# open

# (ON)ZICHTBAARHEID

Voorbij het beeld in kunst,
cultuur en het publieke domein

# editorial

JORINDE SEIJDEL

## (IN)VISIBILITY

The dynamic of contemporary cul-
ture is dominated by the diktat of
visibility. The degree of visibil-
ity of social, political, economic
and cultural events, of things and
people, in public imagery, is con-
sidered a prime indicator of a
society's democratic credentials
and of the quality of the public
domain. Visibility is associated
with openness and communication,
and is taken as prima facie evi-
dence of the orderliness of socie-
ty and its political makeup.
Invisibility is in this logic the
uncontrolled, the repellent or the
repressed; but it is also that
which still awaits disclosure.
From this viewpoint, the reality
of the invisible plays no explicit
part in the sociocultural and
political debate, but the longing
to reveal is all the stronger — to
the point of explosiveness.

Within the regime of visibility,
the visual media generate an
incessant stream of images while
members of the public are also
constantly visualizing their expe-
riences. However, this plethora of
images does not confirm the suc-
cess of the ideology of visibili-
ty; on the contrary, it exposes
the decline of that ideology.

There is a growing scepticism
towards images, manifesting itself
as public doubts about their
authenticity and evidential status.
These doubts can apparently only
be countered by yet more images,
without a point of satisfaction
ever being reached.

In this baffling situation, any
visual message or social agenda is
out of the question. What position
does art take in this situation?
What contribution can artists,
designers and architects make,
with all their commitment and
legitimizations, in this 'lost'
public domain? And what specific
developments in today's visual
culture are relevant here? *Open 8*
explores these questions with the
help of a guest editorial panel
consisting of Jan van Grunsven,
artist, and Willem van Weelden,
artist and researcher/commentator
in the domain of new media. Both
are directly and explicitly occu-
pied with issues relating to pub-
lic space and the public domain,
and both support taking a criti-
cal, defiant attitude in practice.
In the introduction, 'Viewing:
Seeing: Looking Away' the guest
editors expand their views on the
problems of visibility and invisi-
bility.

In a condensed version of Chap-
ter 1 of his new book *The Regime of
Visibility*, to be published this

autumn, Camiel van Winkel offers examples from fashion, art and design to demonstrate that today's culture suffers not so much from an excess of images as a deficit. This is followed by a visual contribution from Pascale Gatzen, a designer operating on the borderline of fashion on art whose work places a critical accent on the treatment of fashion in photography. In his essay 'The Post-Monumental Image', Jouke Kleerebezem argues for strategies in this mediatized, computerized culture that will lead to 'enduring visibility'. In 'Transparency & Exodus', the British culture critic and activist Brian Holmes explains how experimental art has stamped its signature on contemporary social protest movements. In 'Wild Images', I myself describe the increasing influence of amateur images on news and opinion. In 'Empire and Design', the Belgian philosopher Dieter Lesage contends that the stress placed by architects, artists and designers on the visual identity of territories is actually a concession to a postpolitical situation; he strives for a form of resistance that avoids this pitfall. Henk Oosterling, in 'The Public Existence of Homo Informans', reflects on events surrounding the American artist Steve Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble, who was arrested on suspicion of wire and mailfraud. The architectural theorist Wouter Davids contributes a column on a

work of art by Santiago Sierra made for Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Deurle, Belgium.

Further, *Open 8* reports on a discussion conducted by Jan van Grunsven and Willem van Weelden with Arno van der Mark from the multidisciplinary design group DRFTWD Office Associates about a design attitude in which visibility and autonomy are secondary. Willem van Weelden interviewed the French conceptualist group Bureau d'études, that produces maps intended to make 'the organization of capitalism' visible; one such map, titled *The System*, is included as an insert in *Open 8*. This issue of *Open* also documents a private discussion on the present-day legitimization of art school courses for art in public space, starting from the assumption that the Netherlands lacks a politically engaged practice or tradition regarding public space art; the participants were Jeanne van Heeswijk, Henk Slager, Jouke Kleerebezem and Jan van Grunsven, Henk Oosterling took the chair.

Willem
van Weelden

# Viewing: Seeing:
# Looking Away

*In rebus quoque apertis noscere possis,*
*Si non advertas animum, proinde esse,*
*quasi omni Tempore semotae fuerint,*
*longeque remotae.*

*Even in the case of things which are clearly*
*visible, you know that if you do not turn*
*your mind to them, it is as though they had*
*never been there or were far away.*

(Lucretius, IV, 809)[1]

1. Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, translated by M.A. Screech, Penguin Classics, London 1987.

Visual art, in all its manifestations, benefits from contradictions that serve to extract clarity about the variables that define its public existence and effect. You might say that the contradiction presented in this *Open 8*, visibility versus invisibility, refers to the most significant presentations and oppositions within the current, complex battle of images. Traditionally, the theme of (in-)visibility is linked to emancipation movements, lending their existence, practices or particulars visibility, out of a struggle to be seen. Feminism, for instance, would have had less prestige had it not explicitly engaged in the struggle to influence dominant models of perception. The tradition of lending visibility to alternative modes of perception has always been a political one.

The history of visual art, certainly the tradition that has shown evidence of engaging with the public space, or public debate, was originally closely linked to the movement, more broad-based from a societal point of view, of emancipating visibility strategies. Be it a question of pointing out abuses or proposing illegal or alternative methods of perception, or simply showing something that would otherwise remain invisible, 'visibility', as an ideal, has given direction to a practice that aimed to correct the dominant and obfuscating representations of so-called visibility.

The question under discussion is to what extent visual art, in its fusion with the culture of everyday, mediatized images, is still capable of lending visibility to this emancipating agenda of perception.

## (In-)visibility in Practice

When the world is shocked by a natural disaster, as it was recently by the devastating tsunami in Southeast Asia, the signifying crisis photography that records the pain is judged, in terms of quality and selectivity, by the way it shows the lonely, invisible suffering the disaster has produced. Images that show the suffering in a subtle, suggestive manner are usually perceived as the strongest. These are images that demand to be seen and that toy with our capacity to negate the invisibility of the suffering in our imagination.

By suggesting rather than showing the actual suffering in images, its depth is made visible. This turns them into poignant images that recall the diabolical pact between suffering and invisibility. A hand to the left of the frame lying open and immobile

on the beach, to the right part of a kneeling woman, in profile, weeping. Not the body washed ashore, not the bloated, partially ruptured skin, not the deformations, not the ostentatious horror – that can all remain invisible. What we do want to see is an image that gives an indication of what is not being shown. Such images evidently still have the power, in spite of all our defence mechanisms, to move us.

In talk shows in which the quality of crisis photography is discussed, the photo of the lifeless hand serves as a paragon. Simultaneously, photos that do explicitly show the devastation and horror are dismissed as amateurish and as examples of unprofessional journalism. These horrific photos are cited in the commentaries as a troubling sign of the times. An age of obsessive visibility. Everything must be shown, until there is nothing left to see in all this visibility, and everything becomes interchangeable, evaporated into omnipresence.

Jean Baudrillard, a sombre analyst of hyper-reality, sees in this visibility mania 'the equivalent of the ready-made transposition of everyday life'. Everything seems caught in closed circuits of visibility and monitored by cameras that record everything. In his view the hunger for all-revealing images is not based on any great feelings; the craving for visibility is an expression of being in the thrall of the spectacle of banality. One is fascinated by a totalitarian void, but at the same time terrified of the indifference this generates. Baudrillard sees something akin to big-time sports in this

heroic toleration of the void: 'Banality as a last form of fatality has become an Olympic competition, a last version of extreme sports.'

Because the public has become part of the closed system of visibility, the idea of control has become diffused. It is no longer a question of control being visible, but of things being transparent to the external eye. This corresponds with the inalienable longing to be nothing, and to be seen as nothing. Two possibilities remain: either you don't want to be seen, or you surrender to the exhibitionist regime of visibility, and therefore to banality. In the courtroom, too, the conflict between the unconditional right to see and the right not to be seen is in many cases insoluble. This conflict can often only be resolved by an external, enforced form of visibility, as evidenced recently by the commotion occasioned by the publication of photos of the suspect in the assassination of Theo van Gogh. In that regime of imposed visibility, communication loses its originality. Language loses its capacity for symbolism and irony and becomes an empty medium. This obscenity, says Baudrillard, is inescapable. These over-explicit images, however, exert a totalitarian power that helps to re-establish a basic principle in our relations with images: the rule of the sublime, the rule of secrecy, the rule of seduction. It is in the very visibility of their excesses that images succeed in breaking open the problem of verification.

## Excesses of 'the Real'

The practice of making images has not been made any easier by the visibility industry. Yet injustices, abuses and human suffering must be seen.[2] If only as a call for solidarity, or simply as an alternative history. Crisis photographers in fact often justify their voyeuristic practice with this argument: 'The rest of the world has to see this suffering, this abuse, this injustice.' Visibility is still seen both as a weapon and as justification, in defiance of heart-rending meaninglessness. In Christian Frei's universally celebrated documentary, *War Photographer*, about the war photographer James Nachtwey, this ideology culminates in an amazing point of literal double-meaning when the filmmaker mounts a miniature video camera with a microphone on Nachtwey's photo camera.[3] You hear the spinning and clicking of the motor-drive camera while seeing almost the same thing he is photographing. But you also see more; you see what happens in the silences Nachtwey lets fall before pressing the button. In those moments, the film shows what he does not photograph. The intervals between his shots lend visibility to his 'editorial eye', which he uses to record the 'horrific reality'. What Roland Barthes described in the 1960s as 'l'effet du réel' ('the effect of the real') meets its opposite in the film: 'l'effet de l'irréel' ('the effect of the unreal'). *War Photographer* attempts to show the limits of the amount of 'reality' we can perceive and tolerate.

As Slavoj Žižek put it in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*: 'We should discern which part of reality is 'transfunctionalized' through fantasy, so that, although it is part of reality, it is perceived in a fictional mode.'[4] The challenge is not so much to unmask (what passes for) 'reality' as fiction, as to recognize fiction within 'real' reality.

## Perception as a Model

It is thus not so much about what is generically labelled 'virtual reality' as about the 'reality of the virtual'! In an age of 'pervasive computing' – the tendency to equip the total living environment with computer systems that often have been made invisible – and perception modelled by the media, 'ordinary' perception of 'reality' also seems to be in the throes of programmed visibility and model-based viewing. The quality of the images no longer seems relevant; the power of images is extracted by the repressive

---

2. Jean Francois Lyotard writes in his book *Le Différend* (The Differend) about the (philosophical) problem in proving that the Holocaust really took place. The problem to find a living witness that saw with his or her 'own eyes' the workings of the gas chambers. One was not supposed to be able to testify after a visit to the gas chamber. The Germans used the term Final Solution (*Endlösung*) for exactly that reason. He states :'This is what a wrong (tort) would be: a damage (dommmage) accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority.' Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, translated by Georges van den Abbeele, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1988 (original text 1983).

3. *War Photographer*, a film by Christian Frei, 2001 (nominated for an Oscar for best documentary film in 2002). Available on DVD via http://www.warnerbros.co.uk.

4. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Verso, London/New York 2002.

David Gibbs, Mosque in a former school building in the Presikhaaf
district in Arnhem, 2002 (OK5 Arnhem).

strategies with which they are employed. This is often done in order to make money. In advertising, this is called 'perception management'. The images presented and endlessly repeated lend the necessary legitimacy to the product. Even innocent and artistic images are easily absorbed into the daily media circuits, without ever having been made for the purpose.

In this theatre of programmed perception, no image seems immune to the power of coding – not only the coding that is necessary to process and transmit images, but also the coding that prescribes how they should be seen and understood. In a communications universe of technological images this alienation of 'authentic' perception from the concrete reflects a media tradition in which our perception has gradually entered into an increasingly abstract relationship with reality.

Certainly as the eye becomes more and more suspect as an instrument of observation and is replaced by cameras, sensors and 'tracking devices', there is less and less room for the intuitive judgement of the naked, unmediated eye. The complex of mediatized images forces the observer to subscribe to an increasing degree to the logic of the technology that is instructing him in observation. How can the images still be critiqued? For critiquing images by means of other images from the same economy of meaning seems a hopeless undertaking.

Since the early 1990s there has been a huge flow of books and publications on the subject of 'visuality' and 'visual culture'. No longer limited to studies about the visual arts, or specifically visual media such as film, photography, video or television, visuality is now a broad subject that can count on the attention of literature as well as philosophy and cultural criticism. You could say that this development has been one of a shift in emphasis. Whereas the emphasis in the 1980s was on the culture of images and the attendant, primarily art-historical discourse, it has since come to be placed increasingly on visual culture and the observing subject. The entry of media theory and cultural studies into the discourse has also meant the introduction of new conceptual frameworks to investigate and debate an abundance of, traditionally speaking, predominantly specialist knowledge concerning visuality and perception. Media theorists call this fundamental cultural change, this 'pictorial turn', 'the late age of print'. This end of written culture coincides with a return to the Middle Ages in the sense of a 'retour avant la lettre'. With the difference that images back then came out of the 'artisanat', were the creation of artisans, whereas they are now products presented to us by technology.

According to Vilem Flusser, the increasing difficulty of critiquing images is directly related to the decline of the critical tradition itself. In his analysis *Die Schrift. Hat schreiben Zukunft?,* he deals with the vampiric relationship that exists between the domain of the image and the domain

of the written word.[5] The two domains by nature bleed each other dry in terms of

5. Vilem Flusser, *Die Schrift, hat schreiben Zukunft?*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1992.

meaning and effect. Text interprets the image to death, while the image reveals and mediates the inadequacies of text. But Flusser also sees a difference in consciousness in their opposition. The image, he reasons, reflects a magical consciousness that is circular and therefore has no linear temporal order, while the written word expresses a consciousness that is historical and therefore performs a critical dressage. The advent of the binary code – the elementary programming language of computers – marks a watershed in this critical tradition. Writing becomes programming, and therefore follows set 'prescriptions' and procedures. This development threatens to increasingly engulf the critical tradition of the written word in the imperative technological culture of the production of meaning.

From the classical text that attempted to explain the world as a historical presentation, we have progressed to a system of technological images that treats the world as a timeless model. Whereas the critical written word was the ideal instrument to attack the frameworks within which perception was coded into models, the complex of technological images seems to make us part of an apolitical, self-regulating system. A system that has transformed writing to the point that it can no longer encompass historical, political and ethical categories. All images circulate in this system; the image has definitively become democratic.

Let this image of crisis be a call to develop a new politics of perception from within our fusion with the media. A politics of perception based on Michel de Montaigne's insight: by not seeing something yourself, you make something visible to another.

Camiel van Winkel

# The Regime of Visibility

Using a number of examples from fashion, advertising, graphic design and television, Camiel van Winkel investigates the regime of visibility and its implications for a critical approach to contemporary visual culture. This article is a condensed version of Chapter 1 of his forthcoming book *The Regime of Visibility*.

*The Regime of Visibility* will be published in autumn 2005 by NAi Publishers Rotterdam.

There are too few images. The dynamics of contemporary culture are determined by a visual shortage rather than a visual surfeit. The demand for images – not just 'complex' or 'interesting' images, but any images – far outstrips supply. Life in a world dominated by visual media is subject to a permanent pressure to furnish the missing visuals; to visualize practices and processes that do not belong to the realm of the visual, or that aren't even visible as such. This is the regime of visibility. Images may be omnipresent, but as a social force they are less powerful than the imperative to visualize. The visual shortage creates an unstable situation requiring constant effort in accordance with the economic principle of permanent growth. Success equals visibility and visibility equals success. Anyone failing to conform to this model automatically places themselves at a disadvantage. No further conspiracy is necessary. That which is invisible does not exist.

The regime of visibility is no mere dictate issued by the mass media. The individuals, institutions and practices that are afflicted by it actively contribute to it as well. The regime of visibility permeates all levels of culture and society, from top to bottom, from centre to periphery. The most diverse forms of cultural production – in the widest sense of the word – have reduced themselves (or allowed themselves to be reduced) to a number of visually mediatable aspects. Self-awareness, coupled with the sense that one is different from the rest of the world, has to be expressed in a visible form, otherwise 'it doesn't work'.

In visual disciplines such as art, architecture and film, the regime of visibility results in shifts that may seem small but that are always significant. It appears there is a superlative of visibility – an extra degree of visualization. In 2001 sculptures that for many years had occupied various modest outdoor locations in Rotterdam were brought to a specially designed, light-flooded 'sculpture terrace' in the centre of the city. Despite their original locations in public space, they were deemed insufficiently visible. Anyone who had thought the idea of a sculpture terrace to be an anachronism was mistaken; it was an utterly contemporary solution to an utterly contemporary problem. Without that extra level of visualization the sculptures would have been doomed to disappear from the city altogether. They could survive only by being reassembled into a 'visual statement' that would contribute to the official self-image of Rotterdam.

The explosive rise in popularity of photography – both in the museum and gallery world and among collectors and artists – can also be linked to this collective craving to visualize the invisible. Photography has developed into a dominant model of image production; it has pushed painting and other visual media to the sidelines and imposed its own quality criteria on them. The appeal of photography is that it accords perfectly with the speed, lack of time and impatience that dominates the life of the modern citizen; moreover, it provides an illusion of immediacy and direct contact with the world, free from the

intrusion of all sorts of awkward, uncontrollable filters and intermediaries. Photographs appear to offer a pure visuality that transcends every form of rhetorical manipulation and theoretical interference. 'A good photo is worth a thousand words.' Compared with any other art form, photography possesses the invaluable advantage that every ingredient of the work is ostensibly there for all to see; everything the maker has put into the work is immediately there and recognizable on the surface. Photography is honest because it is unable to conceal anything. Everybody can understand a photo – or rather, there is nothing *to* understand.

In the case of non-visual forms of cultural production, such as music and literature, the regime of visibility can sometimes lead to even more drastic disruptions of priority, as cultural pessimists know only too well. The degeneration of pop music into an audiovisual phenomenon whereby a band's success has come to depend on the success of their video clip, is a familiar but already stale example. According to the recent formula of *Idols*, one first creates the star and only then the accompanying music. Even in the field of classical music and opera pressure is felt to conform to the television window. The choice between full concert broadcasts and free tv adaptations is seen as a choice between two evils: in the first case those involved complain about a lack of dynamics and dedication; in the second case the extra visual layer is felt to be frivolous and irrelevant. During a symposium devoted to this question a Dutch filmmaker claimed that 'opera is

already music, light and theatre, you shouldn't superimpose too much tv on top of it.' Another participant held firmly to the belief that 'music is not made for television', as if this could turn the tide.[1]

Within the field of literature, extreme positions regarding the regime of visibility are adopted on the one hand by publishers who take out full-page ads in the daily papers for novels written by fashion models, and on the other by pseudo-heroic mavericks like Jeroen Brouwers, the Dutch writer who refused to take part in a television broadcast organized around the presentation of the 2001 ako literary prize. The result of Brouwers' refusal, incidentally, was that the following year the board of the organizing foundation inserted a clause into its rules obliging nominees to appear on television.

The reality soap genre that got off to a flying start at the end of the 1990s with the launch of *Big Brother*, demonstrates that the dictate of the visual media can scarcely be distinguished from the demand by members of the public to be allowed to exercise their right to personal development and self-expression in the democratized public sphere of the media.

Programmes belonging to the reality genre fit seamlessly into the talking culture that characterizes television as a medium. During the second season of *Big Brother* in particular, viewers were endlessly entertained with the psychobabble of the participants. They effectively spent 24 hours a day justifying, analysing and evaluating their own and

each other's behaviour in relation to the isolation the format of the programme had condemned them to. In the soaps of the 1980s and '90s, famous actors played the roles of ordinary people with their everyday trials and tribulations, their ups and downs. In *Big Brother* the stars who play ordinary people were in turn imitated by ordinary people who had spent their whole lives watching soaps. This caricatural reconstruction of the soap genre was made even more explicit in the third season by the introduction of a structure of competition and reward, providing for dramatic contrasts between wealth and poverty, masters and slaves, and spun-out intrigues of rivalry, jealousy and greed.

Notwithstanding the plentiful chatter, in the end the primary aim in contemporary television culture is not verbal but visual communication. It is precisely the most intimate moments of life that qualify to be shown to an anonymous audience of television viewers. People want to get married on tv, make love on tv, suffer, weep and break up on tv, lust, sleep and mourn on tv. This graphic 'coming out' television is the ultimate result of the propagation and vulgarization of radical ideas from the 1960s and '70s. The emancipation of the individual is complete; we now live in a classless society in which every minority has been granted civil rights. Given that situation, nobody can survive without being intensely self-aware and without expressing this awareness in a clear and recognizable form. To passionately celebrate, in public, one's own identity has become

the ultimate goal – and every single individual now has the right to pursue that goal, regardless of skin colour, sexual preference, social position and financial status. After thirty years of coaching, training and therapy, the humanistic ideology of personal development has reached a paradoxical turning point: my identity is no longer located in the inner regions of my selfhood, but in my expression of them – in the way I 'design' my personality, in the signals that I send to my environment.

This externalized and quasi-playful self-awareness functions today as the last great communal mode of exchange between citizens, institutions and corporations. It therefore comes as no surprise that even politicians, when campaigning for the elections, try to hook up to that mode of exchange. In May 2002, *Elle* and *Marie-Claire* published fashion spreads featuring MPs and aspiring MPs in the role of photo model. The studied-casual photos left just enough space for snippets of interview. One of the 'models' provided the following quote: 'In politics you've always got to be prepared for the sudden appearance of a camera. Whenever I'm too lazy to dress well, I invariably regret it.' To a more serious medium she justified her performance as fashion model by saying: 'If there wasn't any accompanying text, I wouldn't do it.'[2]

2. Agnes Kant (SP), quoted in the Dutch edition of *Elle* (May 2002), p. 97, and in *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 April 2002.

Another name for the regime of visibility is the primacy of design. Artworks and cultural products from high to low are increasingly *designed* rather than

just *made*. The principles of 'good design' have acquired universal currency. On this point there seems to be little difference between a cd by Madonna, a painting by Jeff Koons, a novel by Lulu Wang, a talk show by Oprah Winfrey, or underwear by Calvin Klein. To design something is to visualize it; to visualize something is to transfer it to the visual media. A production model dominates in which everything revolves around styling, coding, placement and arrangement; around effective communication with a specified audience or target group; around instant identification and efficient seduction. This applies not only to the big names with their monster budgets and commercial appeal. Even young artists operating in alternative circuits are acutely aware of the importance of a good presentation; they search for a direct exchange with their audience and develop informal, sometimes playful versions of direct marketing.

The ten criteria for designing a successful logo have been listed in professional literature as follows: visibility, cross-media application; distinctiveness; simplicity and universality; retention; colour; descriptiveness; timelessness; modularity; and equity ('knowing when and what to redesign').[3] These criteria can be applied without too many changes to the production of hit singles, musicals, skyscrapers, magazine covers, museum exhibitions and bridges. It is no accident that, shortly after its erection in 1996, the Erasmus

3. Gregory Thomas/Earl A. Powell, *How to Design Logos, Symbols & Icons. 23 Internationally Renowned Studios Reveal How They Develop Trademarks for Print And New Media*, North Light Books, Cincinnati 2000, p. 18.

Bridge in Rotterdam was adopted as the city logo; in fact Van Berkel & Bos's design was selected primarily for its graphic qualities.

The regime of visibility creates the symptoms of a contemporary anxiety or fear. I am paralysed by the idea (or is it a feeling? – it feels like an idea) that while I may be getting more and more to see, I am experiencing less and less. Not only is my sense of reality destabilized by the exclusive domination of visual stimuli; under the present circumstances it is even becoming more difficult to determine what 'sense of reality' actually means.

In a world that has been excessively visualized, the visual possesses an ambiguous potential. It is inherently linked to two contradictory dimensions. On the one hand, the visual is the aspect of the world in which we easily lose ourselves. It functions by way of immersion. The gaze is absorbed by a scene while the body either becomes limp and languid or imperceptibly tenses up. The visual squeezes consciousness through a narrow slit, on the other side of which it ceases to be my or your consciousness and becomes a mindless copy of the things themselves. Gazing for any length of time into an open fire, or staring out of a window or at a computer screen causes the space of experience to fold up into a flat envelope, the contents of which are always somewhere else.

Diametrically opposed to this immersive dimension is the culturally determined association of the visual with distance, detachment and control; with contemplation and reflection.

The gaze imparts depth. From sight follows insight; from insight, supervision. This second dimension of the visual has been elaborated by such authors as Marshall McLuhan and Jean Baudrillard. McLuhan associated the spatial-geometric formula of the 'point of view' with the age and world-view of mechanization. This is characterized by observation from a distance, linear thinking, rationalization and fragmentation; chains of cause and effect, the breaking up of complex processes into simple steps, and the expansion from centre to periphery.[4] With the transition from a mechanized universe to an electronic global city, this optical model would lose its dominance. 'Fragmented, literate, and visual individualism is not possible in an electrically patterned and imploded society.'[5] McLuhan and Baudrillard anticipated an age *beyond* the visual, a world in which the distance between observer and observed object shrinks and is ultimately eliminated altogether by electronic extensions of the human nervous system; an imploding world in which visual perception is transformed into direct skin contact, and tactile communication prevails. While Fredric Jameson has associated the visual with a loss of distance and reflection – 'rapt, mindless fascination'[6] – for McLuhan and Baudrillard the loss of distance and reflection is associated with a collective transcendence of the visual. Baudrillard proclaimed the end of the gaze and even the end of

4. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London/New York 2002, 11964, pp. 5 ff.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

6. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, Routledge, New York/London 1992, p. 1.

the spectacle. All forms of technological and biological exchange would cohere to form the hyperreality of an integrated and aestheticized environment in which distance, depth and perspective had ceased to exist.

With regard to the regime of visibility one could indeed speak of the end of the gaze and the end of spectacle, in the sense that visibility, in today's over-visualized culture, oddly enough has nothing to do with *seeing* any more. Visibility has become a quantitative affair that can only be verified by statistical means such as polls, viewing figures and market research.

The classic duality of *looking* and *being looked* at has disappeared: there may be something that is being looked at, but there is no longer anybody doing the looking. As such the regime of visibility differs from what Christian Metz and Martin Jay have respectively designated 'the scopic regime' and 'the empire of the gaze'.[7] *Being seen* takes over the central position previously occupied by *seeing* and absorbs all connotations of activity and domination. It is not the gaze but the object of the gaze that dominates the visual field – even if there is no one left to be dominated.

7. See Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire. Psychanalyse et cinema*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1977; and Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity,' in: Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*, Discussions in Contemporary Culture 2, Bay Press, Seattle 1988, pp. 3-23.

The apparent contradictions of the visual are more than a theoretical issue; the paradoxical coupling of mindless immersion and detached observation penetrates deep into the phenomenology of contemporary life. That life is characterized *both* by total immersion in

stimulating and stimulated environments *and* by the evaporation of experience in a panoramic overview. Each of these phenomena is inconsistent with the other, yet both are equally 'true'. The psychopathology of contemporary society is marked by a seemingly random oscillation between moments of immense synaesthetic euphoria and moments of total numbness and disconnection. The thing that sparks uneasiness is that this acutely felt contradiction cannot be resolved by any overarching concept. And, like the symptoms of two different, non-related disorders, they cannot cancel each other out. This split 'syndrome' follows an increasingly abrupt and fragmentary pattern. Individual and collective eruptions of emotion appear as discrete incidents devoid of any underlying coherence or structure. Conversely, this lack of connection only serves to increase the intensity of the fragments. Every sensation is at once an absolute sensation. Historical comparison or contextualization is felt to be impossible, undesirable or irrelevant. Everybody communicates for themselves with their own, private version of reality. Nobody is prepared to relinquish the illusion of a unique, individual experience. As such, it is scarcely possible to draw a clear distinction between feelings and ideas; opinion polls and election results are subject to the vagaries of an emotional thermometer.

As a rule, the antithesis between mindless immersion and detached observation is not interpreted as a paradoxical duality typical of the visual per se, but rather as a rift that divides the totality of visual production in two, separating vulgar pulp culture on one side from the intelligent production of artists and independent filmmakers on the other. Even academic researchers specializing in 'visual culture' and drawing their material from the lowest strata of the pulp industry, range themselves with their theoretical and philosophical references automatically on the side of analytical observation. Thus the alleged split in visual production, which these researchers at first sight appear to dispute, is unconsciously propagated at the secondary level of the book: books for the coffee table versus books for the university library.

The question whether the antithesis between 'high' and 'low' culture still exists should therefore always be accompanied by a second question that defines the true objective of the first: how should that antithesis – or what remains of it – be approached by criticism? What attitude should critics and theorists take vis à vis the entire field of cultural production, including its most gratuitous and most complex exponents? According to the philosopher Boris Groys, author of *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* and *Über das Neue*, the antithesis between elite culture and mass culture – an antithesis that he regards as an essential and defining element of modernity – has not disappeared, as postmodern critics claimed; it has merely shifted to the interior of each individual product. The fact that there is a constant exchange of visual inventions between kitsch manufacturers and museum artists is seen by Groys as a confirmation of the gulf that divides

them; yet he also uses this fact to support his claim that the split between pure form and shallow effect no longer runs through the field of production but through the field of interpretation. Groys talks of 'sign-splitting': every sign (cultural product) has theoretically acquired an autonomous, elite, avant-gardist and at the same time a mass-cultural, heteronomous, kitsch interpretation. Interpretation has thus become undecidable.[8]

8. Boris Groys, 'Fundamentalismus als Mittelweg zwischen Hoch- und Massenkultur,' in: idem, *Logik der Sammlung. Am Ende des musealen Zeitalters*, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich/Vienna 1997, pp. 63-80.

The weakness of Groys's theory is that in refuting the postmodern myth of a homogeneous and undivided cultural space, he still displays postmodern views, in particular on the erosion of signs and the neutralization of kitsch. He merely shifts the undecidability from the primary to the secondary level – the level of reception – and in so doing leaves the door wide open to boundless relativism.

Even if Groys is correct in claiming that interpretation has become undecidable, that can be no reason for abandoning interpretation altogether. The fruitless dispute between the cultural pessimist who complains of the increasing lack of content, and the advocate of contemporaneity who objects that, on the contrary, there is more and more content,[9] should be called off on the grounds that it is possible to attribute a meaning (and not just an effect) to even the most banal, everyday phenomena.

9. See Jouke Kleerebezem, 'Een onbetekenende tijd,' *De Witte Raaf* no. 100 (November-December 2002), pp. 2-3.

'As the conduct of life veers away from the compass point of tradition and inner conviction,' writes Hugues Boekraad, 'so it comes within the force field of professional languages and patterns of behaviour, evaluation and observational categories. It is at this moment that designers appear on scene. The function of design – including the design of individual life – has become so dominant that it can serve as a metaphor for post-traditional life. In the absence of prescribed forms, life becomes a quest for new forms.'[10] Here we once again find confirmed that the primacy of design is another name for the regime of visibility. 'The culture of interiority is abolished by the design culture that is by definition directed towards externality and visibility. As a visualization strategy, design is the quintessence of postmodern self-determination, whether it concerns institutions or individuals.'[11]

10. Frederike Huygen and Hugues Boekraad, *Wim Crouwel. Mode en module*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam 1997, p. 189.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

To assume the former existence of a pure 'culture of interiority', incompatible with external priorities, that was consequently obliterated by a postmodern design culture, may offer the critic a comfortable point of departure; yet this assumption is too absolute. After all, there is no logic in claiming that a particular phenomenon, in this case design culture, is extremely superficial and at the same time has profound consequences. If it were true that there is no common ground between the traditional culture of interiority and the postmodern culture of design, the latter

could not have impacted on the former, let alone swept it away. In reality that common ground does exist: no culture without an awareness of form, no substance without representation. For the observer this would have to be a reason to search for mutual adjustments and transformations rather than to fear the end of the ideal tradition.

The critical reflection on art should focus on investigating the shifts and effects that in recent decades have occurred in the field of visual art under the regime of strategies of visualization and design. Although this undertaking is in line with Boekraad's contention that design is the 'quintessence of postmodern self-determination', it will also make clear that questions relating to the visualization of the non-visual and the externalization of internal processes are not by definition alien to the agenda of the artist. On the contrary: such questions traditionally belong to the realm of visual art. The real point is that 'visual intelligence' has become a sort of common pool that ad makers and fashion photographers can draw on (and add to) just as much as visual artists. Thus art is in danger of losing the last bits of its historical advantage. What is there left for critics to do once they have been forced to abandon the idea that artists are capable of doing things that ordinary people are not? Is it possible to adopt a critical stance vis à vis the amorphous totality of contemporary visual culture? And if so, from where would such a critique derive its authority?

# Pascale Gatzen

For *Open 8*, the editors invited Pascale Gatzen to make a visual contribution, more specifically in reaction to *The Regime of Visibility* by Camiel van Winkel. As a fashion designer, Pascale Gatzen is primarily interested in fashion as a formal system of codification and production of meaning.

Gatzen won international fame with photos of clothing she made herself, which were published in various fashion magazines. Her clothes are meticulous re-creations of the two-dimensional images of clothing as presented in fashion spreads in magazines such as *Purple*, *i-D magazine* and *Vogue*, but rather than interpreting the items of clothing from the fashion spreads (the collaborative interpretation of

designer, stylist and photographer) as derivatives of an original, as representation, Gatzen treats them as something that can be treated as inspiration, as source. By photographing the remake and presenting it alongside the photo from the fashion collection on which it is based, Gatzen manages to liberate the image from the representation, or, put more precisely, opts to revise image and representation in a way that transcends their limitations.
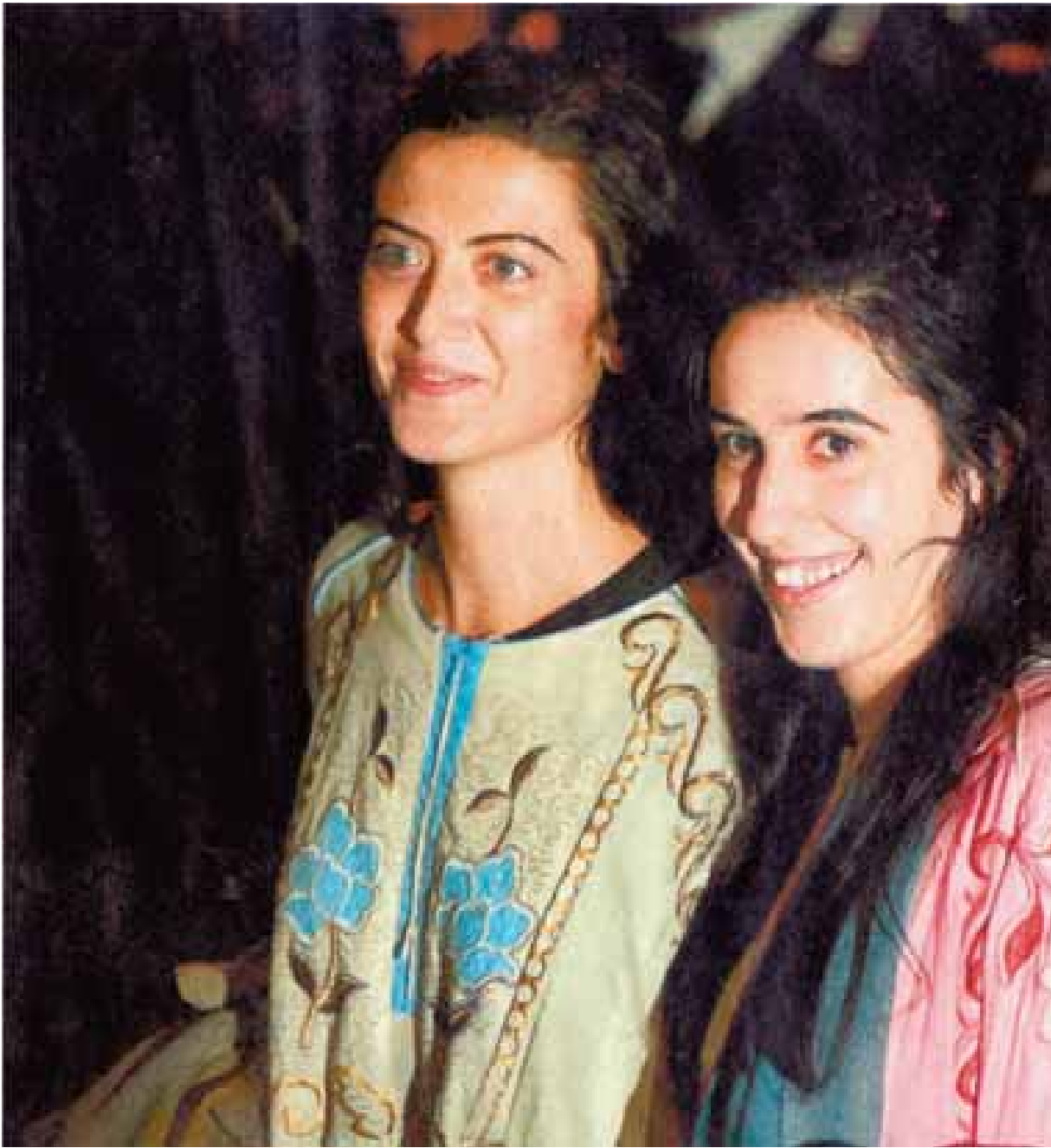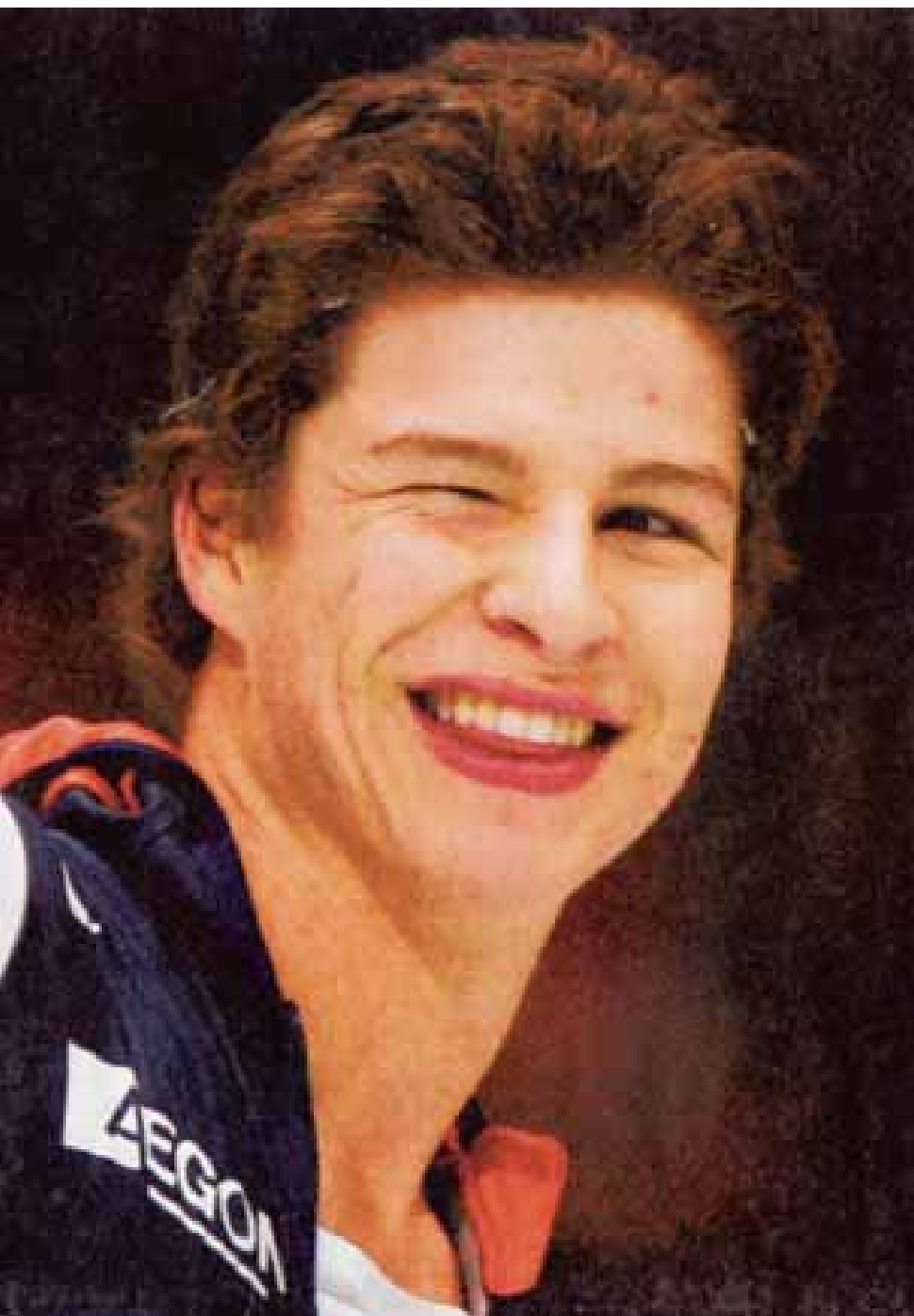
Photo Reuters

Photo Jiri Buller

Jouke Kleerebezem

# The Post-Monumental Image

## *On Enduring Visibility in the Network Society*

In the last several years, under the spotlight of media attention, a number of spontaneous monuments have popped up all over the place, monuments that threaten to ignore society's complexity and remain visible only as long as the media's attention lasts. This places the traditional monument, as well as the collective memory, in jeopardy. In Jouke Kleerebezem's view, the networked media and the network culture related to it, offer significant perspectives of a new process of 'post-monumental conceptualization', a new economy of attention.

*There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen – indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention. Like a drop of water on an oilskin, attention runs down them without stopping for a moment.*

Robert Musil[1]

1. From Robert Musil, *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten* (1936), published in English as *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Worstman, Eridanos Press, Hygiene, Colorado 1987: 'Monuments', p. 61.

Nations write history by commemorating their national successes and catastrophes and giving them a permanent place. Traditionally, monuments are often erected under the auspices of governmental entities. The traditional, historical monument that Robert Musil was writing of in 1936 thus constructs a collective memory by immortalizing persons or events of extraordinary importance. In this way, political interests remain visible within the most specific ramifications of the social enterprise – for those who recognize this.

Monuments are often designed by artists. This does not, however, automatically mean that monuments belong to the domain of visual art. Within the oeuvre of its maker, the monument occupies a separate place, and it is seldom compared with other public or museum work. The artist Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, also designed houses, gardens, public art, a library, a museum, a line of furniture, a skating rink, clothing, two chapels, a bakery and autonomous installations. 'I have fought very, very hard to get past being known as the Monument Maker.'[2] *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, a work by Chris Burden that commemorates 3,000,000 Vietnamese dead, may have been conceived, in a critical sense, as a monument, but in essence it is a traditional post-conceptual museum artwork. A computer generated the names based on random names in four different Vietnamese telephone books.[3] Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* names 57,661 actual victims.

2. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1982 (source: http://www.nps.gov/vive/home.htm); quotation from http://www.anecdotage.com/index.php?aid=14571.

3. Chris Burden, *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, 1991 (source: http://www.archinode.com/wtcmwj.html).

The way the monument relates to art in public space or to museum art forms is not, however, the subject of this text. Instead the focus will be primarily on 'new monuments' created under the current political and cultural circumstances, on monuments that claim legitimacy outside the realm of traditional monuments as well as outside the realm of visual art. These new monuments attract a great deal of attention – especially in the media – for a short time, and in that sense they have the opposite effect to that of Musil's monument. They are attention magnets instead of attention deflectors. They herald a post-monumental age, in which our attention is focused in a radically different way.

Chris Burden, Sketch for *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, 1991.
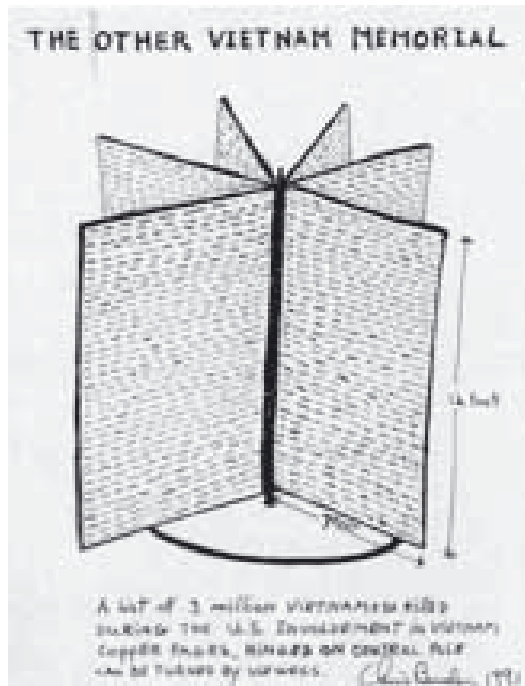


Chris Burden, *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, 1991. Twelve copper plates attached to an aluminium column.

## Media Monuments

The organization of visual art in public space follows the representative principle of the political structure. The patron – certainly in the Netherlands, where this form of art is significantly stimulated by the government – is keen to see the government's interests made visible in the work, not only from a socio-political viewpoint but also from a symbolic perspective. You could call it state art by extension. The national memory is informed with images that are created thanks to the intervention of expert, democratically constituted commissions and with the assistance of funding institutions. In this process, experts with no direct political interests make government policy and allocate collective funding, so that art in the public domain and art that does not thrive in the commercial circuit can be produced. Subsidies presume to correct a market, but they have become the market: a discrete economic reality. Outside the art trade and the subsidy market, attention seems to be increasingly focused on a new type of monument. The breakdown of a government monopoly on the establishment of monuments creates a space in the public domain for a wide variety of spontaneous memorials not initiated by official authority.

In public space as well as in the media, initiatives are taken to write not so much history as *current events*. Even in their democratic aspects, some of these projects can be unmasked as stubborn attempts to salvage what remains of established representative interests. The public broadcasting service originally founded as the Catholic Radio Broadcasting Organization, the organ for Catholics in the Netherlands which has for some time now, in order to update its own identity, been using the image of a breast-feeding Virgin Mary as its media banner, took the initiative of holding a competition to name the 'Greatest Dutchman of All Time'.[4] Pim Fortuyn and William of Orange, *bien étonnés de se trouver ensemble*, vied for the honour. Friends of Theo van Gogh championed the former; friends of the country's history championed the latter. The audience of tv station Nederland 1 enjoyed the 'Idols'-like proceedings and cast their votes. This was the way to create a media monument circa 2004. It lays no claim on prosperity, makes little lasting impression and is not relevant to national historiography. But it caught the public's attention unlike any other cultural event.

4. http://www.degrootstenederlander.nl.

Alongside these media-driven monuments, everyday monuments are popping up that do not tell of great events or great people. They are not established by official or expert institutions. The individual citizen creates his own memorial to a drug user unjustly suspected of theft, improvised on the spot where she was kicked to death by supermarket employees. Individual initiative assumes the responsibility of making the outrage visible in a modest monument. A broad community contributes by making a piece of public space available, possibly

*The Post-Monumental Image*

The statue of Pim Fortuyn was decapitated by a viaduct on the way to its destination. Photo WFA.

maintaining the memorial, deploying a handful of police officers at its unveiling by a city alderman salaried by collective funds.

Media attention, however short-lived, is often the only homage the average person can receive today. The attention fades as quickly as the flowers wilt and the tea-candles burn out at the scene of the crime. In the mass media, brief over-exposure is followed by enduring invisibility. Just as media images begin to actually interest us in particular events and persons, they vanish from television screens and the pages of magazines and newspapers, to pop up again goodness knows when – if they ever do.

The End of History

We live in a time when official institutions and traditional monuments have little or no meaning anymore and the dominant conceptualization of societal ideas and processes has come to an end. This so-called 'end of history' coincided with the rise of the mass media. It was the end of a monopoly on history in which only a select few sources were tapped in order to make the world visible. But the more sources emerge, the less authority the proffered images exude.

Traditional monuments, which are articulated in regularly recurring manifestations, have a prominent claim on visibility. We see, however, that they cannot hold attention. Could a more enduring appeal for visibility grow out of the defenceless memorial? A memorial for passers-by, who pause to reflect at their own initiative, to burn a candle, for instance; a monument that is just as modestly commonplace as the event that inspired it? Might such a 'defenceless' monument be able to hold our attention after all? Would it not, in Musil's words, be 'impregnated' to repel attention, as in the traditional monument?

Did the reason lie in the monumental authority that the multi-faceted meanings of great events and historical figures attempted to set down in an authoritarian conceptualization? Was it precisely the claim on the extraordinary, on special historical circumstance, that was the major component of this 'impregnation'? Is not everyday life more memorable than the monument – more so than art, even, truth stranger than fiction? And should that everyday life be commemorated, articulated, made special in monuments – however democratic and short-lived? Are other kinds of symbolic and perhaps practical memorials imaginable, which can better focus our ordinary, special interests and fix them more lastingly in our memory?

A belief in the value and the power of the ordinary seems to contradict the importance we attach to art. After all, we expect art to make our perceptions and experiences special and elevate them above the anecdote. The ordinary monuments against random violence and the temporary homage to public 'figures' who become victims of murder or accident make visible a great sorrow and a great anger. The new monuments, like the new political engagement, are above all *demonstrative*.

*HELP*, monument in memorial of the murder of Joes Kloppenburg in the Voetboogsteeg in Amsterdam.
Design Sandra de Wolf. Photo Joris van Bennekom.

These new monuments are protest monuments. They do not merely commemorate the special qualities of the memorialized person but above all protest the lack of extraordinary qualities in the representatives of an established system and their preoccupation with the mass media. If the new monuments make anything visible, it is the anger at an established order unable to be credible and trustworthy, no matter how it tries to present itself as ordinary. In that sense they are of historic significance.

History, tradition, politics, art and the monument labour under the studio lights to create a popular conceptualization that tries in vain to become monumental according to historical examples. It tries to hold the public's attention and stamp itself in the collective memory. But media visibility does not produce enduring images. These media monuments seem 'impregnated' against complex meanings, associations and reflection. They merely attract our attention for a moment, only to distract it as quickly as possible and focus it on the next insubstantial event.

This is of course more applicable to the competition for the 'Greatest Dutchman of All Time' than to the word 'HELP' hung in neon in the Voetboogsteeg in Amsterdam as a remembrance of Joes Kloppenburg's murder. The more superlatives accompany the presentation, the more short-winded its advocates are, the more short-lived the excitement and the briefer the memory. The Greatest Dutchman of All Time will always be a media monument. It produces ahistorical, post-monumental, extremely visible but very short-lived, commonplace *protest entertainment*. The temporary memorials on the site of a random crime, on the contrary, attest not only to impotent sorrow and anger, but to a protest against a media industry that offers no lasting narrative and seems primarily intent on making us forget.

## Enduring Images

It is the task of art to consider and visualize our experience of current events and reintroduce this into societal reality, without immediately dissolving in commonplace mediality. It must nourish memory with reflection. This contributes to the value of art as knowledge and enduring insight into the way in which we identify, organize and enjoy matters of philosophy and entertainment. Art produces images that *make an impact*, that *endure*. These can be images varying from the most ephemeral to the most monumental forms, from the most conceptual to the most expressive expression. But 'images that endure' are not monuments; 'making an impact' is not the same as commemorating.

The extent to which contact with art contributes to the accumulation of knowledge and insight depends on complex factors that are difficult to generalize. In a time in which our 'knowledge of knowledge' is increasingly beyond the reach of institutionalization, it is all the more imperative that we subject the organization and expression of individual and collective

memory to closer examination. The way in which we deal with current events and history is determined to a large degree by the mass media. It is precisely here that the epistemological crisis that the traditional culture and political system are undergoing becomes visible. Our knowledge of knowledge is being thrown out of balance by mediatization and informatization. Governments and social institutions no longer have any idea how a society should remember itself, or how it should know itself. They leave it up to the consumer. This lack of insight into the basic requirements of a mediatizing and informatizing society among the parties that formerly wielded authority creates curious mood swings from euphoria to mistrust. 'Society's shot to hell, but I'm doing all right' was the predominant sentiment among Dutch people in a recent survey about the quality of life.

## Mediatization

Investment in knowledge, in enduring principles and in images that can attract our attention every time, is taking place under the influence of two great communication projects. The first is mediatization, in which traditional ideas about collectivity and identity invite an incessant mobilization of as large an audience as possible. The second is informatization, in which the fragmentation of collectivity and identity into infinite sub-interests leads to new forms of interest promotion and social interaction. The difference between mediatization and informati-

zation is not one separating different technological media. It is not a conflict between old and new media, or between analogous and digital production processes. We can observe the result of the mediatization process most clearly in the popular press and on television. The mass media seem to constitute a last social 'institution' that can be understood in traditional terms. However, they do not exhibit the principle of solidarity based on an ideological canon that characterized traditional organizations and movements: we do not become members in them. Therefore we would do better to consider the popular media as an aggregate rather than as a directional force, as a medium, a vehicle that holds disparate elements in a loosely relational context.

But the most significant aspect of mediatization is of course the endless expansion of the public realm, for the preservation of the media's own industry. What is private is dramatized and what is public is individualized. Both in entertainment and in 'more serious' genres, television is the quintessential mass medium, with 'content' for and by a mass audience. On what is still the most popular medium, mediatization brings everything to our attention, without distinction as to the person, without distinction as to the quality of the content, without distinction as to the value of the exhibited knowledge, and without a response from the viewer, who is increasingly thematized and presented as part of the offerings, in the dramatic banality of his or her everyday existence.

## Informatization

Informatization is a substantially different project, although, due to technological and commercial developments, parallels can be drawn with mediatization. Informatization outstrips mediatization in terms of technology and logistics at almost every level. The best model for studying informatization is of course the Internet. It provides an unlimited supply of content and offers the consumer superior selection and navigation possibilities. 'Network culture' – if we define it as the culture that could only emerge with the advent of the Internet – is characterized by the free exchange of digitized content among individual interested parties, independent of institutional intermediaries. The Net forms a platform in which every individual interest can be assured of a response and in which, thanks to the idealism of the first and second generation of Internet pioneers, an unparalleled amount and quality of cultural property is made available, free of charge. On the other hand, because it was dependent on wiring for the last 40 years, the Internet was long unable to penetrate society to the same degree as printed media or television. Thanks to today's high-speed Internet connections, this gap is rapidly being closed.

In order to avoid thinking of informatization as a primarily technological condition, we must concentrate on the characteristics in which it sets out its objectives, those that distinguish it from mediatization. Informatization is geared not to the masses but to the individual. The network offers its infinite possibilities for the individual to identify him or herself in terms of his or her interests and then to search for the desired information, or to be addressed according to his or her individual knowledge and interests. Unless he or she deliberately presents him or herself as a member of a specific interest group, the network user cannot be addressed as such by other users of the network. Informatization is also the lasting storage of 'content' – data on ideas, people, and issues in the form of image, text and sound – to be kept ready and delivered to any address, on demand and as desired. This requires no editorial intermediary; it suffices that the data I am looking for is stored at that moment in the network and earmarked in such a way as to be delivered at my request.

The information network can also mediate, however. In response to my request, data can be added to my 'content' by another network user. All transactions in the information network unfold thanks to an unlimited storage of data in endless configurations and thanks to selective access to these data. While it is often said that the network operates according to a process of 'dis-intermediation', the reality is that what is taking place is 'pan-intermediation'.[5]

Of course, the information network is not free of mediatization. There are attempts to control data management and articulation according to the model of the old media. Mediatization

5. 'disintermediation': see, for example, one of the best examples of 'panintermediation': the Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disintermediation.

is presented as the activity of a social institution that supposedly can help us choose or (re-) discover our cultural identity. It will supposedly shield us from nefarious information, or prevent our own information leaking out to those who might abuse it. As in any snake-oil scheme, the profiteers will actually swindle us out of the very thing they pretend to be protecting us from losing, namely our exclusive attention and our privacy.

It would be naïve to think that in the Internet a sanctuary free of fraudulent schemes had been created – as naïve as to believe that the Internet is in fact a breeding ground for terrorism and professional crime. Both the mass media and the information media are different sources of conceptualization and knowledge, within which both constructive and destructive forces are at work. They are not utopian self-contained universes.

## Post-Monumental Conceptualization

A network culture demands a new form of attention, which you could call 'post-monumental': the result of an array of conceptualization and knowledge produced not in a clear-cut, broad-based, institutionally legitimated, authoritative, commercial way or without the potential for interaction. Post-monumental conceptualization is geared toward the gathering of experience and knowledge in an open and dynamic structure of supply and demand. Prior to the advent of the Internet, such structures led a fairly concealed existence. When they came to the surface of the public domain it was usually in a form of epistemological disobedience: in direct action, alternative publications and various forms of protest. In the arts, a long line runs from Surrealism and Dada via Situationism and Fluxus to flash mobs and culture jamming. Via the route of mouth-to-mouth publicity, marginal print publications and improvisation in alternative channels of communication, the content took shape and the audience was reached – sometimes only for the duration of a single public event. In his collection of essays *Air Guitar*, art critic Dave Hickey recalls the network of out-of-the-way record and book shops his parents would go to in the 1950s to attend poetry nights and jam sessions.[6] To the young Hickey's amazement, these places where like-minded spirits came together could always be found, even in places where his parents had never been before. Such vital networks have always formed a parallel reality in the arts, where knowledge was produced among true enthusiasts and stored in their memory and where interests were shared.

6. Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar*, Art Issues Press, Los Angeles 1997, ISBN 0-9637264-5-5 ('Unbreak my Heart, an Overture', p. 12).

Post-monumental conceptualization is not just the visualization of a post-monumental, post-institutional system. It is also the construction of the post-monumental image. The visibility of the images and their construction as a consequence of an ever-changing interrelationship between content and context are not the work of a centralizing initiative, or an institutional authority.

More information is constantly being made available on the Internet, while the objects themselves remain invisible until attention is focused upon them and they are sought amid the supply. Unlike in the old media, the relationship between object and context, thanks to the specific characteristics of the network, is constantly changing, which makes it incidental. The question is how, with incidental connections, we can hold attention for images that remain visible.

This represents a unique challenge for art. Images that endure without having to be *pushed* amidst media over-exposure using monumental resources and relying on institutional authority require a new artistic consciousness and new artistic methods. Works of art differ from other striking images in that they are systematically produced, distributed and consumed by means of a vast system of established institutions like museums and biennales – in other words, they are *systematically brought to our attention*. The art system, however, is not solely institutional. It has also operated independently of the institutions. Because these institutions, and by extension art criticism, have reached a crisis, art, for the moment, will have to manage without authoritative finger-pointing. For the organization of the production, distribution and consumption of the arts at this juncture it is imperative that artists and art enthusiasts thoroughly understand the unique potential of a network culture. Only then will the requirements for constituting a lasting post-monumental conceptualization be archieved.

## Attention in the Object

Attention produces temporary visibility, but neglect breeds invisibility. The latter is the fate of the traditional monument and of a great deal of art in public space. Enduring visibility occurs only in interaction with enduring attention. If post-monumental conceptualization is to be made resilient, if our visualization of what concerns us, in all its complexity, is to make an impact that lasts longer than the mediatized moment, our attention must literally be invested in the object. We invest in ideas, people and issues in the information age by producing information about them, sharing it and storing it. By directing our attention to the loose linkage of the objects in an informatizing aggregate, we can elicit meaningful connections. Their durability is measured on the modest scale of a casual articulation shared by interested parties. We find ourselves back in the backrooms of the record and book shops. But we no longer have to wonder how we are going to find them again. They come up amidst the concentrated attention of a network of shared interests, which finds its optimum conditions in the present network of communication. Collectivity is created both at the level of a perhaps modest but concentrated attention and at the level of the interest in the principle of interaction between visibility and attention under new conditions. The durability of meaning is guaranteed by the durability of the attention of those who share this meaning. Authorship and readership come together, are

shared. In this way, interested parties become beneficiaries. Having moved beyond the competition for attention within a limited number of channels waged by the traditional media, we can relish in the unique features of the huge supply of specialized knowledge and interests the network mediates.

We might thus attempt to imagine a 'democratization' of signification. Democratization in a political sense has been contaminated by the idea of the masses, of a monumental 'people' – that illusory unity with a preferably shared illusion, with shared 'standards and values'. But if we manage to reduce this 'unreliable' people into the group of 'interested parties who become beneficiaries', we witness the emergence of a distinctive effect of the network culture. Attention is invested in objects around a shared interest, forming a non-monumental, non-mediatized, enduringly illuminating context. A context whose meaning we commemorate, as owners of this conceptualization, candles in hand. The post-monumental image is thus a temporary resting point, a loose node in a network of relationships among interested parties and the objects of their predilections, which lasts exactly as long as their interest in these objects. Sharing of the objects themselves and of the interest in them, being at once author and reader, artist and recipient, results in a visibility that is dependent only on the motivation to keep this node in the network, this condensation in the media fabric, intact.

Our post-monumental consciousness distributes attention for new

contexts among new beneficiaries. The professional and the true enthusiast get to know each other in new ways and encounter each other in different places. The established order is no longer established enough to impose monumental interests via official institutions in a traditional mediating role. It has been fifty years since any such public order existed. Mediatizing and informatizing forces focus our perception of new and old objects in all directions and manage to hold on to it for varying periods. Every place, every object, every moment and monument, every contextual relationship is informed and absorbed within a new economy of attention. Visibility is not an aesthetic luxury; it remains the basic condition for the acquisition of meaning and knowledge. What we see tells us who we are.

Brian Holmes

# Transparency and Exodus

*On Political Process in the Mediated Democracies*

The British culture critic and activist Brian Holmes claims that the imprint of artistic experimentation on social protest move-ments is undeniable. He examines the notion of process as that which exper-imental art and activism have in common. Holmes analyses the exodus, mass defection, as a means of escaping the immobilizing transparency of the mediated democra-cies, as a way to resist politics-as-usual.

*What is it that separates the left from the right?. . . Fundamentally, it is nothing but a processual calling, a processual passion.*

Félix Guattari[1]

1. F. Guattari, 'The Left as a Processual Passion,' in G. Genosko (ed.), *The Guattari Reader*, Blackwell, London 1996, p. 260.

In October of 1968, in Rosario, Argentina, the artist Graciela Carnevale invited visitors to what would be the final opening of a 'Cycle of Experimental Art' held in a storefront space in the city. Her contribution to the series consisted in luring the public inside, then slipping out to lock the door and enclose the crowd within the gallery. The visitors became the material of a social artwork. The question was: How would they react to this imprisonment? Who would finally shatter the glass to release the captives from the trap? 'Through an act of aggression, the work tends to provoke the spectator to a heightened consciousness of the power whereby violence is exerted in the everyday world', wrote the artist. 'On a daily basis we passively submit, through fear, connivance and complicity, to all the degrees of violence, from the most subtle and degrading violence that coerces our thinking via communications media broadcasting false contents provided by their owners, to the most provocative and scandalous violence exerted on a student's life.'[2] In the event, the public submitted. After an hour, the blow that finally shattered the glass

2. G. Carnevale, catalogue text, 'Ciclo de Arte Experimental,' in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a 'Tucumán Arde'*, El Cielo Por Asalto, Buenos Aires 2000, p. 122.

came from outside. A photograph shows a woman crouching down to exit through a jagged hole in the window.

At the same time, Graciela Carnevale was also part of the project known as *Tucumán Arde*, or 'Tucumán is Burning' – an experimental process of information analysis, multimedia reportage and artistic display, involving some thirty artists in an attempt to expose the conditions of exploitation, expropriation and impoverishment in an Argentinean province. The participants, who had drawn their conclusions from the most advanced theoretical positions and technical experiments of the time, chose to break with the existing institutions in the hope of infiltrating the national information system and contributing directly to the political struggle against the Onganía dictatorship. *Tucumán Arde* is increasingly recognized as a genealogical departure point for the kinds of media activism practiced today.[3] But can we not also read Carnevale's enclosure piece as an allegory of the way that social classes are transformed under conditions of urgency?

3. See M. Carmen Ramírez, 'Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980,' in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, catalogue, Queens Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 66-67; as well as M.T. Gramuglio and N. Rosa, 'Tucumán Burns,' in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, A. Alberro and B. Stimson (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1999), pp. 76-79.

In the late 1990s, the politically involved sectors of the overdeveloped countries – the NGOs, the charities, the unionists, the communists and ecologists – were the people inside the glass bubble of consensus, or 'civil-society dialogue.' It was the direct actionists who shattered the window.

Graciela Carnevale, *El Encierro* (the Lock-up Action), part of El
Ciclo de Arte Experimental (The Art Experimental Cicle), Rosario,
October 1968. Photo Carlos Militello.

We know that the cycle of massive demonstrations that began in the years 1999-2001 was no miracle. The impetus had come from the South, primarily from social movements in Latin America and India. The global justice campaigns, inspired by South African efforts to force debt cancellation, had built a tremendous following. Critique of neoliberalism had become a national issue in both France and Canada. The labour movements of the overdeveloped countries were ripe for radicalization. And the Zapatistas offered a new model of political confrontation, combining powerful symbolic actions with national and international networks of support. But political forces must be set into motion, passions have to catch flame. In the cities of Western Europe and North America, where the postmodern waning of affect appeared to be complete, it was the urban cultures of resistance that struck the match. 'Reclaim the Streets' in Great Britain, the *Tute Bianche* ('White Overalls') in Italy, the Direct Action Network of the Pacific Northwest United States – these were the catalysts that transformed a diffuse aspiration of isolated civil-society groups into a movement, able to take to the streets and reach beyond the specific demands of each dissenting group.

A political generation is forged, not by determinants of age, but by choices of involvement and experiences of confrontation. How are such choices made? The invitation to illegal protest that sparked the current cycle of anticapitalist mobilizations aimed to draw out the participation of social categories, particularly youth, who could no longer be lured into involvement by identity issues, parties or unions. But it also sought to bring more traditional formations into heightened conflict. The success of the Direct Action Network in Seattle, at the WTO meeting in November 1999, was to use civil-disobedience techniques to immobilize traffic in a key sector of the city, focusing police repression and in this way creating a magnetic attractor for union members exiting from their consensually managed events – but also for local inhabitants, ecologists, Third World delegations, anarchists and many others. Through that intervention a five-day urban uprising was unleashed. In a less disciplined yet equally potent way, the 'Reclaim the Streets' carnivals offered a tantalizing cocktail of transgressive pleasure, informed political protest and direct confrontation, which radicalized the participants by exposing the structural violence of contemporary social relations. But the *Tute Bianche* of Italy developed the most explicit strategy. The white overall, which could be donned by anyone, signified the permeability of a movement that was not ideological in the disciplinary sense. The use of quite ridiculous-looking protective padding created a theatrics of humour and self-derision, while allowing police brutality to be captured on video as a kind of comic spectacle. Most importantly, the duration of this movement was limited in advance by the prediction of its self-dissolution into all the colours. The release from a paralyzing consensus became constitutive of the movement.

## Art and Activism

It would be misleading to claim that the direct actionists played the role of a vanguard artist, leading a naive public into an experiential trap where every participant would be forced to draw fresh conclusions. The self-transformation of society is more complicated, more multiple, than Carnevale's enclosure piece can suggest. Yet the imprint of artistic experimentation on the current political generation is undeniable. The most obvious contribution of the visual arts to the anticapitalist movements is the merger of community-oriented video with the distribution system offered by Internet, giving rise to innumerable non-normalized media projects that combine documentary information and expressive politics, in the lineage of *Tucumán Arde*. These projects carry out a specular combat with broadcast TV – that is, with the spectacle society – and in that way, they at least partially fulfil the political aspirations of the early video makers.

Another, more subtle thread is the proliferation of mail art, first through 'zine culture and desktop publishing, then through the net, culminating in the mid-1990s in the widespread circulation of subversive texts and media pranks under multiple names like Monty Cantsin or Luther Blissett. Multiple names bring the refusal of copyright and intellectual property to the very centre of ego-dominated subjectivity, in an attempt to dissolve the proprietary function of the signature which has always served as the barrier between contemplative, individualistic art and

collective, interactive forms of expression. Yet another artistic contribution to the movements is performance culture, with its emphasis on the embodiment of the political, played out in its inseparability from the sexual, ritual, generational, ethnic, and psychodramatic dimensions of human experience. One could be tempted to conceive the entire *dispositif* of the carnivalesque demonstration as an extension of performance to the streets. But if we stopped there we would miss the deepest commonality between experimental art and activism. This is the notion of process, as a value in and of itself.

In the now-canonical 'anti-form' definitions of the 1960s, process designates the temporal dimension of materials, their transformation in time, as initiated or continuously effected by the activity of the artist. But there is another definition, whose roots lie in the chance philosophy of John Cage, in the relation of prop and performance sought by Fluxus, in the interplay of score and interpretation developed in concrete poetry and vanguard dance, in the orchestrated chaos of the happenings, the improvisational work of the Living Theater or the insurgency of Provo and Situationist interventions. In these approaches, process can be defined as the generative matrix constituted by the meeting of catalytic artefacts, more-or-less conscious group interactions, and the dimension of singular chance inherent to the event. This artistic understanding of the way that 'social material' can proactively transform itself over time was enriched by the movements of anti-psychiatry and schizoana-

lysis, which extended the domain of what could be accepted as self-expression, and attempted to reshape institutional structures to accommodate this multiplication of subjective forms. The micropolitics of a host of liberation movements of the 1970s, including the women's movements in particular, but also the local constellations of Italian Autonomia, made group processes of self-understanding and decision-making into one of the ways that adherence to a political project is developed and sustained over time. The difference of the last ten or fifteen years is that the proliferation of expressive practices in everyday life – inseparable from the rise of intellectual and affective labour[4] – has brought the specifically artistic definition of social process back to the forefront, not within the art world but in the more open and uncontrollable space of the urban event.

4. For the relation between labour and expressive politics, see Paolo Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution: the Political Theory of Exodus,' in M. Hardt and P. Virno (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1996, available at: www.makeworlds.org/book/view/34.

The fundamental relation between post-vanguard art and contemporary social movements is here, in this resurgence of expressive and interactive process which has helped forge a political generation. What it gives us to understand is that an entire current of experimentalism has migrated outside the realm of art as defined by the signature-work. But this realization is only the departure point for a series of questions concerning the political postures that have developed as a necessary exodus from the immobilizing transparency of the mediated democracies. The questions are these: Why was the mix of carnival and direct action so important to the protagonism of civil society? How has the situation changed since September 11? What will happen to the new political generation that emerged just before the authoritarian turn? And what roles can artists play in that generation's development?

## Civil Society in a Hall of Mirrors

I've suggested that art can be compared to activism through the metaphor of an intervention on 'social material.' The idea might sound scandalous; yet just such a process lies behind the emergence of what we now recognize as global civil society. In the late seventies and early eighties, Eastern European writers like Adam Michnik, Václav Havel and Gyorgy Konrad used a combination of literary expression and political critique to redefine the classical concept of national civil society, and in this way, to precipitate a change in collective consciousness. No longer would civil society be simply understood as the pacifying rule of law within the boundaries of a sovereign territory; nor just as the right of citizens to engage in critical discourse. Instead it would designate the need to create an everyday space of civic engagement that effectively secedes from the totalitarian state. For Konrad, civil society was an *anti-politics*. As he wrote in 1982, 'Anti-politics is the emergence of forums that can be appealed to against political power; it is a counter-power that cannot take power and does not wish to.'[5] The Czech dissidents

5. G. Konrad, *Anti-Politics: An Essay*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1984, p. 231.

Graciela Carnevale, *Tucumán Arde*, graffiti advertisement for an exhibition in the CGT, Rosario 1968.

spoke of a *parallel polis*, which, as Václav Benda explained, 'does not compete for power. Its aim is not to replace the power of another kind, but rather under this power – or beside it – to create a structure that represents other laws and in which the voice of the ruling power is heard only as an insignificant echo from a world that is organized in an entirely different way.'[6] Because the Soviet and American blocs were widely perceived as two sides of the same coin – both threatening nuclear violence on a scale that dwarfed the traditional, nationally bounded space of civility – it was immediately considered necessary to extend the rightful space of anti-politics to global dimensions. Konrad maintained that the 'existence of a world forum favours the emergence of the eccentric, those who stand out.' And he continued: 'The international alliance of dissenters and avant-gardists takes under its wing those few people who, in their various ways, think their thoughts through to the end.'[7]

Similar ideas developed in South America, in the face of the dictatorships. The aim was to open up a myriad of divergent and ultimately uncontrollable micropolitical spaces, in order to succeed where the guerrilla struggles had failed.[8] This conception of divergent spaces remains an important legacy for anti-systemic movements, as witnessed by the Zapatista autonomous zones, the Social

6. V. Benda, quoted in Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, Polity, London 2003, p. 56.

7. G. Konrad, *Anti-Politics: An Essay*, op. cit., p. 211.

8. For the Brazilian situation in the early 1980s, see Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Cartography of Desire: Schizoanalysis in Brazil* (forthcoming from MIT/Semiotexte, 2005).

Forums, John Holloway's call to change the world without taking power, or Paolo Virno's notion of a non-state public sphere.[9] But there has been a critical change since the 1980s. No one today can ignore the deeply ambiguous role that civil society would play after 1989 – especially since Michnik, Havel and Konrad have all supported the invasion of Iraq.[10] The more recent attempts to intervene on social material have all had to respond to the bewildering metamorphosis of civil society after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

9. J. Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, Pluto Press, Londen 2002; P. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, Semiotext(e), New York 2004. Also see note 4.

10. Michnik justified himself and his two peers in an article entitled 'We, the Traitors,' published in his own newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborzca*, Warsaw, 28 March 2003, available in English at: www.worldpress.org/Europe/1086.cfm.

The integration of a diluted concept of civil society to the reality of capitalist globalization was a consequence of the ideological vacuum left by 1989. In the absence of any coordinated oppositional force, every critique could be considered at worst harmless, and at best, profitable. The exploitation of humanitarian NGOs by the neoliberal state is there to prove it – along with the corporate patronage of art. Yet the 1990s were also a time of opening. Air transportation, global communications and international coordination were now accessible even to informal groups. The structures of governance became more transnational but more transparent too, permeable to the public, permeated by the media, constantly overseen by innumerable observers. The paradox of civil society in the years of Clinton, Blair,

Jospin and Schroeder was to sit on all kinds of official panels, to be aired on all kinds of channels and to be allowed to debate about everything, except the basic values that orient the post-'89 world-system.

Such was the Western *glasnost*. The hidden aims of public relations and private sponsorship, the *realpolitik* of elected office and international commissions, and the increasing insistence of the news media on the rules of a world marketplace in which they themselves are major players, all gave civil-society figures the uncanny sensation of moving in a hall of mirrors. As though transparency in the mediated democracies could only be found in a camera lens, whose function is to select and frame, even before the image is recorded, edited, repurposed and broadcast as the opposite of whatever was initially intended. In the late 1990s, Havel's warning in his famous 1978 essay on 'The Power of the Powerless' was timelier than ever, despite or even because of the presidential office occupied by its author: 'It would appear that traditional parliamentary democracies can offer no fundamental opposition to the automatism of technological civilization and the industrial-consumer society, for they too are being dragged helplessly along by it. People are manipulated in ways that are infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in the post-totalitarian societies.'[11]

11. V. Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless,' in J. Keane (ed.), *The Power of the Powerless,* Hutchinson, London 1985, p. 91.

By the end of Clinton's imperial mandate, the need for direct action became obvious – at least to those on the fringes. Because they did not claim to be civil anymore, deliberate gestures of disobedience could break the distorting mirror and reclaim the density and opacity of an oppositional position. Only this kind of confrontation could make activists from the South take the Northern protests seriously. But the carnivalesque dimension, the artistic treatment of information and the experimentation with social process are not just window dressing for a protestor's brick. These are the ways that participants have found to reinvent the anti-political space of everyday experience, despite full-spectrum attempts at commercial, cultural, governmental and ideological mediation.

It's often said that September 11 put an end to the effectiveness of direct action protests, by delegitimating anything that could be assimilated to terrorism and authorizing massive deployment of the police. That's true, and the strategy had already been sketched out in Genoa. But the consequences of September 11 on the US government have had the long-term effect of demonstrating that the fusion of the state with a corporate oligarchy can produce a repressive apparatus that stretches its electronic fingers into every aspect of daily life. We are witnessing the onset of a social pathology, comparable in scale if not in nature to the Cold War. And only idealists could believe that the European bloc is not producing its own variations on this pathology, for instance in the treatment of immigrant workers and the nationalist rhetoric surrounding the presence of so-called foreigners, or in the establishment of detainment camps inside and

outside the EU borders.[12] But to oppose the security panic and the reality of institutional racism

12. See I. Saint-Saëns, 'Des camps en Europe aux camps de l'Europe,' in *Multitudes* 19, Paris, December 2004.

that underlies it would mean refusing the false transparencies, escaping the co-optation machinery of parliamentary democracy itself. This is why in the very moment of their rise to visibility and to more complex forms of organization, dissenting social movements have begun to experiment once again with new forms of anti-politics, marked by the pragmatics of defection and exit, but also by the more intangible, almost mythical theme of exodus.

Redisappearing

A strange and quite funny anecdote from the European Social Forum in Florence, in November 2002, can help make the point. Faced with an overload of slogans like 'Stop this Bloody War' and 'Another World Is Possible' – which is like a marriage of Trotskyist populism and civil-society naiveté – members of the Euraction Hub network decided to intervene. They used the materials at hand. An activist in an outlandish blue wig was installed on the roof of a van outfitted with projecting pink wings; this emissary from the outside advanced within a compact crowd toward the Fortezza da Basso, a medieval castle where the main events were being held for paying admission. Vanquishing the objections of the security team, the procession entered the Forum to have a dance party right next to the circus tent where SWP Trots were bellowing out slogans from 1917.

As the perimeter of the castle was crossed, the activists raised a banner that read: 'Stop the World, Another War Is Possible.'

The satire of consensus was perfect – and so was the call for massive direct action that would paralyze entire cities. The banner in the gateway expressed the widespread desire for something more effective than the global antiwar demonstrations of February 15, 2003, which were in fact proposed at the ESF meeting in Florence. Along with this idea of mass defection from the militarized societies, it asserted the possibility of a wholly *other war*: a subversion that could dissolve normalized behaviours and established hierarchies.[13] The networked activists had not forgotten that Deleuze and Guattari conceived their nomadic war

13. For the subversive philosophy of this slogan, see the Spanish-language publication '[sic]': http://sindominio.net/ofic2004/publicaciones/sic/indice0.html.

machine as a potential of expressive and epistemological variance that could operate within every institution, and even at the heart of the military-industrial complexes. They had not forgotten, because the development of the Internet over more than thirty years has proved this kind of subversion to be a practical reality. Such struggles necessarily take place within the capture-devices that seek to neutralize them: thus the entry of the activists into the castle, as a way to pursue the exit from politics-as-usual that had launched the entire social forum movement in the first place. Without a constant resurgence of the radicalizing process, grassroots mobilization can be halted by the very organizations and figureheads it needs

in order to expand its field of transformation. But this is what has been learned since the early demands for the representation of civil society. The destinies of the current political generation depend crucially on maintaining the possibilities both of large-scale organized confrontation, and of direct, micropolitical participation in the processes of self-government.

These understandings appear clearly in the new mobilizations around precarious labour, articulated among others by the French part-time cinema and theatre workers and the EuroMayday paraders in Milan and Barcelona.[14] These confrontational movements, which make a great use of street performance and artistic invention but also of very specific juridical and sociological knowledge, can be seen as attempts to infiltrate, destabilize and reconfigure the social state. Not only is a new kind of labour to be considered – part-time or interim workers – but also a new set of claims, which mix wage and social insurance issues with the demand for more free time and better opportunities to use it. The treatment of casual labour becomes a question of human ecology. Thus what is ostensibly a workers' movement builds constitutive links to struggles over unemployment, education, environmental conditions, real-estate speculation and the commodification of culture. The massive presence of migrants in the circuits of precarious labour brings in concrete North-South issues of unequal exchange as well, and thereby lends these campaigns at least the potential to act with the full political

14. See www.cip-idf.org and www.euromayday.org.

composition that first appeared in Seattle and Genoa. In this way, unionizing strategies can remain part of a larger struggle, which requires a multiperspectival awareness of its protagonists. The goal is to transform the state, but without becoming it – that is, without being subjected by its market imperatives and bureaucratic categories. Only in this way can the horizons of social change remain open enough to embrace the world.

Artists and media activists participate directly in these movements and at the same time symbolize them, by condensing their experience of the radicalizing process into expressive works. The distribution of these works, through alternative circuits and then gradually through broader institutional formats, is a way to give complexity and consistency to the affects of rebellion and refusal. But the familiar limits have not vanished. The basic functions of selection and framing, editing and repurposing, are performed in perfect transparency by the gallery-magazine-museum system. As the demand for an activist aesthetic rises, the selection will almost inevitably come to focus on dramatized images of insurgency, associated with a truncated genealogy of theoretical concepts from the late 1960s and early '70s. In other words, the presentations will slice out a few visual and conceptual elements from a longer, broader and more complex history, leaving the viewer untroubled by any kind of processual passion. A new institutional critique might then arise, denouncing the failure of museums to adequately inform the public. But in reality, it is the inherent

failure of representation, both in the visual and the political sense, that continually leads activist-artists to abandon their work and their familiar skills, and to dissolve once again into the intersubjective processes of society's self-transformation.

This moment of dissolution is where one could locate exodus, not as a concept, but as a power or a myth of resistance. On the one hand, exodus is a pragmatic response to the society of control, in which any widespread political opposition becomes an object of exacting analysis for those who can afford to invest major resources in the identification, segmentation and manipulation of what we naively call the public. In the face of these strategies, exodus is a power of wilful metamorphosis: the capacity for a movement to appear, to intervene and to disappear again, before changing names and recommencing the same struggle in a different way. And this too is a process that artists can symbolize, by performing the self-overcoming of art once again – at the risk of dissolving their proper names, their trademarks and their careers. But the very statement of this tactical necessity of disappearance raises a deep anxiety, which must be familiar to all old revolutionaries, about the possible continuity of resistant culture, or the constitution over time of something like an anti-systemic movement. In this regard, exodus seems to designate an existential reserve, that psychic space where fragments of artistic, poetic and musical refrains are inseparable from the wellsprings of action, but expressible only as a kind of

myth.[15] To touch this intangible space is the ultimate intervention on social material – something no individual can do, because it is only achieved through a collective experience, by a multiplicity that has no authority, no signature.

Exodus is an expression of process politics. It points beyond the distorting mediations and structural inequalities of capitalism toward a strange sort of promised land for the profane, which is the immediacy of the everyday, the direct experience of cooperation with others. The carnival that sometimes breaks out in the midst of concerted political action is a way to celebrate the occasional reality of this powerful and persistent myth.

15. See F. Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1995, esp. pp. 19-20, 60-61.

Jorinde Seijdel

# Wild Images

## *The Rise of Amateur Images in the Public Domain*

There is nothing new in camera images shot by amateurs being able to play a role as evidence and as a visual resource in the reporting and interpretation of significant events – witness the Zapruder film of the assassination of J.F. Kennedy or the Rodney King video tape. Now, however, digital media and the Internet seem to make an increasing intrusion of amateur images in the professional media inevitable. What is the status of these 'wild' images in the public domain? Do they reveal the new blind spots of the official news media? Or do they primarily demonstrate a public desire for images that almost eradicate the distance from events?

Photos of the torture of Abu Ghraib prisoners in Iraq were first made public in America in April 2004 via CBS's 60 *Minutes* and *The New Yorker*, and then spread quick as lightning around the globe via the Internet and other news media.[1] Less than five months later, a selection of the images was featured in the 'Inconvenient Evidence' exhibition at the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York and the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.[2] The digital photos were printed directly from the Internet and pinned 'raw' to the walls. 'Inconvenient Evidence' was organized by the critic, writer and curator Brian Wallis, the ICP's Director of Exhibitions. Wallis's intention was not simply to feed the prickly public debate about the events in Iraq, but also to generate a discussion about the new relationship between photography, digital media and conflict. After all, what was especially shocking about the Abu Ghraib photos was that they were not journalistic photos but amateur snapshots, personally made by the American soldiers as part of the torture, as a souvenir of the war, to mail to family and friends.

The exhibition obviously sparked protest. On an Internet discussion forum about the representation of violence, 'Under fire', in which many Americans participated, there was a heated argument about the ethics of the exhibition. The opponents of 'Inconvenient Evidence' did not think it legitimate or responsible to show photos of this nature in an art centre; the proponents praised Wallis's courage and defended the necessity of exposing such material as widely as possible, wherever that might be.[3] In the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* it was summarily argued that the photos in 'Inconvenient Evidence' would function as 'quasi-artistic images, or as images that are interesting to look at in their own right'.[4]

The question is whether or not this actually says something about a pre-programmed, blinkered art public. The American critic Michael Kimmelman wrote that the exhibition had quite the opposite effect, and that the photos also had to be seen in the light of the continuing and suspect invisibility of official American photojournalistic images of the war.[5] Kimmelman underscored the status of the images as personal, amateur snapshots that were never intended for public consumption, but for circulation within a small circle of family and friends. While public photos of suffering usually

1. See Seymour M. Hersh, 'Torture at Abu Ghraib', *The New Yorker*, 10 May 2004. http://newyorker.com/fact/content/?040510Fa_fact. See also Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command. The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, HarperCollins, New York 2004.

2. 'Inconvenient Evidence, Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib', 17 September - 28 November 2004, ICP, New York City/Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, 3 October 2004 - 2 January 2005. http://www.icp.org/exhibitions/abu_ghraib/.

3. Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, Jordan Crandall (ed.), *Under fire. On the Organization and Representation of Violence*. http://www.wdw.nl/underfire-archive/.

4. Article in the arts section of *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 October 2004.

5. Michael Kimmelman, 'Museums: Abu Ghraib Returns - As Art?', *International Herald Tribune*, 12 October 2004 (reprinted from *The New York Times*).

http://www.k12.nf.ca/gc/SocialStudies/whist3201/World%20History/MMartin/
ZapruderFilm/analysis.htm
Fragments from the Zapruder film of the murder of J.F. Kennedy, Dallas,
1963.

http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=2444. Torture of Iraqi prisoners
by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison, Irak, late 2003.



www.tamisilicio.net. Photograph taken by Tami Silicio of the coffins of
American soldiers in a freight airplane at Kuwait International Airport,
7 April 2004.

appeal to the viewer's sympathy for the victim, and seem to be made by the photographer in our name, the Abu Ghraib photos confront us with the problematic and painful issue of what the photographers actually assumed about the viewers of their images. In any case, those images are evidence of a society suffering from amnesia, according to Kimmelman.

In this light, 'Inconvenient Evidence' was in the first place the statement of a political standpoint in the thoroughly frustrated American intellectual debate about the Iraq war, an attempt to give undiminished visibility in the public domain to what the Bush administration would have preferred to suppress as swiftly as possible – or to what American society itself suppresses. On this last point, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek wrote that the Iraqi prisoners were effectively being initiated into American culture, and were given a taste of the obscenity that lies hidden behind the values of human dignity, democracy and freedom held high in public.[6]

6. Slavoj Žižek, 'Between Two Deaths. The Culture of Torture', *Infoshop News*, 23 June 2004. http://www. infoshop.org/inews/stories. php?story=04/06/23/8774033.

Secondly, the exhibition forced questions about the cultural and political implications of democratized digital production and distribution media (cameras, mobile phones, the Internet) for journalistic reporting and public opinion. 'The pictures taken by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib . . . reflect a shift in the use made of pictures – less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated, circulat-

ed,' as Susan Sontag formulated it in the essay 'Regarding the Torture of Others', written shortly before her death. 'A digital camera is a common possession among soldiers. Where once photographing war was the province of photojournalists, now the soldiers themselves are all photographers – recording their war, their fun, their observations of what they find picturesque, their atrocities – and swapping images among themselves and e-mailing them around the globe.'[7] And even though the government does not want to be confronted with them, there will be many thousands more snapshots and videos to come, argues Sontag. There's no longer any way of stopping them.

7. Susan Sontag, 'Regarding the Torture of Others', *The New York Times Magazine*, 23 May 2004. http://www. southerncrossreview.org/35/ sontag.htm.

The fact that the photos that escaped the Bush administration's censorship of images of the Iraq war are amateur photos is what is significant here, and, as Sontag observed, this was less of an 'unfortunate' incident than the Bush government would have us believe. For a while now, there have been amateur photos of the caskets of American war dead circulating on the Internet, a genre of image that the American government decreed could no longer be made public.[8] The civil rights activist Russ Kick success-fully filed a request to the Pentagon under the Freedom of Information Act to gain access to many similar photos, but this time from the official Pentagon archive. He posted these on his website, 'The Memory Hole',

8. http://www.tamisilicio.net/.

which is wholly devoted to 'rescuing knowledge' and 'freeing information', and also indicates where the amateur photos can be found.[9]

9.The Memory Hole, http://www.thememoryhole.org; http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/coffin_photos/; http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/coffin_photos/dover/.

Photos of coffins cost amateur photographer Tami Silicio her job – she worked for a transport company in Kuwait that is responsible for the transportation of human remains. And it is not improbable that the American military will be formally forbidden to take photographs or videos when 'on duty'. However, it is ultimately difficult to impose such a ban on images, or the restrictions that 'embedded journalists' and photojournalists are subject to, on 'the amateur' in general: that could, indeed, be anyone, and they could be anywhere and everywhere, at all times. And with the Internet they certainly have a publication and distribution medium available to them with an unprecedented public dimension.

## What Can You See?

Besides the official images, more and more 'wild' images will start to circulate in the public domain – these are 'wild' in the sense of being unedited and uncontrolled as well as savage and barbaric – made by chance passers-by, tourists, victims or participants, which manifest what the professional news media cannot or may not show. This does not merely have a revelatory, democratizing or 'liberating' effect, as with the amateur images of the Iraq war, but also a more perverse or obscene side. The wild images originate in part from a society that increasingly behaves like a permanent public, equipped with a camera as standard, and wanting to consume events from absolutely anywhere in the world while they are still unfolding, from the inside. And this is by necessity via imagery, since the public itself cannot be physically present everywhere.

With traditional public spectacles such as football matches that is not so unusual, but when it concerns accidents, disasters, wars or other dramas this narrowing of the distance between event and public is more problematic, and also more questionable. The professional reporting of the media, which are kept at arm's length or cannot be on the spot immediately, is then supplanted by the snapshot of somebody who was there by chance and happened to have a camera at hand. That is what happened with the stabbing and shooting of Theo van Gogh: there was someone in the vicinity who immediately snapped a photo. By the time the press arrived at the scene the police had already created an impenetrable buffer zone around the corpse. However, there was already a picture, a fresh and authentic image, made before it was ascertained whether Van Gogh had died. Without this specifically pertaining to this individual citizen, could or should the photographer not have established this first?
If in public space we start to behave more and more as a public that does not actively intervene but records

http://www.waveofdestruction.org/photos/rolex83.html. Amateur photo of
the tsunami in Southeast Asia, posted on the internet, 2004.



http://www.volkomenkut.com/sites/fuck/vangoghtelegraaf.jpg
Photo made by a passer-by with a cell phone camera of the body of film
maker Theo van Gogh, Amsterdam, 2 November 2004.

http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/images/0220-02.jpg
Image created by merging two photographs, showing presidential candidate
John Kerry and actress Jane Fonda, who campaigned against the Vietnam
War in the 1970s.



**Fonda Speaks To Vietnam Veterans At Anti-War Rally**

http://www.nos.nl/nieuws/artikelen/2004/8/7/executieamerikaanblijktstunt.html
American Benjamin Vanderford made a fake decapitation video in the summer
of 2004, which he distributed via the internet.
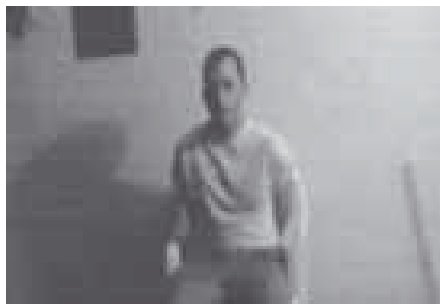
events via the camera, like instant bounty hunters for images, then something like 'fellow citizenship' irrevocably goes out the window to do that. At the same time, the long-term significance of the transaction of events in the public sphere is subjected to pressure from the short-term interest of 'premature' images, which are not only capable of demanding all the attention but also steer the dynamics of the ensuing course of events and resolution.

The popular Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* published the photo of Van Gogh on its front page: newspapers and television will increasingly resort to material by amateurs in order to satisfy the desire for the first pictures. A few days after Van Gogh's murder, during the police siege of a house in the Laakkwartier neighbourhood in The Hague, for which the entire neighbourhood was hermetically sealed, the frustrated television newsrooms resorted to the live report of an 'eye witness' via telephone, in this case a woman who coincidentally had a limited view of what was happening on the street from her living room. She was continuously pressured by the news presenter to relate what she was seeing. What can you see now? Can you see anything? Usually she could see nothing, though she tried desperately. This course of events, in which the interpretation of a serious event was delegated to a layperson, irrefutably contributed to the dispersal of fear in the media. Between event and report/image there was, literally and figuratively, absolutely no room

for serious news analysis, interpretation, and signification or placing it in perspective.

Fake

Until recently it was primarily lovers of pornography who distributed and traded their dilettantish 'adult' videos and rancid little JPEG files via the Internet. These shady, semi-public snuff media, in which it is often unclear what is real and what is manipulated, have now found their public counterparts in sometimes equally obscure, quasi-political images that want to masquerade as real. For example, at the time of the last American presidential election, there was a photo posted on the Internet which was then also published in the regular media. It apparently showed the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, at an anti-Vietnam campaign in 1972 together with the 'actress/activist' Jane Fonda. Having caused a great deal of furore, the photo turned out to be fake, Photoshopped together by a still-anonymous 'Internet activist' and then appropriated by the Republican camp.[10] And inspired by the 'execution videos' of Western hostages in Iraq, which were also recorded by amateur filmmakers, Benjamin Vanderford, a young American, single-handedly filmed his own staged beheading at home, which he then put on the Internet with all the resulting media confusion. His aim was to

10. For photos see: http://journalism.berkeley.edu/faculty/light/KerryFonda.jpg; http://wampum.wabanaki.net/archives/kerry_fonda_040219_450.jpg.

http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=2444
Torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib
prison, Irak, late 2003.

demonstrate how easy it is to 'fake' such a video and how easily the media can be taken for a ride.[11]

Fake images or 'hoaxes' of this kind being deployed as so-called evidence seems to be symptomatic for the fading evidential value of images in general. The authenticity of documentary images is indeed cast into doubt with increasing frequency, and in many cases not without reason. The question here is no longer whether the image is real or original in a material sense – hardly a meaningful question in the digital age – but whether the claim of the image to represent a social, political or historical reality is bogus or not. Did the depicted scene really take place? Image manipulation has, of course, been around since the invention of photography,[12] but nowadays people often immediately question the veracity of what is depicted. This global suspicion stems only partially from the realization that the digital image-processing software no longer needs an external reality in order to produce a realistic image. Distrust of the image also springs from the growing realization that the 'reality' of the media is a genre.

Under the current dictate of visibility, people demand images of events, the right to be able to see and to show everything. But by the same token, through the agency of the democra-

11. See, for example, reports from the NOS, BBC, and Camera/Iraq: http://www.nos.nl/nieuws/artikelen/2004/8/7/executieamerikaanblijkt-stunt.html; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3545822.stm; http://www.camerairaq.com/faked_photos/index.html.

12. See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2003.

tized media, people now know from personal experience that the reality retreats behind the images, behind the 'reality'. (Not for nothing is there the endless spin-off of many a reality TV programme, showing interviews with participants, who tell how it really was.) And since everyday reality and 'normal people' have become the media's reality material, they are the ones who know what is kept off-camera and what is manipulated. Amateurs are not only increasingly professional producers of reality, but are also increasingly professional performers and an increasingly professional public. In a certain sense the media has thus created a 'monster', a monster that brings about an ironic inversion, with all the attendant crossing of boundaries: while the institutionalized media focus more and more on the private, often imitating an 'amateur' style, the amateurs and their media now have the public in their sights.

## Re-enactment

'To live is to be photographed, to have a record of one's life, and therefore to go on with one's life oblivious, or claiming to be oblivious, to the camera's nonstop attentions. But to live is also to pose,' Susan Sontag observed in her reaction to the Agu Ghraib photos. 'To act is to share in the community of actions recorded as images. The expression of satisfaction at the acts of torture being inflicted on helpless, trussed, naked victims is only part of the story. There is the deep

satisfaction of being photographed, to which one is now more inclined to respond not with a stiff, direct gaze (as in former times) but with glee. The events are in part designed to be photographed. The grin is a grin for the camera. There would be something missing if, after stacking the naked men, you couldn't take a picture of them.'[13]

13. See note 7.

Slavoj Žižek's perception of one of the Agu Ghraib photos seems to render this condition even more complex: 'When I first saw the notorious photograph of a prisoner wearing a black hood, electric wires attached to his limbs as he stood on a box in a ridiculous theatrical pose, my reaction was that this must be a piece of performance art.'[14] The term 're-enactment' that is currently bandied around so widely, both in popular culture and in art circles, thus gains a more complex stratification. 'Re-enactment' refers to the large-scale, live reconstructions of historic events performed by hobbyists, often military battles or feats of arms.[15] Within art, the term is primarily used in relation to the re-creation of historic performances by modern artists.[16] In re-enactment, images, representations and documentary remnants are in effect repeated, whether motivated by a conservative nostalgic desire or as an attempt to gain a han-

14. See note 6.

15. On the phenomenon of 're-enactment' see, for example:http://livinghistory. leukestart.nl/; http://www. n-a.co.uk/; http://www. cwreenactors.com/.

16. On re-enactment in art see, for example, Mediamatic, 'Re-Enact' report by Paul Groot, performance night organized by Mediamatic and casco, 12 December 2004. http://www.mediamatic.net/ article-200.6384.html. See also *Metropolis* m, no. 3, 2004.

dle on history and the present. At the same time, new representations of historic representations are being produced.

In societies where in principle everything and everyone can become an image at any instant, and where everything and everyone is also constantly prepared for this, the logic of the re-enactment also works the other way around: the reality and its actors take their cue from the images, imitate the images, consciously or unconsciously. It is often said that the attacks of 9/11 were in the style of American action movies. And with the attack on Van Gogh you might assume that the perpetrator reckoned that his victim, along with the message that was theatrically pinned to his body with a knife, would be broadcast. In the fantasy of the perpetrator the image already existed, before it became reality. And if the events are not staged according to a pre-existing model or image, fictitious or real, then they become so in public perception. The pyramids in which the naked prisoners in Abu Ghraib in Iraq were stacked were similar to shows by cheerleaders in the us in which they also form pyramids, said the lawyer of one of the military personnel accused of torture. 'Don't cheerleaders all over America form pyramids six to eight times a year? Is that torture?'[17]

17. From an article in *de Volkskrant*, 11 January 2005.

The dynamic of modern public space is largely based on the desire for visibility or transparency as a precondition for openness, order and commu-

nication. The wild images that are increasingly infiltrating this space lay bare the extent to which the paradigm of visibility is an illusion: they are subversive and liberating in their undermining of the official or professional images and their commissioners, as far as they have the performative wherewithal to break open and make visible suppressed or hidden realities. At the same time they are therefore also the fulfilment of the visibility ideology in optima forma, and they exaggerate the obscene or perverse of the permanent boundary-breaking that is inherent to this. The wild images contribute to the culture of spectacle, but simultaneously blow it up by manifesting themselves outside any given order. Wild images are barbaric images, and therein lies their power and their peril.

In the meantime, a new battle of images will start to become apparent, a battle that is not only about the authenticity of the images, but also about their legitimacy and exploitation – and even more so than previously. Did what the image shows really and truly happen? Can what the image shows really be seen by others? And by whom exactly? And who has the right to control the images, or see them? A certain tragedy for reality lies hidden here, insofar as the evidential or disturbing function of the image will increasingly refer back to the image itself, and less and less to the reality from which it has been extracted.

Dieter Lesage

## Empire and Design

When the political discourse retreates to the realm of the visual, when we are supposed to debate the appearance of a flag, then we have to admit that politics has become little more than visual design, according to the Belgian philosopher Dieter Lesage. He argues for a 'fundamentalism of human rights' that will guide us out of the post-political impasse of Empire, the world-embracing network characterized by Negri and Hardt.[1]

---

1. Some of the ideas in this essay were first presented in a lecture given at the conference *State of Emergency. Territorial Identity in the Post-political Age,* organized by the Jan Van Eyck Academie at Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam, 23 September 2004.

Several years ago, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt gave a powerful new twist to the globalization debate by introducing the concept of *Empire*.[2] By this they meant a new kind of sovereignty that is post-modern, post-imperialist and post-colonial alike. They contended that sovereignty was no longer the prerogative of nation-states but was increasingly characterizing a global network of organizations and institutions whose rule over the whole world territory was underpinned by a global consensus on human rights.

2. See Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire,* Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2000. For a critique of *Empire,* see Dieter Lesage, *Vertoog over verzet. Politiek in tijden van globalisering,* Meulenhoff/ Manteau, Amsterdam/ Antwerpen 2004.

This Imperial network, according to Negri and Hardt, has a pyramidal structure with three tiers: in the role of the monarchy we find the United States, the G7 countries, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and NATO; the other nation states and the transnational corporations form a worldwide aristocracy; and the media, religious institutions, the United Nations and NGOs democratically attempt to represent the People. Empire, like the Roman Empire, thus combines the political regimes of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, as a means to control the inherent power of the global multitude.

Nation-states are embedded within this imperial network, and their role consists of filtering the flows of the multitude, capital and goods and thus determining their respective mobility on the Imperial territory. Sovereignty, that is, the power to declare a state of emergency or, rather, the state of exception, has become the prerogative of Empire. Even the United States must be regarded as part of this Imperial network. US military hegemony naturally gives them a function within the Empire with which scarcely any other nation-state can compete, but they can no longer 'go it alone', as Negri and Hardt continue to argue in their latest book, *Multitude*.[3] The fact that the United States does not play its monarchist role properly and does indeed go it alone, even if it is not supposed to, is the biggest problem Empire today faces and one for which it is desperate to find a solution.

3. See Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire,* The Penguin Press, New York 2004.

## Identity and Design

The reduction of the status of nation-states from holders of sovereignty to functional filters within the global imperial framework does not mean that they can no longer be different from one another. There is surely still some space for national identity. But this identity can no longer have a deep political significance, as it used to have during the Cold War. Empire will want all nation-states to be organized as democracies. At least, all nation-states are under the Imperial obligation to commit to the principles enshrined in several universal declarations of human rights. A country can no longer derive its identity from its political principles. If it does, it becomes an exception that Empire must deal with.

If the political identities of nation-states are under the Imperial mandate of sameness, then we are left with their cul-

tural identities as the only terrain for differences and discussion. Negri and Hardt insist that, contrary to the widespread belief in the destructive impact of globalization on cultural differences, Empire encourages the construction of culturally defined national identities. It has no interest in the erasure of *all* differences. Imperial rule corresponds to a triple imperative: 'incorporate, differentiate, manage.'[4] The first of these is the liberal, inclusive face of Empire, which says 'all are welcome within its boundaries, regardless of race, creed, colour, gender, sexual orientation and so forth'.[5] The second imperative concerns affirmation of those differences that are acceptable within the Imperial realm. 'While from the juridical perspective differences must be set aside, from the cultural perspective differences are celebrated.'[6] As an example, Negri and Hardt refer to the re-creation of ethnic identities in the formerly socialist countries, where local languages, traditional place names, arts and handcrafts are celebrated as components of the transition from socialism to capitalism.[7] The third imperative implies managing all these differences in a general economy of control.

4. Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire,* op. cit., p. 201.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

6. *Ibid.,* p. 199.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

It is for all these reasons that discussions on the visual identity of political entities or authorities quickly prove unsatisfactory, however interesting or witty they may be. Empire is represented as a pyramid, an eminent architectural form. But if the architecture of global politics is no longer open to discussion because it is presumed to be the expression of a well-established global consensus, all that is left for us to discuss is the design of global architecture. This is why there seems to be less complaint about the constitutional structure of the European Union and the part it can play within Empire than about the ugliness of the buildings of the European administration in Brussels. If the political discourse retreats to the realm of the visual, if we are supposed to debate the look of a flag, then we must concede to the Imperial mandate that politics is merely a matter of design. This imperative is wholly consistent with Fukuyama's thesis of the end of history. In the post-historical era of capitalist liberal democracy, not only is art reduced to a formal exercise like ikebana, but there is no longer any space for political acts. In this respect, too, the post-historical age is also a post-political one, an age in which the only remaining area of concern for the politician is territorial identity. Artists, designers and architects are only too glad to lend a helping hand. Even those architects who feel it is their duty to provide trendy logos for ponderous liberal-democratic institutions are actually embracing Fukuyama's ikebana-philosophy of art, however much they may deny it. Consequently, it is somewhat ironic that in 2003 Rem Koolhaas won the 15th Praemium Imperiale of the Japan Art Association.

Alexandre Kojève, who, after the World War II, gave up his professorate of philosophy in favour of a career in the European Commission, would no doubt have been pleased with Koolhaas's provocative proposal for a new European

EU Flag design with bar codes, designed by AMO (2001), commissioned by the European Committee as part of the research into the role that Brussels plays as the capital of Europe. (Rem Koolhaas, Reinier de Graaf, with Catarina Canas, Fernando Donis, Roberto Otero, Markus Schaefer, Saskia Simon, Johan de Wachter)

emblem: the 'barcode flag'.[8] Koolhaas's symbol, which solves the problem

8. See e.g. *The New York Times,* 23 May 2002.

of representing the muddled, confederate character of the EU by treating it as a branding issue, marks the point when ikebana has at last become the model for artistic practice as Kojève once predicted. The role of the artist, or in this case the architect, entails at most the 'expression' and visual styling of politics. For AMO (the research offshoot of OMA), Prodi is no less a client than Prada.

Once the end of history has been reached, art and politics meet to discuss the form of a multicoloured 'flag'.[9] AMO's barcode Europe tallies with a consumerist conception of politics in

9. See also Dieter Lesage, 'Art after the end of history', in *New commitment. In architecture, art and design,* NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2003, pp. 80-91.

which citizens are seen as customers for political products. Koolhaas is convinced the European Union doesn't *sell*, good though the product may be. This consumerist approach to politics is dubious enough, quite apart from AMO's proposal for a new visual style for the European Union. Putting all the colours of the EU nation-states together to make a colourful barcode is not only tantamount to consumerist logic but gives in to precisely the kind of paralysing confederative thinking that prevents the EU from becoming an attractive political force. To begin with, we should start seeing the European Union as something more than an aggregation of nation-states. But AMO shows its inability to do so with its barcode flag proposal.

The Geography of Extraterritoriality

The visual design of territorial identity on the whole tends to legitimize the political structure of Empire; the resulting form defers to the restrictions the imperial regime imposes on the political imagination. The designer does not challenge the constitutional foundations of the territory whose identity he is supposed to define, but to characterize that territory, to give it a name and a face so that it can take its rightful place within the Empire.

Most of the territories the designer is asked to deal with presumably seek a visual identity in order to establish a place for themselves within the global Empire. But what about the 'islands' which the German curator and critic Anselm Franke described and listed in *Territories: Islands, Camps and Other States of Utopia*?[10] Franke's impressive list aspires to offer a 'geography of the extraterritorial'.[11] In an essay on the spatial logic of islands, Franke apparently seeks

10. See Anselm Franke, Eyal Weizman, Ines Geisler, 'Eilanden. De geografie van het buitenterritoriale', *Archis*, 2003, No. 6, pp. 18-52.

11. See *Territories. Islands, Camps and Other States of Utopia*, Verlag der Buchhandlung König, Berlin 2003.

out zones that shun the omnipresent sovereign authority of Empire. Negri and Hardt deny that Empire has an 'outside'; in other words, they claim that the imperial territory embraces virtually the whole earth. But couldn't we argue that the 'islands', or at least a few of them, constitute a kind of outside? And assuming we recognize the extra-imperial character of these islands, isn't the interest some designers take in them evidence of their counter-imperial motives?

An example that springs to mind is the Principality of Sealand, an 'artificial island' off the coast of England, actually a World War II fort erected on a sunken barge. In the late 1960s, the abandoned superstructure was occupied by a family who immediately declared independence and constituted a hereditary monarchy. A succession of legal actions led, surprisingly though it may seem, to the *de facto* legal recognition of the sovereignty of the Principality of Sealand. A group of artists and designers from the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, the self-styled Sealand Identity Team led by Daniël van der Velden, has looked into this fascinating case.[12] You could say that the importance of the Principality of Sealand is precisely that it spurns the dominion of Empire. Most designers see no problem whatsoever in designing identities that satisfy the Imperial demands, although it must be the intention of some designers to support resistance to Empire through their work.

12. See Daniël Van der Velden, 'Mission: impossible. Data Haven, Meta Haven – Sealand Identity Project', *Archis,* 2003, No 6, pp. 54-59.

Franke appears to use the term extraterritoriality rather loosely. In international affairs, the term does not relate to territories falling outside all national jurisdiction, but to national legislation incorporating a claim to validity in territories outside national territory. Although some 'islands' on Franke's list may give the impression that extraterritoriality refers to a place not governed by any legislation, it actually concerns a region where certain laws have declared themselves applicable. Extraterritoriality also refers, in international relations, to the 'immunity from local law enforce-ment enjoyed by certain aliens. Although physically present upon the territory of a foreign nation, those aliens possessing extraterritoriality are considered by customary international law or treaty to be under the legal jurisdiction of their home country. This immunity from law enforcement is reciprocal between countries and is generally provided for visiting heads of state, those in the diplomatic services of foreign nations and their families, and officials of the United Nations.'[13]

13. See, 'Extra-territoriality', *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th Edition, 2001.

Four Fundamental Principles

Defined thus, extraterritoriality is something we could describe as a way of dividing up the legal work, in which the laws of a person's home country apply instead of those of the country where they are at the moment. International law indeed allows entitlements based on different sets of legal principles, according to Alan Hudson.[14] Hudson identifies four principles which may well introduce some clarity into discus-sions about extraterritoriality: the *territorial principle* on which the modern conception of sovereignty is founded; the *nationality principle* which on the one hand underpins diplomatic immunity and on the other can legitimate prosecution of a national who has committed a crime (e.g. a sex offence) abroad; the *protective principle* which underpins the doctrine of preventive military action; and the *principle of universality* which comes into play when nation-states are com-

14. See Alan Hudson, 'Beyond the Borders: Globalisation, Sovereignty and Extra-Territoriality', *Geopolitics,* (3) 1998, No. 1, pp. 89-105.

The 'Meta Haven: Sealand Identity Project' (Daniël van der Velden, Tina Clausmeyer, Vinca Kruk, Adriaan Mellegers) develops strategies of an (im)possible national/corporate identity for Sealand. Designs for two scenarios are shown here: *Stealth Country* and *Logo Nation*, which characterize the schizophrenia of the location. *Stealth Country* encompasses the strategic invisibility or 'stealthness' of Sealand (so that it can become a possible 'retreat' for the 'Empire'/Imperium), while *Logo Nation* considers Sealand as an accumulation of postmodern and information iconography. Research project at the Jan van Eyck Academie.

The former war platform off the coast of England in the North Sea – known since 1967 as the Principality of Sealand.

Sealand — *Stealth Country* (Utopia)



Sealand — *Stealth Country* (Empire)

Sealand – *Shadow Nation*



Sealand – *Logo Nation* (Information Monument)
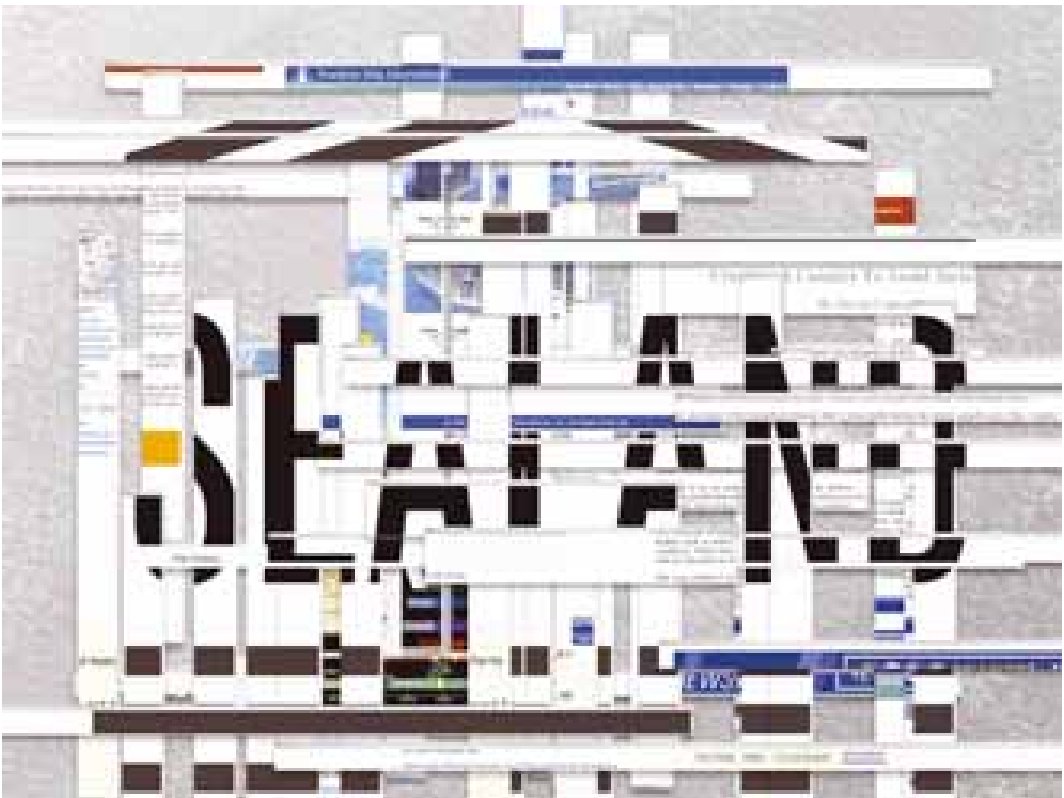
pelled to respect human rights by economic or military pressure. All but the first of these can clearly be used to justify the extraterritorial application and imposition of a certain law or regulation. Only a nation-state or a federation of nation-states such as the European Union can, by definition, appeal to the nationality principle. The protective principle is primarily to be applied by nation-states but it could also be used by transnational organizations such as NATO. The principle of universality, finally, is the most credible principle to underpin interventions by such transnational organizations as the United Nations and its related bodies.

Franke's concept of extraterritoriality seems to have a certain heterogeneity, although it refers primarily to the fact that some so-called islands are seen as falling outside the jurisdiction of a certain national state. A number of the islands on his list demonstrate only that the nation-state is incapable of imposing its sway on the island concerned. These islands, such as the enclaves in Johannesburg classified as 'paranoid islands', are in other words zones where the national legislation is theoretically in force but is not effectively imposed; they are thus not *de jure* extraterritorial in Franke's sense, even if extraterritorial *de facto*. Other 'islands', strangely enough, owe their inclusion on the list to the fact that they do have a certain sovereignty, if in an atypical manner; for example the abortion ship which sails under a Dutch flag, or American warships deployed outside the 12 mile limits of other nations.

The notorious 'Wall' on the West Bank was also mentioned in Franke's

geography of the extraterritorial, but this brings us to a separate problem. The Wall creates whole archipelagos of islands, making life extremely difficult for many of the people living nearby; but it could also be said to be an outstanding expression of the modern conception of sovereignty. The Wall anticipates a definitive delimitation of Israeli and Palestinian sovereign territory, like it or not as a political strategy. But even if we disagree about the fact that the Wall deviates from the Green Line, for example, and even if we protest against its exceptional stupidity in the light of the humanitarian consequences, the Wall still does not prove the existence of extraterritorial islands that fall outside every form of national jurisdiction. On the contrary, the Wall prepares various areas for the fact that they will eventually fall under one or the other national jurisdiction. The idea that a territory can only be subject to a single jurisdiction is completely in accordance with the modern view of sovereignty.

## The Paradox of the Postmodern Island

Insofar as Franke's island project attempts to sketch a 'geography of extraterritoriality', and given that since Hardt's and Negri's *Empire* the notion of extraterritoriality has been due for a postmodern redefinition, we cannot evade the question of whether or not there are islands that not only fall outside the jurisdiction of the nation-state but also outside the jurisdiction of the new, postmodern sovereignty of Empire. From a postmodern perspective, an island would thus be an area that rejects

all Imperial jurisdiction. This confronts us with a huge paradox. If we accept that Empire has no 'outside', we concede that its territory extends over the whole earth and even beyond it; but if we define the postmodern conception of an island as an area outside Imperial jurisdiction, we must concede either that an 'outside' does in fact exist, consisting of all known zones that are islands in the postmodern sense, or that such islands do not exist because all zones fall under the jurisdiction of Empire. Either the claims made by Negri and Hardt in *Empire* are faulty, or Franke's island list is based on fallacy.

The jurisdiction of Empire predominates by definition over every national jurisdiction. The Imperial laws are in principle set down in conventions, protocols, agreements and UN Security Council resolutions. Rather than a whole list of areas where neither national nor supranational laws hold, there are areas where the two are in conflict – a conflict that will not necessarily end in factual imposition of the dominant legislation. From a global standpoint, the tendency, backed by Empire, is for supranational or Imperial laws to take precedence over national laws. An excellent example of this is the 'Kosovo decision' taken by NATO in 1999 to bombard Serbian military, paramilitary and police positions and infrastructures, officially on the grounds of humanitarian concern for the safety of the Kosovo Albanians.

In the Imperial era it is perfectly possible for there to be territorial oddities, special cases, exceptions, distinct identities, etcetera, but there can be no legal extraterritoriality. The Empire cannot acknowledge extraterritorial laws, because its territory comprises all territories. The Empire will ensure that its system of human rights is respected in every corner of the globe, in every nook and cranny. Some islands, such as refugee camps, are a clear example of how Imperial authority can push national authority aside. Islands of that kind are not outside the Empire; on the contrary, nowhere is as 'inside' the Empire as these so-called islands.

Anselm Franke's island list thus forms, on reflection, a proof not so much of the potential or real existence of extraterritoriality, either in the modern or postmodern senses, as of the standpoint that there really is no 'outside'. The Empire seems to solve all the legal problems created by extraterritorial laws, such as the conflict between two sovereign states that both claim jurisdiction over the same persons or the same events: all persons, all regions and all events now fall under Imperial jurisdiction. Of course, conflicts of jurisdiction clearly occur on a daily basis, so we know we are talking about the *concept* of Empire, not the reality. Still, faced with the complete legal stalemate of Guantánamo Bay, for example, we may wonder whether there would be some advantage to the Empire really becoming an effective global authority, able to impose its laws by virtue of being more powerful than any of its constituent parts. Would it be so bad if the contract imposed by this global, leviathan-like authority were to consist of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

## Bodily Integrity

Against this idea of an Empire capable of imposing adherence to the human rights accord, we might object that nobody ever reads the small print on a contract. People in the present Empire are not so much filled with knowledge and understanding of the *letter* of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as with a certain *spirit* of human rights which, paradoxically, centres on the concept of the body. In his book *Iraq. The Borrowed Kettle*, Slavoj Žižek notes that 'what is increasingly emerging as the central "human right" in late capitalist society … [is] *the right not to be "harassed"*, that is, to be kept at a safe distance from others.'[15] It does indeed seem that the present conception of human rights has

15. Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle,* Verso, London/New York 2004, p. 152 (italics by author).

narrowed down to a respect for bodily integrity. When the International Red Cross insists on checking that the detainees of Guantánamo Bay have not been subjected to torture, it implicitly accepts this limited definition of what human rights are. The western cult of the body has become so dominant that we actually conflate human rights with bodily rights. We have almost reached the point where we seriously believe everything is OK as long as nobody is being tortured. And since we like to believe that all is well in our own house, we naturally wish to demonstrate that torture is something only the other side does.

The *spirit* of the human rights system, understood as 'the right not to be harrassed' is much nicer than its *letter*. An explanation for this could be that it is literally much cheaper to act according to this factually predominant spirit than it is to act according to the letter of the contract; that it is cheaper to leave people in peace than to support them. This interpretation of human rights allows the Empire to avoid costs it would prefer not to incur. It is clear that this interpretation of human rights as the right 'not to be harassed', as the right to be left in peace, is in complete accordance with a neoliberal political outlook. Terrorism may strive for entirely different goals, but in fact it has only contributed to the dominance of this neoliberal interpretation of the nature of human rights. People have the right not to be terrorized, and the Empire therefore has the right to harass anyone suspected of having an aunt whose cousin is in the habit of reading a little bit too (a)loud from the Koran. The annoying and paradoxical side effect of this is that the imperial choice of a very cheap human rights system starts looking like a very expensive one. Perhaps this arouses hope for a Project for a New Global Century instead of the Project for a New American Century. In the long run it could turn out to be more economical to opt for global jurisdiction and justice. The day may come when a neoliberal replies to an antiglobalist's claim that a different world is possible by saying 'you're completely right: it would be cheaper!'

## Human Rights Fundamentalism

What form ought resistance take nowadays? Should we admire the model of

withdrawing into a zone over which we claim total sovereignty, as exemplified by the Principality of Sealand? This is certainly the utopia of the 'sovereignists' within the anti-globalist movement such as Jean-Pierre Chevènement, a former French Minister of the Interior. Setting great store as they do by their territorial identity, the sovereignists are the ultimate adherents of 'interior design'. Hence the French interpretation of the term 'state of emergency', *sans aucun doute méthodique possible*, comes down to *l'exception française*. Strongly though France may object to American exceptionalism in geopolitical affairs, the country clamps just as fiercely to an exceptionalist doctrine in cultural matters. Insofar as this policy of cultural identity dominates the logic of sovereignist exceptionalism, it reformulates national sovereignty as autonomy in cultural matters. Insofar as sovereignism is identical to cultural exceptionalism, it falls nicely in line with the logic of Empire.

Empire is better than the nation-state in the same way as capitalism was, for Marx, better than feudalism. Therefore a political project should not consist of marking the identity of a territory within the Imperial territory. We ought not to cooperate with making areas into recognizable, identifiable, branded nation-states by means of postage stamps, coins, flags and all that old-fashioned paraphernalia. If we do, we succumb to the false belief that we live in a post-political era. The discourse on the end of all ideologies is the most ideological discourse of all. We should therefore concern ourselves directly with the ideology of

Empire, the ideology that operates on a limited conception of human rights as being merely the right not to be harassed. One way of criticizing this ideology would be not to dispense with human rights altogether, but to become fundamentalists of human rights and hold to the letter of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A strategy of human rights fundamentalism has the advantage that we have a contract undersigned by all parties and we can insist on them sticking to it.

In their critique of Imperial ideology and their enthusiasm for the revolutionary potential of the multitude, Negri and Hardt take no account of the hypothesis that there might already exist a political reflection of the multitude's longing for peace, namely, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Most of the desires they ascribe to the multitude (the desire for mobility, the desire for a decent standard of living, the desire to be creative) are already enshrined in the Declaration. Article 13, for example, states that 'Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own …' If the longings of the multitude are enshrined as rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, then it is the Empire's constitutional duty to create the conditions under which the multitude's longings can be fulfilled. Should the multitude try to overthrow Empire, as Negri and Hardt propose, or would the multitude be wiser to insist that Empire becomes what it now only pretends to be, given its impotence in the face of American exceptionalism?

# column

WOUTER DAVIDTS

## THE MUSEUM DISMANTLED AND EXPOSED

In November 2004 the artist
Santiago Sierra staged a much-
discussed intervention in the
Museum Dhondt Dhaenens in Deurle,
Belgium. Entirely in keeping with
his reputation as a controversial
artist, his gesture was as simple
as it was radical. He took all the
artworks out of the museum and
then removed all the glass from
the outer windows and doors. The
building was completely dismantled,
stripped and reduced to a gaunt
structure in which wind, rain and
vandals had free rein. There was
nothing to see, other than a
slowly crumbling skeleton. Sierra
has a history of similarly drastic
architectural interventions. For
his contribution to the Venice
Biennale in 2003, he had a brick
wall erected in the main entrance
of the Spanish pavilion. To the
dismay of many visitors, Sierra
moved the entrance to the rear of
the building, where a Spanish
police officer would only allow
passage to people holding a valid
Spanish passport. Once inside, the
handful that met this requirement
got to see only an empty and
(again) dilapidated space. In
Kunsthaus Bregenz Sierra loaded
300 tons of bricks on the top
floor. The work, *300 Tonnen, 300
tons,* tested the load-bearing capa-
city of the KUB to its limits. The
weight of the top floor had to be
distributed via support pillars on
the floors below. In each of these
three examples, architecture – and
in particular the accommodations
of institutions – is tested in its
capacity to undergo and resist
artistic intrusion. Whether the
building is dismantled, closed off
or put under pressure, the end
result is always that the institu-
tion is no longer able to function
in a normal way, or in the worst-
case scenario, to function at all.

Sierra's interventions are part
of a relatively short tradition of
symbolic and increasingly violent
assaults on architecture, and
against institutional architecture
in particular, from Daniel Buren's
sealing off the entrance of the
Galerie Apollinaire (1968), Robert
Barry's *During the Exhibition the
Gallery Will Be Closed* (1969),
Michael Asher's removal of the
windows of the Clocktower New York
(1976), Gordon Matta-Clark's
*Window Blow-Out* (1976) to Chris
Burden's *Exposing the Foundations of
the Museum* (1986). In the 1960s
and '70s architecture was something
that had to be reacted *against*.
Architecture was seen as the
discipline and practice that
represented and empowered the

system — the institutions and the social order — and therefore had to be criticized, opposed, demolished, destroyed, rent asunder or blown up. Architecture gives institutions their form — it makes them 'recognizable'. Therefore it was the ideal target for attacking these institutions and 'visualizing' the critique. By intervening in architectural elements like doors, windows, staircases or foundations — those elements that define and demarcate the institutional space — one could assail and challenge the institutional conditioning of that interior.

Such offensives against architecture are no longer opportune today, let alone meaningful. In an era dictated by commercial, media and virtual regimes, there is an explicit need for temporal and spatial enclaves that 'make a difference'. Art needs its own, demarcated places to prevent it from being washed away, unlamented and unnoticed, in the visual slurry of society. Architecture is simply the perfect medium to give this 'difference' a form and a concrete content. It makes it possible to create a framework within which an institution can make concrete and publicly visible moves in the wide and, above all, misty domain of cultural production. 'Subversive' works like Sierra's are nothing more than yet another pathetic and hysterical assault on the wrong institution, typical of the critical zero

degree at which a lot of contemporary art operates. It is a blind, nihilistic, and, in a political and social sense, even dangerous attack by art on that very institution that lends it both its rationale and its visibility. In an artistic-institutional landscape plagued by a constant questioning of the 'means' as well as the 'place' of art institutions, it is an act of unbelievable stupidity to play the anti-institutional card once *again*, and to do so by tackling the very instance that mediates in the creation and demarcation of this institutional place. Sierra's dismantling of the museum building, then, is nothing more than a vulgar stunt that made the Museum Dhondt Dhaenens briefly 'visible' in the media. But above all it is representative of the cynical complacency with which curators, in their servile flirtation with artists, are willing to put their own institutions on the line. Moreover, their common hidden agenda is all too obvious: a hankering for a reputation as a critical and controversial rebel. It goes without saying that we *must* continue to question the place(s) in which art appears in public, and the role of architecture in this. But preserve us from frivolous and idiotic interventions like Sierra's.

Santiago Sierra, *Removal of a museum's glass windows'*, 3 October through 7 November 2004 in Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium.
Photo Guy Braeckman.

Willem van Weelden

## 'Nothing will come of nothing'[1]

## *Territorial Investigations by Bureau d'études*

For a considerable time now, the Parisian conceptual group Bureau d'études has been engaged in literally mapping contemporary capitalism. Since the erosion of the Iron Curtain, capitalism as an organizational form has undeniably become a global affair. This article is a conversation on the practice of contra-cartography, which, by making information that is available but often invisible visible, aims to 'potentialize' society and at the same time to actualize a potential society.

1. 'Nothing will come of nothing', a citation from *King Lear* by William Shakespeare, section title of chapter 2, 'Every schoolboy knows…' in: Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature, a Necessary Unity*, Hampton press, Cresskill, NJ 2002 (original print 1979, Dutton edition). Other quotes of Bateson from the same source.

## The Cartography of Information and Place

In 1992, at a time that the world was no longer being held captive by the oppressive divide between East and West, when it was being confronted with the information revolution caused by the World Wide Web, three artists, then still students, founded the collective 'Das Kapital' ('Capital'). Their origin was tied to a place in Strasbourg; an independent exhibition space in which they showed, for a week, a work with the same title. It consisted of 1600 identical wooden logs, a sort of meccano set, with which the collective composed a different installation each day. This 'daily construction' ('construction quotidienne') necessitated the design of a system, a procedure that would allow them to continuously make use of the 1600 set parts. The work functioned as a 'common language' ('Capital'), an organizational form with which to generate the various spaces (installations). After various other attempts to cooperate two artists of the 'Capital-group', Xavier Fourt and Léonore Bonaccini, founded another group: Bureau d'études.[2]

The name, a reference to the research department of an architec-

2. Willem van Weelden (translations from the french by Brian Holmes, Paris)

tural practice, may express something cautious and modest, the work Fourt and Bonaccini produce most certainly does not – it is threatening and aspiring. It uncovers the fact that an abundance of available information, for instance on the internet, is basically not utilized to its full potential. One of the many troubling and bizarre features of contemporary politics is the paradox that although the informationalization of society implies an enormous increase in the traceability of the doings and dealings of the powerful, the disruptive power of the exposure of these activities is still remarkably small.

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Bureau d'études started out by mapping the art world, in order to understand how as artists they are a product of the system, and to get a grip on the various meaning-producing economies (market, state, cooperative, etcetera) that are active in it. Since then they have become part of a vast international network of critical information workers. At the moment they are in the course of developing new models and approaches with which to redefine the relations between information and place in their visualizations. They do this mainly by making maps that lend visibility to what they call 'the organization of capitalism'.

# Languages and Territories

*What are your inspirations in mapmaking?*

We are still in the phase of fabricating our tools, our cognitive schemas and our modes of symbolization. Our maps are preparatory studies, work in progress. We can not yet claim to entirely master the practice or the know-how that would be needed for their realization.

We began with a great many studies on the organization of capitalism that had been done by Marxist structuralists in the 1970s, and with critical sociology (Bourdieu, the Frankfurt School) and critical history (Foucault). The studies on finance capitalism more or less ceased with the downturn of criticism around 1978-1979, and books on the question become rare in the early 1980s. We went and rediscovered those older studies on the used book shelves, while collecting flowcharts that we found in the press and consulting corporate financial reports at the library, along with official financial bulletins and the general or specialized business press. On that basis we began to do maps on the organization of ownership in French and then European capitalism. The first examples were exclusively maps of ownership links, which we drew like architectural plans featuring rooms and corridors. It gave you planar views of immense cities vaguely resembling electronic circuitry. But those maps remained quite abstract for anybody not already familiar with the corporations or the individuals we were representing. What's more, they were based solely on financial links. In time we came to see their limits (the absence of companies that aren't quoted on the stock market, and of companies specializing in mergers and acquisitions, which have a key role to play in the structure of capitalism). To increase the comprehensibility of the information, we used pictograms differentiating the fields of activity of the companies being represented (banks, arms manufacturing, consumer-product distribution, etcetera). Since the objective was to create a map of power in the contemporary world, we also began to put in non-financial data, such as lobbies, influence groups, think tanks, governments and so on. At the same time we read tons of studies to understand the formation of capitalism and the evolution and strategies of its major components (the history of merchant banks, the links between finance and diplomacy, industrial policy. . .) and the influence of non-financial organizations. We also carried out a series of exploratory maps of state administrative structures and international organizations. Right now we are working on a quite complex map of the French state where we wanted to go beyond simple representation by identities and relations, and show in detail how the machine operates physically and socially, its technical, legal and organizational components, its functional articulations.

Bonaccini-Fohr-Fourt, *Das Kapital, sans titre 6* (carton d'invitation), 1994



Bonaccini-Fohr-Fourt, *Das Kapital, sans titre 7* (pas de soupe aujourd'hui), 1994
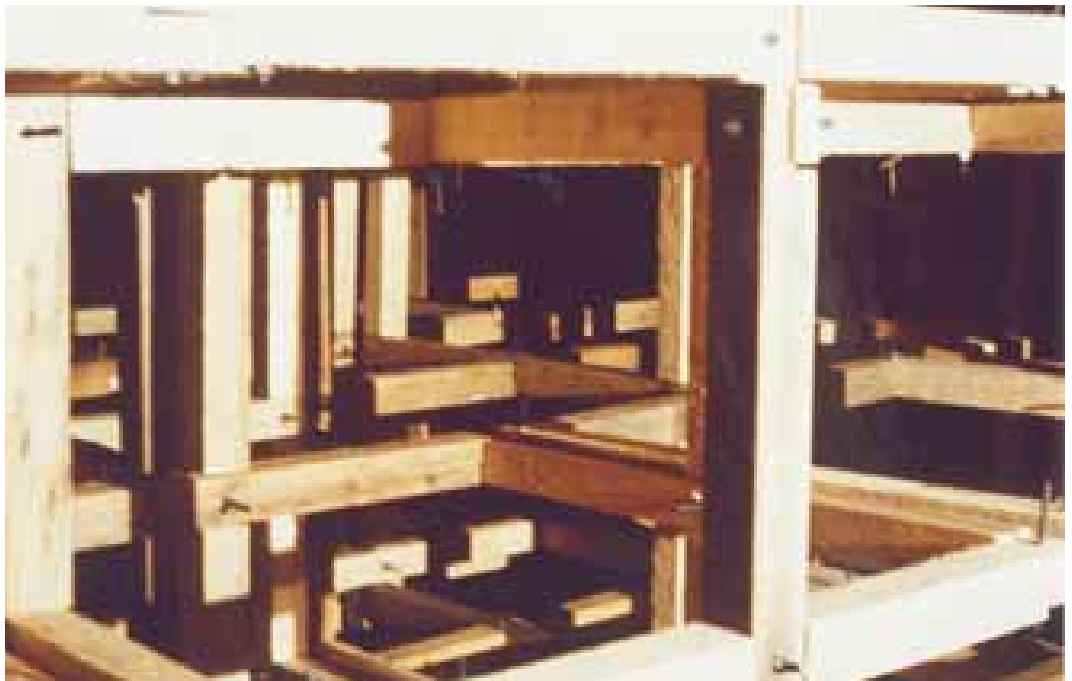
*Gregory Bateson[3] often used the notion he borrowed from Alfred Korzybski: 'The map is not the territory.' and he would then add: 'And the name is not the thing named.' With regard to your maps, what then is the relationship they have with the territory they represent?*

The physicist Ernst Mach said something that can help to understand what cartography means: 'In reality, human beings and animals who have lost their sense of direction move without exception more or less in a circle, whose diameter varies according to the species, while the center of the circle, depending on the individual and the species, is located either to the right or to the left of the individual following the circular path.' A map is what keeps you from going round in circles, it is knowledge to supplement the loss of a sense of direction.

Among the cartographic tools, there is a difference between geographical maps that allow you to orient yourself in space and organizational maps that allow you to orient yourself in social or symbolic complexity. We have done maps in each of these two areas.

It can't be said that the geographic map is not the territory. It resembles the territory, and that's what makes it into a perceptual crutch that keeps us from going in circles, that allows us to orient ourselves in space, despite all the simplifications and evaluations it contains. It allows you to act, to move around or to transform the territory. But just as there exist different ways of resembling the real on the basis of a geographical matrix (just think of the difference between an Aboriginal map and a map by the National Geographic Institute of France), so there exist different ways of putting reality into words on the basis of a linguistic matrix. With the maps of social organization, there are no latitudes or longitudes or techniques like those of topography. There is no North Pole, no social magnetic field, and therefore no compass. A 'compass-image' of a social organization is based on symbolic or quasi-symbolic elements such as information, conventions, rules or laws that govern social relations. It constitutes the invisible objects of social relations and powers, by means of legal, institutional, financial, sociological, anthropological, psychological and historical knowledge. It constitutes identities or units of information (state, firm, individual. . .). It works in advance via selection, classification, data refinement, and then finally symbolization, positioning, assemblage, interlinkage. Thus it produces a feeling of totality

through the construction of landmarks, the construction of a system of dynamic coordinates that allow you to put some order into social reality. For all these reasons, the map of social organization seeks to be a tool allowing us to perceive, to orient ourselves, to act on social space, like a general or a rat who activates affects, representations, perceptions, beliefs and rules.

*But what possible relation is there between a geographic map and the map of a social organization?*

We could illustrate this relation on an initial level with a map we did in 1995 in Dresden in the former GDR. We took our departure points from geographic maps of infrastructure grids (electricity, telephone lines, water pipes) and from aerial photographs. We cut out a district which we took as being emblematic of the city centre. The very concept of city centre, as a bourgeois concept, had been refused by the Soviet-era urbanists. We then observed the reinvention of the city-centre by the irruption of Western capitalism. After the fall of the Wall, the first geographical maps of real-estate prices appeared (the price of real-estate in the Soviet era was indexed on the value of a square meter of arable land). We took three maps (1991, 1993, 1995) which made apparent the gradual appearance of a centre (the most expensive place in the city). This re-creation of the city centre was carried out gradually through real-estate speculation by the major West German banks (Deutsche Bank, Dresdner Bank) which bought up the buildings. It was also carried out by various signs (large advertising billboards, etcetera) which had not existed before. We did several proposals for the organization of the city centre, with four utopian projects. There you see a precise junction between geography and capital, through the reformulation of a city centre by the big West German banks.

*Is that junction also apparent in your map* 'World Government'?

In the latest version of the map of 'World Government', this junction takes another form. The globalized networks of transportation, telecommunications and information have entirely reformulated spatial and therefore strategic constraints, the possible alliances and relations across the planet. Each day in the media we see that the informational geography of the Europeans does not match the physical geography of the planet. And this obviously has psychic consequences, it elicits social hierarchies and behaviors, even within our own societies.

For the moment we have basically sought to map the dominant socio-technical organizations, and some of the antagonistic formations. The big difficulty is to try to displace the criteria of evaluation, so as not to reduce

the global social struggles that are trying to radically modify the course of history into mere critical feedback loops in an integrated world-system. This is why we find it necessary today to have an ontology different from the rationalistic materialism that is still dominant in the critical movements (despite the epistemological upsets of the twentieth century) and also from the socio-technical approach to the world where the map would claim to be or to create the territory and language (whether cybernetic, informational, genetic…): to be or create the real. This would allow us to represent something other than machines, or to do something other than fabricating tools of modeling, simulation, delegation, manipulation…

The Cartography of Hypercritical Madness

*What is your basic concept of mapmaking? Do you use classic map-making knowledge, or is it an applied bric-a-brac of info-graphic traditions?*

We try to create a language corresponding to what we want to show. We're still only at the beginning. The graphic language that we use is still far short of the complexity and diversity of the information that we have to deal with. Our maps are works in progress at several levels and, in particular, where the creation of graphic knowledge is concerned.

We refuse to just recycle the types of simplification normally employed in flowcharts. Hierarchy by the scale of size or value gives information (the power of a given company compared to another) but it masks the difference in the meaning of power, depending on the geographical origin. We don't lend any particular credit – even if we do pay attention – to the official modes of evaluation, classifying the 100 leading world businesses according to turnover or number of employees. We have observed that these official evaluations are relative to the people who carry them out: the world's leading companies aren't necessarily the same when seen from the United States, Europe, Japan or China. What is more, it's well known that among the world's leading financial funds some are not evaluated, because they are not traded on the stock market or because their organization is not attached to a state, but instead is networked, based on financial operations by companies located in tax-free zones, etcetera.

For the moment we have basically used three parameters of graphic representation, which are *identities* (pictograms representing, for instance, a state, a business or an agency), *links* and *spatial positions*. Each of these parameters has its own economy.

Bonaccini-Fohr-Fourt, *Das Kapital, sans titre 3* (sonnige Holzwege), 1994



Bonaccini-Fohr-Fourt, *Das Kapital, sans titre 9* (construisons-nous notre destruction), 1994

*What are the conceptual problems that you face in the making of your maps?*

The major problem in our analytical maps remains the representation of identities. If we differentiate them too much (out of an analytical preoccupation), the vocabulary can become too complex. In this way you can lose the visual divides between the identities. What is more, even as they are differentiated, the reality of the identities remains quite relative. We are incapable of concretely imagining the one hundred thousand people who make up IBM. A pictogram marked 'IBM' can't show this firm with its hundreds of affiliates, its thousands of subcontractors and its multiple partnerships with other businesses and states. An identity such as IBM isn't univocal and its coherency comes from its strategy rather than its internal organizational chart. Its reality is not immediately perceptible.

In the same way, we don't know what we're communicating or even what we have in our heads when we talk about the state. A state like France has thousands of businesses at its disposal and constructs international strategies with other states and businesses. It is not just closed in on itself or inside its territory, with ties attaching its outer edges to exterior identities. The French state is crisscrossed with multiple identities that are not 'French'. Graphic representation merges realities together, more than it distinguishes them. The United States and France each appear in a 'state' pictogram and this relationship visually supplants the historical, geographic, demographic, religious and military differences that characterize each of them.

For this reason we proceed somewhat as geocartographers do, adjusting the graphic generality by means of additional data or symbols that qualify the identities. A given state will be qualified as democratic, or the number of inhabitants will be indicated, the dependency on oil resources, the religions that are practiced, etcetera. But in fact, we continually oscillate between different obstacles: the selective forgetting and manipulation of information, the variability of the viewpoints (official, non-official, and so on), the lack of strict analysis, a hypercritical attitude that leads you to flip out, to exaggerate.[4]

4. Websites of and in cooperation with Bureau d'études, or on them: http://bureaudetudes.free.fr/
http://utangente.free.fr/
http://syndicatpotentiel.free.fr/
http://twenteenthcentury.com/uo/index.php/
BrianHolmesMapsfortheOutside
http://www.oeh.ac.at/oeh/progress/101464756341/104342089623/
?tqs=11
publication artistic autonomy (autonomie artistiques) (text by Bureau d'études): http://utangente.free.fr/anewpages/autoart.html
Cartography of excess (Cartographie de l'excès) (text by Brian Holmes): http://utangente.free.fr/anewpages/cartesholmes1.html

## On the Quality of Relations

*Bateson defines information as 'a difference that makes a difference'. What is information for you as contra-cartographers?*

Information can never produce a feeling of the world. Information is a-cosmic, diverse and accidental. A newspaper is a collage of heterogeneous bits of information, clues that can't be composed into a coherent picture. What we are trying to do is to recompose the coherency of this seeming chaos, at the very moment when human beings can be modified just like the information in any data-processing system.

It is not always possible for a reader, a listener or a TV viewer to discern true information from false, or to simply identify the degree of manipulation in the information received. What they get is a second-hand reality, which they have never experienced, a reality constituted by the sedimentation of representations and critiques of those representations: 'I've never been to Iraq but I saw this account, I read this and that article, I heard this or that testimony or analysis, and I formed an opinion.' How can I judge whether or not my opinion is true or false? Isn't it just an argumentative judgment on a reality that I have not experienced? But first of all, why is Iraq constructed as a media object? Who creates the information, who sets the focus and the establishes the hierarchy of world events, lending importance to one and passing over another in silence, as they do every day at Agence France Presse? And above all, why do we inform ourselves? Why has information become so important today?

The complement of democratic regimes is propaganda, or in other words, the possibility of a public debate leads to the political will to orient or manipulate that debate, to escape the abstraction of the free exercise of each one's faculties by educating those faculties and shaping the objects of judgment. The whole problem with information is that in militarized democracies like ours, information is rigged for war. There are systems to help manage the 'media battle', systems to help create media deceptions, systems of argumentation for special operational communication, etcetera. Here you have to pay some attention to the way that propaganda has been working for over a century, how one creates friends and enemies in wars where the public enemies are also the friends of the established powers. You have to know how a statistic is twisted or how an insignificant piece of information is amplified (murders in the suburbs, rioters in the demonstrations or journalists in battle) in order to create a certain psychic disposition among the population. The press agencies as well as governments and transnational corporations define the orders of priority and importance of world events. You have to see reality like a chess player or a Go player, without believing that it's natural, spontaneous, without history, hierarchy or *habitus*. Debate in public space (and riots in particular) are struggles against the monopoly on the representation of reality. It's a matter of raising insurrections against the psychic frameworks imposed by the information systems.

*Does your cartography exclusively show an analytical attitude vis-à-vis the informa-tion that you collect, or does it serve a purpose?*

It must be said that we don't only do analytic maps. The ways of doing (and therefore, the hermeneutics) vary with the kinds of cartography. In a given context, for example the defense of autonomous publishing/production/distri-bution, we make maps that can constitute a target or an enemy serving as a foil (such as the map *Chroniques de guerre* on the Lagardère group, or the map *GNR NBC TIC*). Such a map has an instrumental aim, which is to identify, locate and qualify the components of a given target (a business, service, per-son, machine…). Businesses and web crawlers continually carry out such tar-geting operations, in order to conquer, contaminate or influence a population. In the target map, the idea is to turn these capitalist guerrilla techniques around and identify the power of a firm, a technology, a person or a state. The target map may also be accompanied by further instructions describing different ways to act on the target. But identification in itself opens up means of action. For example, in the map like the one we did of an arms-media group such as Lagardère (publishing, distribution, news stands, radio, TV), there is a list of components (stores, publishers) which can be boy-cotted. When the target map is geographic and not only organizational, the action induced by the map is first of all that of becoming physically aware of the very existence of an agent.

Other maps potentialize information in such a way as to reveal where we are going, what we can do or what we are (see the maps of *Communisms*, of *Gratuité*, of *Inklings of Autonomy* on contemporary social movements, etcetera).[5]
For example, we have done several maps on autonomous movements which could possibly be grouped under the name of the multitudes.

5. Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, Routledge, New York 2000. An article of her in Andere Sinema, media tijdschrift, no 171 herfst 2004, Rotondomania/Bush als special effect/ Cartografie & Dérive : 'Un-/Re-mapping, buiten beeld / in kaart gebracht'

The problem with the use that is made of the term 'multitudes' is the low degree of multiplicity and sometimes even the ideological univocality of the term. Basically, the term 'multitudes' has been annexed by a social move-ment, or more precisely, a range of social movements, which do not have or desire contacts with the multiplicities of other social movements which are assembled differently and construct war machines of different 'models' than theirs. In these maps of the multitudes we timidly sought to represent the amplitude and diversity of the fronts of struggle. We are quite careful about not having a unitary approach but on the contrary letting war machines coex-ist, since they are all struggling in their own ways against the system even if they are sometimes in conflict with each other as well. For example, we did a map where we put movements against imperialism next to movements interested in extraterrestrials and struggling against the government policies

that deliberately hide or manipulate information about those subjects. But that's not very easy to do in our psychically sealed-off countries, so different from what we encountered on a trip to Cameroun, where the discussion would easily shift from class or group struggle in the country, to UFOs or voodoo.

# Henk Oosterling

## The Public Existence of Homo Informans

### *On Art in Times of Terror*

The trademark activity of the Critical Art Ensemble is producing and distributing knowledge as a counter-expertise to the relatively opaque and one-sided information issued by governments and by commercial companies about their products. This artists' collective makes use of the nomadic, virtual character of today's information society. However, the hybrid practices they use in striving towards openness and visibility are not often understood let alone appreciated. For Steve Kurtz, a member of CAE, the consequences were disastrous. On 29 June 2004, he was charged with wire and mail fraud.

In times of terror, the quality of public space alters. Well before 9/11, the rising influence of information and communication technologies had already resulted in the addition of an invisible, virtual dimension to physical space. The result has been that the separation of the private and public realms – what happens at home or in your head, as against what happens outdoors among citizens – has become thoroughly problematic. This has consequences not only for government officials and regular citizens, but also for those artists for whom public space is simultaneously a medium, a working territory and an object of study. And if, in their modernist effort to bring art and life closer together, they go so far as to parade their work as 'political', this can have unpleasant repercussions.

However closely art approaches life, art remains fiction. But the nature of the present relationship between art and life differs from that which the modernist avant-garde had in mind. Michel Foucault, in a 1966 essay on the work of Maurice Blanchot, portrayed the problem of the socially committed artist as follows: 'Fiction ... does not mean making the invisible visible, but showing just how invisible the invisibility of the visible really is.... [Fictions] are not so much images as transformations, alterations, neutral interstices, spaces between images.'[1] Whereas modern 'unmasking' art was preoccupied with demythologization, in our own times – on this side of modernity and postmodernity – the invisible is

1. Michel Foucault, *De verbeelding van de bibliotheek. Essays over literatuur*, SUN, Nijmegen 1986, p. 102, (retranslated from Dutch).

not so easily 'exposed', as Jean-Luc Nancy once tersely put it. The invisible is already discounted in the attempt to get 'behind' the visible. *Homo informans* knows himself only through the media that surround him. His interactions with the world, with others and with himself are 'interfacial': from supernovas to DNA, from mobile phones to GPS. We cannot take off the spectacles through which we see; and our present-day spectacles are what we call media technology.

## The Steve Kurtz Affair: A Critical Ensemble

On 11 May 2004, Steve Kurtz, an associate professor at the University of Buffalo (New York State) and a member of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), woke with a start in the middle of the night. His 46 year old wife Hope had suffered a heart attack which was quickly fatal. Kurtz rang 911 for assistance, but by the time the ambulance arrived his wife was dead. The paramedic noticed some laboratory equipment in the room, including a few Petri dishes containing bacterial cultures, which proved to be bacillus globigii, serratia marcenschens and e.coli. Materials like

this are to be found in practically any secondary school biology lab, but Kurtz had them in his possession for use in a new CAE action at 'The Interventionists. Art in the Social Sphere', a group exhibition which opened in MASS MoCA on 30 May 2004. Their project, 'Free Range Grains 2004', was intended to draw attention to the genetic manipulation of foodstuffs. The installation included a mobile DNA analysis laboratory which museum visitors could use to test their food for the presence of genetically modified organisms.

The paramedic put two and two together: a dead woman plus a suspicious-looking bacterial culture. He phoned the police, who then warned the Joint Terrorism Task Force. The Task Force descended on Kurtz's home together with the FBI. Kurtz was arrested on suspicion of bioterrorism under the USA Patriot Act as amended after 9/11. His experimental apparatus was seized together with his wife's corpse and all his computers, papers and books. Kurtz and later the other CAE members received subpoenas to appear in court, as did several of their colleagues. CAE's publisher, Autonomedia, was also served a writ. Once the news of Kurtz's arrest leaked out, a demonstration was hastily organized in front of the museum. Since the exhibition material had been confiscated, the MoCA exhibited the information and images of the confiscation.

On 16 June, Kurtz and the CAE had to appear before a Federal Grand Jury in Buffalo. The bioterrorism charge proved to be overreaching. On 29 June, the defendants were arraigned with 'wire and mail fraud' (because the bacterial source cultures were allegedly illegally procured), a crime for which the Patriot Act prescribes a penalty of 20 years jail. While awaiting trial, Kurtz has to present himself to the police at regular intervals.[2]

2. For further information, see http://www.caedefensefund.org/background.html.

## Transparency: Art as Counter-Expertise

Things are clearly getting terribly out of hand here. All the same, it's naive to think that the public prosecutor's office is trying to have its way simply to hide the fact that the FBI made an initial blunder. You don't have to be a paranoid conspiracy theorist to realize what officialdom must have thought on reading the subversive ideas that CAE propagate in the texts that accompany their art interventions.[3] The possession of bacterial cultures which are quite legally obtainable becomes a welcome pretext for a public warning to dissidents. Or, as Kurtz foresaw in 1996 although it was then still

3. In chronological order: *The Electronic Disturbance*, Autonomedia, New York 1994; *Electronic Civil Disobedience. And other Unpopular Ideas*, Autonomedia, New York 1996; *Flesh Machine*, Autonomedia, New York 1997; *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media*, Autonomedia, New York 2000; and *Molecular Invasion*, Autonomedia, New York 2002.

science fiction, their possession 'will eventually be used to suspend individual rights, not just to catch computer criminals, but to capture political dissidents as well'.[4]

4. *Electronic Civil Disobedience,* op.cit., p. 17.

CAE was founded in 1986. Its inspirations included Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari.[5] CAE shares with these thinkers the critical insight that the self-awareness of individuals is the product of life-long disciplining resulting from the control society's continual check-ing of their behaviour. While the informational surveillance of public life only affects overt behaviours, this control is reinforced in the application of gene technology by anticipatory genetic manipulation from within.

5. For an introduction to Guattari's politico-philosophical ideas, see Henk Oosterling & Siebe Thissen, *Chaos ex machine. Het ecosofisch werk van Félix Guattari op de kaart gezet*, CFK, Rotterdam 1998. See also http://www.xs4all.nl/~maai/hsys/frms/fcem.htm.

The balance is drawn up in *Flesh Machine. Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness* (1977). After the premodern 'war machine' which suppresses resistance by force of arms, and the Foucaultian/Deleuzian 'sight machine' of almost total surveillance ('the Net functions as a disciplinary apparatus through the use of trans-parancy'),[6] CAE foresees the rise of a new dynamic of monitoring and control which remains one step ahead of any resistance. By implanting chips and other electronic devi-ces in the body and by manipulating the building blocks of life, DNA, the powers that be transform their grip on life into a 'flesh machine'. The body becomes a 'data body' which is simultaneously both a repres-sive matrix and a marketing device: the voluntary consumption of information makes citizens totally controllable.[7] To criticize this situa-tion is highly problematical, not least because the collective fear reflex overpowers individual introspec-tion. Many citizens consider cameras, iris scanning and the global monitoring of email traffic to be necessary evils for the sake of security. Freedom is meekly sacrificed in favour of safety. The activist interven-tions of CAE put their finger on a sore spot on the data body.

6. *Flesh Machine*, op.cit., p. 152.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

But CAE's interventions are controversial for several reasons. Not only do they have subversive potential for the police and the political class, but their place within art is also a sensitive issue. What kind of art is it? Some critics see CAE's work as a form of political art. It shows a closer affiliation with that of Guerilla Girls, subRosa and The Yes Men.[8] Others hold that 'art with a message', particularly when exhibited by scientists, turns art into a stra-tagem; they see the informed bio-resistance that CAE aspires to as offering no more than a diverting bit of infotainment.

8. See Gregg Bordowitz, 'Tactics Inside and Out', in: 'The Art of Politics', *Artforum International*, September 2004, p. 212.

Indeed, CAE would rather inform their audience than fascinate them. Art provides a more penetrating way to do this than text alone. Texts form an integral part of CAE's activism, however. By means of public participation, CAE produce and distribute knowledge as a counter-expertise to the relatively opaque and one-sided information issued by governments and by commercial companies about their products. Their target is corporate power, in which transnationals and the war industry join to form an almost impregnable network structure. In their showy performances, CAE demythologize high-tech procedures and supply information as a counterweight to the fear factor[10] that dominates the general public's perception of genetic modification.

10. *Molecular Invasion,* op.cit., p. 34.

It is not only the 'critical' designation but also their liberative resistance to the increasingly impenetrable power structures that indicate CAE's roots 'in the modern avant-garde, to the extent that participants place a high value on experimentation and on engaging the unbreakable link between representation and politics'.[11] Besides elements of Living Theater and of Brechtian drama, CAE feel akin above all to Surrealism and its interventions. Still, how should we designate their work? They reject classifications such as 'site-specific artists, community artists, public artists, new genre artists and all the categories with which we had little or no sympathy'.[12] Considering their emphasis on public openness and transparency, and their focus on creating an alternative discourse, a qualification as 'public artists' would seem the best fit. But then it must be stressed that their work is not so much about art *in* the public space as about art as public space or art of public space. CAE specialize in the art of publicness.

11. *Digital Resistance,* op.cit., p. 3.

12. *Ibid.,* p. 4.

Their work is clearly not at all about artificial intelligence or conceptual art. CAE's experimental practice operates precisely at the 'intersections between art, technology, radical politics, and critical theory'.[13] The domain is art, the subject matter is technology, the method is activism and the goal is critical theory. It is the very hybridism of their practice that opens up indefinable intermediate spaces, interstices or in-betweens in which 'the political activist and the cultural activist (anachronistically known as the artists) can still produce disturbances'.[14] Hacking into computer systems is the most exemplary

13. *The Electronic Disturbance,* op.cit., p. 12. For an example of an approach of this kind, see the study carried out by Centrum voor Filosofie & Kunst (CFK), a centre established by the Erasmus University Rotterdam, *Intermedialiteit. Over de grenzen van filosofie, kunst en politiek.*
See also www.henkoosterling.nl/output.html.

14. *Ibid.,* p. 12.

tactic, but as soon as a fascination with the 'aesthetics of efficiency'[15] or with 'technocratic avant-garde'[16] predominates it becomes counter-productive. Resistance flips into its opposite and becomes an accomplice of the power it sought to stem. Producing 'disturbances' makes the double bind in which resistance can find itself comprehensible and tangible. The production of 'disturbances' is not an appeal to abandon the media and media technology; that would not only be tantamount to blowing up the infrastructure of our informational existence, but it would also explode our self-conception, which after all thrives on this media technology. Individual autonomy is expressed rather in the determination of the level of mediation adapted to the pace and rhythm of the means in small groups of four to ten people. These organic 'cells' are 'based in trust in the other people'.[17] Given their many connections to a diversity of social practices, their identity is not a fixed one but a multidimensional one. The synergy of this diversity of connections makes the whole of the cooperation into more than the sum of its parts.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

16. *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, op.cit., p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

## Tactical Mediocrity: A Political Double Bind

With Foucault and Deleuze, CAE share the knowledge that there is no longer one central power against which mass resistance can be mobilized. Power is distributed in the information society. Surfing on flows of information, power has also become nomadic. It no longer has a centre. Power is everywhere: micropolitics in my fantasies, geopolitics in my rice and in my sneakers.[18] While power utilizes media and technology, in electronic civil disobedience this very media technology is displaced, turned agaist itself by deploying them tactically. The invisibility and unfathomability of this technology must be measured off against human criteria, informed by mutual engagement, the open exchange of ideas and justice.

18. See Michel Foucault, *De wil tot weten. Geschiedenis van de seksualiteit I*, SUN, Nijmegen 1984, pp. 93-97.

CAE thus know that they cannot cast off the spectacles. That is why they deploy media tactically: 'resistance can be viewed as a matter of degree.'[19] There is absolutely no sense in being 'for' or 'against', due to a complete integration of resistance into life. Since tactics always presuppose a context and contexts change all the time, CAE's interventions are more pragmatic than dogmatic. So perhaps, owing to the media-technological double bind, we should describe them not as critical but as hypocritical: we are ourselves always part of the system we have targeted, and we ourselves use the

19. *The Electronic Disturbance*, op.cit., p. 130.

media technology we criticize.[20] Conventional, dogmatic disobedience is no longer sufficient. To have any effect, resistance has to be just as

20. See Henk Oosterling, *Radicale middelmatigheid*, Boom, Amsterdam 2000/2002, p. 12.

nomadic and virtual as power is. Physically blocking the way of people, trains and tanks can still be effective locally, but geopolitically it is always a matter of blocking, corrupting and diverting information flows. The arrest of Kurtz proves that bioresistance too can be considered subversive and effective.

'As far as power is concerned, the streets are dead capital.'[21] Public space has changed, with inevitable

21. *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, op.cit, p. 11.

consequences for artists who work in it as a location or medium. Publicity is physical or virtual. For CAE, it is an invisible discourse which we have involuntarily absorbed: a mode of thinking and doing which, despite all pretenses of transparency, invisibly but effectively automobilizes us and if need be immobilizes us. The 'informational turn' has the consequence that visibility is no longer the prime criterion for the control of thought and action, because the representative institutions are no longer needed.

Power is no longer embodied by identifiable capitalists or represented by elected politicians in national parliaments: 'What lies behind the representation is lost. . . . Macro power is experienced only by its effect, and never as a cause.'[22] Power presents itself through global information flows that are connected

22. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

directly to living rooms and brains. It is through data bodies that representation and politics are inextricably linked. Corporate power can rely on representation as a technological implant, but consumers experience this power merely in and as its supposedly benevolent effects.

## Homo Informans: Radical Mediocrity or Scaled Inter-esse?

Thus invisibility paradoxically coincides with media transparency. The radicalism of a literal 'medio'-crity makes individuals into informational nodes. With the help of SMS, MSM, GSM and GPS, they become interactive spies in their own home. The transformation of knowledge into information instigates the metamorphosis of *homo sapiens* into *home informans*.

Representation within this post-political configuration always ensnares itself in a media-related double bind: the means are our repression and liberation. So there is little point in thinking in these terms. The emphasis CAE place on individual autonomy as an 'agency'[23] may seem modernistic, but critical self-

23. *The Electronic Disturbance*, op.cit., p. 140.

Presentation of Critical Art Ensemble in the catalogue of the exhibition 'The Interventionists. Art in the Social Sphere' in the MASS MoCA, 2004.

insight tolerates this ambivalence if one forgoes thinking in terms of repression and liberation. CAE's 'recommendations' are tantamount to saying that individuals must determine their means and not vice versa. *Homo informans* must be aroused from his passivity by means of inter-activity, and, in conveniently small groups, must so adjust his media usage that he retains his grip on life. The criterion is the prevention of the total transparency of individual existence by corporate power. But, as said, the media-related 'empowerment' that CAE aspires to is dubious on account of its hypocritical character; before one realizes it, resistance has already been incorporated and autonomous freedom has been absorbed by the security mindset.

The crucial factor remains the binding, synergetic force which operates within groups, and on which CAE's cultural practice also depends. By emphasizing the 'in-between' – CAE's 'intersections' and Foucault's 'interstices' – or inter-est[24] in the literal sense, these groups form small-scale counterparts of the worldwide mediatization of trans-national corporations. But this interest too is experienced only through its consequences. Representation of the in-between is therefore impossible. It is down-scaled participation made to measure, as in the museum interventions at MASSMoCA, that triggers interest. By linking science and art new public space is created.

24. The Dutch and German 'inter-esse' literally means: the being (esse) of the in between (inter). The English 'interest' already implies the normative aspect.

Jan van Grunsven and
Willem van Weelden

Invisible Politics

*The Practice of DRFTWD Office Associates*

Arno van der Mark joined forces with
Gilbert Koskamp in 1999 to form the
practice 'DRFTWD/Archi components
services', now known as 'DRFTWD Office
Associates'. Their design practice is marked
by a strategic spatial approach in which the
concept of neutrality plays an important
part. The text below is based on an inter-
view with Arno van der Mark which took
place at DRFTWD's Amsterdam office
on 22 September 2004.

In the broad field of urban design, landscape design and architecture, DRFTWD combines a multidisciplinary, research-based approach with a design practice which they themselves describe as 'landscape urbanism'. It is striking, considering Van der Mark's background in visual art, that the DRFTWD practice has developed beyond the point where it can still be described as 'art'. Yet DRFTWD seems to stay clear of the paralyzing battle of definitions that results from the much vaunted 'erasure of boundaries between art, fashion, advertising, design and architecture'.

The interview concentrated on the question of the social changes which DRFTWD sees as relevant to its practice, and how those changes motivate them to seek a new position and new modus operandi within the field of spatial design. To many designers, these social changes prompt a new political zest, but DRFTWD takes the opposite outlook. A hallmark of their approach is to instill a conscious neutrality into the design process, a tactic of postponed judgement in an overheated market of interests.

Out of the varied and often complex projects that DRFTWD has undertaken since it was founded, the main one to enter the discussion was Heerhugowaard – Forecasting glasstad/duinstad.[1]

1. A publication about 'forecasting' as a stage in the design process, written with Dennis Kaspori, will appear in autumn 2005.

'You could say that a number of social and cultural changes are taking place, and that these have an effect on the production of spatial designs and on the functioning of a spatial design practice. The *Umfeld* – the context in which a design is situated – is changing, and the disciplines that engage with it respond to those changes, or at least they should. The point is thus to specify more exactly what that *Umfeld* consists of: what are its main characteristics, how does it function and who makes it function?

'Here's an example. In 1995, the Dutch government pulled out of the housing market and passed responsibility for social housing to the private sector. Although we are just at the beginning of this change, its first effects are already becoming evident; cracks are appearing in the running of the city, cracks in its sociability. Now that the government has pulled out, there is no longer any central management. The executive branch has become largely invisible and seems unwilling to steer matters from the outside.

'The question of whether this new situation is right or wrong is not an interesting one. It's much more important to decipher the balance of relations – between developers and the authorities, between private and public and so on. The old culture of decision making is changing and nobody knows for certain where it is heading. There are signs that private companies are beginning take their own responsibility – partly through personal insight and partly on account of these new relationships – with the consequence that market situations will alter. A new territory is opening up and it cries out to be 'shaped'.

*Invisible Politics*

Consumers play a part in this. They are the purchasers of what the market has to offer. And there is still a role for government; the private parties depend on the government for its ability to cooperate. This has major consequences for the practice of spatial design and for the functioning of those who participate in that practice. Who are the players? Who points out the direction, and of what?

'The times have passed when we could derive meaning from differences in ideology. The century ahead will be the century of the *free field*, when it becomes possible to develop the kind of participation for which we have been fighting for a hundred years. The knowledge required for this exists, and the technology is on hand. The 'open source' concept opens the way to the greatest possible *neutrality*; neutral, in the sense that all parties can participate; and neutral, because it accommodates the individual interests of everyone within a collectively supported process. This neutrality has above all consequences for the design attitude; the new situation demands a 'design for design', a vision of a structure for the design process. Designing turns into generating information and facilitating communication – before, during and after the actual process. The end result is then a logical consequence of the way the process is organized.

'*Respect* is a necessary self-regulating condition, a condition without which a process of this kind would not stand a chance; mutual respect between the investing parties, developers, politics, the designing parties and the consuming public.

'Culture as we know it, a visual culture based on symbolic values, on iconography, is undergoing transformation into a culture of participation and processes. The transformation is an irreversible one. In the new culture, the design will no longer simply be determined, it will be *generated*. This distinction is crucial.'

Changing Practice

'As the designing party, how can you be sure you are equipped to zoom in on the questions you find interesting, the questions which are essential (because they matter) and for which you can take the responsibility yourself (because you can 'manage' them)? When we set up DRFTWD five years ago, we told ourselves 'we're starting something new, and we'll call it *cross-disciplinary*'. You have the disciplinary field, that is architects, urban designers, etcetera, and viewed traditionally this field is a multi-stage one. First it's your turn, then someone else's, and so on. It's just like in house building: first the piles are driven, then the concrete is poured, then the bricklayers turn up, then the carpenters, followed by the services installer and the painter; and finally the wallpaper goes up and everything is finished. These disciplines all follow one another in succession; the process starts at the top of the hierarchy and ends somewhere near the bottom. This is an outmoded setup, an analogous process.

But there is plenty of play in the handover between one stage and the next, in the space between the disciplines.

'The changed relationships call for new tools, for scenarios that do not immediately lead to an expression or a picture, but to a process. That is where a task lies for the designer. What has potential? How do you create the conditions to develop that potential? How do you calculate the effects of your actions – not only for those with whom you engage in the process, but also for yourself, as new input, as a new proposition or a refinement of an existing one?

'It's no longer a question of an 'executive' practice but of an 'initiating' one, a development practice; a practice concerned with the creation of conditions and the reorganization of the means; a practice that isn't set up only for the development of knowledge, but also for unearthing new possibilities. How do you organize that kind of practice? Where do its dependencies lie? Who are its partners?'

## Tactics

'DRFTWD is currently much more than a network organization. It's a conglomerate which, on the basis of present practice, aims to bring people and knowledge together, to form combinations and connections which are not established in conventional practice, and to guide the process of creating a spatial design.

'In the case of Heerhugowaard, for example, we are responsible for conceptualizing a recreation zone of 72 hectares. We are also detailing the public infrastructure in that area, and we are writing a scenario that involves an artistic contribution. That more or less sums up how we got started on the project, how we developed and our current state of play. At the same time, at the end of the road, we'd like to take credit for how the result looks and feels, and carry that experience forward to a new project. The goal is for the final result, which may admittedly be the outcome of years of work, to be a palpable and verifiable 'product' – a product that is capable of being described as such. In this respect, there is no difference at all from the objectives of a classic discipline.

'That isn't to say that the functioning of DRFTWD is evident in all respects and to everyone. The process is too complex for that, there are too many parties, and it isn't a good idea for an office like ours to lay an advance claim on any part of the results. The question asked of all the participating parties is: how can the individual interests be deployed collectively? It's the collective effect, and not everyone's individual subjectivity, that counts. An incidental consequence is that the process results in the postponement of authorship. The authorship is only dealt out at the end of the project, or maybe not at all. Although DRFTWD aims, strategically speaking, at 'hard' results, it relies on the ambiguity of its participation in tactical respects: to be both present and

absent, both initiating and supplying a service. This is a choice we have made as a practice.'

Case

'For the subplan of Heerhugowaard that relates to the building of 550 dwellings, we introduced *forecasting* as a phase after the zoning plan but before the urban development plan. By forecasting, we mean instigating a process that tries to formulate the urban design not merely in terms of parcelling out land, defining building lines, functions, the programme, the streets and buildings, etcetera, but first and foremost in terms of cultural and social core values. By introducing the forecasting phase, we hope to create the space needed to tie matters into one another – the space between individual parties, the space between agreements that have been made (the zoning plan) and agreements that are yet to be concluded (the urban design).

'Once the zoning plan has been approved by the Municipal Council, the market parties normally gather around a table and divide up the zoning plan into subprojects, each of which has its own project leader in charge of execution. The path from the zoning plan to the urban design consists in this case of a manageable number of agreements between a manageable number of partners, on which democracy – politics, the consumer, etcetera – no longer has any influence. Our proposal for a forecasting phase inserts a process prior to this. We do so firstly in the interests of a transparent process, because we wish to give local government (and at a later stage, the consumer) a place at the table; and secondly because we wish to reshape the process with a view to future developments by reformulating a number of core values and setting them down in the 'forecast'. The forecasting phase thus functions as an intermediary between the zoning plan and the eventual urban design. The intention is to arrive at a design which, in its basic condition, has sufficient sustainability to function in the longer term as well as in the shorter term. The design must moreover be flexible enough to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the time.

'Our first step was to organize a workshop to deal with the general question of what the designing parties might be able to contribute at this stage of plan development, as well as the specific question of 'how can we set a new course after VINEX?' The main programmatic target of VINEX is the nuclear family and two-income households, but it takes no account of population aging. It won't be long before the rural area around Heerhugowaard has 70% of its population over 55. What does this imply for the dwelling and for the level of services? How will Heerhugowaard then relate to Alkmaar from a regional viewpoint? The countryside will literally be full of seniors in this situation. Housing in its traditional sense is then no longer an issue, and the focus will instead be on the 'residential product', on 'residential product development',

an so forth. What will the programme be? And who dominates the market, in a situation of this kind, in terms of service provision?

'On the basis of schemas which we may adhere to or elaborate further, we decide on visual aspects and on items to be placed on the agenda. Abandoning the traditional parcelling of the district and the associated street plan, and instead treating the allocatable land in its entirety as a buildable surface, allows us to create loose clusters of dwellings, leaving the use of the space between the clusters to be detailed afterwards. What we hope to achieve is a design for a project of 550 dwelling which consists of a number of partly independent residential domains. By so doing we create an opportunity to radically alter the relations between allocatable land, rights of ownership and housing density. Here we can see the first signs emerging of a new way of considering the distribution of the dwelling and its connection to the public infrastructure. Suppose it were possible to define the relationship between seniors and two-income households at the level of public facilities. Suppose, too, that, as a citizen, you could arrange a service provision for yourself collectively but keep it under personal control, so becoming a shareholder in your own residential area. These are options which could be worked out in detail, complete with their financial implications, to which further options could be added; and these will eventually result in programmatic choices rather than spatial ones. You could then run these options past a number of different development scenarios in terms of volume, distribution, typologies, housing categories, added services, etcetera. And, as I explained, politics and the consumer could also get involved and exert an influence on the process, instead of leaving the decisions to be settled unilaterally by the market.
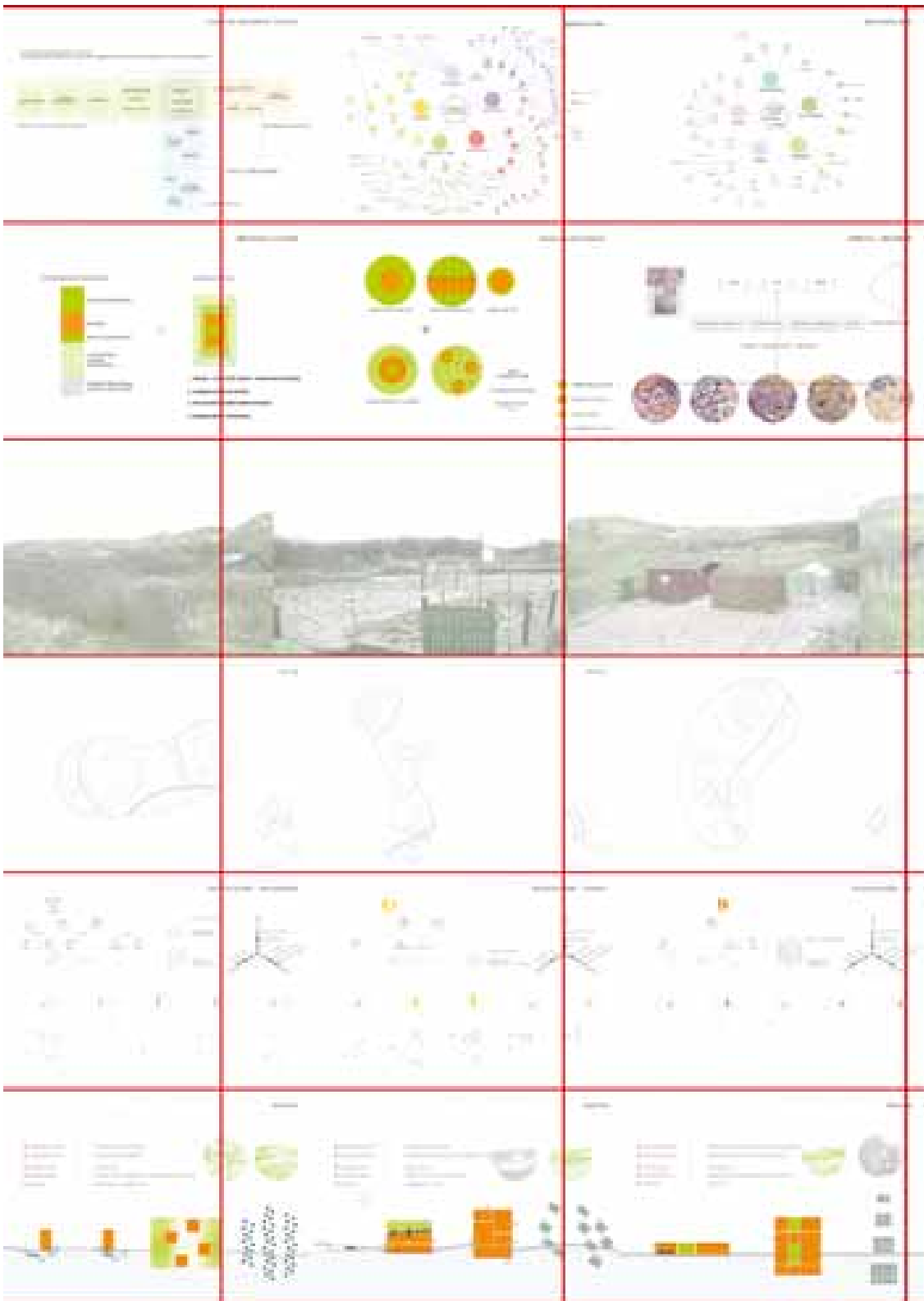
'The important thing is to believe in something; and then, when someone comes along with an opportunity for it to come true, it will come true. At the same time, that person is a partner. Perhaps that's the difference with the past; everyone's a partner now.'
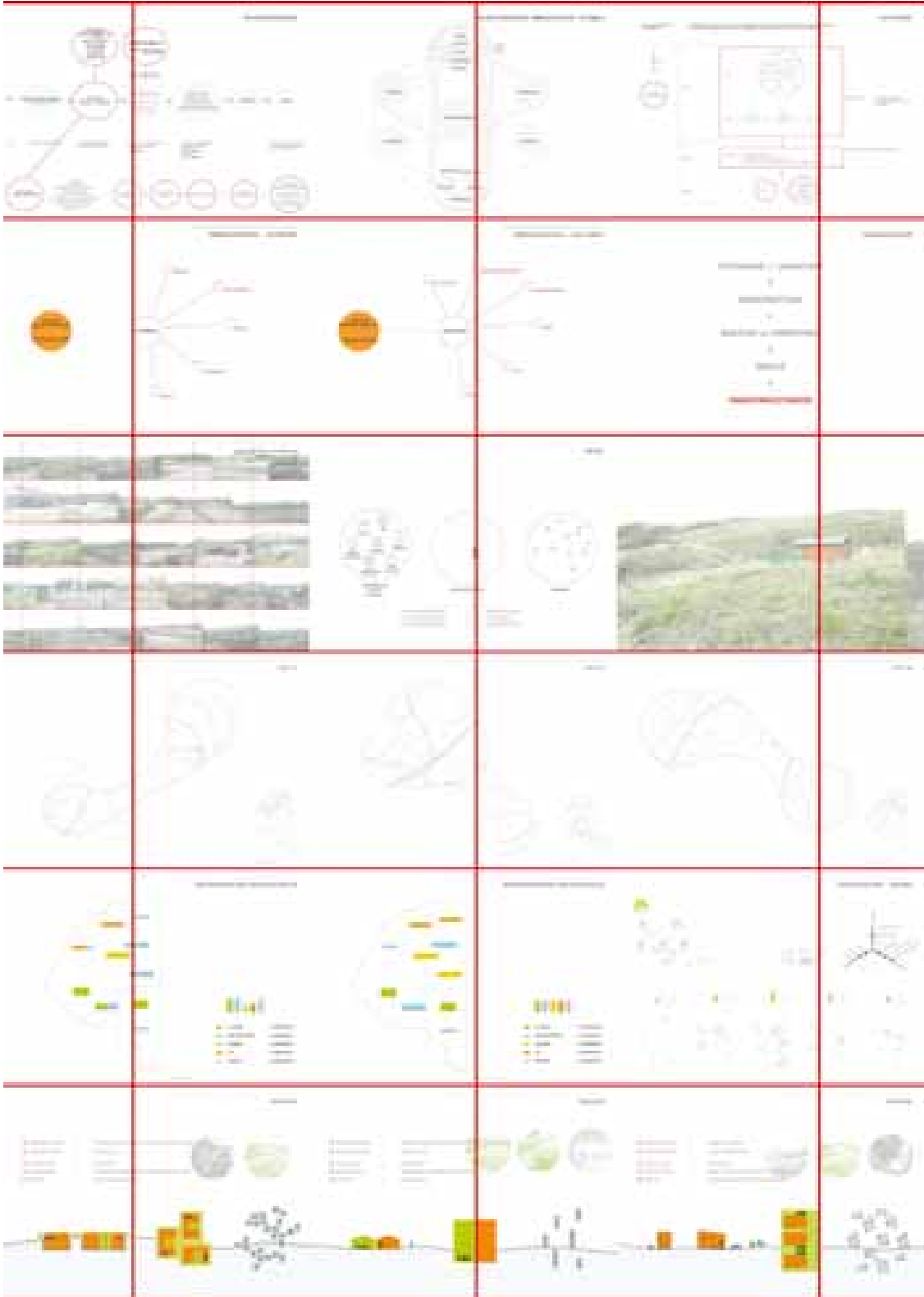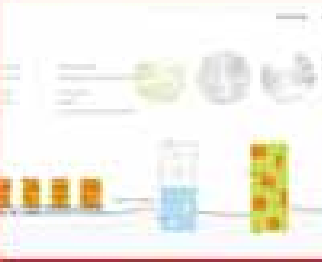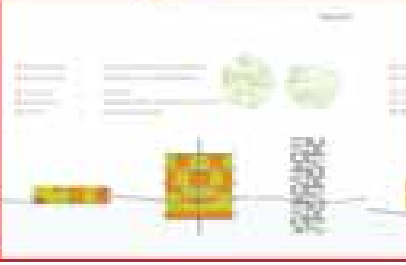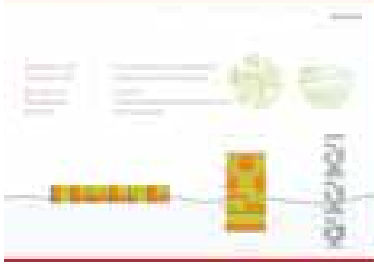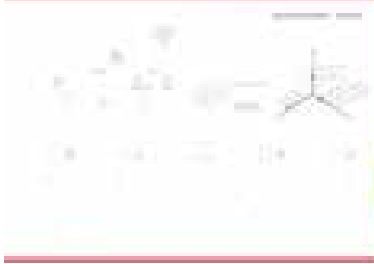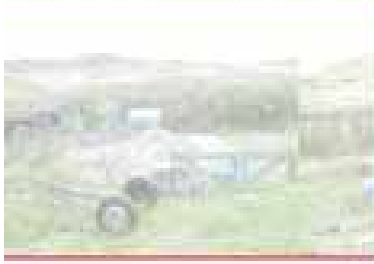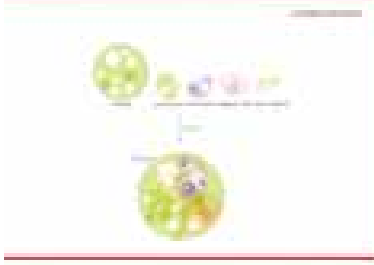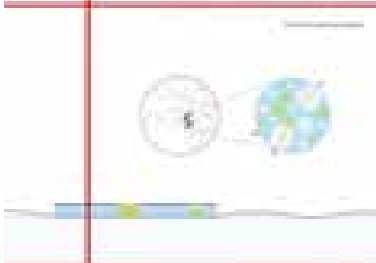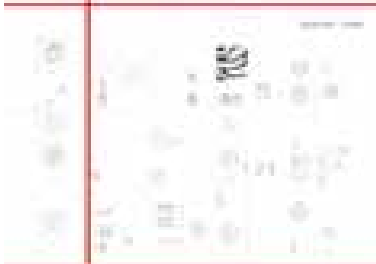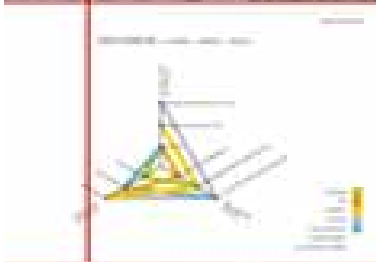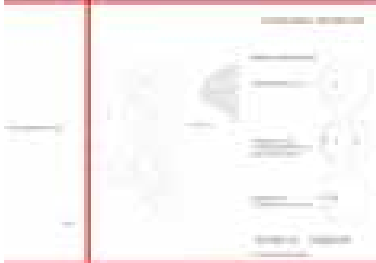
# Views on Art Training for Art in Public Space

## A Round-Table Discussion Chaired by Henk Oosterling

Publicity and public space have turned out to be urgent sociocultural and political issues in recent decades. Art is pre-eminently a domain that has a bearing on the public sphere. Yet the Netherlands has neither a politically committed practice of art in public space, nor a tradition in that area. This country also lacks an artistic training option that concentrates exclusively on the practice of art in public space and on the social commitment that goes along with it. Apparently no need is seen for such a course within higher art education; or perhaps there is an insufficiency of expertise for anticipating the changing, compelling contexts that affect today's art practice.

The editors and the guest editors of *Open 8* invited a number of 'professionals' to exchange some ideas on higher art education with regard to art in public space. The participants in the private round-table discussion, chaired by philosopher Henk Oosterling, were as follows: Jeanne van Heeswijk, artist working in public space; Henk Slager, head of the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design; Jouke Kleerebezem, artist and advising researcher at the artists' workplace Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht; Jan van Grunsven, artist and former coordinator of the ok5/ department of Art and Public Space, ArtEz, Arnhem.

Below are reproduced some fragments of an exploratory discussion on the possibility or impossibility of creating a specialized training course, and on the legitimation and social commitment of artistic practice in public space.

HENK OOSTERLING   *Considerable changes are presently taking place both in public space and in art and artistic training. The pressure of various social, political and economic developments is forcing these fields to reassess their legitimacy and to redefine their positions with regard to one another. What does this imply for the artistic training options for artists who wish to work in public space? Can artists indeed be trained to work in public space? If so, what infrastructural conditions must training courses of this kind satisfy? And, now that Dutch higher and academic education has adopted the bachelor/master system, what institutional setting is appropriate for that training?[1]*

## Towards an 'Applied' Alternative

JAN VAN GRUNSVEN  Yes, artists can be trained to work in public space, although this does imply a fundamentally different way of thinking about artistic practice. In 1997 I was asked by the Arnhem Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, now part of ArtEZ, to think about a 'restart' of the Arnhem School.[2] You could say that the socially involved kind of artistic practice the Arnhem School once aspired to had gradually turned into a symbolic practice, reduced to a question of mere form. I saw no benefit in just prolonging an aesthetic doctrine. To me, the

1. Starting from the academic year 2002, a new bachelor/ master structure has been introduced into Dutch higher education. This structure is a detailed interpretation of the agreements arrived at by 29 European countries in Bologna in 1999 to harmonize academic qualifications for higher education by 2009. Rather than the length of study, it is the final level achieved that provides the criterion of international equivalence. Agreements were also made towards increased cooperation in the fields of quality assurance and curriculum development. Along with the bachelor-master system, an accreditation scheme was introduced in higher education. Educational courses will be reassessed for quality once every six years. The bachelor-master structure entails the separation of bachelor from master courses in higher education. The bachelor course comes after previous education at a secondary or technical school level; the master course follows after the bachelor course. Source: http://www.minocw.nl/bachelor/index.html.

2. The Arnhem School, during the late 1960s and '70s, supported the use of fine art to enhance living conditions in the built environment. The ideologists of the Arnhem school were the artists Berend Hendriks and Peter Struycken, who were appointed as joint heads of the Architectural/Monumental Design department of the Arnhem academy of art.

development of art in any case no longer emanated from art itself but from art's capacity to react to the context in which it operates. The autonomous proposition that was universally accepted in thinking about art in that period seemed to me would inevitably migrate towards an applied alternative. That observation encapsulates the main essence of what I then proposed for the educational course at Arnhem, called OK5/art and public space. It implies after all a principally different formulation not only of the basic departure point of art in public space, but also of its effects, the visibility of its outcome. The kind of practice I had in mind no longer puts the primary stress on individual self expression; it does not begin with endless introspection into the artist's personal history with the aim of trying to amplify or adjust that history. This practice of 'art in public space' places the world outside art at the centre of its concerns. Public space is its most important point of reference and field of action. This way of artistic practice regards the problematic autonomy of visual art as secondary to the cultural issues that concern society; it seeks its *raison d'être* explicitly in the context within which it functions. That entire *Umfeld* has to be explored. After all, you have to ask yourself what it

all means for the definition of the design task. I defined that *Umfeld* at the time as the 'hardware, software and orgware of the design task', and in that light I made a case for the development of specific tools and a design-oriented strategy. The fact is that when we speak of the practice of art – that is, the practice with regard to commissioned work – we are also concerned with questions such as those of internal and external expertise, of the commissioning client and of decision procedures. What is your strategy, and what are your tactics? What frame of reference do you need for organizing feedback on the results you have achieved?

My aspiration with OK5 was to position the practice of art in public space much more in the centre of things; not as an aloof discipline but as one expressly engaging in dialogue with the context and with other disciplines. Professional art education had and still has accumulated very little experience in taking an approach of this kind. There is an excessive fixation on single disciplines. I don't believe you have to train first as an artist and only then seek your 'field of applicability' in public space. Public space is not just some or other genre but a specific, complex discipline, and, if you wish to consider it in connection with artistic training courses, in my view you have to develop things as an integral whole. It isn't a question of one thing or another, but of both one and the other. Nor is it simply a question of starting a bachelor course as an artist in public space. When you start on a course of education for art in public space, you have to start entirely from scratch, at a basic level and in direct dialogue with the area of application. That is where the questions and where the tasks lie waiting.

On the grounds of the experiences I had with OK5, I was asked to write a curriculum plan for an educational department of 'art in public space' at post-HBO (roughly, postgraduate) level. I devised the plan in communication with two partner institutes in the same region, the Arnhem Academy of Architecture (Academie van Bouwkunst) and the EMILA (the European Master of Landscape Architecture) school in Velp. The city of Arnhem acted as a fourth partner in the construct, especially for determining the design task. The intention was to share knowledge on a systematic basis, with a strong focus on interdisciplinary cooperation as a standard part of everyone's training curriculum; a setup that would be unique in the Netherlands. Technical considerations of financing resulted however in the Academy in Enschede being asked to implement this plan. The fact that the substantive focus of that institution conflicted with the intentions behind the curriculum plan did not stand in the way of the governing board's decision to place the affair in the hands of Enschede. What might have become a unique educational construction was thus scrapped, and the preference went to something that could have been developed just about anywhere.

As to the concrete study curriculum, it consisted of a design-oriented component, a visual art component and a theory component. The curriculum was compiled in close cooperation with groups such as Crimson and Schie 2.0 in Rotterdam, and resulted in the introduction of what is termed design-oriented

David Gibbs, *We ask high prices for our vows and we gaily return to the muddy road* (after Baudelaire), 2004. Temporary structure made of coffee cups attached to metal fencing around the building site of the Arnhem Dance Academy. (OK5, Arnhem)

research. This is an approach rooted in the thought that research can deliver such valuable information that communicating its results sufficiently justifies the making of a design. The design strategy and tactics that directly follow from the approach were taught by Lucas Verwey (Schie 2.0). Jorinde Seijdel taught media theory and Herman Verkerk taught 'design and analysis' in an approach derived from Delft University of Technology.

Something I missed in the course structure was some serious thought about the skills necessary for a design process of this kind, which includes not merely the capacity to prepare an architectural drawing and model, to interpret the idea to scale, but also skills in negotiation. There were also classes on art appreciation, art history, architectural history and architectural theory. We also worked with a Practice Agency, through which students could gain experience on assignments in real practice from real clients, such as the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer in connection with the new high-speed rail line, the Ministry of LNV (Agriculture, Nature Development and Fisheries) and the Gelredome stadium. There was also the collaboration with the EMILA and the Academy of Architecture, in which context we carried out a number of studies over 3 years under the name 'Atelier 4', looking for example into the Schuytgraaf VINEX location and the post-war Presikhaaf estate, both in Arnhem. This enabled students to participate in an exchange of ideas and to test their acquired knowledge against current practice. This took place either with an external client (quite a different matter from receiving an assignment from a teacher) or as part of an exchange with students from the other disciplines, architecture and landscape architecture.

A Public Domain Department

JEANNE VAN HEESWIJK  I don't know if a course of training for art in public space really ought to be taught as a separate discipline at an art academy. You rapidly get caught up in the confused dichotomy of autonomous and applied art. I would situate a course of this kind within a larger 'Public Domain' Department. And I wonder whether such a department ought to be part of a school of art. I could imagine it being part of the course at an Academy of Architecture, for example. In that kind of department, a student should be able to get involved in developing a specific, visual perspective on public space. My view is that you should first be trained as an artist or architect, and only then move on to a Public Domain Department: something like a postgraduate or master-level course, with a multidisciplinary structure, following on from a monodisciplinary prior study. In other words, it would allow you to specialize in working in public space equally well as an artist or as an architect. The existence of a course of that kind would help prevent the rise of a generation of artists who seriously believe they can conduct a public process merely by inviting everyone for a cup of coffee, because they have never really grasped the concepts of publicity, of autonomy or of

compromise.

To me, the capacity to pose aesthetic questions with regard to the public domain is one of the most important qualities, and is essential for working in public space. It's a quality that's inherent to being an artist. The capacity for posing aesthetic questions is something we ought to try to instil at art schools. This skill can be put to use in many different processes. As to which process, it's an area where you can pick and choose. That's why I would prefer not to position the 'public domain' business within an art academy, nor in a professorial chair, but in there with the hardware, with architecture and urban design.

My practical experience as an artist leads me to believe that the curriculum of a Public Domain Department ought to include at least sociological research, social geography and social communication. When working public space it is after all a matter of identifying the different groups present in that space, and of increasing the visibility of the forces that prevail there. You have to develop special tools for that purpose, tools that enable an artist to respond visually to the space.

## 'Despecialization'

HENK SLAGER  Thinking about making art in public space is a second option for many artists. After all, exhibiting work in prestigious museums and public galleries takes pride of place. It seems this is precisely why the Netherlands has never felt the need to have a specialized training course in art in public space. I carried out a study into the functioning of the art academy, in response to a book by Ute Meta Bauer (*Education, Information, Entertainment*, 2001). The outcome was that I made a number of proposals for different forms an art education could take in practice, and how it could be made to mesh with social developments. I then took a close look at a number of Dutch art academies and concluded that they are still dominated by art-historical thinking. The training is given largely by people in their fifties, who think about art and about art-historical concepts in traditional terms, with the result that the frame of reference of art education is almost unquestioningly museum-oriented. As long as that discourse still holds sway, people are forced think in terms of museum-like contexts, forms of presentation, etcetera. So a different discourse needs to be introduced into the art academies if they are to have any chance of creating a different climate and a different form of artistic professional practice.

The present reformulation prompted by the introduction of the bachelor-master structure should in my view in no way concern itself with developing new specialisms such as art in public space. On the contrary, it appears to be time to *despecialize* the graduate programme, for this is a necessary consequence of the complexity of today's society. Along with this there should be an increasingly transmedia and transdisciplinary research attitude. A training as an artistic researcher, as is offered by the recently started MA Fine Art programme of the Utrecht Graduate School of

Visual Art and Design (Mahku), is concerned with this kind of artistic practice: an artist who embraces both exhibition projects and commissioned work in public space, as two research tracks that are in principle of equal validity. The course puts the student in a position to focus on art in public space when desired, and it does so by giving him or her an opportunity to compile an individual research programme which contains components of both the Fine Art MA and the Design MA courses; components which address relevant issues, such as cultural/critical studies, transmedia research, urban interior design and an individual research project in public space.

I consider that the course on offer here is an ideal form of training towards the public practice of art. Moreover, the perspective of artistic research provides exactly the perspective needed to seek a balance between developing a discourse and engaging in individual research in the public domain. This individual research will thus never result in a kind of legitimizing, static or definitive discourse production, such as that of art history, but for the sake of the desired dynamic it will endeavour to maintain a balanced interaction between researching practice and positioning reflection. This kind of despecialization can only exist within in a postgraduate course. In other words, I consider it necessary to have a monodisciplinary, medium-based curriculum for the first higher educational phase, and to engage in transdisciplinary experiments only in the second, postgraduate, phase.

## The Consciousness of a Disciplinary Tradition

JOUKE KLEEREBEZEM   I am very much attached to the label of an artist. I do not believe you first have to go through a monodisciplinary training and only then get involved with public space. Whether you're an artist, an architect or a designer is something you will discover in the course of time. As to taking a multidisciplinary approach, there is a lack of clear examples. What form, for example, should the transition from a monodisciplinary to a multidisciplinary context take? There are of course specific disciplinary skills you have to acquire, but the consciousness of a disciplinary tradition is of primary importance. You have to learn to relate to a tradition, to speak the language of a discipline. That can set a direction for the way you relate to things as an artist, and thus also for the way you relate to public space. It is not so much a matter of having a 'history': tradition also means the consciousness of belonging to a specific group with specific interests.

The central question in current art education is, in the context of a postmonumental information culture, what principles, disciplines and skills must we acquire in order to generate meaning through art and design?[3] Learning is a practice of study and research that operates within a broader social activity, and which must remain somewhat aloof from that activity

3. See Jouke Kleerebezem, 'The Postmonumental Image. On Enduring Visibility in the Network Society' elsewhere in this issue.

in both technical and conceptual respects, although without totally isolating itself. The 'laboratory', the 'library', the 'studio' and the 'stage' are places which, under refined and carefully controlled conditions, are supposed to optimize the technical parameters and the human resources for conducting an individual artistic practice. One of the main objectives in this area is to establish channels through which the knowledge acquired is testable in relation to other social activities. The relation between the knowledge institute and its social context needs to be redefined for art education as much as it does for other disciplines. The cultural, economic and epistemological value of art-specific and design-specific knowledge is at present drastically underestimated.

The knowledge generated in the realm of art and design is not primarily theoretical in character. It is a living knowledge, which takes shape within a changing society. This knowledge must never be made subservient to any other societal aspiration, but has to develop meaning from the starting point of its unique position, tradition and possibilities, all of which are unreservedly 'social' in nature. Especially now that there is a stress on the investigation of new knowledge systems, care must be taken that art and design do not lose themselves in other social practices which are trying polish up their image. Art nor design can be a quick fix.

I nurture a great suspicion of 'applied art', and almost as great a suspicion of art institutes. The Jan van Eyck Academy where I am now engaged is a knowledge institute, not an educational institute. The major handicap affecting art and other education is the shortage of knowledge among a corps of lecturers who underwent a now long obsolete form of training in the 1960s to 1980s. It is for this reason that in my view a model should not be sought in teaching/learning, but in discipline-wide, communal knowledge acquisition, in which the differences of social experience among different 'learners' must work to the advantage of all generations. A related pitfall is that a knowledge gap is also evident in other societal disciplines and institutions, and this manifests itself as misguided measures, short-term solutions, poorly planned allocations of resources and opportunities, faulty priorities and, to add insult to injury, an inappropriate formulation of the questions to be addressed by the artistic disciplines in their training courses and practices. The challenge facing art and design is to be found, time and time again, in cultural production itself.

HO    *Public space has long ceased to be public space in the conventional sense. We come up against a web of consultation and decision structures, of politics, project developers, local residents, subsidy applications, committees and so on.    An artist who works in public space is also faced with privatization and deregulation processes, and with visualization processes inaugurated by the new media. The legitimation of the semi-public space, of the museum or public art gallery, seems to me to be still on the grounds of art history. But from where does an artist who works in today's public space derive his legitimacy? What discourse can he develop on? Must it always remain a derivative discourse?*

JVG  The artist's legitimation and his social commitment both lie in a commitment to public space. The origin of the artist is art, and the field of application of art is public space. The legitimacy of art in public space is located precisely in the zone between the origin and the application, in the dialogue. Both are in the end inseparable components of what one might term the work of art. The artist is confronted with specific demands and conditions, the programme if you will, which is set or engendered by the situation within which he functions. Just before, I referred to the hardware, the software and the orgware of the design task. Other parties are involved in that programme, but unlike them an artist can manipulate the programme himself.

I think that if you base art in public space solely on art, you soon arrive at a purely symbolic approach – a symbolic practice rather than a realistic practice. After all, once an artist enters into a concrete relation with the complexity of social reality, he begins to take that reality seriously. He will have to involve all those who play a role within that reality in the process, to the extent that he can achieve what he has in mind. If he has not organized the process properly, or if the institutional field within which he works has not organized it properly, so that the artist remains insufficiently aware of the position he occupies with regard to the network of actors on the basis of which he operates, the whole exercise becomes little more than a mere artistic gesture. An action of this kind would fail to touch on the real functioning of the other actors, since it operates so to speak outside the social reality.

JVH  To me there is no distinction between 'the artist' and 'the artist who works in public space'; as if they were not one and the same person, as if the former performs no more than a symbolic act and has no relation to the other parties. I don't believe in the argument that you have to place yourself on one side of the fence or the other. There are artists who perform a 'symbolic' act but who are capable of upholding excellent relations with the other parties. There must however be an intrinsic awareness that an artistic position entails upholding a relationship with the immediate context, and that it is precisely in that context that part of the realization of the work lies. In that respect it is all about an attitude that consists of 'relating to', and that's what you ought to teach. In art education, a distinction is all too often maintained between autonomous and functional ways of working, but in my view the position of the artist is always relatively autonomous. It is often this relatively autonomous position that breaks the ice in the usual processes that take place in public space, so that new collaborative relationships can arise. I also see it as important to seek new collaborations with a view to financing projects. My project for *De Strip*,[4] for example, was financed for the larger part by local sponsors, even more than by government subsidy, and out of the latter only 10 percent was 'art' money. Part of the

4. From 23 May 2002 to 23 May 2004, an ambitious plan was developed and realized for accommodating a cultural zone in a strip of vacant shops in Vlaardingen, initiated Jeanne van Heeswijk.

artists' legitimacy naturally also comes from the various streams of finance. Every

purse of money has so to speak a ticket tied to it specifying its intended purpose. But it is just as important to justify yourself towards the people with whom you collaborate. At the same time, I also hope to legitimize myself towards the professional field, because in my opinion it's also necessary to build up the range of ideas extant there. For example, it rankles with me that it's almost impossible (and this is my critique of the current art discourse) to get an intensive practice, in which you collaborate with many people on the same level, recognized as an artistic practice. The art discourse still attaches so much importance to the name of the artist. I often have to fight tooth and nail for my autonomy, so as to make a different kind of practice possible. I'm not complaining about that, because I feel I am continually pushing the envelope of artistic practice. But the art world keeps hunting for its heroes.

At present, in collaborative projects, we are fantasizing about how I could have people refer to me privately by my surname, so that 'Jeanne van Heeswijk' could become a brand, which stands for a certain manner of collaboration that no longer has anything to do with the conventional notion of the individual artist. To me this is closely bound up with the question: how can you develop an artistic concept that consists not only of a work of art but also of a way of working? That's why, if we're talking about art in public space, you should no longer refer to an 'art object' but to an 'art objective'.

HO   *An explicit ideological standpoint could supply me with criteria for evaluating certain projects in public space. Shouldn't we speak of an artistic practice rather than a work of art? How is an artistic training supposed to facilitate something like political commitment?*

HS   In my view, every artist ought ideally to have that commitment. To my eye, it's inherent in art. And the museum can be the platform for that critical, *engagé*, reflexivity. The borderline between the museum space and public space doesn't in my view have to be all that stringent. Our expectation at Utrecht is at any rate that students will take a clear visually-critical stance. The basic starting point of the course is reflection on the way artistic images can function within the visual culture. We presuppose a critical attitude *a priori*. That, at least, is the point of departure. It is of secondary importance whether it relates to images in public space or images in other contexts, that is, whether it starts from the question of the possibility of a modern cultural critique or from the question of the current position of the artistic image. In Utrecht we treat the research projects of the graduate students as our basis. For example, if someone wants to do some research in the area of gender studies, that's OK with us. At the moment, for example, one of our students who takes an interest in gender issues is being co-supervised by Rosi Braidotti, Professor of Gender Studies at Utrecht University. That the course takes a stance critical of ideology is thus something you can take from me. It is after all taken for granted that students will take a reasonably critical attitude towards the prevailing image culture during the development of their project.

Otherwise the project certainly won't go ahead.

To deal adequately with the problems of art and public space in relation to art education, the institution needs to maintain a good overview held of successfully completed projects. This could even be treated as a discipline, consisting of a systematic overview in which all the associated conditions and contexts could be scrutinized in a constructive way. There is in my view an absolutely vital need for a similar form of discourse formation that is related to case studies.

JVG  If the political momentum consists of engaging with group processes, you also have to specify which group, and which group process. There are very many artists operating in museum spaces who are sincerely committed, even politically. In the end, however, I have to admit that the 'museum artist' mainly has the museum context in mind when making a work, instead of genuinely trying to instigate something in society; whereas the 'open space artist' sees his fulfilment, or at least his most important moment, in 'bearing a relation to' or 'binding yourself to' society. It's a matter of different areas of expertise. Working in public space presumes a different expertise, a different approach, compared to working within the museum context.

JK  The formation of an 'ideological standpoint' is in my view not equivalent to being 'politically' committed. If we define politics very broadly as a form of awareness-raising interaction between people, it follows that you don't have to stick to a specific ideology in order to be politically active as an artist. I believe there exists a whole political field which is interwoven with the experiencing of works of art, whether seen in a museum or elsewhere. If you accept such a broad notion of politics, and investigate how it can be delimited and how it functions in every specific circumstance, then you are active as an artist in that area. It is of course possible to pay attention to politics in that sense as a part of a course of education. I myself favour a somewhat narrower and more modest conception of politics, and I am against the overvaluation of an ideology, especially when holding that ideology is regarded as a 'shortcut' to a socially committed practice of art! But I do see the merit of adopting a clear profile. Visible strategies and explicit standpoints allow distinct reactions, and a discourse may emerge from all the pros and cons. The formation of ideology then becomes one of the first matters that can be opened to discussion. I believe that in art practice you should aim to achieve a political momentum rather than a political direction. Perhaps it's a sign of the times, but I see it as all very *momentané*. I don't believe that in education you have to be capable of plotting out what the future is going to look like, because in trying to do so you will never win the backing of the necessary parties who are essential for setting up an interactive, multidisciplinary structure for research into art and the public domain.

*Preparatory work for the discussion was carried out by Willem van Weelden and Henk Oosterling. Jorinde Seijdel wrote up the report.*

# bookreviews

There was one work which stood head and shoulders above the rest at 'Utopia Station', the disorderly tail-piece of the most recent Venice Biennale. It was a film, which showed a strange and wonderful journey through the night and day of a dilapidated Eastern European city with a man in a taxi – Mafia boss or artist? – who offers a detailed account in an incomprehensible language to someone who remains out of shot. Buildings and streets are reduced to rubble, broken-down means of transport edge their way through, stray dogs appear and disappear, little huddles of people stand around fires. So far the film is showing the clichéd image of a city in a former war or disaster area, with *one* crazy difference: the facades of the houses are painted in vibrant 'colour fields'. Is this the work of a house painter on the loose? Is it the result of a 'percentage for art' programme that has spun out of control? I didn't

have a clue, because as usual at such exhibitions there was little background information and the subtitling wasn't functioning – on that day at least – so with affection and bemusement I stored away this short film on my hard disk.

Titled *Dammi i colori* ('Give Me Colour'), the creator of this work was Anri Sala, an Albanian artist in his thirties who has already produced a sizeable oeuvre. Eight of his projects from 2001 to 2004 are described in detail in the publication: *Entre chien et loup/When the Night Calls it a Day/Wo sich Fuchs und Hase gute Nacht sagen*, beautiful expressions for what is also known as twilight. This is the time when the day transforms into night, and time and space briefly seem to dissolve: an in-between time that is typical for Sala. At this time, our imagination goes into overdrive and we confuse a dog for a wolf.

In the catalogue for the 2003 exhibition 'In den Schluchten des Balkan'

('In the Gorges of the Balkans'), the Albanian curator Edi Muka brands Balkan artists like Sala the 'new proletarians of the art world', artists who still have nothing to lose and are not yet shackled by the international art scene. That Sala is the exception to the rule is demonstrated by the list of internationally renowned gallery owners, his biography, and the impressive line-up of writers in the book that appeared to accompany his exhibitions in Hamburg and Paris. Published in both English/ German and English/French editions, besides texts by the exhibition's three (!) curators, namely Laurence Bossé, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Julia Garimoth, the catalogue also includes essays by a number of eminent professors in the fields of philosophy, memory and psychology, and art history, such as Jacques Rancière and Israel Rosenfield. Sala's rising star in the constellation of international art is ratified by the scenario for a film,

which the star artist Philippe Parreno wrote for Sala. Parreno, who claims never to have seen a work by Sala and intends to keep it that way for the time being, has created a scenario for a mini-feature film based on conversations with Sala, a film that Sala might make in 2010. Parreno, who became known with Pierre Huyghe with the launch of the virtual character Annlee, who everyone could fill out artistically, totally misses the point with this scenario. Sala is obviously not a 'shell figure' like Annlee, though his work does invite a whole range of interpretations.

Molly Nesbit, co-curator of 'Utopia Station', for example, unquestioningly accepts the story by the mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama, formerly a painter, who has decorated the facades with a patchwork of colours at a furious tempo in anticipation of future (infra-) structural improvements to the city. By way of Wittgenstein, Nesbit becomes engrossed in the limitations of the knowledge of consciousness on the basis of colour (does your red mean the same as my red?) to conclude that colour in Tirana is 'real', and that aesthetics can again become politics. Nesbit puts forward the fact that the mayor has not exploited Sala's film *Dammi i colori*, the film that was shown at the Venice Biennale, to promote Tirana as evidence of his sincerity.

A more interesting and more controversial interpretation of the same work is provided by the two young French philosophers, Alexandre and Daniel Costanzo, in their essay 'The Politics of Colours'. They prick the mayor's Utopian coloured bubble in the opening paragraph, then they analyse the fables of the city, the colours, politics and 'cinematographic' fiction. To begin with the latter, they make a distinction between film as a traditional political dream factory and film as a narrative machine, which are brought together in Sala's film. Mayor Rama talks enthusiastically about the creation of a new society in which people form a close-knit community. But Alexandre and Costanzo note that Sala only allows the mayor to have his say; the city's inhabitants have none. How democratic is a mayor who single-handedly decides the appearance of an entire city, and only then gauges the opinion of its inhabitants? And how does this stand in relation to the socialist and/or totalitarian belief in the engineerable society that has now been declared bankrupt? And if the colours project is a re-conquering of the public space over the space claimed by individuals, then what does that public space signify? Is it not in fact a feature of democracy to allow unplanned spaces which can be claimed by residents?

The designation 'new proletarian' turns out to be not wholly incorrect for Sala, if you bear in mind that he retains an old-fashioned belief in the power of art, while simultaneously maintaining an instinctive awareness of the powerlessness of the artist to bring about real changes. Sala's work is politically engaged, without remaining stuck in the pamphlet-focused stance of much of the other art that was shown at 'Utopia Station'. The clever thing with Sala's methodology is that he creates space to prompt questions about the reality of the filmed images using cinematographic and artistic means. This results in strangely beautiful and moving works, which echo in your mind for a long time.

The publication is justifiably conceived as a polyphonic commentary on the work of a multifaceted artist.

The Spectre of the Capsule

René Boomkens

Lieven De Cauter, *The Capsular Civilization – On the City in the Age of Fear, Reflect # 3*, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam 2004, ISBN 90-5662-407-5, €27,-

Few people write political manifestos anymore – certainly not intellectuals normally working in universities. Political manifestos against the political world order are even more rare. *Empire,* by now the Bible of the anti-globalization movement, is a notable exception: a solid and even hermetic philosophical treatise that is also a political manifesto, according to authors Hardt and Negri. A few years ago, *Empire* was ranked high on the sales list of Amazon.com, surprisingly for a book in which St. Augustine, Spinoza, Marx and Foucault set the tone.

*The Capsular Civilization – On the City in the Age of Fear*, by Flemish art historian and philosopher Lieven De Cauter, is not as complex or hermetic as *Empire*, but it is, like Hardt's and Negri's tome, both a solid and complex philosophical dissertation and an impassioned political manifesto. In this sense, the book fits in perfectly in NAi Publishers' 'Reflect' series, which aims to focus attention of relevant social issues in architecture, urban planning, fine art and design. At the same time, this book surpasses the scope of the series: De Cauter begins his book, a collection of edited essays written between 1998 and 2004, with the problems of the contemporary city and urban culture, but it quickly becomes clear that he has a far broader and weightier subject

in mind: nothing less than the (threatened) future of the planet. In a certain sense, the recent history of the city and of urban culture serves as a sort of case study for a broader issue, which De Cauter mostly refers to as the rise of a 'capsular civilization' but sometimes also as the establishment of 'transcendental capitalism' (a capitalism without antithesis) and also, in a more political sense, as the New Imperial World Order. Such a broadening of the subject has consequences: what began as a contribution to the 'political aesthetics of the city' (the *urbs*) grew into a book about the future of the city as *civitas*, as a 'human city', as a society in general. The political events of the last three years inexorably shifted the focus of De Cauter's text onto a more general, more political and more immediate plane, but this was already the partly hidden focus of his intellectual project. De Cauter's philosophical work is strongly influenced by the philosopher to whom he devoted his doctoral thesis, *De dwerg in de schaakautomaat. Benjamins verborgen leer* (Nijmegen 1999): Walter Benjamin. Benjamin combined a philosophically and scientifically informed critique of the prevailing optimism of progress (of a positivist-liberal and Marxist slant) with a half-hidden mystical Messianism, in which attention to and study of history

were approached in terms of 'salvation' – in short, they always had an acutely normative focus. The fact that De Cauter's book gives new content to Benjamin's intellectual position is not surprising: Benjamin has played a major role in cultural theory debates in the last twenty years. What is surprising is the way in which he does this. De Cauter's work is not characterized by the theorems of scientific and cultural criticism of the critique of progress that dominated the post-modern agenda, but rather by the Messianic theorems of *salvation*. It is precisely this semi-mystical, theologically inspired theme that pervades the book and draws heavily on the attention to the many subterritories De Cauter explores and comments upon. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

The book is essentially divided into two parts: the first three chapters contain a series of interesting, not to say brilliant, essays on the late-modern city, set emphatically in terms of the disintegration of the modern city. This is not a value judgment: modernity and destruction have always been paired. But is precisely the loss of any value judgment, any normative (ethical or political) debate about this destruction, that troubles De Cauter. He shows this most sharply in the first essay, on the generic urbanness of Rem

Koolhaas. Koolhaas, says De Cauter, 'can see the process of destruction taking place, but this lucidity offers only two outcomes – *Realpolitik* and hedonism', or building for China's state media and shopping. Koolhaas the realist offers a lucidity De Cauter clearly appreciates but which does not outweigh the greater danger presented by the ultimately cynical, cheerful, technocratic but above all conventionalist character of the realist: 'realists abolish the world while laughing.'

Against Koolhaas's cynical realism and the naïve, but unintentionally prophetic urban political interventions of the Situationists and other avant-gardes of the 1960s, De Cauter develops his great critique of the capsular civilization, which he illustrates with concrete descriptions of an urban space increasingly taken over by 'capsule formation', in other words the emergence of a network of enclosed, inward-directed urban spaces that are dominated above all else by control, and thereby potentially mean the end of the fundamental, albeit always contentious, openness of the classical modern form of urban life and urban space. From malls to airports, from amusement parks to suburbs: everything is increasingly taking the form of a capsule. Many of his examples are persuasive, and his detailed analyses indeed cry out for more material. His attempt to outline a general theory of the new (post-)urbanness ('The Capsule and the Network') is also challenging and stimulating, precisely in its self-critical awareness of

being partly a 'prophecy of doom' – but therefore all the more relevant from a Messianic standpoint! His resistance against the neo-liberal pep talk that has contaminated virtually every political, academic or cultural debate in recent years is also persuasive.

In the second part of the book the capsular civilization is unequivocally linked to the geopolitical issues of 'the new world order', globalization and the war between Bush's United States and terrorism. This connection is correct, in my view, and as far as I'm concerned it cannot be made often enough. It is essentially the connection between the politics of everyday urban life (from migration, immigrants and natives, crime and violence, but also education and multiculturalism, etcetera) and the broader issues of politics and economics, imperial or not, on a global scale. This connection is far too rarely made, and for that reason alone the second part of De Cauter's book is of great significance. It is far less successful, however, in terms of rhetoric and argumentation. Here the activist wins out too often against the intellectual and the philosopher. We get too many reminders of global warming, the explosive growth of the earth's population and the perverse power plays of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Perle, the neo-conservative think tank behind the new imperial and interventionist American policy of George W. Bush. We're already familiar with the facts through Benjamin Barber, Michael Moore, Alain Joxe and many

others. Like De Cauter, many will be outraged by it all. De Cauter enumerates multiple forms of anger, repeats this several more times – and what's the result? Outrage.

I certainly became angrier thanks to De Cauter's book. As a manifesto against the New Imperial World Order, *The Capsular Civilization* is at times quite compelling. But in its consideration of possible alternatives or solutions, the second part of his book is intellectually unsatisfying. The digression on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer, on the basis of which De Cauter analyses the current political world order as a legal state of exception (a kind of 'state of emergency') is too summary and hermetic in its argumentation to provide support for the activism that exudes, as it were, from the very pores of his argument.

To sum up: this is one of the most challenging collections of essays on the city and urban culture in recent years and also one of the few books to take an explicit political stand in the debates about the city, which are usually quite conventional, policy-oriented and 'realistic' in nature. It is also a courageous book, which adopts a Messianic tone that, though tricky to justify, is not out of place, but rather sorely lacking, in the current political and intellectual climate. Too bad the debate about the city is ultimately overtaken by an overdose of anti-imperial activism. The activism is legitimate in itself, but in a book with such all-encompassing claims on the city, its effect is counterproductive.

## Will Anything Come of It?

Max Bruinsma

*One Year in the Wild*,
Jeroen Boomgaard (ed.),
Professorship in Art and the
Public Space/Gerrit Rietveld
Academy, 2004



Last year, with befitting pride and ambition, the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and the University of Amsterdam (UvA) instated a Chair in Art and the Public Space with the support of the Zuidas Virtual Museum and SKOR, to which Jeroen Boomgaard was appointed as Associate Professor. The combination of supporting institutions immediately indicates in what context this post operates: on the one hand, the Bachelors/ Masters structure which must help to bridge the gap between higher vocational education and university education; on the other, the practicalities of one of biggest construction projects in the Netherlands today: Amsterdam's Zuidas ('South Axis'). On an extended site along the A10-Zuid ring road, above which construction will also proceed once the infrastructure is 'docked' below ground, a new 'skyline' is being constructed for the Dutch capital, slated to become the new business and cultural centre of the city. As with much new public space, the project naturally merits a new vision for the public art that is, self-evidently, being planned in conjunction with it. Jeroen Boomgaard's associate professorship is specifically intended to help shape that new vision, in tandem with the 'supervisor for art in public space', Simon de Hartog, and his team. Such a supervisor's post is itself unique – never

before has art been so heavily represented at the level of administrative supervision of project development as here – and the combination with the professorship leads one to suspect that Zuidas is an area where the integral development of public space and art is for once being taken truly seriously.

A question that immediately springs to mind if one opens the associate professor's first 'annual report' is therefore whether anything will come of it, this public art at Zuidas? After reading it, the answer must be: we cannot tell yet.

The Dutch/English publication, *One Year in the Wild*, is introduced by Boomgaard as 'a report on an expedition'. From the short chapters by Boomgaard and others, it is evident that the expedition has only just begun, and for the meantime primarily concerns reconnaissance, the mapping out of the project area in a general sense. One thing becomes apparent fairly swiftly: it seems to be the explicit intention of Boomgaard *cum suis* to leave that map blank for as long as possible: '...the present shortage of the planless forms the basis of the appeal now being made to art for the public space.'

Boomgaard arrives at this insight on the basis of two trains of thought: the first is rooted in an analysis of contemporary artists' strategies that strive to initiate processes in which public space and the

people using it are actively involved. This kind of 'process art' often fails to result in lasting work, if any at all, but it does symbolize the core of what public space can or should be: 'A public space should, ideally, be an open space where nothing is set and everything is possible: it constitutes, in a sense, the heart of democracy, because debate and opinion formation can take place there.'

At the other end of the spectrum there is the indomitable propensity of real estate investors, government bodies and other commissioners to define everything, including works of art, within a plan area at as early a stage as possible. Investors and directors like stability, not surprises. Thus the 'shortage': in a prestigious setting like Zuidas there is little place for 'the planless'.

But no matter how desirable as a counterweight to the planners, who try to find a function for every piece of 'leftover space', this lack of plan or function also has its artistic and societal snags. In his article 'Authenticity and construction', Boomgaard describes how process art can degenerate into consensus art, and the artist into a 'concept manager' in the midst of construction bigwigs who misuse the artist in order to channel the urges for public consultation and civil disobedience of local residents into a symbolic and thus innocuous

artistic process. Here Boomgaard quotes Paul Meurs, who commented: 'By virtue of his role, the concept manager is doomed to operating in the margins, since he can only attain freedom if he stays away from the actual power.'

Boomgaard subscribes to that vision, and in the five articles bundled here he actually comes to a fairly pessimistic vision for the existing opportunities for art in public space. Art that is not socially engaged soon becomes simply decorative (he calls Tom Claassen's dog sculpture at the ABN Amro bank 'the bronze equivalent of Bartje in Assen'), while engaged art seldom results in a sculpture and, if it does, 'suffers from a lack of ambivalence'. He continues: 'However subtle a work of art may be, the big machinery of institutions, curators and government, which wants to use art to stage its own involvement with the world, will not tolerate any confusion and strictly rules out any possibility of different layers of meaning. Thus in the history of committed art, text has moved from the artist to the target group to end up with the party placing the commission and the government. Involvement has become a set of regulations.'

The other authors who contributed to *One Year in the Wild* also subscribe to this vision. 'All too often, the initial idea of the artist's original concept is, in fact, realized in watered-down and adjusted form', writes Hanne Hagenaars. And Xander Karskens notes, 'Increasingly often, art appears

to be routinely deployed as a planological adhesive in urban architectural designs, as a way to give public spaces a more human face'. The issue is therefore 'whether art is at all able to hold its ground, in view of the far-reaching process of coding which the urban context is undergoing'. Karskens poses the question, but has no response that will cheer up artists or commissioners. Referring to unofficial forms of urban decoration such as graffiti, posters and 'other exponents of street culture' as 'street infiltrators [that] effectively complicate the task of reading of our everyday environment', he concludes: 'The spontaneous, organic, direct character of such statements does not lend itself to visual art specifically commissioned for the public space.'

And do the artists who have contributed to this annual report see more light on the horizon? Orgacom states that 'if the role of the artist can be more clearly formulated and verified, possibly being formulated in terms of supply, this would increase both the autonomy of the artist and the project's added value for the municipality and project developer'. With this, the artists identify themselves almost as caricatures of the 'concept managers', who were effectively knocked for six earlier in the book. Boomgaard's proposal for a study under the header 'Station ¿At Odds?' would 'seem an impossible task', Harald Schole comments. He continues, 'The state of being "at odds", or contrary, threatens inherently to isolate

art from its assigned location, the specific site. Paradoxical proposals put art at odds with the urban entity, the station and, above all, put art within its domain. In such a field of tension, "at odds" is a priori accepted and art is protected from external influences. In this way, contrary art has found a safe haven.' Which takes us back to the initial problem: how to leave space for the indeterminate, the unplanned, in a development project costing billions? Reading this first annual report of the Professorship in Art and the Public Space is not immediate cause for optimism.

Bigger and Brasher

Tom van Gestel

In the late 1950s, I perused photographs of Canada and the United States which were sent by family members who had emigrated there to those of us left behind. What have always remained with me are the snapshots of cousins, toddlers at the time, next to enormous, white cupboards. When my parents purchased a standard-size fridge a few years later I clicked that those white things in the photos were refrigerators, but substantially bigger than the one in our house. Over there, everything was much bigger and brasher, automobiles included.

That same feeling hit me when I read *Plop*, a survey spanning more than 15 years of art in New York's public space. The book provides an outline of developments since the 1960s and presents developments since the 1990s in detail. In a certain sense these developments run parallel with those in the Netherlands, except the works of art are a bit more substantial: modernist sculptures next to modernistic buildings and on public squares in the 1960s and '70s (Tony Smith, Mark Di Suvero); more autonomous and more figurative in the 1970s and '80s (Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg); textual and graphic in the 1980s and '90s (Jenny Holtzer, Keith Haring); situational and socially oriented in the 1990s and at the turn of the new millennium

(Dan Graham, Rachel Whiteread, Christian Boltanski, Pipilotti Rist, Mark Dion, Paul McCarthy). All the works of art considered are emphatically or perhaps overly present in the streetscape, and their physical impact is therefore considerable – no subtle hovering on the periphery.

The book puts 46 artists on parade, many of whom have also left their mark in museums or in the (semi-) public domain in the Netherlands, such as Vito Acconci, Alexander Brodsky, Juan Muñoz, Tony Oursler and Tobias Rehberger. Whereas art in public space in the Netherlands is still usually subsidized and financed by government, directly or indirectly, the financing and organization of projects in New York, and probably throughout the United States, is a 'public-private partnership'. However, this makes little difference to the way it is organized. From the highly readable texts, by Tom Eccles and Dan Cameron in particular, it is possible to deduce that there is little difference in insight between here and there about how projects are conceived and organized. On both sides of the Atlantic, promoters of art in public space must contend with biased attitudes within the art scene that art in this domain can be characterized as weak or of poorer quality, and that it actually merits only one

qualification: compromise art. Having to defensively stand in the breach for the realization of art on the street is therefore not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon.

There are also many similarities as regards the position of the commissioner or delegated institutional supervisor. Their advisory, wait-and-see approach to what the artist would make of a commission shifted towards a role as co-organizer, producer and participant. Another parallel is that once realized a work of art can no longer stake an eternal claim to a given site, and there is always one particular instant that proves critical for that change of site. This is captured well in Tom Eccles' observation that the removal (i.e. demolition) of Richard Serra's Tilted Arc in 1989 coincided with the installation of the engaged billboard work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres in memory of the Stonewall Riots in the West Village two decades earlier.

*Plop* describes the development of art in the public space of New York, and in a material sense its evolution in the Netherlands, perhaps throughout Europe, can also be described as shifting from being rock-solid and intended for posterity to fleeting and extremely temporary.

More and more publications about art stand out for leaving out visual material.

Modern-day contextualization has resulted in an essayistic art criticism which has become so autonomous that images have become almost super-fluous, or only serve to substantiate what is asserted in a text. This cannot be said about *Plop*, at least, which is a volume with plenty of illustrations offering an attractive overview of the development of art in New York's streetscape.

## Progressive Forms of Public Art

Eric Kluitenberg

www.republicart.net



A feeling of ambivalence takes hold of me as I read the introductions on the website www.republicart.net. *Republicart* is an Internet platform with a large collection of essays and activities centring on the significance of the public domain and the role of art within this domain. The 'heavy encounter' with constant quotations from celebrated leftist thinkers, which seem almost an obligatory opening to the introductions to the theme sections, is hard for me to digest.

The project (which can also be read as *Re: Public Art*) makes its premise quite clear: 'Our investigations focus on the concrete experiences of non-representationist practices, the constituent activities particularly in the movements against economic globalization.' Fortunately the authors immediately go on to say that this is not about glorifying revolutionary movements against economic globalization, but rather about new forms in which critical cultural activities can organize themselves 'in between' the great movements of our time.

Another source of unease is the continual references to the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in particular their book *Empire*. A concept central to the neo-Marxist analysis of *Empire* (Marx adapted to the age of 'neo-liberal economic globalization' – *Republicart* jargon) is that of the 'multitude'. This is a transformation of the monolithic concept of the masses according to Marx, which is no longer applicable in the wake of countless authoritarian catastrophes. In *Empire*, Marx's masses are transformed into a kind of cohesive amalgam of micro-groups and identities all working toward the same ultimate goal, namely the collapse of neo-liberal global capitalism.

If one sets out to investigate how critical culture can organize independently or in relative autonomy today, one might wonder whether a unifying concept like the 'multitudes' and Hardt's and Negri's *Empire* theory, with its strong tendencies toward historicization, are genuinely useful. The site's manifesto quotes Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe: 'We are experiencing a politicization that is much more radical than any we have known before...' How so? Was there no history before 1968? I would have thought that the politicization of Russia in 1917 or of Germany in 1933, to name but two examples at random, were much more far-reaching.

So why read on? Because this website contains a great number of brilliant essays (with and without Hardt/Negri quotations). Because it raises many fascinating questions about critical cultural activities, public space and the broader public domain. No one can deny that art and politics have entered a new arena of contention in recent years. The time when the political was negated in art is long past; political issues have in fact become a theme of contemporary art production in a very direct way. Two successive Documenta exhibitions, more or less successful, have provided clear evidence of this.

I fully subscribe to *Republicart*'s thesis that there has been an increasing politicization of public space recently. The invasion of public space by cameras and security systems, the increase in ethic conflicts in multicultural cities, the legal requirement to carry personal identification documents – which went into effect in the Netherlands on 1 January 2005 – preventive

searches, attacks on religiously identified buildings, vigilante groups, the resurgence of the trade union movements and social conflicts manifested in the streets, terrorist threats and security measures, the proliferation of commercial propaganda in urban space, along motorways, on building scaffolds, and as a tragic nadir the ritual assassination of film-maker Theo van Gogh, have turned the street, the town square, the temple, the meadow and the parliament into a central stage for political drama as never before.

However, what would be more useful than expressions of support for unifying theories with a limited shelf life would be to identify the many dilemmas currently facing producers of critical art in a politically polarized and charged environment. In that context, the essay on a post-emancipatory concept of emancipation, by the philosopher and founder of the Croatian political-cultural journal *Arzkin,* Boris Buden, in the 'Space of Empire' theme section, is fantastic. Buden analyses how complex political relationships have become in a multicultural and multivalent world. Before you know it, your protest against an unjust war turns into a demonstration alongside religious fundamentalists, or resistance against 'neo-libs' turns into a *potlatch* of hard-core conservative nationalists! What does this do to your social engagement? It makes it half-hearted; ambivalence creeps up on us. Which 'values' do we actually share?

It is these more specific explorations that make the website highly readable. The fact that documents can be viewed as PDF files and if necessary printed out is another useful aspect. *Republicart* is more than just a website or Internet magazine; it is a broader-based research project into the position of public art and culture, carried out in cooperation with a large number of international culture organizations. In addition to the publications, art projects are organized, as well as a series of thematic conferences – most of which have already taken place, incidentally.

A project of such breadth and with such an explicitly politically charged objective should be highly appreciated. *Republicart* clearly takes a stand against the 'anything goes' mentality of the 'happy 1990s', the era without movements. Yet I doubt whether the reinvention of Marx's ideology is the right answer to the social and cultural complexity that defines the current dynamics of the public domain – that enigmatic and magnetic space to which we are inevitably drawn.

Common Civil and Social
Disobedience

Marjolein Schaap

In the supremely pluralist and heterogeneous world of contemporary art there are barely any new 'isms' evolving – at best generic terms such as 'Brit Art' and 'relational aesthetics'. That, at least, has been the prevailing idea since post-modernism. Current art, however, according to the catalogue for the exhibition 'The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere' at MASS MoCA, is an incubator for a recently introduced 'ism', imbued, moreover, with a battle-ready élan: interventionism.

Although the 'freaky' graphic design is a permanent distraction and the emphasis is primarily on the American art scene, this publication is worth the effort in every sense. This is not simply because of the collection of highly divergent elaborations of the key concepts of the French Situationists: *détournement* (a subversive rendering of a popular code system, such as advertising message, feature film and cartoon), and the *dérive* (subversive insertion of an activity, instrument or vehicle in an urban setting). The catalogue is also interesting because of the enormous, often dryly comical inventiveness and the well-intended motivation of this newest crop of political artists – an engagement that is based on a common civil and social disobedience.

The artistic methods used are in line with this: we recognize the anarchist, the anti-globalist, the political activist, the street nomad, the urban guerrilla and the proletarian consumer. For example, in direct reference to the house style of the international fashion chain Mango, the Spanish collective YOMANGO (which means 'I steal') produces a bag with a magicians conjuring compartments in order to be able to shop like the proletariat: 'YOMANGO is like all other major brand names about the promotion of a lifestyle.' With the white, inflatable one-man shelters by Michael Rakowitz, the less well-off are likewise helped on their way. Connecting the conduits to the left and right of these shelters with the external vents of a mall or apartment complex creates a sheltered spot.

The catalogue tells us that Krzysztof Wodiczko developed and has been producing modified shopping carts/sleeping cabins with cupboard and storage for the homeless since 1987. Lucy Orta is one of the pioneers in portable architecture with, among other things, her sleeping-bag shelters. The catalogue makes one realize to what extent Wodiczko and Orta paved the way for trends from the late 1990s to the present with the irrepressible references to, and production of,

tents, caravans, mobile homes, retreats, canopies, kiosks, clothing variants and survival and backpacker sets. In the catalogue, curator Nato Thompson therefore argues that 'the entire world feels unsettled'.

The appearance of technically advanced utilitarian equipment, including graffiti-spraying robots and fully automatic survival units made for protest demonstrations, leads one to suspect that the interventionists hope to recruit sympathizers. The 'event' and performance-like expressions expose socio-economic structures in a somewhat pedagogical manner. The Flash animation on top of a taxi by the HaHa collective displays constantly changing comments by residents and users about their city's infrastructure. 'Reverend Billy – the credit card exorcist', founder of the 'Church of Stop Shopping', holds his fire-and-brimstone sermons with a megaphone and dressed in full regalia in a capitalistically infected zone like The Disney Store. Decidedly problematic is the 'I'll throw a custard pie in the face of this figurehead' antics of a pie-throwing brigade. Bill Gates has been served a pie like this, and Milton Friedman.

An artist can often disseminate a political message with greater success and thus be an

activist (or even a political leader). However, not every activist is an artist. In order to be sure of attention, activism relies on expression and publicity, but the idea that an act of resistance is therefore also an artistic act is a misapprehension. Since in practice the boundary between art and activism is extremely vague, every simplistic statement is one too many. In the catalogue, writer Gregory Sholette points out a similarity between interventionism and a protest organization such as Greenpeace, since 'they stress pragmatic and tactical action over ideology'. As an art critic, you become an activist in your own right; the chaff has to be separated from the corn. If the activism is 'base', without visual and semiotic layering, lacking in transformation and exaltation, then it is simply not art.

Another point of criticism is the selection of artists. The interventionists who infiltrate in a business and/or organizational context while retaining their autonomy are conspicuous by their absence, no matter how high-profile their position. Do they have too

little street awareness? Are they overwhelmingly doomed to a compromise, under the spell of the Hugo Boss emporium? We don't find out, despite Sholette's observation that 'art and business' are increasingly interdependent.

The catalogue holds the attention nonetheless, certainly as far as the text contributions are concerned. The introduction by Nato Thompson, for example, reads like an intriguing plot. In an explanation for the rise of the interventionists he refers, among other things, to the inflation of 'political representation', to the socio-economic changes in the 1990s, and the rise of the 'culture industry' in particular. Thus passing the review – for my contemporaries it will be a feast of memories – are Bill 'saxophone' Clinton's promotion of the pop group Fleetwood Mac, the commercial incorporation of Nirvana's music, and – against the (critical) background of Naomi Klein's book *No Logo* – the advertising campaigns of certain mighty multinationals with Che and Gandhi playing the lead roles. According to

Thompson, such segments of underground culture annexed by capitalism are the reason why the interventionists migrate to relatively impalpable political fringes.

In his essay, Gregory Sholette goes in search of a correlation with Soviet Constructivism – deemed highly desirable by the interventionists – associating interventionism in guarded terms with the short-cut thinking of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the authors of *Empire*. This book is a hybrid of modernist progressive thinking *and* post-modern conclusions that until 9/11 was the hope of a bankrupt left wing. The interventionists supply instruments and opportunities, Sholette says, not so much for the masses but for the *multitude* (the title of the recently published fruit of Hardt & Negri's pens is *Multitude*). Is Sholette being reserved because he does not yet dare state aloud that interventionism has moved beyond post-modernism? Interventionism as the signalling of a new developmental era is indeed revolutionary news.

---

Alternatives for Spaces of Fear

Dennis Kaspori

Urban Affairs (ed.),
*Fear and Space. The View of Young Designers in the Netherlands,* NAi Publishers, Rotterdam 2004,
ISBN 90-5662-422-9, €25,-



From senseless violence to terrorism: at the moment, local as well as international media are completely under the spell of an all-pervasive call for 'safety and security'. In his book *De veiligheidsutopie*

('Safety Utopia', The Hague 2002), Hans Boutellier offers a sociological analysis of this predominant call for safety and security in public debate. Boutellier recognizes this urge but sets it opposite a different

and also almost irrepressible longing for an unhindered sense of freedom: 'Vitality and safety are flip sides of the same coin: a liberal culture that has elevated self-realization to a life skill must at the same time

do its utmost to determine and uphold the boundaries of individual freedom.'

Nowhere is this paradoxical desire so starkly manifest as in the public space of the city. Because of its concentration of people, programmes and ideas, the urban public space is the arena of encounter and renewal. But this density also has a flip side, since it can degenerate into conflicts. It is within this context that fear was chosen as the theme for the fourth 'Group Portraits' event, a joint initiative of the Netherlands Architecture Fund and the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (Fonds BKVB), in which four teams composed of designers from various disciplines developed ideas on issues that have considerable influence on the spatial design of the Netherlands.

Following on from this project, the book *Fear and Space. The View of Young Designers in the Netherlands* was recently published. The most important question for designers of space is whether there is an alternative to these 'spaces of fear', which are controlled by repression and risk reduction. Examples include the privatized collective spaces of shopping centres and gated communities, and the urban hotspots where people can expect preventive search swoops. The designers were specifically given the task of devising alternatives for these spaces: 'Our security Utopia prescribes a sterile, transparent and neutral environment where being normal is the norm and the exceptional is experienced as a threat. The

issue of security can also be approached from the other side: what risks are we actually prepared to take? How does the environment we live in look if we ourselves are able to determine, or at least interpret, where the boundaries lie?'

It is a complex issue for which no single team was able to find an adequate response. Most interesting is the analysis by the Mr. Smith team (Mark van Beest, Duzan Doepel, Claudia Linders, Minke Themans and Ronald Wall). Its contribution consists of the elaboration of a character suffering from the psychiatric condition 'acute techno-democratic phobia'. This condition is a modern form of agoraphobia, the fear of an uncontrollable public space where the precarious balance between control and freedom of movement could at any moment collapse into revolt (the anarchy of the underworld) or regression (a 'Big Brother' control society). Where everyone else sees a dead normal street scene, Mr. Smith is constantly searching for signals that point to a possible escalation.

By elaborating a psychosis in which fear and space combine to induce a modern-day agoraphobia, the designers have produced an interesting and productive analysis of the precarious balancing act of safe freedom, and they are capable of naming and categorizing the different signals that could potentially disturb this state of affairs. But this analysis then degenerates into a megalomaniac argument for universal democracy. Perhaps this indomitable urge to extrapolate is a symptom of Mr. Smith's syn-

drome, but would it not be much more interesting to use this analysis for an effective approach to local problems?

Here is where the problem of the book lies: it is never concrete. The illustrated designs are so abstract that they say little (Untitled: Kersten Geers, Bas Princen, David van Severen, Milica Topalovic) or display an inappropriate simplicity (DUS: Arja Boon, Hedwig Heinsman, Diana Kuip, Roel Spits, Hans Vermeulen, Martine de Wit). Nowhere do they seem capable of developing a feasible spatial strategy for society's problem number one.

What sticks in the mind is the impotence of the entire project to deal with this complex problem. To shift the blame to the competency of the selected designers would be too facile. For it is difficult to escape the repressive techno-judicial approach that predominates at the moment and replace it with a socio-spatial alternative. It would have been better for the organization to tie in this broad and intriguing subject with concrete situations. The complexity of the task precludes the chances of success of any universal solution; it requires a precise, localized approach. It is also typical that the highly acclaimed design culture in the Netherlands is incapable of coming up with a single interesting solution. The levity which has caused international furore is not adequate to make a substantial contribution to maintaining a lively (not just liveable) public space, as demonstrated once again by this exploratory design research.