shall consist in a private judicial service or services, under contract to the Federal Administration. Such contracts are to be established and revoked by majority vote of both houses of the Legislature. Such private judicial service shall be considered a division of the Federal Judiciary (and thus of the Government under this Constitution) for the duration of its contract and no longer.

1.4.12 It shall be the chief aim of judicial adjudication to secure restitution for the victim to the fullest degree possible at the expense of the criminal or wrongdoer. Likewise, the government (whether Federal or CITY) shall do as possible make full restitution for all loss suffered by persons arrested, indicted, restrained, imprisoned, expropriated, or otherwise injured in the course of criminal proceedings that do not result in their conviction. When they are responsible, government employees or agents shall be liable for this restitution. The claim of a victim (or class of victims) to restitution shall be a marketable claim, which may be acquired through gift or sale (or in the case of deceased victims, through bequest or homesteadings).

1.5.6 Disputes among members of the same CITY, if adjudicated under this Constitution, are to be adjudicated in accordance with the laws of that CITY, allowing or not allowing for Federal appeal as those laws may determine. Disputes across CITY boundaries are to be adjudicated as detailed in the section on the Federal Judiciary.

2.2.7 No law shall abridge the freedom of thought and feeling, or their peaceful expression or dissemination, as in speech, press and other media, artistic depiction, or religious practice; nor shall any law be made to promote or hinder religion, artistic culture, education, scientific research, or communication; nor shall the government of AMSTERDAM 2.0 operate or support any school, college, or university.

1.5.7 The manner of holding elections and referenda, both CITY and national, shall be determined by the laws of each CITY, except that the Federal Legislature may by two-thirds vote of each house make or alter such regulations with regard to the national elections and national referenda; but national elections and referenda shall in any case be universal, free, and secret. In the case of national elections, a petition of not fewer than 10 to be established number of Shareholders shall be sufficient to place a candidate on the ballot; and in elections for Federal office each ballot shall contain the alternative "None of the above is acceptable." In the event that "None of the above is acceptable" receives a plurality of votes in any election, the elective office for that term shall remain unfilled and unfulfilled.

2.2.8 No law shall abridge the right of the people peaceably to assemble, or to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

1.5.8 No CITY shall, without the consent of the Federal Legislature, enter into any agreement or compact with a foreign power, or engage in war unless required by such imminent danger as will not admit of delay.

1.5.9 The average tax burden within a CITY shall rise no higher than 10 to be established percentage of the income of the average Shareholder of that CITY, this figure to be determined or approximated by statistical methods involving no compulsory disclosure of information on the part of Shareholders.

2.2.9 No law shall countenance the existence of involuntary slavery, conscription, indenture, or any other form of involuntary servitude within AMSTERDAM 2.0, or in any place subject to its jurisdiction.

1.2.7 The powers of the Legislature shall be restricted to the following provisions:

- to protect the rights of the people to their persons and property;
- to conduct the financial affairs of the Federal Administration;
- to lay and collect taxes on Shareholders of AMSTERDAM 2.0, for the purpose of paying the debts and providing for the common defense of AMSTERDAM 2.0, and likewise to solicit voluntary contributions to the Treasury, or to provide services such as lotteries to that end;
- to declare war in defense of AMSTERDAM 2.0, and to make peace, and to raise and support a military force;
- to provide for calling forth a militia to execute the laws of the nation, suppress insurrections, and rebel insurrections;
- to vest the appointment of such officers whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Federal law, in the Executive or in the Judiciary, as the Legislature deems proper;
- to impeach any federal officer;
- to exercise an extraordinary power, for a period of no more than 10 to be established number of years immediately following the adoption of this Constitution, to regulate or prohibit the importation or exportation of mind-altering drugs, or the manufacture, importation, and exportation of large-scale chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, but not insofar as and solely to the extent that such regulation or prohibition is necessary in order to avert a severe risk to AMSTERDAM 2.0 of following the adoption of this Constitution;
- to make such laws as shall be necessary for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the Federal Administration, or in any department or officer thereof, provided that no law imposing greater restrictions on the people than needed for the attainment of this end shall be regarded as necessary.

1.3.2 The Executive shall from time to time publicly give to the Legislature information of the state of the nation, and recommend to their consideration such measures as the Executive shall judge necessary and expedient.

1.4.6 The power of the Judiciary shall be restricted in the first instance to the adjudication of disputes among the branches of the Federal Administration (except disputes to which the Federal Judiciary is a party), or between the Federal Administration and a CITY, or between the Federal Administration and a Shareholder; or between the Federal Administration and a non-Shareholder; or between one CITY and another, or between one CITY and the members of another, or between members of different CITIES, or between a CITY and its own members, or between a CITY and non-Shareholders, or between Shareholders and non-Shareholders, or among non-Shareholders.

1.4.14 Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor torture or other cruel, unusual, or degrading treatment inflicted. Convicted criminals shall not have their liberty restricted except so far as is necessary for the protection of others, nor their property seized except so far as is necessary to make restitution to the victim and to pay the costs of the criminal's capture and trial.

Part Two: Provisions Not Subject to Amendment

2.1 Provision for Amendments

2.2.10 No law shall restrict or hamper the free and peaceful movement of persons, goods, or ideas within or across the borders of AMSTERDAM 2.0.

1.3.3 The powers of the Executive shall be restricted to the following:

- to be Commander in Chief of the military, when called into the actual service of AMSTERDAM 2.0 (but this shall not be construed to extend to the Executive the power to initiate military action);
- to make treaties and to appoint ambassadors and other public officers, and to make the advice and consent of two-thirds of each house of the Legislature, and to commission the officers of AMSTERDAM 2.0;
- to receive ambassadors and other public ministers;
- to convene, on extraordinary occasions, either or both houses of the Legislature (but the Executive shall not convene the Legislature at strange or difficult times or locations);
- to sign or veto legislation as provided for in the section on the Legislature.

1.4.7 In addition, disputes among members of the same CITY may be adjudicated by the Federal Judiciary if the laws of that CITY grant such jurisdiction to the Federal Judiciary; disputes to which the independent Judiciary is a party may be adjudicated by the Supreme Court; disputes to which the Supreme Court is a party may be adjudicated by the independent Judiciary, without appeal to the Supreme Court; and disputes between the Supreme Court and the independent Judiciary, and disputes to which the Federal Judiciary as a whole is a party, may be adjudicated in such manner as the Legislature may determine.

1.4.15 It shall be the duty of the Federal Judiciary to strike down as void and of no effect any laws, whether Federal or CITY, in conflict with the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0.

1.4.16 The Federal Judiciary shall not construe any part of this Constitution to be without effect, or to be judicially unenforceable.

1.5 The CITIES

2.1.1 The Legislature, whenever four-fifths of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose Amendments to this Constitution (a process to be initiated by a four-fifths vote of the Parliament, and confirmed by a four-fifths vote of the Negative Council); such Amendments shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of this Constitution when ratified by both four-fifths of the CITIES (to be determined as the laws of the individual CITIES shall direct) and two-thirds of the Shareholders, provided that no Amendment shall in any manner effect Part Two of this Constitution.

2.1.2 All Amendments shall collectively constitute Part Three of this Constitution; the Legislature shall have the power to enforce any Amendment by appropriate legislation, so far as such power is consistent with those provisions of the Constitution not subject to Amendment.

2.2.12 No law shall abridge the right of self-defense by victims or their agents against initiators of aggression (including governments or their agents), including the right to own, manufacture, sell, and bear arms; but the right of self-defense shall not be construed to license resistance on the part of such aggressors to the legitimate use of force against them in defense of the rights of their victims.

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Preamble: We the Shareholders of the country known as AMSTERDAM 2.0, in order to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, receive for their services a compensation to be determined by the Legislature, but such compensation shall be neither increased nor diminished during the period for which they shall have been elected, and shall in any case exceed the average Shareholder's income (to be determined as in 1.2.10) by no more than the established percent. Nor shall any Federal officer receive any compensation in any year in which the Federal budget is not balanced (nor may any budget item be declared "off-budget").

1.1.5 The Federal Administration shall consist of a Legislature, an Executive, and a Judiciary.

1.2.8 The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended; no bill of attainder or ex post facto law shall be passed.

1.2.9 No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by Federal law; and statements and accounts of the receipts and expenditures of the Federal Administration shall regularly be made public.

1.3.4 In time of war, any Regent may delegate his or her decision-making authority to any other Regent, for a stated period revocable only by majority vote of the Regents, and not to exceed three months (but renewable thereafter).

1.3.5 Any Regent shall have power to grant reprieves and pardons for any offenses tried under the laws of AMSTERDAM 2.0, except in cases of impeachment.

1.4.8 Disputes between the independent judiciary and other divisions of the Government are to be adjudicated as provided by contract.

1.5.1 In becoming a Shareholder of AMSTERDAM 2.0, one also chooses citizenship in a CITY. THE CITIES are not geographically or territorially defined entities, but free associations of Shareholders. There shall be no fewer than one CITY for every 4,700 Shareholders, and in any case no fewer than 100 CITIES in total. Members of one CITY may change their citizenship at any time to that of any other CITY, without change in residence.

1.2 The Federal Legislature

1.2.10 The average Federal tax burden shall rise no higher than it to be established percentage of the average Shareholder's income, this figure to be determined or approximated by statistical methods involving no compulsory disclosure of information on the part of Shareholders.

1.3.6 It shall be the duty of the Federal Executive to refuse assent to or execution of any laws in conflict with the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0, and to grant reprieves or pardons to any person accused of violating such laws.

1.3.7 The three members of the Executive, subsequent to the first election, shall be assigned terms by lot, with one retiring at the end of the first year, another at the end of the third, and another at the end of the fifth.

1.4.9 No person shall be convicted, sentenced, or imprisoned without due process of law, including the right to trial and habeas corpus, and there shall be no detention without trial, nor shall any person either before or after trial be held incommunicado. An accused person shall be assumed innocent until proven guilty. A person who has been arrested, detained, imprisoned, tried, or sentenced either illegally or in error shall receive restitution. At every stage of criminal process, an accused shall be informed of the charges against him or her, and to the privilege of counsel. An accused who does not speak the language in which the proceedings are conducted shall be provided without expense the services of an interpreter.

1.5.2 The political constitution of each CITY shall initially be chosen by majority vote of its members; subsequent CITY laws shall be passed, and measures for enforcement determined, in accordance with the provisions of that constitution. The constitution and laws of each CITY shall be binding on its members, subject to the provision that such constitution and laws may not conflict with the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0, and that free exit and entry must always be permitted. No CITY shall have authority over persons who are not its members, unless by prior agreement with those persons or with their CITY, except insofar as is necessary to protect against aggression the rights of its members to their persons and property. The method of determining a CITY's vote on proposed Amendments to the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0 (see Section 2.1) shall be determined by the constitution or laws of that CITY.

2.2 Bill of Rights

2.2.13 No law shall establish occupational licensure, nor make or claim grants of monopoly privilege, nor restrict competition or free entry into any profession or industry, including the services of adjudication, protection, and enforcement of legitimate rights.

2.2.1 The following protections of rights shall be binding upon the CITIES and all branches of the Federal Administration. Public officials and government employees possess no special rights, immunities, or exemptions not possessed by other Shareholders, nor shall crimes against the Government of AMSTERDAM 2.0 or its officers be labeled "treason," or regarded as more serious than crimes against other organizations or individuals. Moreover, apart from the rights of suffrage, referendum initiative, and the holding of public office under the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0, which are reserved to Shareholders alone, the following rights apply to all persons equally, regardless of Shareholdership or residency, with the qualification that persons judged incompetent (e.g., young children, or the mentally ill) may have their rights suspended in order to secure those ends to which, so far as can be established, they would be likely to consent if competent; but such persons retain in full force, as do others acting on their behalf, the right to challenge in court their status as incompetent no less often than once a year, and to sue for false judgment. Every person of the age of (a) to be established number) or older shall be assumed competent, and every person under the age of (a) to be established number) shall be assumed incompetent, until proven otherwise in a Federal court. The standard of evidence necessary to prove incompetence shall be higher than the standard of evidence necessary to prove competence.

2.2.14 No person shall be convicted for violating government secrecy classifications unless the government discloses its burden of proving that the publication violated the right of privacy of those who have been coerced into revealing confidential information to government agents, or disclosed defensive military plans so as to materially impair the capability to respond to attacks; but it shall be a valid defense to such prosecution that information divulged shows that the government has violated the law.

1.2.1 The Legislature shall be composed of two houses: the Parliament, and the Negative Council.

1.2.11 All elected officials in the Federal Administration shall, of stated defense, receive for their services a compensation to be determined by the Legislature, but such compensation shall be neither increased nor diminished during the period for which they shall have been elected, and shall in any case exceed the average Shareholder's income (to be determined as in 1.2.10) by no more than the established percent. Nor shall any Federal officer receive any compensation in any year in which the Federal budget is not balanced (nor may any budget item be declared "off-budget").

1.3.8 The Legislature may by law provide for the case of removal, death, resignation, or inability of any member of the Executive, declaring what officer shall succeed to that office, and such officer shall act accordingly until the disability be removed or a new Regent shall be selected in the usual manner.

1.2.2 The Parliament shall be composed of Shareholders representing the CITIES. Each CITY, regardless of size, shall send exactly one representative to the Parliament. These Members of Parliament are to be chosen in accordance with the laws of the respective CITIES. Each Member of Parliament shall serve a seven-year term; no Member of Parliament may serve more than one term consecutively or three terms non-consecutively. Members of Parliament may be recalled in accordance with the laws of the relevant CITY.

1.2.12 The Federal laws (unlike the CITY laws) shall apply to anyone within the territory of AMSTERDAM 2.0, whether Shareholder or not.

1.2.13 The sum total of Federal laws may not exceed one million words. Any Federal laws passed after this limit has been reached, no previous laws having been repealed, are void and unlawful. Also, each Federal law, before being passed, must be read aloud, at normal speed, to a quorum of each house of the Legislature. These provisions may not be evaded by attempting to give the force of law to documents that are not Federal laws by passing Federal laws which merely refer to these documents.

1.4 The Federal Judiciary

1.4.10 The right of the people to be secure in their persons, dwellings, vehicles, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of penalty; nor shall any be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against him or herself, nor be deprived of liberty or property without due process of law. Where illegally obtained evidence is judged to be admissible in court, those who obtained it remain subject to criminal prosecution.

1.5.3 A Shareholder may be denied citizenship in a CITY. Dual or plural citizenship shall be permissible if authorized by the laws of the CITIES involved.

2.2.2 The laws of AMSTERDAM 2.0 shall apply equally to all persons regardless of gender, ethnicity, opinions, religion, national origin, or lifestyle.

2.2.3 No law shall abridge the right of each person to do as he or she chooses with his or her own person and property, so long as he or she does not interfere, with the equal right of others to do as they choose with their own persons and property.

2.2.16 The enumeration in this Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

1.2.3 The Negative Council shall be composed of Shareholders representing the Shareholders of AMSTERDAM 2.0. There shall be one Councillor for every (to be established number of) Shareholders. Half of these Councillors, the Councillors by Election, are to be chosen by majority (or plurality) vote of the Shareholders. The other half, the Councillors by Lot, are to be selected randomly from a pool of all Shareholders willing to serve. These two kinds of Councillor shall have identical voting rights. Each Councillor shall serve a seven-year term; no Councillor may serve more than one term consecutively or three terms non-consecutively. Councillors of either sort may be recalled by national referendum as detailed in 1.1.4.

1.2.14 It shall be the duty of the Federal Legislature to refuse their assent to, or to repeal, any laws in conflict with the Constitution of AMSTERDAM 2.0.

1.2.15 The deliberations of the Legislature shall be open to public view and record.

1.2.16 The Legislature may not delegate its legislative authority to any other person, body, or bureau.

1.4.1 The Federal Judiciary shall be composed of a Supreme Court and an independent judiciary.

1.5.4 Any association of (a) to be established number) or more Shareholders may constitute themselves as a new CITY under the Constitution.

2.2.4 No law shall abridge the right of persons to the peaceful control of their own bodies, nor interfere with voluntary consensual or contractual relations among persons, or their right to form cooperative ventures of any kind; nor invade the privacy of peaceful persons, nor by confiscation, expropriation, regulation, redistribution, restriction, control, or of any other means abridge the right of any person to acquire property by homestead, purchase, or gift, or to use, control, exchange, lease, sell, transfer, bequeath, dispose of, or in any manner enjoy, their property without interference, until and unless the exercise of their control infringes the freedom of others; nor shall private property be fully or partially taken for public use without the consent of, and mutually agreeable compensation to, the owner.

2.2.17 The powers not delegated to the Federal Administration by this Constitution, nor prohibited by the Constitution to the CITIES, are reserved to the CITIES respectively, or to the people.

1.2.17 Each house of the Legislature, subsequent to the first election, shall be divided by lot into three classes, as nearly equal as possible, with one class retiring at the end of the first year, another at the end of the fifth, and another at the end of the seventh. Temporary vacancies in the Negative Council may be made up by the Executive until an election can be held. Temporary vacancies in the Parliament may be made up in such manner as the laws of the relevant CITY may direct.

1.4.2 The Supreme Court shall consist of (a) to be established number of) Shareholders, and shall judge by majority vote. Appointments to the Supreme Court, barring impeachment, shall be for an indefinite term, or until such age of retirement as may be specified by law (except that legal age shall not be the age of retirement; that shall not affect the term of existing appointments), and shall be made by the Executive and confirmed by a majority vote of both houses of the Legislature.

1.4.11 The Judiciary shall have no power of compulsory witness, not of compulsory jury empanelment.

1.5.5 A CITY may dissolve itself in accordance with its own laws, unless such dissolution should bring the number of CITIES below the required number. In addition, any CITY whose citizenship falls below (a) to be established number) shall be regarded as dissolved, subject to the same qualification.

2.2.5 No law shall create a class of victimless or consensual crimes.

2.2.6 No law shall abridge the right of freedom of association; any person may associate or transact with any other person or refuse to associate or transact with any other person for any reason, and the proprietor or lawful possessor of any movable or immovable property may exclude or refuse admission to any other person, except where such property is being used to violate the rights of others.

2.2.18 The existence of a state of emergency shall not be construed to limit the individual rights, or to expand the governmental powers, herein enumerated.

'City of Cards', contribution by Joke Robaard, exhibition 'Amsterdam 2.0' in Mediamatic, Amsterdam, 22 December 2005 – 29 January 2006.

PROTAGONISTS:

- A. Relatives of former owner playing card factory Faddegon & co (1, 2);
Foundation 'Behoudt Karakter Prinseneiland' (3, 4, 5);
cardplayers bar Riviéra, Amsterdam (6,7)
- B. Model 'after 'unknown girl' by Jacob Olie, september 1872; Gemeente-archief Amsterdam (8)
- C. Musician from Benares; living in Amsterdam (9)
- D. Yogis (10,11)
- E. Frieda (12)
- F. Drowned person (13)
- G. Squash players Squash City, Amsterdam (14,15)
- H. Lawyers, van Till advocaten (16,17)
- I. Aldermen Stadsdeelraad Noord (18,19)
- J. Representatives Mondriaan Foundation, Rotterdams Art Council (20, 21)
- K. Author (22)

3.

MODELS:

- A. Theo Faddegon (1), Hans Faddegon (2);
Bram Faas (3), Bernard Hunnekink (4),
Suzan van Canon (5); Corrina Beenhakker (6), Hans Bonneveld (7)
- B. Belle Barbé (8)
- C. Sandip Bhattacharya (9)
- D. Nicoline Wijnja (10), Lara Bresser (11)
- E. Pascale Gatzen (12)
- F. Bas Medik (13)
- G. Linda Douw (14), Steffen van Nessel (15)
- H. Inez den Nijs (16), Mirjam Maris (17)
- I. Rob Post (18), Chris de Wild (19)
- J. Robert de Haas (20), Hans van Straaten (21)
- K. Tom McCarthy (22)

1.



CITIES:

- City of Cards (A)
- City of Models (B)
- Death City (C)
- Yoga City (D)
- City of Sex (E)
- City of the Drowned (F)
- Squash City (G)
- City of Justice (H)
- Functional City (I)
- City of Grants (J)
- City of Cards (K)

2.

CODES :

white: main characters
white and grey : playing-card lines (A, K)
grey: local authorities (H, I, J)
black: fictive characters (D,E,F)
stripes: subgroup (G)
yellow patch

CLOTHING-LINES

Big NO bag, collection Sang Froid, Jeroen Theunissen, 2005 (A-3)
Tie-scarfs; collection Corné Gabriëls, 2005 (A-4,5)
Historical costume, Gerritsen Kleding-verhuur, Amsterdam (B)
Kurta Payama, Indian costume (C)
Costumes for David Parker & the Bang Group, NYC; Rozema & Theunissen; (2001) (D)
Pascale Gatzen, fashion designer (E)
Private clothes

4.



- unfortunately for our anarchist - 400 different versions of enforcement. Can you imagine living in an environment with 400 different types of enforcement? 400 different types of cop? Imagine being out for a stroll with your four-year-old daughter and on the way stumbling across a public execution of a citizen of the City of Bullfighters as ordered by the City of Bullfighter's court and carefully prescribed in its criminal code. Not only are you and your daughter suddenly witness to a citizen being executed but you are witnessing an execution in the historic style of *Lingchi* or the *100 Pieces Chinese Torture*.

TMCC And the father and daughter might belong to the City of Human Rights or Anti-Executionists. So there's a clash of modes, of values or beliefs. I had a sequence in my 'dystopian' fictional response to the project where a stray dog wanders through the Vondelpark and citizens of the City of Dog Eaters want to cook it, the citizens of the City of Animists want to make friends with it and citizens from the City of Perverts want to fuck it. There's this constant colliding-together of systems in your vision, a sense that they can operate alongside one another even when they're mutually contradictory. Perhaps what you're describing is not *anarchy* but *agonistics*, in the sense in which Jean-Francois Lyotard uses the word.

MN Agonistic is indeed the right term. Anarchy, in a way, gives us the promise that everybody can be the same and equal in a wild system, while agonistics, in a total other way, set an order where everybody can be totally different in a totally ruled system. This is the most crucial point of *Amsterdam 2.0*, where we have to consider how an agonistic system - a system of radical tolerance - can work practically.

PP I agree, *Amsterdam 2.0* is a system of radical tolerance. But what does the competitive tension of *agonistics* have to do with what we are talking about? To be honest I don't see the cities as competing with each other. But then again I'm not at all familiar with Lyotard's use of the word.

TMCC I've heard this term, 'radical tolerance', bandied around before in relation to this project. I wonder how you, Maurice and Paul, would understand this term from your respective architectural and artistic points of view.

PP Ah, there's the rub. Radical tolerance means a world where each party (or in this case city) is tolerantly fundamental.

MN You can only talk about tolerance when you are sovereign. You can only talk about radical tolerance when the idea of sovereignty is carried out fully. As an artist or architect it's the task to produce singular objects or works,

which produces sovereignty. So by creating a city (for instance) which is singular, you create sovereignty, and therefore parties who are tolerantly fundamental.

TMCC Tolerantly fundamental or fundamentally tolerant? Are subscribers to the City of Fascists (to take an obvious example) there because they share their belief in totalitarianism with a belief in plurality, or do they aspire to make every city a City of Fascists?

PP Not fundamentally tolerant. Tolerantly fundamental. You could say that our world today - our world of late-capitalist ideals - requires each of us to be fundamentally tolerant. *Amsterdam 2.0* requires something different: citizens of cities are obligated by law to tolerate citizens of other cities but 'at home' within their own legal system no tolerance is required.

TMCC You've described *Amsterdam 2.0* as a return to Amsterdam's first principles: a kind of dynamic capitalist hub that allows for a convergence of radically diverse systems under one regulating superstructure. And this superstructure, in the original version of Amsterdam, was always an economic one, essentially: the laws were there to facilitate good trading - not the other way round. Does this aspect continue through to your new version of Amsterdam, or is the relationship reversed?

PP I don't think 'tolerance' was ever formally embodied within Dutch seventeenth-century law - and if it was I think it would have more likely been formalized in church law - but tolerance was certainly celebrated as a cultural phenomenon. And yes, there would have been some awareness that this shared and transmitted cultural rule, this *meme*, tolerance, facilitated good trade. Another idea which has always intrigued me but which I've never been able to follow up is that tolerance naturally emerges from one of the tenets of Calvinism, namely one should not interfere with another's moral dilemma. Or perhaps an even more radical idea: tolerance emerges from the notion of predestined or unconditional 'election'. But to answer your question: while these historical precedents may play a role in the shaping of Free-Trade City or Neo-Calvinist City they certainly wouldn't apply to all of *Amsterdam 2.0*'s cities.

TMCC I'm still intrigued by this dual concept of being 'at home' and simultaneously accommodating radical otherness. This goes back further than Calvinism or the foundation of the first Amsterdam - it goes right back to the origins of Western thought, to the Greeks. In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, Athens takes in Orestes despite the fact that he has murdered his mother, something that

would seem abhorrent to all their laws, and this gesture forms the bedrock of Athenian democracy - that is, of democracy itself. I wonder if, fundamentally, *Amsterdam 2.0* isn't a meditation on the notion of democracy - one that divorces it from the neo-liberal impasse it finds itself in the world today and returns it to its radical origins.

PP Do you honestly think that any *single* democratic system, even your bedrock Athenian democracy, can truly accommodate absolute otherness? When the Athenians took in Orestes they assumed he'd already killed his mother, that his mother killing was in his past and that he had no more mothers to kill. But what if, while staying in Athens, Orestes kept killing his mother? What if he killed his mother five times a day? What I'm saying is of course temporally impossible - at least within the temporal world most of us inhabit - but here's my point: no system can accommodate extreme or radical otherness without itself being deeply disrupted and breaking down. Now of course we can say that's fine, that's change, that's paradigm shift. But cultural systems aren't science. Have you ever watched Nicolas Roeg's *The Man who Fell to Earth*?

TMCC Yes, it's a great film. What's the connection?

PP I find the film terribly disturbing. In the film the other arrives, in this case the other being an entity from outside of the system. I think your phrase 'radical other' applied here would be completely justified. And what do we do? Nothing. Nothing except kidnap the entity and surgically alter it in such a way so that it can never prove that it is not human. That's what I would call a warm welcome.

TMCC In a way that film is like Kafka's *The Hunger Artist*: keep the stranger in a cage because we don't know what to do with him. This ties in with what Maurice was saying about sovereignty. In the *Man who Fell to Earth* example, our sovereignty relies on suppressing the other's difference. But in the best philosophical formulations of ethics - Emmanuel Levinas's, notably - ethics is born of a fundamental interruption by the other. I am ethical not because I am sovereign and tolerant, but because I am confronted and shaken down, left incomplete, by the other's absolute otherness. The other doesn't have to explain or justify himself: all he says (according to Levinas) is *me voici*, 'Here I am' - kind of like a weird neighbour you pass on the staircase every morning. Maybe your creation - *Amsterdam 2.0* - is ultimately a radical reflection on ethics.

PP Maybe. I certainly like Levinas's conception of ethics being born when faced by the absolute otherness of *any other*.

MN The 'other' is definitely not a stranger, but someone you can't 'see', can't comprehend. The other is maybe not the man who fell to earth, but (as Tom suggests) the neighbour next to you who is cursing, or smoking, or dressed in a burka. What can you do when your belief system, your city rules, tell you that cursing, or smoking, or being unrecognizable is totally out of the question? In our present moral and ethical law system there is no solution, other than a violent one (take the simple example of the unsolvable situation between the Palestinians and the Jews). But when you embody your city rules in an amoral law system then there is only a difference of belief systems. Of course there still will be fights and violent situations, but they will be short, because conflicts are simply too expensive. This is the point where the rational - or economic as you say - Dutch attitude in the seventeenth century maybe coincides with our project.

PP As I understand Levinas *every other* is sufficiently *other* to bring an ethical relation about, to confront and shake oneself down - no? If this is so you could also argue that ethics emerges from a sovereign position, where one feels neither the need to assimilate others nor the need to separate themselves from them. Or am I mistaken?

TMCC The liberal-humanist take on Levinas would try to maintain the sovereignty of the subject who cohabits harmoniously with the other. But what I think is really compelling about Levinas is that he stages his arguments in the most extreme and violent of situations: torture, murder, being 'taken hostage' - these limit-situations in which sovereignty breaks down. The ethical moment for him - the *real* ethical moment - is so extreme that it is almost unthinkable. Which, if I recall correctly, is a term you both used earlier in this interview: *Amsterdam 2.0* is characterized by 'unthinkability'. Maurice talked about this unthinkability in terms of a blind spot within the present, a blind spot which we inhabit, invisible. I want to return to this: I find it very intriguing. Is *Amsterdam 2.0* an attempt to 'see' that blind spot, or to *be* seen at it, in it?

MN It is an attempt to start to live in it, and therefore indeed to be seen in it. But it's not an attempt to 'see' it, to see some kind of blind spot. First of all, we cannot see *Amsterdam 2.0* because it's beyond humanistic perspectives, beyond human ethical point of views. Second, the other - your future, your death, your constellation, your neighbour, your dog, your child, your building, your art work - cannot look at us, because *we* are the blind spot. Everything that we produce enters that blind spot. We only can construct a set of rules trying to unfold this 'unthinkable' new paradigm and to be seen by the other. Maybe that is the beauty of *Amsterdam 2.0*: a paroxysm of visibility, an attempt to make us visible to the other, in stead of trying to cope with him.

Exhibition 'Amsterdam 2.0' in Mediamatic, Amsterdam, 22 December 2005 –
29 January 2006. Photo Joke Robaard





YOUR
MOTHER.

Joke Hermes

Not a Comfortable Situation to Be In

*How Politically Effective is the Work of
Martijn Engelbregt?*

Joke Hermes lectures on the formation of public opinion at the InHolland University. The editors of *Open* invited her to write about the political effectiveness of the work of Martijn Engelbregt (www.egbg.nl), an artist who systematically explores the functioning of democracy in his projects. Her conclusion is that popular culture achieves more than art in terms of influencing the free formation of public opinion. For the moment, Engelbregt's work is reserved for political and cultural *cognoscenti*.

Woe betide anyone who unexpectedly becomes involved in a project by Martijn Engelbregt. You receive a seemingly official questionnaire in your letterbox that asks if you are aware of any illegal aliens in your neighbourhood. Or someone takes a photo of you in a gallery where you yourself are taking photos of other people. You fill in the questionnaire in good faith, even though the questions are somewhat strange. Perhaps you are pleased that the government is at last really tackling the issue of all those foreigners in our country. You arrive at the place where the photos are hanging and you want to see whether you look good. Tough luck! You've been bamboozled. It wasn't the government that asked you to be a snitch. You are made to look a bit of a fool. What's worse, your photo is displayed back-to-front and is only recognizable from the time you walked in. Very funny! First you realize how easily you allow yourself to be drawn into acquiescing with the xenophobic logic that characterizes the immigration policy of our government – and then that you always simply think that everything revolves around you in this world.

The work of Martijn Engelbregt is controversial. Using drastic means he makes us – wittingly or unwittingly – feel how we assent to the control of the state and big business on the pretext of defending freedom and democracy. Though the circulation of quasi-official forms is not exactly the done thing, Engelbregt's intentions speak of a well-nigh excruciating political integrity. In his work, art functions as a bastion against the seduction and corruption of twenty-first-century consumer society. The question is whether art lives up to such a task. Can art be politically effective? Can art projects change how we perceive the world? Do they contribute to the free formation of public opinion?

The response to the question of whether art plays a political role of consequence is simple: sometimes. The Belgian struggle for independence in 1830, according to Wikipedia for example, broke out after a performance of the opera *La Muette de Portici* by Auber. *The deaf-mute* recounts the tale of the Neopolitans who revolted against the Spanish occupiers in the seventeenth century. Legend has it that the people of Brussels, singing *Amour sacré de la patrie*, spilled into the streets and ran riot. Art, or culture, was therefore the direct instigation for the Belgian uprising. Historians like to remind us that the prevailing economic crisis also played an important role, not to mention the exceptionally weak political performance of king William I of the Netherlands.

There are also political decisions that have been cause for symbolic protest, thus lending the protest a cultural overtone. When NATO bombed Belgrade, the small target badges worn by the city's inhabitants on their lapels – as well as by other sympathizers, including foreign journalists – were a form of art as much as a political indictment. The Stars of David that Danish citizens wore en masse during the Second World War, in protest against the Nazi edict that Jews must make their identity known in this manner, frustrated the occupier. This shows that the cultural domain can provide powerful weapons with which to assail the legitimacy and

'Persoonlijke registraties' ('Personal registrations': are you happy? no, fortunately; yes, unfortunately), exhibitions of photographs in Voorheen het Archief, The Hague, 1998. Photo Andrea Stultiëns



quiet acceptance of (totalitarian) power. The resistance is effective and it is moving, because it takes courage, but primarily because it is borne by people without much power or political say.

That is also why the story of the Belgian uprising is so attractive. *La Muette de Portici* is no longer performed very much. It must be one heck of a melodrama, described in textbooks as an example of ‘National Romanticism’. It was performed in a bona fide theatre and thus in a certain sense deserves the label ‘art’, but it actually has more in common with the gypsy girl with a tear in the corner of her eye than with abstraction, reflection or alienation – qualities one would sooner attribute to art.

Seduction and Surprise

Culture in the broad sense includes art, but art does not correspond with culture. There is indeed a tradition that champions the political and civic interests of culture. This tradition can be found in ‘cultural studies’, a branch of scholarship that originated in Britain (not to be confused with ‘cultural studies’ in the Netherlands that focus more on the management of cultural institutions). The crux of this tradition is its serious consideration of everyday practices as a locus for the creation of meanings. Culture is understood in the broad sense. Art belongs to it, but is equal to Mills and Boon’s novels, sentimental operas, burlesque or punk music. The third important element is power. Cultural studies understands culture as a constellation of power differences – class differences, for example, but also differences in sex, ethnicity or age.

From the perspective of cultural studies, Engelbregt’s work is primarily of interest to an elite. His work does not connect with the everyday experience of ‘ordinary people’ (whoever they may be), which is a key precondition for grasping what the world means from their perspective. It does not break a lance for ‘lowly’ forms of culture but pokes fun at the commercialized practices of cultural institutions and government, and it mocks the all too convenient pinpointing of scapegoats for everything that is wrong with our society. Engelbregt’s illegal aliens project is art that does not attempt to promote understanding or thrash out an issue; it is art that indicts. It operates on two levels: it insults people who do not deserve it and subsequently – over their heads, via debate conducted in person and in the media – asks attention for the degeneration of society, for the blinkers that we put on, for how we willingly allow ourselves to be taken in.

Politically effective culture, as in the above examples, gives ordinary people the power to resist. Within cultural studies there is a prevailing view that popular culture is also able to achieve this. ‘Fictional rehearsal’, for example, is a concept that refers to how we are free to ‘rehearse’ vital questions following the example of characters in television drama.¹ Soap

1. On Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘fictional rehearsal’ in relation to soap opera, see John Mepham, ‘The ethics of quality television’, in Geoff Mulgan (ed.), *The Question of Quality* (London, BFI Publishing, 1990). See the same essay for Mepham’s concept of ‘usable stories’.

operas can be included in this category. The genre provides us with ‘usable stories’, stories or story lines that we can use as a mirror. They provide an opportunity to reflect on who we are and who we want to be. Ordinary television culture is usually not terribly meaningful, but it can serve as an informal teacher.² In the space of about half a century, television has become the medium of all those groups who have little access to art, culture or the education system, without it wholly excluding the more privileged. Television is not a medium that makes or keeps people stupid; it teaches us a great deal about difference and equality. Television introduces viewers to many different worlds and people. We have become ‘good neighbours’ of groups we would never encounter in the flesh.³

2. On television as an everyday teacher see John Hartley, *Uses of Television* (London, Routledge, 1999).

3. See John Hartley, op. cit., for his arguments about the knowledge class and the good neighbourliness that television teaches us.

The commercial logic in popular culture seduces us, and from time to time it surprises us in order to keep us in suspense. For example, the first season of *Big Brother* (1999-2000), which originated in the Netherlands, unleashed a torrent of discussion, both in the media and on the street, in the football club canteen and on the Internet. Marianne van den Boomen has described how discussions on two ‘usenet sites’ (nl.actueel.big-brother and alt.nl.tv.big-brother) demonstrate the formation of opinion in action: ‘In a stream of about 200 postings a day, people dealt with all the ins and outs of the TV programme *Big Brother* in this forum. Vicious rumours and slanging matches appeared in the newsgroups, but also exceptionally acute psychological analyses of the house’s occupants. . . . [I]t is not only great thinkers, men and women of letters, journalists and stars who spur people to think about sense, meaning and morality via the media – “ordinary people” like the *Big Brother* housemates can do that as well. And perhaps more effectively, because they are more recognizable and more accessible. You can mirror yourself in them, measure yourself against them. And that is what people did – they set their own tales of infatuation, divorce, cancer and foster children alongside those of Karin, Sabine, Bart and Willem. And they did not do this in private, in their own minds, but publicly, in open communication with others.’⁴

4. Marianne van den Boomen, *Leven op het Net: De sociale betekenis van virtuele gemeenschappen* [Life on the Net: The social significance of virtual communities] (Amsterdam, Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek/Dutch Centre for Political Participation, 2000), 26-27, see <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~boom/boek/2cultuur.htm>> (date of access: December 2005).

Examples like these show that simply condemning commercial culture as a culture for the masses that ‘makes them stupid’ and ‘keeps them stupid’ is not an option. They also demonstrate that there is more public and semi-public formulation of opinion than we realize. They show that taking what people do with everyday and popular culture seriously is important and potentially productive. Engelbregt’s work, conversely, does not seek points of contact with us as public. It does not attempt to seduce and surprise, nor to validate and alienate. It wants to shake us to our senses. If we were actually living in a nightmare that would be salutary, but that is not the case.

Questionnaire concerning the willingness to report illegal aliens in the Netherlands, part of the Regoned (Registratie Orgaan Nederland) project. See www.regoned.nl

Registratie Orgaan Nederland is bezig met een inventarisatie van illegalen in Nederland. Ook als u niet illegaal bent wijzen wij u erop dat u dit formulier dient te retourneren. Geef antwoord op de vragen en stuur het formulier per omgaande retour.

*Aankruisen (vragen op u niet betrekking is) *Dit is vragen op niet verplicht
Indien u het Nederlandse taal niet machtig bent, maak dan een foto te maken bij uw toezicht 0-10000

Aangifte

Bent u legaal? ja nee Geslacht* m v

Voornaam*

Achternaam

Nationaliteit

Adres

Postcode

Woonplaats*

E-mail adres*

Van hoeveel mensen in uw omgeving weet u dat zij legaal zijn?

Wat bent u voorhen door legaal? maximaal 5 personen mogelijk

vriend werkgever kennis familie verhuurder Markt

buurman /-vrouwe* anders, nl.

Van hoeveel mensen in uw omgeving vermoedt u dat zij legaal zijn?

Wat bent u voorhen door (vermoedelijke) legaal? maximaal 5 personen mogelijk

vriend werkgever kennis familie verhuurder Markt

buurman /-vrouwe* anders, nl.

Wilt u deze (vermoedelijke) legaal aangeven? ja nee

Waarom doet u deze aangifte?

Ik verklaar deze aangifte duidelijk, strof en zonder voorbehoud te hebben ingevuld. datum

handtekening

Art is tied to profit-driven financiers to a much lesser extent than popular culture. If I decry a political analysis in Engelbregt's work, then that is down to me as a spectator. If I think that Engelbregt is teasing me when I end up in a 'loop' by following an Internet link that looks intriguing (a project he devised for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*), then that does not detract from the project's autonomy.⁵ Asking what his work achieves politically is therefore wholly inappropriate. The question about the 'uses' of art is, after all, one that fails to acknowledge the very singularity of art. If Engelbregt's work is politically effective, then that is almost in spite of itself.

5. Other people had more patience with *de Volkskrant* link and could see how long the other visitors had waited and how long it took before they reacted.

Engelbregt wants to conduct research, posit questions and present the results. Forming opinions and greater political awareness are not his primary goal. But does his work achieve that nonetheless? The examples mentioned at the start of this article, in which art and politics mutually reinforce each other, suggest that this is unlikely if you primarily get in people's hair. Anyone who has been the subject of a tirade of abuse from a stand-up comedian, showered in bits of chewed apple sputtered out by a cabaret artist, or has experienced the sound and smell of escaping gas at an avant-garde theatre performance will remember the disapproval, revulsion, shock and fear followed by the liberating laughter, but a broadened world outlook hardly comes into it. Art is politically effective if, besides analysis and critique, it imbues self-confidence and offers a bit of encouragement.

Martijn Engelbregt does not, on my part, need to go and compose any sentimental operas or revolutionary anthems, but if his work were, for example, to reach me via television – and then preferably via drama as the BBC or its Dutch counterpart, the VPRO, like to make it – then I would probably think it was wonderful. Programmes like *Yes, Minister*, *The Office*, or a pseudo-docudrama by the Dutch producer and performer Arjan Ederveen offer a mixture of absurdism and politics that gives pause for thought as well as for smirks (and sometimes grimaces). As befits 'good' art, these programmes prompt reflection. At the same time, the viewers sit at a safe distance from the conspiracy. We are the ones who have chosen to watch. The description in the TV guide or the reputation of the programme's makers means that we knowingly choose to be surprised and wrong-footed. If we are the target of a 'practical joke', then that should not surprise us. The following day, a great many of us will talk about the programme with a great deal of emotion.

There is no need for EGBG, the registry research bureau established by Engelbregt, to be like *Candid Camera*, a television programme with a hidden camera from the 1970s and '80s, or like some of the scenes in MTV's more recent *Jackass*. The only issue here is whether something is 'acceptable' or 'beyond the pale'. Participants eating a goldfish from the bowl on the counter at a butcher's shop (a *Candid Camera* scene) did not, to my recollection, spark a debate about animal rights

or about the means employed by shopkeepers in order to increase turnover: ‘A slice of *saucisson*, madam?’ Engelbregt could indeed toy with questions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘truth’ in a manner that invites participation in discussion about the issue itself instead of exclusively about the means used, or – worse still – in a manner that plays people off against each other.

Losing the Plot

In his recent project *de Dienst* (‘the Department’), an Internet-based project to select a work of art for a new annex to the Lower House of Dutch Parliament (see www.de-dienst.nl), he does actually stimulate the forming of opinion. Though I have become a wary visitor, there is something poignant about this project. Anyone in the Netherlands could submit proposals for a work of art and was able to vote for a favourite: democratic art. If I extrapolate the personnel costs, then Engelbregt charged a fee of 320 euros a day for his personal input. After tax, that is less than a cleaner would earn cash in hand. The project has, moreover, already been running much longer than planned, without any increase in the budget; it can hardly be a money-spinner. Once the project is completed, the workspace will be compacted, ‘crushed’ like cars at a scrap yard, and exhibited at chest height on a pole. Discussions are conducted in the web-based forum, about the budget and the highly coincidental ‘election’ of Engelbregt’s own work to the top nine winning entries, among other things. While some people bravely speak their mind, the ensuing reactions reveal how others think that is pretty stupid. We, the Dutch, are clearly not terribly adroit as shapers of public opinion.

Since it is not television but art, I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do with the amateurish photos of artworks and events, with the background colour of the website that looks to me like camouflage green. Whereas with earlier work by Engelbregt I was under the impression that the scales were meant to fall from my eyes, here I lose the plot. Neither the works of art themselves, the slogan of the day or the discussion on the site are very fruitful, which means this work is lacking a clear-cut goal to an even greater extent than his abovementioned work. Credulity and naivety are not rebuked in this domain. Oddly enough, I then actually seem to have a greater liking for the illegal aliens project. There, at least, I knew where I stood: it was about stupid, unsuspecting endorsement of the status quo. It involves the tacit rubber-stamping of the machinations of a state that is restricting more and more freedoms and systematically undermining the democratic aspect of society. In addition, the earlier work allowed me to angrily argue that ‘the unsuspecting’ value their personal worldview – however ignorant – or to state that Engelbregt’s work is art for our own benefit, a complaint against short-sightedness and political inanity. A complaint that was understood by only a small group of ‘the enlightened’.

Fifth proposal of nine artworks, to be produced for the 'logement' (a new annex) of the Dutch House of Commons: 'jullie zijn hier voor ons' ('you are here for us'), by Liset van Dommelen, 2005.



De Dienst (The Service), see www.dedienst.nl. Photo Heleen Klopper



Incidental Rather than Structural

Can Engelbregt's work be of any use in the formation of public opinion, and in that respect does it function politically? Can his art projects truly reveal something about contemporary society? And if so, is it then also possible to translate it into debate and the formulation of critique, or indeed of a Utopia? Does it make us reflect on what connects us, or indeed divides us? My answer is fairly brief in this respect: it is old-fashioned avant-garde art. Straightforward social analysis is translated into projects that inventively twist and pervert rules and expectations. If the projects do serve as a prod to formulate an opinion, then they are a mental exercise for political and cultural adepts, and – in spite of themselves – they offer the pleasure of self-satisfaction for those who 'get' it. Sometimes I'm a member of this club, for instance if I read in the texts of *de Dienst* how Saskia Noorman (MP for the PvdA, the Dutch labour party) cheerfully announces that there is absolutely no guarantee that the 'elected' artwork will actually be realized; the presidium of the Parliament's Lower Chamber will decide this. A satisfactory answer, it seems to me, to Engelbregt's question of whether art and democracy can go together. If I had still been able to vote, then it would have been for artwork number 5, which bears the slogan 'You are Here for Us' as its title. Even if the people's representatives would probably not understand this as a cutting observation.

Meanwhile, I have bowed to the logic of Engelbregt's work. Yes, it shows how society functions, but even I seem to contribute to the exaggeration of differences between those with cultural capital and those without, which is not what I want to do. Engelbregt extends an explicit invitation to take part in discussion on the website of *de Dienst* and anyone can act as a moderator, but nobody does. The website is an open medium and the discussion on the site suggests it is very open, but the lack of clarity about status and structure means it is not. Increasing the democratic quality of our society is an art in itself. Art proper contributes something to this more incidentally than structurally, especially since all the arts, including that of the formation of opinion and discussion, demands skills that must be cherished and propagated, and we cannot take these skills for granted.

Lonnie van Brummelen
and Siebren de Haan

Open Letter: Call of the Wild

In their work Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan make use of film, texts and exhibitions to explore the limits of the public domain and to investigate the relations between art and its context. They wrote an *Open Letter* to the art committee of Zwolle municipal council in response to a commission for an ‘observation’. In their letter they examine the hidden preconditions behind contemporary site-specific art practice and challenge the committee to tolerate their objections as a site-specific contribution to the debate.

CALL OF THE WILD

#

Open Letter



Dear committee,

You have recently offered us a small-scale art commission on the recommendation of Arnoud Holleman. When we discussed this commission further, it became clear that it was part of a pilot project aimed at achieving a new form of art in the public space. The customary site-specific object art apparently no longer fitted in with the contemporary dynamics of your city. Zwolle is one of the few large towns in the Netherlands that has preserved its medieval structure with surrounding moat and city walls kept largely intact. It has done so by cherishing its remains, rebuilding or evoking them in post-modern retro architecture. Within this historical contour a compact inner city has been created in which old and new coexist. Although Zwolle has become a large urban sprawl, many residents remain attached to the urban core and this is where the majority of cultural and economic activities still take place. To prevent further pressure on the resources of the inner city, the council is encouraging moving such activities from the centre to the periphery. The pilot project for art in the public space is, as we understand it, an attempt to put this spatial concept into practice. This new form of public art should not annex but examine the urban space of Zwolle. Within this context the choice of subject is left to the artist. In this sense it is a 'free' commission.

On our first visit to your beautiful provincial city, one lane of the ring road was temporarily closed. Curved rusted steel plates floated over the asphalt. It looked like a new version of Serra's controversial *Tilted Arc*, but it turned out that they were building an extra insulating flange behind the already existing concrete noise barrier.¹ Does this double noise barrier, well outside the old city boundaries, perhaps represent the new enlarged identity of Zwolle? By coincidence, some weeks later, during an exploration of the outer borders of Europe we stumbled on one of the mythical models for city walls; the double fifteen-metre high, eight-metre thick Venetian walls of Famagusta. Famagusta is a fortified city in the Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus. In 1570 these ramparts resisted the siege of an army of 200,000 Turks for an entire year. At first the structure served as a fortification but when the battle reached a crisis point the Greeks and Venetians present in the city blew up part of it to crush the enemy beneath the stones. Although a few hundred Turkish soldiers were indeed killed, Famagusta was immediately taken through the breach in its walls.² A noise barrier reinforced with an ornamental wall resembling an artwork that was once rejected by the public because it divided an open space; and a wall of defence that was demolished as a last resort. In the twentieth century physical barriers might still be dismissed as anachronistic, but in the new century of fortification and security aesthetics they have become pertinent once more. A study of city walls seemed appropriate.

In recent years we have produced artworks and exhibitions in relative autonomy. We assume that you did not approach us as ‘aesthetic suppliers’, producing works tailored to a given context, but that you have invited us to respond to your commission with our specific expertise from an independent position. Artistic freedom lies in the awareness of the limitations present everywhere, to cite Robert Smithson.³ During the preparations however it became clear to us that the conditions of the commission undermine any critical stance, thus making it impossible for us to develop a work. In this letter we attempt to explain our objections.

You have chosen not to place your art budget at the disposal of a single artist to make a large work, but to split it up into smaller resources to benefit a number of small-scale exemplary draft commissions. The advantages of diversity and a wider scope apparently outweigh the risk of fragmentation. In your proposal these small art commissions are reduced to ‘observations’. As outsiders, artists are expected to observe something unique in the context of Zwolle and share this with the public by means of a dematerialised artwork (a photograph, video, document or performance). The documents and curiosa that the artists collect and produce during their working process will in the end be archived in a ‘Wunderkammer’; a capsule designed by Kim Adams in the renewed and extended Historical Centre Overijssel. But first the observations will be presented in an event in the public space of Zwolle.

We explore in our work the boundaries of the public space. However for us the representation of the public space is as much connected with the institutionally conditioned inside of art as it is with the specific sites where the images have been recorded. For us the dislocation of exterior recordings to the interior of art is a necessary movement. How can any reflective exchange be attained otherwise? Maybe the best way to explain this is with a second reference to Smithson, and specifically to his *site-non-site* installations, which seem to have as their theme this shuttling back and forth between the inside and outside. In these works photographic and filmic records of sites; samples of the raw materials found there; and layered, associative reflections on his location scouting are compiled in a white-cube setting. The representation of the site that has been explored on the non-site of the white cube requires the viewer to engage in a constant mental movement back and forth. This movement between the inside and outside does not bridge the gap, but discloses the distance between these spheres and thus expresses the relativity of the human representation of the exterior. With the overlap that you propose, an observation of the urban exterior presented in that same exterior space, the distance between presence and representation is missing.⁴ Are you not concerned that the overlap of presence and representation will mislead the

observer? Is it not suggested in this way, that the observation simply identifies the site? It may be that your ideas about site specificity, dematerialisation and the impermanence of art are not only prompted by lack of space, but that you also hope to relate to tendencies within art itself. After all, the production of art objects seems obsolete in a time where performance, video and photography dominate the art practice. Has not the materially saleable art object been replaced by the transitory happening for decades? Is the dematerialisation of art not one of the by artists most well tried anti-establishment strategies to break with the capitalist production of commodities? Like for example the Situationists at the beginning of the 1960s, who attempted to shake civilians from their dream state with confrontational events in the public space, striving to unleash a revolt against the emerging society of the spectacle. Although the revolution failed to appear, the Situationist strategies did expose a moral bankruptcy. A maximized production process had resulted in enormous profits, but it seemed as though both workers and capitalists suffered from a lack of motivation, since neither received any recognition for their work. Division of labour and working for wages caused workers to morally disconnect. While the capitalists lacked social prestige. Over the subsequent period capitalism appears to have appropriated the strategies of artistic engagement in order to combat its moral deficit from within. A capitalism of goods, that exploited and alienated, was able to transform itself into an experiential economy satisfying people's needs for social identity.⁵ The huge commitment that capitalism requires of its participants is obtained by actively involving them so that they can identify with their role in the system.⁶ Instead of purely functional goods, companies offer 'carriers of concepts and affects' that represent collective identities in a society in which traditional ties are disintegrating. Even local authorities attempt to market their cities as unique and desirable identities. *Connecting people; Get involved; Come in as guests, leave as a family; iThink therefore iMac; I amsterdam.*⁷

The revival of the happening of the 1960s in the art of the 1990s appears to have anticipated this new Identity capitalism. With public manifestations artists attempted to develop new attitudes to cope with progressing alienation and uprooting.⁸ Artists sublimated again Marx's idea that "reality is nothing more than what we do together". They tried to create new temporary collectives by replacing the passive, detached viewing of objects with an intense interactive communal experience of events. However can participation and collective experiences still be considered as artistic strategies of resistance, now that capitalism has made them its core business? In the present phase of capitalism art still seems to search for an 'outside' in a world where, as described above, every outside is incorporated. Why are art projects that enter the public arena

still so much in vogue? Is the boom of site-specific projects and biennials obsessing the art world for some years now, merely sprouting from capitalist profiling aspirations?⁹ Lyrical metaphors by artistic initiators also testify to the high intellectual expectations of these ‘new’ utopian stations, as realms that lie “beyond the administered world” where “curiosity and the desire to discover suffice as a passport.”¹⁰ How does this ‘call of the wild’ maintain her critical aura? Does an art project on location as a capsule of site specificity perhaps represent a double exit from the enclosing forces of both art institutions and capital?

To explore this exit potential, it is perhaps enlightening to briefly digress to the most recent Istanbul Biennial. This 9th Istanbul Biennial, under the artistic direction of Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, presents itself with the tautological title *Istanbul*, thus making use of an almost analogous Identity strategy to the city of Amsterdam’s promotion campaign, titled *I amsterdam*. It perhaps seems far-fetched to connect a project in Zwolle with the prestigious biennial of a vast metropolis such as Istanbul, but it is less strange than it seems. Like the project in Zwolle, this biennial aims to “reveal the city itself (by means of the artworks) to both residents and visitors.”¹¹ Moreover Istanbul has at its own initiative entered a partnership with a Dutch provincial city in the exhibition *EindhovenIstanbul*.¹² Istanbul presents itself as the new model for biennials, breaking open the closed circuit of established art with its culture of stars, conservation and conventions.¹³ This biennale would also be able to escape the spectacle of the culture industry by retreating to low-profile locations. With its alternative approach *Istanbul* aims to recover the support of the public that is thought to feel let down by the alliance that art has entered into with the market. Potential visitors are seduced with the promise that demanding, time consuming video works are omitted, and that only artworks offering ‘immediate intimacy, desire, aesthetic satisfaction, idealism and personal fulfilment’ are programmed.¹⁴ Seduced by these tempting reports and won over by offers of cheap flights, we decided to visit this biennial. Despite its rhetoric of ‘no city marketing’ and ‘escaping tourist industry’ Istanbul became our first experience as culture tourists: subjects with ‘purchasing power’, stimulating the local economy by booking flights, taking taxis, staying in hotels and eating in restaurants. And we were not alone. In the biennial venues we saw mainly Western European tourists (like us) and well-dressed twenty-something female cosmopolitans from Istanbul’s new suburbs. Local residents were noticeably absent. One artist had installed spotlights in the dark alleys for the local shoeshine boys, but even they stayed away. An artist who lives in the neighbourhood explained that the admission was too high for most residents. On top of that they were too class-conscious to actually visit the exhibition. *Istanbul* announces not without euphoria that for the first time the biennial has





abandoned the tourist centre of Aya Sophia and other oriental historic buildings and moved to 'ordinary', less exotic sites in the districts Beyoglu and Galata. To emphasize the new direction, the unknown venues are presented as atmospherically interchangeable backdrops.¹⁵ Specific historical background information is omitted, as the curators state, "We approach this area from left field so to speak, eliminating any reference to this semi-colonial period."¹⁶ Beyoglu and Galata are middle-class neighbourhoods, located in the European part of Istanbul with plenty of late-nineteenth century architecture, shopping arcades, hotels and embassies. The city council attempts to market this district as Pera, the traditional name for the far side (of the Bosphorus). This name also refers to the Pera house: the still functioning British Consulate building, a remnant of Istanbul's imperial past.¹⁷ These references are supposed to evoke the cosmopolitan, historical greatness of the city. In our hotel room we found a bilingual glossy with an introduction by the mayor, praising the local hotels, shops, cultural sites and the new image of the district. The magazine celebrates the Istanbul Biennial as the "most important artistic event of 2005", comparable only with the Venice biennial. Despite all its strategies, it seems Istanbul has not been able to entirely escape city marketing, but perhaps this pipe dream is only attainable in a biennial without visitors.¹⁸

A more important question might be in what ways art benefits from this 'Istanbul-centric' model. The exhibition is comprised of two parts. One part shows works representing other urban locations. In addition artists who were familiar with the local context have been invited to respond to the site Istanbul with a new work. Lengthy artist-residencies, instead of brief visits, were intended to ensure that the works are firmly embedded in the city. Istanbul's marginal position on the edge of the Western world allows the city to stay beyond the range of the capitalist control system, and will "charge the works with a stronger meaning."¹⁹ Although the curators insist emphatically that, "it is important for the artists to have free space to negotiate their own position", institutional critique is almost absent as an artistic strategy.²⁰ Some works engage intelligently with the specific context of the city of Istanbul, for instance Michel Blum's speculative life story of a Jewish, Marxist-Feminist, who is said to have long been the mistress of the irreproachable Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). Or Solmaz Shabazi's architectural video report of an exodus that the average biennial visitor otherwise would not see to the many new gated communities in the suburbs and satellite towns around Istanbul. With the exception of Maria Eichhorn, however, there was no work that paid any attention to the institutional context of the biennial. Would the biennial not be interested in the ideas of artists about the conditions persuading them to produce more site-specific works of art? Or do artists have no interest in the condition of a relocated biennial that whisks away semi-colonial connotations and prescribes the subject,

purpose and target group of their artistic activities? Have they accepted a biennial to pose as an opener of the closed-off art circuit? Do they find it self-evident for a biennial to avoid city marketing to win back the public's trust?

The absence of critical reflection by artists on the biennial project has been compensated for by *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World, Writings from the 9th Istanbul Biennial*, the "critical reader dedicated to the conceptual framework of the biennial." This reader offers a range of theoretical texts that do not concretely discuss the specific artworks shown in the biennial, but address general developments in society and oppositional strategies in art and culture. *The Coming Community* by Giorgio Agamben is presented as the programmatic text, the conceptual outline of the biennial. Curiously the organizers do not expand on that other than noting that the text is "a hard one to fully comprehend."²¹ The organisation of the Biennial would thus appear to have taken over the artist's critical task only to contract it out to specialist critics. This transfer is indirectly visible in Maria Eichhorn's video representation of her much-debated contribution to the 4th Istanbul Biennial of 1995. In spite of obstruction by the fundamentalist mayor at the time, she put up an empty billboard on Taksim; one of the main public squares in Istanbul and invited various Turkish oppositional and sub-cultural groups to display their posters.²² Drawing on interviews with production staff and film fragments recorded at the time, the video exposes the great lengths the biennial organization had to go, to ensure that her work was implemented. Time and again one of the many local authorities judged they had jurisdiction over this public forum and removed the billboard. The documentary thus exposes the production relations of Eichhorn's previous site-specific work: the artist proposes an intervention by creating an open space for criticism, but the concrete negotiations and contesting of the space are carried out by the biennial organization, who made a great effort to obtain the permits, to pay the taxes and fines and to reinstall the work over and again. The task of conquering free space seems in the current Istanbul biennial to have been interiorised by the organisation.

We would like to explain the implications of this institutional identification with the quest of the artist by citing an experience from our own intervention practice. As mentioned above, we visited Cyprus some months ago to make a film about the borders of Europe. After months of negotiations with the authorities we finally got permission to film the disputed border between northern and southern Cyprus in Lefkosia. While we were there, *Leaps of Faith* took place, an independent international art project in the public space of Nicosia (the international name for Lefkosia), curated by Katerina Gregos and Erden Kosova. To get permission for the artists' interventions, the *Leaps of Faith* organisation turned out to have followed a similar formal trajectory

as we had for our film. They too were finally given permission to work in the ‘dead zone’. The artworks were thus able to ‘intervene’ in sites that were politically highly sensitive. Marc Bijl set up a loudspeaker at the Turkish-Cypriot checkpoint with *Status Quo* hits such as *In the Army Now* blaring out.²³ At a prominent spot on the edge of the buffer zone Kendel Geers put up a provocative neon sign with the words *THIS I SNOT AMERICA*.²⁴ And Dan Perjovschi decorated several blind walls on both sides of the border in his hallmark subversive cartoon style. But can works of art that are installed in a militarised area at the request of an art organisation still be seen as critical artistic interventions? What is left for artists to intervene, when art organisations not only take over the ‘manual work’, but also the idea of intervention itself? By smoothing out the path, do they not deprive site-specific artistic practice of its critical edge? We can perhaps find an answer to the above questions by investigating the position of the artist in the *Faith* project. Even more than with the Istanbul Biennial, *Leaps of Faith* has an inevitable narrative. The political reality of the island is so palpable, so distressing and so seemingly endless that social aims justify an art project in this context and make it credible. Who is not in favour of reinforcing communication and understanding, bringing attention to hidden injustice, making positive developments visible and giving hope of solving the conflict?²⁵ Opening up a disputed ‘dead zone’ in an attempt to renew contact between the populations of two hermetically separated regions is a social mission that will harvest plenty of applause; it is a point of departure that almost anyone can relate to – both the various political parties and the artists taking part. In this urgent context a critique of the artistic condition would seem inappropriate. Artists do what is expected of them – they enter the new ‘free space’ that has been annexed for a good cause, and they create a ‘site-specific’ work.²⁶

In itself, the deployment of art to achieve a social agenda is not something that should never occur. It appears however that with the growth of the number of site-specific projects, it has become a dominant practice to use art as an instrument. Due to the commitment that socially engaged projects demand, artists hardly have any freedom to adopt a critical position of their own within the context of these projects.²⁷ The critical potential seems thus to have shifted from the artist to the art organisation, from the work of art to the initial release of a new space to present art. With the provision of legitimising narratives and the incorporation of the critical stance of artists, art organisations do not, as they claim, offer an alternative ‘outside’, but reproduce the identification mechanism of the present phase of capitalism. Instead of providing a space that resists the hegemony of the market and its politics of incorporation, they create an enclave in which art can no longer be self-critical.²⁸ When we breach the bastion of art, are we opening up to the ultimate take over, like the fall of Famagusta?

OPEN LETTER

These considerations have made us aware of the limitations present everywhere. To parry the terms, we will carry out your commission for a site-specific work by detour through non-participation. You asked us to formalize this, so that our rejection could be included in your Wunderkammer. To push the envelope, we propose not to produce a unique document, which in the context of the Wunderkammer would become an cut off curiosum, but rather to release our objections in *Cahier Open*, that as a specialist periodical represents the institutionally conditioned inside of art.

Yours sincerely,

Siebren de Haan & Lonnie van Brummelen



NOTES

1. *Tilted Arc* was installed as a public sculpture in 1981 on the Federal Plaza in New York. Serra set up an almost forty metres long curved, rusty metal wall that split up the square “[to] alter and dislocate the decorative function of the Plaza.” A critical lobby took offence to the work on grounds of it “completely ruins one of the rare open spaces in the most densely populated section of the entire country, lower Manhattan ... Its waste of funds seems particularly improper during a national movement towards reduced government spending.” Popular feeling against the work resulted in a hearing and the appeals court finally decided that the American government was entitled to remove the work. “*Tilted Arc* is entirely owned by the Government and is displayed on Government property ... The Government may advance or restrict its own speech in a manner that would clearly be forbidden were it regulating the speech of a private citizen.” The metal wall was removed in 1989, the year of the fall of the Iron Curtain. *Richard Serra's Tilted Arc*, Van Abbemuseum, 1988, Letters from Edward D. Re to the General Service Administration p 25, 27 Decision Court of Appeals, p 263
2. When the commander-in-chief Marcantonio Bragadino emerged with the white flag, the Turkish commander Lala Mustafa Pasa initially received his opponent with great courtesy for putting up such lengthy resistance with his small army. But when he recalled the losses his own troops had suffered, his attitude suddenly changed. Marcantonio's nose and ears were cut off, then he was imprisoned in a dungeon for ten days and finally the Venetian was hung from chains between two poles, skinned alive and his skin stuffed with straw. Mustafa paraded triumphantly through the vanquished city in the company of this Marcantonio-dummy.
3. *Collected Writings*, p 185, California Press, 1996, quoted by Wouter Davidts in *Messy Minimalism, voorbij de white cube*.
4. Other examples of the added value of overlap: “The whole public space is drawn in as pretext and stage.” “... an exhibition that is *about* the city, taking place *in* the city.” Or further from home: “Istanbul is not only the subject of the biennial but also its operational field.” “The School is both the site and the content of the Biennial, and is its sole activity.” The quotes are from texts on *AI*, a project by Kunstcentrum Hengelo, Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, Kunstenlab Deventer; *The Urban Condition*, Museum De Paviljoens; 9th Istanbul Biennial; and *Manifesta 6* in Nicosia.
5. *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalism*, the much-debated French sociological study of 1999 by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, describes this metamorphosis of capitalism. The English version *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (with a curiously high price for a critical study of capitalism) has not been published yet. We depend on the interpretation of Dieter Lesage in his *Vertoog over Verzet*, in which *Le Nouvel Esprit* plays a key role.
6. Employees are given responsibility and the possibility of self-development; consumers are treated as active participants instead of passive users; and with both staff and consumers identifying with the product, the management, that has replaced owners and directors as the driving force behind the company, acquires social recognition as a motivating and creative visionary.
7. Recent slogans of respectively Nokia, the European Union, Main Hotels, Apple Macintosh and the City of Amsterdam.
8. Observations and events seem like an awkward marriage here. “Those who claim to describe it from the outside are taking themselves for God, not for artists. An artist invents new ways of swimming, he or she does not spend time sitting on the shore deconstructing the wakes of the boats, as if it were somehow possible to step outside human society.” *Berlin Letter about Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud, 2001.
9. Viktor Misiano, initiator of the first Moscow Biennial (2005), concludes that it is easier to get a prestigious biennial off the ground than a small specialist journal: “It is much more efficient to approach official institutions with ambitious projects rather than with small ones. If you ask for big money, for a big event, you immediately get a response. Why? Not because you meet with generosity and an understanding of cultural sensibilities, but it is something power can use.” *Manifesta Journal 2*, Winter 2003/Spring 2004, p 122 Over recent years biennials have been started in Havana (1984) Istanbul (1987), Cetinje (Montenegro, 1991), Dakar (1992), Sharjah (United Emirates, 1993), Santa Fe (1995), Gwangju (1995), Johannesburg (1995), Shanghai (1996), Berlin (1996), Montreal (1998), Tapei (1998), Tirana (1999), Göteborg (2001), Liverpool (2002), Beijing (2003), Prague (2003), and in Moscow this year. *Manifesta* (1996) was founded as a European biennial – on tour in Europe, that is – and new biennials are planned in Luanda, Cape Town and Singapore (2006).
10. “The biennial is a realm that lies beyond the administered world, where politics and economics have no more jurisdiction over interpretation. An emporium where curiosity and the desire to discover suffice as a passport.” Alphonse Hug, official website Sao Paulo Biennial. “Biennials are privileged agents in the planetary redistribution of art.” Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun in *The World is Yours, in Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World, Writing from the 9th Istanbul Biennial*, 2005
11. “Istanbul is not only the subject of the biennial but also its operational field. [The biennial] is not a survey, and it is not an attempt to sum up the state of art or to represent certain tendencies in contemporary practice ...

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It is a series of artistic projects for and with the city of Istanbul constantly in mind." *The World is Yours*, in *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World, Writing from the 9th Istanbul Biennial*, 2005 p 24/25

12. Although the title *Eindhoven Istanbul* would seem to express a new hybrid identity, the Van Abbemuseum press release suggests that what is aimed for is a (Smithsonian) movement between the Istanbul Biennial site and the museum non-site of Eindhoven. (A movement facilitated by the sponsor Correndon airlines.) In this exhibition, the Istanbul Biennial represents "a specific but exemplary model of a biennial" and the Van Abbemuseum "a specific but exemplary model of a Western European museum". In the politically correct press release of *Eindhoven Istanbul* an endless pile of good intentions is offered to support the choices. The Istanbul press release is significantly clearer about the role of this exhibition – *Eindhoven Istanbul* is an 'extension' of the Istanbul Biennial. With postcolonial irony the transient event of a peripheral biennial annexes the established western centre.

13. The antiquated name the museum struggles with, can be seen in the way the word 'museum' is used more and more as synonymous with things that are behind the times. In his book *The World is Flat* Thomas Friedman states the competition with hard-working countries where labour is cheap will increase worldwide. Europe, he argues, is not competent in this struggle and thus it will be assigned the role of museum. Europe as a large Venice, would this be a nightmare or not such a bad idea?

14. "This biennial is not a tool for selling the city to global capitalism but an agency for presenting it to its citizens and others with eyes awry ... A purposeful scaling down of durational video will encourage the audience to engage with different artistic positions and reflect, without becoming overwhelmed and fatigued." Conceptual framework, IKS V press file. "Any attempt to change [the lack of solidarity] needs to address the qualities of intimacy, desire, aesthetic satisfaction, and quixotic personal contentment that art speaks about and that are emphasized in our selection of the biennial." Charles Esche/Vasif Kortun, *The World is Yours*, in *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World, Writing from the 9th Istanbul Biennial*, 2005, p 24, 29. The title of the essay *The World is Yours* is notably enough taken from a slogan on a billboard in the film *Scarface*. The slogan urges the high-flying 'servant' Tony Camonte to develop into a (Kojévian) 'master'. Tony however is gradually corrupted and ends up as a rapacious monster.

15. Deniz Apartments Palas for instance is described as a decayed apartment block "which retains an air of sophistication and class, their dishevelled state simply adding a sense of history and atmosphere." The description of Garanti, an empty bank building, also feels as if it has

been copied from a real estate advertisement: "the venue has great potential for the incorporation of a café on its roof terrace." Or the clean Bilsar building renovated in retro style: "a striking feature within a district currently on the verge of gentrification." Venues, IKS V Press file.

16. Ibid 11, p 27

17. Turkey once was an extended Ottoman empire that encompassed an area stretching from the Balkans and the north coast of Africa to almost the entire Middle East, with Cyprus and Crete as its 'overseas colonies'. During this imperial period, the Turks had good diplomatic contacts with the other leading powers of the time, Britain and France. After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire the Turkish intelligentsia and army officers, headed by Atatürk, sought contact with western ideas. Turkey became the only Moslem country to implement a division between church and state. In order to disassociate themselves from the religious past of the Ottoman Empire with its dynasty of sultans, the group chose to present themselves as 'Turks'. At the time the word 'Turk' was a swearword meaning something like 'barbaric peasants', and was only employed by westerners to denote Ottomans. This is the background to Atatürk's famous statement, "happy is he who calls himself a Turk", a statement that we also discovered in the form of a mosaic of pebbles written on the Five Finger mountain range in northern Cyprus ('TRNC'). *Echoes from the Dead Zone, Across the Cyprus Divide*, Yiannis Papdakis, 2005, *The Formal Trajectory*, p 36, 39, Lonnie van Brummelen, 2005

18. Back in 1972, Harald Szeeman proposed creating a Documenta without visitors. He was immediately confronted with the inevitable conditions of this prestigious, recurring urban event: the municipal council of Kassel made clear it couldn't miss the income from the wave of tourists that paid back investments many times over. *De Witte Raaf*, no. 117, September 2005.

19. "The position of Istanbul itself is of course a huge benefit to any [alternative] strategy. Being placed on a perceived borderline ... gives the city a particular character and responsibility that charges the works in the biennial with a stronger meaning than would be the case elsewhere ... The control system of capitalism is less secure here, brand-named products are copied relatively freely." Ibid 11, p 28 This argument is to say the least curious coming from one of the curators who elsewhere promotes a museum as a "power plant for the region." *All that Dutch, Gesprek met Charles Esche*, NAi Uitgevers, p 021

20 Ibid 11, p 26

21 Ibid 11, p 30

In his books *Homer Sacer*, 1995, and *Homo Sacer II: State of Exception*, 2003, Giorgio Agamben takes Foucault's bio politics a stage further and introduces 'the

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camp' as a metaphor for an outside without rights; a state of exception in which people are viewed not as individuals with rights but as naked bodies. Although he based himself on the concentration camps of the Second World War, Agamben writes enclaves like Guantanamo Bay as extra-judicial domains are once more a reality. Private and public merge here and the private domain is dissolved. Undisputed human rights are temporarily rescinded by appealing to an emergency or, as Agamben says, "a state of exception means the rescinding of the rule of law in order to save legality ... The unlimited singularity that aims to appropriate its belonging-to, ... and from then on rejects every identity and every membership, is the principal enemy of the state." For Agamben, it is the unlimited singularities that have to take a stand as a 'mass' against the new imperial capitalism. *La communauté qui vient (The coming community)*, 1990, p 90, Lieven de Caeter, *De capsulaire beschaving, over de stad in het tijdperk van de angst*, p 167, 173 If this text is intended to be programmatic for the Istanbul Biennial, how does the 'rejection of every membership' tally with the commitment (to the aims of the Biennial) that is expected here from the 'unlimited singularities'?

N.B. The deduction made earlier in this letter, that capitalism would appear not to tolerate any 'outside', is in this sense not entirely correct. It would be more accurate to say that it doesn't tolerate any outside that it has not generated itself. The imperial world order can excommunicate, but is unwilling to allow itself to be excluded.

22. *Abbildungen Interviews Texte Maria Eichhorn 1989-96, Plakatwand* (1995), Verlag Silke Schreiber, p 144

23 'Status Quo' is the usual term for the Turkish stance in this conflict.

24 Although the UN at first granted permission to install the work of Geers in the dead zone; the permission was withdrawn at the last moment. Geers moved his work to a private section on the edge of the buffer zone instead, from where the sign had an even wider scope.

25 "For 30 years, the UN-controlled buffer zone, with its shelled-out homes and shops left in ruins since the war in 1974, has run through the heart of Nicosia, a visually dramatic and alarming reminder of the hostilities that split the island and prevented Cypriots from interacting with each other ... The purpose of the project is to reinforce communication and exchange between both sides but also to encourage an alternative discourse, which diverges from the political perspective that has been largely limited to the internal issues surrounding the perennial 'Cyprus Problem' ... The project also aims to bring into dialogue the issue of Cyprus with other areas, which have also experienced division and political turmoil and ultimately the trauma that is the result of these. Thus it seeks to highlight the wider geopolitical

realities of the region ... At the same time, it aims to shift its attention to a host of existing socio-cultural issues and problems that have been marginalized as a result of real-politik such as gender and class issues, minority rights, the ill effects of tourism, de-regulated urban expansion, skewed notions of 'development' and economic and sexual exploitation of immigrants ... Apart from focusing solely on issues of opposition, division and closure, the exhibition and parallel events hope to focus on the possibilities for 'openings' and social change, offering a hopeful interpretation of a border-less future of the island." Press release, *Leaps of Faith*, 13-31 May 2005, www.leaps-of-faith.com.

26. The explicit definition of the art practice and the expectations of the invited artists, seem to confirm that art has become an instrument: "*Leaps of Faith* will include 12 international and 4 Cypriot artists whose work has conveyed an understanding of the notion of a contested territory, is engaged with a strong sense of social responsibility, operates site-specifically, and is in a position to be able to highlight the particular physiognomy of the city of Nicosia." Ibid 25

27. Perhaps *Manifesta 6* can change the current trend. The goal of *Manifesta 6* is not to present an exhibition of works. The collective efforts of *Manifesta* and its participants will be dedicated to laying the foundations for a *School*, which will continue to exist after the *Manifesta*. The *School* will "address the mechanisms employed by power structures such as public institutions, academia, media and corporations, and examine architecture as a significant ideological force. It will look at Cyprus as a case study of complex political reality and location. It will address the bipolarity of nature and nurture within the context of contemporary society." Will the 'public institution' of the *School* itself as an alternative for the site-specific exhibition also be an object of critical reflection? Will the *School* enable us to develop a self-critical perspective on our post(art)historical era?

Call for Applications, Manifesta 6

Colophon

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The New Freemasonry

*Appeal for Symbols Creates
False Expectations*

Art critic Anna Tilroe's and exhibition maker Rutger Wolfson's appeal to art to furnish the Netherlands with new symbols is, in Lex ter Braak's view, ill-considered and gratuitous. Not only is it indefensible to presume you can prescribe a direction for art in this day and age, but the form in which the appeal to create new symbols went out was equivocal. The debate and the exhibition took place within the exclusive circles of the art world, and the attempts to target the public domain lacked all impact.

However hot the soup is served, a Dutch expression runs, it has cooled down by the time you eat it; meaning things are never quite as bad as they seem. The acceptable temperature is for the dinner guest to decide. Anna Tilroe's article 'Het grote gemis' ('The Great Lack'), which appeared in *NRC Handelsblad* in December 2004 and lamented the shortage of symbols, must have struck some readers as a soup gone so cold it was no longer worth consuming. But not everyone saw it this way. The article was one factor that sparked off a spirited debate in the Rozen theater, Amsterdam, it also prompted the publication of a small book (or perhaps pamphlet would be more accurate) titled *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland* ('New Symbols for the Netherlands'), and motivated an exhibition of that same title in De Vleeshal, Middelburg.¹ Above all, however, it deeply coloured the discourse among art professionals around the country: Tilroe's essay was the talk of the town. Whatever you think of the article, it set the ball rolling, and for that reason alone it merits serious attention.

1. The debate was organized by the Lectoraat Kunst en de Publieke Ruimte, the Dutch Art Institute and Fonds BKVB. It took place in the Rozen theater, Rotterdam, on 31 May 2005, to mark the presentation of the book *STIFF, Hans van Houwelingen vs. Public Art* (Amsterdam, Artimo, 2005); Rutger Wolfson (general editor) *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland* (Amsterdam, Valiz, 2005); the exhibition 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland' took place in De Vleeshal, Middelburg, from 24 September to 27 November 2005.

It is therefore strange to note that the excitement did not translate into critical disquisitions in the professional press. For once, someone writes a newspaper article that kicks up some dust, and serious criticism is out to lunch. 'Het grote gemis' has, as far as I know, not once been commented on in the national media. The exhibition in Middelburg was reported by the local press only, and the book *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland* has not been reviewed anywhere. The weekly *Vrij Nederland* did print a piece by the author and journalist Chris Keulemans, but, since the book contains several of his own contributions, that article belongs more under the heading of committed fan mail.

The lack of critical reaction is disturbing and is symptomatic of the state of the discourse on art in the Netherlands. It is worrying because it betrays an indifference towards thought on visual art, and because the painful silence does nothing to promote the debate in society at large. Those discussions that do take place now and then are often left to outsiders who are able to score easy points with populist arguments. We do of course read defences of individual standpoints which, depending partly on the author's status in each case, may meet with either muttering dismissal or endorsement in the artistic back rooms. But the potentially wide public debate somehow never materializes, and the published scraps seldom amount to more than sputtering squibs that fizzle out in mirror-thin puddles. The articles, especially those in the dailies, are furthermore short and airily descriptive, so they are digested almost as quickly as read. Such light fare lacks the bulk required for that endless rumination which is the essence of a critical debate.

The silence of art criticism in the face of Anna Tilroe's article is all the more alarming because her essay is no ordinary one. In 'Het grote gemis', she develops

such radical ideas about the social position and tasks of art that you cannot simply shrug them off – among other reasons because she is widely held to be the country's most authoritative art aficionado. Views like hers merit critical reflection and declared standpoints. If it is mere indifference or fear of a rejoinder that lies behind the unresponsiveness, then no Dutch art critic can be considered worthy of his profession. Besides, as Chris Keulemans writes in *Symbolen voor Nederland*, Anna Tilroe 'is not paranoid and does not wear heavy horn-rimmed glasses'. She awaits a response, eager for the fray.

Normative Attitudes Enlarge the Void

De Vleeshal attempted to give that response by taking Anna Tilroe's article as the starting point for the book and the exhibition. The critical void which De Vleeshal hoped to close by putting on 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland' has, in retrospect, become only greater.

About the exhibition I will be brief: in my view it was a miserable flop. It was a typical instance of a cerebral infill exercise: there was a concept and there were works of art. The quality of those works did not matter too much as long as they clearly had something to do with the subject matter. And, as happens all too often, the exhibition drummed that subject matter in so relentlessly that it was a relief to be outdoors again afterwards. An art exhibition is not a punitive exercise in driving home ideas, but an unexpected fall into free space. De Vleeshal's well-tryed formula of not only inviting artists, but showing work by a mix of creative contributors, failed for once. It seems Chris Keulemans already sensed this would happen when he wrote his piece for the pamphlet: 'How exasperatingly difficult,' he concludes regretfully, 'to make a symbol for altruism, resistance and courage without falling into the trap of history. But also impossible not to try. If I didn't have two left hands and weren't completely colour-blind, I'd apply to the Rietveld Academy tomorrow. I'd become an artist.'²

2. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the contributions by the authors named in *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland*.

The exhibition's failure was the consequence of a misconception that also afflicts Anna Tilroe's thinking about art: that, as a critic or curator, you are free to impose your will on art, and that art will then conform to your own ideas. This outlook is closely associated with the modernist notion of art as a straight line towards the future which only becomes visible under the firm hand of the critic and curator. Tilroe eagerly aspires to the role of one who plots the course of art and sets its bearing. As she wonders in the introduction to her recent collection of essays *Het blinkende stof*, 'Where does the new, better world lie?' and quickly follows this up by deciding, 'Art is in search of a new, ethical awareness.'³ These two classic premises combine to determine her outlook on art. Art must – wholly

3. Anna Tilroe, *Het blinkende stof. Op zoek naar een nieuwe visioen* (Amsterdam, Querido, 2002), 9-10.

Black and white posters ('altruism'), designed by Annelys de Vet, have been distributed around Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Middelburg. Middelburg, photograph by Annelys de Vet.



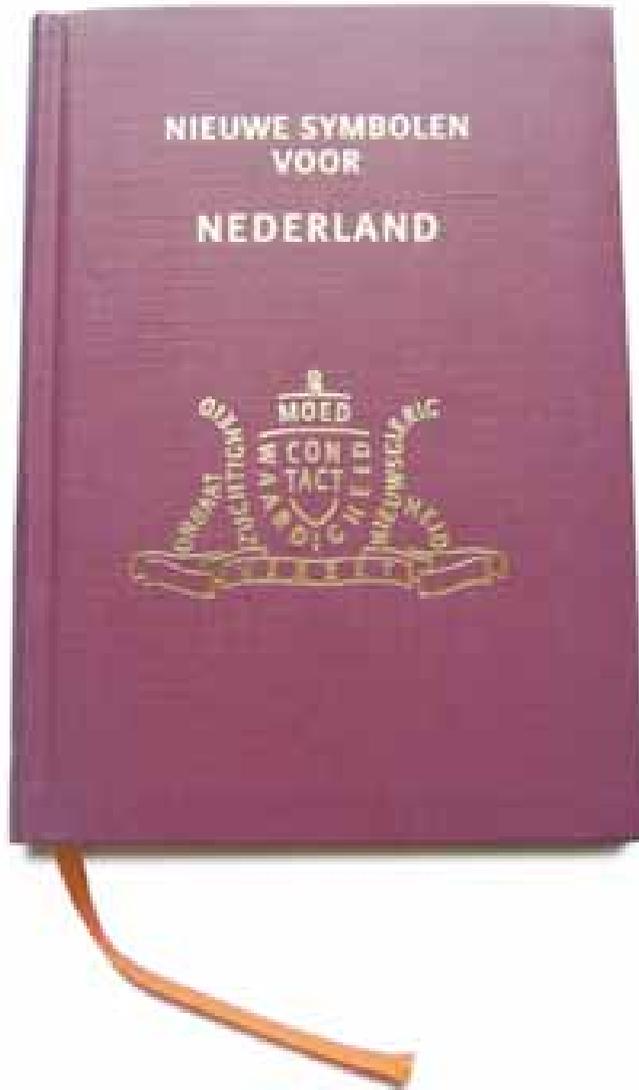
in accordance with the modernist tradition – proclaim a new world, and must – wholly in accordance with religious tradition – give that world an ethical significance. There is not too much wrong with this philosophical vision as long as it remains subservient to art. Maybe it excludes many interesting, indeed crucial, developments, but it does offer both the critic and the reader all the benefits of a clear-cut standpoint. It becomes problematic, however, when Anna Tilroe thinks, on the ground of her convictions, that (and this is the misconception) she is capable of prescribing the direction art will take. This may well be an aspect of modernist fundamentalism, but it has become untenable in this day and age. Both society and art have become so democratic that no single artistic expression can lay exclusive claim to relevance. Perhaps Tilroe is less militant than the modernists, but her views are no less normative.

Whether that normative outlook, without any shared basis, is capable of engendering good art, is a rhetorical question. In ‘Het grote gemis’, she scorns the *Burgermonument voor de Eenheid van Europa* (‘Citizens’ Monument for the Unity of Europe’), sponsored by the European Commission. This sculpture is the outcome of collaboration between artists from various countries, and is intended to express respect for human dignity in the context of the expansion of the European Union. Tilroe considers it a total flop, and I cannot but agree. But this is not because a fluid is not a powerful sign, as she argues, but because the monument is hackwork. It is meant to portray something that is remote from the artistic thinking of the artists involved. They were told what to think and feel, and they undoubtedly did their best to make something of it. But when artists visualize their own ideas about Europe, as in the series of billboards on the EU in Vienna in 2005 (see also p. 64 and p. 66 in this issue), the result is immediately a scandal.

In ‘Het grote gemis’, Anne Tilroe implicitly concludes that the new world is farther away than ever, that ‘we’ are surrounded by emptiness, that ‘we’ have developed an aversion to the symbolic world of brands, and that fear is in the ascendant. Hence ‘a longing has been formed for symbols that represent the values of the free, open society’. Without supplying arguments to support this assertion, she all too easily falls into line with prevalent views about our society. She offers no historical comparisons to back her intuitive conclusion and, apart from some impressionistic remarks about the media and mass culture, there is no substantial evidence for her conclusions. Never mind: the subject was new symbols, wasn’t it? We crave after all ‘symbols that are authentic, meaningful and inspiring’ like Picasso’s *Guernica* and Zadkine’s *The Ruined City*. But contemporary art fails to deliver any symbols we can hang on to. It has become nonsocial and ‘aims rather to abandon the existing, known meanings so as to arrive at new insights.’ And that is not enough, for, quoting Jos de Putter, she agrees that ‘art is no longer relevant to the social debate’.

To Rutger Wolfson, Director of De Vleeshal in Middelburg, this was the motivation to pick up the loosely-knitted gauntlet. He had already admitted at the

Cover of booklet accompanying the exhibition 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland', general editor Rutger Wolfs, published by Valiz 2005. Designer Annelys de Vet.



'Interventies' ('Interventions': space), Annelys de Vet, 2005. Series of proposals for new symbols for the Netherlands, 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland', De Vleeshal, Middelburg NL, 24 September – 27 November 2005.



'Interventies' ('Interventions': dignity), Annelys de Vet, 2005. Series of proposals for new symbols for the Netherlands, 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland', De Vleeshal, Middelburg NL, 24 September – 27 November 2005.



start of his directorship to finding contemporary art weak and pathetic. Now he suddenly found public support for this outlook from an unexpected quarter and more daintily expressed, and it was time for action.

Lack of Social Relevance

Rutger Wolfson and Anna Tilroe invited a number of artists and designers ‘who have discussed topics of this kind with us more than once’ to assemble in the aptly-named Hotel de Filosoof and ‘join with us in formulating values that could provide a basis for new symbols for the Netherlands’. The outcome of these discussions was to be placed before artists who then – like the makers of the *European Citizens’ Monument* – could swing into action. But on reflection, ‘the distinction between the commissioning group and the artists was too artificial’, so the artists who were considered competent to devise the new symbols for the Netherlands were directly invited to take part. The account of these discussions and the essayistic contributions of Anna Tilroe, Chris Keulemans, Cor Wagenaar and Bregtje van der Haak make up the booklet *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland*.

Has *Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland* turned out to be the signal Wolfson dreamed of in his introduction – the signal that ‘intellectuals are making an effort to reassert their guiding role in society, instead of abandoning it to neoconservative politicians, populists, religious fanatics and the purely economic forces of the “free market”’? Objectively speaking, the answer to this question – considering the lack of reaction from the press – is that the signal seems to have gone unnoticed. Subjectively, the ‘slightly revolutionary euphoria’ that overcame Wolfson in his first conversation with Tilroe remained within the cosy circle of bosom friends. The bitter truth is that the whole project is a symptom of the accursed artistic mentality, a textbook instance of the very pattern it opposes: it has no social relevance whatsoever, it is a shameful exercise in in-crowd thinking, it opts for the safety of Hotel De Filosoof and the artistic sanctuary of De Vleeshal rather than more problematic, atypical places, and it addresses itself abundantly to an artistic audience which, with its pliant autonomy, can easily stand up to this kind of treatment. What it does not do is what Anna Tilro dreams of in her piece, namely ‘pulling art across its imposed boundaries, right into the heart of society.’ The following will illustrate this, as a *pars pro toto*.

During the discussions, a number of values condensed out, which the artists were required to forge into symbols. ‘Courage’, ‘resistance’, ‘dignity’ and ‘memory’ are a few of these. The value ‘unselfishness’ made its way into three cities in Holland, the other values were showed as photomontages in the exhibition. It would be nice to be able to say they turned those cities head over heels, shook them up or raised a rumpus in them – for that would have countered some of the criticism. But the posters were little more than abstract messages-in-bottles bobbing around in the urban ocean, too thinly spread to catch the attention

'Interventies' ('Interventions': resistance), Annelys de Vet, 2005. Series of proposals for new symbols for the Netherlands, 'Nieuwe Symbolen voor Nederland', De Vleeshal, Middelburg NL, 24 September – 27 November 2005.



of anyone except the initiates. Compared to a witty fly-poster campaign like the familiar 'Loesje' posters, their visual – let alone conceptual – effect was zero. And it remains a question how people were meant to read the posters. Is the exhortation 'courage' intended to spur young Muslim fundamentalists to keep pursuing their goal? Is its purpose to encourage Rita Verdonk, the Dutch Minister responsible for immigration and integration, to stay the course? Or is it meant to pat the backs of the participants at Hotel De Filosoof who – as Jos de Putter averred in one of the dialogues – had taken such a daring plunge? The lack of precision, the open-ended interpretability, and the lack of any personal involvement or stake, made the poster campaign worthless. If the organizers had gone on a march from Middelburg to Groningen bearing banners, in old-fashioned socialist style, proclaiming their highly personal values, and had engaged the public (formerly known as 'the proletariat') in their discussions in cafés, social centres and public spaces on the way – well, that would have been quite something, wouldn't it? Whether it would have been a good work of art is an entirely different matter, but at least it would have immersed itself in the social context for once. Art would have ventured out of its safe harbour to prove its worthiness on the high seas. But in reality the action was no more than an invitation to partake of drinks and light refreshments on a millionaire's yacht bobbing just offshore.

False Expectations

All this is more than just an unfortunate incident. Now that people no longer feel safe on the street, that lunatics and faithful believers shoot other people dead, that the media clamour for everyone's attention, that society is propelled by the over-revved engine of the spectacle – to pick a few things at random – art is required to . . . Well, to what? To fix the problems, to impart a symbolic meaning, to offer the one true alternative? Day in, day out, commentators occupy themselves with questions like these on radio, tv, in the newspapers and magazines. Isn't it going a bit far, if not quite insane, to expect these social issues be the subject matter of art, in the genre of late-capitalist realism? Shouldn't art do the opposite of that, shouldn't it give us the space to step back and think about our reality in a different way? To present a space in which symbols could emerge? Picasso painted *Guernica*, outraged, indignant and alone in the privacy of his studio. It was not until later that it turned into a symbol. Zadkine's sculpture similarly took many years before it transformed into the 'national' symbol it is now. We live, without knowing, surrounded by symbols of the future. Artists are working on them, and in the meanwhile we must take care not to make art the football of our false expectations. For they mask a cold indifference to the essence of art: its ability to be itself at any moment.

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UP.

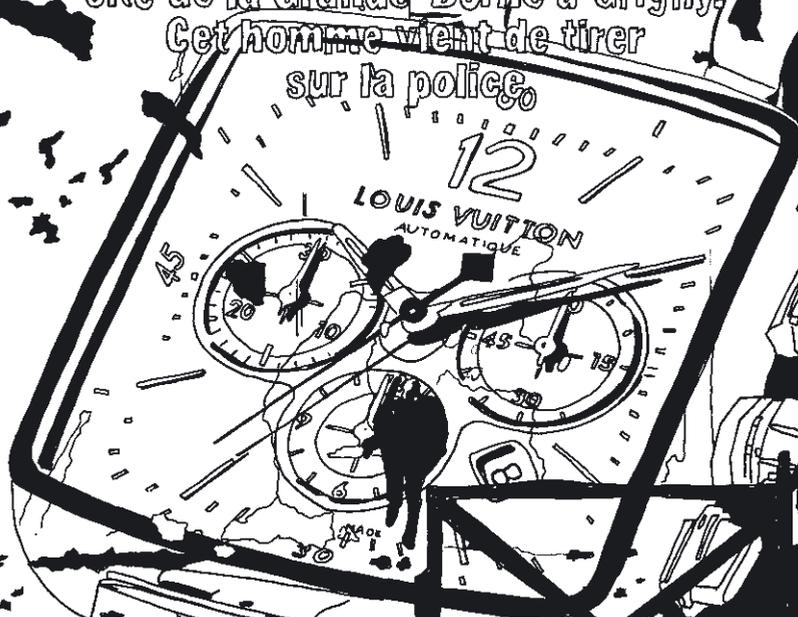
Front and Back Cover

In a society that is characterized by privatization and where the use of the computer has led to a democratization of graphic design, it is important for designers to think about their relationship to the radically altered public domain. According to graphic designer Ben Laloua/Didier Pascal, designers should be more profoundly involved with what is happening socially, culturally, politically and economically. In an interview with Lisette Smits in response to the *Public Club* project (2005) in the *Ontwerpposities* ('Design Positions') series at Casco, a platform for experimental art in

Utrecht (see www.cascoprojects.org), Ben Laloua notes that the focus among designers is most often on formal aspects, whereas meaning is seldom a consideration. *Public Club* is a proposal for a new design practice that explores its own position within the public domain. The pivotal question here is what public role a designer can perform, now that design increasingly serves commercial interests. For the Casco presentation, Ben Laloua designed flags and symbols with which she wanted to demonstrate the complexity and ambiguity of reality instead of an idealized or simplified reality, which is merely a stimulus to consume. This project prompted the editors of *Open* to invite Ben Laloua/Didier Pascal to contribute to this edition.

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NOVEMBER 12TH-18TH 2005 www.economist.com

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Lonnie van Brummelen

The Formal Trajectory

In 2005, Lonnie van Brummelen won the Prix de Rome with the third part of *Grossraum*, a triptych on 35mm film about the boundaries of Europe. The various parts of the film were shot in Hrebrenne, at the border crossing between Poland and Ukraine, at the Spanish-Moroccan border in the enclave of Ceuta, and in Lefkosia, the capital of Cyprus that is bisected by a European Union border. The correspondence and accounts in the accompanying publication, *The Formal Trajectory*, provide an impression of the negotiations involved in gaining permission to film. Part of this publication is presented here.

THE FORMAL TRAJECTORY

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The film triptych *Gesamtes* (35mm, 2004/2005) explores the composition of the landscape along the fringes of Europe. Three outlying crossings are traced empirically by optical traveling. Divided landscapes are heavily guarded by the military and photography is forbidden without the permission of proper authorities. This publication is an expression of the formal trajectory that preceded filming. Phases in the application process are illustrated by a selection of correspondence with officials and associates at the different locations.

YOUR REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO FILM THE TURKISH BORDER

Dear Ms. Lennie van Brummelen,

With reference to our correspondence and pleasant meeting in the Embassy concerning your precious project called "Borders of Europe", I regret to inform you that the Embassy has just been informed by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the relevant Turkish authorities have refused your request to film the border points located at Gürbulak, Kaplıçy, Esenkere and Habur in the East and the Southeast parts of Turkey.

Please be assured that the Embassy had fulfilled its duty to convey the contents of your project and your request to the Turkish authorities in a clear and timely manner and with a positive advice.

No motivation or reason was communicated to the Embassy regarding the decision.

Wishing you success in your endeavors, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Turkish Embassy in The Hague

Ondanks een welwillende Turkse diplomatie leek het niet mogelijk om Turkije bij ons Europa-project te betrekken. We besloten uit te wijken naar een locatie in de 'Turkse invloedssfeer': Cyprus. Door haar strategische ligging op slechts tientallen kilometers van de Turkse, Syrische en Libanese kust hangert het eiland sinds mensensbegrip als *cross-over* tussen oost en west. Mede hierdoor is het uitgegroeid tot een zwaar gemilitariseerde regio. Op strategische locaties aan haar noord- en westkust bevinden zich twee grote Britse oorverreine legers: resultaat van de onderhandelingen met de voormalige koloniale overzetter. Maar het meest ingrijpend is de naar bewaakte niet internationaal erkende 'grens', die het noorden en het zuiden van elkaar scheidt. Hierdoor moest Cyprus op 1 mei 2004 als gedeeld eiland tot het Europees territorium toetreden. In het noorden werd de invoering van de Europese regelgeving opgeschort. Concreet aansluiting voor de opsplitting was een militaire coup van de Griekse junta in 1974, die de democratisch gekozen regering van Turks- en Grieks-Cyprioten poogde af te zetten en *enosis* (verwording) met Griekenland wilde bewerkstelligen. Het Turkse leger groep in om de minderheid van Turks-Cyprioten te beschermen. De Griekse coup werd vrijdeld maar de Turkse bezetting bleef in het noorden van Cyprus tot op de dag van vandaag. Om te voorkomen dat de strijd tussen de nog altijd in *cease-fire* verkerende partijen weer opvlait, is al decennialang een sub-munitie VN troepenmacht gestationeerd in een Green Line die het hele land doorkruist. Deze verlaten overwoekerde bufferzone verdeelt de hoofdstad Lefkosia en snijdt cruciale verkeersaders af. De diepste gloed-nieuw internationale luchthaven wordt door de zone ingesloten en staat te verwoerd bij, compleet met een vliegtuig dat in 1974 niet op tijd kon vertrekken. Een van de startbanen is ingericht als skelterack voor recreerende VN-ers, en de ontginnende

Despite a willing Turkish diplomacy, it did not seem possible to include Turkey in our European project. We decided to change our plan, and to opt for a location in the 'Turkish sphere of influence': Cyprus. Because of its position only tens of kilometers of the Turkish, the Syrian and the Lebanese coast, the island has always functioned as a *ge-between* the east and the west and as a strategic spot in military actions. There are Sovereign Base Areas of the United Kingdom on the South and West Coast, a remnant of the time that Cyprus was a colony of Great Britain. Even more disturbing is the presence of a heavily guarded, non-internationally recognized 'border', that separates the north from the south. This caused Cyprus to join the European territory on May 1, 2004 as a divided island. In the northern part the introduction of European regulations was suspended. The concrete cause for the division was a military coup of the Greek junta in 1974 that attempted to remove the elected government of Turkish and Greek Cypriots and wanted to establish *enosis* (unification) with Greece. The Turkish army intervened to protect the minority of Turkish Cypriots. The Greek coup was prevented but the Turks stayed in the north of Cyprus until this day. To prevent breaking of the *cease-fire*, a substantial UN force has been stationed for decades in a buffer zone cutting through the entire country. This abandoned overgrown Green Line has divided the capital of Lefkosia and cut off crucial roads. The international airport has been enclosed in the zone, complete with an airplane that got trapped in the conflict. One of the runways has been turned into a kart-track for UN recreation, and the surrounding fields are used as a golf course and a meadow for goats. Nothing points at a change in this deadlock being near. Nonetheless, the Cypriots are under growing international pressure to solve their 'rich man's problem'. The Turks are put on the screw too. The negotiations about

velden worden gebruikt als golf court en als grasvelden voor golfen. Niets wijst erop dat de patstelling binnenkort doorbroken zal worden. De Cyprioten worden echter steeds meer door de internationale gemeenschap onder druk gezet om hun "rich man's problem" op te lossen. Ook bij de Turken worden diplomatiek de deuren open gezet. Zo kunnen de onderhandelingen over Turkse toetreding pas aanvangen na Ankara's bekrachtiging van het EU decaime verdrag, dat door alle lidstaten en dus ook door Cyprus ondertekend is. Met ondertekening van dit verdrag wordt Cyprus impliciet als onafhankelijke staat erkent. Dit wetende, lag het voor de hand dat permissie voor het verfilmen van deze omstrede schiedlijn, flink wat tactisch geléveer zou vereisen. De ambassade van Cyprus in Den Haag adviseerde om de formuleringen zorgvuldig te wegen. De kans op medewerking zou aanzienlijk toenemen wanneer het zuiden van het eiland als 'government controlled' zou worden aangegeven en het noorden als 'occupied'. Voor de zekerheid besloten we de mogelijk aanstootgevend werktitle *Frontline* definitief te veranderen in het in onze ogen neutralere *Borders of Europe*. Stel werd echter duidelijk dat de situatie zo gecompliceerd lag, dat deze vlieger niet opging. Laat de 'neutrale' titel bloek een zenuw te raken, de aanvraag werd ook hier door een hoge militair afgewezen.

Turkish entry to the European Union can only begin after Ankara's confirmation of the new EU customs treaty, which would be an implicit recognition of Cyprus as a unified autonomous state. Knowing this, to get permission to film this embattled division was going to demand tactical maneuvering. The embassy of Cyprus in The Hague advised us to carefully choose our words. The chance at cooperation would grow considerably if the south of the island would be described as "government controlled" and the north as "occupied". For the same reason we decided to avoid the working title *Frontline* and to rename the project *Borders of Europe*. It became clear quickly that the situation was so complex that this did not work. The neutrality of this title turned out to actually hurt the application, it was again denied by a military leader.

ADAPTATION OF PLAN

Dear Mr. Mrs.,

The European territory is expanding. For many Europeans the impact of these recent developments seems difficult to grasp. With a series of silent 35mm film works, I would like to give an impression of the wide range of landscapes and inhabitants Europe contains. Since Cyprus is the most south-eastern European location, has a strategic position at the crossroads of three continents, a miscellaneous landscape which was the setting for numerous enticing myths, battles and ancient civilizations, and because of the exceptional situation of the Green Line caused by the Turkish invasion in 1974, I would like to explore its rich landscape in a film work.

In my previous proposal, I asked permission to make film recordings of the Green Line in Cyprus for the artistic documentary *Borders of Europe*. The Embassy of Cyprus in The Hague told me, that the *Press and Information Office* in Cyprus could not give a positive answer to my request because the film might give the wrong impression to European viewers that the Green Line is an official European border instead of the result of the Turkish invasion of 1974. I can understand these objections to the initial proposal. Therefore, I would like to adjust the plan so that any possible misunderstanding of the Green Line as an official border will not occur.

Because of its specific circumstances, the Cyprus recordings will not be included in the film *Borders of Europe*. The recordings will be presented as a portrait of a unique, remote European location. To avoid misunderstanding as much as possible, historical backgrounds of the Green Line will be given in a text with these film images.

I would like to ask permission to make the film recordings for this artistic document. The recordings will show the Green Line and one of its crossings embedded in the remarkable Cyprus landscape. The camera will take a high point of view at an appropriate distance from the checkpoint, so that individual persons cannot be recognized. Of course, the precise perspectives can be conferred with the authorities involved. The crew consists of two persons: Sieben de Haan and I. I wish to emphasize that the footage is for artistic purposes only.

Please contact me if you are feeling the need for more information or supplementary adjustment of the film plan.

With friendly regards,

Louise van Brunnelen

WALLED CITY DIVIDED BY A DEAD ZONE

We leerden Cyprus kennen via het *Press and Information Office (PIO)* in de hoofdstad Lefkosia. Hier werden we gastvrij onthaald door een medewerkster van *International Press & Mass Media* die ons, na een kort doorspreken van de procedures, meeman naar een depot vol lectuur over 'the Cyprus question'. We kregen een PIO-bag vol recente uitgaven mee. Om ons in te lezen. Aangezien we zelf vanwege overgewicht op onze vlucht geen boek hadden kunnen meenemen, brachten we onze avonden door met studies als *Turkish Colonisation: A Threat for Cyprus and its People*, *Resolutions Adopted by the United Nations on the Cyprus Problem 1964-2001*, *The Judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the Case of Cyprus v. Turkey*, *The Continuing Violation of Human Rights by Turkey in Cyprus*, *The illegal declaration of the "TRNC" and Turkey's objectives*, *The Consequences of the Turkish Invasion and Occupation in Facts and Figures - map of distribution of population by ethnic group & positions of the invading Turkish forces*. Hieruit leerden we onder meer dat het 'illegale' Turkse regime onder leiding van Mr. Denktash' 142.000 Grieks-Cyprioten heeft uitgezet, 118.000 kolonisten heeft geïmporteerd om de demografische samenstelling te veranderen, 11.000 jaar culturele en historische erfenis systematisch wil uitroeien, 77 kerken heeft omgebouwd tot moskeeën, 13 kerken in gebruik heeft genomen als boorschuur en zich in 1983 unilateraal tot TRNC heeft uitgeroepen: de Turkse Republiek van Noord Cyprus. De TRNC, zo leren we verder, wordt alleen door Turkije erkend en is economisch volledig afhankelijk. Zelfs water moet uit het 'moederland' komen, in eerste instantie nog aangevoerd in grote onbemande drijftakken die door de stroming vanzelf naar het eiland spoelden, maar inmiddels wordt water het land ingepompt via een lange buis over de zeebodem. Overdag probeerden we te onderzoeken waar en hoe het Cypriote dilemma

We got to know Cyprus through the *Cypriot Press and Information Office (PIO)* in the capital Lefkosia. A female associate of the *International Press & Mass Media* received us hospitably. After a briefing on procedures she took us to a depot packed with literature on 'the Cyprus question'. To read up we received a PIO-bag filled with recent editions. Since we had not been able to bring any books because of overweight charges on our flight, we spent our evenings with studies like *Turkish Colonisation: A Threat for Cyprus and its People*, *Resolutions Adopted by the United Nations on the Cyprus Problem 1964 - 2001*, *The Judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the Case of Cyprus v. Turkey*, *The Continuing Violation of Human Rights by Turkey in Cyprus*, *The illegal declaration of the "TRNC" and Turkey's objectives*, *The Consequences of the Turkish Invasion and Occupation in Facts and Figures - map of distribution of population by ethnic group & positions of the invading Turkish forces*. We learned from this among others that the 'illegal' Turkish regime led by Mr. Denktash' has deported 142,000 Greek Cypriots, has imported 118,000 colonists to change the demographic composition, has attempted to systematically destroy 11,000 years of cultural and historical legacy, has turned 77 churches into mosques, 13 churches into hay sheds and in 1983 has unilaterally declared the TRNC: the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The TRNC, as we read on, is only recognized by Turkey and is completely economically dependent. Even water has to come from the 'motherland', at first transported in large unmanned floating sacks that drifted along with the current to the island, but nowadays water is pumped into the country through a long tube over the seabottom. During the day we tried to discover how the Cypriot dilemma manifests in public space. This was not a simple thing. Taking photographs turned out to be strictly forbidden nearly everywhere.

zich in de publieke ruimte manifesteerde, wat niet eenvoudig was. Fotografieren bleek vrijwel overal ten strengste verboden. Er was altijd wel een vlag in zicht van één van de vele militaire uitkijkposten. Na veel wachten en heen en weer gebel, lukte het om van de verschillende partijen medewerking te krijgen voor opnamen op drie locaties langs het breukvlak in Lefkosia. We begonnen bij de Ledra Street, een drukke winkelpromenade die halverwege doorsneden wordt door de bufferzone. Aan Grieks-Cypriotische zijde is een oude verdedigingsstelling omgebouwd tot 'toeristische attractie'. De barricade is geschilderd in frisse kleuren en opgefleurd met kindertekeningen. Kijkgeaten bieden zicht op de overwoekende ruïnes in de voormalige gevechtlinie. Een monument en een mini-museum herdenken de slachtoffers. Dit alles wordt dag en nacht bewaakt door militairen. Met een lokale delegatie van militairen en officials vertrokken we van de verdedigingsstelling naar een warenhuis, om via de dampende keuken van een restaurant uit te komen op het dak van de Shakolas Tower. Onze zware uitrusting werd gedragen door jonge Grieks-Cypriotische rekruten, die met hun officier gedurende de opnamen voortdurend aanwezig bleven om 'assistentie te verlenen' maar vooral ook om op te letten of alles volgens protocol verliep. Vanaf de Shakolas Tower ontvouwde zich een wirwar van daken. De strikte opdeling van de stad werd slechts verraden door wat vlaggen, enkele dichtge-metselde vensters, en een rij roestige oliedrums op een dakrand. Op de achtergrond verrees het 'Vijfvinger' gebergte met op haar helling een mega-mosaïk van witte kiezels in de vorm van de TRNC vlag, de Turkse vlag in omgekeerde kleuren. Dit omni-presente 'logo', aangebracht door Turks-Cypriotische weduwen bij de oprichting van hun republiek, wordt door Grieks-Cyprioten nog altijd als een onverdraaglijke provocatie ervaren. Daarna bezochten we Ledra Palace midden in de bufferzone: een

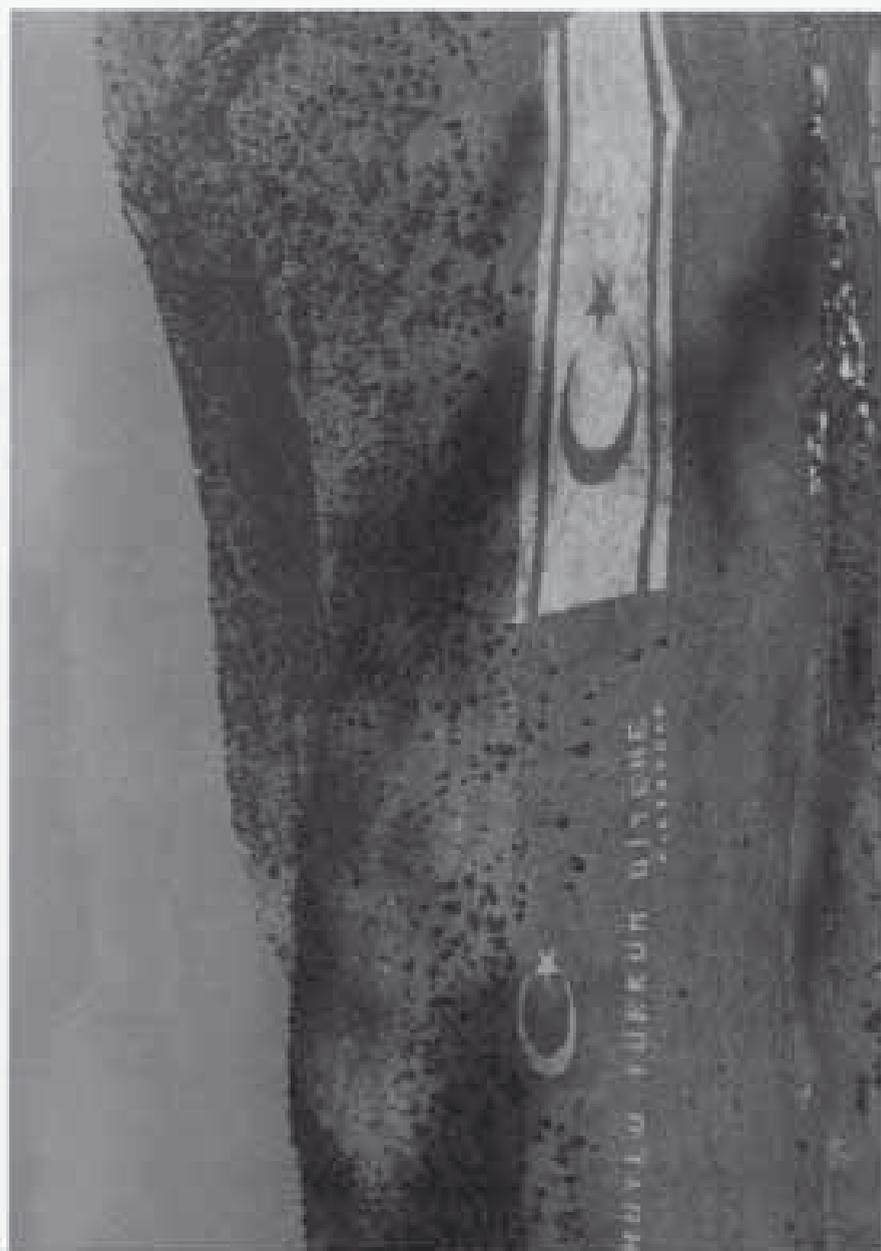
There was always some military object within sight: a bunker, a roadblock, or a flag of one of the observation posts. After much waiting and calling around, we succeeded to receive the cooperation of the various parties to film in these locations along the fracture in Lefkosia. We started at Ledra Street, a crowded shopping promenade cut in two by the demarcation line. On the Greek Cypriot side an old defense position has been turned into a 'tourist attraction'. The barricade is painted in bright colors and cheered up by drawings of children. Peepholes offer a view of the overgrown ruins in the buffer zone. A memorial and a mini-museum commemorate the victims. All these attractions are guarded by military. With a delegation of military and PIO-officials we walked through the shopping street, a department store, the steaming kitchen of a restaurant, to end up on the top of the Shakolas Tower. Our heavy equipment was carried by young Greek Cypriot recruits that stayed on continuously with their officer during our shoot to 'assist us', but also to take care that we followed protocol. From the roof of the department store a jumble of roofs unfolded. The division of the city was only visible in a few flags, closed-off windows and a single line of rusty oil barrels and piled bags of sand on the edge of a roof. In the background rose the 'Five-fingered' mountains with on their slope a grand mosaic of white pebbles in the shape of the TRNC flag, the Turkish flag in reverse colors. This omnipresent 'logo', put in by Turkish Cypriot widows at the foundation of their republic, is experienced by the Greek Cypriots as an unbearable provocation. The next morning, we went to Ledra Palace: a former chic hotel in the middle of the buffer zone, just outside the old Venetian city wall. Nowadays, the hotel functions as a UN headquarters. For decades only diplomats could travel back and forth at Ledra Palace, but now there is a civilian crossing, used mostly by Turkish Cypriots, that work

voorheen chic hotel net buiten de oude Venetiaanse stadsmuur dat fungeert als VN hoofdkwartier. Decennia lang konden hier alleen diplomaten oversteken, maar inmiddels is er een *civilian-crossing*, waar vooral gebruik van wordt gemaakt door Turks-Cyprioten, die als goedkope arbeidskrachten in het rijke zuiden werken. De recente Grieks-Cyprioten weigeren nog altijd de oversteek, omdat dit in hun ogen zou suggereren dat zij de situatie als 'genormaliseerd' beschouwen. Opnieuw werden we vergezeld door een PIO-official en Grieks-Cypriotische militairen. Bij de slagboom voor de VN sector ontstond een protocolair dilemma. De Grieks-Cypriotische militairen mochten volgens de VN voorschriften niet worden toegelaten, maar moesten om desalniettemin van hun superieuren escorteren. Het werd een heikel compromis. De uniformen moesten uit en vervuld worden voor vrijetijdskleding. De lift van Ledra Palace bleek al dertig jaar defect, maar ook deze keer konden we gebruik maken van de spierkracht van jonge soldaten. Wel had de aanwezigheid van de verschillende groepen militairen consequenties voor de bewegingsvrijheid van de camera. Het was nog net niet als bij documentairemaker Jerin Ivens, toen iedere opname die hij maakte van de Chinees-Japanse oorlog, exact werd nageflamd met een 16mm camera door iemand van de Chinese censor. Pas nadat de identieke 16mm opnamen waren ontwikkeld en goedgekeurd, mocht Ivens' 16mm negatief het land verlaten. Bij ons keken twee Britse VN-ers voortdurend van achter de camera mee of niet iets in beeld kwam dat de indruk van partijdigheid in het conflict kon wekken. Regelmatig werden we op de vingers getikt en werd ons vriendelijk, maar dringend verzoekt het stafiel te verplaatsen of de camera wat de draaien. De neutraliteit van de VN moest immers gewaarborgd worden, zeker nu afgevaardigden van het Grieks-Cypriotische leger toekomen. Pas toen tegen het middaguur vanuit de

as cheap labor in the rich south. Most Greek Cypriots still refuse to visit the north, because in their eyes it would suggest that they consider the situation normal. Again we were accompanied by a delegation of the Greek Cypriot military and a PIO-official. The UN had granted us permission, but at the entry gate to the UN sector, a dilemma about procedures arose. The Greek Cypriot soldiers were not allowed entrance into the sector according to UN regulations. They nevertheless had orders from their superiors to escort us. It became a precarious compromise. The soldiers had to change their uniforms for plain clothes. The elevator of Ledra Palace turned out to be defective for the past 30 years. Fortunately we again had young energetic soldiers at our disposal. The presence of various groups of military had significant consequences for the free mobility of our camera. It came close to the situation of documentary filmmaker Jerin Ivens, when every shot he took of the Chinese-Japanese war was copied exactly by the Chinese censor with a 16mm camera. Only after the identical 16mm shots were developed and approved, was Ivens' 16mm negative allowed to leave the country. In our situation, two British UN soldiers watched continuously from behind the camera to make sure nothing came into our frame that could give the impression of partiality in the conflict. Regularly we were admonished and told in a friendly though pertinent manner to move our tripod or turn the camera. The neutrality of the UN had to be safeguarded, especially now that delegates of the Greek Cypriot army were watching. Only when around noon inams from the many minarets in the north bellowed over the divided city, was there some space for the coming together of parties. A UN soldier began to talk about his recent employment in a buffer zone in Baghdad, and by the time it got dark the whole company of British UN soldiers and Greek Cypriot militaries in civil clothes were talking animatedly about

vele minuten in het noorden een immanen over de gedeelde stad begon te schallen, ontbond er ruimte voor toespraak tussen de partijen. Een van de VN-ers vertelde over zijn recente stationering in de bufferzone in Bagdad en tegen de avond zat het hele gezelschap van Britse blaasblazen en Grieks-Cypriotische soldaten in burger geamuseerd te keuzelen over de laatste nieuwtjes uit de *Cyprus Weekly* en het saai en dure soggantsleven in Lefkosia. Als laatste locatie bezochten we Agios Dometos aan de rand van de stad, één van de schaarse doorgangen waar autoverkeer mocht passeren. Wegens een recent incident waren de mogelijkheden beperkt. Beschonken Grieks-Cypriotische soldaten hadden Turkse soldaten in een naburige observatiepost beschamp, waar zij meer dan de twee toegestane wachters hadden zien patrouilleren. Van dit voorval waren wij toevallig getuige geweest tijdens ons eerste bezoek aan de locatie. Hoewel de VN zich van een uitleg onthield, werd voor deze locatie uiteindelijk geen medewerking verleend. We kregen wel toestemming van de Grieks-Cypriotische autoriteiten om vanuit hun grondgebied de auto-doorgang en de checkpoint te filmen. Onder begeleiding van een PIO-official en enkele militairen installeerden wij ons aan de rand van de bufferzone. We werden onmiddellijk gespot door drie Turkse soldaten in een observatiepost, die het op een fanatiek schreeuwen zetten. Een voor één verlieten onze begeleiders de set om "de verhitte gezesoderen tot bedaren te brengen", maar zonder resultaat. De Turkse soldaten braken hun kelen schor en zwaaiden woest met hun vuisten en geweren. Terwijl we inspikten kwamen de officials weer te voorschijn en excuseerden zich voor het wangedrag van de bezetter. Nu hadden we "met eigen ogen gezien hoe vreselijk het is niet vrij te zijn in eigen land". We zwegen, knikten en bedankten, maar vroegen ons af of we ons hier niet hadden laten inzetten in een politiek machtspeel.

the latest news in the *Cyprus Weekly* and the boring and expensive nightlife in Lefkosia. As a final location we visited Agios Dometos on the edge of the city; one of the rare passages where cars are allowed to cross. Due to a recent incident our options were limited here. Drunkenly singing Greek Cypriot guards had insulted soldiers at a nearby Turkish observation post, where three instead of the two allowed guards had been patrolling. We accidentally witnessed this incident during our first visit to the checkpoint. Though the UN did not explain itself, we did in the end not receive cooperation for this location. Despite the tensions, the Greek Cypriot authorities did give permission to film the car passage and the checkpoint, from their territory. Again accompanied by a PIO official and several soldiers we set down along the edge of the buffer zone. Three heavily armed Turkish soldiers spotted us instantly and began to howl at us. One by one our guides left the set to 'calm the situation', but with no effect. The Turkish soldiers shook their fists, waved their guns, and screamed fanatically till they were course. We decided to withdraw. While we packed, the officials returned and apologized for the misbehavior of the occupier. Now we had seen "with our own eyes how terrible it is not to be free in one's own country". We remained quiet, nodded and thanked them. Had we just been used in a political game?



CRUSH
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book reviews

Losing Sight of the Broader Issues at Stake

Sophie Berrebi

Documentary Now!, the latest volume to appear in NAI Publishers' *Reflect* series, begins in the way Lars von Trier's *Dogville* and *Manderley* end: with a montage of documentary photographs. Similar to a credit sequence, the inspiring beginning of this generally thoughtfully designed book sets the tone for what follows, featuring images discussed elsewhere in the book or made by artists who also contribute statements in the volume. The programmatic quality of the book's opening sequence is further made clear by the inclusion of two black and white exhibition views of Documenta 11, showing people looking at TV screens. These images underline, three years on, the significant role of Documenta 11 – the so-called '600-hour Documenta' because of its inclusion of a large number of full-length films – in revealing an artistic and curatorial interest in documentary practice and formats. This interest serves as a point of departure for the editors of *Documentary Now!*, while the visual montage raises questions pertaining to the nature of the documentary image, its place within visual culture and how it may be discussed in terms of style, aesthetics and eth-

Frits Gierstberg a.o.
(eds.), *Documentary Now!
Contemporary Strategies in
Photography, Film and theV-
visual Arts* (Reflect #04), NAI
Publishers, Rotterdam, 2005,
ISBN 90-5662-455-5, € 27.50

ics. All these issues and more are addressed in the six essays written by Frits Gierstberg, Maartje van den Heuvel, (Frits Gierstberg and Maartje van den Heuvel also edited the book along with Hans Scholten and Martijn Verhoeven), Ine Gevers, Jean-François Chevrier, Olivier Lugon and Tom Holert. Alongside shorter contributions by visual artists, these constitute the bulk of the volume.

The essays are of differing quality and the last three authors undoubtedly contribute the most rewarding texts. Olivier Lugon, who has made a name for himself with a very thorough and extensively documented study of 'documentary style' as an aesthetic and social project in the works of August Sander and Walker Evans, provides a solid and historically grounded reflection on the multiple definitions of documentary since the origins of the term and the beginnings of photography. Jean-François Chevrier anchors the discussion about documentary in a historical framework. Using such terms as 'picturesque' and 'description' he makes a strong case for the continued prevalence of the finalities of nineteenth-century photography in present day documentary



practice, evoking a genealogy of photographers and artists around the paradigmatic figure of Walker Evans whose invention of 'documentary style' enabled him to distance himself both from the pictorialist and modernist fashions of the time and from a certain demonstrative rhetoric of reportage. Rather than postulating that documentary has been contaminated by media society and thus requires greater visual literacy in order to be grasped and produced, or that it has been reconfigured by the art context – as other authors in the book argue – Chevrier shows himself to be very critical about the legacy of the term in contemporary practices, stating that the careful balance achieved by Evans is difficult to reach: 'many photographers refer to Evans but few of them understand him or can afford the same economy' (p. 53).

Taking up the issue of the increased presence of documentaries in art exhibitions and museum spaces, Tom Holert's essay on the artistic appropriation of the documentary (previously published in *De Witte Raaf*) makes several strong points. He discusses the unresolved ambivalences of curatorial practice in relation to documentary films and

emphasizes the carelessness with which these films are installed in museum contexts and the effect of the spatial reconfiguration upon the intelligibility of these works.

Most of the other essays in the book pale by comparison with these well-argued and rigorous pieces. Maartje van den Heuvel's essay is replete with cliché statements such as 'the mass media increasingly dominate our perception of reality' (p. 105), as she laboriously sets out to remind us of the necessity of a greater visual literacy to face the world we live in, and discusses the artistic responses to this situation. Embarking upon a false dichotomy between aesthetics and ethics, Ine Gevers throws in a few jargon terms such as post-media age (a misreading of Rosalind Krauss' 'post-medium age?') and post-documentary that she does not bother to define while charting an overview of the term aesthetics that falls short of mentioning actual dates and periods (save for Antiquity) or indeed philosophers. Several of these articles also repeat information already exposed elsewhere and in better terms

(Van den Heuvel's historical account of the origins of documentary for instance overlaps with Lugon and Chevrier).

The great difference in quality among the texts suggests problems in commissioning – Chevrier's text, for instance, could have gained from being longer – but also reveals ambivalence as to the book's precise aims. The preface emphasizes the popularity of documentary in film festivals and television programmes but simultaneously states that the 'traditional platforms of documentary' are losing terrain in favour of the museum. A comparable dichotomy exists between the book's subtitle *Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts* and its content: the essays rarely venture beyond the narrow perspective of an art world responding to the outburst of documentary formats and genres. This may explain why, all too often, the articles feel like their authors are moving in circles, losing sight of the broader issues at stake in discussing documentary today. Precisely for this reason, it would have been desirable to include contribu-

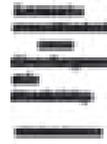
tions from the world of press photography and documentary film, where issues of distribution – through agencies, galleries and cinemas – of exhibition, publication and festival screenings are topical and also trigger a reflection on the forms and subjects of documentaries made by artists and by filmmakers.

Alternatively, a book focussing exclusively on the intrusion of the documentary in art would have required a more distant and analytical approach of its subject, deconstructing for instance the rhetoric of contemporary art discourse, and investigating what lies beneath the 'boom' of documentary in the art world, in relation to the phenomenon of globalization and ethnic representation, and to the tradition of modernism and post-modernism. While the articles by Holert and Chevrier begin to provide answers to these complex questions, the bulk of the volume seems to carefully avoid them. In this context, the artists' contributions, candidly stating their positions, offer a welcome respite from the over-laboured and often vague essays.

Tom Holert

Camiel van Winkel:
The Regime of Visibility,
NAi Publishers, Rotterdam
2005, ISBN 90-5662-425-3,
€ 30.00

W.T.J. Mitchell: *What Do
Pictures Want? The Lives and
Loves of Images*, University of
Chicago Press, Chicago 2005,
ISBN 0-226-53245-3, \$ 35.00



Taken together, the titles of the two books on review here could be read as if forming a sort of sentence or statement – certainly elliptical, but tremendously suggestive. The question mark in Mitchell's title would apply as well to all other parts of this statement. Indeed, what is a 'regime of visibility' supposed to look like? How do we have to conceive of the 'lives and loves of images'? Finally and probably most importantly, the idea that pictures 'want' anything or anybody, is irritating enough to demand closer inspection.

However, the fact alone that both books wear originality as well as questionability on their sleeves doesn't necessarily qualify them to be a matching couple for a review essay. What really makes them comparable is a whole array of themes and issues they share, in each case linked to a project of reconceptualizing the experience of an age 'characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey', as Michel de Certeau put it more than 30 years ago, writing about a 'sort of epic of the eye'.¹ Both books, replete with new insights and ideas, step into the arena of debates about

the use and misuse of the sort of knowledge production which has been labelled 'visual culture' and 'image science'. Their agendas, though very different in detail, meet where they are questioning traditional hierarchies of high and low, fine arts and mass cultural imagery, the profound and the superficial. When transdisciplinary visual culture studies are accused of destroying the capacity of engaging skilfully (in the disciplinary traditions of modernist art history and art criticism) with the material and 'medium-specific' dimension of artworks, both writers argue that the epistemological ground on which a certain idea of the visual arts was once cultivated has been profoundly reconfigured since.

Let's begin where the two projects literally intersect. In *The Regime of Visibility* Camiel van Winkel, an art historian and critic, who currently teaches visual art and art theory at art schools in Den Bosch and Brussels and who is also known as a former editor of *Archis* and *De Witte Raaf*, makes direct reference to a 1996 essay that W.T.J. Mitchell, an art historian and English literature scholar at the University of Chicago, has included in his eighth book *What Do Pictures*

Want? The Lives and Loves of Images. 'Instead of asking what images *mean*, what meaning they possess, Mitchell suggests that we ask what they *want*; and what an image wants is precisely what it *does not* possess, what it lacks. Departing from the weakness of images, the emphasis should shift from their power to their desire.'² This affirmative and fairly comprehensive summary of Mitchell's project requires further explanation and exemplification. Van Winkel tries to provide the appropriate clarification in a discussion of two fashion magazine advertisements for sunglasses. In one of them, an ad for Pal Zileri, the male model is wearing the glasses on his forehead instead of having them protecting his eyes; in the other, an ad for Versace, the eyes of a female model are blocked from sight by dark sunglasses whereas the male model at her back doesn't wear any. Van Winkel suggests that these still images probably want to be moving images – that these photographs act as if they were something they are ontologically not, that is, films. Why? Mainly because they are showing, in different ways, faces with and without glasses in one picture, thereby creating a sense of simultaneity of 'two successive and mutually exclu-

sive stages: the glasses on and the glasses off'.³

One might wonder how plausible it is to assert a specific desire of the images themselves. The reading of the photographic assemblage of consecutive stages of the drama of raising a pair of sunglasses could be more or less convincing, whereas the thesis that the photographs are weak subjects of lack, desiring to become more complete, more film-like, does not strike one as bearing a great deal of persuasive evidence. Interestingly, Van Winkel's close observations of the Versace ad, revealing how disturbing it becomes the longer one looks at the reflections on the sunglasses, the greasy glossiness of the models' skin, the monstrous imbrications of body parts, the cubistic instalment of dead gazes, etcetera, seem to be far more instructive when read as an analysis of the visual strategies developed and deployed in the fashion industry.

Turning the entire face into a mask, Van Winkel says, is a technology of producing visual immunity. And it is in such observations that the strength of his book lies. *The Regime of Visibility* attempts a genealogical (re)construction of the contemporary situation of visibility, which Van Winkel defines as a normative, imperative cultural urge to convert the non-visual into the visual, a 'permanent pressure to compensate for missing imagery'.⁴ In contrast to Mitchell's mission, whose primary interest is to steer attention away from a fixation on hermeneutics and semiotics towards the 'constitutive fiction of pictures as "animated" beings, quasi-

agents, mock persons',⁵ Van Winkel's enterprise is less the ontological reconfiguration of mute objects into 'sounding' things, as Mitchell would have it (more of this further down), than the historical and discursive processes which restructured the ways of seeing and being seen in an over-visualized world.

The two case studies which constitute the core of Van Winkel's book-length essay are concerned with the interdependency of image practices that belong to allegedly different realms of visual production. In an interesting (re)construction of the near encounters of design practices and the conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s, Van Winkel points towards the 'bureaucratic or semi-bureaucratic traits' of both fields. Wim Crowel, the designer who almost single-handedly created the 'look' of the Netherlands in the 1960s with his trademark reductionist logotypography, is regarded as working in a similar mode to conceptual artists such as Dan Graham or Lawrence Weiner. Wishing to avoid subjectivity as well as any imposition of form, Crowel tried to translate design into sheer, noiseless information, free from uncontrollable aesthetic surplus.

Van Winkel draws an analogy between the administrative aesthetics and managerial protocols of the period's graphic design and a professionalization of the conceptual artist, articulated in her/his delegation of the actual realization of the artwork to third persons. But in contrast to Crowel, the conceptualists accepted or even provoked the 'noisy'

aspects of communication; rejecting the visualization in favour of utter information, they created a specific material and visual dimension of their work, a redundancy called the aesthetic. The refusal of the visual always produces a visibility of its own, 'a package of information that needs to be communicated'.⁶ Therefore the conceptualist 'regime of information' does not escape visibility but is instead a structural component of a visual culture that is informatized through and through.

In another attempt to convey the intricacies and resonances between different sectors and degrees of visibility, Van Winkel links together the work and person of artist Cindy Sherman with the work and person of fashion model Kate Moss. Here, he's searching for a way to liberate the production of visual artists from the tight embraces of a critical discourse and to redefine the relationship between art photography and fashion photography as dialogic (or reciprocally parasitic) rather than hierarchically or dichotomically organized. Often hilarious and truly inspiring, at times repetitive and slightly implausible, the argument leads to a comparison of two types of submission: by turn Sherman's submission under the critical system which has endorsed her and made of her a critical artist following the deconstruction of the myths of aesthetic originality, and Moss' subjection to the production system of the fashion industry. Van Winkel privileges the latter submission over Cindy Sherman's critical reputation, as the identity of 'Kate Moss'

'fully evaporates behind the surface of representation',⁷ and therefore marks an acknowledgment (and embodiment) of the realities of the regime of visibility.

A certain sadism and even misogyny lurks behind the lines of this chapter, even though the sadism may just as well be the masochism of someone living through the epic of the eye which, in Van Winkel's view, is no longer the story of the active gaze, but the tale of a passive, exhibitionist visibility. As long as Sherman and/or her critics want her to be an artist in charge of the means of representation and of images of herself, she will not reach the level of total subjection under this regime of the being-seen, while Moss has moved into the most radical position – in being 'just a cog in the machine'. Van Winkel takes Moss to be radically 'sceptical' of the myth that 'we can be the author of our own life', whereas Sherman 'just does what the system expects of her'.⁸ Acceptance of the impossibility of a detached stance thus qualifies as the ultimate critical posture. Immersed in the digitized mirror halls of visibility, any aesthetic or visual judgment seems futile, since it would simply be the sign of a failure to recognize the totality of this regime. The critics 'are standing empty-handedly',⁹ and Van Winkel celebrates their/our impotence as the irreversible condition of the present situation.

The Regime of Visibility recommends a subject position of relative disempowerment, of productive confusion and stimulating helplessness. Van Winkel admits that the 'bur-

lesque operation' of his book is as 'hybrid as its subject, visual culture'.¹⁰ Offering 'unorthodox readings' of images, making 'far-fetched comparisons', the reader should not expect 'homogeneity and consistency'¹¹ from this exercise in mimicry. But this is just too true. Inspiring as many parts of Van Winkel's book may be, the theoretical project of a 'critical dialectics of art and mass culture'¹² remains amorphous. Moreover, the politics are at best vague; clear-cut statements about the political economy of visual culture would probably be considered a further obstacle in 'the development of more sophisticated forms of criticism and cultural analysis.'¹³ It's a disconcerting book, leaving the reader and its author with the task to make operable such sophistication.

There seems to be more at stake in w.r.t.j. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?*, a collection of re-worked essays on visual culture, written and published since the publication of the author's influential *Picture Theory* of 1994. Mitchell, who coined the phrase 'pictorial turn', here proposes the next turn or shift-of-emphasis, from the meaning to the *desire* of pictures. It's a bold thesis, and its author goes to great lengths to substantiate it, mobilizing the history and mythology of the tropes of living and loving images from Pygmalion to the robot child in Steven Spielberg's *AI*. Visual objects or things are reconsidered as animated, desiring beings, as friends or relatives in social intercourse. Taking the lead from Émile Durkheim's concept of totemism and

the recent 'material turn' in cultural and science studies, Mitchell engages in what he calls a 'construal of pictures not as sovereign subjects or disembodied spirits, but as subalterns whose bodies are marked with the stigmata of difference, and who function as "go-betweens" and scapegoats in the social field of human visibility'.¹⁴ Defining 'picture' as a fusion of object and image, Mitchell traces the genealogy of contemporary iconophobia, from the Taliban's destruction of the Buddha statues to the 'Sensation' of seemingly offensive images in a New York show, back to the uses of pictures as idols, fetishes and totems. In a strange and slightly uncanny ethics of friendship, the picture as totem is preferred over the picture as idol (which is or represents a god) or fetish (object of compulsive fixation). Following his argument, the totem is less a thing to be adored or worshipped than a member of the clan or tribe. Mitchell clearly sympathizes with the idea of a picture as totemic 'friend'. His renderings of this sympathy (or empathy) are compelling, sometimes funny, often disturbing. Working hard on the suspension of disbelief, *What Do Pictures Want?* repeatedly and slightly redundantly invites the reader to share the 'fiction' of the desiring picture that is in need of assistance, for someone to make it 'sound' – like a musical instrument longing to be played upon, as Mitchell muses in a metaphorical fashion. Self-consciously bordering on fantastic literature, these essays have the uncanny and perhaps productive effect of retroactively transmuting every

past approach toward images, pictures and visual culture into a mythic narrative, since every verbal discourse on the visual, be it semiotic or iconological, historical or hermeneutical, is based on an 'as if', assuming the image is something else... a text, a sign, a lie, an agent of power, and so forth. Seen that way, Mitchell just pushes the envelope of a longstanding fantasy production in the relation between pictures and beholders.

In one of the most intriguing chapters on the 'visual construction of the social' and 'vernacular visibility'¹⁵ the fate of abstract painting as a by now 'familiar, classical, standard, even official'¹⁶ visibility is discussed in terms of totemism. Instead of serv-

ing the avant-garde cause of medium specificity, opticality or modernism, abstract paintings today are 'more like members of a brother- or sisterhood of objects than Oedipal spectacles, more like totems, toys, or transitional objects than fetishes'.¹⁷

Here as elsewhere, Mitchell's aesthetic-ethical project of claiming recognition for a particular collectivity and intimacy of human beings and picture persons gets close to Van Winkel's disillusioned deconstruction of the art/mass culture dichotomy. Though the one is driven by the pathos of advocating justice for the subaltern picture while the other keeps a cool and ironic stance, both books are concerned with the particular ecologies and

economies, the *doxa* and paradoxes in the 'complex field of visual reciprocity'¹⁸; and both books are daring enough to risk some bewilderment about those concerns.

1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, English translation by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 21.

2 Van Winkel, 37 ff.

3 Van Winkel, 41.

4 Van Winkel, 15.

5 Mitchell, 46.

6 Van Winkel, 186 ff.

7 Van Winkel, 86?.

8 Van Winkel, 104 ff.

9 Van Winkel, 188.

10 Van Winkel, 10.

11 Van Winkel, 11.

12 Van Winkel, 10.

13 Van Winkel, 189.

14 Mitchell, 46.

15 Mitchell, 356.

16 Mitchell, 231.

17 Mitchell, 231.

18 Mitchell, 47.

Relational Art as New Avant-Garde

Ole Bouman

Goede bedoelingen (Good intentions) is the name of the book Erik Hagoort was recently commissioned to write for the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (Fonds BKVB). The reason for the assignment is immediately apparent from its subtitle: *Over het beoordelen van ontmoetingskunst* (On appraising relational art). Apart from a desire to develop the necessary theory, the Foundation primarily wanted Hagoort to come up with a tool to improve their own operations. In recent years they have encountered a type of art that is hard to assess with familiar artistic and

Erik Hagoort, *Goede bedoelingen. Over het beoordelen van ontmoetingskunst*, Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam, 2005, ISBN 90-76936-14-5



formal criteria. Committee members are regularly faced with art projects which do not lead to a formal product, but to moments of social contact. Relational art, as it were, and when you describe it that way you are likely to experience discomfort at the idea you will be subsidizing things people also organize for themselves without art. Perhaps the appraisers sometimes had the feeling that they were being taken for a ride. Should they provide money to those who designate everyday activities as art and therefore think they should have access to art subsidies? Or is the Foundation being exploited for activities

that are more appropriate to community work, social counselling, social activism, and actually, therefore, to 'soft' forms of 'do-goodery' that could better not be defined as art, but just as the outcome of sheer good intentions?

I won't beat about the bush. Hagoort has done the Foundation, and so the entire debate on this art form, a great disservice by making these alleged good intentions the crux of his argument and even pinning his title on them. From the start, he has legitimized the awkwardness of the art viewer and art appraiser wishing to come to terms with such art by launching a defence that

will be a godsend for everyone who denounces it. Because, Hagoort says, this art is more about attitude than content. Indeed, he claims, you should base your appraisal of this type of art on the ethics of merit rather than art criticism. Also, passing judgement is out-dated and, instead, you should really try 'assessing good intentions'. Accordingly, philosophers are put forward who can help you in that process, folk like Martha Nussbaum, Michel de Certeau, Alisadair MacIntyre and Ilse Bulhof. They are believed to facilitate, with their ethical analyses, appreciation of this art, because they are concerned about the quality of good intentions.

Relational artists, wherever you may be, with friends like that you don't need enemies! You are slowly being forced into a corner where intention outstrips fact. In this way a radical mind can be condemned for having a thought, but also just because of that thought. And since that is nonsense, Hagoort proposes jettisoning judgements completely. What remains is a kind of understanding, a vague kind of sympathy that is as non-committal as it is insipid. As anyone with talent knows, that is the beginning of the end. As an artist, you don't only have to hold your own against the

reality in which you want to make your mark with a special project, but also against an a priori assessment that your heart is in the right place.

Just to be perfectly clear: a person wishing to be appreciated as an artist will have to produce art, not comfortable platitudes. So anyone wishing to investigate the value of relational art should not start with the work of all kinds of artists, but with the good grounds for this art in general. If they are there, you can proceed, entirely in keeping with good art criticism, to examine whether those grounds are served with the project or work in question. That is true for all cutting-edge art: it is not a matter of whether you can appreciate it, but whether the work examines and conveys an important issue persuasively.

So, does relational art have a strong motive, one that is stronger than the personal preferences of the Jeanne van Heeswijks, Rirkrit Tiravanijas and Alicia Framises of this world? Are these artists exponents of something that concerns the entire world and do they express it in a special way? Once we have reached our conclusion, judgement is no longer a pain but a pleasure, something to help good artists stand out from the crowd

and give their work and lives meaning.

And here we have the remaining reasoning to bring the foregoing argument to a satisfactory conclusion: relational art may well be the most vital art form of the present day. At one time artists questioned the extent to which our perception obeyed 'scripts', or how our cultural hierarchy was coded, or what 'the museum' entailed. They made exceptional art works about those issues (just think of Picasso, Warhol and Duchamp), and similarly, today, it is essential to question the erosion of human relations by radically reversing existing scripts or finding others in their stead. In a hyper-individual society, in which it is often more important to avoid people than to seek them out, there are artists who are actively trying to devise new formulas for this pressing matter. Whether they are doing a good job is something that can still be discussed by good art critics, and whether they should receive financial support can continue to be noble work for art commissions. But those commissions and critics must understand what is at issue – not good intentions, but the rediscovery of human relations in an age of considerable concomitant abstraction.

Change One Thing, and You
Change the World

Arjen Mulder

How does democracy work? Or, in contemporary terms, how can democratic politics function in today's network society? And what is the role of the arts in those politics? A schoolchild can practically explain how democracy works: the various economic, religious and cultural groups in society strive for more or less permanent representation, by parties who defend the interests of their own rank and file, in most cases at the cost of other people's interests, in local, regional, national and supranational parliaments. Consequently, whenever there is an issue to be settled, there is at first a lot of bickering and infighting, after which decisions are reached to which all the parties promise to reconcile themselves – for the while at least.

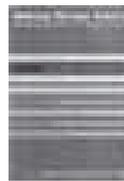
This method of doing politics is showing strain due to globalization, especially the globalization of business. As a result, decisions are made that exert profound effects (ranging from enhancement to destruction) on local, regional, national and supranational life, without the existing popular representative bodies having much say in those decisions. Examples are legion: industries decamping to low-wage countries, dam building, continental borders being sealed against the hordes of outsiders seeking a better life, expansion of the Internet, global warming, rising sea levels and so on. In

Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ZKM/The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 2005, ISBN 0-262-12279-0, € 47.90

the circumstances, democracy hardly operates through parliaments any more. Yet democratic processes are still possible.

These alternative democratic processes always coalesce around specific themes and on specific platforms (which may or may not be intended for those themes). The World Bank, for example, has to deal with NGOs that object to its financial policies because they believe they promote more CO₂ emissions and hence accelerate climate change.¹ Groupings of various kinds from all around the world rally around an issue and in a venue, which may range from a real-world conference to a virtual forum, and bring to bear a cocktail of arguments, media and actions, which resembles a democratic process and leads to a more or less democratic conclusion.

Note that I say 'resembles' and 'more or less'. For this is an extra-parliamentary brand of democracy; or, more exactly, a parliament or 'assembly' is organized for each theme by all manner of interest groups, persons, corporations and media. And in this parliament, through discussion and pressure, a decision is reached with which the various groupings can live (sometimes literally) for the time being. *Dingpolitik* is what Bruno Latour calls this in his introduction to *Making Things Public*, a catalogue published in conjunction with the similarly named exhibition



held in the Zentrum für Kunst en Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe from March to October 2005, with Latour and Peter Weibel as curators.

The exhibition was a little frustrating because it offered so much to read and study that it was impossible for a visitor to digest it all in one day. The catalogue should have dealt with this objection, but it did not appear until after the exhibition was over. The reason for the delay in publication is now evident: the catalogue is 1072 pages thick. It contains essays by dozens of internationally renowned authors from many different scientific disciplines, from art history and art criticism; and these are supplemented by pieces written by relatively free-range essayists, artists and philosophers from all over the world, plus a number of deceased literary figures. All the exhibition's themes are thoroughly gone into, so do not despair if you missed the exhibition at the ZKM. Just take a year off to read this slab of erudition.

The 'things' to be made public are meant to be taken literally. The word 'thing' refers not only to objects and issues, but also to the Althing, the parliamentary democracy which the Vikings established in Iceland. A 'thing' is something, a subject or a theme, which brings people together despite their divisions: it is precisely because they don't agree that they want to talk

about it. A thing is not a 'matter-of-fact', Latour writes, but a 'matter-of-concern'. A public congregates around each thing, and the form in which people gather around that thing or issue may be termed a parliament or an 'assembly'. An assembly of this kind does not consist of elected party members who represent other people, but of concerned individuals and groups who feel involved with the particular issue and who congregate around the thing in a certain place.

Parliamentary politics without representation: how does that work? That is the subject of this book by Latour and Weibel. Bruno Latour, known as a philosopher for his science studies, and well-known from an earlier major exhibition at the ZKM and its splendid catalogue, *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (2002), formulates the new perspective on democracy in his introduction, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public'. Peter Weibel, the director of the ZKM, incorporates the new outlook into a traditional *grand récit* on democracy as a regulated form of class struggle in his epilogue, 'Art and Democracy: People Making Art Making People'.

After a fascinating exposé of the appearance and disappearance of the thing in art from antiquity to the present, Weibel poses the theory that only interactive media art is truly democratic, for it consists of things that we may not only look at, but also may do something with, in accordance with the artist's instructions. Things, in interactive

art, are not only depicted and represented as in painting, sculpture, photography, film, etcetera, but also present in reality; and they elicit real-world behaviour from the viewer. Interactive works of art are no longer closed, autonomous entities but nodes in networks, open and relative. They are more like services than objects.

The thousand pages of text by the dozens of authors, which are sandwiched between the rather brash introduction and epilogue, respond to Latour's and Weibel's theses: they support or undermine them historically, they mitigate them, they turn them on their head, they refute them, they sharpen them, they make them more specific and so on. It's fascinating reading matter, I cannot deny: a feast of a book, not least because of its many attractive illustrations.

Still, there is something odd going on here. Despite the countless disciplines and many different countries represented among its authors, the book cannot be truly called interdisciplinary. The texts do not connect to one another; they are all illustrations of and commentaries on Latour's and Weibel's standpoints – just as the works of art in the exhibition were all illustrations of and commentaries on those ideas. Real interdisciplinary research is generally organized around a single theme or thing (also known as a 'boundary object') which forms a link between the different disciplines, as a point of concentration in the ramified network of research. Here the boundary object is the very phenomenon of the thing or the issue,

together with its derivatives: the assembly, representation, knowledge networks, political passions, parliamentary techniques and so on.

That is something like being committed to commitment – a phenomenon familiar from the *engagée* art of recent decades. 'What is it like to be socially involved?', was the question addressed by many a young artist (and not 'I feel involved with this group of people or this theme, so what kind of art should I make?') In the book, philosophers, scientists and artists wonder: 'What would it be like to be really concerned and passionate about a theme in the real world of today, instead of about concepts, media, the theories of other philosophers, scientists and artists, and so on. Just imagine we weren't postmodern. What would we see, experience, discover and be capable of?'

This new approach proves surprisingly productive. An endless stream of striking observations appear in the pages of *Making Things Public*. But the aim of the contributions is not to achieve an interaction between disparate areas of knowledge in order to generate a different kind of knowledge; the goal is rather to paint a picture of what contemporary democracy ought to be like if it is to be truly democratic once more (for the idea that all is not well with democracy is one on which all the authors tacitly agree). The crux is an ethical question: what, as Latour wonders, is the nature of 'good government' in the 21st century? And does the new attitude yield 'good art', as Weibel claims?

I cannot help thinking of my own past. Back in the 1980s, the 'public' of the squatters movement coalesced around the theme of the housing shortage in Amsterdam and formed a 'parliament', which met in a network of squats bound together by telephone calls and bicycle routes. Derided by the established political left as a 'single issue movement' ('back in the 1960s we tried to change the whole of society,

but you're concerned with just one little thing'), the model of concrete action unaccompanied by ideology, of aiming for concrete results in the here and now, suddenly seems to have a future. As an ex-squatter, I have no quibbles with that. But did squatting deliver good government and good art? Well, maybe it did. Perhaps interactive art had its origin in squatting. Perhaps that is why I love it. And perhaps that is why,

despite all the criticisms I can level at it, I find *Making Things Public* such a good book that I have no reservations in recommending it to you. You can't always be interdisciplinary, can you?

1 The example of the World Bank comes from Noortje Marres' dissertation *No Issue, No Public: Democratic Deficits after the Displacement of Politics* (University of Amsterdam, 2005).