

Jonas Staal

Power?...

To Which People?!

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I

Power?... To Which People?!

Introduction

Jonas Staal

The reason underlying the conception of this publication is tantamount to the motives that have formed the basis of my visual and written work of the last five years. The projects that I have realized during this period, and the way I wanted to direct them, all have been driven by an urgency that I want to call the urgency of positioning: the continuously present need to demand a platform; a platform to shape my existence and the theatre where I execute myself as interchangeable subject. The persistent question: what does it mean to live in these times, and how do I claim them as my own?

1

To answer this question, it is necessary to penetrate the fundamentals of the systems regulating Western thought today: the fundamentals on which we show our ethical and moral perspectives. I claim, that the basis of this thought is formed by 'democratism': an ideological framework that originates from – and aims to be an answer to – the slogan 'Power to the People!'

2

The representatives of democratism institute an ideal model in which those who find themselves in a (temporary) position of power can always be held accountable by the People. For this reason, they claim that in democratism, through elections or referendums, the People always have the final say. According to this ideological principle, power is distributed over society; each individual who passes the magical age of eighteen is considered a full member of civil society, carrying the responsibility to assist in shaping the ideological fundamentals of society and to manage its development. Elections do not only form a so-called beginning of a renewed interpretation of this ideological principle, they also announce the moment when the leaders of the past years are judged for the way they have shaped the temporary position of power that they were given.

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Thus, the power of the people solidifies the outcome of the elections into temporary leaders occupying temporary positions. This dictatorship of the majority is meant to prevent

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other forms of dictatorial regimes; the moment when a single individual acquires an unlimited mandate and is no longer obligated to legitimate its consequences to the People. This form is usually referred to as totalitarianism. The traumas of the twentieth century have elevated concepts such as totalitarianism and dictatorship to the level of obloquy. Anything related to totalitarian thought, the idea that any vision could be an absolute vision – or worse: could represent a claim to truth – is interpreted as an inevitable impetus for mass murder and repression. In order to no longer know themselves to be vulnerable for these concepts, politicians employ the important maxim: ‘The voter is always right!’

5 In doing so, an apparently full reversal has been effected: from the People’s demand (‘Power to the People!’) to a complete compliance with this demand by politicians (‘The voter is always right!’). Each inception of totalitarian thought is always retorted with this maxim, whence it forms the ultimate weapon of the stupid and dangerous among us whenever the foundations of democratism are being discussed. For who would want to doubt the will of the People? Would it not be the case that the foundations of democratism are affected, when politicians would place their truth on a level higher than the truth of the People? For the democratic project is a Triumph of the Will – and this will is always valid, always right. Since it is not because of a will to power (citizens usually don’t vote literally to be in power themselves), but rather because of a delegation of power, assigned to a number of individuals, representatives, who are tolerated under the merciful, all-seeing eye of the People: politicians.

6 Over the past years, the occidental interpretation of democratism has been an ideological instrument, a weapon of radical enlightenment thinkers – writers and opinion makers who used the separation between church and state and related civil rights such as freedom of speech to differentiate themselves fundamentally from other forms of society which had not experienced a similarly recognizable break. Often, they even dared to claim that their own enlightened doctrines were not ideological in nature, for they would merely protect individual liberties in a ‘natural’ way. Under the guise of concepts such as Freedom of Speech, they intended to differentiate themselves from the Muslim community,

which is often called radical, but which in fact appears to be ultraconservative and surprisingly unimaginative. In Western Europe, these enlightenment thinkers have created the basis for a rapidly growing number of right wing populist movements. Within their discourse, which is finding ever growing support within society, a crucial inversion in the thinking about democratism is taking place; namely from a structure that we can constantly redefine and change, to a system which has become a hermetic vehicle of vaguely formulated ‘enlightened’ values that are beyond questioning. Concepts such as tolerance and freedom are no longer employed in favour of an imagination, a necessity for dangerous thought – i.e., the dangerous capacity of identifying with the motives of individuals that are not our own, and will never have to be our own – but have become weapons of a conservative wave, mainly employed by the ‘enlightened’ to differentiate themselves from the ‘unenlightened’, who, owing to their religious background, will never be able to become ‘enlightened’, or in any case are still far from it.

This aspect can also be traced as the ideological basis of the Dutch political support for the invasion of Iraq by the American army in 2001. Although there was no possible rational argument to legitimate such a violation of international treaties, the fact that Iraq was led by a dictatorial regime, a totalitarian state, and the conviction that this country was underdeveloped by definition and headed by an actually ‘retarded’ regime, rendered this violation unassailable and legitimate a priori. This is a case of exported democratism, in which democratism is marketed as a better and high-quality system, especially when the undemocratic target market refuses any co-operation whatsoever. Comparable obscurity was shown in the international response to the execution of the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Our Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende argued: ‘I do think *justice* has been done, [but] you all know, the death penalty is actually something about which the Netherlands have said: “this is not really how it should be.”’² So the inverse is also possible: targets that Western democracies would like to realize (execution of a dictator) are legitimated by having ‘retarded’ cultures do the job as something which they cannot be fully blamed for; they have only just encountered democratism, as if they were still innocent and ignorant children.



8 Inevitably, an equally unimaginative opposition to the radical enlightenment thinkers has developed: the diversity thinkers, pretending to stand for an intercultural dialogue, unrestrained tolerance toward ‘the other’, whom they thus proclaim to be some kind of foreign fairy-tale figure. These diversity thinkers merely advocate Human Rights, and dissociate themselves from ideological dogmas, of which they prove that their lack in differentiation could never lead to something good. To do so, they use the Holocaust as a perverse instrument to undermine any real discussion. They too champion democratism, freedom of speech, and equal rights, albeit only on the basis of an apathetic ethics which suppresses any real difference.

9 The basic assumptions of both apparently opposite movements lead to the following question: when we are flooded with the umpteenth plea for Democracy, Liberation, Human Rights, and Freedom of Speech: about whose democracy, liberation, human rights and freedom of speech are we actually talking? We are speaking here of the liberty of those –in case of the radical enlightenment thinkers– to use the weapon of the Freedom of Speech to legitimate illicit interventions in public discourse, and –in case of the diversity thinkers– to use the weapon of Human Rights to render any discussion about difference impossible.

10 In the former case, a foundation is created for the shameless arrogance, which, beyond any discussion, claims democratism to be ‘better’ than any other system, and in the latter case, any possible radical interpretation of democratism is rendered impossible through crushing and oppressive universal equality thinking. Both attitudes are at the service of the ‘open’ debate, at the service of development and progress, at the service of the People, the Citizen, the Voter... But it is not through ‘answering’ during the weekly polls or occasional referendums, that we act upon our democratic rights. A truly interesting interpretation of this so-called right appears at the moment that we ask a necessary counter-question. For it is not the one who answers a question, but whoever formulates a question that holds the power. Power lies with whoever formulates it, and who therefore can take any unfavourable answer into account beforehand. If the questioner possesses any knowledge of the context he asks



the question in, any answer will be favourable as long as his question is well formulated. The referendum for the European Constitution in 2006 proves to be an excellent model to illustrate this: the political parties, who were against it, celebrated their victory on account of the rejection by the omniscient voter. But also the parties who ‘lost’ celebrated their victory, because ‘Democracy had triumphed.’ A triumph, for the power was in the hands of the people... About which power and which people are we talking here, when each answer, each reaction, can always already be claimed as right and just by the system itself?

I suspect that it is the trauma of the so-called big ideologies from the (even bigger) twentieth century that discourages our artists –our avant-garde– to affiliate themselves with any ‘ideological’ viewpoint whatsoever (I place the concept ideological between quotes since –naturally– any utterance or act has an ideological basis, the only difference being whether one would wish to be held accountable for this publicly or not). In the perception of most contemporary artists, ideology equals doctrine, and the role of representation –of propaganda– has acquired a negative connotation, for it can always be used to ‘other ends’ than the producer intended or wanted.

The answer to this trauma formulated by contemporary art, lies in its own definition as questioner. Art is supposed to be layered and merely commenting, it imagines, questions, and envisions, yet it does not soil itself, it will not let itself be infected by what is unequivocal, propagandistic, and political. If nowadays contemporary art can be called political, that would be mostly in spite of itself; only political in its denial of its unassailable roots in politics. Precisely the idea that art, just like any other form of (cultural) production, would be fundamentally ideological in nature, seems to be most feared by artists and related figures, who profit from a deliberately marginal discourse. For who could expect any responsibility or accountability when merely moving in the margin? The avant-garde is recoiling from yet ‘another’ doctrine.

The problem arising from all of this is a very simple one. Although contemporary art production still aims to test

and relate its relevance to existing socio-political conflicts and developments, its position always remains the same: questions are asked, they indicate and visualize. But what do all these questions, indications, and visualizations mean, when no real commitment is founded on them? They demonstrate and use this to legitimate the existence of the art work, but even before the work is produced they state that no actual consequences will be drawn from it. I deem such a critique without consequence fully ironic. The reason they give themselves the space to allow for such shameful nonsense lies in the lack of urgency: for there is space to freely make notes, to comment, but without any fidelity connected to it. Precisely this culture of irony,³ a culture in which we actually do not have any faith anymore – for this lack of faith is exactly what makes this culture ironic – demands resistance.

14 In this resistance, the basis is established for the alliance of writers and artists that this publication brings together: not a resistance that strengthens this culture – as would be the case with a critique without consequence that always already sustains the status quo of ironic art production – but rather a resistance that from this urgency wants and manages to represent other platforms and other parameters. Other than the ones that are part of a society that does not attach any value anymore to its own structures and systems. Thus, I offer this publication to writer Chris Keulemans, theoretical research group BAVO, curator Mihnea Mircan and curator Marko Stamenković as a platform from which they can expand and deepen this shared urgency from the perspective of their own specialization and areas of research. Each of them explores the question that forms the title of this publication, and each of them forces a radical reading of this question of power. Each of them demands a position, and claims his own territory: each of them defends a fidelity.

15 For fidelity has become a fundamental concept within my work. I am not thinking about a vacuous fidelity to the protection of the poor or the execution of the retarded, not a fidelity to a fatuous anthem or the umpteenth elections. I am thinking about a fidelity targeting another desire, another wish, and another vision. This alterity can first and foremost only be reasoned, it is a fidelity to a reality or a thought which could also exist, and which, if acted upon,

will be. It is a blank vote: an unconditional vote, an unconditional relation sought with what remains unwritten, a relation with the co-ordinates, parameters that, precisely in the composition of thinking and acting, locate their meaning; in the act of positioning; in the event: in the work of art.

Notes

- 1 [Ed.] In Tokyo, Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei directed my attention to the fact that in Japanese, the concept of 'democracy' (*minshu-shugi*) could be better translated as 'democratism', namely as one of the many 'isms' (*shugi*) like capitalism, relativism or Marxism. From that moment on we decided to stop using the concepts 'democracy' or 'democratic system', and to actually designate the inherently ideological project of democratism as such. [See also p. 192]
- 2 [Ed.] 'Verdeelde reacties op doodvonnis Saddam Hussein', in *NRC Handelsblad* (November 6, 2006).
- 3 [See p. 219]

Power?... To Which People?!

Suppose... (Concerning the work of Jonas Staal)

Chris Keulemans

Suppose the crisis persists. The economy collapses. Thousands of employees end up on the streets. Benefits, subsidies and pensions go up in smoke. Complete institutions break down. Only two types of political parties survive: very big ones and very small ones. Citizens used to nothing but a steady increase in welfare end up living below poverty level. The wealth gap between them and the *nouveaux riches* acquires monstrous proportions. Shop owners close their shutters and leave. Wholesale stores are under attack. Televised amusement is elevated from daily life to an escape from it. News programmes, by lack of certainties, lose even their guise of objectivity. Fear rules the streets. The streets? Wide open. Low payment jobs have long been cut. Garbage bags pile up. No one cleans the squares. No one refreshes the billboards. No one writes parking tickets. Public transport is shut down. Commercial wares grow dull like souvenirs from times long gone. The walls are overrun with graffiti. Public space has become unrestricted territory.

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Everyone is looking for a new way to survive. So is Jonas Staal. For five years he has placed his work in a public space occupied by the ideology of media and politics. 'Art is a tool with which the individual seeks to dissect the world around him', he said only a year ago. 'Art is a weapon to, as an individual, regain and revise the claim placed on reality by the organs of media and politics. In that sense, art is a form of marking. It is demarcating, using and eventually (re)claiming my territory.'¹ Public space, and publicity in general, has always been dear to him. Staal refuses to leave it in the hands of powers telling us how to live a good and happy life. What is impressive about his work – notwithstanding the uneasiness, nonchalance or hilarity it evokes – is its cold rage, which translates into the clinical precision with which he positions it in spaces that would usually leave an artist no other options than pleasing or remaining silent. At this moment however, his enemy is in disarray. Public space lies fallow. Literally: one recognizes a society in crisis by the negligence of its streets and squares – what was once everyone's property,

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and therefore the property of the members of parliament, broadcasting networks and commerce, is presently owned by no one. Suddenly, reclaiming this territory is no more an act of resistance, but rather an empty gesture anyone could make. Metaphorically: when all that remains of sentimental politics, a phenomenon that Staal has ruthlessly scrutinized in the era from Fortuyn to Wilders, is mere sentiment and no politics, no coherent or organized movement, the artist will have no masses to distinguish himself from. The populist standard, the will of the citizen, the right of the majority – all exploded. Staal finds himself without target.

18 Suppose that Staal decides to move abroad. He contemplates Belgrade, where for already more than twenty years, sentimental politics, wild capitalism, public wasteland and artists' resistance determine the cityscape. He chooses Beirut, where they have been perfecting this lethal cocktail for much longer. Arabic instead of Cyrillic. Sixteen religious movements instead of four. No European Union around the corner, and each day the feeling that war could break out again tomorrow. It is a radical decision. Staal's work exists by virtue of the Dutch context. It shows and exposes a Dutch iconography. It pokes holes into the specifically Dutch climate of political consensus and lack of artistic freedom. In the Netherlands, he knows his opponents and the conventions they use. In Beirut he still has to decipher them.

19 The first adjustment he makes is his definition of war. Last year he still asked his audience in Groningen some tough questions: 'Do we really believe that the Netherlands is a country without conflict, which would probably make it the last one in the world? Has public space in reality not become a governmental space, facilitating unilateral impulses from our landlords? Is anyone here going to tell me', he concluded emphatically, 'that we are not in a state of war?' He has already become a fighter, and the fascination for war has been present all along too, or rather: a fascination for the representation of war, the images that we are presented with, out of context and hardly distinguishable from the other products the media have to offer us. Hence the car bomb wreckage he placed in the streets of Rotterdam: first reproductions, later to be followed by the real, distorted steel from Baghdad.² Hence the stomach turning exhibitions of torturing

techniques from the archives of Al-Qa'ida and Guantánamo Bay: household items and pop music, familiar American export products, now employed to break people.³

He arrives in a city where war is not represented, but presents itself. A city founded on trying to survive war. Not one or two, but dozens of them, throughout centuries. A city built from one ruin on top of another. In Beirut he is immediately liberated from one dogma. Here the illusion that art is supposed resolve problems has long been given up. There is plenty of art in the highly developed Lebanese art scene, but not of the world improving type. He now stumbles onto a paradox. In the Netherlands, the dogma of artistic distance, the necessary irony with which the current affairs are to be approached, has lost in credit during the last few years. Ever more artists, Staal at the forefront, place their work in a direct relation with news, politics and media, without distance or delay. In Beirut, the actuality is insistently and violently present, also outside the war season. Short-tempered politicians do not launch a court case but rather have a gang take care of you. Burned out car bomb wreckages do not need to be imported; they are already there, on the sidewalks of the beautiful, damaged city. How do the artists react? With irony. The unfathomable irony of writers, photographers and theatre makers who, in their longing for beauty, for something that remains without breaking, know all too well how vulnerable and temporary this beauty will always be. It is a sad irony, a form of self-defence against an actuality wearing guns and kicking in doors.

Until the present moment, one cannot catch Jonas Staal on the use of irony. Each suspicion breaks down on the consequently sustained, ice-cold seriousness of the essays that underpin his work. The question now would be whether this seriousness can hold up in the Lebanese public arena. What was already familiar to him, he finds here distorted and amplified. Pim Fortuyns in every shape and size: political martyrs with their orphaned followers, their life-size portraits adorning ads and banners. Populists enlarging the scope of their influence by entering in ever changing coalitions with friends and foes alike. Segregated media not even trying to dissimulate their political loyalties. Streets, where in a patchwork reality, glossy posters, portraits of martyrs, and

campaign ads push each other aside. Proprietors abound, yet the impulses they transmit are anything but univocal.

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Staal, who in the Netherlands ever so often extended his I to a we, only because there was always an even bigger they opposed to it, will have to relearn who that is, this 'I'. He will discover that its identity changes, whether he wants it or not, with the passing of the political seasons. Without him able to influence it, he is on one day defined in this way, and in another way on the next. His enemy of today will be his friend tomorrow and vice versa. A consequent attitude becomes impossible. The decisiveness, which marked his artistic practice in the Netherlands, is crushed under Beirut's forever war. He will have to choose. There is the option of irony. The option of going back home. Or will he have to, without quitting his work, stop calling himself an artist. Suppose all of this does not happen. The crisis does not persist. The Netherlands holds up. At the last instant, media and politics cling to something deep, ugly and stubborn, which appears a reliability in our consensus society. Jonas Staal stays home. Surrounded by a community in which no one will deny that they have been at the edge of war, he will arm himself more than ever before. He enters the streets. He plans his art on the streets and squares, the forums and formats, which are now, inch by inch, reclaimed by the rulers, developers and broadcasters. For a minute, they had lost their grip on reality. At this moment however, during the frosty fear after the crisis, the battle for the lost territory breaks loose – viciously. The artist knows what he has to do. He has rid himself of the suspicion of irony, for no one cares for irony anymore. He is taken seriously. His work is wiped off the map.

Notes

- 1 [Ed.] This and following citations from Staal have been published in: Jonas Staal, 'Stellingen over engagement in de kunst', in *Avant-a-PreS(S)#3* (Groningen: NP3, 2008).
- 2 [Ed.] The author refers to *Car Bomb Study I-II* (2006) [see p. 106] and *Car Bomb III-IV / Anatomy of a Car Bomb Wreckage* (2007) [see p. 110].
- 3 [Ed.] The author refers to *Al-Qa'ida Torture Devices* (2007) [see p. 134] and *US Army Torture Devices* (2007) [see p. 130].

Power?...To Which People?!

The necessity of enthusiastic artistic leadership in the formation and activation of creative coalitions in the Netherlands

BAVO

Creative coalitions and artistic discipline

The need for creative coalitions

In these days, there is a great need for a new vision of society that can serve as a foundation for the transfer of power to the people. Only an original vision can end the old-fashioned, antagonistic view on society. According to this view, clearly demarcated parties – ‘Citizen’, ‘State’, ‘Capital’ – each satisfy their own needs at the cost of others. In such a framework, there is no space for a fertile climate of co-operation between citizens, authorities and market participants. The outmoded idea of defending one’s own interests by opposing the interests of others feeds mutual distrust, and enables the people to remain deaf to interested parties.

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To break through this archaic, hostile view and the fears and passivity it generates, it is very productive to view society as an interlacement of forces and participants that are constantly on the lookout for synergy so as to obtain a maximum yield. The substantial advantage of this framework is the fact that concepts like ‘State’, ‘Capital’, or ‘People’ no longer exist. These abstract entities now fall apart into a multitude of participants, who –each at their own operational level – wield a certain expertise, call upon their capacities and seek after their interests. Interests, which, moreover, may coincide locally and temporarily with those of others. Thus, a space of deliberation is opened culminating in immediate emotions of unity and involvement between the participants striving for a democratic solution in which everyone comes out a winner.

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This dynamic vision on the social process is only possible insofar as so-called creative coalitions are actively sought for. All political, economic, and civil participants should be persuaded to voluntarily weigh their respective capacities and desires in relation to specific projects. This democratic co-operation allows the different participants to exploit the

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creative capital that they collectively represent. A creative coalition offers the best guarantee for obtaining the highest social benefits and securing these benefits in a sustainable way vis-à-vis the individual interests of the participants.

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The leadership of art

The formation of a creative alliance however, does not come naturally. The trickiest impediment is formed by the historically grown distrust amongst citizens concerning co-operation with their partners in society. Moreover, the patronising attitude of the authorities and market participants toward human capital obstructs the formation of coalitions. Yet, all of this resistance vanishes into thin air as soon as creative coalitions are put to work and start to pay off. It is only at the moment that human capital is exploited to the fullest within a given creative coalition, that each party involved can and will acknowledge its inexhaustible surplus value. This shows clearly that a creative coalition shouldn't merely be formed; it should also be proactively put to work so as to pay off.

27

A leading role within the formation and activation of creative coalitions is reserved for the artist. Concerning this capacity, two fundamental traits of the artistic discipline should be kept in mind: first, art has an exemplary function. The formation of creative coalitions is – whether consciously or not – an essential part of the artist's daily practice. In pursuit of their creative ideas, artists are constantly on the lookout for interested third parties who are prepared to contribute to the process of realization. Especially in case of so-called 'art in public space', or art executed within the context of problem neighbourhoods, it is commonplace for artists to enter into coalitions with authorities (municipal and district), semi-public organizations (housing corporations), market participants (developers), as well as organizations operating in the social midfield (neighbourhood associations), with regard to implementation, public support and financial needs. The incredible inventiveness shown by artists inspires citizens and beams out across the whole of society; second, art actively contributes to the creation of a climate of trust in which civil capital can be uninhibitedly exploited. Of old, art has been a social practice promoting a sense of community through the playful discovery of newly offered possibilities. Lately, there has been a return to this essence in the discourse of

'relational art'. This art movement employs creative capacities so as to develop an interactive platform, where citizens can relate non-antagonistically to the different participants who are active in their environment, such as enterprising fellow citizens, market participants, and authorities. Again, art practices founded within the context of public space or problem neighbourhoods lead the way: through artistic activities, the people are being immediately and playfully involved in a creative coalition with their former opponents, such as housing corporations, real estate developers, and the government.

Advantages for the art sector

The natural leadership of art within creative coalitions confronts artists with an evolutionary leap forward in artistic practice: the times of haphazard artistic engagement are over. The art sector would do well to remember that its noble effort within the formation of creative coalitions will not only benefit swift social functioning, but especially the art sector itself. The many advantages can be summed up easily! The role of art within creative coalitions will end the marginal role of art within the social system; end art's relation of dependency on the fickle aesthetic desire of the art consumer for ever more novel and sublime works of art; end the artificial life of art practices within an undemocratic system of grants; disclose new areas of artistic practice and add new potential clients to the artists' networks; realize a substantial growth in artistic production; enlarge the art sector's sphere of influence; contribute to the professionalization of art; and contribute to the general recognition of art as an independent social actor and new avant-garde. For any authentic artist, the decision is an easy one: he refuses to marginalize any further within a globalized world, and resolutely claims the new leadership of art in the transfer of power to the people.

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Thus, the artist terminates the overstrained ambition of art to liberate the people from their revolutionary role in the progress of history; instead of assisting the people in their process of emancipation, artists thought that they themselves were to realize social change. In his role as initiator of creative coalitions, the artist incites the citizen to identify his own creative potential, and to employ this capital within

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solid partnerships. The task and challenge of the avant-garde artist is to help the people help themselves. Thus, art comes ever closer to its natural role of ‘vanishing mediator’, a role proper to the true revolutionary: art creates the conditions of social change without effectuating it.

Creative coalitions in practice

30 To efficiently and effectively form and activate creative coalitions, artists will need to respect a number of rules that determine the circumstances and limits of their artistic engagement. These rules of engagement are important, for creative coalitions obligate the artist to act outside of the safe, institutional borders of the museum or art gallery. The new area of practice is formed by the unconventional context of public space or problem neighbourhood, within which urgent social conditions (like civil disorder) demand decisive action. Besides, artists will not be able to fall back on outmoded rules concerning artistic engagement, such as the ‘autonomy’ of art. Moreover, artists will need to reckon with a large increase in semi-artistic participants as initiators of creative coalitions, most importantly designers and architects, because of their greater availability and more docile attitude.

31 The relevance of these rules of engagement is threefold: standardization of artistic action within the formation of coalitions (increasing visibility and consistency); synchronization of the political and artistic components of creative coalitions; exclusion of unfair competition and equivocal co-ordination. Rules of engagement offer artists a number of operational handles that determine *where* art is to be deployed for the promotion of creative coalitions; *vis-à-vis whom* art is to be deployed; *what* art is to undertake within given circumstances; *when* art is to be deployed; and *how* art is to be deployed so as to reach its intended targets.

Where? (Location)

32 In the formation of creative coalitions, artists should exclusively focus on conflict areas within Dutch cities. When defining the field of action, they should always investigate whether an area suffers from one of the following problems: dereliction and destruction of the physical environment; lack

of social cohesion and enterprise; high level of unemployment; religious fundamentalism and/or right-wing populism; unstable support for planned development; tension between native and foreign communities; loitering. Within these conflict situations, the artist is the designated party to challenge all groups to seek creative alternatives through mutual deliberation. For the authorities and the market no longer possess the focus, knowledge nor means to solve all of these issues. At the same time, it is nothing but natural that the inhabitants contribute to a solution for the problems they have caused themselves.

Who? (Target group)

In accordance with the considerations concerning the selection of a location, artists need to focus on two specific target groups where their leadership can manifest itself to the fullest.

Socio-economically weak groups

34 Groups historically known for their lack of creativity and enterprise. In the past, they got away easily owing to the protection of the government. As a result of the new co-operative bond between government and market, this is no longer an option. The challenge for art lies in making these specific communities self-responsible, and in activating them within creative coalitions.

Highly flammable groups

35 Groups, which because of political or religious beliefs fanatically cling to an antagonistic world-view. Because other social parties (government or market) by definition appear as the ‘Other’ sabotaging their own development, and who therefore have to be eradicated, these groups display an unco-operative attitude. Here, the challenge for art lies in surpassing the ‘us-against-them’ sentiment by showing how creative coalitions form an ideal platform for the protection of private interests.

What? (Task)

36 The artists’ assignment within the formation and activation of creative coalitions involves a fourfold task: artists will have to break through the citizens’ natural mistrust by playfully and spontaneously acquainting them with the innu-

merable possibilities that creative coalitions can offer them; artists will have to make the market sensitive to the hidden civil capital in the Netherlands, and stimulate it to supply credit to spontaneous private initiatives; artists will have to stimulate the government to think beyond organizing possibilities for community participation, and to create public support by valorizing all useful, creative civil initiatives within its policies; artists themselves will have to learn to no longer give in to emotional reflexes concerning the autonomy of the artistic discipline, and, in view of a well-filled portfolio of commissions, balance autonomy and service.

When? (Timing and means)

37 The tactics to be employed by the artist are highly dependent on the attitude of the civil population targeted during the process of the formation of creative coalitions. Concerning this attitude, five levels can be distinguished (with increasing degree of civil antipathy), each supplemented with a provision for the artistic action the artist will have to deploy.

Level 1

Docile (co-operative)

38 The civil population subscribes to the necessity of creative coalitions and puts them in practice. No specific artistic techniques apply.

Level 2

Stubborn (passive)

39 The civil population resists creative coalitions on an ideological level, but deploys them in practice. Except for vigilance, no specific artistic techniques apply.

Level 3

Stubborn (active)

40 The civil population refuses to deploy creative coalitions in practice. Use targeted artistic acts of persuasion to remain in control: organization of artistic festivities in the neighbourhood; increase in physical presence of artists; initiation of sample and pilot projects in the field of creative coalitions.

Level 4

Offensive (physical)

41 The civil population physically resists creative coalitions

and is impervious to reason. Use defensive tactics to canalize the threat: creation of a platform where problem groups can express themselves; incorporation of local aesthetic traits in communication; manipulation of the obstacles through de-localization and gentrification.

Level 5

Offensive (damage)

42 The population is prepared to employ violence and/or damage property and persons in its resistance to creative coalitions. As for now, artistic tactics are little sufficient, owing to the lack of a more offensively adjusted repertory. In this case, the population should be controlled with non-artistic, police action.

How?

43 Considering the unique, open-minded approach, which is so particular to Dutch artists, it comes as no surprise that, of all places, the artistic sector has organized itself here, so as to formalise its behaviour within creative coalitions through the *Rotterdam Code*. This code concerns a number of rules, intuitively understandable for any engaged artist.

The Rotterdam Code

- 44 Never approach your target directly; use detours and metaphors.
- 45 Always legitimize an intervention in strictly artistic terms. In case of conflicts of interest, stress the fact that the relative autonomy of art forms a condition for its social productivity.
- 46 Reject an antagonistic attitude. Respond with attainable, concrete alternatives that produce immediate effect and verifiable results.
- 47 Enchant friend and foe by breaking through the usual clichés surrounding artists (serious-minded, sophisticated, unshakeable). Let yourself be noticed through a pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude.
- 48 Never explicitly take sides in a social situation (each party is always right or wrong somewhere). Rely on the equivocality of artistic action.
- 49 View any opponent as a potentially interested party, partner or sponsor. Anticipate on universal themes such as durability, social cohesion and national interest.
- 50 Avoid the suggestion that you are the driving force behind your intervention (so-called 'solo actions'). Create the impression that you merely anticipate on existing processes.
- 51 Occupy a role, which is unorthodox both in the art world and in the outside world, thus avoiding easy identification and critique from both sides.
- 52 Never act on the basis of certain presupposed ideals or reigning ideologies. In every circumstance, cherish a healthy distance.
- 53 Do not venture afield too much. Remember that art is and remains a human enterprise.

Power?... To Which People?!

Notes after a conversation with Jonas Staal

Mihnea Mircan

While ‘the crisis’ is a staple of much recent talk within and about the art world, the world that art is interspersed with prepares for difficult times. Beyond economic malfunction, a crisis is a regime of enunciation where power, defeatism and propaganda play significant parts, a form of collective suspension where individuals’ access or entitlement to resources can be denied or deferred until further notice. Crises materialise through collective behaviour, and thus actualise a form of communality that stems from vulnerability and loss, rather than the pursuit of collective well-being. The crisis seems to be the direct inheritor, disguised in economic terms, of the much-discussed state of exception: the condition where politics occupy, or rather immobilize, the territory between law and life. In tandem with all this, our immediate present is an occasion to rethink responsibility in art, both personally and institutionally, to ask what kind of worlds art should mirror or engage, and what kind of institutions it should critique. There is an oblique opportunity here to contrast today’s bankruptcy and mistrust to the feverish, glamourously irrepressible proliferation of the art world in the years before, to rethink the sustainability of what we are doing, between the parallel flows of imagery and capital, ideological unrest, new forms of communality and new modes of historiography. In short, to engage the citizens and subjects of the crisis.

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As the art world’s favourite litany has repeatedly proclaimed, the art of the last decade can be read as a way of enacting neo-liberalism, or at least furnishing it with its life-size image. Art has adopted ‘the logic of big numbers’; statistics have inflated at the same rate as real estate and museum architecture, biennials, fairs and galleries have spread and expanded beyond any connection to the meanings circulated by the art they are supposed to present. Consensus on the inevitability of crisis, financial or symbolic, was accompanied by infrequent, and infrequently fruitful, steps to pare down the scissiparity of the art world. Efflorescence went in tandem with decomposition, participation was melan-

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cholic, while the difficulties of artistic engagement formed a perverse alliance with the formidable multiplication of artistic events. Radical thought and work became enmeshed in the problematic terrain between engagement and autonomy: they either accreted in the slogans of activism, appeared as vacuous gesticulation or photogenic shake-up, or they conceded defeat by equating their own existence and resonance with the confirmation of a benevolent plurality in the system it sought to interrogate. Radicalness was assimilated, perfectly digested by the system, it even seemed to fuel or legitimise that same system's expansion. The art world surpassed itself, ramified in a drive to cover the globe and be as big as it could be, in an amputated comparison that, once again, confronted art with the difficult questions of value making and credibility. There never was a simple connection between the proliferation of projects and the multiplication of ideas they rely on or stem from, the increased circulation of intellectual and artistic resources. It is probably a fair assessment to say that this age of growth did not bring its own understanding of institutional critique.² There was no third wave of institutional critique, just the languid ripples of the second.

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Moving backwards along this makeshift timeline, the striking perspectives opened up by the first assaults of institutional critique into the relationships between art institutions and other configurations of power, the assumptions and coercions of museological space and museological thinking, coalesced into a softer, nuanced stance, whereby art was supposed to traverse, meaningfully, society, while society was supposed to traverse, lastingly, the art institution. The second wave of institutional critique was in fact the adoption of critique by the institutions, resulting in various, mild forms of self-sabotage. Institutions have internalized critique in a pathology of self-definition, a syndrome of institutional anxiety that intensified as budgets and logistic capabilities grew. The institutional was supposed to be undone or made unrecognizable, reinvented as a set of tactics that engendered not only an exhibition policy but also a system of monitoring it, ensuring that things are in flux and that the institution permanently extricates itself from the contexts it proposed. The eviscerated (non-)institution projected itself as a site of diaphanous bureaucracy, of unencumbered

display and imponderable process. Eventually, this half-hearted self-contestation was matched in magnitude only by its contradiction, an inflationary wave, so that the art world progressively looked like a cancerous outgrowth on its own history. The present crisis brings about the necessity to re-evaluate this complex of the prodigal institution, to return to Andrea Fraser's pronouncement that 'we are the institution',³ and look at how our practices – those of artists, curators, writers – relate to the contexts they serve to create. 'I would opt for the following approach: to insist on Institutional Critique's investigative potential..., while working on new, more adequate, definitions of "institution" and "critique" alike.'⁴

Institutional critique begins, perhaps, with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's advice that museums are to be visited only once a year, 'as one visits the graves of dead relatives'⁵ and connects practices as diverse as those of Hans Haacke and Michael Asher, Daniel Buren and Maria Eichorn, Robert Smithson and Santiago Sierra. Its efficacy relies on an 'operationally specific'⁶ understanding of critique, that aspires to elaborate and clarify, rather than simply state, the strategies – artistic, curatorial, institutional, philosophical – through which objections to contexts are formulated and raised. Those are the very modes in which forms of antagonism are incorporated in a matrix that allows for the continuous re-calibration of divergent claims, the scenarios through which engaged practices can continue to assert their relevance, a relevance that institutes an intermediate space of investigation between an 'inside' and the 'outside' of the context.

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The insistence here on institutional critique in response to Jonas Staal's question about the most schematically overused notions in recent art, 'power' and 'the people', stems from a simple observation: it is through institutional critique that the conditions for this question were created. The project of institutional critique articulated its disempowerment of the institution with an empowerment of the participant. In fact, it invented the participant and the notion of participation, it formalized protest as a democratic countermove to the workings of the institution, contaminated by its affiliation with either political or white-cube ideologies. The revelation

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that ensued was almost theatrically staged for an audience invited to react and grab hold of symbolic resources thus made available. The promise of institutional critique, simultaneous with its dismantling of institutional control and its divulgence of the blind spots that obstruct the emergence of radical thought, was that the power subtracted from the institution would be equal – and, later, commensurate – with the power it would grant the viewer-cum-participant. That power could indeed be reassigned within the triumvirate of un-built institution, radical artist and critical spectatorship. It was to be the task of the following decades to clarify whether this equation was correct, and whether arithmetic had anything to do with power. And what followed was precisely a protracted study into the capacity of power to mutate, re-locate, put on masks, absorb shocks, never distribute and never diminish. Institutional critique was confined to an attempt to localize or visualize power – as stable, definable interlocutor – and materialize a phantasmal transfer: the recent, exasperating echo of this effort is the fetishization of the immigrant in exhibition spaces worldwide.⁷ It is both the contractual and transversal natures of this promise that Jonas Staal's question addresses. Instead of exchange, his contention is for an intensification of parameters, for voluntary confinement in the paradox opened up by institutional critique.

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How, then, to create points of intersection – adherence, even, in Roland Barthes' sense – between the necessity to rethink the institutional in and after times of crisis, and the drive to re-imagine the spaces of potentiality⁸ that institutional critique might breach and permeate? Art has portrayed itself in a condition of ghostly equivalence to power, correspondences were, in vastly different ways, traced between the poetic and the political as equally legitimate modes of administering the possible – endowed with the same leverage in the field of what could be done, via contiguous mechanisms. Various strategies emerged from this tangle of synonymy, where each element manifests itself with all its political force or poetic dexterity to incarnate the other, and where transgression is forever matched by what is being transgressed. Artistic discourse either declared the state of secrecy – it sought to complicate or obfuscate the equation until exchange between the endpoints is temporarily

halted – or took the alternate path of over-identification,⁹ whereby authority is taken for granted and its claims are profusely confirmed, its premises are passionately actualized and thus disclosed as carriers of political resentment or enforcement. Jonas Staal's appeal is an invitation, timely and ardent, to reflect again on delocalizations of the relationship between art and power, on the obstacles symmetry creates and alternatives to the stagnant algebra of give and take. The question and exclamation marks indicate – clamour, even – the plurality that we should inscribe in any reference to 'the people' to the same extent that they posit a multiplicity of forms of power. We are asked whether the distribution of information across non-hierarchical trajectories and the unconsummated power of resistance, flight or vocal refusal, are to be discussed under the same category, and whether the most formidable power of all – that of categories themselves to rest untroubled on the ground of metaphysical difference – can be temporarily disabled by the drive to remove them, or render categories void.

The need to repossess institutional critique and reassert it as indispensable paradox, is bound up with acknowledging that the position from which this assertion is made is one of fundamental subservience, even if to democratic ideals. And that the 'outside' that artistic authority would institute as spectral recreation area is only the discursive function of a laborious, complete use of the resources and operations afforded by the 'inside', of taking maximal advantage of one's position as an artist. As art interrogates the institution to come, and as this new institution is constrained to revise its strategies and relevance after the welfare state and through the crisis, institutional critique remains an important solution to reformulate the terms of asymmetrical combat. Not in the sense of empowerment, of a transformative theatre of social or cultural justice, which would presuppose a break in the fundamental interrelatedness of loser and victor, culprit and victim, but as a means to visualize, as accurately as possible, the disparities that bind power to the people at this and any historical juncture. 'Power to the people' is an instrument for intellectual and artistic inquiry, something that, depending on philosophical predilection, we can construe as a measurement scale, a striated map, or as a set of repressed conditions. This investigation is geared to

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maintain, in any circumstance, the supposition of equality between powers and peoples. Alongside other narratives or slogans of emancipation, and counter-manifestoes of radicalness, 'Power to the people' should subtend discourses that hold today's political equations up for our conjecture, and test them against whatever political geometries refuse power to the people. Upon impact, a reciprocal visibility is instated, a sociology of power, finally a form of knowledge that is... what kind of power?

Notes

- 1 [Ed.] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)
 - 2 [Ed.] The project of Institutional Critique researches the role of the institution within art production. The first developments of this research are generally located in the 60s and 70s of the previous century. The 'first wave' comprises a group of artists who criticized the influence of external actors (such as commercial enterprises) on the art institution. The 'second wave' consisted of a group of artists which considered itself always already related to the institution, and therefore could not distance themselves fully from it. They produced their work within this tension between artist and institution. See also: *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zürich: JRP | Ringier, 2006)
 - 3 [Ed.] Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zürich: JRP | Ringier, 2006) 133
 - 4 Isabelle Graw, 'Beyond Institutional Critique', in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zürich: JRP | Ringier, 2006) 143
 - 5 F.T. Marinetti, 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thomson (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006) 15
 - 6 Isabelle Graw, *Op.cit.*, 139
 - 7 This relies on the writing of Giorgio Agamben in texts like 'We Refugees' and 'Beyond Human Rights', specifically his contention that the condition of the country-less refugee should represent 'the paradigm of a new historical consciousness': 'Inasmuch as the refugee, as apparently marginal figure, unhinges the old trinity of state-nation-territory, it deserves instead to be regarded as the central figure of our political history.' See Giorgio Agamben, 'Beyond Human Rights', in *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. V. Binetti and G. Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 22
- Yet the immigrant's short-term and fundamentally scripted access to the art institution is the limit-case of the institution's theatrical syndrome discussed above, supposed to legitimize any artistic project and not to articulate an understanding of social art grounded on delocalization and a complicated relationship to norms. The misreading of Agamben that the present text engages in is, conversely, that the

crisis holds us all against the horizon of a diffuse state of exception.

- 8 [Ed.] Potentiality as an ‘actually existing possibility’ is a concept developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben based on an interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of *dunamis*. See: Giorgio Agamben, ‘On Potentiality’, in *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 177-184
- 9 [Ed.] The concept of over-identification is for example discussed by Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek in relation to the Slovenian art group NSK/Laibach, which “frustrates” the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but represents an over-identification with it – by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency... By means of the elusive character of its desire, of the undecidability as to “where it actually stands”, Laibach compels us to take up our own position...’ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Why are Laibach and the Neue Slowenische Kunst not Fascists?’, in *The Universal Exception*, eds Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Continuum, 2007) 65

Power?...To Which People?!

The Sign of Withdrawal

Marko Stamenković

The signature of the creator — painter, poet, film director... — seems to me the point where the system of lies begins, the system that every poet, every artist, attempts to construct in order to protect himself... though I am not sure exactly what against.

—Marcel Broodthaers¹

For a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written 'in his name'.

—Jacques Derrida²

This text revolves around the fragments of facts, interpretative data from a variety of written sources of expertise, and imaginations of a subjective nature. The fragments have been brought together by my personal need to re-articulate, bring to the higher level of visibility, and put into focus a less-known, marginalized, almost forgotten figure (though historically one of the most powerful and significant ones) of Slovenian, Yugoslav, and (Eastern) European neo-avant-gardes: the poet and philosopher Aleš Kermauner (1946, Belgrade – 1966, Ljubljana). As an echo of the most self-destructive gesture of extreme alienation, his name is coming out of the darkness once again: in relation to the ideological (socialist, post-socialist, late-capitalist, and global neo-liberal) frameworks of being, it resonates even stronger today, when our proper experience of the poet's need to execute personal strategies of resistance, protest, and uncompromising critique, pleads for an updated analysis and comprehension. This is why, now more than ever before, a new light needs to be cast upon the current cultural and social manifestations of the 'comfortable conditions of production' that are being witnessed on a large scale in this striking phase of ('world economic') crisis and decadence at the very moment of writing (2009).

This text comes into being as a result of silent communication, intentional intertwining, and mutual hospitality among the written traces left by Giorgio Agamben, Louis Aragon, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Constantin Brancusi, Tomaž Brejc, Marcel Broodthaers, Jacques Derrida, Dubravka Đurić, Aleš Erjavec, Marina Gržinić, Martin Heidegger, Taras Kermauner, Vladimir Kopicl, Kazimir Malevich, David Nez, Francis Picabia, Marko Pogačnik, Suely Rolnik, Victor I. Stoichita, Miško Šuvaković, and Igor Zabel. The very (non-)being of this text finds its most proper visual form in the unveiling of the non-signature of Aleš Kermauner himself. It also comes onto the stage of actual political reality through a series of live and Internet-based conversations between Jonas Staal and myself. The virtual and material constellation of all these subjects (alongside with their roles and voices, and the absence of any particular meaning behind the shadows of their presence, respectively) forms the roots for a discourse that is about to emerge. It serves – without any pretensions to become a comprehensive, ‘objective’ overview – only as a preliminary sketch and a painful scratch, a starting reference point towards another phase of a research as a never-ending movement, as a ‘concrete utopia’,³ and as a departure point for a journey into the space of potentiality, a promise to come.

This is NOT a body, rounded along the volume of a foot...

—OHO Manifesto⁴

In early 2009, in the small but exciting Slovenian town of Celje, I was doing curatorial research. As part of a bigger project developing around the notions of personal autonomy, individual freedom of choice, and longing for a radical escape, the initial part of my research was rooted in the need to situate, both politically and theoretically – always through the visual arts – my ongoing interest in the necessity not to accept any given situation at all costs, but to propose a radically different way of being – in any context that is ostensibly fixed or unchangeable. Such an approach, at the very period of my performance as a working and acting (im)migrant body in a foreign country, has led me back to practices of conceptual art in the late 1960s as a basis and a locus around which the topographical, geopolitical, and poetic constellation of powers finds its most proper methodological target:

the Slovenian neo-avant-garde group OHO.⁵

OHO has been recognized as a forerunner of conceptual art practices in former Yugoslavia, and one of the most significant cultural phenomena that took place in former Eastern Europe after the WWII. In the words of Marko Pogačnik, the group’s cofounder and one of its main protagonists,⁶ the OHO movement was based upon the variety of consecutive experiences articulated on the levels of the Idea (the emergence and the formation of OHO’s pre-history, 1963–66), the Concept (of a broad movement, 1966–68), Spiritual Contents (of the group of artists, 1968–71), and the Commune in Šempas (of a farming community/‘family’, artist group, and a spiritual centre, 1971–79).⁷ This last phase, predominantly perceived as a short-term attempt to propose ‘an alternative to market economy laws’, figures as the gesture of a radical withdrawal.⁸ The characteristics of this OHO period, as well as the interpretation of it in the sense of a radical withdrawal at that times, have a particular significance for the nature of this text. According to Igor Zabel, who was one of the most ardent institutional historiographers, critical promoters, and curatorial interpreters of the group since the 1990s, this final phase of OHO’s work represents a combination of Concept Art and a kind of esoteric, ecological approach: ‘The subject of the work was a harmonic unity between the members of the group, but also of the group and nature and even the universe as a whole. In the search for such a harmony, they used different means, including telepathy. The group was just starting an international career when the members decided they should abandon art as a separate area and really enter life; therefore, they settled on an abandoned farm and started a community.’⁹

The decision to ‘abandon’ their own urban field of belonging (to leave the self-determined field of art as something they used to believe in), and to ‘really enter life’ (as a way of critical and countercultural migration to the countryside, toward a new, although always already there, scope of belongingness) represents not only a singular gesture of discontent and a symptom of a ‘culture of complaint’: it stands for a determinate orientation to expand their range of active perception of the world, as a microcosm which is capable of providing the experience of a radically different

way of being: 'OHO's projects did not originate in a search for some ironic tradition... but derived instead from more elementary and essentially different questions: the group's work represented an investigation of the function of art, the meaning of the artist in the world, the identity of art, and its conditions and boundaries...within the context of the so-called "concrete utopia" which can be defined as being neither an illusion nor wishful thinking, but rather offers us a perspective and an orientation, as well as ideas about how to approach the future.'¹⁰ It is in this sense – but without any need for nostalgia – that I am trying to understand the relevance of OHO for the present moment. What is nowadays understood as the 'concrete utopia', for the disturbed spirits of the OHO group has been a specific type of Conceptual Art and Conceptual Life that aimed at establishing spiritual connections between the members of the group, and between the group and the world.¹¹ Although aware of their own artistic position at the moment of establishing their commune, they consciously opted for another option: they chose a less visible and non-market-driven direction in order to withdraw into the insularity and isolation of the nature, of their own perception and beliefs. Such an articulation of – living and working – experience can be understood only through the line of thought that leads from the transformation of an artistic practice to the transformation of the world, that the members of the commune attempted to experiment with, to realize and to ideally achieve in the 1970s.¹²

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The Heideggerian philosophical legacy has marked the entire generation of young scholars and intellectuals in Slovenia at the times, and ever since the very beginning, the OHO group wanted to develop a 'radically different relationship towards the world.' The focus of this relationship was to be determined by so-called Reism (based on the Latin word for thing: *res*) – an attempt to reach a non-anthropocentric world of 'things', which could be perceived not according to their function and meaning for people but for themselves alone: 'Instead of a humanistic position, which implies a world of objects dominated by the subject, they wanted to achieve a world of things, where there would be no hierarchical (or indeed any) difference between people and things; the correct relationship towards such a world is not action, but observing.'¹³

It is this modest, utopian attempt toward the harmonization and democratization of the world, based upon the horizontal, non-hierarchical principles of non-aggressive, 'passive' observation of the phenomena, that I find the most appealing about the reistic aesthetic doctrine. Reism as doctrine¹⁴ of Slovenian concrete poetry since 1965 manifested itself among the members of the OHO group in the radicalization of poetic forms, and of understanding the language as a tool. In relation to it, a Belgrade-based poet and editor Dubravka Đurić writes the following: 'Reism describes the penchant of Slovenian poets for placing the word at the centre of focus. The word no longer pointed to a world outside language. Poets were moving from meaning to sign. Reist ideology implied that poets had become aware of their devices.'¹⁵

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Through the reduction of art to the thing itself, the artwork became an object which speaks of and points to the fact of being the object and only the object itself.¹⁶ Meaningless as such, it opens up (or better, encloses) the nature of the object towards the status of a pure sign: the sign without any inside or outside, without any past or future, only the eternal Now.¹⁷ The disappearance of the subject comes as a (counter)effect of such a drift: a drift away, a withdrawal, from subjectivity towards objectivity, into the reistic state of mind where nothing is anymore experienced as a subject, but rather everything is experienced as a thing. Stripping the subject of its meaning, erasing it, and deleting its humanistic aura of an omnipotent creator led to the clear process of intentional cancellation of a man.

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Why, then, would a human being decide to disappear, to become invisible, to drift away, to cancel himself, to commit suicide, even? If, in Đurić's terms, what prevailed was this 'anti-humanistic position according to which man, his transcendence, and his existential suffering are of no importance to these poets', then Pogačnik's reference to the elements of writing and drawing is interesting at this point: that the form of a drawing brings to light the line as the basic element of the page besides printer's ink and paper.¹⁸

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It is the drawing itself that I am particularly interested in as regards the subject of this text. Let us for example consider the *Invisible Sculpture* (*Nevidna skulptura*) (1969), a project

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by OHO's member David Nez executed in Ljubljana. The project consisted of a printed reproduction of an authentic artwork document under the same title, realized on the premises of the artist's idea to tie a 400 meter-long transparent nylon thread around the city's medieval castle. This work articulated the artistic ideas of the epoch to intervene in the public realm by providing the conceptual and mental (rather than merely physically perceptible) production of meaning. However, what provoked my particular attention was the actuality of the author's gesture for the very moment it was revealed right in front of my 'blind' eyes: the fact that such a (communicative and inclusive) public action left a mark, a trace onto the city's urban texture, both mentally and physically, without imposing itself aggressively onto the spectator's sight; I try to understand it beyond the conceptualist paradigm applied to the expanded field of art, and to situate it exactly at the level of a ghostly presence that resides at the border between visibility and invisibility, and which comes into being in a most paradoxical, absurd way: through the simultaneity of its absence at the moment of its appearance, and its 'future disappearance': 'To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten.'¹⁹

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In one of his texts Giorgio Agamben writes about this paradox. In a way of referring to the difference between the light (actuality) and darkness (the shadows, the colour of potentiality²⁰), he traces the moment in which the action of uncompromising resistance takes place. This is where the key figure of potentiality, the mode of its existence as potentiality (the shadow), enters as a potentiality that is not simply the potential to do this or that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality: 'One is potential, Aristotle says, thanks to a hexis, a "having", on the basis of which he can also not bring his knowledge into actuality (*mē energein*) by not making a work, for example... Human beings can... see shadows (*to skotos*), they can experience darkness: they have the potential not to see, the possibility of privation... The greatness – and also the abyss – of human potentiality is that it is first of all potential not to act, potential for darkness.'²¹

It is from within such a potentiality not to see, from the experience of darkness, that the shadow of Aleš Kermauner emerges right now in front of our eyes.

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Kermauner's shadow

What is the point of criticism? ... Why write? Why not simply show photographs?
—Constantin Brancusi²²

There are seven main resources that I have been relying on in this initial phase of my passionate interest for, and lucid identification with the 'Kermauner' phenomenon and its revolutionary Geist. Beside the two publications bearing the name of Aleš Kermauner as their author,²³ the texts where he is mentioned are either the fragmentary reflections on his role within the Slovenian cultural horizon as applied to the tradition of the OHO group and its beginnings,²⁴ or the brief critical accounts in overviews based on his individual achievements within the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde streams of concrete and visual poetry,²⁵ as well as the Slovenian post-WWII existentialist lyrics' circles,²⁶ or the interpretations of modernist and postmodernist poetry in Slovenia through the lenses of contemporary philosophical and theoretical patterns.²⁷

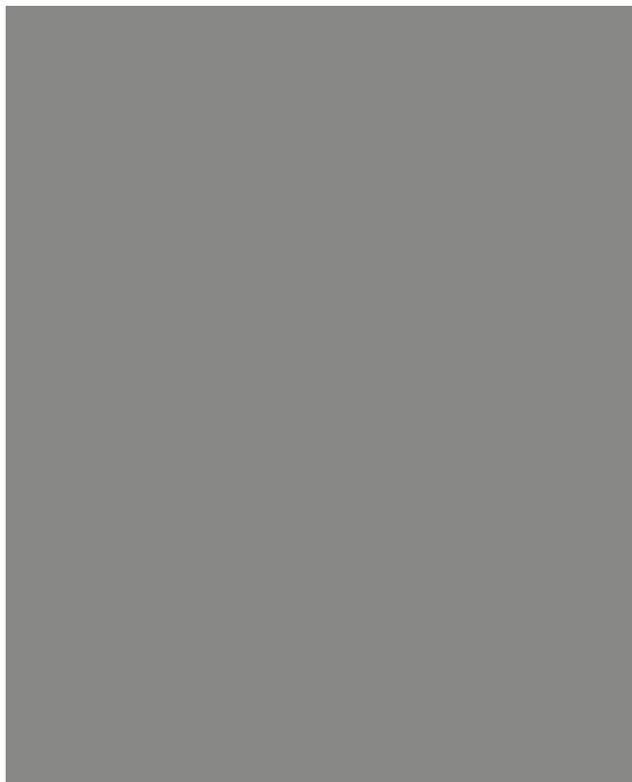
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The first pieces of information containing Kermauner's biographical details came to me through the notes at the back pages of the OHO's 1994 retrospective exhibition catalogues: 'Aleš Kermauner (1946, Belgrade–1966, Ljubljana). Studied philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. He wrote critical and existentialist poetry dealing with the position of an individual in a consumer society, essays, and concrete poetry.'²⁸

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Furthermore: 'At the end of 1965, Marko Pogačnik and Iztok Geister are visited by Aleš Kermauner, the leading figure in the group of Ljubljana students, which also includes Milenko Matanović. The group cultivates a "hooligan" lifestyle (that is, unconventional attire and behaviour, listening to rock music, and the like) as an expression of personal dissatisfaction with the consumer society. Kermauner is a poet and philosopher; the main theme of his work is alienation in the consumer and mass society. He also shows an affinity with

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Aleš Kermauner, Self-portrait, undated photo (lost?)

reistic procedures: he takes Pogačnik's method of imprinting objects and uses it on a number of pages onto which he imprints Ljubljana's street gutters.²⁹

According to curator Igor Zabel, the possibility for the OHO movement to come into existence (coming out from its own 'shadow') is largely due to some other groups and individuals who got in contact with members of the Kranj Group such as Pogačnik, especially those who belonged to the so-called 'hooligan' movement. Among them, it was exactly Aleš Kermauner, 'a rebel without a cause', who played a pivotal role in the constitution of OHO's future orientation and overall development. Zabel also highlights the perversely attractive mutual dependence between hooliganism and reism, based on 'the avant-garde impulse of OHO, that manifested itself in aesthetic and social provocations', without forgetting to highlight the 'deliberately un-political attitude of OHO': 'While the hooligan movement involved a strong existentialist element of dissatisfaction with the developing consumer society, and of protest against it, reism aimed primarily towards an open and attentive approach to the world and not a social or even political protest. Reism therefore – unlike most of the avant-garde movements – did not begin with a project of changing the world, it just wanted to change consciousness and transform it into the permanently open and attentive reistic vision. Reists had no intention to destroy museums, they just wanted to change the museum's context so that it would break with established conventions and throw light onto things as they are (and this is the case not only with the museum but with any institution). For OHO the point is not in changing the world, it is only necessary to see it.'³⁰

In the last publication (2003) that has appeared so far in Slovenia as a direct homage to Aleš Kermauner's revolutionary oeuvre,³¹ he is introduced to the new generations of readers as an author who, in the context of Slovenian poetry, follows the line of post-avant-garde poetics rooted in conceptualism: his work attempts to integrate the visual (graphic) and textual element, to transcend the social conventions, and to defend the realization of individual freedom on the European and global scale. Although Kermauner's activity has never entered the Slovenian literary canon, it has managed

to produce a significant alternative to the literary developments in Slovenia by the autonomous gesture of the author. In that sense, and according to a new actualization of his 'programmed' poetry, there are three main characteristics that can be discerned: 1) breaking away from the 'normative' linguistic, conceptual, and ideological structures; 2) autonomization of poems as independent cultural artefacts; and 3) the civic thematic backed up by the strong presence of anti-consumerist and anti-commercial attitudes.³²

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Aleš was the younger brother of Taras Kermauner (1930–2008). Taras was a Slovene literary historian, philosopher, essayist and playwright, whose legacy comprises of numerous texts among which those dealing with the aesthetic practices that his brother was involved with.³³ According to Zabel, it was Taras who coined the term reism and first used it in the mid-1960s in an essay on Tomaž Šalamun's poetry.³⁴ A reistic consciousness, constructed upon the reistic activities, put into the centre of perception 'the thing itself', but also the perception as such, i.e. it accentuated the position of a (reistic) spectator who was essentially determined as a viewer: 'As there was no hierarchic difference between man and other things, man stared at the things, but the things also stared at him.'³⁵ In relation to the subject of this text, what is the most significant aspect of the reistic doctrine is the very idea of the independent being of things as autonomous entities: 'The basic concept of the first (reistic) OHO period is therefore that of "the thing". We should understand this notion as essentially different from the "object". An object is always determined by the subject-object relationship. It is, therefore, determined by human notions and practical needs. Because of this, the independent being of things as autonomous entities remains hidden, and so does the richness of their qualities. To discover things means to discover their radical independence from man and their own, autonomous being.'³⁶

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It is this idea of independence and the idea of autonomy that make a landmark of my personal understanding of Aleš Kermauner's heroic and, at the same time, tragic and paradoxical position in the history of the twentieth century (poetic) revolutions: 'All writing, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empiri-

cally determined addressee in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, "death", or the possibility of the "death" of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark.³⁷

80

Aleš Kermauner committed suicide in April 1966. He executed the ultimate gesture that the personal choice, a free will, and the spirit of absolute individual freedom could have opened to him: he withdrew into the insularity and isolation of death, of his own perception and beliefs; for suicide is the institution that represents the knowledge about the choice of death.³⁸ In the 'spirit of expatriation', a profound sense of dislocation, and the atmosphere of Duchampian exile, Kermauner also 'defines a new ethics of independent life in the modern age of nationalism and advanced capitalism, offering a precursor to our own globalized world of nomadic subjects and dispersed experience.'³⁹ Drastically enough, he devoured himself in the cannibalistic metaphor of a self-destructive ritual of transgression. Kermauner is the figure of transgression, a 'hooligan' – the REAL one... By the end of 1966, in the logic of cannibalistic absurd and the anti-logic of Dadaist reality, Kermauner's OHO fellows (Milenko Matanović, before all the others) translated Picabia's *Manifeste cannibale dada*⁴⁰ from 1920 and read it as a posthumous, delayed homage to their prematurely deceased colleague, and his polemical (poetic) language.⁴¹

81

None of the aforementioned resources has any photographic (or any other visual) accounts on how Aleš Kermauner actually looked like; but how does a revolutionary subject come (back) into visual appearance? This, I believe, makes the story about him even more peculiar, mysterious, fogged, and makes me think of Roland Barthes and a famous (always invisible) photograph of his mother that Barthes has been writing (and only writing) about, without ever showing it (making it visible) to the eyes of his anonymous reader/spectator in *Camera Lucida*.⁴² This is perhaps the reason why, without insisting on revealing the image/trace of the actual/physical body and face of Kermauner from the times of his brief life, I have instead proposed a 'personal design' for a singular grey square image bearing the hyphenated title: "'Aleš Kermauner", Self-portrait, undated photograph (lost?).' In Barthes' semiotics, this image would function

as an 'icon': a representation of an object that produces a mental image of the object represented; according to such a logic, the picture of Aleš Kermauner (remaining constantly hidden from my sight, and always repeatedly invisible to the readership of this text) conjures up 'Aleš Kermauner' in the brain, and attempts to fill the gap (no matter how unnecessary or irrelevant it may look at first sight) between the representation of the subject and the object of research.

82

This need to discover, articulate, and, consequently, 'designate' the meaning of a missing object of (bodily) representation brought me to the moment of recognition: the recognition of an unnecessary, irrelevant, black bodiless stain 'looking at me' from Kermauner's book. It made me think of the concluding paragraphs in the oho Manifest: '*Stvari* (things) are *stvarne* (real). We draw close to the *stvarnost stvari* (reality of things) by accepting a thing as it is. And what is a thing as? A thing, we notice first, is silent. But the thing has something to offer!'⁴³

Nothing

*You are all indicted; rise! The orator cannot talk to you unless you get up.
Get up like for the Marseillaise, get up like for the Russian anthem,
get up like for God Save the King, get up like for the flag....
Dada alone does not smell: it is nothing, nothing, nothing.
It is like your hopes: nothing.
like your paradise: nothing.
like your idols: nothing.
like your politicians: nothing.
like your heroes: nothing.
like your artists: nothing.
like your religions: nothing.
Hiss, shout, kick my teeth in, so what?
I shall still tell you that you are half-wits.
In three months my friends and I will be selling you our pictures
for a few francs.
— Francis Picabia⁴⁴*

83

In the logic of the absurd there is no single meaning one could produce out of the act of mutual, silent looking (at each other): it is just the fact that a simple process of communica-



tion and recognition happens when one could least expect it to happen. So it happened: from the old, cheap piece of paper, where Kermauner's poem *ABECEDA* (*Alphabet*) and its visual counterpart had been lying since the year of his death,⁴⁵ the imprint of his previous presence, and the sign of his actual absence, strikingly reflected in my eyes and left the mark in my brain without the possibility of erasure. In its pure visual form, it is abstracted from the background of a pseudo-alphabetic net; this grid of letters, beside his (intentional?) type-printed 'spelling mistakes', makes an authentic piece of visual poetry done by Kermauner himself. This piece of graphic apocalypse contains a minimal 'deviation' from the central image of that black bodiless stain (the unfinished, broken circle with two fat dots, one in the centre of a broken circle, another outside, at the very entrance to it): a deviation that resides in the coma-like little line at the upper right corner of the Sign; this line is at a safe distance from the rest of the image, but simultaneously it makes a constituent part of the whole; neither inside, nor outside, and paradoxically – both inside and outside, its position hovers between the two, without any clear conclusion. It is the line that, symbolically powerful enough, allows the subject to distance himself from the discourse, and does not necessarily demand his identification with power or with any person(s) who retain it at the top (of the State, for example).⁴⁶

84 I do not intend to analyze any further, or even interpret the possible (non-)meanings that such an 'unnecessary, irrelevant black bodiless stain' left on me. I only feel the desire to (once it was recognized) accept it as his sign of radical non-acceptance, and also – as his eternal (non-)signature confirming his a-spatial presence: 'In the final analysis, this black shape is neither specular reflection nor shadow. Neither is it the projection of a physical body. It is the negative image of the physical body, both its nothingness and its model. It is the negative matrix from which the shape must free itself.'⁴⁷

85 In line with Agamben's notion of the shadow (the experience of and potentiality for darkness), art historian Victor Stoichita approaches the phenomenon of the shadow that, 'given the status of non-figure, forms one body with the representation.'⁴⁸ In doing so, he is analyzing a paradigmatic

case of twentieth-century art: Constantin Brancusi's photograph of his sculpture *The Beginning of the World* (c. 1920) – the light/shade conflict from which emerges the symbolic and positive form of the beginning.

'In Brancusi's case it is not the egg that engenders the shadow – that black bodiless stain – which emerges into the world of existence in the shape of an egg; it is a kind of Platonic reversal where the shadow takes on the role of the paradigm and the marble egg that of the object. Through the photographic creation of the primordial form, Brancusi recounts "the beginning of the world" in the shape of a split drama, in the shape of an upheaval (*a kata-strophe*) of the shadow in the object... The shadow is not "equal to the object", it is more important than the object in as much as it is instated as its paradigm.'⁴⁹

Always keeping in mind the status of the photograph in Brancusi's case as a kind of portable 'double' of his sculptures, a commentary and a form of reproduction, Stoichita's account gives us a possible tool to approach Kermauner's legacy in a different way: the one that opens up the 'embryo of infinite possibilities', and attempts to give a whisper of new life to the one who has been (already many times before) qualified only as a Poet of Death.⁵⁰ This need for 'resurrection' is, without doubt, and over and over again, completely unnecessary or irrelevant from the perspective of critical discourse that situates Kermauner's personal and political oeuvre within the currencies of 'canonical' cultural codes. The thing is, however, that his practice has not yet been canonized, and has always been at the margins of the academic perception in relation to the achievements of Slovenian, Yugoslav, and (Central, Eastern, etc.) European intellectual efforts in the fields of concrete and visual poetry. This is the reason more why his ghostly presence, that has been haunting the misfit cultural spirits of his own, and even more – our own generation, needs to be articulated anew, without falling into the traps of a canon.

The gestures of radical self-erasure confirm the irreversible status of Kermauner as Death-Poet. However, and quite in line with the confirmed and established ideas around the rebellious subject of the Poet, I do not accept the given

interpretation even at risk of having a completely misleading direction of thought. I want to understand Kermauner's legacy as the result of his academic Heideggerian aspirations towards the philosophy of negativity and despire of life; but, at the same time, I want to see his apocalyptic production as a result of the singular (though short-living) revolutionary gesture of extreme rejection and intellectual disobedience in relation to a system of silent repression; I want to understand Aleš Kermauner as a Poet of radical withdrawal.

89 His (untitled, and now purposefully entitled) *Sign of Withdrawal* bears the burden of a graphic apocalypse, the Zero of Forms, even; and in being so, it performs an ultimate critical distance from the locus of power and the locus of (any) totalitarian discourse. It also serves as a good visualization of what the other Aleš (Erjavec, a contemporary Slovenian philosopher) describes as a theoretical diagram of totalitarian societies and the relationship between political-ideological discourses and power by recalling the following: 'In his writings... the French historian and political philosopher Claude Lefort offered a persuasive theory of totalitarian societies, be they of a fascist or "communist" kind: in his view, the difference between political and ideological discourse and power is annihilated in both... In totalitarian societies... the totalitarian discourse must identify itself completely with power and those who possess it. The totalitarian society gives a semblance of being completely homogenous and unified, the border between the State and civil society therein being concealed if not eliminated, with the former annihilating the latter, and with social divisions being completely masked.'⁵¹

90 Kermauner's *Sign of Withdrawal* is positioned in the closest proximity to his poem *ABECEDA* in the posthumously published collection.⁵² Coincidence or not, in Francis Picabia's *Cannibale No. 1* (as of April 25, 1920), Louis Aragon published a poem-manifesto entitled *Suicide*, consisting simply of the letters of the alphabet (abeceda?) printed in order. In a coded gesture there is no decipherable message, and, for those who do not possess the key to unlock it, the meaning remains hidden behind the deviation of language. It is the deviation of language, both written and drawn, that makes the opening (not the closure) of the communication

flows (and consequently, a mutual recognition, among those who can read the message behind the alphabetic 'curtain') possible. Just as Dadaists in Paris and elsewhere seized on stock phrases— clichés, slogans, puns—as glaring examples of the conventionality that permeates both ordinary language and most attempts at expressive writing, Kermauner's (and Aragon's, and Nez's) coded messages are designed to be opaque to outsiders, but have the potentiality of becoming transparent for whomever is capable of unlocking them; thus deciphered, they imply total communicability, a flow of information that is transformed from meaningless codes into the fully meaningful signs.⁵³ The collaged appearance of the assembly between the black bodiless stain and the letter-grid in Kermauner's *ABECEDA* is merely a single example of it, but an important one: beside the message it hides and reveals at the same time, it contains the potentiality of seeing the author's absence in presence—Kermauner's personal signature.

Kermauner's signature of *kata-strophe* thus cancels itself out in the spirit of bearing a pure proper 'name' (previous presence of a signer) 'without organs' (absence, or rather non-presence of the signer): 'By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical non-presence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now* or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future now or present, thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness [*maintenance*]. That general maintenance is in some way inscribed, pinpointed in the always evident and singular present punctuality of the form of the signature.'⁵⁴

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Why, then, does Man decide to lock himself in a coded message, to disappear, to become invisible, to drift away, to commit suicide, to cancel himself? Why does Man decide to withdraw? Instead of giving any clear answer, let me conclude this text (before the ghostly subject of it comes into being in another form, in "another" future) in the most unacceptable, indecent, impolite, ignorant, and misbehaving way that one can perform at the very end of one's own writing—by quoting someone else: 'Aragon was therefore perfectly right when, in another context, he said: "The revolutionary

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intellectual appears first of all and above everything else as a traitor to his class of origin.” In a writer this betrayal consists in an attitude which transforms him, from a supplier of the production apparatus, into an engineer who sees his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletarian revolution... The mind which believes only in its own magic strength will disappear. For the revolutionary struggle is not fought between capitalism and mind. It is fought between capitalism and the proletariat.⁵⁵

This text is devoted to Aleš Kermauner, an engineer, and all the fellow engineers and ‘traitors’ around the world today.

Belgrade, February 29, 2009

Notes

- 1 Suzanna Héman, Jurrie Poot, Hripsimé Visser (eds), *Conceptual Art In the Netherlands and Belgium 1965–1975 – Artists, Collectors, Galleries, Documents, Exhibitions, Events* (Amsterdam/Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam/NAI Publishers, 2002) 120
- 2 Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988) 8
- 3 [Ed.] The notion of concrete utopia has been first elaborated by the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) in his publication *Geist der Utopie* (Spirit of Utopia), and can be characterized by an active, militant optimism for the realization of a really possible utopia.
- 4 Marko Pogačnik and I.G. Plamen, ‘OHO Manifesto’, in *Primary Documents. A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, eds Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002) 92
- 5 The term OHO is an acronym for the Slovenian words *oko* (eye) and *uho* (ear), the organs of reistic attention. For reism, see: Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* (Zagreb/Ghent: Horetzky/Vlees & Beton, 2005) 542
- 6 Beside Marko Pogačnik, the leading members of oho in its different periods were Tomaž Šalamun, Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Iztok Geister Plamen, Naško Križnar, Andraž Šalamun, Srečo Dragan, Drago Dellabernardina, Marjan Ciglič, Vojin Kovač (Chubby), Franci Zagoričnik, and Aleš Kermauner.
- 7 For a reading of the group’s history and the system of its periodization different from Pogačnik’s, see: Tomaž Brejc, *oho 1966–1971* (Ljubljana: SKUC, 1978). Also: Igor Zabel, ‘Short History of oho’, in *East Art Map. Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (London: Afterall, Central Saint Martin College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, 2006) 410
- 8 Miško Šuvaković, ‘Conceptual Art’, in *Impossible Histories. Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) 213
- 9 Igor Zabel, ‘Art in Slovenia since 1945’, in *Aspects/Positions. 50 Years of Art in Central Europe, 1949–1999* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2000) 150

- 10 Marina Gržinić, 'IRWIN, OHO, and Post-conceptual Strategies', in *Konceptualni umetniki in pomen njihovih umetniških del danes*, eds Marina Gržinić and Alenka Domjan (Celje: Zavod Celeia Celje, Center for Contemporary Arts, 2007) 69
- 11 Marko Pogačnik and I.G.Plamen, 'OHO Manifesto'
- 12 Marko Pogačnik, 'Od transformacij umetniške prakse do spreminjanja sveta', in *Konceptualni umetniki in pomen njihovih umetniških del danes*, eds Marina Gržinić and Alenka Domjan (Celje: Zavod Celeia Celje, Center for Contemporary Arts, 2007) 143
- 13 Igor Zabel, 'Art in Slovenia since 1945', 150
- 14 Taras Kermauner, 'Humanistička kritika i reistička ne-kritika', in *Eseji i kritike* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1978). Quoted from: Dubravka Đurić, 'Radical Poetic Practices: Concrete and Visual Poetry in the Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde', in *Impossible Histories. Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) 83
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Miško Šuvaković, Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti, 542
- 17 'A word does not have a meaning conferred on it by man, its creator; a word has no meaning at all that should and can be deciphered. A word simply "is", it carries its meaning within itself like any thing under the sun.' Taras Kermauner quoted from Dubravka Đurić, 'Radical Poetic Practices', 83
- 18 Tomaž Brejc, 'OHO as an artistic Phenomenon 1966-1971', in *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966–1978*, Marijan Susovski (ed.) (Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, 1978)
- 19 Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', 8
- 20 [See footnote 8 on p. 42]
- 21 Giorgio Agamben, 'On Potentiality', 177
- 22 Victor I. Stoichita, 'Of Shadow and its Reproducibility during the Photographic Era', in *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) 187
- 23 *Knjiga Aleša Kermaunerja*, Ljubljana: author's edition, 1966; Aleš Kermauner, *Luknja v novcu*, intr. Primož Čučnik (Ljubljana: Društvo Apokalipsa, 2003); also: Herman Vogel, 'Knjiga Aleša Kermaunera', in *Polja* 101-102, Novi Sad, 1967. Kermauner also published work in the miscellanies *Eva* and *Pericarežeracirep*.
- 24 *OHO Retrospektiva*, exh. cat. (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 1994); also: Tomaž Brejc, 'Juvenilia. Notice o ohojevski recepciji zgodovinskih avantgard', in *TANK! Slovenska zgodovinska avantgarda* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 1998) 135
- 25 Dubravka Đurić, 'Radical Poetic Practices'
- 26 Vladimir Kopiel, 'Writings of Death and Entertainment. Textual Body and (De)composition of Meaning in Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde and Post-avant-garde Literature, 1968-1991', in *Impossible Histories. Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds Dubravka Đurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) 96
- 27 Miško Šuvaković, 'Filozofska pitanja o modernoj i postmodernoj poeziji u Sloveniji (t)', in *Ovdje*, 400–402, XXXIII (Podgorica: Centar savremene umjetnosti Crne Gore, 2002) www.komunikacija.org.rs/komunikacija/casopisi/ovdje/XXXIII_400-402/d005/show_html?stdlang=ser_lat [accessed April 29, 2009, ed.]
- 28 *OHO Retrospektiva*, exh. cat.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Igor Zabel, 'Short History of OHO'
- 31 Aleš Kermauner, *Luknja v novcu* 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Fragmentarni prilozi povijesti i analizi konkretne poezije u Sloveniji* (Fragmentary Contributions to the History and Analysis of Concrete Poetry in Slovenia), *Humanistička kritika i reistička ne-kritika* (Humanistic Criticism and Reist Noncriticism), and *Avanguardia in Slovenia*, to name but a few.
- 34 Igor Zabel, 'Short History of OHO'
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', 8
- 38 Miško Šuvaković, 'Filozofska pitanja o modernoj i postmodernoj poeziji u Sloveniji (t)'
- 39 See: T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007)
- 40 Published in Hans Richter's *DADA. Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965)
- 41 Tomaž Brejc, 'Juvenilia. Notice o ohojevski recepciji zgodovinskih avantgard'
- 42 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982)
- 43 Marko Pogačnik and I.G.Plamen, 'OHO Manifesto', 92
- 44 *Manifeste cannibale dada* by Francis Picabia, read at the Dada soirée at the Théâtre de la Maison de l'Oeuvre, Paris, March 27,

1920. Translated from <http://cf.geocities.com/dadatextes/cannibale.html> [accessed April 21, 2009, ed.]
- 45 Aleš Kermauner committed suicide in Ljubljana on April 3, 1966; his entire literary legacy is published the same year in *Knjiga Aleša Kermaunerja* (The Book of Aleš Kermauner), which also includes the imprints of the gutters and other objects. See: *OH O Retrospektiva*.
- 46 Aleš Erjavec, 'Neue Slowenische Kunst – New Slovenian Art: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Self-management, and the 1980s', in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003)
- 47 Victor I. Stoichita, 'Of Shadow and its Reproducibility during the Photographic Era', 190
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, 150
- 50 Miško Šuvaković, 'Filozofska pitanja o modernoj i postmodernoj poeziji u Sloveniji (1)'
- 51 Aleš Erjavec, 'Introduction', in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003) 8
- 52 Aleš Kermauner, *Luknja v novcu*
- 53 Janine Mileaf and Matthew S. Witkovsky, 'Paris', in *DADA*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2006) 370
- 54 Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', 20
- 55 Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, UK/Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 2003) 498

II

The Geert Wilders Works

Series of twenty-one installations, anonymously executed on four different days in April 2005. The installations comprised a collage of pictures of the politician Geert Wilders, stapled to trees, a framed picture of Wilders, one teddy bear, candles in glass cups and white roses. The project researched the meaning of the public memorial, a phenomenon representative for the Dutch Populist Movement. This series of works referred directly to the death of politician Pim Fortuyn. At the site of the murder, in front of his house in Rotterdam, and in front of the Rotterdam City Hall, enormous public memorials were installed, consisting of different paraphernalia. Thus, the phenomenon of the public memorial acquired its meaning as intimate expression of mourning and loss,

as well as a celebration: a celebration of the popular, celebrity status obtained by politicians. This expressed itself through the far-reaching blurring between the representative of a certain political message and the message itself. During the period in which the work was executed, Wilders reported to the two counts of threat. After the public announcement of the work the artist was immediately arrested and put in jail for two days, after which the Public Prosecutor decided to indict the artist. This led to the two subsequent works: *The Geert Wilders Works — A Trial I-II* [see p. 72]. The accusation was as follows: 'threatening a member of Dutch parliament with death.'

*Photo material from OPS-dossier 2005137109
Police Archive Rotterdam Rijnmond, photographer unknown.
Rotterdam / The Hague, 2005*



The Geert Wilders Works *A Trial I–II*

Two lawsuits filed against the artist by the Public Prosecutor, after politician Geert Wilders reported two counts of threat to the Rotterdam police in reaction to the series of installations *The Geert Wilders Works* (2005) [see p. 70]. The trials were announced as public debates and sequels to the installations from 2005. For both trials invitations were printed, and at both instances the artist wrote a plea in the form of a manifesto: *Plea No. I* (2007) and *Plea No. II* (2008) [see p. 207]. During the first court case, the artist was assisted by lawyer R. van den Boogert, and during the second by lawyer J.P. Plasman.

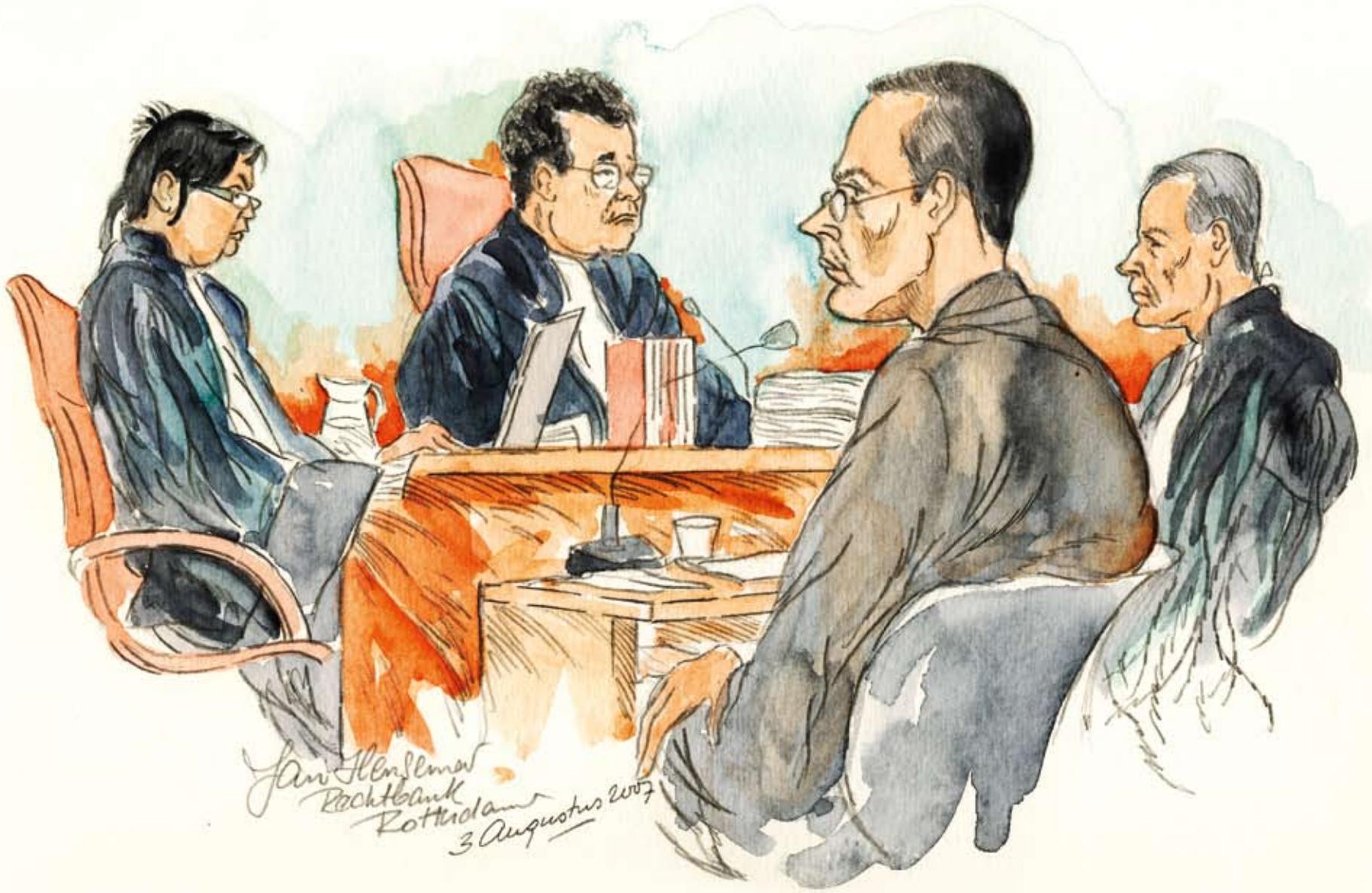
Court drawing by Jan Hensema
Invitation design by Vincent W.J. van Gerwen Oei
Cantonal Court Rotterdam, 2007
Court of The Hague, 2008



DE GEERT WILDERS WERKEN een rechtszaak II

J.H. STAAL – *aangeklaagde*
J.P. PLASMAN – *advocaat*
Advocaat-Generaal
Raadsheer, Voorzitter
Jongste Raadsheer
Oudste Raadsheer
Griffier

Woensdag *éénentwintig* mei *tweeduizendacht*,
om *twee* uur des middags
ten Gerechtshove 's-Gravenhage,
Prins Clauslaan *zestig*, 's-Gravenhage.



Jan Henselmans
Rechtbank
Rotterdam
3 Augustus 2007

Icons 2002–2006

Public memorial maintained for the duration of five days, as a cartography of the development of the Dutch Populist Movement. The work mapped Pim Fortuyn's heavy impact on the socio-political consciousness in the Netherlands after his death. Images of Fortuyn formed the centre of the installation. Beside several prints and drawings that marked the public debate during the period after the death of Fortuyn, the installation included pictures of other politicians and opinion makers, both allies and opponents.

*Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Photography by Maarten Steenhagen
'Nederlands Triptiek' ('Dutch Triptich'), Enschede, 2006*









Icons 2002–2006 *Through a glass darkly*

Memorial executed in an empty shop in southern Rotterdam. Originally, the installation *Icons 2002–2006* was supposed to be shown in public space, but after the local security co-ordinator had given a negative advice on its public exhibition one week before the opening, the municipality decided to intervene. This intervention was related to several of the images that were to be shown during the exhibition *Nederlands Triptiek* (Dutch Triptych), which included *Icons 2002–2006*. Concerning the latter work, the images at issue were the so-called ‘Danish cartoons’, which featured drawings allegedly portraying the prophet Mohammed. The fact that the work was to be shown in a neighbourhood with a large Muslim immigrant population that could possibly be offended by the work, had

triggered the municipality to intervene. Thereupon, the artists involved in the exhibition suggested that the municipal authorities would take a decision on which elements in the work had to be censored, if they would be prepared daily and publicly to discuss this decision with the artists. In case of *Icons 2002–2006*, this led to the removal of all images from the picture frames, and their replacement with black glossy photo prints. Owing to the increasing media attention for this co-operation between the artists and the municipal authorities, their representatives decided to abandon the idea of daily debates. Thereupon, the artists informed each individual visitor about the creative process underlying the work.

*Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Photos by Maarten Steenhagen*

‘Nederlands Triptiek’ (‘Dutch Triptych’), o.a.c., Rotterdam, 2006

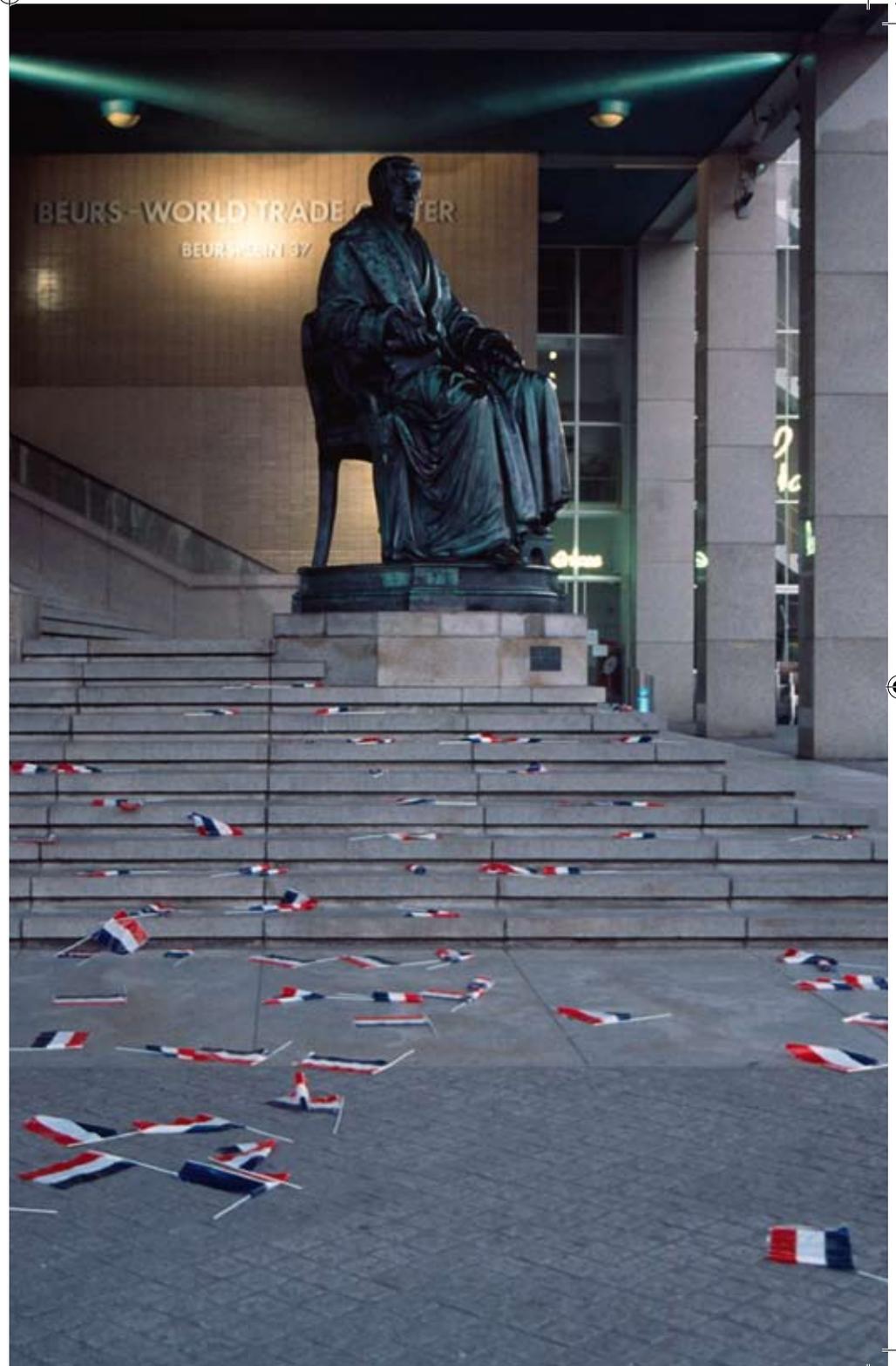




Dutch Flags I

Series of eight, anonymously executed installations, comprising different amounts of hand flags, distributed on several locations in Rotterdam. The presence of the flags suggested a past gathering of people. These 'spatial drawings' were executed on days on which no event worth mentioning occurred.

Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Rotterdam, 2005



Dutch Flags II

Series of seven hundred and fifty magnetic Dutch hand flags, placed anonymously on rows of parked cars in several neighbourhoods in Rotterdam. The flags suggest a nationalistically oriented connection between the owners of the different cars.

Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Rotterdam, 2005

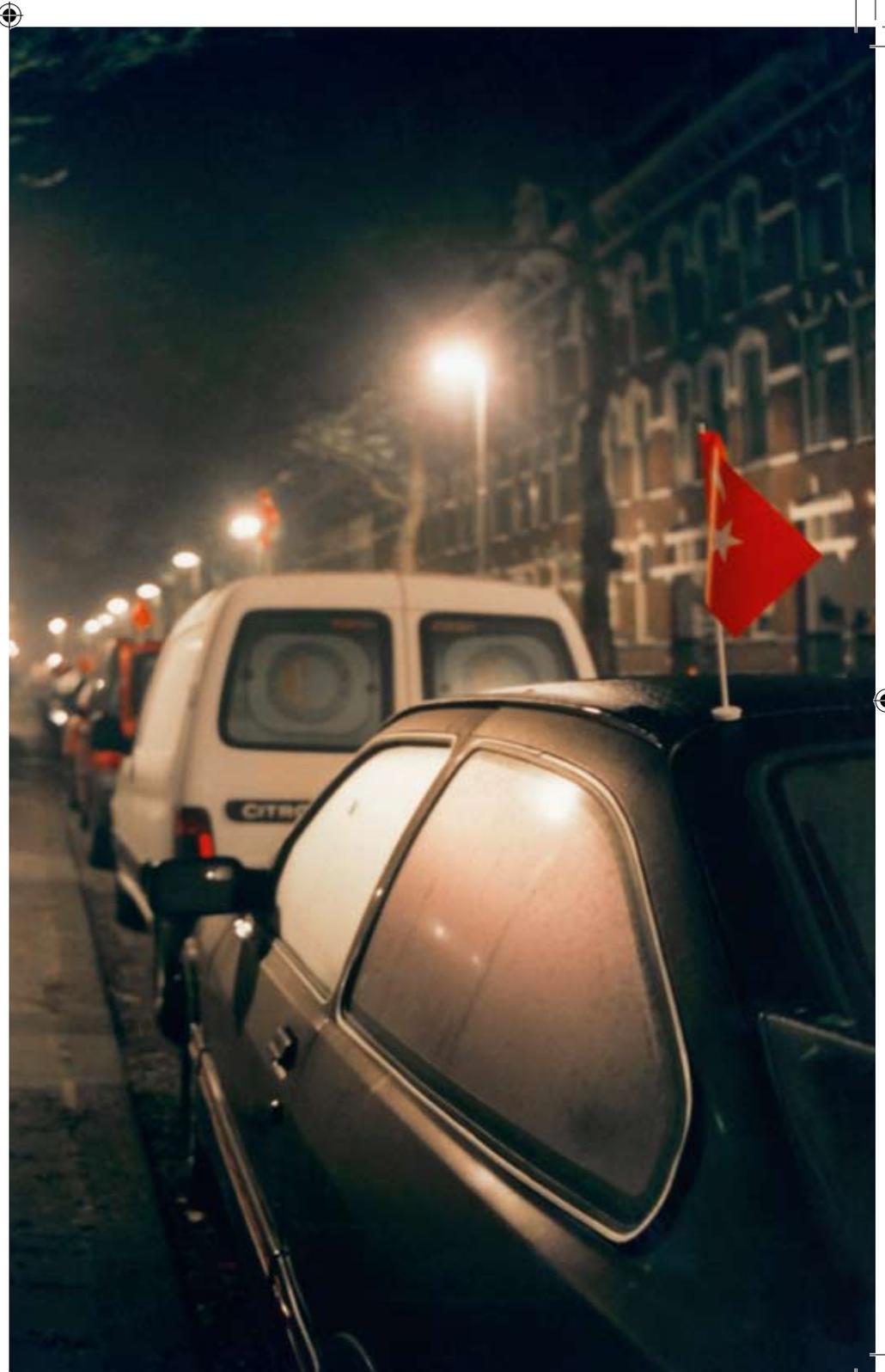




Turkish Flags

Series of seven hundred and fifty magnetic Turkish hand flags, placed anonymously on rows of parked cars in several neighbourhoods in Rotterdam. The flags suggest a nationalistically oriented connection between the owners of the different cars.

Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Rotterdam, 2005

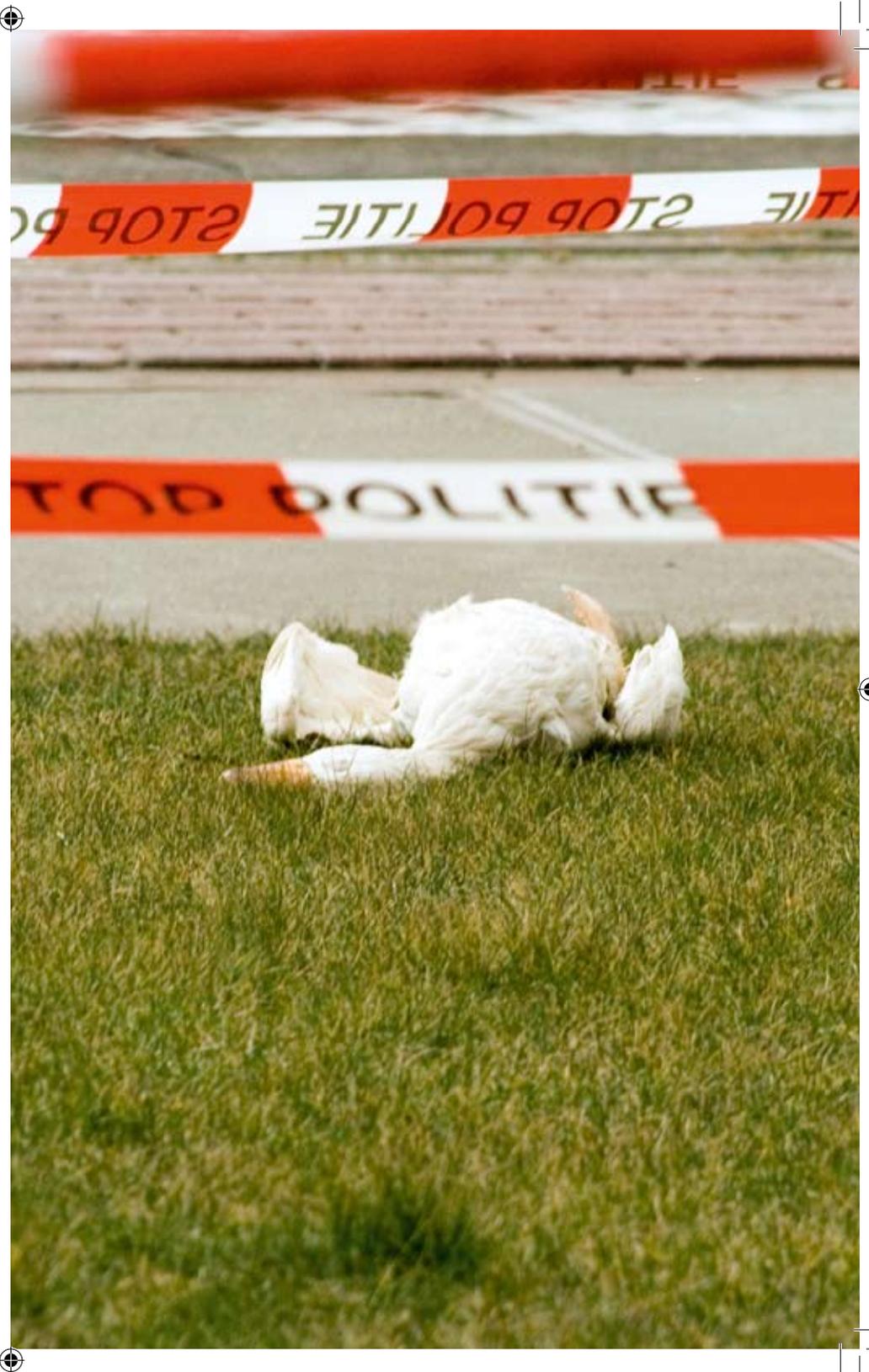




Dead Birds

Two still lives anonymously executed on two central locations in Rotterdam, consisting of several local and migratory birds species. The still lives were realized in a period of great fear for avian flu, after earlier discoveries of the virus in other countries. This fact formed the reason for the immediate intervention of several security agencies, blocking off the area with police tape. In one case, the birds were taken away, but the tape remained in place. This caused the 'invisible danger' of the virus – which first had temporarily manifested itself in the form of the birds – to take on a new appearance.

Rotterdam, 2006



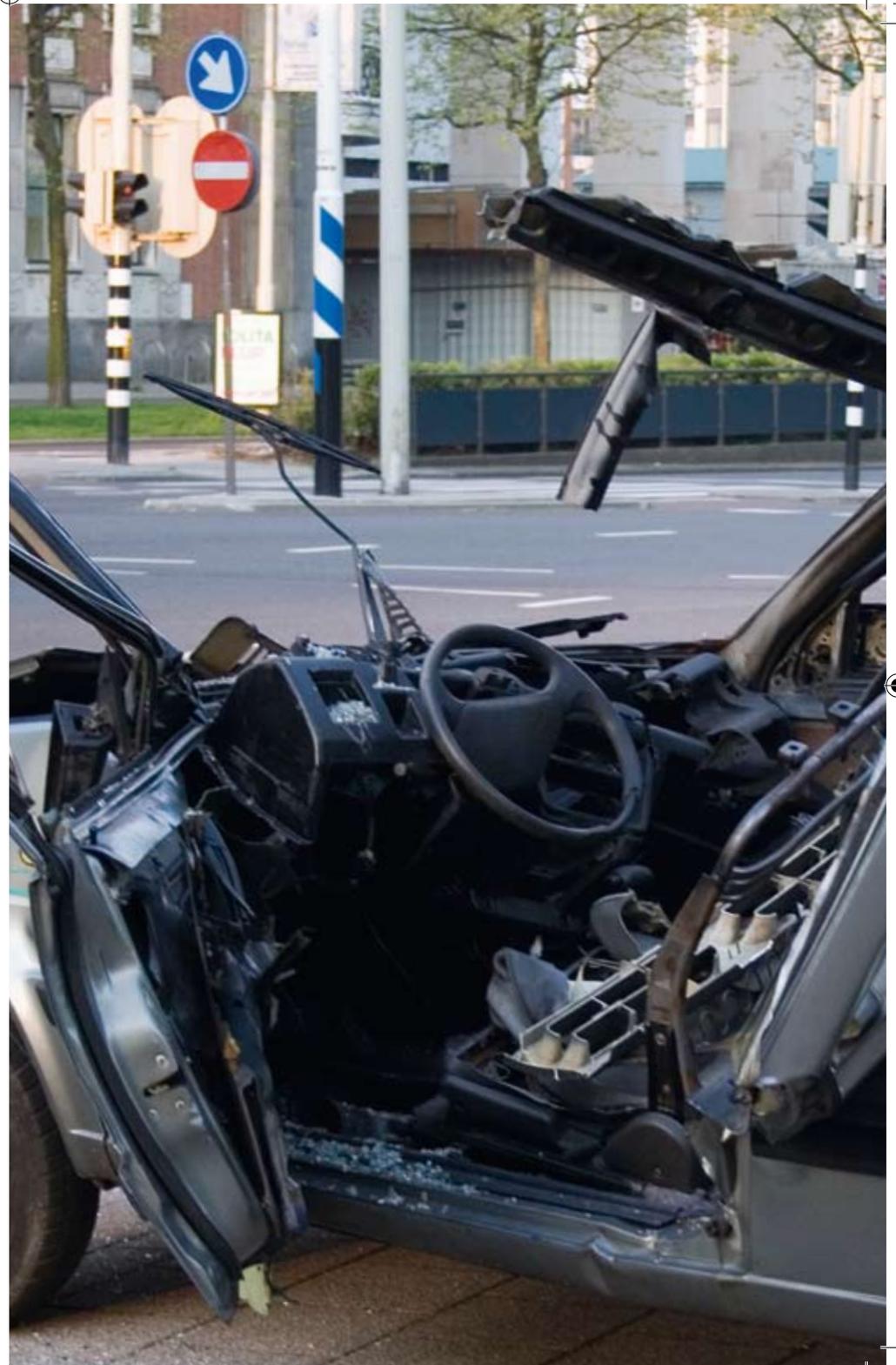




Car Bomb Studies I–II

Two anonymously executed installations modelled after cars used in car bomb attacks, placed on two central locations in Rotterdam. In this project, the mediated images of the car bomb wreckages were reduced to graphical elements, without a specific history or external features explaining whether they were used for, or were targeted by, an assault. The studies researched two environments that, though influenced by each other, never physically meet: observable reality, and reality represented by the media.

*Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Photography by Maarten Steenhagen
Rotterdam, 2006*





Car Bomb III–IV

Anatomy of a Car Bomb Wreckage

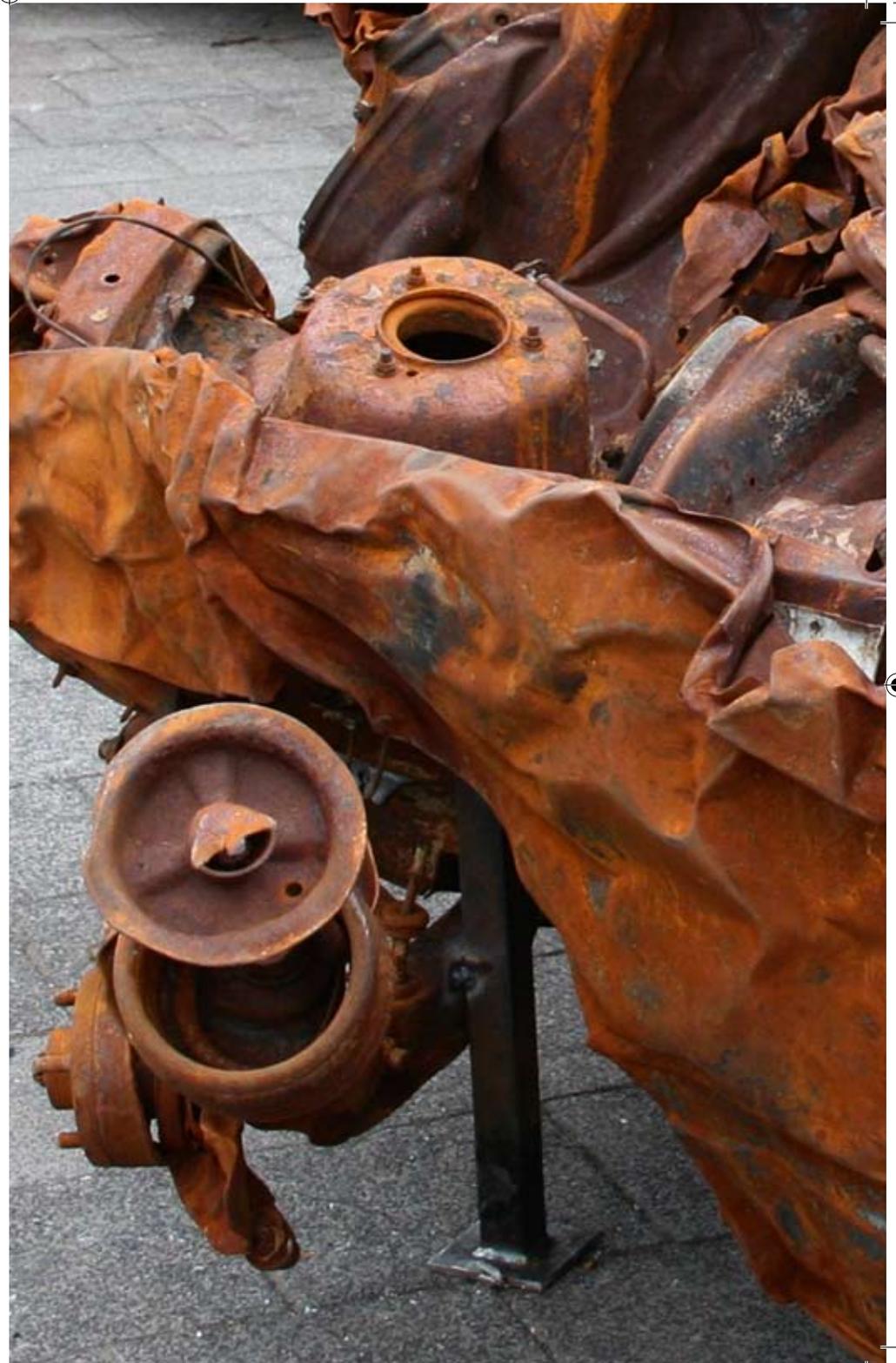
Three day exhibition of and concluding symposium about two car bomb wreckages placed in front of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam. Both car bomb wreckages were the remains of two cars used in early 2007 for an attack on Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, killing thirty-eight people. During the exhibition, each of the wreckages was placed on four metal bases so as to amplify their sculptural properties. Also, they were lit day and night. During the concluding symposium, after two introductions from the artists, several speakers were asked to interpret the wreckages within a Western context: social engineer Joost Janmaat, who was directly involved with the transportation of the wreckages from Iraq to the Netherlands, writer Chris Keulemans, writer Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

Concept in co-operation with Jack Segbars

Production in co-operation with Jack Segbars and Kasper Oostergetel

Photography by Kasper Oostergetel, Jack Segbars and Jonas Staal

'De Wereld van Witte de With', Rotterdam, 2007









Bomb Wreck Jewellery

Production of a jewellery set (necklace, bracelet, ring, brooch, earrings) produced from the remains of the two cars that were used for an attack on the Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, killing thirty-eight people. The goal was to further embed (the remains of) of the car bomb wreckage within a Western, capitalist system after the earlier presentation of the bomb wrecks in 2007 [see p. 110]. During the opening of the exhibition, the jewellery was shown by models, positioned in five grey wooden boxes. Through rectangular holes made into the boxes, the jewellery was visible, being worn by the models on the skin, without the display being disturbed by the rest of the appearance of the models. Thus the bomb wrecks, which represent a barely imaginable violent dimension, acquired an essential place within a Dutch

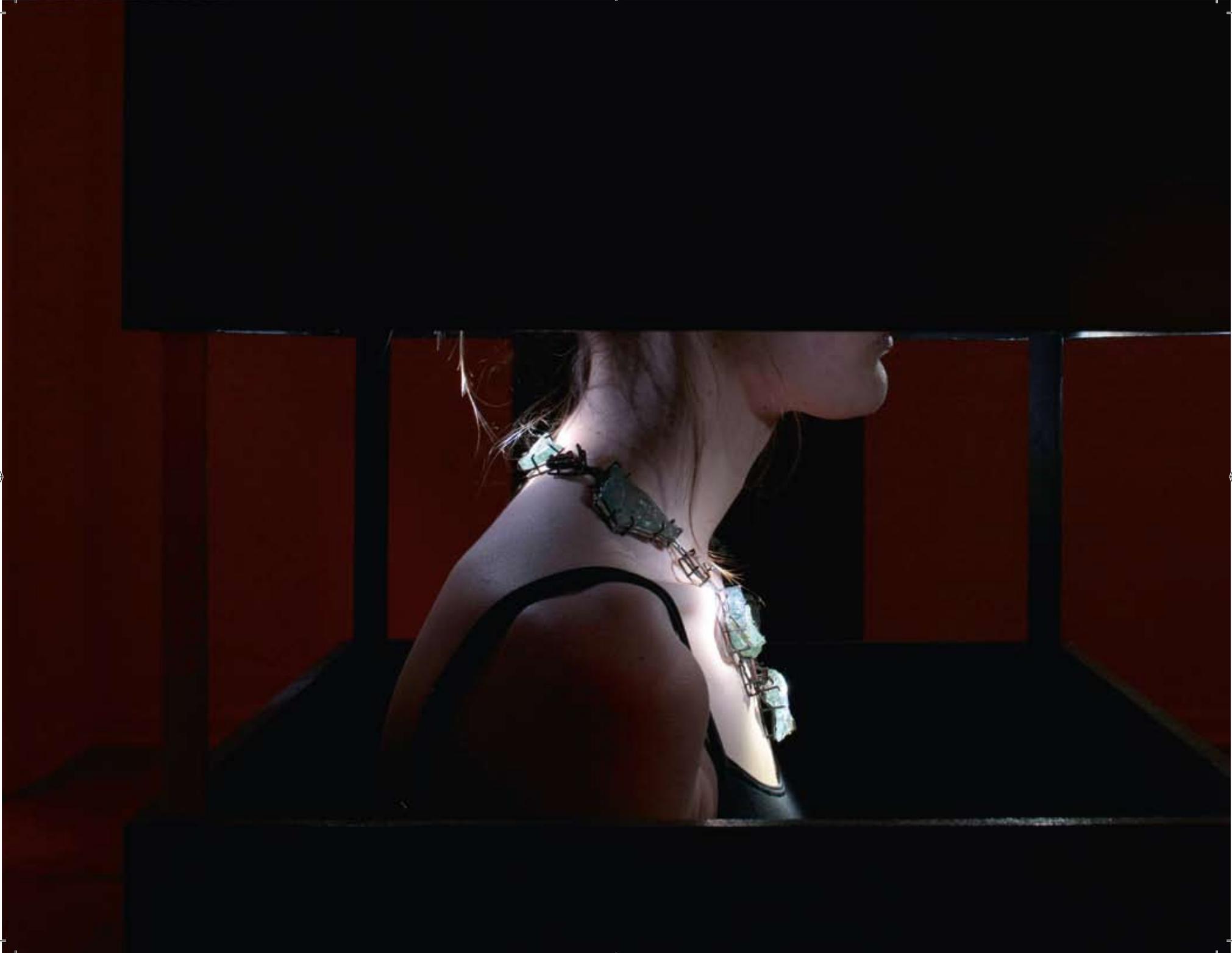
context. The jewellery set represents a synergy between economical and moral values that through its appearance symbolises both an ethical and an aesthetic conflict.

*Concept and production in co-operation with Jiska Hartog and Michiel Henneman
Set photography by Folkert Datema and Hein Mulder
Exhibition photography by Ruud Ploeg
NP3, Groningen, 2009*









How to Make History Mine I–II

Two bloodstains from photos in the media, reconstructed with the artist's blood. The project treated visual art as an extension of the press: as a potential framework in which not only the subject of transmission is discussed, but also the process of transmission itself. This was amplified within the artworks by reconstructing the bloodstains only to the extent that the images inform us about them: the 'end' – the edge – of the picture was literally replicated in the work. All objects present on the photo which had been touched by blood – i.c. the sandals – were represented. The perspective of the image, in which one sandal appears larger than the other, was preserved.

*Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
De Verschijning, Tilburg, 2007*





US Army Torture Devices

Installation as the result of a research on the relation between torturing techniques as deployed in detention centre Guantánamo Bay, and elements from the Western clubbing scene. The installation comprised a stroboscope, a constant loop of music by Christina Aguilera, two binders on lecterns, one containing images of pin-up models and another containing images of victims from the attack on the Twin Tower on September 11, 2001. Also, a free publication was available containing over fifty pages with excerpts from the interrogation of Mohamed al-Kahtani, who was held captive in Guantánamo Bay in connection to the 9/11 attacks. The elements in the installation corresponded to the pop and clubbing scene products employed during the interrogation so as to torture al-Kahtani, like the music by

Aguilera, the stroboscope and the pictures of pin-up models. Thus, the exhibition, which was only open on Friday and Saturday night from 10 PM to 1 AM, addressed the ideological tensions underlying apparently neutral Western consumption products.

*Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Photography by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Jonas Staal
Galerie Masters, Amsterdam, 2007*



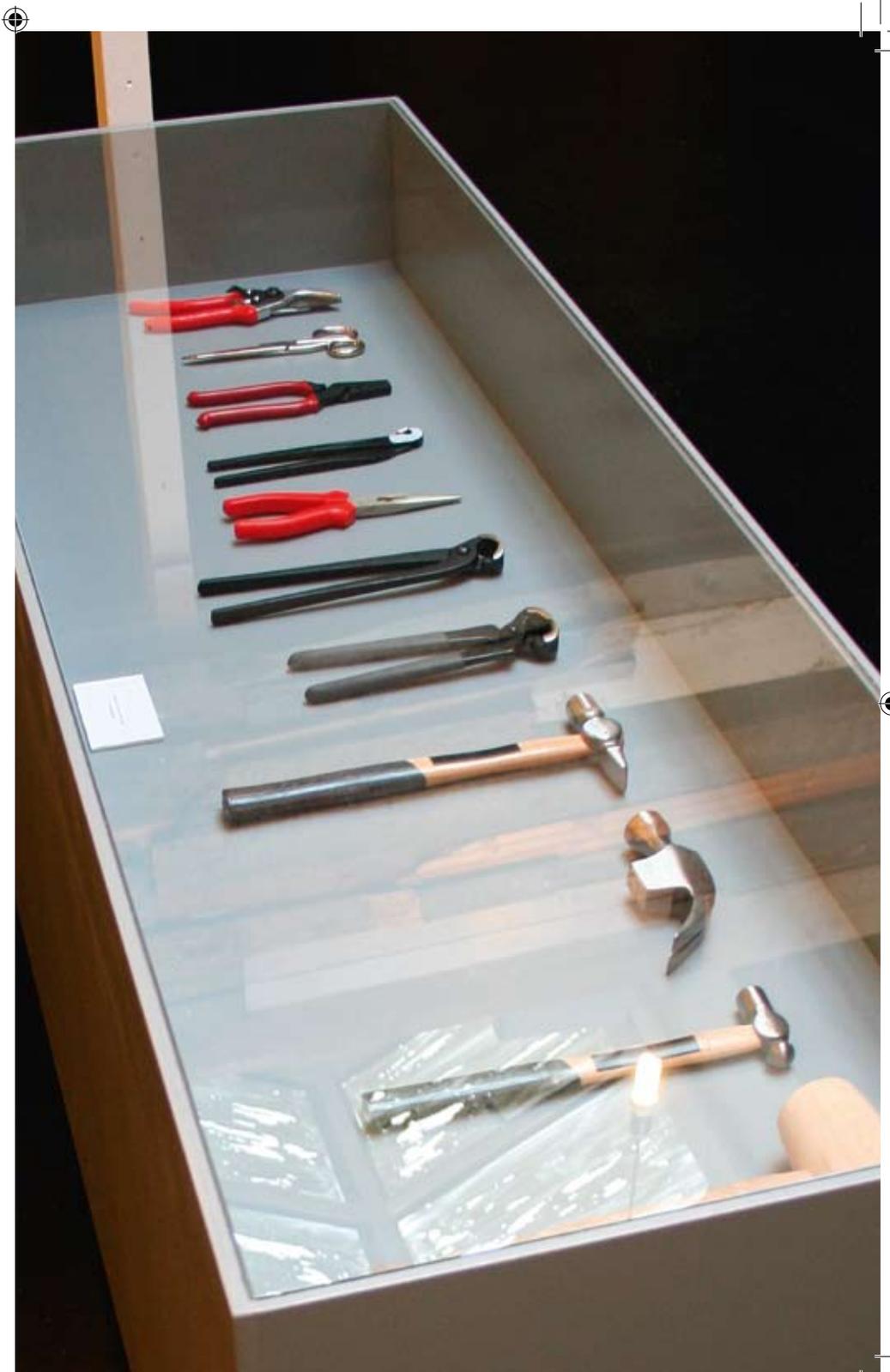
MY SHAME CAUSES ME TO LOOK AT THE FLOOR



Al-Qa'ida Torture Devices

Research on the relation between torture devices used by Al-Qa'ida, and household appliances exported by the West. These appliances were selected according to a hand drawn torture manual found in 2007 by American soldiers in a so-called 'Al-Qa'ida safe house' in Iraq. At the same location, two prisoners were found who presumably had been tortured according to the methods described in the manual. The selected products were exhibited accompanied by the titles and usage as mentioned in the manual, such as 'drilling hands' in case of the drill, and 'eye removal' in case of the awl. Thus, the exhibition addressed the ideological tensions underlying apparently neutral western consumption products.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei Roodkapje, Rotterdam, 2007





Against Irony (*English version*)

Text engraved on four fine-grained Belgian blue-stone plates. In this pamphlet, the artists emphatically oppose any appeal to irony within both artistic and theoretical discourses. Irony is equated with the unwillingness to directly specify certain thematic, or to straightforwardly attack certain symbolic orders, and remaining in gratuitous observations, deprived of any real standpoint: bereft of an accountable position. This pamphlet [see p. 219] formed the foundation of a series of principles developed together with Van Gerven Oei.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Permanent loan to Stroom Den Haag
'Since We Last Spoke About Monuments', Stroom Den Haag, 2008



IRONY is a *deliberate strategy* intended merely to create distance, merely to be able to look the other way, merely to avoid viewing the essence of visual art, literature, theory or opinion — as a creator or spectator — in its direct form.

IRONY is a *tactic employed by the lazy, cowardly and idle*. it is an attempt, a wish, not to be held accountable for what is said, written or done: it was after all intended *aloofly*, with a pale smile, a grotesque slight curling of the lips which feigns insight, but in actuality expresses nothing more than *inability*: inability to make a statement and assume full responsibility for doing so.

IRONY is an expression of fear and, at the same time, a gratuitous display of miserable intelligence. It stands, on the one hand, for the wish to remain a spectator, the suggestion of neutrality, and, on the other hand, for the will to nonetheless be recognized as having an opinion or a taking a stance. It is a facade: the affirmation of not wanting to face the complex network that, in a few brave cases, one dares to call reality.

IRONY is a diversion that heaves improper space for the observer to distance himself, space that the observer fills with ironic reflection which overshadows any substantial contemplation. It is the means used in approaching a matter so as not to be subjected to its full implications: out of fear, out of laziness, out of boredom.

IRONY is a wishful fancy of withdrawing a meaning without exposing oneself to the consequences of a transparent gesture. It is a wish to be able to look the other way, merely to avoid viewing the essence of visual art, literature, theory or opinion — as a creator or spectator — in its direct form.

IRONY is a facade to minimize the pressure of potential meaning and suggest it at the same time. It is a wish to be able to look the other way, merely to avoid viewing the essence of visual art, literature, theory or opinion — as a creator or spectator — in its direct form.

Forty Years of Boredom 1968–2008

Room 1—Follow Us or Die

Film pamphlet providing a framework for contemporary resistance, in relation to a film by Guy Debord and the so-called *high school shooters*. As an extension of Guy Debord's notion of the 'society of the spectacle', the artists introduced the concept of the digitalization of society, in which Debord's vision was claimed still to harbour a sense of 'innocence' and sentimentality. Whereas Debord could unashamedly speak about labour as 'alienating', this cannot be clearly recognized anymore by our current generation. The detachment that Debord discussed in relation to labour and the targets of production, were extended toward the domain of the individual: the 'Second Life' principle, in which reality as such as disavowed for its lack in consumability.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Exhibition photography by Casper Rila
Editing by Michel Ligtenbarg
'Redefine the Enemy', Tent., Rotterdam, 2008



Forty Years of Boredom 1968 – 2008

Room 2 — Citations

Two recited texts on headphones: *Natural Selector's Manifesto* (2007) by Pekka-Eric Auvinen, read by Staal; *JC-001-026343/4* (1999) by Eric Harris, read by Van Gerven Oei. In *Citations*, the artists appropriated the rhetoric of the *high school shooters* in relation to their own film pamphlet *Follow Us or Die* (2008). In doing so, the artists claimed a direct connection between the resistance of the *high school shooters* and their own resistance, which they identified as 'searching for the impossible way out.'

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Exhibition photography by Casper Rila
'Redefine the Enemy', Tent., Rotterdam, 2008



Forty Years of Boredom 1968–2008 *Room 3 — Against Irony (Dutch version)*

Text engraved on four fine-grained Belgian blue-stone plates. In this pamphlet, the artists emphatically oppose any appeal to irony within both artistic and theoretical discourses. Irony is equated with the unwillingness to directly specify certain thematic, or to straightforwardly attack certain symbolic orders, and remaining in gratuitous observations, deprived of any real standpoint: bereft of an accountable position. This pamphlet [see p. 219] formed the foundation of a series of principles developed together with Van Gerven Oei.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Exhibition photography by Casper Rila
Collection of Don't Talk Let's Talk, Voorburg
'Redefine the Enemy', Tent., Rotterdam, 2008



Forty Years of Boredom 1968–2008

Room 4—Réfutation de tous les jugements...

Film pamphlet by Guy Debord commenting on the reaction to his previous film *La société du spectacle* (The Society of the Spectacle, 1973). In *Réfutation de tous les jugements...* (Refutation of All Judgments..., 1975), Debord addressed the impossibility of the viewer's 'objective appraisal' of his 1973 film. Thus, he fractures the ideal of the viewer's false commitment: precisely the impossibility to 'understand', the impossibility of 'identifying' or being 'involved' with the art work, social movements or politics, creates the link between producer and consumer. In the exhibition, the film was shown in its original language, French, on a pedestal around 3.5 meters high, which made it impossible for the visitor to see the film as a whole. In this sense, Debord doesn't occupy the role of exhibiting 'artist',

but rather as a marker of critical, activist discourse. Thus, his conception of the (impossibility of) engagement acquired a literal, visual dimension.

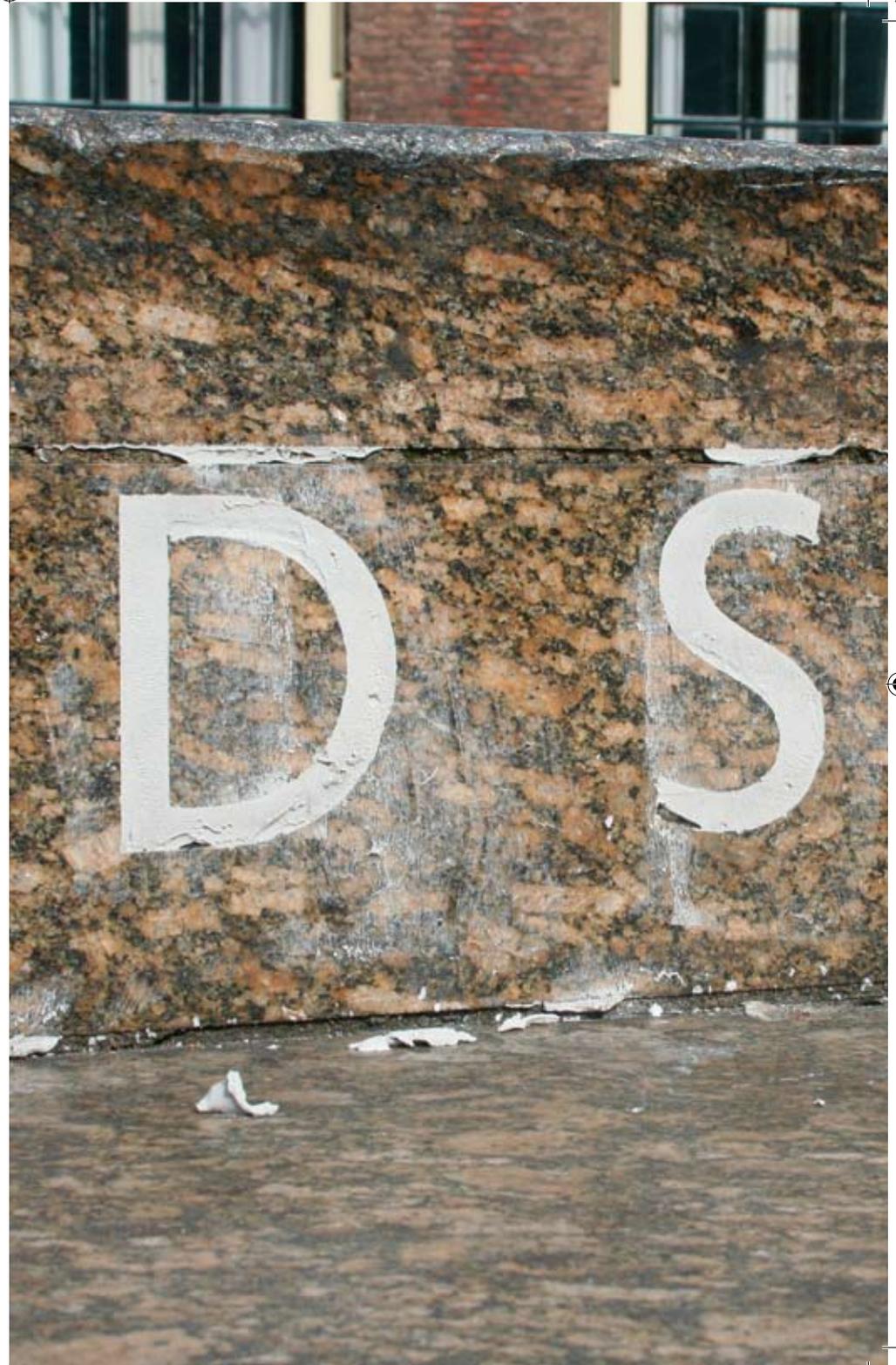
Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Exhibition photography by Casper Rila
'Redefine the Enemy', Tent., Rotterdam, 2008



Plastering of the Dutch Constitution (Article 1)

Public intervention concerning the *Monument for Article 1 of the Constitution*, located on the Hofplaats in The Hague. Article 1 of the Dutch constitution – the principle of non-discrimination – had already been often discussed, especially in relation to the treatment of immigrants from non-Western countries. The act of plastering had a double function: on the one hand, the inscription became clearly visible for the first time. On the other hand, the action demonstrated the issues concerning this article through the accentuation of the fact that it is provisionally, and in this case literally, filled up. It is an article that was held to be inviolable as such, but at the same time was frequently modified in usage and interpretation, so as to treat equal cases unequally.

Concept in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Execution by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Den Haag, 2007







Populist Performances I *Teen Porn Destruction*

Performance executed by the artist concerning the ambivalent attitude of the press and the Dutch population toward the so-called 'paedophile party' (PNVD: Party for Charity, Liberty and Diversity). The performance, in which a large collection of so-called 'teen porn' – legal pornography in which the actresses seem under age – was destroyed, formulated a critique on the inability to transpose the discussion of legal age to the 'regular' segments of the porn industry.

Photography by Sjoerd Oudman
Groningen, 2007



Populist Performances II

Chained to a Statue of Pim Fortuyn

Performance executed by the artist, in which he had himself chained to a statue of Pim Fortuyn, located in the centre of Rotterdam and commemorating the murdered politician. The performance treated Pim Fortuyn as a beacon of nostalgia within contemporary politics. The action of chaining and 'being chained' expressed the longing for an ideal, but also the inability to accept that this already irrevocably belonged to the past.

Photography by Sjoerd Oudman
Rotterdam, 2007



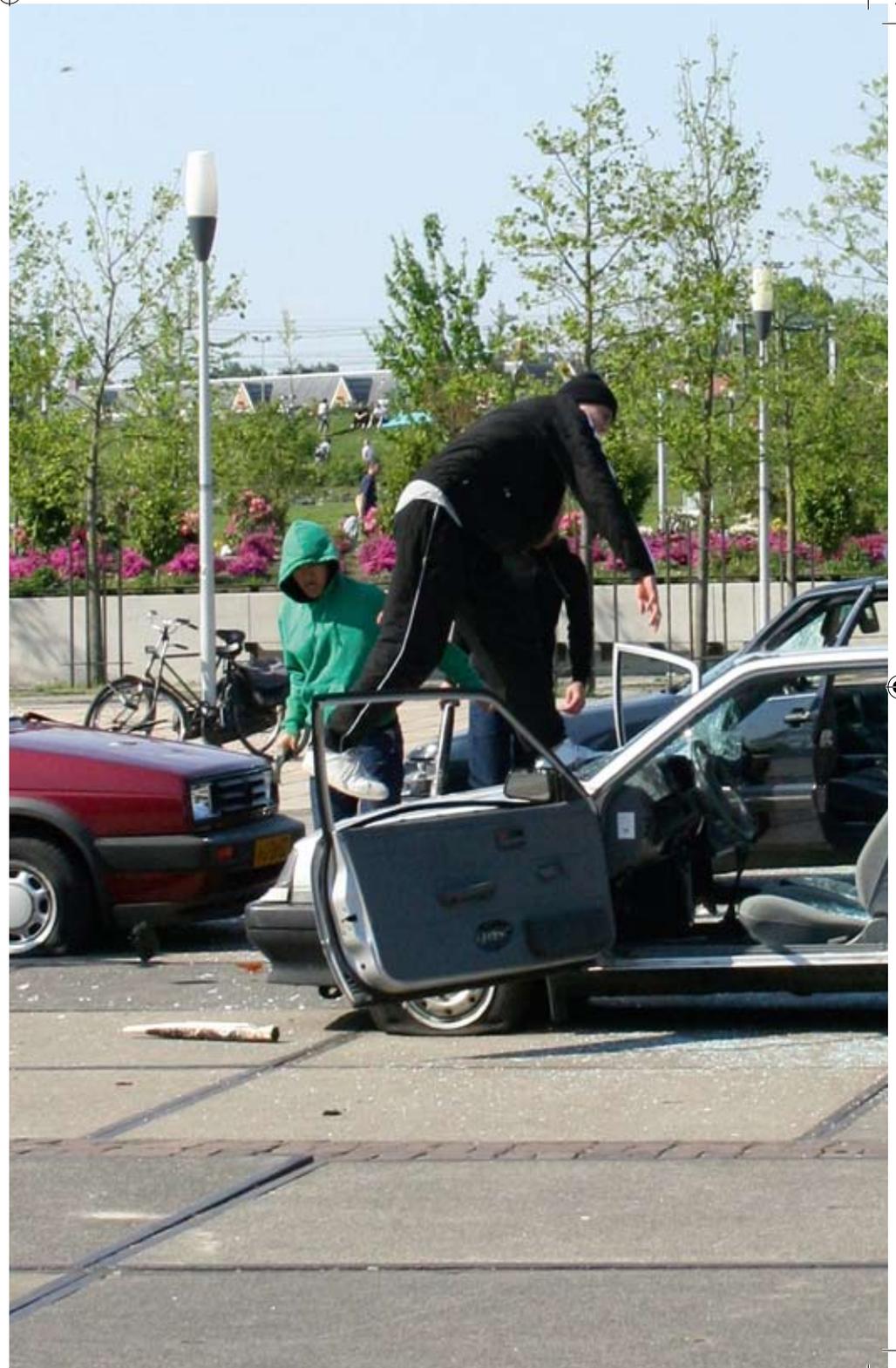
Vandalizations I

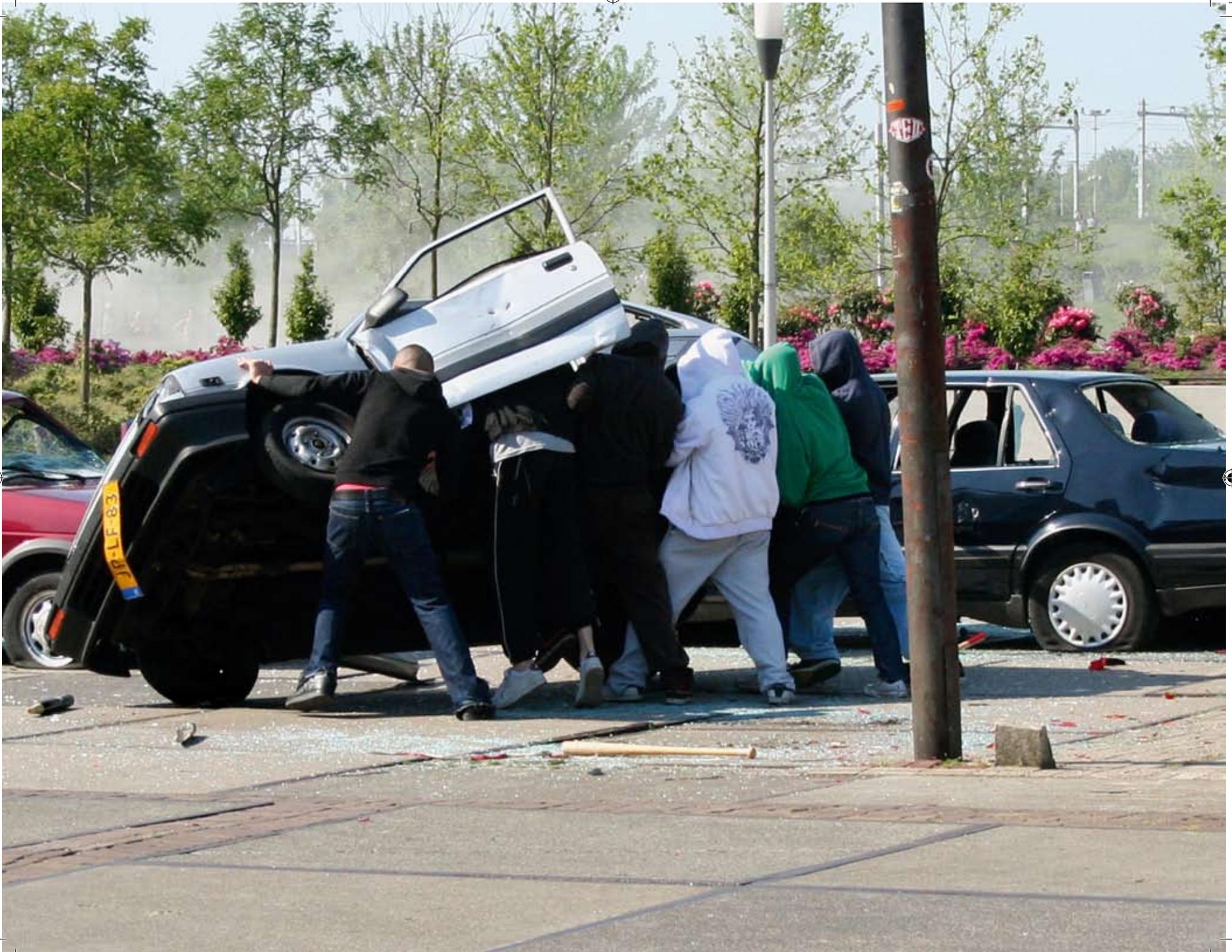
Proposal Biennial Kunstvlaai Opening Ceremony

The staged event *Vandalizations* took place during the opening of the biennial art manifestation Kunstvlaai API, and consisted of six so-called *hangroepjongeren* (loitering youths) and actors, who vandalized three parked cars within a timeframe of around eight minutes, using a range of different tools. The performance was developed in reaction to the many art works that had been vandalized by loitering youths during the previous editions of Kunstvlaai API. During the art show, the remains of the staged event functioned as a *hangplek* (loitering site), thus averting the attention from the other art works. The result was, that after the opening ceremony during which the cars had been vandalized, they were additionally damaged and sprayed with graffiti. The event was proposed to the organiza-

tion of the Kunstvlaai API as a biennial opening ceremony.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Kunstvlaai API, Amsterdam, 2008







Vandalizations II

Installation placed on a central intersection in Venlo. The work was developed after reports of an increase of civil violence against ambulance personnel. During New Year's Eve 2008-2009, ambulances had to be escorted by the police to protect them from the people they were supposed to help. An increase in this type of reports has led to a growing criticism on the level of security in the Netherlands. But until the realization of this installation, due to a lack of photo and video registrations of ambulance personnel being attacked, no image had been available to actually represent these sentiments.

*Production in co-operation with Kasper Oostergetel
Photography by Peter de Ronde
Different Places Different Stories, Venlo, 2009*





Monument for the Chased-Off Citizens of Rotterdam

The sketching phase for this monument was completed based on several statements by Leefbaar Rotterdam leader Ronald Sørensen. In a reaction to a proposal by PvdA council member Zeki Baran for a monument for the immigrant worker, to be placed in the Afrikaander neighbourhood in Rotterdam, he stated that 'on balance, immigrants from Turkey and Morocco have cost the Dutch society more than they have contributed to it.' He continued by stating that it would be better to erect a statue for the citizens of Rotterdam, who had rebuilt the city after World War II with 'a natural work ethic': 'A bronze statue of a dockworker and his family, looking alienated at the surroundings from which they have been chased off.' Based on these statements and further specifications

provided by Sørensen in an interview with him and Leefbaar Rotterdam spokesman for youth, education and culture Anton Molenaar, the design for the monument was realized and discussed with the party representatives. Together, the interview [see p. 213] and the 3D animation formed a two-channel video installation.

Commissioned by Ronald Sørensen

3D model and animation design by Sjoerd Oudman

Interview in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

Editing by Michel Ligtenbarg



A photograph showing two men seated at a wooden table in an indoor setting. The man on the right, with white hair and glasses, is wearing a brown jacket and is gesturing with his right hand while speaking. The man on the left, with dark hair, is wearing a dark suit and a red tie, and is looking down with his hand to his face. On the table are several items, including a white cup on a saucer, a clear plastic cup, and a small blue packet. The background features a window with light coming through and vertical blinds.

**it should be those people that worked their ass off
for this city after the war.**

Replaced Street Signs

Anonymous executed intervention, during which street signs in the Schilderswijk (Painter's neighbourhood) in The Hague were replaced by street signs translated into Arabic. This action was performed as an extension of the Chinese street signs placed by the municipality in the adjacent Chinatown of The Hague. By implementing this already existing intervention by the municipality in another neighbourhood (where Arabic would be the dominant language), the project reflected on the level of tolerance towards (originally) 'minority groups'. Strictly speaking, Chinese immigrants are not much better integrated into Dutch society than Arabic or Turkish ones. Yet there had been no discussion of the replacement of the street signs in Chinatown, whereas a similar interven-

tion was unthinkable in the Schilderswijk. Thus, the project addressed the inconsistency with which the Dutch state treats its cultural minorities, and the implicit moral judgement underlying this behaviour.

*Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Translations by Willem Flinterman
Den Haag, 2008*



حديقة عامة تنيرس

داويد تنيرس الاصغر، 1610-1690 م، رسام.

شارع بولس بوتر
بوسطن ۱۰۰۰۰



Pim Fortuynplein

Re-enactment of a civil action performed by Jaap Roepius in 2002, protesting against the Rotterdam city council's refusal of a request by Leefbaar Rotterdam representative Dries Mosch to change the name of the Hofplein (a central square in Rotterdam) to Pim Fortuynplein (Pim Fortuyn Square). Documentation of the re-enactment, together with an actually produced street sign and accompanying letter, was sent to Roepius and Mosch.

*Based on a picture from the Rotterdam Municipal Archive
Design by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Rotterdam, 2009*



Shaka Zoeloestraat

Realization of a proposal by Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) alderman Robbert Baruch from Rotterdam, who, in 2006, intended to change the street names in the Afrikaanderwijk (Afrikaner neighbourhood) which referred to Dutch colonial history. He suggested renaming them with the 'new African heroes'; for example, he intended to change the Paul Krugerstraat (Paul Kruger Street) into Shaka Zoeloestraat (Shaka Zulu Street). Documentation of the realization, together with an actually produced street sign and accompanying letter, was sent to Baruch.

*Based on a picture from the Rotterdamse Courant
Design by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Rotterdam, 2009*



Stalinlaan

Restoration of the sign Stalinlaan (Stalin Lane), which had been changed in 1956 into Vrijheidslaan (Freedom Lane) after the invasion of the People's Republic of Hungary by the Soviet army. Documentation of the restoration, together with an actually produced street sign and accompanying letter, was sent to the borough Amsterdam-Zuid.

*Based on a picture from the Amsterdam Municipal Archive
Design by Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Amsterdam, 2009*



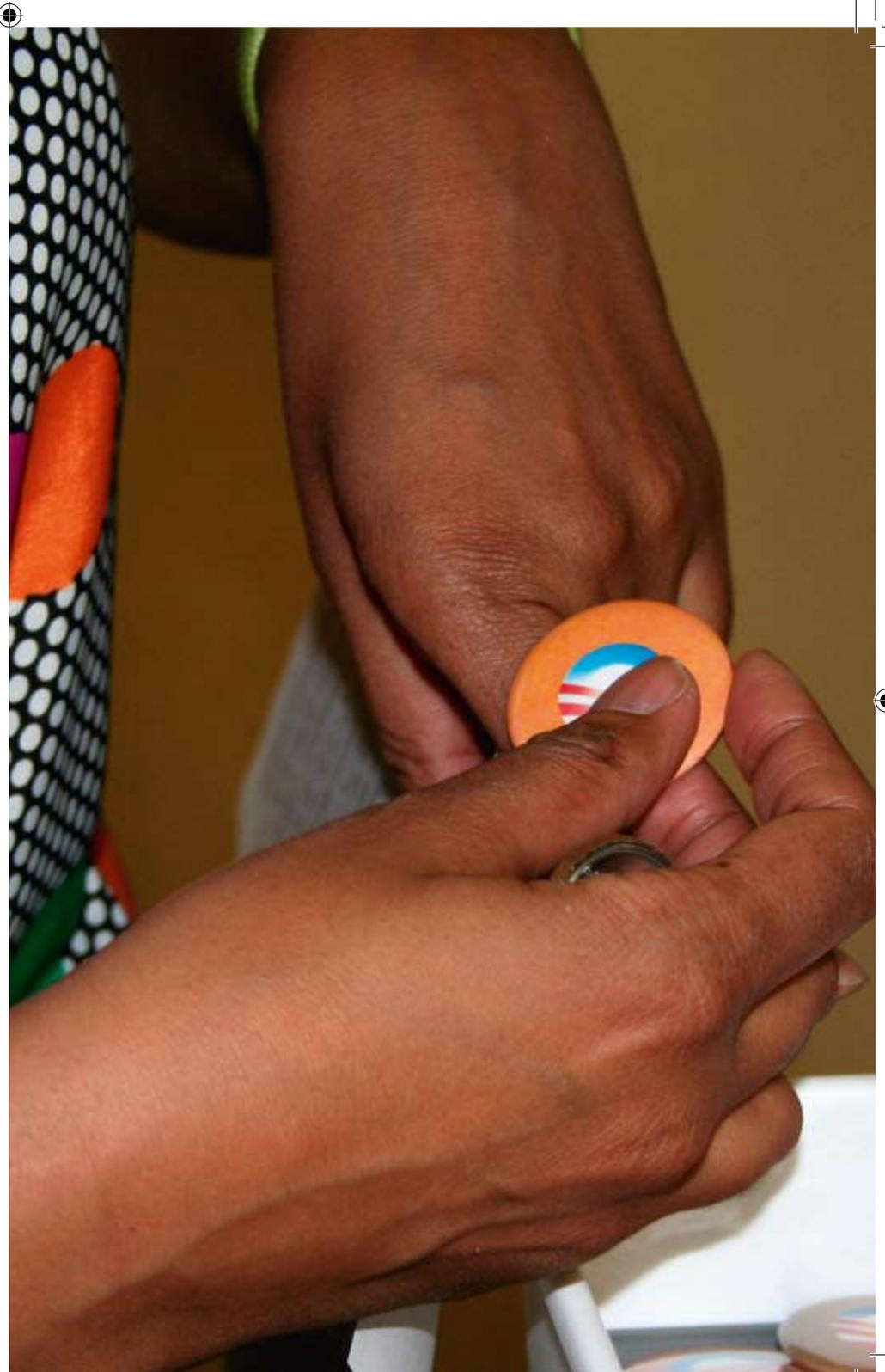
The Barack Obama Project

Series of one thousand unique pins featuring cut-outs from a thousand different pictures of Barack Obama's skin.

The pins were offered to visitors of the Obama campaign Chicago headquarters on the night of the Pennsylvania elections for the Democratic presidential candidate between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. This project was the second in a triptych concerning the mediation of the so-called 'race issue': the persisting race and class difference in America, the role of photographic representation of the Democratic nominee Barack Obama in relation to the O.J. Simpson case and the controversies relating to a Clinton campaign TV ad depicting him 'more black' than he would 'actually' be. The project treated photography from an ethical viewpoint, as a statement,

and not from a 'neutral' technical perspective as 'objective registration'. By allowing individual visitors to choose a free pin, they were faced with a dilemma similar to the one faced by Obama's photographers: the choice for one specific picture is comparable to the choice for one pin conforming to the individual supporter's image of Obama. For example, African American visitors often made their selection based on their own skin colour.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Chicago, 2008





I love Mao Zedong / I hate the Dalai Lama

I love Mao Zedong / I hate the Dalai Lama researched the possibilities for creating critical models within the context of the People's Republic of China. In the 798 Art District, Beijing, 250 T-shirts were distributed on which the anagrams 'OOZE AMONG LIVED' (I love Mao Zedong), and 'HAIL DAHLIA EAT MEAT' (I hate the Dalai Lama) were printed. Both T-shirts also featured the address of a website with the same sentence as URL (www.oozeamonglived.com and www.haildahliaeatmeat.com). The central topic of research was the mechanics of *double-speak*: by communicating the two statements in such a distorted way, a potential critical distance appeared 'inside' the statements itself. By introducing this distance within two statements, which fundamentally emphasized the opinion of the Chinese

authorities, a critical tension appeared within them.

Concept and production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Beijing, 2008



Democratism

An Introduction to Five Models of Civil Protest

Five individual re-enactments of more and less known historical protests from the Western world, in which all slogans have been translated into Japanese. The selection of the actions was based on the measure in which they were able to reflect on their own form of appearance. Several Japanese performers, who were also handing out flyers containing a short description and documentation of the original protest, performed the actions. Thus, the work formulated a critique on the institutionalized Western mass protests as well a reflection on the state of democratism as it was implemented in Japanese society.

*Production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Tokyo, 2009*





The Plays of Cho Seung-Hui

Richard McBeef

A performance of the theatre piece *Richard McBeef*, written by the Korean American Cho Seung-Hui (1984-2007) and executed as truthful to the script as possible. At the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), on April 16, 2007, Cho shot thirty-two students and wounded twenty-five others, before committing suicide. His act lines up in the series of *high school shootings*, of which the beginning can be marked by the so-called 'Columbine High School Massacre' on April 20, 1999, perpetrated by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. During this one time event in the municipal theatre of Rotterdam, the piece was performed twice. Once with the audience on the stage, surrounding the decor, and once with the audience seated in the theatre hall. During the intermission

Concept in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
Production in co-operation with Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei
and Productiehuis Rotterdam

Performance by Wunderbaum (Matijs Jansen, Walter Bart, Maartje Remmers)
Rotterdamse Schouwburg, Rotterdam, 2010





Art, Property of Politics

Exhibition, documentary, and publication concerning a selection of works from the art collections of the political parties represented in the Rotterdam City Council. The aim was to provide an insight into the relation between the art works and the ideological bases of the different parties. Departing from their different backgrounds, political parties intend to develop their own art and culture policies. However, they all agree on one single point: Dutch politics is not supposed to exert any influence on the 'content' of the visual arts. The role of politics always lies – in its own words – in the protection of the 'freedom' and 'independence' of the arts, even if it formulates additional criteria – demands – for government support. The project *Art, Property of Politics* showed the untenability of this position; politics

had and still has an ideological interest in the role played by the arts in our society.

Photography by Lotte Stekelenburg
(Marianne Smits: 'Brothers and Sisters', *Leefbaar Rotterdam* collection)
'The People United Will Never Be Defeated', Tent., Rotterdam, 2010



Politiek Kunstbezit
Art, Property of Politics

Jonas Staal



Appendix

Plea II
Rather a threat than a marginalized pawn

Jonas Staal

Today, I am not speaking as a suspect, potential threat, or activist. Today, I am speaking as Jonas Staal, visual artist and pamphleteer. And what is happening here, your honours, is my work. 93

Being a visual artist, I am conscious about the juridical system, but this does not entail that this system also immediately determines the framework in which I decide to make one or the other consideration concerning the realization of my projects. More and more, I have become convinced of the necessity to consider analyzes within the context of my work as an artist, which question and address the juridical system as a guiding structure. 94

If I would pit each action or statement against the borders of the law, this would inevitably entail a type of self-censorship; it would make my artistic calling a willing prey to the fiction that we call democracy: a system that communicates freedom and free choice as its most important foundations, yet does seem to able to deal with choices or actions that question it on an essential level and confront its main principles. 95

Such an unequal relation between the artist and the law would mean a relation of full instrumentalization: only constrained by the authorized margins of this framework, where the spectre of the 'freedom of speech' restlessly dwells, I would be able to move. I would only be tolerated within the territory where I would have no influence on the organization of the public domain. In other words, I would be pacified. In serving the constitutional state, I would assist in maintaining the illusion that it supports criticism, which the voice of artists and writers would 'matter'. But what does this public space mean, when only a few institutionalized players claim a monopoly to it? What does democracy or the so-called 'freedom of speech' mean, when they are merely used as political play, in which the user – the artist – is a mere pawn in the game of policy making? 96



97 The discussion of the form and the use of the public domain occupies a central position within my work – be it about public space itself, or about the frameworks in which citizens can express themselves in discussions or debates. Taking, or having someone take, this possibility away from me owing to external pressure –like the private emotions of a member of parliament– means disapproving of my responsibility as an artist. In that case, I would prefer to be considered a threat, rather than a tolerated, and therefore marginalized, pawn.

98 Within the line of argument that I have expressed, this trial has inevitably become part of my work. This made it necessary to announce and document both the previous court case in Rotterdam, and this case [in The Hague] as my art work; as a performance, a happening; as a part of the populist theatre that has been staged during the past few years and is still being staged in all its majesty, owing to a sentimental politics, of which Representative Wilders presents himself to me as the infallible leader.

99 Through *The Geert Wilders Works*, twenty-one installations produced in 2005 [see p. 70], I have expressed the personality cult within politics; a fundamental blurring of the line between the representative of a political message, and the message itself. This is a development for which I consider representative the so-called public memorial, which first was established in its current form following the death of Princess Diana in 1997. From the catholic context in which the public memorial originates, these installations of candles, flowers and all kinds of paraphernalia are associated with a ritual in which death and mourning occupy a central place. It is a ritual corresponding to the cult of threats, which currently surrounds public figures, in which MP Wilders is holding an iconic position. In our current times, ever since the rise of what I have called the Dutch Populist Movement, starting in 2001 when politician Pim Fortuyn participated in both the Rotterdam municipal elections and the national elections, these public memorials have equally become expressions of popular culture, and the cult and celebrity status achieved by politicians and other public figures. Owing to this development, their personal histories and emotions acquire a role equal in importance to their political position. Other aspects play an important role in this series of works too, such as the



break with the taboo to publicly speculate about the death of public individuals such as MP Wilders, as well as the intimacy of the installations which represents the personal relation and admiration of citizens for the almost ‘chivalrous’ position of MP Wilders. Therefore, I consider these installations both relevant within an artistic context, as a research about the historical transition that the public memorial has undergone as image and metaphor, and relevant within a socio-political context, in which my work publicly occupies an analytical position, where the power of the media and politics over the organization and maintenance of public space is analysed, and, when necessary, re-articulated.

Nothing is more characteristic for the current state of our politics, than the fact that a series of art works addressing exactly this condition, result in a lawsuit instigated by the personal emotions of a public representative, leading to a willing instrumentalization of the Public Prosecutor to populist ends. Why, do I ask you, am I even informed about the personal status of MP Wilders? Why do I know, beside the fact that he has publicly revealed that he lives under permanent threats, of his travels in the Middle East, the cigarette brand he smokes, his favourite films and supermarket, and the interior of his temporary housing in detention centre Kamp Zeist? Why? Because he, and many other politicians with him, chooses to use his personal background as an instrument, as a weapon on which the media willingly throw themselves with unprecedented consequences. For the question today is: is this trial not caused by a sentimental politics, a politics that has already for a long time been held captive by the People – a People that, because of its irrational address to politics, is not only accepted, but even stimulated in its lazy engagement? Might the verdict of this court of law not also be the introduction of a sentimental justice?

A purely objective approach, your honours, does not exist. The media know this, politics knows this, and they all act upon it too –which should not be a problem in itself. Yet the fact that the populists have launched a frontal attack on the aim for an objective approach is extremely dangerous. And because I, as I have just said, classify this trial as part of my oeuvre, your verdict in this case will play a key role in my analysis of the popularization of politics, media and law.

102 Anyone entering the public debate accepts the responsibility to represent, and hence be associated with, certain ideas. As a consequence, articles, columns, cartoons, and the like published by aforesaid representative, may, and even should be quoted, in case one refers to him or her. MP Wilders too should know this, and he seems to have made a clear choice. Although he might be expecting several cartoons, instead of a series of public installations within the context of contemporary art, when contemplating this choice, this does not in any way decrease his own responsibility concerning the formation and usage of a framework and the methods employed in public debate.

103 For in line of this argument, I am stressing that in this case, MP Wilders is carrying a great responsibility – just like me. Ever since he has entered politics, MP Wilders has always been very outspoken about the ‘right to the freedom of speech’. MP Wilders has often appealed to this right himself. For example, when he published the so-called ‘Danish cartoons’ containing images of the prophet Mohammed on his website, at the height of an extensive international discussion about artistic freedom in 2006. More recently in 2008, when he produced his film *Fitna*. These are all choices that I cannot, and do not, want to hold against him. What I want to show with these examples, is the fact that for years, MP Wilders has been representing a climate in which individuals are stimulated to speak out in public, even when their message might be shocking or even threatening to other people. He has helped to create a climate for which he is responsible, and within the context of which my own work is equally legitimate. But the support of MP Wilders only extends to people proclaiming standpoints that support his own. Anyone who unequivocally represents and defends a right like the right to the freedom of speech, will have to accept that this will cause a (public) reaction. The fact that such a reaction – in this case, in the form of my series of installations – appears to be inconvenient for MP Wilders, can be no reason to convict me. The fact that he has not withdrawn his charges against me, is, a sign of great weakness and hypocrisy within his own discourse.

104 I would like to add, that, in my opinion, the current discussion concerning the ‘freedom of speech’ has acquired grotesque and pathetic proportions, and I would like to stress

clearly, that, within this discussion, I do not want to make claim on this right in favour of my ‘defence’, and that I do not desire at all to ‘contribute’ to discussion as it is being held at the moment. In other words: I do not wish to hand over either my claim on this trial as a part of my work, or through its mediation to my public, as weapons in this already meaningless battle. The public debate has eroded, and the continuous reconfirmation of the same topics when considering ‘Islam’, ‘censorship’, and the so-called ‘need for debate’, is played out in a dumb duality, a continuous passage of the same perspectives provided by the same representatives, eagerly turned into a tsunami of sound bites by the media, so as to vacuously make public ever the same ‘opinions’. As an artist and as an intellectual, I consider it my duty to undermine and reformulate this inimitably pathetic order within the context of that order itself: this trial.

Interview with Ronald Sørensen (Party Leader Leefbaar Rotterdam) and Anton Molenaar (Leefbaar Rotterdam Representative for Youth, Education and Culture)

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Jonas Staal

This text is a translation of the transcription, as literal as possible, of a conversation held on July 17, 2008 at the Rotterdam city hall between the interviewers and the representatives of Leefbaar Rotterdam.

105

Leefbaar Rotterdam is a local right-wing populist party from Rotterdam, which was founded together with numerous sister parties at the end of 2001. During the municipal elections on March 6, 2002 the party lead by Pim Fortuyn gained a landslide victory of 34.7% and became the leading party. After the assassination of Fortuyn on May 6, 2004, history teacher Ronald Sørensen became his successor as party leader.

106

RONALD SØRENSEN: I have no background in art. As a politician, I do not want to be involved with it.

107

The Afrikaanderwijk is a neighbourhood in Rotterdam.

108

rs: Well, the Afrikaanderwijk was built during the 1920s-1930s to provide housing for the influx of workers from the southern Netherlands.

109

In the early seventies, large groups of Moroccans, Turks and Southern Europeans were attracted as labour force in the harbour. Rack-renters bought many building blocks in the Afrikaanderwijk and rented these to the workers. This caused the fury of autochthonous families. They often had to wait for years to obtain housing, and now they had to find foreigners obtain housing before them. On August 10, 1972, this caused a riot: neighbourhood inhabitants advanced to the guest houses of the immigrant workers and removed them together with their furniture. The Military Police had to intervene, and only after three days order was re-established.

110

rs: What happened in 1972 is really unfortunate, really nasty, but I think it has been totally pulled out of context. The reason for the riots has never before been clearly stated, which was the abusive way in which the Turkish labourers treated the young ladies from a boarding school in the neighbour-

111

hood. That should have been properly addressed, which however had never happened due to the hyper-correctness back then. This has subsequently led to unfortunate acts of public justice. We are very much against that sort of behaviour, but even these riots should be viewed from both sides. [...] Well, we know already the way in which Muslims speak of Dutch girls, and the first time that that happened it evoked much resistance.

112 In 2007, Labour city council member Zeki Baran proposed a Monument for the Immigrant Worker, to be placed on the Afrikaanderplein. Baran suggested that the statue be paid by asking every former immigrant worker for a contribution of 1 Euro.

113 rs: A statue to express gratitude to and commemorate the hardworking immigrant, which would have given us our prosperity. Again, you do not do such a thing, that's nonsense. [...] Because that would entail that we owe our wealth and prosperity to these so-called guest-workers and that is absolute nonsense. It is untrue. It is only a hyper-correct manipulation of history which always intensely annoys me and which is used time after time again. So, when Baran said 'We need to erect a monument for all those people to which we owe all of this.' I said: 'Get real, this a lie insistently kept alive by the multicultural Mafia.' If you really want to honour someone in this city, to whom we owe our prosperity and wealth, it should be those people that worked their ass off for this city after the war. [...] But those people do not feel themselves at home anymore in the Afrikaanderwijk, they have all left, or have been chased off. So if you want to honour someone, honour the chased-off citizens of Rotterdam.

114 At that time, Leefbaar Rotterdam party leader Ronald Sørensen said, reacting on Baran's proposal, to be furious, because 'on balance, immigrants from Turkey and Morocco have cost the Dutch society more than they paid off.' Instead, a statue should be erected for the citizens of Rotterdam, who 'with a natural work ethic' rebuilt the city after the war. He described this monument as follows: 'A bronze statue of a dockworker and his family, looking around in an alienated way at the surroundings from which they have been chased away.'

115 rs: In fact, they should place this monument

ANTON MOLENAAR: ... in Barendrecht.

rs: Yes, in all suburbs and Nesselanden [suburb of Rotterdam], with people looking over their shoulders: 'That's where I come from.'

am: With running figures!

rs: A little family that looks around totally bewildered: 'What has happened to my neighbourhood?'

Following Sørensen's indications, a 3D model was made of the Monument for the Chased-Off Citizens of Rotterdam. This was the first time it was presented to him.

116

rs: Yes, I think it is beautiful. It is a total surprise for me, but I think it is beautiful.

117

am: Yes, I think so too. I am not sure whether it is on purpose, but it is not really provocative. It is just objective, there are many possibilities, so...

rs: Yes, I think it is beautiful.

Ronald Sørensen has to attend a city council meeting. The representative for youth, education and culture, Anton Molenaar, subsequently addresses the meaning of the monument, and the tension between civil and political initiative relating to the decision-making process concerning public space.

118

am: Art can also be like this. You do not want to forget events that happened in a certain period. The sculpture [*The Destroyed City*] by Osip Zadkine is clearly about the Second World War; this is about the flight of the 1970s, 80s and 90s. It is in fact still going on, it remains a contemporary image. We should not shy away from it, what happened when Fortuyn was still alive. We should rather be honest about it.

119

You can only have a chance for a civil initiative, and this is very banal, when there is a lot of fuss, commotion about it. [...] In that case, you could get a neighbourhood initiative and people saying: 'Yes, this is actually a funny idea.' Similarly, for example, to a lot of people that know Zeki Baran, who say: 'We really want to have it there.' You can create something similar with this statue. [...] Who do we think we are? We are representatives. So when a whole group takes up the initiative by themselves, isn't that the most beautiful thing? [...]

120

In case that doesn't happen and no initiatives emerge, which would have my preference, the municipality would have take a decision on its own. [...] Yet conversely, to conduct interviews and investigate among the people the preferred location of the statue also isn't a practical solution. [...] You know, with statues it is also the case that, I have to admit, if they are finally put in place, people get used them and they do not seem that ugly anymore. [...] So, if you finally put something in an environment... it goes too far to hold a referendum about it. For that, art is too... about art you will never find consensus among the people.

Against Irony

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Jonas Staal

IRONY is a deliberate strategy intended merely to create distance, merely to be able to look the other way, merely to avoid viewing the essence of visual art, literature, theory or opinion – as a creator or spectator – in its direct form. 122

IRONY is a tactic employed by the lazy, cowardly and idle. It is an attempt, a wish, not to be held accountable for what is said, written or done: it was after all intended aloofly, with a pale smile, a grotesque, slight curling of the lips which feigns insight, but in actuality expresses nothing more than inability: inability to make a statement and assume full responsibility for doing so. 123

IRONY is an expression of fear and, at the same time, a gratuitous display of ostensible intelligence. It stands, on the one hand, for the wish to remain a spectator, the suggestion of neutrality, and, on the other hand, for the will to nonetheless be recognized as having an opinion or taking a stance. It is a façade: the affirmation of not wanting to face the complex network that, in a few brave cases, one dares to call reality. 124

IRONY is a diversion that leaves improper space for the observer to distance himself, space that the observer fills with ironic reflection, which overshadows any substantial contemplation. It is the means used in approaching a matter so as not to be subjected to its full implication: out of fear, out of laziness, out of boredom. 125

IRONY is a worthless choice of juxtaposing a message with an opposing image or statement, with a renouncing tone or dismissive gesture, which leaves everyone's stance undisputed, and yet expresses that one has understood it: how shameless! Shameless because, in doing so, one prefers the indisputability of an idea or status to an actual critique of the parameters with which we approach the world. 126

IRONY is a feint. It insinuates the presence of potential meaning and negates it at the very same time. It is nothing other than an escape, a fear: a fear, in fact, of standing unconditionally behind a recognition, a declaration, 127

of previously mentioned parameters: a fear of actually committing to this statement or, at least, to the importance of making a statement as an act in itself.

128

How shameless!

Index Nominum

The reader might not be fully acquainted with some persons and organizations mentioned in this publication. The short index below aims to provide additional background information on them.

Agamben, Giorgio (1942-) Italian philosopher highly influenced by the work of Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, as well as medieval poets and grammarians. Became known for his work on the theme of the homo sacer in relation to Auschwitz and the detainees in Guantánamo Bay.

Aguilera, Christina (1980-) American pop star.

Auvinen, Pekka-Eric (1989-2007) *High school shooter* responsible for the dramatic shooting at the *Jokelan koulukeskus* (Jokela high school) on November 7, 2007, killing nine students and injuring one. After the massacre, he committed suicide.

Badiou, Alain (1937-) French philosopher, writer and political activist who, by proposing a mathematically founded re-interpretation of philosophical and political developments in the last two centuries, advocates a rehabilitation of concepts such as ‘fidelity’ and ‘truth’, against the claims made by the postmodernism during the last decades.

Barthes, Roland (1915-1980) French philosopher and semiologist who, through his reflections on wide ranging subjects such as photography, sport and literature, created an important foundation for philosophical and critical developments in the second half of the twentieth century.

Bouyeri, Mohammed (1978-) Radical Islamist and murderer of film director Theo van Gogh.

Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA) Christian Democratic Party operating in the political midfield and the main representative of power politics in the Netherlands. Formed governments with both Labour (PvdA), the Liberal Conservatives (VVD) and Pim Fortuyn List (LPF), as well as the Christian fundamentalists of the Christian Union (ChristenUnie).

Debord, Guy (1931-1994) French filmmaker, theoretician and cofounder of the Situationist International. The book and film *La société du spectacle* (The Society of the Spectacle, 1973) is largely considered as his main work in which he coins the notion of the 'spectacular society'. In 1994, he committed suicide by shooting a bullet through his heart.

Dutch Populist Movement Political movement initiated by the rise of Pim Fortuyn in the political landscape. Generally speaking, the movement comprises local 'Leefbaar' ('liveable') parties, the already dissolved Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), the short-lived Party for Justice, Decisiveness and Progress (PRDV), founded by crime and society journalist Peter R. de Vries, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (pvv) and the Dutch Pride (TON) movement founded in 2007 by politician Rita Verdonk.

Fortuyn, Pim (1948-2002) Local party leader of Leefbaar Rotterdam during the municipal elections of 2002, national party leader of Leefbaar Nederland, which he had to leave after a policy dispute, and subsequently head of his own Lijst Pim Fortuyn during the national elections in 2002. Assassinated on May 6, 2002 by animal rights' activist Volkert van der Graaf.

Freedom Party (PVV) Right-wing populist party founded by Geert Wilders in 2006.

Harris, Eric (1981-1999) Together with Dylan Klebold responsible for the so-called 'Columbine high school massacre' in Littleton, Colorado, United States, on April 20, 1999. Both committed suicide after having killed thirteen students and injured fifteen.

Heidegger, Martin (1889-1976) German philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. His thought has influenced both the French existentialism of Sartre and the post-structuralist and post-modern thinking of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, as well as current anti-post-modern philosophers such as Badiou, Agamben and Slavoj Žižek. In his later period he mainly dealt with Pre-Socratic philosophy as the origin of thinking and questions concerning technology.

Kahtani, Mohamed al- (1979-) Suspect of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. Detained in the Guantánamo Bay detention centre. Acquitted from all charges on May 12, 2008.

High school shooters Adolescents who commit to murdering their fellow students, teachers and finally themselves with the use of firearms, while communicating their acts through writings, videos and manifestoes.

Leefbaar Rotterdam Local party from Rotterdam founded in 2001, which, headed by Pim Fortuyn, gained a majority of 34.7% of the votes during the municipal elections of 2002. After the murder on Fortuyn, Ronald Sørensen became party leader.

Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) Right-wing populist party founded by Pim Fortuyn in 2002, after he had to resign from his position as leader of the Leefbaar Nederland party. After the murder on Fortuyn, the party, still officially led by Pim Fortuyn, acquired 26 of the 150 seats in parliament. The subsequent coalition government of LPF, VVD, and CDA disintegrated in 2003. The party was dissolved in 2007.

Obama, Barack (1961-) 44th President of the United States of America (2008-).

Party for Charity, Liberty and Diversity (PNVD) Political party founded on May 31, 2006, featuring the rights of paedophiles as one of their main issues.

Sørensen, Ronald (1947-) Party leader of the Leefbaar Rotterdam party.

Wilders, Geert (1963-) Party leader of the Freedom Party (pvv). Separated in 2004 from the liberal conservative vvd party after a dispute about the possible EU membership of Turkey. Subsequently, he founded his own party.

Authors

BAVO is an independent research office focused on the political dimension of art, architecture, and planning. BAVO is a co-operation between Gideon Boie (b. 1975) and Matthias Pauwels (b. 1975), who both studied architecture and philosophy. Recently, BAVO has conducted research into creative city development and embedded practices of cultural activism. BAVO's mission is to enhance public debate by means of publications, symposiums, and interventions. Recent publications include: *Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: episode publishers, 2007) and *Urban Politics Now. Re-imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2007).
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Mihnea Mircan (b. 1976) is an independent curator. At the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, he curated the exhibitions *Sean Snyder, SUBLIME OBJECTS*, and *Jaan Toomik-*

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Jonas Staal (b. 1981) has studied monumental art in Enschede and Boston. His work includes interventions in public space, exhibitions, lectures, and publications, which emphatically relate to political subjects and developments. From a Beuysian perspective he interprets democracy – democratism – as a Gesamtkunstwerk, which necessitates a co-authorship of art and politics. His essay *Post-propaganda* (Amsterdam: Fonds BKVB, 2009) provides the theoretical basis for this line of work, which has already translated itself into direct co-operation with several political parties.

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Jonas Staal, April 2010

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