Waking up from the Nightmare of Participation

Expothesis is an outcome of the collaboration of Expodium and MAHKU, the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design. It investigates the significance of artistic knowledge production in regard to art and public space. Each year Expodium and MAHKU invite a prominent author to throw light on these issues. Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation is the second publication in the series.

EXPOTHESIS NO.1:

Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation! This book presents a platform for the development of proactive engagement and aims to fuel an agonistic debate among theorists and practitioners from various fields of knowledge, cultural backgrounds and political positions about the central thesis of Markus Miessen’s recent publication - The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality.

This book does not look for approval or consensual deliberation, but seeks for an agile examination of a proposed post-consensual (spatial) practice, formulating the necessity to undo the innocence of participation while promoting a conflictual reading of participation as a mode of proactive first person singular engagement: a step towards a state of acting and an individual, propositional practice.

None of the contributions were content-edited; no consensual or editorial constraints were imposed on any of the contributors.

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Wake up from the Nightmare of Participation! This book presents a platform for the development of proactive engagement and aims to fuel an agonistic debate among theorists and practitioners from various fields of knowledge, cultural backgrounds and political positions about the central thesis of Markus Messers’ recent publication: The Nightmare of Participation – Counterpoint Praxis as a Mode of Criticism.

This book does not look for approval or consensus declaration, but seeks for an agile examination of a proposed post-consensual (social) practice, formulating the necessity to undo the innocence of participation while promoting a critical reading of participation as a mode of proactive first-person singular engagement; a step towards a stance of acting and an individual, propositional practice.

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Are we on the inside pissing out or the outside pissing in?
WAKING UP FROM THE NIGHTMARE OF PARTICIPATION

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& MARKUS MIESSEN
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Waking Up from the nightmare of participation

EXPODIUM

PREFACE
This book is the second publication in the Expothesis series, an initiative of Expodium and MaHKU, the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Arts and Design. The Expothesis series investigates the significance of artistic knowledge production in regard to art and public space.

Expodium intervenes in the city. Through a series of long-term projects and energetic actions, Expodium draws attention to urban problematics of our time, confronts groups of young, international artists with current tendencies and phenomena in the urban environment, and seeks to help them utilize possibilities for breaking through entrenched patterns of thought.

Expodium surprises, irritates, provokes and stimulates the city’s users, to crank up the conversation about their surroundings.

It was through the publications Did Someone Say Participate? (2006), and The Violence of Participation (2007) that we got interested in Miessen’s work. Especially when The Nightmare of Participation (2010) was in the making, we felt close connections between Miessen’s ideas and experiences and Expodium’s own practice and visions.

The Nightmare of Participation attracted our attention in particular because of Markus Miessen’s introduction of ‘crossbench praxis’ as a mode of criticality, the ‘uninvited outsider’ as someone who could create conflict in order to instigate a productive process. We found this approach appealing because it relates directly to our own mode of operation. Questions arose about how the idea of the crossbench practitioner could be concretized in an art practice. What would that look like? And how do you create a place of conflict that goes beyond the idea of compromising, and instead aims for innovation and new strategies?

There is an unstable equilibrium that is constructed through an art practice in public space, the main aim of which is to function as a ‘spark plug’ that seeks to stimulate dialogue and thinking on urbanism. We challenge artists to become the generic force behind that ‘spark plug’, and to undergo a series of successive conflicts as the subsequent ‘offspring’ of that challenge. We trust in their autonomous capacity to shape that conflictual space, and argue that their outcome will be productive for all parties involved.

There is an inevitable connection between engaging with public space, the way that it is shaped, and dealing with users of that space. There are multiple levels of participation taking place during that process, layers that call for an artistic practice that goes against being
educational, invasive and patronising, an artistic practice that instead activates and mobilises people to think about, and be concerned with their own habitat.

We invited Markus to write Expothesis no.2 as a follow-up to The Nightmare of Participation, elaborating more on the notions of participation as false nostalgic desire, conflict versus compromise, consensus as collective passivity and the artist/art institution as uninvited outsider.

The end result exceeded our expectations. Markus Miessen, together with Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, shaped this publication into a collective platform of critical thinking and reflection. Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation is an amalgam of thirty-seven contributions that constitute a true space of conflict, questioning, disproving, endorsing and taking further the critical participatory practice suggested in The Nightmare of Participation. It opens up a much wider field of discussion, including the question of the outsider, disciplinarity, democracy, political correctness, institutional critique and more.

We thank Markus Miessen and Nina Valerie Kolowratnik for their collaboration, commitment and massive efforts on making this book, and we express our utmost gratitude to the contributors who so generously offered us their thoughts, reactions and creative input. Furthermore we thank CLEVER°FRANKE for being in charge of the design, Don Mader for the English text editing and Ben Ferguson for the German-English translations. And of course, a major thank you to MaHKU, Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design, for co-producing the book with us.

Expodium
NINA VALERIE KOLOWRATNIK
& MARKUS MIESSEN

ON THE PROTOCOLS OF INVITATION
NINA VALERIE KOLOWRATNIK: One of the first things we were speaking about in our initial talk was the title of the book, Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation, which you already had clearly in mind before we even started with the actual work on it. Where does the title originate?

MARKUS MIESSEN: Over the last six years I have been working on a series of publications that all deal with different aspects of the issue of participation. It all started with the anthology Did Someone Say Participate, which was on the one hand my MA thesis project at the London Consortium and on the other hand a publication I edited together with my co-editor Shumon Basar. This was really my entry point to investigate a series of concerns around the problematic of participation. Another project I worked on the year after was a project for the Lyon Biennial titled The Violence of Participation with Ralph Pflugfelder. It presented a testing ground for some of the ideas and hypotheses that were posed in Did Someone Say Participate. The latest book, The Nightmare of Participation, was my first attempt to try to come to terms with some of those issues and in a more theoretical and at the same time proactive way to develop a thesis around my alternative rendering of a potential contemporary practice of participation. Waking Up was a very simple idea: to throw something on the table and to provoke a reaction by others, to start a conversation, to start getting to grips with the nightmare I described in the previous title.

NVK: So, to wake up in this context means to first realize that you have been caught in the scripted scenario of representative, hollow participation, which is what you have been engaged with for the last years and you summed up in your last book The Nightmare of Participation, and then – to make the next crucial step – you start to act, which is what we have done here, as editors, by inviting several practitioners from different fields to contribute to an agonistic, non-consensual debate. If the aim of the Nightmare of Participation (NOP) was to prepare a common understanding and starting point, where in Chantal Mouffe’s terms we can start to disagree, then this book is to be the platform where proactive disagreement actually takes place. In this sense, the authors invited and their contributions to Waking Up form the Nightmare of Participation become an example of conflictual participation: a debate beyond the need for consensus, a testing ground of the thesis you presented in NOP. The authors step into an existing situation – the framework of NOP – and operate from a critical distance, and in some cases alien fields of knowledge, and are being asked to
critically reflect upon its central thesis. In order to build up the facilitating framework for such an agonistic debate to take place, we of course also needed to translate it into the book’s concept and editorial policy. We quickly agreed that the contributions should not be edited in terms of content, neither should they be restricted in terms of the length of the contribution or in the style of language – no constraints. We agreed that every contribution would be accepted, even if it deals very critically with the book itself.

**MM:** Now, I think you have already mentioned in an interesting way this level of agonistic reflection. I totally agree with this. This was really the idea for this book or publication to become a platform for exchange, and in this sense I also think that the reflection should or actually will deal more with the main part of the thesis rather than the book itself – because the main idea is certainly not that it simply presents a series of reviews that are investigating or referring to the book, but rather that a kind of core idea is being taken and assumed as a starting point for a series of almost individual discussions to take place: individual further developments, where someone takes an idea and either develops it further or hijacks it in one way or another, corrupts it or does something else with it, where there is a new author relationship with the work, not one that is purely reflective, but one that is intrinsically proactive. So rather than this being a kind of pure reflection, it is really a mode of production. Hopefully, and of course at the moment we don’t know this, this is what at least some of the contributors will do – that they take an idea and they develop it further. We treated every contribution as an autonomous, individual statement, as part of the debate, and neither placed the contributions in an editorial, content-related structure nor in any kind of hierarchical order that would attempt to string them together based on potentially shared views, for example. One of the triggers for the idea of this book was actually Carson Chan’s text in *NOP*, which originally was treated like an epilogue. I invited Carson to reflect critically on the book [NOP], within the book itself, to write a reflection of the piece in the piece so to speak, to include this within the body of the book itself. Similar to the core idea of *Waking Up from The Nightmare of Participation*, it was based on the notion that you would invite someone to contribute, but to very clearly state – right from the beginning – that the autonomy of the piece would be secured by all means. Whatever a contributor would reflect on and however critically this would be pursued, there wouldn’t be an editorial filter in terms of content, criticality, or proposition. So, even if the invited author would utterly condemn the content of the book, it would be included.
This was then also what originally happened with NOP. I was very pleased to receive Carson’s contribution, because he not only very cleverly analyzed, evaluated and criticized parts of the thesis, but really took some specific aspects discussed in the book further, when for example he, towards the end of his piece, interestingly reflects on the notion of what I call the ‘uninvited outsider’ and introduces the figure of the midwife. To return to your question about the title – where is this title Waking Up from The Nightmare of Participation coming from? It is precisely as you say, in a kind of next step towards a state of acting, a more proactive way of dealing with the situation before us. Whereas NOP is somehow describing the frustration which I have increasingly been exposed to during my inquiry into this whole issue of participation over the last six years, now for me it’s really the time to become propositional. Do you think that the way in which we structure the book is helpful in terms of the individual arguments?

NVK: The structure of the book works like an archive, a chronological one. I would say that we are trying to illustrate this in the way that we deal with the content of the book. All authors received the same invitation. This invitation letter formed the collective base from which the content was developed. Hence, we decided it is absolutely crucial to deliver this invite as well and consequently to include it in the book, as the starting point of the project so to speak. The individual pieces are simply arranged according to the submission date. Keywords and contribution indexes are chosen not by the authors, but us, without consulting the authors. This is part of the book’s concept – and represents another, if you want personal, non-consensual means of contribution. These keywords, or keyword sentences, which we believe represent the core argument of the contributions, will also work as triggers – giving the reader the possibility to understand parts of the central proposition of each contribution at a glimpse. If you observe the keywords, you can easily compare and directly juxtapose the different positions of the authors.

MM: …which otherwise would only be possible after having read all individual contributions – and probably only the most interested readers would do this anyway.

NVK: Exactly. Now, after having talked about the notion of Waking Up, it would be interesting to talk about the question of what it is that you want to wake up from? What constitutes the nightmare you have witnessed? In your last publication, NOP, you describe your frustration
with the topic. What I find particularly interesting here is your call to reverse the romanticized, unquestioned and innocent mode of participation into a new mode of critical spatial practice and conflictual participation. You strip it of its innocence. But you still keep the notion of participation. Why?

**MM:** Because I strongly believe in proactive engagement and direct involvement. I just think that the rules of the game need to be manipulated. Participation needs to be de-romanticized, loose its innocence, and we need to speak about the fact that often participation is dirty and not politically correct in case you really want to change something.Demanding that everyone should always be included is simply crackbrained. I have started to develop a role, which I call the ‘uninvited outsider’, a practitioner without mandate. This role is based on the notion of a conflictual rather than consensual rendering of the term and practice of participation.

**NVK:** In the beginning of this project, when we started working on this book, you were sceptical about ‘inviting’ authors yourself, authors you may know personally, to critically reflect on your work. And there of course, also in general, arises the question whether one can invite authors or someone else to be critical. I am also thinking of the position you and Andrea Phillips adopted in the institutional consultancy project you did for the Dutch organization SKOR, where you have been invited to assist in reformulating and restructuring an institution as outsiders. When linking the notion of the ‘invited outsider’ to the project you did with SKOR, while looking at the management consultancy-examples you gave from the business world in *NOP*, I wonder: when you invite an outsider to change your company or institution in a positive way – because you of course would want to change it in a positive way – you would probably invite a person whose work you know and whose previous work you also appreciate. Basically, you then “facilitate an a priori imagined outcome”, a phrase you actually critically stated in *NOP*. So, do you already know the outcome, or hope for a turn in a certain direction, in the case of *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation*, because you are aware of the previous work of the contributors you invited – and of course selected the authors accordingly? How can a person invited provoke critical change or friction? And how important is setting up the frame-work – the rules of the game – in order to facilitate a non-consensual debate despite maybe similar minded authors?
MM: Almost by default this would assume that if you invite someone you respect for his or her work, the outcome of a project or consulting phase must always be positive or successful. I think it depends heavily on the client. There needs to be a certain willingness on the side of a client to allow for change. If a client already knows what they want, and from whom they expect to get this assumed product delivered, right from the beginning the tendency is for the project to fail. Facilitating an a priori imagined outcome is also a danger, as it uses others only to blame the change on them, while already knowing what will happen. This is why I find, for example, the McKinsey philosophy and approach very unproductive. Nevertheless, I think it is important to mention that I don’t claim to have a blueprint for change. Yes, the authors were selected according to certain positions that I admire. However, those positions do not necessarily agree or overlap with mine. Today there is a tendency to say that even if you invite your adversary you are incorporating him or her into your system, similar to a corporate strategy. My answer to this is that what we are producing here is a next step of the process, a move towards something specific, productive. The contributions in *Waking Up* are not meant as an anthology-like selection of great works, or simply people I always wanted to work with, but a concrete imagination turning reality, being: that a set of individuals are invited to react specifically to the work I produced in *NOP*, following up on an ongoing discussion around the topics and themes I feel strongly about. My work is not about production, polishing, and moving on. I like it to trigger other forms of production, which assume their own authorship. The problem is, if you don’t start the conversation then nothing new will ever develop. Can one invite someone to be critical? Yes, I think so. But the rules of the game must be clear. No false promises. Like the Winter School Middle East [www.winterschoolmiddleeast.org], there was a very clear agenda right from the start, that contributors would also be chosen on the basis of their diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. This is to say, to enable a discussion between people who are not all insiders when it comes to the core argument and its history. The role of the outsider in SKOR, or in fact the book, is a slightly different one from the one that I am proposing. In both cases, contributors are invited to an ongoing process. When I talk, in *NOP*, about the ‘uninvited outsider’, I am referring to a role which – by default – is without mandate and the result of pro-active, self-initiated practice.

NVK: So you think it’s possible.
MM: Of course it’s problematic if one invites someone to be critical when there is already a personal relationship, which often is also a friendly relationship, or one that at least is based on previous joined professional experiences such as cooperations, collaborations, or certain projects one has been dealing with together. But at the same time I think that in the book critical exchange is possible, even amongst those who may know each other. I think of this list of people that we have in front of us here – there are in fact a lot of authors who have agreed to contribute, who I actually didn’t know personally before we started this project – although quite a lot of them I knew, or at least I have briefly met. This does not necessarily mean though that they agree with me and I agree with them. In fact I know that some of the contributors of the book think that I am pretty much of a bullshitter. What we did is that we were trying to come up with an interesting list of protagonists and practitioners who we believe are relevant in terms of the discussion at hand, to further it, to develop it, to hijack it. So, can one invite someone to be critical? Again, yes, I think so. When one invites, the definition of the terms of acting, the rules of engagement, and the codes of conduct must be clear and must be stated. You need to be able to let go, to hand the control button over to someone else. Carson Chan’s text in NOP, for example, was quite a heavy critique of the book, but at the same time I consider it a very productive critique as it understands the idea, but also its flaws, and develops it further, or re-contextualizes it. So, in that sense it was really a pleasure to read it. I was and still am under the impression that, here, somebody really understood what I was trying to do and then really took this opportunity to do something with it. And it’s really my hope that also with the other contributors this will be the case, so that I am only the one who is throwing an idea on the table, and then people react on it on their own terms.

NVK: In this context, please can you tell me more about the project for and with SKOR?

MM: Andrea Phillips and I have been invited by SKOR in order to devise an ongoing project through which a kind of rethinking process of the institution over the course of two years would be started and executed. This was, at the time, commissioned by SKOR’s new director Fulya Erdemci, who invited us on the basis and idea that we would come in as outsiders in order to critically reflect on an ongoing operative system, which usually is very difficult to critique or reflect on from the inside. In that sense – and I also think this is the kind of link you made earlier to NOP and, more precisely, the chapter called Learning
from the Market – one could certainly compare it to, or find some kind of similarities with, the way that conventional or conservative consulting models such as McKinsey or Königswieser function. At the same time I think there is one huge difference, which you have already pointed out, which has to do with an individual’s approach to a specific kind of work or task as opposed to model based on track-record, which is common in this industry. Companies like McKinsey work on track record regarding both their acquisition and their supposedly tailor-made models or scenarios for change. They work with their own company archives as blueprints for change. So whenever they go to meet a new company they will always compare it to their previous experiences. In a sense, their approach is generic. When you ask them to come into your company you know what you are going to get. Which is precisely why they are being invited. They are the invited outsiders. To give an example: as a CEO who aims to restructure a company, you know exactly what you want, but from the inside it is difficult to push it through. So you get these outsiders to simply tell you what you knew already, to reconfirm your assumptions through another voice, possibly even in another language. They will tell you – and you know this already, as this is why you invited them – that it will be easier for you if they communicate ‘the news’, the restructured model, to your staff, because it will officially be read as them making the decision, and not you. In our situation at SKOR this is slightly different, because the approach is far more contextualized. We are actually working with the director for a period of two years on programming and how, basically through program, you can change both the internal approach, the kind of work-process-approach of the institution and the stuff being involved in the institution, and how one can learn from those processes. This comes closer to what – in consulting methodology – is being referred to as an embedded approach.

NVK: I would like to juxtapose to the model of the ‘invited outsider’, and the one of the ‘uninvited outsider’, who enters an existing situation with a precise intention, but without being asked to do so. I will briefly explain a recent project of mine, which – in fact – could not have reached its aim if one would have been invited. I am referring to a project on the spatial re-reading of the Palestinian refugee question, where I was trying to counteract a stagnant and tabooed discussion by offering a spatial perspective on the return of Palestinian refugees into the transformed landscape of contemporary Israel, and thereby provoke new discussions and open up other possible futures: to bring the topic of return on the political agenda again. Within this project I found myself working as an uninvited outsider
regarding both Israelis and, at a certain point, Palestinians as well. On one side of the conflict, fears of a demographic earthquake and the questions it casts on the moral legitimacy of the Zionist project have made the topic of return taboo. On the other side of the conflict, it is a constant presence, expressed in the temporary status of the refugee. Political realities however often limit how return might be imagined within the Palestinian population, and tend to restrict the theme of return to a projected unanimity, constrained by fundamental demands concerned with the symbolic and the legal level. Thus every deviation from the collective consensus regarding the debate on return is perceived as a potential threat – fearing to undermine the refugee community’s strength and social homogeneity, or let differentiated practicabilities of return make their fundamental demands seem utopian and just far too complex to implement.

**MM:** How did your status as ‘foreigner’ effect or affect the way you were acting within this forcefield?

**NVK:** Even though my status as a foreigner on site rendered it even more difficult to engage the local population in a discussion on concrete forms of spatial return due to the fear of misrepresentation, it was on the other hand precisely my outsider’s role which brought me into the position of asking questions a person directly involved in the conflict which has now been ongoing for over 60 years could simple not; due to emotional constraints and the repeated setbacks in the struggle for recognition of the right of return, manifested in the daily life of the refugees and due to ideological constraints or the silent dictate of collective consensus. Thus it was precisely interfering from the outside and a critical distance that made it possible to transfer the topic from a symbolic into a new, practical and propositional level – offering a way to break the deadlock of the current discussion, reframing the debate to read the conflict from a fundamentally spatial perspective and addressing ways in which return might manifest itself. Then, of course not only the notion of the uninvited outsider, but the one of the innocent and disinterested outsider as well, comes into play here. Israeli transit and travel laws do not allow Palestinian refugees to visit the villages their families came from or to consult archive material in Israel. As a European though I was granted freedom of movement, and as a student working in the ‘harmless’ field of architecture and arts I could pursue in-depth research, both in Palestine as well as in Israel, almost without facing any questions. The role and perception of the arts in Israel is particularly interesting, as it is one of the only fields where criticism against Israeli state politics is tolerated,
but at the same time or precisely because, according to Eyal Danon, art in general and the socio-political potential or impact of art is not taken seriously by the vast majority of the Israeli audience.

**MM:** I think this issue of the refugees' return is super interesting and probably a really good example for how one could possibly act. Also, I think it is an interesting example of the role of someone coming from the outside, who is not an immediate stakeholder. In order to contribute to what you are describing as a stagnant discussion and how one could possibly break such deadlock open, this role becomes an interesting model. The outsider is understood as someone who does not threaten the internal system due to lack of knowledge of its complex structure. He or she is no threat – at least not a consciously perceived one. It is precisely this condition that allows one to fully immerse oneself in the subject’s depths, in a dilettante but unexpected and productive manner. Having said this, what is actually another important question here is the context in which this practice is being situated and contextualized. It has to do with both the social and political realities as well as with the role that one is trying to define or develop for oneself. If, for example, you are coming from the background of architecture, how do you produce what one could maybe call a 'soft practice', one that is deliberately based on a non-physical approach, but also how one can devise alternative systems to get engaged – as an architect? What is actually quite interesting in this model that you are describing is that you, as an architect, are actually approaching a context from the outside, where the means of engagement, and – for the lack of a better word – participation are actually non-architectural. So, not all the things that you might be proposing are spatial in effect, that is to say physical. This is true also if you look at some of the projects that have been developed over the last decade, for example with Eyal Weizman’s project developed with the human rights organization B'tselem, and later with Decolonizing Architecture. They are spatial in the sense that they are territorial. But at the same time they function more like a voodoo doll or a MacGuffin, catching everyone’s attention to drive the plot forward with the strategically most relevant and at the same time economic means, in the most positive sense of an economy. The proportionality between stake and outcome is very economic. It attempts to describe certain political and social realities and how political decision-making has an immediate effect on space, as described, for example, in the *Politics of Verticality*. It is built around the idea of hijacking an architectural tool, which is that of drawing and notation, as a means to describe those power relationships. So if you look on the maps that were produced during this project,
they use an architectural language to describe the political and social realities on the ground, but at the same time they do not come across as a result of an architectural project, or in fact something done by an architect. I would actually be really interested to hear some more from you about how you think one could – as an architect – possibly get engaged in such kind of context, and to which extend the background of architecture could possibly be an asset in such role of the outsider.

NVK: When acting as an architect within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in my case on the topic of return, which is currently at a standstill, I think the primary aim must be to open spaces of possibility for new ideas and spaces for change, rather than to fix the future through design – which would merely hinder any productive discussion, rather then to enable it. No architect can fully expect to plan, let alone to implement, a new political reality. A project however can use architecture to make an alternative political scenario imaginable. On the one hand spatial thinking in combination with the tool of mapping or drawing can lay bare complex political force-fields by abstracting an image down to its basic structure, and in the case of Israel-Palestine, by decoding the landscape, a constructed reality and the intentions behind it. Yet, on the other hand, this must not be the only way in which architects can act in a conflict situation like this – and that’s exactly what I learned when working with Decolonizing Architecture in Bethlehem, directed by Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti and Eyal Weizman, during the months of the research of my project. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the political situation limits the way in which a different future could be imagined, it is most important to become propositional as an architect; to move from an analytical to a propositional approach to the situation. We might imagine that in a situation of such utter political uncertainty, the creation of a new pool of ideas and the necessary level of abstraction stand in contrast with the architectural scale. Nevertheless, I think this is not the case. Architects work at a scale which allows us – in the midst of a conflict on many levels – to concentrate for a short moment on one single set of questions and, going back to my project on return, to show with a simple sketch what has so far been treated as the final step in any development of strategies for return – the spatial relation to the place of return, and consequently, the practical implementation of return. Furthermore, to introduce the architectural scale in this conflict situation meant daring to design, or put on paper, something which was not imaginable at the moment, a tabooed topic, and thus to provoke the much needed discussion simply by visualizing new ideas in a ready-to-be-implemented scale. The very tool of mapping is here used
as a trigger for discussion. In addition to producing maps myself, I also asked my interviewees to do so, in their case to map the images of their memories of the place, in order to initiate the crucial discussions on the inevitable individual alterations of memory of a place that has been overwritten, and on the common idea of expecting return to mean the simple rebuilding of the past. When producing images of the future, the aim of which is to have them taken further by the refugees themselves, the way of presentation must be carefully chosen. It must be abstract enough to leave space for associations and the further development of the story outlined, but at the same time specific and personal enough to allow for identification – aspects which we are accustomed to integrating in conventional architectural drawings as well. It is important though to stress that the reopening of discussions where there are none at the moment, and the sketching out of new possibilities where imagination has become limited, must remain the only purpose of the architectural scale in this phase of the conflict at hand. And, as Alessandro Petti stated in an interview with Ahmad Barclay about their spatial practice in Bethlehem, “When there will be a political situation where people can start to plan the reuse of settlements, and when refugees can return, I don’t think we have to be there any more.”

**MM:** So, to be very precise, what is the role of spatial practice in this context then?

**NVK:** The aim of spatial practice is to become a tool in the conflict, a tool for the people directly involved, a starting point – working with the means of architecture in order to bring discussion on a more practical level and to trigger people to start thinking about the way they want to return – which then can be used as a tool within the struggle for return from their side. You could describe the project as a kind of helping devise ways to jump scales of negotiation, an intermediate step – an initial trigger.

**MM:** The worry that I often face with my own projects is that the moment you are working in the context of self-initiated projects there is always this danger of how it is being communicated, and more precisely, how it is being communicated to whom, and – as a result – how it is being perceived. In the context of critical spatial practice related projects in Israel-Palestine, for example, it is interesting to see that a lot of the practitioners who are directly involved in these projects tend to fly in, so to speak, from Western Europe or elsewhere. Those projects are often very well known or have been communicated
Waking Up from the nightmare of participation

quite a lot in Europe and the United States, and for example also in biennials in urban centres around the globe. However, they are often not to well known in the areas, territories and geographies that they are actually dealing with. So we also need to address the question of how it could also be misunderstood, or be read, as a kind of colonial gesture in itself. And this is not at a critique towards others, but mostly a self-reflection, or critical comment on my own work when it comes, for example, to the Winter School in Kuwait. Returning to the notion of the outsider, I think that – although it can be absolutely productive, and often it is – it can also be highly problematic, and I think when one works in a context like this, or proposes such models, one really needs to be aware of this danger: how is it being read and how does one’s action fuel this potential misreading. To use the example of SKOR again, our invitation so to speak had a very clearly defined agenda. As an outsider on the one hand you try to contribute to this agenda, but with tools and means that the people directly involved in this context would otherwise not even consider, because they just weren’t aware that this could be an option of structural change, content development or contribution from the inside. The role of the outsider needs to be strategically considered in terms of how and where to get engaged, because this can have an enormous effect or influence on the way it is perceived, and also in the way that it can stimulate change. There is an emerging aesthetic around the issue of conflicts and war zones, which I find quite worrying. A lot of artists and architects are now assuming such aesthetics, although they are otherwise not very involved. To a certain extent it has become almost like an approach that has more to do with the phenomenon than the deeper implications of it, but at the same time I would say in the case of Eyal Weizman, for example, looking at the way in which he was dealing with B’tselem and the way that he set his entire inquiry up over a long term, it’s actually very interesting and highly relevant to showcase how, as an architect, you can also deal with a very specific audience, in his case that of an NGO and a general public. Of course the ones who really talk about it are architects and the art world. With projects that are self-initiated, I think one of the really important questions is not only ‘who are you dealing with’ or ‘who are you immediately addressing in terms of your inquiry or propositional mode of acting’, but also then beyond those who are immediately involved, ‘what is the audience for such projects’? If one talks about architecture as a tool, who is the audience, and who can also understand that tool that you are using? I wonder, for example, when you said that you use drawing as a tool, how did you communicate this? I know your book for example, which I find quite
interesting, but again this book is probably not something which is widely distributed in, let’s say, Israel-Palestine, right?

**NVK:** It is an appropriate and crucial question, whether outsider approaches of this sort are merely colonizing the future. Precisely if one acts in a propositional way and does not limit one’s work to research or theory, one has to genuinely face this question. But even if I, and also Decolonizing Architecture, have worked on projects on a more detailed scale, it is not about proposing solutions. Even though we have worked on concrete strategies, they were not meant to be end products or to work as solutions, either on the level of the conflict or on a smaller scale, but instead to open up a space where different possibilities of the future could be imagined, using architecture as a tool to do so. This leads me to your notion of audience. If you use architecture as a trigger, a starting point for new ideas within the local population, the primary audience must of course also be the local population. Working without mandate, unasked, and defining my audience very widely as the Palestinian refugee community and the Israeli public, has been essential for my project in order not to be caught in the consensus machines at work at the moment. It also meant that I didn’t have an immediate audience to address afterwards – an audience like the people in the reach of an NGO, where you could effectively activate people and instigate or inseminate change. Local institutions or appropriate forums can furthermore communicate the idea much more effectively and, as an ideal case, continue working on it, in a certain way appropriating it or incorporating it in their agenda. In my case, the Israeli organization Zochrot, whose main aim is to create awareness of the ongoing Palestinian Nabka [‘catastrophe’ in Arabic] in Israel, and which kindly helped me to gather research material, is now using my project as an educational tool in their school projects in Israel – and as workshop material, which makes me really happy. In addition, they also continued working with spatial planners and recently organized the workshop *Counter-Mapping Return.* In the end I think it is incredibly important to address and activate the people directly involved, on site, or in this case in the Diaspora as well. But I think especially when talking about projects concerning Israel-Palestine, at the same time it is important to create awareness on an international level as well – helping to push the discussion on the political agenda again from various sides. And also, even if the scope of some projects’ excessive touring in renowned art venues is questionable, one must acknowledge that publishing and exhibiting are probably the most effective tools an architect or artist can apply to create awareness – and thus are not wrong in themselves. Very sadly though, as you already
mentioned, many of these projects are by now well known within the European academic art and architecture audience, but barely known by the people concerned – even though it is precisely an architectural or spatial project that can easily switch between these two audiences. In fact, I would like to ask you about your ongoing project at the Winter School Middle East, and what you are attempting to achieve. You have, in the past, described the use of self-initiation in projects as a means to insert external discourses and, together with partners and collaborators, to develop new initiatives which transport a certain critical discourse with the intention of mobilizing local potentials. In other words: to mobilize local potentials through setting up a critical platform in places where such a dialogue barely exists, or does not exist yet. If I understand correctly, the setting up of the institution itself – reaching a certain momentum – is one of the main goals in this project, including the workshops and activities, which happen during and around its temporary existence.

**MM:** Correct.

**NVK:** You also told me that you want to build a platform for critical knowledge production, which can then be claimed or taken over by locals in order to develop it further independently. Is this the reason why, as far as I know, the Winter School’s outputs, the work you produced during the workshop sessions, were not widely, internationally published? There have not been, for example, any books so far, and no frequent touring in exhibitions.

**MM:** In a way one could argue that this kind of ‘taking over’ is happening already now in Kuwait. Zahra, my co-director in Kuwait, is already using parts of it in order to develop it in other directions, starting new initiatives now that people started to get interested in such work. Yes, you are right, it was never my aim to develop this into a content-production machine for distribution. This is supposed to be about the local, and not necessarily about its international or even global distribution. The questions we are raising are very specific and the work we are developing is much more about educating the assumption of a different role, enabling young practitioners, rather than producing material that can be circulated.

**NVK:** I only know that the Winter School contributed to the Sharjah Biennial this year. Is this because what was published is the theory on a conflictual, propositional practice – and this is what should be spread? The starting point – not the implementation – or one project
shown as an ideal example of such, an art work, a final product which needs to hang in exhibitions in order to educate other spatial practitioners on conflictual practice, or the general public about the conflict situation?

**MM:** Sharjah was an absolutely pragmatic, rather than a content-related means to celebrate ourselves. What is really important is that this idea of an institution is not one that is based on representation at all, but on reflection and a critical production of a discourse – and where I would of course say that for example with Decolonizing Architecture, they are also obviously and most definitely interested in the critical production of discourse – but this kind of approach, of heavy circulation in the art world, is something that I am not at all interested in, at least in the context of the Winter School. You mention the Sharjah Biennial this year and our contribution to this biennial. The contribution is actually not at all one that is representative, in the sense of a visual or project based contribution to the Biennial itself, the exhibition, but it was a contribution in the format of a presentation, at a kind of mini-conference called the *March Meetings*, which is basically an opportunity for small or emerging institutions or projects in the Middle East to get themselves a platform where, on the one hand, they can be discussed, but on the other hand, and more important, to possibly receive future funding, for them to take place. In this sense the presentation was really like a kind of operative part of the project, rather than being interested for example in the mediation of its work. That is why we were there – in fact Zahra was there, as I could not go in the end – and it seems that it was successful in the sense that we are now talking to new funding bodies in regards to the years to come. I am personally not interested in turning the Winter School into either a product in itself or a body that churns out products. It is really about alternative means of education and setting up informal institutions as platforms for change. I think in this sense it is a completely different species of project from, for example, Decolonizing Architecture, because it is one which right from the beginning was never thought of as one that establishes or develops a kind of communicable product in any way, but that is simply interested in the setting up of an operative structure, that can be taken over. The goal has always been to establish an institution, a very informal one in nature, that can act as a platform for local, regional and super-regional protagonists, to bring them together with practitioners from abroad. To put it very simple: to generate contact zones. I am interested in bringing people together, people who are genuinely interested in discussing these topics, and for them to trigger certain responses on the one hand, and on
the other further projects that can be developed on the basis of those subjects involved, with the help of the platform that has been established. This is actually a really important aspect, because from my point of view the outcome of each workshop is of minor importance only. Of course we end up with interesting content, and also some interesting projects, or even objects – which, this year for example, had to do with the specific topic of ‘Diwaniya’, which was much more physical than some of the previous annual topics such as ‘Labour Camp’. But at the same time, this is only a secondary outcome. We are not interested so much in the idea of a specific or haptic outcome, but rather the kind of process, both in terms of the students dealing with specific topics, in a particular setting, but also the processes of what it means to build this platform of exchange. What does this mean socially and culturally, in a place where such civic, non-profit institutions as soft bodies of knowledge production don’t exist? At the same time also literally, physically: what does it mean to built up an institution like this? What does it mean in terms of a potential physical presence, also for it to be taken seriously by some more formal, local protagonists, be they political, cultural, or social? Interestingly, this notion of an institution as a trigger did not work at all in Dubai. Almost immediately there were questions coming in from the outside about how one could possibly deal with this in the future, if it was a profit-making institution. Now in Kuwait – we started in October 2010 – already there is the first project that is coming out of this, which I am actually not directly involved in. It’s called Madrasa, which is a new school or mini-institution, also self-initiated, spearheaded by Zahra Ali Baba. It is set up on a much more frequent basis – lectures, panel discussions, small exhibitions. This is now starting to produce a very proactive discourse or displays that didn’t exist as such in Kuwait before. I am interested in introducing international protagonists and practitioners to the region – but with the clear intention that those people then are teamed up with locals, and together develop projects.

**NVK:** Finally, how do you see the relation between your work at Studio Miessen and nOffice – are you trying to transfer or integrate the ideas you develop in Studio Miessen into your architectural practice nOffice as well? Would this be the ideal? Why are these two offices separated then?

**MM:** It is absolutely crucial that the two entities are separated, I think. Not because I would not trust it to work if we were all working on the same projects, but because different tasks require different approaches. On the one hand there is an interest in a set of diverse
topics and involvements, which I would call Critical Spatial Practice. This is something that Studio Miessen is dealing with, and that I am now, from October onwards, trying to develop through a newly launched professorship at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, which will try to understand precisely the different dimensions and facets of Critical Spatial Practice. At the same time, there is an absolute interest, together with my two partners Magnus Nilsson and Ralf Pflugfelder, in developing and setting up architectural scale frameworks. There are different layers here, and they are all responding to certain tools that an architect can offer. Those different species of projects, be they textual, curatorial, educational, physical installations, buildings, the setting up of operative frameworks for institutions, or consulting projects, they all present – in the end – just a certain form, format, and means of enabling – or sometimes strategically disabling. This is what I am interested in.

**NVK:** Most critical spatial practitioners gave up actually building, and mostly turned towards an academic career or a career in the realm of pure theoretical or conceptual, curatorial, and publishing work. Why are you still dealing with physical architecture? Is it simply a fact of economic life, or do you believe that it’s possible to combine those two components of the architecture discipline – or somehow, if it’s not the aim to combine, to be involved in both?

**MM:** Of course I do believe it is possible and in fact interesting to combine these two: it produces a content-related surplus. I simply think that for different tasks one needs different tools, and the way that it works with these two entities – or in fact three if you count the Winter School in – is that they support each other. There should not be any ready-made answers or solutions – and the only way to possibly offer a structure for this is to cater for those different realities with different tools and sensitivities. Not every problematic favours a physical intervention. But sometimes there is really the need for an actual building or physical structure, sometimes an exhibition or a publication, sometimes a radio-show or a documentary study trip with my students. I don’t find this distinction between these practices problematic. They complement each other. Sometimes it is good to be able to clearly identify what one is doing through different means and to also to produce different bodies or machines that can perform different tasks. To answer your question about the economic repercussions of this decision: there is certainly not an economic factor involved in this decision-making, because – at least at the moment – we don’t have the kind of commissions that would lead to a carefree life. Then of
course, with nOffice, there are these overlaps where sometimes we are developing spaces in which then we are also heavily involved in the programming, like for example the space we just opened for 0047 in Oslo, the Hub we built for Performa Biennial in New York, or the project we did for Manifesta 8 in Murcia, Spain. But then also sometimes there is a very clear-cut and clear distinction between architectural projects that we are dealing with, and other issues or themes that we are interested in as individuals. I think one thing that I can certainly say is that we are all very interested in in the architectural practice, and are trying to concentrate on, is a kind of sensitivity toward the question of congregation and social spaces in which individuals come together, in order to discuss or produce. So there is obviously an overlap in my personal, private interests.

NVK: ... creating, developing, and setting up as well the physical bases or frameworks that produce non consensual shared spaces?

MM: Exactly. How do you create a spatial, architectural framework for content-related activities and programming to take place, and for those also to potentially take on a political dimension? How can you, through spatial and architectural implementation, produce situations, which almost by default produce conflicts? This is, for our interpretation and us at least, the moment where the political emerges. We are not trying to engineer a particular situation, we are not designing in order to move everyone towards a certain behaviour, but we are interested in design that can become an enabler, and also sometimes a disabler. This conflict produces something – but we are not interested in dictating what it produces. We are just interested in ‘it’ – doing something. So it’s a very soft form of architecture, how do you devise a structure that can enable these forms of exchange, or can enable follow-ups of forms of exchange to take place, for possible projects to grow out of this? Whether we are involved in these forms which come out of this, is totally irrelevant.
CARSON CHAN

EPILOGUE

[EPILOGUE TO THE NIGHTMARE OF PARTICIPATION]
The little book in front of you attempts to outline a hypothesis: Sometimes, we must remain skeptical of what we read, at all cost. This sentiment stayed with me after going through a preliminary draft of Markus Miessen’s *Nightmare of Participation*. For the text did not elicit Miessen’s intended delivery – that of a whole-cloth revamp of architectural praxis into agonistic systems – but delivered a stronger, more poignant, epiphenomenal sense of active distrust in establishments paired with a bullish confidence in the self. Miessen employs a particular way of arguing that is more insistent than rhetorical. Claims are laid, positions are held, though external means of theoretical validation in the form of quotes and citations are too often presented as self-affirming platitudes rather than as an index of intellectual becoming. In chapter two, Miessen needlessly provided a citation of Nicolas Bourriaud’s 1998 book, *Relational Aesthetics*, for the words ‘relational aesthetics’, yet in chapter three, no date or source was given for a statistic from a survey of relative xenophobia in European countries. At key moments, footnotes lead us to other chapters of the book, or texts by Miessen published elsewhere. As alternate forms of spatial practices, Miessen refers the reader to his own past projects (Winter School Middle East, East Coast Europe).

So how to interpret Miessen’s *Nightmare*? Where do we make the first cut? Nothing gets us reading, and reading with more fervor than ideas that raise eyebrows. As the third in a series of titles dealing with participation, it is perhaps only this one that actively engages us, apophatically, by instilling a sense of doubt. The skepticism for existing institutions and hierarchies that Miessen wears on his sleeve rubs off on the reader as he or she becomes skeptical of the author’s methods. Indeed, the introduction preemptively states that “the material, research, and knowledge collated in this publication is not the result of endless weeks in libraries and archives.” The proclaimed non-academic approach to writing a book – which was also submitted as a PhD dissertation – will surely challenge scholars as to the discursive value of the text. In fact, several of Miessen’s proposals seem designed expressly to provoke. In the chapter *Learning from the Market*, we’re told that the management consultant, or external interlocutor, is to be seen as a viable role model for the architect or designer; like consultants, architects are ‘oppositional animals’ whose outsider status allows them to plant seeds of change within preexisting systems. Framing each project as a set of conditions to be challenged rather than fixed givens will inevitably redirect the dynamics of the design profession – an industry that has transformed rather sorrowfully into a service organ of the financial elite – but imitating the methods of
the financial market’s players, of those who have worked to make the architect’s work into a commodity, seems deluded. The ‘desolate situation of the profession’ and the ‘love with the idea of never-ending economic opportunities to build’ harbored by many architects, I would contend, is born from the very logic of opportunistic intervention that Miessen is suggesting as a viable path to disciplinary renewal. In any case, both McKinsey and Königswiesser already hire architecture students straight out of school.

Questions like the one above resonate particularly because Miessen’s critique of consensus is largely adopted from Chantal Mouffe’s construction of agonistic relations – along with all its problems. Consensus breeds stasis, yes, but to the extent that consensus is ever met. But when is consensus ever achieved? The agonistic model was devised primarily to offer an alternate framework to the dominant one in democratic political theory. It is a critique of the deliberative model of democracy as proposed by philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, which, by upholding modern democracy as a tool for rational consensus, ignores the plurality of contemporary politics – one that, Mouffe argues, can find no reconciliation. For my taste, the difference between agonistic pluralism and deliberative democracy is one of emphasis, of dialect. They are both critiques of the so-called aggregate model of democracy, which addresses the need for parties to represent collective desires; they both celebrate the individual, though the deliberative model through morals, the agonistic one through rights; and they both insist on the plurality of values. But before stating the obvious difference between the deliberative and the agonistic models – namely the value of consensus – Mouffe has stated several times that her first objection to Rawls’s and Habermas’s attempts is their neglect of the central role emotions and passions play in the decision-making process.¹ By coming to terms with the role of power, as constituted through passions rather than rationality, Mouffe posits agonism as a conflict between adversaries, not enemies. She also claims that agonistic confrontation is not so much a matter to be implemented, but is already a preexisting condition of democracy. As opposed to deliberative democracy, which aims to reach an agreement – if not consensus – agonism advocates the continued expression of adversarial passions so as to recognize modern democracy’s plurality of values.

Mouffe has addressed the paradox of modern liberal democracy, namely its limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty;² but she has less directly addressed the apparent paradox in agonistic
democracy: nurturing an environment for dissensual interaction requires more than a collective agreement to disagree – it requires nothing less than consensus. To wit, agonism’s critique that consensus systematizes stasis applies equally to itself. Agonism compels all its participating adversaries to recognize the productivity of irreconcilable confrontation over consensus. The institutions or players that sponsor agonistic relations must be univocally in support for it to be actualized. Unfortunately, rejecting or disagreeing with the fundamentals of agonism is not recuperated by its definition of contesting pluralities. With this perspective, it is unclear how the various hegemonic systems constantly at play in society can be “disarticulated and transformed as a result of agonistic struggle,” when agonistic democracy is itself one of the hegemonic systems. Mouffe has acknowledged that “the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place,” the social grounding on which power is perceived, “is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices.”

If Miessen’s point is to celebrate non-consensual forms of generating knowledge, the contributing voices in the book seem to suggest the opposite. Far from fostering a venue for plural agendas to play out their differences, Nightmare includes contributions from Hans Ulrich Obrist (Miessen’s friend and sounding board), Eyal Weizman (Miessen’s thesis advisor), Chantal Mouffe (Miessen’s inspiration) and Jeremy Beaudry and Bassam El Baroni (two curators of Manifesta 8 who hired Miessen and his design colleagues to design one of the exhibition’s venues). Buttressed by a wealth of support – particularly in the interview with Mouffe, where the interviewer and interviewee appear, ironically, to be in mutual agreement – the book proves to be more of an exercise in consensus-making than a treatise on the generative powers of disagreement. It is consternating to critics observant of this double standard – and the true beauty of Miessen’s argument – that any dissenting voice can be neutralized as validation for agonistic politics at work. One can venture to say that suggesting the irrelevance of concord is tantamount to eradicating the perspective needed for critique. In other words, if the status quo is already oppositional, it would categorically be impossible to be oppositional otherwise. That I criticize, confront, and oppose in fact endorses and actualizes the book as a place of agonistic relations.

The crux of the book comes at the end of Miessen’s interview with Mouffe. When Miessen evoked the crossbencher of the British House of Lords as a model for independent, non-partisan action, Mouffe observes that the author is in fact most interested in theorizing his
own position. That Miessen sees the crossbencher – House members who sit squarely between the Left and the Right, both physically and politically within the parliament – as an agent analogous to himself reveals the underlying dependency, regardless of one’s self-perceived independence, on established systems. As it was rightly noted in the interview, the crossbencher’s freedom as such is manifest only within the consensually established confines of the British legislature. For Miessen, the role of the individual agent, glorified in the text as a self-propelled, self-motivated juggernaut – armed with ‘serious interest’, ‘healthy curiosity’, and an ‘intuitive but deep understanding’ – who is readily assailable on any project from health care infrastructure to education to architecture and design, has worked well for him as a professional modus operandi. But how exactly does this translate for the rest of us ‘spatial practitioners’? Could Miessen’s method work for everyone else? Can a society of individuals be imbued with collective values? Furthermore, practicing architects will share Robert Milklitsch’s critique of Mouffe’s post-Marxism, which in theorizing the political, evacuates the materiality of the institutions of culture – materials and its social economy is of primary interest to architects who intend to build, rather than discuss architecture. Alas, most architecture students still enroll into architecture school with the intention of designing buildings when they graduate. Even if we were to take the recommendations supplied by agonistic democracy outlined in Nightmare at face value, it goes without saying that they’re only operable in the parts of the world where democracy is seen as a legitimate polity – an area restricted to the Western world.

Skepticism is the dominant mode in Miessen’s book. From the opening sentence of his introduction, which asks us to cast doubt on democracy, to his gloomy appraisal of the current state of affairs within professional architecture, to his call for self-initiated forced intervention upon existing social institutions, Miessen’s persistent distrust in establishments sponsor the reader’s own distrust of Miessen’s writing. As previously mentioned, the non-academic approach to bringing about his argument presents challenges to the thoughtful reader. How are claims verified? What does Miessen mean by “critical”? Freely citing both Nazi apologist Carl Schmitt and Jewish literary critic and Holocaust survivor Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Miessen assembles a complexly befuddling world-view that, outstripping his thesis in distinctiveness, ultimately stands as the key identity, the protagonist of the book.

The air of doubt thickly circulates between the author and the reader, but this seems, surreptitiously so, exactly how Miessen wants it.
Like a cartoon thought bubble that reveals a parallel stream of thought, our questions for Miessen shape us into active participants of the text. In short, he makes us into his “individual outsider.” In chapter nine, Miessen evokes the Stoics, and by proxy the image of the Sage, but the parallel thoughts of doubt – the third text activated in the reader – reminds me of an earlier figure in ancient philosophy: that of the midwife, introduced in Plato’s recounting of a dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus. Socrates approached the young orphan Theaetetus and asked him for a simple definition of knowledge. When the boy was confused by his question, Socrates explained to him that just as women in labor employ midwives to help birth babies, he could help with the birthing of ideas. Pace Miessen, the Socratic midwife is one that is intellectually barren, but nonetheless able to produce knowledge through bringing it forth in others. Like Miessen’s characterization of the uninvited outsider, the non-expert interlocutor armed only with “serious interest” and a “healthy curiosity,” Socrates produced knowledge through actively locating venues for dialogue and intervention. Thus, our pangs of doubts are simply intellectual labor pains.

ENDNOTES
1 Mouffe, Chantal, Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism, Political Science Series 72 (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies 2000)
2 Mouffe, C., The Democratic Paradox (London: Verso 2005) 4
4 Ibid., 9-10
FROM: NINA VALERIE KOLOWRATNIK
SUBJECT: CONTRIBUTION TO MARKUS MIESSEN’S FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION
TO: *
CC: MARKUS MIESSEN
Dear *

I am currently working as an assistant editor with Markus Miessen on the forthcoming book *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation* (Expothesis, published by Expodium, Utrecht).

The book’s aim is to fuel a critical debate amongst practitioners from different fields of knowledge, cultural background and political positions about the central thesis of Miessen’s recent publication *The Nightmare of Participation – Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality*. This book does not look for approval or consensus, but seeks for a critical examination of the proposed post-consensual (spatial) practice, formulating a necessity to undo the innocence of participation while promoting a conflictual reading of participation as a mode of pro-active first person singular practice.

As a result, Expodium invited Markus Miessen to run a workshop and develop a book with them, which can perform the before-mentioned undertaking. In this context, we would like to invite you to contribute. Since we believe in your work and practice as one which is not only crucial, but also relates productively to the problematic that *The Nightmare of Participation* has outlined, we would like you to become an active agent within this debate.

Within this framework your contribution can take on whichever format or species of text (or other) you feel most comfortable with (i.e. essay, review, conversation, academic text etc.), as well as a length of your choosing (if you decide you need 200 words, that is fine – if you need 8,000 words to make your argument, this is OK as well). The only given is that your contribution should somehow address the central theme of *The Nightmare of Participation* and either try to develop it further, corrupt it, productively criticise it or simply take it elsewhere and do something with it, which was the intention of the book in the first place. We also welcome the use of images, as an addition to your argument, or even as the prior medium to make your argument. In either case, images should be understood as contentual statements.

We would like to stress that your text will not be edited in terms of content before being published (even if it deals very critically with the book itself); texts will only be copy- and proof-edited.
In the attachment you will find the PDF of *The Nightmare of Participation*. If you prefer to read the printed version of the book, of course we are happy to send a copy to you.

We are very much looking forward to receiving your response. If you decide to participate, we would be very pleased to receive your contribution before April 15.

I am looking forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,
Nina Valerie Kolowratnik

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**THE NIGHTMARE OF PARTICIPATION**  
(CROSSBENCH PRAXIS AS MODE OF CRITICALITY)  
PUBLISHED BY STERNBERG PRESS, MERVE VERLAG, METIS KITAP, DPR EDITORIAL, AND ARCHIVE BOOKS.

Welcome to Harmonistan! Over the last decade, the term ‘participation’ has become increasingly overused. When everyone has been turned into a participant, the often uncritical, innocent, and romantic use of the term has become frightening. Supported by a repeatedly nostalgic veneer of worthiness, phony solidarity, and political correctness, participation has become the default of politicians withdrawing from responsibility. Similar to the notion of an independent politician dissociated from a specific party, this third part of Miessen’s Participation trilogy encourages the role of what he calls the ‘crossbench practitioner’, an ‘uninterested outsider’ and ‘uncalled participator’ who is not limited to existing protocols, and who enters the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to generate change. Miessen argues for an urgent inversion of participation, a model beyond modes of consensus. Instead of reading participation as the charitable savior of political struggle, Miessen candidly reflects on the limits and traps of its real motivations.

“Miessen has looked at current modes of form creation, and found them frozen in a near-Soviet style political ice age of pseudo-participation. He sees the early twenty-first century design process as one in which cynical globalized Muppets, drained of all joy, enact outdated hollow rituals grounded in unquestioned capitalism, zombie-style political correctness and poll-driven mock democracy. The end result of these rituals can only be designs and structures that embody, at best, the stale aesthetics of
accommodation—a place and space he cheekily calls Harmonistan—a realm whose inhabitants unflinchingly believe that ‘majority equals smartness’.

One might quickly sense a potential whiff of Ayn Rand or crypto-fascism here, but as a means of escape, and with the goal of creating critical and productive change, Miessen instead advocates vigorous cross-disciplinary intrusions—a universe of butting in where one isn’t necessarily invited—to willfully generate alien and unexpected new spaces and ideas. He advocates individuals to become crossbench practitioners, ‘uninvited outsiders’ who actively seek out conflict, despising the stillborn texture of today’s culture, a world whose default design mode is one of reflexive consensus.

What could have been a career-trashing minefield of a thesis is instead a strikingly intelligent, profoundly well considered Way Forward that feels both futuristic and correct. It’s not a simple read, but this book has earned every nuance of its complexity.”
— Douglas Coupland

“...the book impressively uses curiosity and delight in order to mobilize underexposed issues into central operative questions, locating them at the foremost political front. Miessen could be described as a pyrotechnician of projects and activities. In a literally limitless network of collaborators, he is spearheading a post-architecture generation, while the old men are still waiting for their architectural commissions, not realizing that the ship is sinking and the architectural community has lost its relevance. This is all Cedric Price territory.”
— Konrad Frey

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NVK
NINA VALERIE KOLOWRATNIK
ASSISTANT EDITOR
STUDIO MIESSEN
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Waking up from the nightmare of participation

PATRICIA REED

ECCENTRIC SPACE:
DEMOCRACY AT ALL COST AND THE INDISCIPLINARY PARTICIPANT

Yet It Is an Invited Nightmare; Arrest Miessen’s Equation; Participation as Democracy; The Demos Is Already Given; Imbrication with an Order of Governance; Equality Is Pure Potential; Indisciplinary Participant, Reveal Logical Dissonance; Naively Question the Knowledge of Experts; ‘Intellectual Emancipation’ Passing Through Rancière’s Axiom of Equality; Xenos; Surplus Actor; Enactment of Authorship; Production of Eccentric Space; In the Spirit of Play;
Part I – Democracy At All Cost

Markus Miessen’s latest book, *The Nightmare of Participation*, attests to a spirit of agonistic participation. It is telling that it commences with a quote from Slavoj Žižek, the very embodiment of a nightmarish figure upon the discipline of philosophy:

“One of the most disgusting things is when what you secretly dream about is brutally imposed on you from the outside. We have a nice name for a realized dream: it is called a nightmare.”

If Miessen’s original monograph is the description of a nightmare, a realized intrusion, then this post-production publication could be read as a nightmare squared – the intrusion of an intrusion. Yet, it is an invited nightmare. We invited authors brutally impose ourselves within the framework initiated by Miessen, to provoke its very contours. We convene on a common ground to debate and contest the articulation of a given rhetorical framework or stage. Thus what this book does is to render citable through a plurality of voices, the nightmare that constitutes participation. But does that mean we are merely invited to resonate its flows in disagreement or in agreement, reproducing its discursive validity within a given territory of knowledge production, reverberating as it were its contents through quotational and proximal reference? Quite possibly. Yet citation, as Samuel Weber notes, is not simply that which is quotable, but includes a double (both/and) etymological resonance of the word. Citation originates from the Latin root *citare*, to set in movement, yet is simultaneously included within the juridical order as arresting movement (as in a traffic violation citation). As such, it seems only apt to qualify this text as an excurses, as a trajectory of divergence from its conceptual origins, that lays down points of interruption and other criss-crossing paths through this labyrinth of dialogue surrounding participation. It is therefore my intention to arrest and diverge the ‘realized dream’ of participation already set in motion, and second, to put into movement other, augmented trajectories of the agents of participation implicated in the discussion through an expanded figuration of Miessen’s nightmarish protagonist *par excellence*, the uninvited outsider.

*The Nightmare of Participation* is introduced with a confrontational line of thought: that sometimes “all inclusive-democracy has to be avoided at all cost.” But is this statement really a critical provocation at all? Does the chastising of ‘democracy’ not risk falling into the trap on the right and the left concerning the hatred of democracy?
It is true that the very word democracy has seen better days and is perhaps worse for the wear, but when laying out methods of conflictual participation it is also necessary to contest the very reading of the word itself. The struggle of politics is a struggle for sensibility, including meaning in language, so it is here where I would arrest Miessen’s equation between the avoidance of democracy and non-consensual participation. The equation, rather, needs to be fundamentally inverted and read as a beckoning call precisely for participation as democracy.

In order to unpack this inverted equation between non-consensual participation and democracy, it is worthwhile to take a brief detour through the particular socio-political constellation to which Miessen responds. The regime of consensus against which *The Nightmare of Participation* is set has been identified as depoliticization, the social turn of politics and the post-democratic across the fields of political theory and philosophy. In the most rudimentary sense, the regime of consensus concerns the ‘victory’ of a liberal-democratic apparatus for political/social organization after the ‘defeat’ of communism, embodying the oft-repeated slogan from Margaret Thatcher, where there is ‘no alternative’. This perceived ‘victory’ was so utterly commanding for the theorist Francis Fukuyama to declare an infamous ‘end to history’; not that there would no longer be any events per se, but that the historic struggle for political structures was finally over. The alternative-less plight of politics amounts to a form of politics stripped of politics. In this regard, politics has been reduced to a management tool of the social, doing away with future scenarios and other modalities of (co)existence, politics reduced to “the art of steering the ship and embracing the waves, in the natural, peaceful movement of growth.”

*Harmonistan* is Miessen’s tongue-in-cheek name for this regime of consensus, and although eliciting a chuckle upon reading, is anything but harmonious. What is at work in the regime of consensus is the totalization of various peoples, places and functions into a unity of a single space indistinguishable with the population and its distribution, to the exclusion of any remainder. Consensus has nothing to do with a common agreement of policies of an expert government, yet permeates and petrifies the normative symbolic order or, to the violent segregation of that which is supernumerary, to that which is otherwise possible. The stultifying presupposition of consensus is that the people, *the demos* are already given (consensus is whole), that their communities are established, and their modes of speech are concordant with their roles, functions and disputes. Within the normative
symbolic order, what the regime of consensus sets up is an impotently myopic vision: that we have attained resolution in regards to the fight over political structures, yet the condition of this resolution is that we only can have what we have; in the words of Alain Badiou, consensus is the fusing of what is with what can be. To downplay the inherent violence of this totalizing consensus is a dangerous gesture, both in theory and in practice, for to do so prohibits the political subjectification of that which is excluded, of the part that has no part in the normative structuring. The regime of consensus cannot even conceive of a representable barrier of exclusion, nor of the processes of division in its totalizing view; as a result, the delineation of a supernumerary is completely absent from common sensibility, from the sensus communis.

To conflate consensus with ‘all-inclusive democracy’ reifies this violently negligent presupposition of totality, of wholeness, of the congruency between the population (the accountable, the surveyable) and the demos. Now in fairness, the general tone of The Nightmare of Participation seeks necessary and admirable strategies to combat such a regime of consensus, through the intrusion of uninvited intervention, yet the stakes of rhetoric involved in such a project cannot be unquestioned. Words are not innocuous. The suggested avoidance of democracy alluded to through the book, in order to instigate other modes of appearance (of architecture, art, people, interactions, policy-making, pedagogy and so forth), is a commonly held opinion from both the right and left. The beaten up notion of democracy as that associated with mediocrity, watered down solutions, majority rule, rampant populism coupled with mass individualism, passivity, and the reproduction of the status quo, is explained as a form of governance riddled with bureaucratic procedures, unable to propel substantial change or novelty. What we are reduced to on both sides of critiques on democracy is an imbrication of democracy with an order of governance, a form of governance that can be instituted (even viciously imposed), and a form of governance synonymous with certain states known simply as ‘democracies’. In these instances democracy becomes identical to systems of law, expert guidance, protocols of management, and even designates certain geographical regions, to the subordination of democracy as a universal potential power of the people. Daniel Bensaïd captured these doubts projected at democracy quite acutely when quoting Tocqueville from 1853: “I accept the intellectual rationale for democratic institutions, but I am instinctively an aristocrat, in the sense that I contemn and fear the crowd. I dearly love liberty and respect for rights, but not democracy.”
Tocqueville’s statement is emblematic of an ongoing hatred or deep mistrust of democracy (from Plato to Churchill and beyond) that has been duly traced by Rancière, who resuscitates this bloodied term from the shackles of ordered governance. Fear of the crowd is nothing new, for the crowd is inherently unbounded, and it is here where we see Plato’s critique of democracy: that the limitless wills and demands of the people (the excess drives of the demos) must be contained to conform to the wills of an expert government, of those who know better, of those who are privy to knowledge. By equating democracy with a system of expertly delineated limits, what is at stake is a fundamental shift from the very unsettling force implied in the ‘-cracy’ of democracy, to an ‘-archy’ (of oligarchy, monarchy) that is some form of legitimated, grounded power. This is not merely a linguistic issue, but the very limiting of the limitless, which strips democracy of its political thrust and is conceived as a structure to contain the implicit excess of wills and drives of the people. The hatred of democracy is thus that a ‘good’ democracy is one that can successfully contain, stabilize, subdue and repress the inherently unstable and excessively demanding demers. The hatred of democracy is a doubly directed one; on the one hand it is directed at the increased instantiation of limits by government (totalitarianism), and on the other hand, the hatred is directed at popular participation in public affairs itself, which is portrayed as irresponsible, individualistic and consumer driven (mediocrity, media driven).

The call to avoid an ‘all-inclusive democracy’ in the Nightmare of Participation reveals an accord with the hatred of democracy itself. And herein lies a central point that demands arrestation before proceeding on this excurses. What needs to be avoided at all cost is not democracy, but its very equation as a totalizing instrument of cohabitational, structural limitation and popular mediocrity. For it is in the hatred of this particular apprehension of democracy where politics disappears, being usurped into the category of a given ordering, the disappearance of which is the specific critical axis around which Miessen’s ‘agonistic’ stance on participatory intervention revolves. If participation is called upon to unsettle given modes and protocols of operation, instigating other conditions of possibility, this commendable portrayal of participation can go by no other name than the enactment of democracy, assuming the vital force of the ‘-cracy’ (kratos) in all of its augmentative capacity in agonistic relation to the settlement of the ‘-archy’ (arkhe), or that which rules and distributes a given order.
Now why is this participatory gesture of augmentation and unsettlement an enactment of democracy? What is this calling for democracy at all costs that we are alluding to here? If democracy is no longer figured as a legitimate state of a parliamentary or social system (a grounded, ‘-archy’), it is rather a happening, a doing, constituted by the impetus (-cracy) of the people (demos). The ‘-archy’ we are speaking of here, is not pejorative in any sense, it is simply a normative structure; in the parlance of Rancière this goes by the name of ‘police’. This ‘-archy’ is constituted by a given organization of bodies as part-of a community, coupled with the administration of places, operations and functions proper to the population and its parts. The ‘-archy’ is sustained through the distribution of the sensible wherein ways of living, being and co-existing operate through a certain perceptibility, to the exclusion of that which is imperceptible (in French the expression is partage de sensible, with partage denoting that which is both shared and that which is divided). The allotment of parts and roles is based on a particular allocation of spaces, temporality and modes of operation that delineate the common, or the topology of the normal, the sensus communis, and the ways in which individuals may par-take in that distribution. The ‘-archy’ of the distribution of the sensible is aesthetic in nature, contingent as it is on what is seeable, sayable and what makes sense where, by whom and when. Yet this inherently inequal structuring of the ‘-archy’ is upheld by a paradoxical equality that can be succinctly formulated as such:

“There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you.”

This equality at the root of all ‘-archy’ is not to suggest equality is some sort of flattened hierarchical (Harmonistan-like) goal, but rather a truth, a universal, an axiom at the core of all constellations of human co-existence. Equality is pure potential; it is the utter, shared capacity sustaining the imbroglio of aesthetic conditions that delineate a given sphere of social operations. It is this potential potency (-cracy) of equality where politics happens, in the very testing out of this contingency of equality buttressing the ‘-archy’. Politics here is reformulated as a doing, a force rather than a thing or structure – it happens when those who have no part re-assert and test out the contingent equality through which the inequal distribution of the sensible
operates. Politics, as such, is instigated by that which is supplementary (the demos), by that which doesn’t quite fit, nor is common-sensically understood in the normal configuration of the community (the population). Politics shifts the symbolic ordering of the ‘-archy’, whereby the population and its parts are confronted with a supplement to its very structure, with “what had no business being seen, and [making] heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise.”

If Miessen’s participatory agent *par excellence* is sketched as an ‘uninvited outsider’, (s)he is the very embodiment of this supplementary appearance, for it is in that which does not quite belong, the part-with-no-part, where unsettlement and reconfiguration can take place. This taking place of politics in relation to the ‘-archy’ is so by way of a supernumerary impetus, the force of ‘-cracy’, that is identical with the doing of democracy.

**Part II – The Indisciplinary Participant**

By arresting the call to avoid democracy in the discussion of participation, inverting its course as it were, towards a beckoning call for its very enaction, it is worthwhile to proceed on an excurses of the uninvited outsider, Miessen’s central protagonist, in order to carve out speculative paths as to how this character comes to deploy a democratic impulse. This excurses is by no means exhaustive, but meant to outline exploratory modes of participating, with certain figurations that may be useful in describing the characterization of participatory gestures, their attitudes and positioning.

In *The Violence of Participation*, Miessen’s second part of the trilogy on the subject, Tirdad Zolghadr raised an important point in framing these participatory discussions, especially in relation to politics. The acknowledgement that he made, when we frame the capacity of art or spatial interventions to produce novelty, or new spaces for thinking and doing, thereby redistributing sensibility of the ‘-archy’, is a rarity to say the least. This statement is entirely accurate and infuses the discussion with a much needed humility, but politics, or democracy itself is also an exceptional and fleeting event, contingent as it is not only on the participants themselves, but also the network of relational, contextual and historical conditions within which an aesthetical situation is instigated, not to mention the role of chance. It is extremely difficult, in theory and/or in praxis to produce affects of unsettlement of the sort we have been discussing. That said we should not merely give up at its potential production, as grandiose, happenstance or ephemeral as it may be, in the words of Beckett, to try
again, fail again, fail better. What is at stake here is not the rewriting of justice-making policy within the ‘-archy’, but rather the ways in which those contingencies reinforcing the ‘-archy’ can be rendered experiential, and thus, opening up relations of perceptibility. In a further passage in *The Nightmare of Participation*, Zolghadr challenges the notion of the ‘uninvited outsider’, again, I think rightly pointing out that we actors, fully implicated within the realm of cultural production (for lack of a better term), are not in fact outside of anything. We may occasionally be an architect working on a pedagogical platform rather than a building, but we are wholly inside a particular grammatical set as to how to discuss, familiar with rhetorical conventions, modes of articulation, networks of actors, modes of presentation and so on. Miessen’s defense of this position is quite interesting, and calls for a less Romantic (his word) connotation of this figure of the uninvited outsider. By calling for sets of skills beyond disciplines, beyond certain professional circles, or rather traversing through them, he is actually calling up a figure which could better be described as indisciplinary. Without the Romantic overtones of the uninvited outsider, I shall prefer to position these following characterizations as belonging to that of an indisciplinary participant, as (s)he who willfully neglects categories of knowledge, whilst twisting and transforming, disciplinary conventions.

**The Ignorant Participant**

The plight of the ignorant comes to mind when figuring our indisciplinary participant, particularly in the guise of three historical characters: Socrates, Elizabeth of Bohemia and Joseph Jacotot. With Socrates’ famous statement “I know that I know nothing,” he of course did not mean that he actually knew nothing, but felt that all knowledge (or wisdom), begins with a presupposition of ignorance, in order to intensively question opinions and that which one thinks one knows. Knowledge begins with a sense of wonder, and not that of (perceived) mastery. In taking to the agora to (uninvitedly) question prominent Athenians, his particular method of revealing inconsistencies in respondent’s answers, was a wholly relational and theatrical one – a living philosophical enquiry with interlocutors, whether they liked it or not. What has become known as Socratic dialectics was never a written philosophy, but always a performative one instigated in relation to the givenness of people’s thoughts. In this sense, and as pointed out in Carson Chan’s epilogue to *The Nightmare of Participation*, Socrates fancied himself as a philosophical mid-wife, himself “knowing that he knows nothing,” but rather bringing others’ beliefs and
epistemology to the fore, challenging them and seeking to reveal logical dissonance. It is in this regard where blind spots within disciplinary knowledge(s) can be confronted and intervened upon, opening up questions from other perspectives, revealing specific limit conditions in thinking and approaches to situations of knowledge. We can thus deduce two rules for our Indisciplinary Participant, following the example of Socrates: assume that one does not know; and deliver knowledge from spaces and people through unprovoked questions.

As René Descartes’s correspondent for seven years (until 1640), Elizabeth of Bohemia, a curious aristocrat, followed the progress of the theories of the separation of mind and body, seeking an understanding of the most advanced thought of the day, known as Cartesian Dualism. As a curious non-expert, who was unbound to mathematical logic, she provoked questions (and gaping holes) in Descartes theory based on the actual experience of living itself: If the mind and body are indeed separate, how do they relate and interact with one another? If these two entities can be logically separated, in theory that is, how are we to mediate this with our experience which is continuous – with the mind and body seemingly acting in concert in our everyday lives? Her questions, embedded in humble, perhaps overly modest language, are still very much alive today, known as embodiment studies, an ongoing field which examines precisely these experiences of mind-body interaction in practice, that is, in consonance. By asking polite and simple questions of the expert intellectual, Elizabeth of Bohemia brought these lofty theories down to earth by asking for concrete, experiential answers to abstract rhetoric. The lesson we can infer from this master/lay-woman correspondence in regards to the Indisciplinary Participant: Question the knowledge of experts, even naively so.

The ignorant schoolmaster, Joseph Jacotot, who has served as the most influential figure upon the thought of Rancière, revolutionized conventions of pedagogy while in exile during the Restoration. His method, known as ‘Intellectual Emancipation’, tangibly confirmed that illiterate parents could teach their children how to read, and, in the process, demonstrated that knowledge is not necessary to teaching, nor is explication necessary to learning. In conventional pedagogy, the schoolmaster’s task is to reduce the gap of knowledge between him/her self and that of a pupil, yet, paradoxically, in order to achieve this goal, a gap of ignorance must always be recreated, establishing new instances of ignorance. Within such a model, the pupil is not simply the one who does not yet know what the schoolmaster knows; the pupil is also the one who does not know what he does not
know, or how to come to know it. What this never-ending pedagogical game of cat and mouse (of contracting and expanding separation in knowledge) entails, is the constant lesson that ignorance is the opposite of knowledge, that knowledge is not an amalgamation of fragments of information, but a *position*. The distance played out in the interaction of knowledge positions is sustained by the unending practice of the schoolmaster jumping ahead and re-instanting the gap – this is the ultimate lesson of such a progressive pedagogical logic: that there is one who possesses the knowledge of the contents of ignorance, and one who does not. The ordered form of pedagogical activity outlined above reinforces its own point of origin: that of the inequality of intelligence. The looping force of the playing out of inequality goes by the name of stultification. The counter-position to the endless playing out of stultification comes by way of a re-configuration of ‘intellectual emancipation’ passing through Rancière’s axiom of equality, which goes by the authentification of the equality of intellect. Such a statement does not invoke the “...equal value of all manifestations of intelligence, but the self-equality of intelligence in all of its manifestations.” Just as in the process of learning one’s mother tongue, the ‘ignorant’ and the scientist who develop hypotheses both operate by translating signs into other signs, proceeding by comparisons and examples in order to convey and transmit their intellectual trajectories, all the while digesting what other intelligent beings are trying to convey to them. Through the equality of intelligence, knowledge is no longer a type of expert position maintained through the stultifying logic of transmission from the schoolmaster-to-ignoramus, but rather knowledge is formulated as a poetic, imaginative labor of transliteration, which formulates the core of intellectual emancipation. Jacotot’s lessons for our Indisciplinary Participant are: to assume the equal capacity for intelligence; to assume the capacity for self-instruction; and continue translating questions and dialogue, compare and contrast these knowledge fragments.

**The Participant as Xenos**

When discussing figurations of an ‘outsider’ as a participatory actor, we are unavoidably entering upon the discursive territory on the foreigner. It is here where we can draw from the fruitful etymology of that which is foreign, from the Greek origination contained within the concept of ‘xenos’. The meaning of the Greek word *xenos* has a triple signification, which is often obscured in our English variant of foreigner, that can be outlined as such:
of course does refer to a foreigner, but is someone outside a particular community, with no clearly defined relationship;
b Xenos as an Enemy/Stranger;
c Xenos as a guest friendship (as opposed to Philos, the root of philosophy, referring to local or known friends)

What this triple signification of xenos signifies, is an inherent uncertainty or ambiguity as to the status of an unknown person, this being the quintessential characterization of a both/and relationship, seeing as xenos can be neutral, threatening or friendly, perhaps even simultaneously. Xenos can only be properly understood in the context of ‘Xenia’, the Ancient Greek protocol for obligatory hospitality, illustrated through several myths where Gods (Mercury and Jupiter) making appearances as humans test a given community in their enactment of xenia, by seeking refuge as strangers. Those mortals who enact xenia are rewarded by the Gods (the old couple, Philemon and Baucis), and that majority who did not, are punished for rejecting the quasi-religious duty to enter into a relationship of reciprocity with those who are unknown.

In Of Hospitality, Jacques Derrida reflects on xenos, as, in particular, one who questions, and asks about others; as a result xenos can disturb the reign of normativity through a world that is strange and unfamiliar. In conventional hospitality, (what Derrida calls conditional hospitality) when xenos knocks at the door and enters the home, they do so under the unspoken rules of the host, in this way xenos is held hostage to the laws of the host. If xenos does not respect the laws, then the reciprocal relationship subtended by the laws of conditional hospitality will be breached and the relation severed. In his description of unconditional hospitality, that is hospitality with no invitation, with no condition to adapt to the rules of the host, the guest/host dynamic finds itself in an inverse power arrangement to that found in conditional hospitality. Through this hierarchical inversion, where the guest becomes a host and a host becomes a guest, a type of conceptual violence emerges, in that the self is interrupted, from the outside: “... the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from outside. The master thus enters from the inside as if he came from the outside. He enters his home thanks to the visitor, by the grace of the visitor.”

What Derrida is suggesting is that the self can only come to identify itself from that which is other, from that which is strange; the self can only know itself through xenos. When we translate this unconditional
hospitality within the realm of ‘houses’ of knowledge, namely disciplinary discourses, can the figure of the indisciplinary participant as xenos, not also interrupt the ‘self-hood’ of disciplines, causing processes of re-identification, based on relations of strangeness? How would the architect, for example, as xenos help re-formulate the identification of the ‘self-hood’ of economics? The indisciplinary participant as xenos is a complex portrait, and arguably a speculative description, further complicated by the unwritten ‘rules’ by which xenos engages reciprocity with the host. What sort of ethics does xenos enact in relation to strangeness or that which has not yet been defined, that which is not known in advance?

The Participant as Surplus Actor

If the indisciplinary participant is always uninvited, (s)he is thrust outside of conventional contractual arrangements (implicit or explicit) where a precise task or need is defined, and the solution, or service, outsourced to the most fitting candidate. The indisciplinary participant is, in this sense, not hosted under the terms of normative economic relations; (s)he is always in surplus of demand. The ambiguity of tasks or imperatives to fulfill are precisely what makes our actor an ethical one: (s)he is not bound to accomplish a delineated role, function or assignment, as is the case with fulfilling rigid moral requirements, (s)he is pursuant of an ethical trajectory, which can be succinctly summarized as an ongoing search for a good life17 – keeping in mind Aristotle’s differentiation between ‘bare-life’ into which human-animals are born, and ‘good life’ (eudaimonia) as that which perpetuates and gives birth to the polis, and thus, politics. What is at work within this indefinite quest for a good life is a process of self-authorization in relation to the perceptibility of a demand, a demand that must first be heard. That demand may not be entirely logical, as it can arrive as a feeling, instinct or intuition to which a prospective indisciplinary participant responds in self-authorizing fashion. Contained within the act of self-authorization, is the root auctor, the author and authority, rooted in gestures of augmentation – those are acts that multiply, amplify, intensify, increase, enhance, or expand a given form or context. An architecturally authored intervention may, for example, intensify a certain experience of spatial sensibility or orientation; a poem may multiply the possibilities of meaning or sense-making in language. The indisciplinary participant is one who authorizes him/her-self (without invitation) to experiment and articulate enlarged possibilities for experience, and in the process, can unsettle given coordinates and functioning of normativity. This
self-authorizing process is not without great risk, for as an unwanted gift, that potential and proverbial thorn in the side of society, we must ask ourselves how that thorn makes an appearance, in which direction is it thrust and upon which soft spots does it scratch and make itself felt. Jan Verwoert has compounded the notion of authorizing, beyond that of merely instigating a novel space, by including the following through and inhabiting of the discursive and/or aesthetic frameworks of one’s making – to dwell within the coordinates of the concrete realities of what has been born.

The ethical call implied by ‘following through’ denotes a fidelity to one’s actions and the affects of one’s authorial gestures. Not fidelity in the dogmatic sense of originary fixedness, but a fidelity to the metaphorical inhabitation of one’s intervention, the capacity to both alter and be altered. The indisciplinary participant enables a space/situation of relationality (textually, pictorially, spatially, rhetorically, etc), that is, the author produces affect, what I like to call contaminating imagination. To enact authorship is thus to initiate an ethical relation in a double sense: it is to self-authorize in response to the perception of a demand, and it is to dwell within the substantial and conceptual coordinates of one’s making, including the unforeseen network of interpretive interactions. If, as Simon Critchley postulates, ethical acts come as a response to the fidelity of a perceived demand, then the indisciplinary participant must also inhabit the space of demand produced through the act of authorship. Ethically speaking, the indisciplinary participant is always listening for the demand, attentive to its whispers, and responsive to its reverberations as an echo, resonance or feedback.

The Participant as Producer of Eccentric Space

What is this territory of novel perceptibility (occasionally) produced by the indisciplinary participant? What are these new topological conditions that have been affectively produced in the re-coordination of the given, of the normative?

The ‘-archy’ can be considered as a system within which diverse peoples, protocols, functions, roles, temporalities, places and materials revolve around a normative gravitational core (with a various degrees of affinity) called an attractor. The attractor, around which the normative inclines, is not a thing, nor an object, but is sensed (as in the distribution of the sensible); furthermore, attractors are both outlined (mapped) by a given social ‘-archy’ and contained within
an ‘-archy’, delineating a particular boundary condition of what can be seen, said, thinkable and doable. Attractors are dynamic and mutable both emitting and absorbing affectivity. Affective perturbations that destabilize or re-incline this normative pull can be envisioned as a process of decentering or eccentricity (ekkentros).

Eccentricity has fallen from its origins in the heavens, at first denoting a non-earth centered orbit in Ptolemaic astronomy, to the decentered notion portrayed above, and in common use today, eccentricity has more to do with whimsy, the slightly strange and that which does not quite fit in. With these three key attributes of eccentricity – whimsically off-beat, in inclined motion (and therefore generating other temporal rhythms), as well as de-centered – one can aptly deploy this descriptor to the novel perceptibility of the normative relationality to time, space, language and other bodies, ushered in and aesthetically instigated by the indisciplinary participant. The production of eccentric space can be conceived as that (rare moment) of the affective sphere which decenters one’s normative orientations and operations in relation to a given ‘-archy’.

The Playful Participant

The production of eccentric space, the decentering of normative orbits, although outlined above in a serious and rather rational intonation is caught up in a drive of play. In the spirit of play, other uses of things, spaces, bodies, etc. are rendered potential, reified structures of use are rendered contingent and wholly malleable, or twistable. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben cites the example of a child who transforms the function of a legal contract into a flying paper airplane; the child as such disregards normalized, official use and transforms it into something completely other. Agamben describes ‘play’ as an act of entirely inappropriate (re)use; an act that can free and distract humanity from a steadfast normality, without simply abolishing it, or negating it. Through play there is a neglecting of the sphere of operations within which the object, place, function, person or role is (sensorially) embedded. To play is to make a new use possible, transforming the normal operations of things and our interactions with them. Considering that our everyday lived experience is one of appropriating cultural codes, incorporating them in our performance of the choreography of the quotidian; through play, one does not merely re-appropriate normative conditions, but more importantly inappropriates them. It is through play, a practice of neglectful mis-use
that the whimsy, and decentering capacity of eccentric space can be articulated.

Our incomplete portrait of the indisciplinary participant can now be combined into a brief character sketch. The indisciplinary participant is a self-assumed ignorant who asks unprovoked questions, challenging expert thought, whilst constantly comparing and contrasting knowledge, assuming an equal capacity for intelligence. The indisciplinary participant is a friendly, threatening, whimsical stranger, who shows up at your house unconditionally, causing self-re-identification from the perspective of that which is outside. The indisciplinary participant does not require master skill, yet authorizes him/herself with fidelity to a whispered demand to create an affective space in which common sense is unsettled, dwelling in the echoes of this novel reterritorialization. The indisciplinary participant poetically twists the grammar of shared sense, hosting a multiplicity of potential functions of space, time, language and image, playfully inappropriating space. The indisciplinary participant is eccentric, to say the least.

ENDNOTES


In *Art Power*, Boris Groys has argued that a positive or negative review of the work of the artist/author is irrelevant. What matters is that attention is given (where and how lengthy the discussion are the only qualifiers), the decision on the part of a critic or commentator to write at all on an artist/author and their works is already a mode of validating the practice of an artist/author.


15 Rancière, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 10
As Threatening as Visiting a Gym Drunk; Curating from Airplanes; Epistemic Bonus Miles; Disciplinary Philandering; They Can Relax and Shine and Let Their Hair Down; But the Favor Is Rarely Returned; The Price for All the Surfing; Do the Arty Mystery Thing;
Markus Miessen has kindly invited me to grumble about the particular brand of easy interdisciplinarity that is now common in the arts. He’s extended this invitation before, and I must say the position he puts me in - the grouch, the party pooper, the call to order – is a slightly ungrateful one, but here goes. To begin with a caveat: make no mistake, I do enjoy listening to my colleagues talk Badiou, biochemistry, Wall Street and other things they know close to nothing about, for the spin cycle of free association is of course pretty harmless in the short term, a type of individualized inefficacy about as threatening as visiting a gym drunk. And there’s indeed much to say about the suggestive poetics of tottering around, especially at moments when others are being so efficacious. But that is pretty much where it ends I’m afraid. What’s more, in the long term, I cannot help but suggest that the lack of criteria at hand is, well, dare I say, PROBLEMATIC.

Isn’t it striking, for example, that what is applauded when it comes to disciplinary wanton and epistemic surfing per se is heftily critiqued when it comes to a similar light-heartedness in geocultural matters? Remember the accusation of curating from airplanes? In terms of travel, the ethical consideration goes, the placelessness leads to the traditional bourgeois impression that ‘audience’ is an abstract, universally self-same entity, and the lack of rooting, grounding, is deplored as sheer colonial antics. So what of the epistemic bonus miles, for their part? Why is semi-knowledge per se not a lack but a virtue, a mark of the freewheeling autonomy of the artistic tradition (borne, mind you, of a historical pact with the powers that be, a contract that determines it remain forever inconsequential). Might there be a connection here somewhere? Maybe the disciplinary philandering partakes in a type of deterritorialization that is similarly damaging? Perhaps. Be that as it may, the visibility economy of ever more inflationary, sweeping political claims does at times speak for itself surely.

When I make this kind of case in public, it’s usually pointed out that the arts’ privilege of being systematically unchecked is what makes intellectuals flock to them in the first place, as some kind of post-academic antechamber, or professional green room, where they can relax and shine and let their hair down, methodologically speaking. At which point I usually concede that I myself am a modest example of this migratory flow, having flocked to the arts from the field of comparative literature in the late nineties. It’s nothing new. In the terrific *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (1996), art historian Thomas Crow explained that people have been colonizing the visual arts at least since the eighties or before: seeing as philosophy has retreated into
“technical exchanges between academic professionals”, he argues, “artistic practice in the Duchampian tradition has come to provide the most important venue in which demanding philosophical issues can be aired before a substantial lay public.” (p. 183) And yet, he asks, can it be a mere coincidence that we’re so eager to have those guest scholars among us, but the favor is rarely returned?

If, by and large, your typical arts professional is not only allowed but expected to skim through vast expanses of knowledge with a minimum of rules and references, checks and balances – then this surely raises the following question: is the reason why this is not institutionalized elsewhere a simple result of academia being peopled by old fogies in tweed, mumbling ancient Greek in the candlelight? While the arts happen to be more progressive and xenoepistemic quite simply? Or is it because the price for all the surfing is higher than commonly expected? Strong, sustainable, ethically circumspect research takes time - and time, to the art tribe, is the one most precious commodity. In the light of the fact that, with time, I do not mean a few extra hours, but a few extra years, it’s a bit of a situation we have here. A new topical flavor can easily require a year or more, in reading and rereading, probing and reconsidering and starting all over again. Two years often seems reasonable. Mass-statistically speaking, two years is apparently the space of time that works best in a relationship, before things fall apart. Two years is also the typical product warranty – and the average life span of most electric gadgets. Two years is equally the average time it takes to learn a language.

It seems the role of the proto-disciplinary grump does befit me somehow; given that I once put the following in frieze magazine: “Over the last few months, I’ve been asked to elaborate on London architects, Arab migrants, Leninism, the eastward expansion of Europe, and the early history of Western philosophy. The term ‘unqualified’ is not an issue. Just do the arty mystery thing.” Funny how the stark arrogance of youth shines through in things you’ve published only years or mere months ago. I went on to describe “some carte blanche we share, some faux-waterfall of the post-medium, post-disciplinary condition. Some desperately muddled sense of proxemics.” I’d be exaggerating only slightly if I said that ever since then, I have not been invited to partake in any of this faux-waterfall stuff. Which is not only to say that people read frieze religiously. Nor to complain about a lack of invites. It is also to demonstrate that, although curators complain about symposium tourism, and artists complain that they’re framed as court jesters in these very symposia, to a certain degree we actually can actively and proactively define our authority as speakers, and as such we cannot be absolved of responsibility. At least not fully.
SCHORSCH KAMERUN
KISSED BY HIS ADBK MUNICH STUDENTS

ART GROUP OF
CHEERING PERSIANS

I Think I Know the Herd; Dragon’s Blood; Good Lemonade; Subsidies; Niko Is Ready; Our Sales Pitch; Much Applause from Inside; But Wait!; Sometimes We Wear Neon Cardigans;
Over the disappearance of instruments
I tip my refreshments
Sometimes I feel like an alpha animal
Because I think I know the herd
Quick as a flash and constantly weary
Or in purest attitude
I say, at first, nothing
Maybe Shirin will show something big
And outside a chorus of very old teachers sings
Very quietly. In the wind:
Today fashion is in the shadow of method
Today method is in the shadow of diode
Today art is in the shadow of cruel favour
Today ambition is written on your forehead
All at once dragon’s blood spurts from a wound
That’s how we’re on everyone’s lips: art group of cheering Persians
Jump up or just get right out

Sometimes I watch telly
Sometimes I enjoy watching you

Because I’ve fallen back into a state of innocence
I also can’t make good lemonade
Wow! That doesn’t look at all like you did it!
My wealth are the most beautiful words
Curves, mountains and walls abandoned
In the city the millions
In the garden subsidies
Niko is ready to re-compose his pictures
He hit the ground running and conquered the stages in one go
You walk like chests of drawers, creep according to rules, that no one else adheres to
Sometimes I watch telly, sometimes I watch liquid soap
The bowl has slowly filled with washing-up liquid
You just don’t have a proper foam dispenser!
We cry “CHEERING PERSIANS”! That’s our sales pitch
Then we met Herder / He was older

Sometimes I watch telly
Sometimes I enjoy watching you

We are now on our way to our new wardrobe
Celebrated, loved and needed. With much applause from inside.
Recently I became really classic to myself
Now we’re auctioning off the first row of seats in the galleries
Sex, power and delicacies
Loud pictures are barely audible anymore
But wait! At some point the double bind comes
There should be places where love is on the lookout
Oh yes, I want to keep quoting Warhol!
I’m sorry? What’s going on? Everything’s already working
Mate, you can wait a long time for a better now, innit,
One more prophesy: You lot’ll never manage it, even though you can do it all
By the way: We’re also threatening Bertelsmann!!
Our pictures are over-the-top comedies / Down the host’s staircase comes a grinning clown / He holds up a flashing sign / With our success on it!! / Sometimes we wear neon cardigans / In mobile phones / facebooks / Shopping malls / Bookshops / In private views and in secondary schools / The swamp snake bites down hard into the queen’s neck

Sometimes I watch telly
Sometimes I enjoy watching you

Sometimes I watch telly
Sometimes I enjoy watching you
AKADEMIE C/O (ARNO BRANDLHUBER, ANNA-CATHARINA GEBBERS, SILVAN LINDEN, CHRISTIAN POSTHOFEN)

AKADEMIE C/O'S LETTER TO BERLIN'S LEADING POLITICAL CANDIDATES, 2011

To Help in Their Voting Decision; The Structural Future of Berlin; Today We Request a Statement; "Baugesellschaft Am Schinkelplatz I.G."; The Sale of Publicly Owned Property; We Intend to Discuss;
TO:

KLAUS WOWEREIT, SPD LANDESVERBAND BERLIN
RENATE KÜNAST, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN BERLIN
FRANK HENKEL, CDU LANDESVERBAND BERLIN
HARALD WOLF, DIE LINKE LANDESVERBAND BERLIN
CHRISTOPH MEYER, FDP LANDESVERBAND
ANDREAS BAUM, PIRATENPARTEI BERLIN

BERLIN, 10 FEBRUARY 2011

To help in their voting decision, the members of Akademie c/o request the clarification of your political plans in relation to the redevelopment of Schinkel Platz and, in the event of your election victory, your planned, future tendering process for property in public ownership.

Dear Leading Candidates for Election to the Berliner Abgeordnetenhaus,

Our built environment must be a central theme in politics. For the last three years the Akademie c/o has been involved in the planning of the built environment in reunified Germany. As architects, urban planners, builders, architectural and cultural academics who are involved practically and theoretically in the structural future of Berlin, we believe that the handling of the city’s property is a blind spot in its politics. The decision-making processes and political aims involved in the awarding of property are not made publicly available or are extremely difficult to access.

In order that we may better understand your future political objectives in terms of urban development, and so that we can use this to make a decision about our vote, today we request a statement from you on the tendering process for property in the public realm and on the concrete example of Schinkel Platz in Berlin-Mitte:

The Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben along with the Liegenschaftsfonds Berlin opened up a tendering process for seven plots of land, mainly owned by the government, in Berlin Mitte, which
are, according to the construction plan of 2006, to be filled with build-
ings oriented on the historical layout of the city. By the closing date for
entries on 14 January 2011 many bids had apparently been made.

“We have gone out to tender for the land internationally and anticipate rich
Russians,” said Holger Lippmann (46), Director of the Liegenschaftsfonds.¹

At the expiration of the deadline for the tendering process the
“Baugesellschaft Am Schinkelplatz i.G.” – a “consortium of [38] inter-
ested members of the public, who [...] would like to take up residence
on Schinkel Platz” – had made their offer public (www.am-schinkel-
platz.de). This offer differs in many ways from the construction plan
and framework that underlined the tendering process: freestanding
villas (instead of interlocking buildings surrounding the square) with
an expanded 5,000 m² surface area will be created on four (instead
of seven) plots; furthermore the rebuilding of the Bauakademie will
be realised with funds from the ‘Baugesellschaft’. In doing so the
estimated market value of the additional area clearly goes over the set
budget for the construction of the Bauakademie. According to what
can be gleaned from publicly available information, a Bauakademie
constructed according to the text of the offer would subsequently find
itself under the ownership of the ‘Baugesellschaft’.

In this context we would request an answer to the following
questions:

1 In the future the sale of publicly owned property and land in
   Berlin will be:
   a Accelerated
   b Continued in the same way and to the same extent
   c Reduced
   d Suspended

2 Direct or indirect public support of residential construction is
   part of your political programme:
   a No
   b Yes
   c If ‘yes’, then in what way and to what extent would this
      support be carried out

3 A decision on the awarding of the property ‘Am Schinkelplatz’
   should take place, in your opinion:
   a According to the highest bidder in the context of the current
tendering process
b In favour of the ‘Baugesellschaft Am Schinkelplatz’
c Through the cessation of the tendering process resulting in
the property remaining in public hands. If the property should
remain in public hands: to what purpose?

We request an answer by 20 February 2011. We expect concrete infor-
mation about your political intentions.

We intend to discuss your plans in the context of an event organised by
the Akademie c/o and to inform the just over 500 registered members
of the Akademie c/o and a wider public of 20,000 interested members
of the public about your response in order that it might help them
come to a decision on where to place their vote.

Yours sincerely,

The members of Akademie c/o

ENDNOTES
1 Kittan, Tomas *Berlin Sells its Most Expensive Meadow*, Berliner
Zeitung, 30 September 2010
Planned development by ‘Berliner Baugesellschaft Am Schinkelplatz mbH i. G.’, architects (from left to right): Bernd Albers, Petra and Paul Kahlfeldt, Jan Kleihues, Antje Freiesleben and Johannes Modersohn.
MARCH 28, 2011, 7:14 PM

MARIA FUSCO

POOR IT IS

Our; Waver; Richer; Poor It Is;
Except; Ink;
It’s our
You see me here
When I was
Plucked me from
It’s our
He will waver when the time
The one who will
She almost
Suffice to say, their work had already been
They’re richer
Softening his jaw
We shouldn’t have slipped
Five of them. Yes, compressed
Poor it is: *this mass,*
Poor it is: *this horizon,*
Poor it is: *this bustle,*
Poor it is: *this plunge,*
Poor it is: *this devotion,*
*Poor it is.*
Reveille. Every morning, except this one.
As a spillage of ink on something precious
In a Desperate Search for Balance; Reverse Production; A Near Complete Dismantling; New Standards Had Emerged; Reassuring Pattern; A True Illusion of Important Work; A Small Group of People Grew Restless; Weight Increased; The Work Was Nearly Complete;
Some decided to leave. Others decided to stay. Within weeks the factory fell silent and closed. At first people were drawn to the factory out of boredom. And a degree of frustration that an incomplete project has been abandoned so soon. Initially people would function in parallel to each other. Many merely choosing this place as a location to pass the time. Calculation became the common language. Sharing notes and speculative models. The decision had been made, to avoid anecdotal play. Instead to move focus away from people and onto objects. A desire to account for everything. A need to create a series of equations that could provide a new balance. A desire to quantify relationships. Great lists of materials were created. Routes and modes of transportation discussed. Everything was tied to everything else in a desperate search for balance.

People found a way to amuse and occupy each other with this global accounting. It drew them all together and transcended all difference. Some mornings, new people would arrive and marvel at the incredible quantity of work that had taken place. An inverse productivity. Over many years the work continued. It initially brought curious outsiders to the former factory. After a while the visitors stopped coming, and left the main group to continue their work. The machinery by this point was unrecognizable. All of it had been broken back down into its component parts. One part of the group now specialized in turning these parts back into elements. Not reprocessing for the production of new things, but the complete breakdown of former parts. The effort put into this reverse production was as extreme as the early dynamic of capitalism.

The core group worked hard on their project at times when they were not involved in refining their calculations. There was an increasing sense that a moment was being reached. A certain level of resolution being achieved. The borders of the building were now completely porous. Gardens extended inside the building. And piles of material were now stacked just outside the factory walls. Some children were born. Some people left. Some people died. A few were maimed in accidents. The old worked alongside the young. There was no obligation to do anything. The texts and calculations formed an enormous archive. A massive log of all potential exchanges. An exhausted but happy group. With a perfect exchange tool. The basis of it derived from experience. A near complete dismantling.

Over time the building no longer resembled a factory. It had been absorbed into the landscape. The rigor of the original structure had
been lost. Every remaining surface was dented and bent. The roof was missing in places. At night people slept in the former offices. Safely located in the basement of the structure. In good weather they slept in the main space. Or on platforms suspended above the floor. The few remaining walls were so heavily marked with calculations that they provided a reassuring pattern. Even though some people no longer remembered what this work had been for. Special days had developed over time. Celebrating markers in the history of the place. Moments when ores and fuels had been resolved. Alcohol and food had been accounted for. There was the general feeling that things were working out. A sense that all relationships in the world had been accounted for.

Yet any casual visitor, had they still bothered to pass by, would notice some strange things. What felt like hard work in the former factory would look like almost nothing to someone used to the dynamic of capitalism. The level of work taking place was almost impossible to sense. A group of shy, nearly silent people moving slowly or lying on the ground. But in their minds they were still resolving great relationships. Breaking down structures and accounting for everything. The general health of the factory population was poor. Their superficial health and appearance even worse. Dentistry had never taken off. Podiatry unknown. Posture was hunched. And mirrors completely absent. New standards had emerged. Connected to the ability to resolve. Yet any attempt to provide an objective reading of this work was now bound to fail.

The true effort of the place mainly went into gardening. And even that was barely maintained. Yet there was a sense that this was a better way. Free from the constraints of production and the obligation to improvise. A true parallel had been created. That offered a true illusion of important work.

One winter, as the weather grew cold, a small group of people grew restless. The arrival of the three people had recently taken place. They claimed to have come from a similar place. And nobody still lived who could verify their claim. Their story sounded real enough, and their experiences extremely familiar. They too had been part of an improvised community. A long way from here. For a while even the most languid attempts at work were stopped. Many nights were now spent comparing research. The factory space was cleaned up. And layers of writing exposed in order to explain, in reverse the working of this place. Gardening stopped, leading to severe malnourishment.
Until one of the newcomers offered to take over, introducing an ‘efficient’ new technique. Killing animals had never occurred to the factory dwellers. But a taste for cooked meat lifted many from the floor and they too eagerly joined in the process of explanation. Some parts of the former walls were now restored. And a small generator coaxed back into life.

It was necessary to show the visitors everything. Reveal slowly how the resolution of all material relationships had been achieved. Layers of text were carefully cleaned from the walls, each removal revealing a hidden layer beneath. Papers were stacked and archived. Carefully constructed indexes were produced. Everyone was open and generous. The visitors would sometime be found searching through the shadows. Initially this was of no concern. But one or two were suspicious. Yet couldn’t find any focus for their concerns. After two or three months work began on reconstructing a computer-controlled welding machine. This now joined the paint shop that had been completed a few weeks earlier. One complete wall of the former factory had also been restored. At great effort the facade had been recreated. The effort took its toll. And people died prematurely. Others were weak. But the collective desire to show the work achieved led to renewed efforts. A new simple high fat and high carbohydrate diet was introduced. Leaving the workers happy for a while. Weight increased. And so did the pace of reconstruction. People were now encouraged to account for their work. Complex relationships were forgotten. Everything now had a rational aim. Death was increasingly common. The rate of reconstruction increased. The archive was lost in a fire. The process of explanation abandoned. The work was nearly complete. The three surveyed the work. They were happy with the reinstated plant. Clean and clear. Early on the last evening. The last of the original workers. Were lined up by the smelter. And no longer knowing what to do... Slipped into the melted ore.

This text was part of Liam Gillick’s retrospective project “Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario” at Witte de With in Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Zurich and Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, 2008-2010 (film part, second half).
MIKA HANNULA

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR HONEY, DON’T GO OFF KILLING ALL THE BEES – THE QUEST FOR THE COMMON GOOD AND THE PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY

The Conditions of the Conditions; Another Way of Contextualizing the Argument; We Face a Cavalcade of Rival Versions; It Takes Place Within It; The Mode of a Copy-Left; Illusion of Speed, Volume and Price; Slowly, Slowly, Slowly; The Opposite of One-Size Fits All Model; A Loving Conflict; Governing the Commons; Collective Self-Organization; Tradition; Sharing Is Really Caring?; Hope Is Always Only Possible on the Micro Levels; But if We Want Participatory Practice;
Participation, we have now learned and acknowledged, is a raw deal. It is a rough ride between expectations and experiences of what, where, how and when – and all this before someone from the lovely, oh-so-solid group tends to disappear and laugh all the way to the bank, to the bank. And you, and we, we are left with sore hands and vile thoughts. We participated and we lost. We gave all we had, but got nothing back. But why is it so? And, well, what could we do about it?

Markus Miessen’s *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)* certainly puts the finger where it belongs and where it hurts. We get an insight into the mess of the contemporary practices of knowledge production, which are by their character participatory. As an argument, Miessen’s endeavor is both entertaining and stimulating. Without a doubt, it is an important attempt to address the inherent problems of participatory practices in contemporary social and political climate.

The main difficulty of the argument is not what it says, or how it does it. These parts are pushed through and brought to the core effectively within the network of circulating discourses embodied into the hub of the book. The problem is the conditions of the conditions within which the argument is taking place. Within its chosen context, presuppositions and premises, the diagnosis is valid.

However, this is not the only possible way the game can be played. Read: what if the premises of the argument are false? What if there exists another way of contextualizing the argument, one that allows participatory practices be and become more, much more than just shadows of self-negating doubt and horrible variations of nightmares?

What follows is not an argument against Miessen’s propositions and descriptions. Instead, I will try to argue for an alternative way of conceptualizing and imagining the chances and challenges of participatory practice. This is then nothing more and nothing less than an idea of participatory practice-based community. To articulate this, I will begin with a short description of how things are, then continue with a vision of how the context and content of participation can be alternatively imagined, and then finish off with the ethical implication of this alternative way.
The conditions of our current conditions are truly blue. We live, among the limited variations of the OECD-countries, in social, political, economic and psychological circumstances where our being-in-the-world is reduced to the following three maxims: speed, volume and price. When adding to these assets of values the old slogan “there is no such thing as a society” (branded in late ‘80s by Margaret Thatcher), we have a lay of the land that leaves very little space and time for alternatives. Our life-worlds are being colonialized and reduced to the max into the one-dimensionality of the above mentioned triangle of values. But no, we are not amidst a great swindle or conspiracy theory. We are doing it to ourselves, being violently happy while demoting ourselves from potential citizens to hysterical consumers. We have forgotten how to imagine an alternative. In the words of Tony Judt, “our disability is discursive”.¹

But, so goes my argument, our disability to imagine is based on another crucial notion. This is to point out and to underline the various co-existing ways of playing the game. We have and face a cavalcade of rival versions, creating a collision of different “socially embodied moral concepts”.² This is to say that what works and makes sense in context A, does not necessarily function or make sense in another set and site B. Thus, we face a grave incompatibility of what words mean, where they come from and how they are used and abused from one context to the next.

The name of the game where Miessen is painting the horrors of the nightmare of participation is called market driven globalized capitalism. This is not to say that Miessen’s argument is solely affirmative of these conditions of our conditions. But with or without criticism of this setting, it takes place within in. And this placement has direct consequences. It has consequences on what participation and what practice can mean and convey.

In the current footloose version of market driven globalized capitalism the rules of the game are that the winner takes it all. We know this. We see, sense and feel it, too. We can even hear it. The inherent logic of this system follows that great self-congratulatory motto: what's yours is mine, and what's mine, is mine. And stays so. Within this game, the aim is to conquer all parts of our living, loving and hating experiences. It is to put a specific price tag on all forms and parts of our lives.
This is the logic where one reason, one choice and one logic fits it all. Did you hear me?: everything, anything, everywhere and anytime.

To call this logic totalitarian is an understatement. By now, it ought be crystal clear that for most of us, if we only follow this logic and the rules of this type of a game, it will end in tears. It is a setting, borrowing the classical description of the modern dilemma from Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim\textsuperscript{3}, within which we are in a pretty bad jam: we keep searching for biographical solutions to systematic contractions. And yes, within this dilemma and its predetermined rules, winning or breaking even is not among the available options.

But to label all efforts of arguing for another way, for an alternative way of imagining the premises of the concept of participation and practice as naive, anti-capitalist, or just plain silly is nothing but lazy. It is also intellectually dishonest. Because there is more to daily life, more to experience, more to expectations of love and hate, and more to imagination of things that hurt and heal, than just speed, volume and price.

II

The alternative premises for the different conditions of our conditions are not science fiction. They are not utopias, and they are not outside of our life-worlds. This alternative is potentiality here, and there – found in our daily lives and in our practices. Not outside the dominant model, because we are all part of it, but next to it, actively seeking a place next to and alongside it.

And sure, there it is, the key word: practices. But this time, these are practices that are constructed, maintained and developed within a different set of premises than the one-dimensionality of vulgar market driven globalized capitalism. This is then a version of a open-ended, self-critical practice that believes that thinking for oneself always must be done in connection and collaboration with others.\textsuperscript{2} Thus, we have the social and collective element that is there not just to serve as an opportunistic playing field, but that directly constructs and defines the way the game is played. What else we have is the move from the idea of the result of knowledge production as a copyright domain into the understanding of these results as taking place in the mode of a copy-left.
In philosophy this rival version of the premises is called ‘Thomist Aristotelianism’. It is a train of thought that takes us back to that man named Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC), but a train that makes a significant stop at the hands and hearts of another man called Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), and is then in contemporary times most actively articulated by the philosopher I’ve already mentioned, Alasdair MacIntyre – someone who certainly is aware of the current malaise of the condition of our conditions.

To quote: “In this situation what is most urgently needed is a politics of self-defense for all those local societies that aspire to achieve some relatively self-sufficient and independent form of participatory practice-based community and that therefore need to protect themselves from the corrosive effects of capitalism and the depredations of state power.” ²

What this long legacy of thinking differently means is that we must reclaim, not the streets, but the sense and sensibility of what is a practice and what is participatory practice. This is to distance us from the omnipotent illusion of speed, volume and price. It is to comprehend the inherent potentiality and the extreme difficult of going and doing things slowly, slowly, slowly. It is to get closer and to develop the internal changes and challenges, not being jerked around by the external pressures, of a practice.

What MacIntyre is after with an alternative sense of a practice is something that is based on the opposite of the one-size-fits-all model. We return to the local sites and conflicts, remain at the scale of interaction that is small and face-to-face. It is a site that argues for and with an idea of a common good that is not there before the action starts, but which is described and defined along the way. It is a give-and-take process, not nostalgic longing back or a mystical vision. It is not about consensus, but about something that is called a loving conflict, the shared conditions of conditions that are within the reach of the participants. It is a setup that will not and cannot promise any immediate result and deliveries, but it does construct a potentiality of “shared participation in deliberation”.²

But next to the dusty old philosophy books, this version of participation also has another name, and another scope of a context. In this other site, it is called a self-organizing and self-governing form of collective action. This is then no longer the domain of Aristotelian
philosophy, but the very pragmatically oriented world of governing the commons that has gained the label of new institutionalism.

One of the leading figures of conceptualization of this type of collective participation is Elinor Ostrom, a political economist who, as the first woman ever, was awarded the Nobel Prize for economics in 2009 for her work on these issues.

One of Ostrom’s main interests has been the study of sites and situations in which collective action can lead to results that avoid both excessive consumption and high administrative costs. Her case studies take her, for example, to the issues of how to deal with the fishing stock in a certain area. In these circumstances, a collective form of organization is faced with the inherent dilemmas of any collective action, which are, besides the obvious ones of the potential free-loaders and the breaking of commitments, the extra cases of human conditions such as stress, weakness and failure.4

Ostrom focuses on the organic situation that she calls a CPR: Common Pool of Resources. The question is how to make use of these resources so that the benefits are greatest, while assuring the renewal of these resources. This is what she calls the flow of the resource units. The interesting issue with Ostrom is that she focuses solely on small-scale units of CPRs that range from only 50 up to 15,000 persons. These involve inshore fisheries, groundwater basins and communal forest, as examples.4

Through the decades of very hands-on studies that collected all kinds of economic, behavioral and other data, Ostrom4 has come to identify seven principles that guide and define collective self-organization. These are:

1  Clearly defined boundaries

2  Rules regarding the appropriation and provision of common resources are adapted to local conditions

3  Collective choice arrangements allow most resource appropriators to participate in the decision-making process

4  Effective monitoring
5 A scale of graduated sanctions for resource appropriators who violate community rules

6 Mechanisms of conflict resolution are cheap and easy to access

7 The self-determination of the community is recognized by higher-level authorities

What Ostrom’s long and complicated list makes clear is that enduring a long-term collective self-organization is not easy, and it is not self-evident. It is very hard to condense the aim and the argument to fit into a fast and furious hype of a twitter message. And, well, perhaps it is not at all applicable to the domain of design and product placements.

Instead of providing catchy slogans, what Ostrom’s examples and analyses convincingly prove is how complicated, time consuming and fragile such enterprises are. They are efforts that require strong local structural commitments both by the participants and the social and political establishment, and they require a longevity that is not compatible with a sense of planning shaped by the short attention spans of continuous reporting and reassembling.

What Ostrom’s highly specific cases imply for any type of a collective self-organization action is that the logic it must follow is definitely not of speed, volume and price, but of something else. And yes, that something else is a locally situated commitment and a type of slowness that is not about quantity, but about the quality of the acts. It is a slowness as in how to do things so that they create and maintain an integrity and a gravity in an open-ended and ongoing process.

III

Instead of the nightmare version of the negative circle of failing participation, in his book Markus Miessen proposes the idea of a contemporary profile of an agent who is called a crossbench practitioner. This is a concept that covers something that we are accustomed to call inter-disciplinary practice. This new jargon is fetched from a rather peculiar institution: the British House of the Lords. “Crossbench praxis could be described precisely as acting without a clearly defined mandate, but proactively seeking engagement: a freelancer with a conscience.” For this promise to be meaningful, for its proactive participation it needs a strength of character involving attitude, relevance and responsibility. These are the missing links that make the current modes of participatory practice the nightmare that it is.
When comparing the strategies displayed by Miessen with the examples provided by MacIntyre and Ostrom, the interesting point is that both sides share a very similar description of the current situation and its problems. What however is the difference, is how the two sides want to make a difference, and proceed from the analysis.

Whereas Miessen sees a major danger in us getting stuck in one context, one milieu or political project, the premises of the alternative imagined and defined by MacIntyre and Ostrom claim the diametrically opposite. The internal and self-critical logic of a practice based participatory community is by its inherent values a site and situation that has to be small, local and embedded. And slow, so slow it hurts and burns traces into our souls.

This situatedness does not mean being closed-up. On the contrary, the practice-based activity is dependent on both internal and external clashes and collisions. There must be interaction, comparisons and conflicts, but for these to be meaningful, they need the continuity of a process, what is called tradition. What constitutes a tradition, a context, and a practice are the give-and-take acts of conflicts, views and visions that stay, and do not run away.

So, if not a crossbench praxis, which is inevitably and relentlessly haunted by its own demons and the past and the present of a rigid class society that it glorifies, what is the alternative, then? Where are the pockets of hope to be found, so to speak, where is the snorkel for sanity? Or to put yet another intentionally cruel twist to it: how can we convince others and ourselves that sharing is really caring?

As I’ve argued all along, if we remain and stay only within the premises and the internal logic of capitalistic system of winner takes it all, we will always lose. We participate, but never ever in any other mode (excuse the expression) than seeking to climb up the tree with our ass up. We sweat, and we suffer, and fall on our heads. But, well, there is no use moaning and complaining about it, because it is truly inevitable.

We should not waste too much time by dreaming or envisioning a site and situation outside the current macro level system (representational democracy) and its internal paradoxes (we do not need less or more, but better government, that really governs instead of pretending to be doing commerce). The hope that is to be achieved, created and kept on keeping on, that hope is always only possible
on the micro level. We must play, and take part, but the whole issue comes down to what kind of games we do in fact play, and why – and how much we can modify, alter and effect them.

What is absolutely and positively certain that it is a game that is – and has to be – local. It is temporal, it is amazingly fragile, but it is there, and it is here. You feel the pull of gravity – not pulling things apart but bringing things together. It is what I have articulated and addressed as the acts of a politics of small gestures. It is the difference between being an actor and a spectator. It is a difference that is localized in choosing whether we are satisfied and ready just to dress up for it, or to stay with it and get into the acts of really playing the part.

It is not in the air we breathe, it is not in the water we drink, and it is not wrapped up in the loud and shiny spectacles that we follow. It is somewhere else, somewhere where the acts and actions defy the deterministic logic of a price tag, and where the acts are supported by their slow accumulation of inherent pleasures. In short, the alternative is to refuse to simplify and to flatten anything and everything into the logic of speed, volume and price. Obviously enough, that is business as usual, and that is just very fine so.

But if we want participatory practice, and the internal goods potentially embedded in it, we need checks, and we need balances. We need accountability. These are acts that are not outside of our life-worlds, but very clearly within them. They need to be acknowledged, acted upon and brought further inside. They need to be respected and cherished, beside, beneath and beyond.

Because – well, because otherwise these one-directional values turn all of us into buy, play, and throw away objects that are not, let me repeat, that are not to be desired. The alternative way is the inter-connected and committed long term acts of doing everything that is in our reach and in our power in our daily realities to avoid being treated, and treating others as objects. It is a question of ends, not of means.

ENDNOTES

Miessen, Markus, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)*, Sternberg Press 2010


"In Sleep, the Subconscious Shows You Something that Your Waking Mind Cannot Elaborate On; It Cannot Construct a More Difficult, Horrific Icon. [...] You Become Trapped in an Endless Cycle. To Wake Up from a Nightmare Is to Reach the Threshold of Realizing that You Are in Fact Dreaming. You Cannot Escape the Nightmare from Within the Logic of the Dream Itself; You Must Exit the Dream World. Crossing the Threshold of Realization, You Begin to Understand that You Are a Character Performing a Role Within a Staged Play — The Dream — That You Are Watching."

‘We will breathe later.’

eaten up by societal consensus

*when dying, he is, for the first time, in a state of truth.*

the reinvention of what it means to be responsible

one might call “smart weirdness,”

how she likes the movement of her ass

trapped in an endless cycle

forcefully or willingly

saying that such protocols

as somewhat symptomatic

are dropped like a hot potato

reinventing oneself,

initiated and eventually directed

through its reputation,

A split within the governance

has been rendered ad absurdum

What else is in the making?
“We will breathe later, eaten up by societal consensus when dying, he is, for the first time, in a state of truth. The reinvention of what it means to be responsible one might call "smart weirdness," how she likes the movement of her ass trapped in an endless cycle forcibly or willingly saying that such protocols as somewhat symptomatic are dropped like a hot potato reinventing oneself, initiated and eventually directed through its reputation, A split within the governance has been rendered ad absurdum What else is in the making? …

"surrogate-democratic participation,"

We have a literature rapidly blowing itself to pieces

the Slacktivism of Facebook, a "critical proximity,"

trapped in an endless cycle

copy-paste establishment—trading on the past interviewees at the Marathon

the likelihood of success Otherwise, we would be trees.

A holistic approach acknowledges the disease is viewed as the occasion a veneer of worthiness;

"A cemetery grows, but does not develop."

this is actually pretty simple.
Far behind the curtain, a voice:

…

Here often the answer is brutal.

(if you’re inside, you’re part of an existing discourse that is to be agreed upon and fostered),

It can be tamed,

as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power,

Why is nice bad?

this work promotes a conflictual the necessary friction to both residents could build their own dwellings, In contrast to the majority cooperation of the people they need no vision or idea themselves. the reinvention of what it means to be responsible producing a scandal is allowed, where practice cocoons itself in banalities

Did Someone Say Participate?

…

saying no is not too far from saying yes.
a post-nostalgic practice, so fashionable in some left-wing circles.

hyper-faceted networks of commonality, one might call “smart weirdness,”

the most complex set of knowledge is useless. referred to as “ambidexterity.”

the ability “to do” things, embodies a plea

from a—or the—norm allowing processing to fail, the less we give a damn.

“You can teach, if you can fund”

What else is in the making?

Several monkeys are placed in a cage with a banana hanging over a ladder.

…

a sixtysomething-year-old man walks his dog along a remote lake.

*the disease is viewed as the occasion* a veneer of worthiness;
“critical proximity,” as self-affirming platitudes
        Consider your role! Right now,

an opportunistic endeavor,
        the monster who is not real,
        scripting is the answer, what was the question?”
        actually pretty simple.

from healthcare infrastructure to education
        romantic notions of negotiation,
        written or commissioned

the above-mentioned planets
        as self-affirming platitudes

themes such as democratization,

...

Many contemporary architects

(start over)

Phillip Zach, 2011
ANGELIQUE CAMPENS

CAN I NOT PARTICIPATE, OR WHAT IS GENEROUS ART TODAY?

When Politicians Start to Flirt with the Term 'Participation'; Institutions Begin Loosing their Criticality; As Art Becomes an Instrument; The Public Becomes the Commissioner; Participation for the Sake of Participation; Moved Past Various Forms of Relational Aesthetics;
“Prescribed happiness looks exactly what it is; to have a part in it (...)
– Adorno

Numerous studies have shown that participation in an art project has a positive impact on the individual and that it brings people together. More often than gallery works, art in public space becomes something participatory. The idea of participatory art practice, where the process is often more important than the final work, has come a long way since the sixties, and there remain ongoing discussions about relational aesthetics and other trends in art practice. But how far can we really go with participation in public space in relation to art?

An exemplary piece in this regard is Alfredo Jaar's *Lights in the City* (1999). In Montreal, Jaar made a project connecting different homeless shelters and the city's historic Copula. Every time a homeless person arrived in one of the shelters, she could (if she wanted) make herself visible by pushing a button that would immediately illuminate the Copula with red light. Jaar thus created a structure for making visible those who often feel invisible in society. While this project came from Jaar's own intervention, it would have been a totally different case had the city itself invited the artist to work with a homeless community. The latter instance would have provided a top-down solution, which is becoming more often the case as cities, politicians and institutions are taking on roles even greater than mere commissioner.

It is alarming when politicians start to flirt with the term ‘participation’ and institutions begin losing their criticality because of opportunistic ideas. When is there critique and when is there opportunism? When is there activism and when is there simply taking money for commissions? The rules get framed by those in power, and artists become instrumentalized as art becomes an instrument.

The pre-existing groups who are part of the project are often composed of people from the neighbourhood who want to be involved, but they are just as likely to be target groups, ranging from people living in retirement homes to prisoners. Sometimes composed groups of this sort even choose the artist, and so the public becomes the commissioner (and may even get involved in artistic decisions). Markus Miessen points out the problem succinctly when he states, “Frankly speaking, not everyone should always be asked or invited to be included in decision making process.” Two questions arise: what is the necessity of practices of this sort, and what will be the value for art?
My answer does not begin by stating that participation in art in public space shouldn’t be done. It begins, rather, in a simple claim that we need to pause and re-think how this gets done and what its stakes are. ‘Participation for the sake of participation’ is as inimical to art as ‘art for the sake of art’ was for public practices. Most of these projects only succeed when they are well thought-out and directed and, most important, if they start from the artist, or in conjunction with reflective institutions. Consider, for example, *Skills Exchange*, a project of the Serpentine Gallery where five artists and architects were asked to explore housing and the ageing population. These artists are now collaborating with older people in Westminster, Hackney and Camden in London to create new work. One of the artists, Beatrice Gibson, knew she wanted to make a film. She started to work with the elderly people in care homes in Camden who were in an early stage of dementia, and thus in need of stimulation. For five months, Gibson organized film screenings, did reading sessions with them and organized discussions. The resulting film script she wrote takes its point of departure from verbatim transcripts of these discussions, while it also moves past mere documentation by incorporating fictional elements as well.

We have moved past various forms of relational aesthetics. For example, the sort of generous and take-away art practices (such as the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres or Rirkrit Tiravanija) in which the concept of a gift is central and the audience is invited to participate are not seen any more with the newer and younger generation. Rather, they are explicitly playing with ideas of this sort. Cyprien Gaillard’s *The Recovery of Discovery* at KW Berlin 2011, for example, only looks at first sight like just another take-away project. The artist created a pyramid of 72,000 bottles of the Turkish beer Efes which visitors were invited to consume. In so doing, the public was participating not by simply taking away, but rather in making a ruin, and thus the work deals more with the ideas of destruction and the image than with mere generosity to the public.

It is necessary to constantly question the possibilities of participation in public space and adapt it to art practices today. After all, shouldn’t the artist start from a desire to work in the public space and the institution/curator merely support, mediate and make their vision possible?
SUHAIL MALIK

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO PARTICIPATE AGAIN – COMMUNISM, ITS RECURRING NIGHTMARE

'Democracy' Is Not Necessarily Their Interest; The Man Whose 'Spark'; Was Mohamed Bouazizi a Participant in the Protests ?; Participant 1; Participant -1; –Participant X; Participant ±1; Participant 0; A Public Destruction of Common Assent; It Is a Communist Movement Because It Is a Common One; Generic; The Politics of the Anonymous Masses; Instituting this Other State that Dissolves the State; That We Know Bouazizi by Name; Refute the Theoretical Idealism;
In the rush of commentaries urgently written by public intellectuals of all political complexions on what has come to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’, Alain Badiou rehashed the standard account of what instigated the first, eventually successful, protests in Tunisia and how, as a popular movement, it acts as a beacon for political action not just in the Arab-speaking countries but also further afield:

“A spark can set a field on fire. It all starts with the suicide through burning of a man who has been made redundant, whose miserable commerce that allows him to survive is threatened to be banned, and with a woman-officer slapping him to make him understand what is real in this world. This gesture expands within days, weeks, until millions of people cry their joy in a far-away square and the powerful rulers flee.”

Badiou is emphatic that unlike those French or Western intellectuals who deign to tell the protesters what is ‘democratic’ in what they do, he, Badiou, understands that those in the West can only learn from these movements, that ‘democracy’ is not necessarily their interest, only the overthrow or counter-Statist mobilization, and that freedom and emancipation – ‘an absolute change of existence, of unprecedented possibilities’ – happens by such mass movements, never through State operations. It is in fact a movement of communism.

Eager to get to this point of declared humility, to which we will return in a moment, Badiou does not name the man whose ‘spark’ set alight not just the ‘field’ of popular uprising but also himself (and it is not clear exactly how deliberately clumsy or jokey Badiou is in this all-too-fitting figure of speech, matching here the headline groaner from the The New York Times, *How a Single Match Can Ignite a Revolution*). In fact, the ‘spark’ was lit by 26 year old Mohamed Bouazizi (or, more fully, Tarek al-Tayyib Muhammad Bouazizi, locally known as Basboosa), who died of burns on 4 January 2011. Bouazizi’s self-immolation took place at the governor’s office in his home town of Sidi Bouzid, Central Tunisia, some two and a half weeks earlier on 17 December 2010. There he poured petrol (or perhaps paint thinner) over himself and declared his intention to set himself alight unless the governor agreed to hear his protest against Faida Hamdi, the police officer who, with her aides, had assaulted him less than two hours earlier (it is uncertain that he was in fact slapped by the officer herself, Hamdi being acquitted in April 2011 from her subsequent detention and trial for the alleged assault), confiscated his weighing scales and the cart from which he made his living selling fruit and vegetables on the street.
Bouazizi had been working since he was about 10 years old, following the death of his father early in his life and his step-father’s poor health, earning about $140 per month to support his family. Local knowledge has it that Bouazizi continued to be harried by the local cops because he was unable or unwilling to pay the bribes to allow him to continue vending, the harassment taking place under the pretext that he had no license to sell his wares, even though such a permit is not required. Reports suggest that the ‘spark’ of Bouazizi’s self-immolation was perhaps not wholly decisively made, his cigarette lighter jamming open during his protest against the functionaries’ refusal to hear his demands for justice or, what is the same thing, only to go about his daily business without harassment. Aftermath: Bouazizi was taken to a number of increasingly well-equipped hospitals for treatment of his severe burns, with gathering local, then international press and public attention in his case. At his last place of treatment in the Burn and Trauma Centre at Ben Arous, he was visited by Zine El Abidin Ben Ali, the then President of Tunisia who, according to Bouazizi’s family, promised to send him to France for further treatment, a transfer that never materialized. The funeral drew 5000 mourners, with chants against the authorities who had led Bouazizi to his protest. And, to return to Badiou’s call to arms, the growth of protests in Tunisia following the funeral led to the Ben Ali’s fleeing Tunisia on 14 January 2011, after 23 years in power and only ten days after Bouazizi’s death. In these protests, riots and eventual overthrow – these cries of joy, according to Badiou - Bouazizi’s name, the name of a street-seller in a minor provincial town in Tunisia, became at least equal to if not greater than the president’s (meaning of course the State apparatus that consolidated him and itself around him). Bouazizi has since been commemorated by having the central avenue in Sidi Bouzid named after him; the Parisian City Council also voted unanimously to name a Place in the city after him. And Bouazizi has been recognized not only by the popular movements in Tunisia and statist sanctioning: there have been several further cases of men self-immolating in protest against harassment or quotidian persecution by officials, including: Lahseen Najji, who electrocuted himself by grasping electrical transmission cables in Sidi Bouzid on 22 December 2010 after declaring “No for misery. No for unemployment”; in Algeria, the 37-year-old father-of-two Mohsen Bouterfif died on 13 January 2011 after also being refused a group hearing with the mayor of Boukhadra over housing and employment concerns, the official challenging Bouterfif to prove his courage of complaint by emulating Bouazizi; Maamir Lotfi, also in Algeria, self-immolated on 17 January 2011 over similar refusal of an official audience, dying on 12 February; Abdelhafid Boudechicha,
dying a day after his self-immolation on 28 January 2011, also over protests about housing and employment; Egyptian Abdou Abdel-Moneim Jaafar died of his burns after setting fire to himself in front of his national Parliament; one unidentified death due to self-immolation in Saudi Arabia on 21 January 2011; and, in Sicily, the death of Noureddine Adnane, a Moroccan vendor of street goods, from burns on 11 February 2011, also self-inflicted in protest against continual harassment from local officials.3

As Badiou’s teen-diary rhetoric might put it, self-immolation ‘spread like wildfire’ through the region. But his point is that it is not just Bouazizi’s name or actions on their own that are equal to the President as index of the established Tunisian State but rather how they are conveyed, amplified, of course, through the mass popular movements that are for Badiou the manifestation of the communism he avows. This is a not just a question of the importance of whether names matter to designate political movements, and how they do so, or the question of which names will come to be important to mark a political trajectory – all significant questions in the configuration of communism to which we will later return. What is more pressing in the context of this collection of essays is the following question, which has to be asked with a cold-blooded lucidity: was Mohamed Bouazizi a participant in the protests against the Tunisian state?

- No, in that his actions were not part of a political or popular movement to get rid of a regime and there was nothing for him yet to ‘participate’ in. But then Bouazizi’s despairing defiant act is only that of a private frustration in the face of what then seemed an immobile bureaucratic autocracy, a story of an individual’s everyday misery without political ambition. To say as much is to repeat at another level the governor’s refusal of Bouazizi’s protest as having any significance beyond his own individual concerns. This we will not do, not least because it is already too late to neglect Bouazizi’s protest in the configuration of the popular anti-Ben Ali movements in Tunisia and elsewhere.

- Yes, in that (i) his protest against the intimidation and bullying by local officials encapsulated the broader rage, frustration and defiance against authoritarian state power (however thinly disguised they may be as putative democracies), a refusal to return to common immiseration in the face of state power which, as Badiou puts it, ‘expands’ to the region’s popular movements; and (ii) without some sense of Bouazizi as perhaps a pre-participant in the popular uprising against
the Tunisian state, his actions are detached from the very protests in which his name and the memory of his protest circulates, turning his suicide into a noble sacrifice or, as it was declared in the Tunisian protests, ‘martyrdom’. Bouazizi is then, to generalize, Participant 1 in the popular movements of the Arab Spring.

This is what Badiou effectively proposes by proposing Bouazizi’s suicide to be the ‘spark’ of a political conflagration, speaking elsewhere of how what is important for a truth in the making by political militancy is participation in the mediation of an Idea, the exception to ordinary life under the state that “shows ... a possibility that everyone can share from now on”,4 in this case the possibility endowed by the Idea of communism. But if Bouazizi is Participant 1 in the popular Tunisian uprising, he is so because of the distressing act of his death and what led up to it, his fury and rage against low-level state harassment taken to an extreme, the annihilating refusal of all further relations to the state by his (in all senses) flagrant suicide. A nightmare of participation if ever there was one.

This nightmare-retraction is the other extreme of participation to the one identified by Eyal Weizman in a precursor to the current volume: collaboration with the state.5 If collaboration is participation to the point of assent or collusion with State power or the enemy, the extreme of participation heralded by Bouazizi as Participant 1 in the ‘communism’ of the Arab Spring could rather be called a negative participation or, to deploy another Badiouxian term, a participation by subtraction. Bouazizi is then better identified as Participant -1 in the Arab Spring, a formulation that signals how he was a pre-participant in the popular movements in which his name has become less central as they themselves became more common, transferring to Egypt (where the arbitrary detention and killing of Khaled Mohammed Said by police in Alexandria on 6 June 2010 is no less important as a key referent for the uprisings in February 2011), Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Libya.... For all its mock-algebraic formality, speaking of Bouazizi as Participant -1 captures equally well the way in which he posthumously ‘took part’ in a series of political mobilizations to which he was a retroactively comprehended precursor.

Two remarks on such a formulation:

a The negative sign in the formula of a Participant -1 is clearly not to be taken as indicating that Bouazizi’s participation is contrary to the popular movements against oligarchic-autocratic states in the Arab-Gulf region; it indicates only the ontology of
the participation, an extrication, not its tendency or orientation. The ‘participant’ negative to the tendency of these movements, which is what President Ben Ali was in Tunisia, is better designated by ‘- Participant X’, where X designates the ‘anyone’ participating in the popular movements. Such a formula for the counter-participant is only a metonym for an entire systemic and structural condition of the power to be deposed by these insurrections and which is no less their ‘cause’.6

b The retroactive determination of Participant -1 as the instigation (not cause) of the movements and occasions that call upon it and give it a force, sense, meaning beyond itself is what marks her or him as Participant 1. Their act does not belong to the development of actions subsequent to it since these have not yet taken place, and it can have no cogency in their terms when it takes place; yet the act is integral to what follows from it as instigation for further protest, the initial term of a series, etc. This prevarication or double determination proposes an oscillation as to whether the pre-participant is a participant or not, is inside or outside of the subsequent ‘fully’ political action in which she or he is claimed as precursor.7 This chrono-logical prevarication of political identification can however be suspended by designating Participant ±1 to be a unitary origin: Participant 0, in the way of other origins or beginnings such as Year Zero, Patient Zero, Ground Zero, etc. But this is not a simple or single origin, rather the covering over of a smeared prevarication that is the integration of Participant -1 into a political configuration that subsequently positivizes her or his manifestation, however flagrant, grand or minor, socially or privately motivated (or, more likely, in some mixing of the two).

If there can be any such thing as a negative participation, if it is not an immediate contradiction in terms (which logical contradiction would under identitarian thinking require its (non-)manifestation as an ontological annihilation or preclusion), it must itself be contrary to any sense of an inherently ‘positive’ participation. The latter is the building of an agreeable consensus on the basis of ideological, hegemonic or institutional norms (not least the norm that is better to agree) that is the by now familiar object of critique in Markus Miessen’s books, of which the current volume is the latest installment. (If the titles in this series resemble Romero’s zombie-movie series, then it is clear that the zombies that need to be put to death here, if they will not first kill us with their encroaching corrosion of indifference, are the malpractices of politics under the heading of
Waking Up from the nightmare of participation. Moreover, negative participation no less repudiates the formulation of politics as a common space of agonism or even antagonism that has been the central contention in Miessen’s series, since the retraction from all relations to the State that it enacts is no less the refutation of any common basis for the political struggle organized according to smaller or larger counter-identifications to collective norms (which are only sometimes given State formulations). Negative participation is rather the implosion of the acceptance of the conditions by which a struggle or a claim could be negotiated. It is the destruction of a given common space (its negativity). Yet through its retroactive significance it is an (eventually) public destruction (its participating nonetheless). This paradoxical notion of a public destruction of common assent could be readily captured by the kinds of formulations put forward by, say, Giorgio Agamben’s ‘community with nothing in common’, or Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘being-with’ of an ‘inoperative’ or ‘shattered’ community, Jacques Rancière’s ‘redistribution of the sensible’, and others no less clichéd in contemporary art for legitimizing through philosophical approbation art’s prevalent shadow politics. Such formulations characteristically maintain the prevarication of Participant −1 without termination, as a perpetually stalled Participant 0 whose politics are forever in emergence, aporia or other indefiniteness, socially-oriented yet dis-identificatory, always in an originary complexity yet without substantially determined consequence, etc. ‘Participant 0’ concisely captures a range of such positions: non-participation, participating in nothing, neutral (i.e., non-committed) participation, participation without participation, passive participation, originary participation, non-identified or indeterminate participation, and so on. To be clear: Participant -1 negates such (pre-subjective) modalities of participation.

What then does Participant -1 participate in? With Badiou, it was for Bouazizi the eternal or universal of communism manifested through the North African and Gulf uprisings:

“this triumph of the popular action, illegal by nature, will be forever victorious. That a revolt against state power can be absolutely victorious is a lesson universally available. This victory always indicates the horizon where all collective action, subtracted from the authority of the law, stands out. […] The popular uprising we are talking about is manifestly without a party, without any hegemonic organisation, without a recognised leader. It should always be determined whether this characteristic is a strength or a weakness. It is in any case what makes it have, in a pure form, without a doubt
the purest since the Commune of Paris, all the necessary traits for us to talk about a communism as movement. ‘Communism’ here means: common creation of a collective destiny.”

The mass movements overthrowing the Tunisian state and then (seeking to do so) elsewhere in any case identify Bouazizi’s own protest as taking place within the horizon of a communist movement. And this movement is to be understood as distinct from the left that colludes with or organizes itself in terms of State formations. It is a communist movement because it is a common one – not the given common largely (over-)determined by the State but a common made by a people between themselves. More exactly, this commonality and this ‘people’ is (i) generic, ‘representing in one place humanity in its entirety’, such that all sides and voices can be heard (the dream of full unbridled participation by all and for all), and (ii) it ‘overcomes the great contradictions’ of social differentiation – Badiou’s examples here are that of intellectuals and manual workers, between men and women, between rich and poor, between Muslims and Copts, between people living in the province and those living in the capital – that it is otherwise the state’s claim to mediate and police. That is, a popular movement is communist if it is common and universal not just in its claim (it is generic) but also in its actuality. In this and with almost the same words, Badiou seconds that man of the left Bertrand Delanoë, Socialist Party Mayor of Paris, who told the press a week before the publication of Badiou’s article on the Arab region uprisings that the city council’s unanimous vote to name a site after Mohamed Bouazizi “was the expression of admiration, affection and support to the Tunisian people whose accomplishment was something extraordinary, not only for Tunisia itself and the Arab world, but also for the entire world”.

Two comments: first and trivially, with regard to Badiou: though he chastises a Western ‘colonial arrogance’ for telling these movements how democratic they are, what he insists that everyone should pay heed to – including himself as much as the uprisings themselves – is that they are but the triumph of a communism that he knows about anyway, having already theorized it qua Idea and its manifestations as political truths. According to Badiou, what we learn from these movements is really only that Badiou is right. Whatever else it may be, Badiou’s praise of the popular insurrections is in other words no less an opportunistic confirmation of his own theorization, and his condemnation of its ‘democratic’ overdetermination is primarily a point of rivalry between French intellectuals. Second and more substantially, with regard to what participation in those movements
has to be: the horizon for participation is communism as the generic, universal commonality of all people. This true participation is alone politics with Badiou. It is not the formation of a consensus but the ‘militant’ practice of the truth of the Idea. And because it is generic and universal, communism’s “emancipatory politics is essentially the politics of the anonymous masses... of those who are held in a state of colossal insignificance by the State.” Such is the riposte to the immediately preceding point: since Badiou’s own communist prescription is that of the masses themselves, there is no ‘colonial arrogance’ on his part. More important, it is also why his elision of Bouazizi’s name is entirely appropriate: the Tunisian’s self-immolation was indeed an act of participation in the communist overthrow of that State, and in its communist truth it is right that Bouazizi’s name is forgotten, his act anonymized, that he disappears into the mass that brings the emancipation from the State he too may have wanted. Bouazizi was then only ever a Participant X in the uprisings, the X marking his necessary anonymity in the horizon of communism. This anonymity is the political truth of his act. It is otherwise just the unhappy story of a frustrated individual with only private consequence. Bouazizi’s deadly protest is here not so much positivized (-1 to +1) as incorporated as a pure participation (±1 to X) into the body of truth that is/are these communist movement(s), purified of its horrific and thankfully uncommon particularity.

Not that communism is without any names at all. Along with the anonymous masses that are the proper expression of its generic universality, in which Bouazizi takes his place, communism is also “distinguished all along the way by proper names which define it historically,” a “glorious Pantheon of revolutionary heroes” (the usual suspects, from Spartacus to Che Guvera). These names symbolize the ‘rare and precious network of ephemeral sequences of politics’. With such names ‘the ordinary individual discovers glorious, distinctive individuals as the mediation of his or her own individuality’, a gathering point of identification for the ‘anonymous actions of millions of militants, rebels, fighters’ through which they come to count as one. Though they are themselves anonymous, the communist masses then do each have their own names: those of ‘an individual, a pure singularity of body and thought’ by which they act in each case as one. These names are those of the true Participants 1, the ones who identify the mass movements to be the each time particular, local, historical variant of eternal communism, that give the anonymous masses an identity and a political integrity; through which generic
and universal participants overcome their anonymity (to themselves), ‘discovering’ their own (transversal) individuality.

Looking again past Badiou’s manifest aspiration to be such a Participant 1, for which career fulfillment the Arab uprisings provide a great opportunity (such is the bid of the article in Le Monde), what is important is that these individuals give name to communism’s otherwise anonymous participation because what they think and enact – project – is not just the destruction or retraction from the State but also what Badiou calls the ‘real of a politics’ as ‘another State’ than the current one, this other State being one that is ‘subtracted from the power of the State’ and thus leads to the withering away of the State.14 Mao is Badiou’s hero in this regard: Chinese State power was seized and sustained so that State organization could be undone ‘in the name of’ and through the anonymous masses who ‘discovered’ themselves individually and no less in their collective name and unity with Mao and his thinking. In general terms, communism’s Participant 1 is the one who rivals State power by formulating and instituting this other State that dissolves the State. For all the opprobrium heaped on State power, communism’s Participant 1 is but a rival to the State.

In his horrific withdrawal from all relations to the State Bouazizi had no such ambitions. Together with the absence of any ‘thinking’ – meaning a theorizing of the destruction of the State – on Bouazizi’s part this is why, with Badiou, the Tunisian’s name cannot – should not - be in the ‘glorious Pantheon’ of communism but must rather be subordinated to the generic universality of the masses that are its body of truth. With Badiou, Bouazizi as named individual means nothing but the ‘spark’ that will result in the unification of a communism (to be) named by their Participant 1.

Participant -1 is however here the demise and retraction from all relations to Statism. Those relations are in a manner restored to or overloaded on Participant -1 by Participant X’s retroactive determination (as a precursory Participant 1, distinct now to the Participant 1 who is the ideological singularity of the movement). As such, Participant -1 is the terminus of communism without the (inter-)mediation of the auto-immune State of communism or its identifying individual. Communism is then peremptorily realized by a man’s self-immolation in a provincial Tunisian government office (signaling that if it is to be a communism the Arab Spring is an eschatology). If these uprisings are to be identified as communist or if communism is indeed the horizon of its ‘participation’, then Participant -1 ought to have a more ‘glorious’
name than any in its Pantheon of Participants 1. But, as noted, this name cannot be so registered: communism is the political truth of the anonymous mass identified and acting as one through the name of a singularity of body and thought which Bouazizi is not.

Yet Bouazizi’s horrific act gives his name an importance in the uprisings, and in this non-anonymity he has too much name to take his dutiful place in the generic masses (Participant X) and yet is also not the Participant 1 that is the singularity of body and thought of a great name of communism. An option presents itself at this point: either the theory is followed, in which case the uprisings are determined to be communist movement and Bouazizi does not belong to it; organized in terms of a Participant X identified only via a Participant 1, his horrific death has no dimension of participation in those movements that claimed him as one of their own. Or Bouazizi is salient to the Tunisian and subsequent uprisings, in which case the persistence of his name and memory marks them to be distinct to communism as the politics of a generic universality.

That we know Bouazizi by name, that he can be identified as a Participant -1 in the uprisings, is enough to refute the theoretical idealism, to prove that the Arab uprisings are not communist (at least, not the communism of a generic universality as Badiou proposes it). Put otherwise: as Participant -1 Bouazizi is not of the anonymous mass nor the Pantheon of communist greats and as such disproves that these are movements of a generic universality acting as one. They are, as of April 2011, still anti-autocratic, non-Statist, popular, public movements in relation to the State. Not only is their politics otherwise yet to be determined, so are the number of names that will constitute them.

In more general terms, Participant -1 refutes the communism of generic universality as the horizon of participation. It also demonstrates that total non-participation in the State, equivalent to a peremptory total participation in communism now, can only be its self-destructive ontological annihilation. Waking up from the ‘nightmare of participation’ and the recursive, worse dream of non-participation requires the rejection of communism, generic universality and its subordination to the one name of Participant 1. This is not to avow or affirm democracy either, but only to dispense with universality, communism and anti-Statism as conditions for what participation amounts to: political reality. It is rather the public determination of Participant -1 that generates a participation without completion for the latter’s negative participation or retraction from it. ‘Without
completion’, since Participant -1 cannot be known as such to her or himself but only retroactively proposed or taken to be such by Participants X, a result rather an origin of the movements that cannot be guaranteed in advance by either side. Who participates is either an X or the one who will be -1 but never was Participant 1. Conversely, there can only be a Participant 1 of these movements through the lie of the ex-termination of/into their anonymity, to which communism has of course lent many names for and against. And if it is Participant -1 whose name is claimed – seized – by the popular movement of Participants X, with which masses act against the State, then they do so not by participating in one name but multifariously, publicly, and with a surfeit of names of which Mohamed Bouazizi’s will be but one.

ENDNOTES


3 This paragraph drawn mostly from the Wikipedia page on Bouazizi (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi), where full source references are given, as well as Eileen Byrne, Death of a street seller that set off an uprising, Financial Times, 16 January 2011 (www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6ed028a2-21a2-11e0-9e3b-00144feab49a.html), and Brian Whitaker, How a man setting fire to himself sparked an uprising in Tunisia, guardian.co.uk, 28 December 2010 (www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/dec/28/tunisia-ben-ali); Elizabeth Day, Fedia Hamdi’s slap which sparked a revolution “didn’t happen”, guardian.co.uk, 23 April 2011 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/23/fedia-hamdi-slap-revolution-tunisia).


6 The structural-historical conditions for the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt are effectively summarized in articles by, respectively, Chamseddine Mnasri and Philip Marfleet in
The logic of a retroactively identified precursor that could not be identified as such at the time of if its occurrence bears comparison with that of Jean Laplanche’s theory of a complex ‘originary seduction’ establishing the unconscious in its primary repression (New Foundations for Psychoanalysis, trans. David Macey, Blackwell, 1989 [1987]). The analogy is made not in order to identify the political dimension discussed in the main text here with the intra-psychic processes Laplanche theorizes, locating the truth of one in/or the other (for neither needs the other), but only to remark that their maybe common logic interferes in both instances with the very possibility of establishing either a known universal determinant for their subsequent (human) developments, or unique and identifiable ‘events’ for their respective inceptions.

By the time of the writings on communism in the 2000s, Badiou prefers the term ‘eternal’ to ‘universal’ as a way to mark that whatever historical specificity communism has – the Paris Commune of 1871, Russian Bolshevism from 1902-1917, Paris in May ’68, the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1965-68 – its truth is not historical but that of the Idea, a ‘transtemporal availability’ of these historical moments to one another (Communist Hypothesis, 232-33).

Bourzou Daragi, TUNISIA: Paris to have either a Rue or Place Mohammad Bouazizi, Ethiopian Review, 9 February 2011 (www.ethiopianreview.com/news/201002/?p=20451).

Communist Hypothesis, 249-50.

Communist Hypothesis, 250.

Communist Hypothesis, 248.
Saveguarding of an Ambiguous Position; Institutionalization of Institutional Critique; Weird Kind of Hosting System; Who Invites the Uninvited Intruder?; Disciplinary Power; New Definitions of Normality; Inhabiting an ‘Outside’ Position Is a Utopian Idea; The Invention of a New Institutional Setting in Culture; The Rule Has Not Only To Be Challenged, but Changed;
“Waking up from the Nightmare of Participation” – but who has ever dreamt the dream of participation that has turned out to be a nightmare? Did Markus Miessen himself dream this dream? And was the participation in the dream of participatory and relational forms of aesthetics and cultural work false, misunderstood, or is it just outdated by now?

Miessen’s book seeks to avoid the answer to these simple questions. Why is this so? The safeguarding of an ambiguous position seems to be at the very centre of all kinds of ‘progressive’ practices and discourses in the various cultural fields of art, architecture, design, and science. I would propose to enlighten this ambiguity, this lack of clarity. Miessen’s overall proposition, the idea of an emphatic outsider or ‘uninvited intruder’, is a proposition I feel sympathetic to. It is a very specifically, even ‘classical’ avant-garde idea. The question is whether Miessen’s formulations and suggestions are able to give us helpful instruments for this purpose. In my eyes, the overall question concerns role models for intellectual practice. In the last instance, the question that we have to ask, and to answer here is: How do we want to live and work?

First, I would like to express a certain irritation as to Miessen’s use of the concept of participation. Does he mean by this term political and cultural (more or less ideological) self-descriptions of all kinds of practices in urban planning, architecture, work in the cultural field? Or does he refer to democratic procedures of the consentment of citizens to collectively binding decisions? At some points in his book Miessen explicitly criticizes participation and democracy as naive and potentially unenlightened procedures of decision-making. This is quite a classical conservative position, and I am wondering if the author is really serious with it. Does he really want to state that we, in the neo-liberal post-democratic societies in the West, have suffered, are still suffering from too much democratic political participation? Does he really want to say that the technocratic regimes of “Authoritarian Statism” (Nicos Poulantzas) of the last two decades have sought too much democratic consent via popular participation in government decisions on the various (regional, national, inter-, supra-, and transnational) levels?

I can not believe this. So why is Miessen unhappy with ‘participation’? At one point in his book Markus Miessen constructs an opposition between the concept of participation and that of ‘responsibility’. He suggests that participation is a largely misunderstood technique
of hiding, or avoiding personal responsibilities for aesthetic, ethical, and political choices. The critique of the idea of ‘consensus’ in the cultural field has already been Miessen’s thesis in his book, co-edited with Shumon Basar in 2006, *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Social Practice* (a book to which I had contributed with an essay on *The Space of Community*) where the authors state, “as a counter to existing models of participation based on the ‘culture of consensus’ and the ‘ethos of compromise’”, there is a “need for actors operating from outside existing disciplinary networks, leaving behind conventional expertise whilst inventing new species of knowledge-space.” I think he is touching an interesting point with this argument. The question is if he is going far enough with his idea of the ‘uninvited intruder’, introducing an irritation into existing professional practices and discourses. The field of practices and discourses Miessen is critiquing can perhaps be described as a kind of simulation of participation. The classical instinct of institutional critique has been interpreted, in the last decades, in terms of a *consensual* practice of opening institutional boundaries: different models of co-operation between different cultural disciplines; incorporations of ‘foreign’ knowledge into the respective professional fields of art, architecture, criticism, cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, etc. The result was something I call an ‘institutionalization of institutional critique’. This was a particular pattern in art and architecture especially. The old, classical modernist gesture of going beyond, of destroying the very established concept of art, philosophy, architecture, has given way to an established style of ‘challenging’ the respective borders of a system. ‘Formalisms of participation’, interaction, or co-operation have been specific practices since the early 1990s.

Miessen’s book is articulating the growing discontent with this situation. The critique of all kinds of ‘participatory’ and ‘interdisciplinary’ practices, of a spreading of endless discourses and conversations is right in many regards. But it also has to be seen that the specific openness or porosity of contemporary art for instance has functioned as a weird kind of hosting system: as a kind of asylum for various cultural forms and encounters apparently impossible elsewhere. The problem in my eyes is not so much those practices as such (hosting activities, performances, debates, researching of all kinds under the roof of art spaces, under the umbrella of the institution of ‘art’). Rather it is the announcement of those forms as the latest new thing (the specific use of those practices on the side of the professionals of the art system as a manoeuvre inside their specific field). The problem is the declarations and symbolic placements of those forms inside the field where it is
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formally located (their quite pathetic artistic exchange value, which to a great extent counters their overall cultural use-value). In other words, it is the disciplinarization, the re-location or re-territorialization of the de-localizing and de-territorializing practices.

One important question here could be put into the following question: Who invites the uninvited intruder? The typically modern idea of critique of professional systems and specialized cultural fields relies on conditions that are not given per se. In other words, the classical modern traditions of institutional critique, of the narrowness and limitations of seemingly ‘natural’ rules and language games, conventions and habits in different social and cultural fields, is dependent on a series of social, material, legal and symbolic preconditions. It depends on individual subject positions strong enough, powerful enough to ‘challenge’ existing power relations and systemic practices. In other words, the independent position of individuals, of intellectual subjects, depends on the preliminary ‘authorization’ of their voice through one of the various professional fields. I think that Bourdieu’s work is absolutely irrefutable in this regard. It shows the extremely weak, or fragile subject positions, depending in their social activation on very powerful mechanisms of authorization or ‘consecration’. In other words, the conflict or irritation someone wants to introduce into a cultural field (art, architecture, literature, science, etc.) depends in its power on the recognition of one of those fields as a specific professional expertise. That means, it is exposed, at any given time, to the rejection, through the powers that be, as mere amateurism. This is the paradoxical situation of any cultural practice experimenting with transdisciplinary ideas and forms. Unfortunately Miessen does not question sufficiently these material and sociological determinations of cultural production. This seems to me the weak point in his argument. He does not seem to see that after a century of avant-garde attacks on Philosophy, Science, Art, Literature, and Architecture, those cultural institutions with their professional standards and their conformizing power over individuals, with their fantastic power of inclusion and exclusion, of giving, and withdrawing social recognition or capital, have re-consolidated their immense ‘power of definition’: the power to determine what is accepted as belonging to a respective field of expertise. It can be said that in many regards the practices of the last decades have represented experiments of transgression with respect to the various cultural fields – but in the mode of citation and flirtation. Let’s introduce a bit of politics into art or architecture, or a
bit of philosophy, or some art into science – but let’s make sure that is still recognized as art, architecture, or science. In a way it can be said that the fantastic disciplinary power of cultural fields has been partly restored precisely through models of ‘challenging the boundaries’ of art, architecture, science, etc.

In my eyes, the historical problem of cultural production and the organization of its fields is that of the trespassing of a threshold. In the 20th century there have been invented cultures and experiments of exceptions from the rule (the rule being represented by a system and its usual practices, procedures, institutions and language games); figures of critique and transcendence of, figures of exceptions from the various field-specific definitions of what is ‘normal’. The problem of the future instead will be the invention of ‘new rules’: of new conventions, new habits, new definitions of normality. The central problem of culture (and of society in general) is the transformation of the ideas and conventions of ‘the normal’: in families, at work, in the economy, in politics, and in cultural life. The classical position, or self-description of cultural disciplines as being ‘outside’ of society has become obsolete. We are discovering, often in painful processes of enlightenment and dis-illusion, the very nature, the very pettiness of the social character of the respective fields we are working in.

The ‘outsider’ or ‘uninvited intruder’ Miessen is calling for is of course a figure of flight in this regard. Strangely enough Miessen does not analyse the powerful mechanisms of disciplinization, of inclusion/exclusion, which are at work in the field of architecture, art, literature, and science. The price one has to pay in order to be part of one of the cultural systems, in order to be included, is enormous (as is also the prize for being really outside, or excluded). It conforms subjects into rules and habits. Inhabiting an ‘outside’ position with respect to this constellation is a utopian idea. In order to make this utopia a strong one, and not a mere literary or poetic idea, we should look at the concrete conditions of its realization.

Wittgenstein is an interesting figure in this regard. Not only because he was challenging, in his philosophy, the very essence and boundaries of what ‘philosophy’ as a scientific discipline is; but also because he was challenging the discipline of architecture when planning and building his Haus an der Kunstmannngasse. Wittgenstein can be seen in various regards as a paradigmatic figure of attack on the institutional identities and boundaries of different professional systems. In Wittgenstein’s Vienna, Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin
therefore speak of the “anti-professional attitude” of the philosopher. Until today, these gestures of radical critique are still a very rare exception in our culture. They are limited to a few enigmatic and charismatic figures, but forbidden to the rest. After one century of all kinds of avant-garde attacks on architecture, art, philosophy, and science, the power of those bourgeois disciplines is still overwhelming. It is still unchallenged in terms of power relations. The real problem here is not a problem of critical consciousness, but a problem of the transformation of everyday practices, of the habitus of all of us. The problem, in other words, is not the individual outbreak, here and there, of privileged ‘outsiders’ from the rules of professional systems. It is the invention of new rules of behaviour in those systems: the creation of new conventions, new rules powerful enough to create a new normality in the everyday life of the cultural fields. In other words, we have to deal with a political problem (and not only a problem of the creativity or inventiveness of individual subjects in the respective fields). It is a problem of a change in the existing rules of mutual recognition of communications, actions, and propositions.

Just like overcoming the traditional gender relations (and their definition of role models and rules for the social division of labour) does not depend only on critical consciousness and subjective motivations of flight from traditional gender norms, but on the creation of new life forms, of new practices, and on the institutional guarantee of a new division of labour between the sexes, the overcoming of disciplinary boundaries depends not only on heroic examples and figures of exception from the rule, but on the invention of a new institutional setting in culture: new role definitions, new requirements for what is seen as the ‘normal’ task of a professor, a researcher, an architect, an artist, a writer, etc. Just as men can not remain the same if we want women to be their equals (a truth the contemporary project of gender equality in the West is constantly denying), cultural disciplines in their internal norms and normalities can not remain the same if we are serious with our ‘challenging their institutional boundaries’. This inevitably entails different job descriptions, curricula, and identities in the various disciplines. In other words, if we are serious with this, we are speaking of a real ‘cultural revolution’. The emphatic ‘amateur’ invoked by such a position is not only undermining or subverting, as until now, the normal order of the various professional fields with gestures of institutional critique. He is claiming to incorporate the new habitus, the new social normality. He is claiming his not only spiritual, but also institutional superiority with respect to the professional, the specialist, the
expert. This claim is quite difficult to think, if we start from the ground of the institutional normalities of today's cultural fields. And it is even more difficult to realize in practice. The amateur invokes a ‘real utopia of transdisciplinarity’. The transformative power of this invocation depends on our discursive conventions and everyday practices as artists, architects, designers, writers, philosophers, journalists, social scientists. And it depends, in the last instance, on the institutional shape of professions in the future. Because it contains the simple question: Is it possible to live with (and from) an anti-professional attitude in the various cultural fields (architecture, art, design, schools, universities, journals, newspapers, etc.)? Can we create the conditions of possibility of this claim? Is one an ‘invited’ intruder or outsider? Does one possess the necessary (material and symbolic) means of realizing projects that fit in this picture of the utopia of transdisciplinarity?

The answer to this question is, if one really believes in the meaning of such ambitious ideas, not a propositional, but a practical one. It is a problem of the invention of new ‘life forms’ in Wittgenstein's understanding. The meaning of cultural practices is a question of their ‘use’. The meaning of our intellectual work as artists, writers, architects, philosophers, etc. is changed through another use of our everyday cultural practices; through the creation of other habits. Just like in feminism, the personal is here indeed the political. New normalities, new forms of life, new models of work – this is the progressive project of our present. In my eyes, Miessen’s position is a bit too modest in this regard. I do not think that the emancipatory project can continue to be served by the invocation of minoritarian gestures, all kinds of exceptions from the rules of the cultural disciplines. The rule has not only to be challenged, but changed in order to create a new practice. Real freedoms, real distances from the various cultural fields will have to be invented and enforced. They imply different visions of a good life, different biographical possibilities. In this regard, our task is indeed, as Deleuze said, to say simple things in the proper name. The precarious knowledge workers of the present might be the revolutionary subject in this project, the proletariat of the future.

ENDNOTES

JAN NAUTA

THE ECONOMY OF PARTICIPATION

Contributors; Pages; Height; Width; Surface in M²;
The Economy of Participation

Did Someone Say Participate?
82 contributors
342 pages
height: 235 mm, width 145 mm
total surface area: 11.73 m²

The Violence of Participation
97 contributors
300 pages
height: 147 mm, width 210 mm
total surface area: 9.33 m²

The Nightmare of Participation
7 contributors
310 pages
height: 177 mm, width 109 mm
total surface area: 6.03 m²
Did Someone Say Participate?

Francesca Ferguson
Frank van der Salm
Peter Weibel
Wendy Pullan
Michael Hirsch
Stephen Graham
Eyal Weizman
Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss
Markus Miessen

Index, etc
The Nightmare of Participation
It Never Leads to Harmony; Ignore the Rhetoric of Participation; Let People Be Free to Like You or Not; Do Not Attempt to Be Accommodating; Creative Educational Industry Facilitating Political Correctness; Don’t Raise Institutional Issues; Let’s Go to the Bar and Have Another Drink Then; Thanks to the Speakers for Their Time and Interesting Reflections; Production of Subjectivity; I Am Not Saying that Pain is Better; Participation Is Not a Soft-Democratic Form;
“During a time when collaborative art strategies have been normalized and absorbed, it is a good moment to be sensitive to revised forms of working practice that are not taking place in the art itself, but are changing the way we understand what is possible.”

– Liam Gillick, 1999

In modern Western democracy participation has transformed into the daydream of politicians and the nightmare of precarious cultural workers. The latter are constantly asked to invent and develop collaboration in order to survive the current economic system, or lack of resources. Collaboration and partnership then suddenly became a trend: working collaboratively is considered cool, it makes you feel good, in the worst case someone will benefit from the situation of deflecting responsibility in case of failure.

Modes of participation have always been shaped in terms of the rhizomatic, anti-hierarchical, anti-dialectical, anti-representative, libertarian, neo-anarchistic, and ideologically open. They are loosely organized by small groups of people in order to avoid structures and to work more effectively as a ‘network’. Is such a strategy still possible today? As participation is always the result of a specific social context linked to specific working conditions (and if the current working conditions have dramatically changed), we should perhaps stop describing it with such terminology and investigate the possibility of naming it otherwise. Is it possible to build up a different system of representation that breaks with the current idea of participation and turn the gaze towards the future?

Participation is based on fragmentation and it never leads to harmony. It is a painful process, taking place in that grey area characterized by antagonism and asymmetry. Against the distorted, schizophrenic and populist definition of participation that reduces it to a static and repetitive chant, we should ignore the rhetoric of participation and propose a more sustainable practice.

The stress on producing relational artworks or projects became the imperative of recent years. As everyone witnessed, participation or collaboration (whatever nuance we gave it) it is not always possible or desirable; on the contrary it can become a mystification, a branding strategy or an empty shell at the service of the same system these activities were claiming to combat.
Riccardo Benassi, *1982 (a corridor)*, 2010
Installation view – synthetic felt, 2 sound loop on hidden endless tape 33” and 363”, waiting room chairs, adhesive film.
Courtesy the artist.
These two identical, adjacent, battery-operated clocks were initially set to the same time, but, with time, they will inevitably fall out of sync.
Fuck 1968, from the Greek Street.
It is necessary to stop thinking in terms of statistics, analytics, readership groups and other marketing classifications. Let people be free to like you or not, to come to visit your museum/gallery or not, to agree or disagree, but do not attempt to be accommodating. It is dangerous to think of participatory practices in the light of a consensual model where people function like numbers, like sustainable funding strategies. If we want to discuss participation under the light of quantitative results, then we will always fail to understand and practice it.

**Antagonism and the production of subjectivity**

“The only acceptable end result of human activity is the production of subjectivity such that its relation to the world is sustained and enriched.”

– Felix Guattari, *Les Subjectivités, pour le meilleur et pour le pire*.

Consensus never developed into a post-consensual practice. It was and still is the malady of our society. It generates popularity and popularity generates economic value, and if economic value is what makes us a living then one should be politically correct without putting salary and wealth under pernicious risks. If you assume a different position; then your boss will find another person ready to take your seat. In this sense, the creative educational industry went a step further in facilitating political correctness by organizing courses and degrees in ‘creative writing’, ‘curating contemporary art’ or ‘critical studies’. All were created with the aim of shaping the development of a critical understanding of art, culture and reality as a whole; to introduce you to the market labour – creating classes of well-educated people, who know what to do and what to say at the right moment...without touching too much or without causing too much dissent.

Unfortunately in the cultural system this is often the norm: don’t ask too much, don’t complain too much, don’t talk about things that don’t concern art, especially as a curator, don’t raise institutional issues. Nobody in the context of the art world wants to bite the sensibility of the other. No interesting discussions, continuous repetitions are criticality left to the hands of the audience. Let’s go to the bar and have another drink then. Of course, the bar could become a new place for the production of knowledge and the sharing of something, but if so then what kind of role do we want to attribute to social and cultural institutions? Did it occur to anyone to rethink and start over? Or do we prefer the short way out and plan to destroy cultural Institutions?
The ‘Politically Correct’ is everywhere, in every word and every gesture. Look at how popular it has become in today’s participatory art practices: infinite numbers of panel discussions, symposia, lectures, book launches and other forms of supposed ‘sharing’ spread all over the globe. You do not have an exhibition without having a lecture, normally including, for example, a guest to discuss topics in art and architecture, art and the role of the artist, art and participation, art and politics, and so on.

Is this the kind of participation we want to pursue? What kind of participation is one based on the fact that you have 40 minutes for reading your statement and 10 minutes left for questions from the audience? But in the end, it is always too late, the moderator comes up to say: “Sorry, time is gone, we have to leave. Thank you for coming and thanks to the speakers for their time and interesting reflections.” Where is this ‘sharing of knowledge’, and what should it mean to be a mono-directional and unilateral process? And if we understand that this is not the right format to be pursued, why should I follow suit? Why should I enable the production and reproduction of such models?

The question here is not if people want or do not want to participate in the small or big revolution of everyday life; this is fortunately a personal choice of responsibility. What is at stake here is how the perpetuation of such social and cultural behaviours can affect the production of subjectivity, and in doing so prevent the very possibility of different models of representation and of action coming into place.

Within a consensual model, subjectivity is diluted and stretched out to become a homogeneous and absolutely coherent field of decision. We might argue that the predominant production of subjectivity today is based on fear and indifference. This is a fear that is often exaggerated by the mass media; the fear of the Other – and in general the fear of difference. We all literally look narcotized.

In Western Liberal democracies, the younger generations have been taught a strange idea of Democracy, a soft-minded approach where the worst is more or less acceptable, even enjoyable, and relativity is the guiding light of a bright future. But this idea of democracy has already generated frustration and dissatisfaction, highlighting the necessity of adopting a more suitable model of participation based on antagonism and difference in practice – based on the real possibilities
Breaker Boys, 1911.
Pennsylvania.
we have at our disposal to rework the existing reality and combat the idea of necessity in cooperative consensus.

Adopting conflict could be the more natural of all possibilities, admitting that conflict is everywhere and that our own subjectivity, our relation with the world is the result of such conflict. I love human beings, but I often hate people. I am not saying that pain is better, just that happiness is not a gift, but an achievement. And in the economy of achievement what might be important is to expose such conflicts, to individuate the heterogeneity of converging elements, produce subjectivity, and dialectically play with them.

In this sense, participatory projects represent an invaluable opportunity to further develop and play with your own subjectivity. It might contribute to the active and practical involvement of individuals in determining their own intellectual and creative projects, and indeed their wider lives. In a participatory approach what is important is not so much the definition of roles, but the acknowledgement of who I am and what I can offer to the group.

Asymmetries and Acceleration: a balancing act

Even if we like to discuss participation as a rhizomatic, horizontal and non-hierarchical process, we should perhaps admit that modes of participation are often characterized by asymmetries – of energies, competences, levels of involvement into the projects. Asymmetries exist as natural fact – we are not all the same, we have different expectations, different relationships, different attitudes, different cultural backgrounds and different ways of interpreting the same subject.

The recognition of differences is again a painful process, and it generates incomprehension and frustration. It often happens with collaboration that people become a bit frustrated with other participants and with the general situation of working collectively. Frustration is additionally amplified by the fact that you cannot complain about the disproportionate output by each of the group members. The problems are likely to arise after a first phase of general enthusiasm beginning collaboration: someone is taking things too seriously, some order and others execute, some simply sit by in passive enjoyment, others are contrarians, some are incessantly critical and some impulsive, and so on and so on... we could write a book with the various motivations that bring collaboration at the point of rupture.
We might also admit the possibilities in such a scenario, where it becomes necessary to assume different duties and different levels of action. The recognition of differences runs the risk of being romanticized as well. The idea of difference does not mean that we need to insist on relativistic positions or that hierarchies don’t exist or that we should aim for an abolition of structural distinction. In such a case we can defend the necessity of a structure, of establishing flexible structures that could be considered beneficial for the development of the project.

Participation is not a soft-democratic form. Without structural distinction there is no possibility of opposition. Without the responsibility of acting in the name of the others there is no possible development, no future. Choices are always means of exclusion of people or potentialities, and in this sense we will never achieve a totalizing harmony nor the same level of responsibility. So, we urge consciousness; to re-singularize our subjectivity in order to conceive of new collective achievements.

We should also be aware that such asymmetries, constitutive of the capital system itself, are fertilized by the acceleration of modern time. It is a fact that the sense of not having enough time is itself an effect of the post-Fordist erosion of the boundaries between work and leisure. Everyday life is compressed between the necessity of rightly and quickly performing your tasks and the desire to slow that speed, in an effort to develop your ideas, projects or simple interests. But, we all enjoy success and seeing our ideas materialized. Success in our current society means to rush, to always be first – there is no time left. And people often prefer consensus over conflict because it is a way of saving time and energy.

Time is especially meaningful in the context of participatory practices, where diversity of knowledge, exchange and doing ask for a long-term relations where goals can be achieved only through the long-term – especially in the context of virtual communications. The reason is quite simple: people don’t share the same intensities and the same models of learning – each one travels at a different speed so to say, and we cannot wish for the contrary without falling into the trap of an authoritarian vision.

I am not saying that we should go back to pre-modern times. I was born and raised in such a situation, the idea of precariousness, acceleration of time and displacement of spaces is something embedded in
my idea of society. After all, it is again a question of responsibility, and it is quite clear that what really affects collaborative forms of working is how we are able to manage our time.

(un)Conclusions

So, if our desire is to share knowledge and to grow and define our subjectivity through confrontations with others (if we can set up collaboration this way), then we need to be rid of time as a measure of quantitative outcomes. We cannot imagine participation without the gifting of our time to others.

Participation can resist acceleration and performance’s optimization. It can resist both consensual models and homogenization. Its polyphonic, conflicting, and dispersed nature simultaneously represents a reason for inclusion into the neo-liberal system and a reason for an optimistic exclusion. It could be a motif for ‘changing the way we understand what is possible’. If we admit that another system of representation is possible, an autonomous system that doesn’t belong to anything if not to its own fulfilment, to its potentialities and capacity to facilitate the exploration of new forms and new meanings, then participation might be regarded not as a romanticized concept of community or as the bodily personification of the abstract concept of multitude, but as an operative way to produce another kind of space – a groundless space, a space of uncertainty that does not stop us from seeking that which makes difference in today’s reality. In a recent article for e-flux, Hito Steyerl suggested that falling doesn’t only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place.

There are no overarching narratives that can be discovered or applied to the actual situation, nor the nostalgia of a lost heaven, but there is a new form of realism – there is understanding, awareness, frustration and disagreement. The next step might be an act of generosity.
DIETER ROELSTRAETE

ON STANDING STILL

Radical Affirmation; Art’s Embrace of the World; The Very Idea of an 'Outside' Has Been Dismantled and Proven Obsolete; Boundless Immersion; If 'The World' Was Actually Worth Taking Part In; No Mere Continuation of 'Life' Outside It; Like a Cemetery;
Two major, seemingly contradictory strands have shaped the avant-garde tradition in art for most of the 20th century (and beyond): the call for art’s dissolution into life on the one hand (Bauhaus, constructivism, Dada), and, on the other, the establishment of art as an autonomous sphere of being that is built on a strategy of renunciation, denial and negation (most other modernist isms, most Critical Theory). It is unnecessary to add that the fact of these strands appearing to contradict each other has historically been subsumed under art’s awesome powers of negation, more specifically the negation of logic.

For reasons that need not detain us here, it is abundantly clear that the first trend, that of the blending and merging of art and life, has emerged victorious from this historical tussle: for most of the post-1968 era (this is an important caesura) contemporary art’s relationship to the world, which is really just another word for ‘life’, has been overwhelmingly affirmative – so much so that even the hallowed tradition of art as critique (‘negation’) has come to be couched in such oxymoronic (or plainly moronic) terms as ‘radical affirmation’.

In the twenty-odd years since the momentous events of 1989 (another important caesura), art’s embrace of the world has unfolded along two elemental lines of attack: that of ‘relating’ on the one hand, and that of ‘immersing’ on the other hand. In both instances, the embrace has been so astoundingly complete that it is now very hard to imagine any art operating outside of its grasp – indeed, the very idea of an ‘outside’ has been dismantled and proven obsolete. Needless to emphasize here that the rise and rise of the global art market – in short: the triumph of ‘1989’ – has played a crucial role in this development: no market can be truly global if an ‘outside’ is allowed to continue to exist, however (no pun intended!) marginally. The weaving of a ‘relational aesthetics’ built on the twin principles of interaction and participation most directly reflects the primacy of the network at the heart of this affirmative regime; the gradual darkening, both literally and metaphorically, of the spaces of art and their subsequent disappearance in an architecture of atmospherics and boundless immersion most emphatically symbolize the indiscriminate pervasiveness with which this regime has managed to both infiltrate and implicate the erstwhile sites of contestation and opposition (‘outside-ness’ and/or ‘against-ness’).

Of course, the dissolution of art into life wouldn’t be such a terrible thing if ‘life’ was actually worth dissolving into, and the participatory turn – one of many ‘turns’ that has been making us feel dizzy for the
last twenty years or so – wouldn’t be the worst thing to have happened to art if ‘the world’ was actually worth taking part in, but we all know that this is not really (or is no longer) the case. The mimetic desire in art is an old and perfectly understandable one, but the problem is that this mimetic impulse mostly concerns those aspects of the life-world that really aren’t worth duplicating in what was once known to be the autonomous sphere of art. For me at least, it is important that a visit to the various spaces of art (which are not necessarily only physical ones) will guarantee a break or change from, and no mere continuation of ‘life’ outside it; indeed, that what I find inside will be – it almost pains me to use this much-misused, tired old warhorse-like word – different. And what can be more different from life than death? What are the most peaceful, restoring, inspiring places in today’s stress-ridden, choked metropolises? That’s right, cemeteries – and the odd museum that is content to still feel, look, smell and sound like a cemetery – where art is allowed to maintain the type of distance from both life and the world that (for better or for worse, rightfully so or not) used to be called ‘critical’ – and ‘taking part’ is the last of its expectations.
Still, It’s a Hot Commodity; The Who and the What; How Do We Participate?; As the Very Material of Power Itself; Radical, Unanticipated Figures of Selfhood (and Collectivity); Our Instrumentalization; This Trio of the Ethical, Political, and Aesthetic; There Lies the Promise of Art; A Mechanism for Vigilance;
We will demand transparency and democracy for the market

When faced with participation (as a term and phenomenon), stock in enigmatology rises, for, despite its first-glance, deceptively generic, black-and-white label, there is never one off-the-shelf model of participation available for consumption or scrutiny. Still, it’s a hot commodity in the marketplace of ideas, placed into circuits of distribution channeling multiple discursive analogues. Whether in the high-end boutique (this discussion offering a prime example) or the connoisseur’s shop (e.g., Wikipedia) or the big box store (e.g, YouTube), over the past decade participation (as both an operating principle and subject matter) has extended its frequency and deepened its reach. By now, brand fatigue has surely set in for participation, but evidence attests to the contrary. And yet despite the popularity of participation, we are nowhere closer to a clear definition of it.

We will camouflage our ignorance in regional dialects

Each field employs and deploys its own crucigrammarists to puzzle through participation as object/subject/inquiry in the horizontal and vertical assemblies of crossword-like plays. ACROSS might be dedicated to asking “What is Participation?” while DOWN might propose “Who is Participation?” These are the common clues and, on occasion, compelling coherences take shape while, on others, incompatibility or incomprehension comes to the fore. The who and the what of participation and its relationship to the political, economic, and cultural is, therefore, terrain well-trod, in which the who correlates to a process of subjectification and the what a kind of objectification. I’d like to propose a third, perhaps more important question vis-à-vis participation, which is a key, critical interrogation steering away from the object/subject study of it toward a problematic by asking how do we participate?

We will present ambivalence as a strategy of consequence

Interestingly enough, asking how we participate leads back to the question of who participates. The how, as I mean it here, is inspired by a reading of Michel Foucault’s Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, and refers to conduct specifically and ethics more broadly. For Foucault, ethics belongs to a larger constellation, which includes truth and subjectivity, where the subject operates as an individual, both as a constituted entity and as a self-constituting agent. In the former role, individuals are instruments interpellated for the purposes of serving ideologies
and other forms of power via strategic articulations. And so, individuals and subjects receive expression and recognition not in accordance with their own needs or desires, but rather for a system that requires legitimization from these declared and, by extension, corralled subjects. This is the scenario that Foucault sees at work most of the time – a situation that cloaks machinations of power by stirring individual preoccupations, whether through isolation, alienation, consumption, or some other technique, the ultimate consequence being that we, in fact, circulate as the very material of power itself.

We will diagnose distortions of ambition as symptoms of success

By contrast, the latter role of the subject, as a self-constituting agent, which is the rarer bird according to Foucault, provides a position from which to resist or refuse particularization in order to produce and promote new forms of subjectivity, what we might call radical, unanticipated figures of selfhood (and collectivity) that confuse and might conceivably overload circuitries of power with divergent protocols and languages. For Foucault, this subject makes not only an ethical and political choice to refuse the yoke of existing and prohibiting identities, but crucially makes an aesthetic one as well. Of course, no individuals have easy or exclusive access to this choice, as its availability depends on a rather favorable set of conditions.

We will veil our apathy in the folds of poetry

Given these two roles of the subject (constituted and constituting), it is crucial to ask how we participate because we are always, in effect, in a relationship to power, i.e., as instruments in either the service of or contestation of authority. When we participate in some activity or campaign or study, this power relationship spotlights our instrumentalization. And, in this scenario, we must ask whether when we participate if we are unleashing the promise of the collective or highlighting the limitations of the horde, or are we, instead, doing it all the other way around? For each distinct and telling situation, a careful and considered engagement is warranted in response.

We will deregulate the symbolic economy and invest offshore

Somewhere within this trio of the ethical, political, and aesthetic, I detect there lies the promise of art, a permissive zone, which is characterized not by an autonomy that separates it from its political, economic, and cultural surroundings, but rather always already involves
a critical contingency that renders it a site for engagement and enlightenment (little ‘e’) and agonism (all the ingredients needed for a healthy course of participation!), which contributes to re-defining what aesthetics is. On this diet, we might regularly attempt to cleanse the ailing social body that we are all complicit within, that which we all comprise. If, like Foucault, we view everything in terms of ethics, and in doing so, are able to recognize everything as dangerous (meaning having the capacity for limiting the practices of freedom of some group, individual, or other subject for the purposes of elevating oneself), then we can prepare a space for seriously asking how we participate. For Foucault, a genealogy of problems offers a critical practice for ethics because with every new age, actors, and situation, one set of problems mutates and scatters into a new set before we’ve even had the time to identify and articulate earlier species and behaviors. While not identical to Foucault’s technology for the genealogy of problems, it is possible that art can offer some kind of mechanism for vigilance. It is equally true of participation.
WE WILL DEMAND TRANSPARENCY AND DEMOCRACY FOR THE MARKET

WE WILL Deregulate The Symbolic Economy

And Invest Offshore
WE WILL DIAGNOSE DISTORTIONS OF AMBITION AS SYMPTOMS OF SUCCESS
WE WILL PRESENT AMBIVALENCE AS A STRATEGY OF CONSEQUENCE
WE WILL VEIL OUR APATHY IN THE FOLDS OF POETRY
Participation has been a theme or strategy of note in law (e.g., Lawrence Lessig’s book *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace Version 2.0* from 2006); in activism and organizing (e.g., Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody* from 2009); in technology and software development (e.g., Richard Stallman’s *GNU Manifesto* copyrighted in 1985, 1993, and 2003); in art (e.g., Claire Bishop’s Documents of Contemporary Art volume entitled *Participation* from 2006 and Rudolf Frieling’s exhibition *The Art of Participation* from 2008); in spatial practice (e.g., Markus Miessen’s trilogy of books *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* from 2006, *The Violence of Participation* from 2008, and *The Nightmare of Participation* from 2011); and in advertising (e.g., Stride gum’s appropriation of the man dancing around the world otherwise known as the “Where the Hell is Matt?” campaign).
EYAL DANON

SOME NOTES FROM AN ENCIRCLED SOCIETY*

An Occupation of Representation and Consciousness; Counter the Separationist Ethos Promoted; They Are Always Political; Joint Action of Art and Activism with Other Communities; Bringing the Nakba into Hebrew; Creating the Conditions for Visibility; Over Identification and Identity Correction; Subversive Blurring between the Boundaries of Responsibility; The Mental and Cultural Walls;
Israel's occupation is not solely territorial. It is also an occupation of representation and consciousness. It is through networks of images, texts and messages that the perspective offered and consumed by Israeli society is created. The narrative that this network creates is one of the tools that enables the extreme militarization of society and violent acts of the state, to always appear as if they are unavoidable and inflicted upon Israel by its enemies.

This situation is a challenge for artists and activists who seek to initiate activities addressing Israel's socio-political reality through the sphere of concepts and information, propaganda and education. Its also an opportunity for them to take part in redefining an emerging political and ideological debate that might undermine the current futile ‘Two State Solution’ consensus. It becomes highly relevant to offer new possibilities and alternatives into the Israeli public sphere such that counter the separationist ethos promoted by Israeli governments and work towards joint action and solidarity.

The case studies I will analyse here react to these quite despairing conditions. The guidelines according to which we might examine them should consider the fact that artistic and cultural practices are effective in creating new modes of identification and identities. They are always political, as they are either committed, even unconsciously, to the preservation of the dominant hegemony or to its replacement.1 Israel’s hegemonic domination over representation and perception is the context in which the artists, through various tactics, try to subversively undermine it. This is only possible through the joint action of art and activism with other communities beyond the walls of the white cube. Confining art within the boundaries of its autonomy is a policy aimed at preventing solidarity and self organization that are needed for any practice of change.

‘Zochrot’2 (Remembering) is a group of Israeli activists and artists working to raise awareness of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948. In the organization’s web site they describe their mandate:

“The Zionist collective memory exists in both our cultural and physical landscape, yet the heavy price paid by the Palestinians – in lives, in the destruction of hundreds of villages, and in the continuing plight of the Palestinian refugees – receives little public recognition. Zochrot works to make the history of the Nakba accessible to the Israeli public so as to engage Jews and Palestinians in an open recounting of our painful common history. We hope that by bringing the Nakba
"Through Language" challenges the erasure of the Arabic language from signs in the Israeli public sphere and its foul implications. By spraying words in Arabic, along with their Hebrew transcription and a translation to Hebrew, an urban, large-scale visual Arabic-Hebrew dictionary is created. Through language, by-passers in the street are invited to explore their stand towards Arabic and the possibilities of life that is genuinely shared and common.
into Hebrew, the language spoken by the Jewish majority in Israel, we can make a qualitative change in the political discourse of this region. Acknowledging the past is the first step in taking responsibility for its consequences. This must include equal rights for all the peoples of this land, including the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.”

Zochrot have been active for more than a decade now. In May 2007 they published the first issue of Sedek (crack, fissure) dedicated to addressing the Nakba of 1948 as well as to the continuing Nakba that is manifested by Israel’s treatment towards the Palestinians till now. In Sedek documents and artistic reactions to the Nakba are published in Hebrew, representing a radical act, as the deportation of Palestinians during the 1948 war is still a taboo in Israeli Jewish society and considered part of the Palestinian narrative that fundamentally contradicts the Zionist story about the “People without Land to a Land without People.”

Creating the conditions for visibility and publishing information can be found in projects by other artists who focus on creating visibility in public space. David Reeb is an established painter who identifies himself as a political artist who objects to the Israeli occupation. Reeb started joining the demonstrations against the construction of the separation wall next to the village of Bil’in in 2005 and regularly documents demonstrations and distributes his videos online.³

Reeb also offers his documented materials to lawyers and human rights organizations as evidence, as well as for TV channels. He describes his video work as mainly functional and political. He joins the demonstrations as an act of solidarity and offers his creative skills for the villagers. Distributing the videos through his website⁴ and YouTube enables him also to introduce almost in real time images from the demonstrations that stand in contrast to the regular media coverage of the events.

Reeb always shoots from the point of view of the demonstrators looking towards the soldiers, who fire towards him from a distance. This distance is symbolic to his clear political standing and illustrates the fact that he is not a mere documentary creator, he is a demonstrator as well.

The raw materials from the demonstrations are also used for his paintings. He selects specific frames from the video and paints them. All the channels Reeb uses to distribute his materials, be it newspapers or TV’s, court rooms as evidence, video pieces or paintings in
galleries, the internet, create a different context that effects the shape the materials get. Nevertheless, all these still contribute to a larger goal and that is to create visibility to the story of Bil'in and the occupation through a perspective different from the mass media.

The works described above can roughly be characterized as projects dealing with the exposure, gathering and distributing of information using various tools for the introduction of information from alternative resources into the public sphere. The next two projects also take place in the public sphere, but use different tactics that can be described as over-identification or identity correction.

The group Public Movement uses the choreography and iconography of well known Israeli public ceremonies, like those held in youth movements, the army, memorial days, media generated ceremonies, and re-enacts them in public spaces. In their ceremonies, the ritual becomes the focus, itself. Their re-enactments, through the tactics of over-identification, suggest that the ceremony has become empty of its ideological content. It is now a mere habit that is practised in an almost automatic mode.

The group members wear uniforms for most of their performances. These allow them to blur the boundaries between the ‘legitimized’ violence of the state and their own re-enactment of it. The group’s identification with the ceremony and with the ideology it once represented is ambivalent. This ambivalence is a tactic for camouflage. They are the establishment and they act its ceremonies with extra meaning, as it once was. This identification generates a nostalgia but at the same time indicates a sort of emptiness that the Israeli national ethos has reached. The fact that the Zionist ideological gravitational force is no longer active, and can’t create the same sort of identification, renders the ceremonies, and through them the actions of the state, as pure evilness.

The tactics used by Public Movement offer another route Israeli artists and activists might take. They give up the option of complete withdrawal from Zionist symbols and narratives in favour of a more ambivalent usage of them. Since the left has given up its participation in the shaping of national identity and rejects any kind of identification with national symbols, this sphere has been left to the right. Public Movement’s approach might suggest a path that allows for identification and involvement with the national ethos and nostalgia instead of abandoning them altogether. It might be that through
I'm not talking until everyone shuts their mouth.
Public Movement
– Still from
Promotional Video
(DVD, 9 Minutes, 2008) Theodor
Herzl’s Tomb,
Mount Herzl,
Jerusalem.
Yossi Atia & Itamar Rose, Missiles on Ramat Gan, 2006 Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv subtites: “Reuven where are you?”
their ceremonies, the cracks and gaps in the official narratives and memories can become visible.

In a similar way, using identification and satire, Yossi Atia and Itamar Rose also operate in the public space. Under the guise of an official representative of an organization (the camouflage is always very poor but the presence of a camera gives them the credibility needed for the public) they ask the accidental public to perform various acts that expose paradoxes and injustices through parody and satire. Their direct interventions into daily life enable them to interact with the people and to force them, through play, to confront issues they usually only see through the media’s distant coverage. Through role playing they ask people to decide which way they prefer the state to kill Palestinians, they ask people if they would allow refugees to enter Israel when they ‘cast’ them to the role of guards on the border between Egypt and Israel, they ask people to commemorate the Palestinian village buried under the park in which they picnic during Independence Day, and more.

Their tactic of identity correction and intervention into the public sphere is documented on video which is available on the net and in screenings and exhibitions.

Yossi and Itamar’s works create an interesting and subversive blurring between the boundaries of responsibility. Their tactics expose the paradoxes, evilness and crimes of the entity in the name of which they supposedly operate. However, at the same time, their work doesn’t leave responsibility only on the side of the state. The citizens who are accidentally involved in Yossi and Itamar’s interventions are confronted with the same moral questions and are asked to decide individually to take responsibility for specific situations like punishing or pardoning a Jewish terrorist, accepting or rejecting a gay son, allowing Arabs to enter a mall, or defining who will be the enemy of the future Isra-Palestine state.

I have tried to describe the artistic and activistic initiatives through modest definitions of aims and through wide perceptions of target audiences and communities. The idea that art can influence the masses and create mass change fosters an impossible gap in expectations that cripples the art. A modest approach is important when we remember that the initiatives take place in an extremely unbalanced conflict. The artists mentioned above all, through different tactics and approaches, attempt to create a small opening in the walls Israeli society has encircled itself with. These are not only the concrete walls that are being constructed in the last five years. The
mental and cultural walls might be of even greater importance and influence. They enable Israeli society to continue existing in the Middle East while picturing itself as a Western entity, to control almost five million people under different types of control, and still call itself a Democracy, to have one of the largest military forces on earth and still feel like a potential victim, and to continually talk about the lessons of the Holocaust while being a xenophobic towards refugees and work immigrants. These paradoxes are internal to the cultural and social fabric of Israel. Artists have a role in exposing them and offering alternative perspectives to Israeli society. In time, these perspectives might contribute to the creation of a different world view, a more realistic and responsible one.

*This text is a revised and shortened version of a text originally written for the catalogue of the exhibition Theatre of Peace, curated by bankleer (Karin Kasbock, Christoph Leitner), Anke Hagemann, Dietrich Heißenbüttel and Gunda Isik. Another version of it is to be published in the book Vocabulary of Decoloniality, edited by Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies (Carolina Agredo, Sheri Avraham, Iris Borovcnik, Annalisa Cannito, Miltiadis Gerothanasis, Marina Gržinić, Niki Kubaczek, Marissa Lôbo and Ivana Marjanovic), produced by the Post Conceptual Art Practices Class at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, published by Löcker Verlag, Vienna, forthcoming 2011.
ENDNOTES


2 http://www.zochrot.org/index.php?lang=english

3 Bil’in became a symbol of non-violent resistance against the confiscation of its lands for the construction of the wall. The Israeli army meets this resistance with increased violence, repression and illegal arrests. Supported by Israeli and international activists, Bil’in residents demonstrate every Friday next to the wall.

4 www.davidreeb.com

5 The term ‘over-Identification’ should be considered in a similar manner to the way philosopher Slavoj Žižek uses it in relation to Slovenian art collective NSK.

6 The term identity correction is used by activist group The Yes Men to describe their actions. I use it to describe the tactic of artists Yossi Atia and Itamar Rose in this article.

MELANIE O’BRIAN

THE NIGHTMARE OF PARTICIPATION (CROSSBENCH PRAXIS AS A MODE OF CRITICALITY) EVALUATION

ME; ME; N/A; N/A; N/A; ME; N/A; NI; N/A; ME;
**NI:** Needs Improvement  
**ME:** Meets Expectations  
**N/A:** Not applicable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation and Creativity</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develops new insights, provides innovative solutions/ideas and challenges status quo to improve methodology and solve problems; develops and implements new processes within own area.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed &amp; pro-active; able &amp; willing to assume greater responsibility.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Skills</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considers and responds appropriately to the needs, feelings and capabilities of people in different situations; is tactful, empathetic and treats others with respect, including all user groups.</td>
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<tr>
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<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to an anti-discriminatory environment; respects cultural norms and practices of colleagues, user groups; seeks to understand differences.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works with and assists others cooperatively; promotes teamwork, contributes work in a timely fashion, acts as team member.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeps others informed of current status of work and projects. Conveys ideas, problems or issues in a clear, organized manner. Facilitates an open exchange through communicating in a respectful manner and actively listening to other's ideas/concerns.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies and analyzes problems, distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information to make logical decisions and probes all sources to provide effective solutions.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Organizing and Planning</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structures work for easy access and maximum efficiency; makes effective use of resources and time; able to set priorities.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Work</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work produced is thorough, accurate, comprehensive and timely; attention to detail is evident.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Adaptability &amp; Flexibility</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is open to change and new information, ideas, systems, adapts behaviours and work methods in response to new or changing conditions; reacts quickly and positively to changing work needs.</td>
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The Body of Participation Is Left Gasping; Something’s Wrong?
Find the Opposite; The Specter of Participation; The Presence of the Insider More Firmly into the Picture; Generosity and Curiosity; We Prefer the Term Agent over that of Curator or Facilitator; To the Other; Brought Back into the Centre of the Debate;
Markus Miessen’s *The Nightmare of Participation* gives a good kicking to received notions of participation. In many ways the target is too easy: the body of participation is pretty moribund anyway and is left gasping with such lively boots being stamped over it. For this reason I am less focused here on the critique, and more committed to what may come out the other side.

The hole that *The Nightmare of Participation* continually skirts around, and sometimes puts a foot into, is that of the oppositional dialectic. Something’s wrong? Find the opposite. Move towards higher truth. Consensus bad, agonism good. Expert professional bad, disinterested amateur good. The trouble with this method is that it both leaves the bad side unscathed to get on with its normal business, and also, by framing parts of participation as bad (and I agree that the consensus is an impossible term), it might chuck out some of the constructive aspects of the term. The battered baby is washed away with the gurgling bathwater. There is a danger of reading *The Nightmare of Participation* in this negative light – indeed the hyperbolic title encourages us so to do.

If consensual participation is such a monster, then where does that leave other notions of participation? The answer given is lopsided, in that it concentrates so heavily on just one side of the process, namely that of the facilitator/curator/outsider. What is missing is the voice or presence of the other side – of the insider, of the people, of the agonists. It as if the specter of participation is so threatening that these other presences must be suppressed, because they represent the ground of participatory practice.

The other baby in danger of being washed away in the dialectical rush is that of any form of expert knowledge. Whenever I approach participation, I do so with the brilliantly succinct warning of Gillian Rose ringing in my ears: ‘the architect is demoted but the people do not accede to power’. She is here referring to the poverty of certain forms of ideologically driven “community architecture”, in which any knowledge – including that of the architect – is deemed to be a form of power and therefore must be dissolved. The only role left for the architect is that of technical facilitator and skills provider; all other forms of knowledge-based action are disavowed. As Rose notes, this ends up in a lose-lose situation. The architect is indeed ritually demoted, but the people are left grasping for air, bereft of any help in envisioning spatial futures.
I am sympathetic to the danger of falling into these dialectical traps. My book *Architecture Depends* has been criticized exactly for setting up straw men (many the same as those in *The Nightmare of Participation*) in order to better defeat them. Better then to avoid such oppositions altogether, and just start reconstructing the future from the mess that is inherent, as Miessen notes, in any given situation. To do this, one has to bring the presence of the insider more firmly into the picture, and also allow some forms of specialized knowledge, and with it judgment, to be deployed.

A clue as to how to do this is given on the penultimate page of the text, when Miessen introduces “three positions with which modes of proactive participation can become meaningful: attitude, relevance, responsibility.” But, coming so late in the book, we are left hanging as to what these could actually entail. So I will attempt briefly to sketch what one version of what they might mean, and how they imply a necessary engagement with the other presences that are left silent in the book.

### Attitude

Attitude is informed by two conditions: generosity and curiosity, both of which imply openness to the issues and desires of others. They do not close things down to the consensus of the commons, but demand alertness to alternatives. As Miessen notes, “the venturing out of both the notion of expertise and discipline is crucial in order to remain sufficiently curious towards the specialized knowledges of others.” (p.196). In our formulation of *Spatial Agency* – some of which resonates with Miessen’s arguments and much of which illustrates them – Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and I identify three key components: spatial judgment, mutual awareness and critical awareness. For the purposes of this argument, it is mutual knowledge that is core. Generosity means a willing acceptance, in both directions, of each party’s knowledge; curiosity means being open to being surprised by that knowledge. For Anthony Giddens, mutual knowledge is “practical in character,” but also founded in the interstices of the everyday rather than on the high planes of expert enlightenment. An acceptance of such mushy forms of knowledge is only possible with an attitude of generosity and curiosity: generosity in as much as the professional steps off their crafted podium and onto the level playing field of open discourse, welcoming the imprecise (in expert terms) formulations of the insider as the sharpest insights into the given context; curiosity, because of the willingness to first see, and then al-
low things to happen otherwise (which is another defining feature of Giddens’s agency).

Relevance

The relevance of any given project is only found when it is informed by the multiple voices of the insiders. The irrelevance of so much architecture, and of pseudo-participation, is created exactly in their lack of engagement, as they pursue their abstracted and individual obsessions. Relevance counters the generalized abstractions and melds the individual with the contested collective. A project is only relevant if it is alert to its particular context and with this the imprint of the agent is not exactly dissolved, but certainly transformed, each time. It is for this reason that Nishat, Tatjana and I prefer the term agent over that of curator or facilitator. The curator’s identity is to a greater or lesser extent demanded in the making of a project, whereas agents are less concerned with identity than they are with action. Relevance also suggests a forward looking, transformative trajectory, because that is what makes a project relevant, and so gets away from the danger of the ‘critical’ project, which too often circles around its own internalized, irrelevant concerns. Relevance thus goes hand in hand with intent.

Responsibility

I am often asked about how, in the face of all the multiple contingencies and dependencies of architectural practice, one makes judgments. My answer is two stepped:

“Through intent.”
“But what guides that intent?”
“The responsibility towards the other.”

The latter is a direct quote from Zygmunt Bauman; it is his short and unforgettable definition as to what constitutes ethical behavior. Responsibility here is not to oneself (which is how Aristotle’s ethics are centered in terms of the good behavior of the good self) or to one’s profession (which is how the professional ‘codes of conduct’ suggest ethical behavior is to be found), but always to the other. The ‘Other’, usually capitalized and apostrophized, has become a standard term for the alternative and the forgotten. It is not in this sense that I employ it here, because that may shunt the debate into the margins. Marginal positions are often heralded as the radical alternative, but there is the concomitant danger that being marginal also sets one up to be
dismissed by the center, so the power of the margins is never realized. Although resistance has historically been developed around the edges, when the center has been found wanting, as it was so spectacularly in the late 2000s with the storms of economic collapse and environmental crisis, then one has to question whether the center still has the authority to label things as marginal. The others that I refer to here are therefore not those on the fringes, but the multiple voices that go into the making, occupation and reception of the spatial environment. It is spatial agents’ responsibility to act for and on behalf of these others.

These very brief sketches of versions of attitude, relevance and responsibility may allow a different version of participation to emerge. Participation is not going to disappear as a term or a need, so it is best to allow it to develop on its own terms and be brought back into the center of the debate. The King is Dead! Long Live the Queen!

ENDNOTES
LUIGI FASSI

IN THE MIDST OF THE DISCONSOLATE MODERN WORLD

A Passionate Speech in Front of his Workers; A Larger Political Project Conceived by Olivetti; Comunità; Substitution of the Idea of Profit with the Idea of Service; The City of Ivrea; Participation as the Ideal of a Common and Mutual Growth; To Temper, if Not Fully Erase the Idea of Conflict; A Socio-Political Prescription Necessary to Avoid Devastation; The Disappearance of the Fireflies in Italy; 'Participating' Masses;
Arriving in Naples in 1955 to open his new branch factory in Pozzuoli, the first such outpost of his company in Southern Italy and designed by the rationalist architect Luigi Cosenza, the entrepreneur Adriano Olivetti gave a passionate speech in front of his workers about the contemporary conflict between nature and industrial work, and the destiny of Italian workers who were forced to leave the soil and agricultural tradition to seek work in factories. Olivetti drew an apocalyptic picture, describing the relationship between traditional rural culture and the new realities of industrialized labor in Italy, pointing out the radical fracture at work between the thousand-year-old Mediterranean civilization and the brutal contemporary diversity of the world of mass production. Olivetti’s words were visionary in their scope and it is difficult to believe that they derive from an address by a private entrepreneur to industrial workers on the opening day of a new branch factory of his company:

“Man, torn from the soil and nature and removed to the civilization of machines, has suffered in the depths of his soul, and we do not even know how many cuts and deep wounds, how many irremovable damages have occurred in the depths of his unconscious. In little more than a generation, we have put aside a thousand year old civilization of peasants and fishermen. For this civilization, which still exists in Southern Italy, the enlightenment of God was real and important; the trees, the soil, the sun, the sea and the stars were important... The devastation brought about by two world wars has pushed man towards industry and urbanization. It has torn the peasant for the soil and locked him into the factories.”

At the dawn of the grand industrial development in Italy, which at the beginning of the 1960s would have been seen to lead to the so called ‘Italian miracle’ characterized by a steady increase in the national GNP and rapid diffusion of the national wealth, Olivetti stands out as a figure completely apart from most of the Italian industrial establishment of the time. Rising from being a small local entrepreneur engaged in producing typewriters in Ivrea to an international leader in the sector and owner of factories all over the world in just a few years, Olivetti had conceived and implemented a type of working organization destined to become a model at both the Italian and wider European level. The workers’ and employees’ salaries at Olivetti were incomparably higher than at other companies in the country and its factories
were accompanied by the provision of free of charge apartments, asylums, medical facilities and libraries, according to a logic of social welfare that was not matched by any other company in Italy during those years. But the most unique characteristic of the company even at the European level for the second half of the 1950s was to be found in Olivetti’s capacity to attract around the factory a new generation of intellectuals, poets, novelists, historians and sociologists, employed and generously paid to carry on their intellectual work, even if bearing no direct connection whatsoever to the company’s activities.

All of this was not just the will of a reformist entrepreneur, but the concrete development of the actual steps of a larger political project conceived by Olivetti, that of what was called Comunità. From the beginning of his industrial activity, Olivetti had known how to join entrepreneurial efficiency with a deep intellectual awareness of the increasing upheavals that industrialism was bringing about within Italian society, which was rooted in several centuries of uninterrupted agricultural and rural life. Thus Olivetti’s multifaceted engagement converged upon the outlining the form of an ideal state, a social community (Comunità) conceived of down to its working details as a means to reconcile the worlds of nature and work, and the balance between productive activity and private life. In his text *Society, State and Community*, a key volume released by Olivetti in 1952, this communitarian ideal would find its full expression:

“I knew that man and machine were two domains hostile to each other and that they were meant to reconcile. I knew the awful monotony and the weight of the endlessly repeated gesture in front of a drill or a press, and I knew that it was necessary to liberate man from that demeaning slavery... It was necessary to give an awareness of scope to the work. And achieving that could not be the task of an ‘enlightened master’ any more, but instead the task of society.”

And Olivetti goes further, demonstrating how private enterprise and public interest had to coincide under a new understanding of the common good:

“If I could have demonstrated that the factory was a commonwealth and not a private enterprise, that would have justified the transfer of properties, regulatory plans, bold social experiments of work devolution... The way to balance these things did exist, but it was not in my hands: it was necessary to create a just and human authority able to reconcile all these things in the common interest... There
was only one solution: to make the factory and the surrounding landscape economically supportive of each other. In this way the idea of Comunità was born... It was the substitution of the idea of profit with the idea of service.”

Comunità was for Olivetti the response to the necessity he saw for the enacting of an alternative way, beyond capitalism and communism, and from its beginnings the company distinguished itself by its strong participatory spirit within the relationship between workers and management. In the Comunità of Olivetti, concretely realized through different aspects in the city of Ivrea, it was therefore the notion of participation that became the key word. Every citizen was to contribute to helping to generate the collective welfare, participating directly in the management of the factory and seeing the fruits of his or her labor and engagement placed at the direct disposal of the well-being of the community. Private property, individual wealth, and personal ambition were all perfectly respected but harmonized within a social mechanism, the Comunità, that sought in participation the ideal of a common and mutual growth, trying to temper, if not fully erase (at least in Olivetti’s theoretical writings) the idea of conflict and social contrast within the workplace.

The tension between participation and conflict in fact lies at the core of Olivetti’s discourse and overall comprehension of the Comunità project. In both his theoretical writings and his concrete efforts in Ivrea during the 1950s, Olivetti seems to point to an socio-political uncertainty that marks an epochal passage, a possible moment of emptiness as far as values and power are concerned. This intuition of being balanced on a razor’s edge is recorded in Society, State and Community:

“At one side the forms of a new society, at the other an emergent and irrevocable catastrophe.”

A similar thought appeared in slightly different form in a speech given to the Ivrea workers in 1954:

“In the disconsolate modern world, tarnished by the disordered contrast of immense and blind interests and corrupted by the inhuman will to power, by the domain of Man over Man, we are threatened by the loss of sense and the light of spiritual values.”
This is for Olivetti the negative side of modernity, that which needed to be transformed into something positive through a concrete project of values, namely that of *Comunità*, which would idealize collective participation as a resolution of the central issues of modernity. Olivetti was perfectly aware of the reality of conflict and contrast inside the modern world, and it was precisely the risk of possible catastrophe within industrial modernity that he sought to counter through the concept of participation. In this regard the communitarian ideal seems almost to be a form of exorcism, a socio-political prescription necessary to avoid devastation and to progress in a smooth way without the exclusion of anybody, in short, to ease the passage from the agricultural world to industrial modernity – because the modernity of the 1950s, for the Italian Olivetti, remained a new and unexplored world, one of which nobody yet knew the final horizon.

The uncertainty of modernity to which Olivetti was pointing to in 1952 sounds almost prophetic, especially as interpreted a few years later through the words of the Italian writer and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini. As an intellectual devoted to the critical accompaniment of Italy’s missed entrance into modernity, Pasolini was engaged throughout the 1970s as both an artist and a perceptive journalist in the unmasking of the grand disillusionment of participatory strategies and mass development in Italy. In an enlightening article published in Corriere della Sera in 1974, *L’articolo delle lucciole* (republished later in *Scritti Corsari*), Pasolini began his critical discourse by addressing the phenomenon of the disappearance of the fireflies in Italy, in order to speak about Italian society and the political misdeeds of the Christian Democrat government (Democrazia Cristiana) which had ruled the country from the post-war era up to the time in which he was writing. The disappearance of the fireflies from the Italian landscape since the early 1960s was caused by an increase in air and water pollution, and was read by Pasolini as a powerful metaphorical image of the dramatic end of the peasant and rural world, erased and forgotten in just a few frantic years by the rise of industrialization and the consumer society. The pollution of the machinery of civilization had wiped out the fireflies’ lights, and Pasolini saw in that symbolic image of eclipse the potential for the extermination of an entire world. Without any sort of progressive mediation such as might have been provided by the Industrial and subsequent bourgeois Revolutions of Western Europe, which had no equivalent in Italy, Pasolini saw the tragedy of the ancient Italian consciousness, made up of numerous dialects, traditions, and forms of rural wisdom, now raped by consumer society and the power of money. The consumer society was for
Pasolini an actual anthropological cataclysm, a form of debasement which homogenized Italians according to petit-bourgeois values that erased all cultural differences and particularities. Pasolini wrote in the above-mentioned article:

“Italians have in a few years become a degenerated people, ridiculous, monstrous, criminal. You only need to go out in the streets to gain an understanding of that... I have seen ‘with my senses’ the compulsory behavior of the power of consumerism to re-create and deform the conscience of Italian people, to the point of irrevocable debasement.”

And he further argues in another political article, also written in 1974:

“I consider the totalitarianism of consumer capitalism worse than the totalitarianism of the old fascist power.”

In disagreement with Olivetti’s position, it is clear that Pasolini does not see any possible reconciliation within modern developments in Italy, but only the dismay brought about by the break-up of an old social fabric which is now lost forever, that of local cultures and traditional values, which for centuries transmitted from fathers to sons. Instead, he foresaw a void approaching:

“With their maneuvers and smiles, the powerful Christian Democrat politicians cover a void... But the void cannot subsist... and it is likely that this void I am talking about is already being filled by a crisis and a reassessment that will devastate the entire nation.”

In this context, Pasolini unmasks as a mystification every kind of participatory rhetoric, as being a product of the deception of the new consumer power that had invaded society. Taking on a tone close to that espoused by Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, as a leftist militant intellectual Pasolini had experienced first hand the devastation brought about by this new participatory culture and therefore could write:

“Communists deceive themselves... they do not see that the ‘participation’ of the masses in the grand historical ‘formal’ decisions is merely staged by power; and this latter in fact needs mass consumption and a mass culture. The ‘participating’ masses, moreover, even if formally communist or progressive, are only manipulated by power through the imposition of ‘other’ values and ‘other’ ideologies: an imposition occurring in daily life.”
Olivetti and Pasolini thus outline, in the course of twenty years running from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, a similar sensibility in terms of perceiving the coming catastrophic impact that modernity would have on Italian culture. For Olivetti the ideal of the Comunità, based in shared ethical and economic values and grounded in the idea of progress, was the only foreseeable means of avoiding a dramatic future and of driving the country towards a sustainable future. Conflict for Olivetti existed as an omnipresent risk to be exorcised, but did not bear any irrevocable ontological primacy within society. Pasolini, on the other hand, saw in the ethical void brought about by the hedonism of consumer society no real exit strategy from the drama of industrial development, and was instead convinced that the fracture between development and progress was irreconcilable. Development was not necessarily progress for Pasolini, and in the Italian social landscape of the 1960s and 1970s this essentially meant only the accumulation of wealth and civil debasement. The contrast outlined by Pasolini points to the gap between development and progress, where the first is only a matter of economics and the latter represented a real model of increase and civil growth. And it concerning this notion that Pasolini in the above-mentioned 1974 article disconsolately concluded in the following way:

“I would give away the whole Montedison industrial group for just a single firefly.”

ENDNOTES
7 Pasolini, Pier Paolo, *Scritti corsari*, 2009, p. 64.
10 Pasolini, Pier Paolo, *Scritti corsari*, 2001, p. 134. (Montedison was a large industrial holding company in Italy during the 1970s).
The Notion of 'Disinterest' the most Ideological of All; Through his Genius!; Who Is in the Position of Being an Outsider; Making an Exhibition Politically; Art (or Exhibitions) and Politics Are Not Interchangeable; The German Term Handlung; Governmentality; Why We Should - Seriously - Withdraw from Participation; The Possibility for Protest and Conflictual Participation; As Symbolic Acts They Are Still Part of a Symbolic Economy; Theory that Does Not Translate in Praxis, but that Already Is Praxis;
FELIX VOGEL: There are a few reasons and premises for this talk that we should reveal right at the beginning. Besides having had an ongoing discussion on, if you want, issues of politics, aesthetics and its interstice in the broadest sense, we are both interested in to what extent participation is a viable concept for political struggles. Whereas I myself more or less worked around those issues with the 4th Bucharest Biennale that I curated in 2010, you were very active in the recent student protests in London, among other things with the University for Strategic Optimism. Now, Markus Miessen released his *The Nightmare of Participation* a couple of months ago and invited me to contribute something for a new volume that somewhat extends his arguments. I thought we could take this opportunity to critically evaluate Miessen’s text. Subsequently, we will also use Miessen’s arguments as a diving-board to discuss other prevalent issues and try to contextualize it in our own practices.

MORTEN PAUL: Two figures permeate Markus Miessen’s re-evaluation of participatory practices – the ‘crossbench practitioner’ and the ‘uninvited outsider’. What is the relationship between these two figures? The crossbench practitioner, as I understand it, is precisely not an outsider. After all, the example after which the crossbench practitioner is modelled is what is called a ‘crossbencher’ in the British House of Lords. (2010: 243) The crossbench politician is neither affiliated with the government nor with the opposition party. Accordingly he or she is located in-between, quite literally sitting on crossbenches. Nevertheless, the crossbencher is a fully institutionalized member of the House of Lords. Though Miessen acknowledges its structural conservative alignment, he does not consider its concrete composition. Not only are the members not democratically elected, they are selected through inheritance, supplemented and increasingly replaced by what are called ‘life peers’, appointed by the Monarch. Not incidentally, it is also called ‘house of peers’. Now the role, or one role, of the crossbenchers, as far as I know, is to supply expertise outside of party affiliation. On the other hand, Miessen speaks of something like a professional outsider – I wonder how we are to understand this? In Miessen’s account the role of the outsider is closely tied to specific professions – the intellectual, the architect, the artist. These professions are highly exclusive and access to them is restricted. From a political perspective, one would have to ask, what (class-)conditions and restrictions are in place in order to be able to occupy the position of the outsider in Miessen’s sense? But I believe this also points to a more fundamental issue: Is there something like an outsider in the first place?
**FV:** You are absolutely right in being suspicious about the general possibility of being – or maybe rather: becoming – an outsider, and I am also unsure if something like this exists as such, especially in a highly inclusive context like the arts. I am critical about this for mainly two reasons. First, if I understand Miessen right, one of the ‘tasks’ of the uninvited outsider is to formulate or establish a certain non-consensual critique. But for me, one of the fundamental premises for critique is that you have to understand the issues at stake, and you can thus certainly not read from a distance any more than you can be a uninvolved and distanced observer. Instead, I would argue that you always have to include external factors and your own position as part of the basis of the issue – call it the ‘Heisenberg uncertainty principle’ or self-reflexivity, if you want, or to say it more bluntly: you are always yourself (part of) the problem and thus never an outsider. The second reason why I tend to be critical about the figure of the outsider is – although Miessen talks about this in critical terms in the chapter on *Learning from the Market* – that it evokes a highly neo-liberal rhetoric and praise for the figure of the management consultant.

**MP:** The last point you make seems absolutely plausible to me. Ironically then, the two alternative models set up to unsettle the consensual practice of participation closely resemble the opposite extreme of what has for some time now been called post-democracy – the takeover of the legislative function by the executive branch by means of ‘the expert’. Could you develop further the difference between what you have described and what we can maybe call an ‘embedded critique’ and the external expert hidden in Miessen’s paradigm of the ‘uninvited outsider’?

**FV:** I am not even sure if I would call it an ‘embedded’ form of critique, but rather that the very status of critique needs to be embedded to a certain extent, or that there is no outside – or to stay in Miessen’s terms: *uninvitedness* – of critique, and that you are always a part of certain power-relations...

**MP:** The disinterest that Miessen endows the outsider with becomes quite suspicious, doesn’t it? Is not the notion of ‘disinterest’ the most ideological of all?

**FV:** Well, there are quite a few examples that are worth examining of why disinterest is pure ideology. And something else that concerns the figure of the uninterested outsider that I am also not sure if I understood it correctly – well, actually hope that I misunderstood it –
is the fact that it could all to easily be understood as a continuation of the artist genius as flâneur, bohemian or outlaw who has the magical ability – through his genius! – to tell the truth. The conception of the artists in the late 19th and early 20th century conceived him – well, it is basically a very male conception – as someone who is supposedly privileged – through being an outsider – to do things that were not otherwise allowed, but who usually had a certain clairvoyant or at least corrective power. Not only is such a figure anachronistic and ideological, but I would also argue that he does not take on any responsibility and commitment. Further, the question must be: Autonomy at what price? And this certainly does not mean that I am in favour for a certain form of pragmatism as it is – to stay in the realm of architecture – proposed by the debate on post-criticality in the last decade.

**MP:** This is a very interesting point, especially considering Miessen’s disavowal of romanticism, or what he perceives as the romantic transfiguration (Verklärung) of participatory practices in art, as well as the rejection of nostalgia for traditional modes of protest. I guess this ties in closely with our discussion regarding who is in the position of being an outsider, an outsider who is in fact not excluded. You have teased out how this is a gendered category, and I would like to add that it is racialized as well. It is the male, white artists whose model you cite. As a male and white curator with strong interests in the fields of feminism and post-colonial theory, this is probably something you have encountered as an issue in your own practice. In last year’s Bucharest Biennale I had the impression you were also pursuing a very anti-romantic concept of what a contemporary art exhibition could or should be. I am thinking of the refusal to use industrial ruins as a showroom, of course, but also of the almost anti-participatory opening performance by Dutch artist Nicoline van Harskamp. I wonder if you would like to elaborate on this. And do you think there is ways in which nostalgia itself can become productive again?

**FV:** As a marginal note, I think that there is still a viable part of the Romantic project that can or needs to be understood as an emancipatory politics that does not have anything whatsoever to do with nostalgia. And as for nostalgia, I am not sure if this can become something productive again. But you are absolutely right that I encountered the issues you mentioned during my work in Bucharest, and besides being a male and white curator, who is interested in feminist, queer and post-colonial issues, I also had to deal with being from the so-called West in what is to be considered the former Eastern bloc...
**MP:** I remember at one of the events surrounding the Biennale, some conference I believe, you were quizzed by audience members on your knowledge of the independent Romanian art scene...

**FV:** That was a rather silly question, but I completely understood the reasons why it was asked. I think that there is a certain tendency – if not rule – that curators of large-scale temporary exhibitions drop in like parachutists, without really researching in or engaging with the local context. Quite on the contrary, it has been one of the most crucial premises to first and foremost engage with the local framework and its history and legacy.

But to come back to the initial question: One way to deal with this was to try to, if you want, establish an exhibitory framework that is visible and invisible at the same time – something that I for myself related to Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt. Part of this was also my refusal to use the now common format for art exhibitions – at least biennials – of post-industrial spaces, as I always felt that they were only linked to certain notions of nostalgia without really referring to the actual labour conditions that they were linked to back then, and why such spaces are – because of other labour conditions – empty now. Hito Steyerl did some brilliant analysis on this. Instead, I rather tried to intervene in already existing and used spaces, to unfold a certain criticality.

You also mentioned Nicoline van Harskamp’s performance on the opening day, where she had a staged conversation with an actor who performed as a person from the cultural field, like a curator or critic. Although Nicoline is Dutch, the whole talk was given in Romanian, leaving the audience that consisted primarily out of non-Romanian speakers puzzled. And the content of the talk was also partly about English as a lingua franca and thus of course touched on issues of the possibilities or restrictions of participation. The reaction to the performance ran from people leaving the room rather indignant to people staying there and trying to figure out what was actually happening. There was even a Q&A at the end of the talk, which was only partly scripted – so there were real questions from both the Romanian-speaking part of the audience, and even one question that was posed in Swedish. In a way, I thought it showed a very clear picture of how access to knowledge is highly restricted and participation is only possibly in a very narrow frame.

**MP:** Instead of the usual factory remains or empty warehouses you used spaces like the Institute for Political Science or the Museum of Geology. How does this relate to the question of participation? Both from a curatorial perspective and from the perspective of an audience
– for certainly your exhibition did not strike me as particularly interactive. I guess that was very much intentional.

**FV:** I think it was ‘interactive’ on a different level than you would expect from an art exhibition. Just in the fact that I used intact buildings and institutions – in the case of the Institute for Political Science, even a faculty building that had never been used for any art or exhibition context – the biennial tried to target different audiences (something that was also underlined through a completely free entrance policy) and proposed an activity and participation on a different level. Although this might sound a bit pretentious, I tried – as an analogy to Jean-Luc Godard’s famous dictum for film-making – to not make a political exhibition, but rather make an exhibition politically.

**MP:** Could you concretize this aspect somewhat further? I know I am being a bit silly here, but the intent to reach and engage a broad and diverse audience is, at least on the level of claims, a common trope in the art context and beyond. The Tate Modern, to use a slightly cheap example, does not charge entry fees either. So what exactly happens in an exhibition that is political as opposed to a political exhibition? Referring again to Nicoline van Harskamp performance, one could have the impression that it was as much about alienating audiences as it was about drawing them in, and I enjoyed that – the incommensurability – a lot. But in your framing – the thematic of English as *lingua franca*, the concluding ‘real’ discussion and so forth – it feels almost too didactic to warrant such enjoyment.

**FV:** I don’t have anything against didacticism at all, and I don’t understand why this is such a negative buzzword in the context of art. And I also disagree that her performance was didactic at all. There are a lot of reasons for fact that the Tate Modern does not charge entrance fees, and I would say that the outreach to different communities or what could be termed as an ‘educational mandate’ only serves as an alibi. Instead, I think it is mainly about funding issues: the more visitors you have, the more funding you get from the state or from private sponsors. And the more postcards will be sold in the gift shop. And you also shouldn’t forget that the free entrance is only for the collection of the Tate and not for their temporary exhibitions – this is again another form of exclusion. I think in the case of the Bucharest Biennale it was really for very different reasons. And this leads me back to the difference between making a political exhibition and making an exhibition politically. I think it first and foremost has to do with from which position you speak, and what
speaking as such actually means. A second premise is also to reflect on the medium and how the medium in which you speak anticipates, allows or restricts a certain form, especially a certain form of representation – the specific conditions of the ‘how’ of representation, if you want. It is very clear that art (or exhibitions) and politics are not interchangeable and that they cannot be equated. So I think it is quite useless to (only) show art that has political content or that inquires in political issues, if you don’t reflect on the context in which it appears, and above all: how it appears. Instead, I am much more interested in making the border that separates politics and exhibitions visible. Making an exhibition politically means that you cannot simply repeat political programs or claims, but instead produce encounters where the very politics of the format of an exhibition as such – for example the relation between audience and the work of art or the distribution of spaces – is questioned. I think that’s where exhibitions become directly political. And we actually encountered such a moment at the Bucharest Biennale, where the limits of producing a certain format of politics came to a harsh end, when a work by Kaucyila Brooke that was supposed to be exhibited in the Museum of Geology was censored for misogynist, racist and homophobic reasons.

In the case of the Bucharest Biennale the whole idea of creating a certain exhibition framework that questions its very own conditions and lays them open, as well as creating new possibilities for political actions, is of course also linked to the exhibition title: Handlung. On Producing Possibilities. At the very beginning of thinking about the conceptual framing of the Bucharest Biennale there was an essential question: Is there a difference between actions and stories? The answer, or rather the moment that triggered this question could be found in the ambiguity of the German term Handlung. The word serves not so much as a translation for action as well as story, but much sooner it refers to the very semantic level. It is impossible to differentiate ‘actions’ from ‘stories’, both meanings are intrinsically linked to each other and generate each other. I think it would lead to far away to go deeper in the conceptual framing, but I should nevertheless mention that it was very much linked to Hannah Arendt’s conception of political action and thus related to emancipatory politics and also the possibilities of participation.

MP: But I mean, nevertheless, your exhibition was clearly located in the art context, in a way also, of course, because art has the strange ability to carry its context around wherever it goes. It always invites participation and produces the rules of this participation in the very same instance, generic ones mostly, but that is true even in the cases
of art negating being art. I don’t want to rehearse trite tropes of institutional critique, but for the sake of the argument, does that not neutralize by default any political potential the exhibition could have had? Is art not always and necessarily pseudo-political?

**FV:** Well, just by being an exhibition the exhibition was certainly located in the art context. When Godard claimed that it does not matter to make a political film, but to make film politically, this was partly because of a certain frustration that film was not able to shape a political conscious for the masses, as film-makers or theorists like Dziga Vertov or Walther Benjamin claimed in the 1920s and 1930s. The same can be said about exhibitions, as they are similar tools of mass communication. The history of film somehow showed that it neither formed a (political) conscious, nor did it allow any thinking at all – the same is true for seemingly ‘open’ art projects that emerged under the umbrella term of relational aesthetics. For me this describes the impossibility of art becoming directly political or being equated with politics.

**MP:** The achievement of the BB4 would then seem to be that it negotiated this impossibility in the particular, maybe even the minor. I remember overhearing an art critic saying, very dismissively, that there was nothing particularly spectacular going on, and I found that to be a most beautiful compliment.

**FV:** One critic even said that she had the feeling that I hate colours.

**MP:** Considering our discussion up until now, it appears that at least some of the suggestions put forward by Miessen seem very much capable of being integrated in a ‘human capital’ framework and are already widely practised in managerial contexts. You have mentioned the consultant, but we might add the myriad forms of practices to stimulate competition within companies, etc. To assume a direct relation between a hidden tyranny of consensus and the false promise of participation, as Miessen proposes, simplifies too much in this regard. Instead I would argue that participation is deeply embedded into the fabric of contemporary society, whose form of organization we might call governmental. Governmentality I understand here, with Michel Foucault, as the specific modes of governing a population in a biopolitical context. Governmentality works on both the population as a whole and each individual member of the population, to achieve certain (economic) results. It works on the individual as a member of the population. But then the opposition is not between real, conflicting participation and a consensus ultimately legitimated by participation.
that is no participation. What we are confronted with is instead a form of internalised control, self-control, and the (unequal) distribution of responsibility is a crucial component to execute this control. Once internalized in desires, norms, but also the body, gestures, etc., control does not have to be enforced and supervised any more. It works all by itself. Different forms of enabling and disabling participation have become key instruments for this distribution, making it more adaptable to circumstances than any restriction could ever achieve. Josephine Berry-Slater recently gave a lecture series at Goldsmiths College where she explored the connection between biopolitics and aesthetics.² This is, it seems to me, an extremely important direction to pursue further, as it not only reveals the ‘un-thought’, or repressed, of many contemporary art practices but also complicates and therefore enriches the theoretical understanding of biopolitics. What is often produced by this regime, I believe, is something like an anticipatory obedience, though maybe unconscious, extending even, as German cultural theorist Diedrich Diederichen has shown, to subjection through the choice of an ‘individual’ ring tone.³

FV: I also think that there is a strange misconception of participation in Miessen’s argument that I don’t really understand. In order to be more positive about participation I would ask, why we should – seriously – withdraw from participation as such or identify it as a dead-end, only because this term is misused as a (neo-liberal) process to generate consensus and finally create exclusions. There are still a lot of interesting propositions to make that need a participatory framework. But I also share your observation that participation is included in – or even at the core of – biopolitical or noopolitical forms of governmentality. I certainly do not believe that the critique of participation is an ontological question, but how could we develop a framework that establishes a difference?

A second question that comes into play here is that of the possibility for protest and how this is tied to a certain understanding of conflictual participation and interruption – maybe you could elaborate on this further, as you had a certain experience in recent student uprisings in London?

MP: One aspect that has been much debated in this context is the arrival of school children, from Further Education colleges mostly, on, if I can say so, the stage of politics. The Left has heralded this as a process of re-politicization and declared the ‘end of apathy’, which, according to the very same narrative, had haunted English politics for decades, and which, indeed, could be interpreted with Miessen as a result
of the politics of New Labour, but has to be seen more broadly in the context of the dominance of an ongoing neo-liberal reorganization. One could argue that these school children demanded their voices to be heard outside of both the traditional democratic participation (from which they are excluded simply by not being able to vote yet) and the participatory structures set up by education politics to integrate them into a consensual order. But I am not too sure about the coherence of this narrative, it is too neat. What makes me suspicious is the extent to which the mainstream media has been able to integrate this phenomenon into their coverage without changing a single parameter. This has led to the strange situation where the age-old distinction between peaceful protesters and a violent minority has been replaced by an even more distorted distinction between well-behaved school children – cute girls in school uniforms protecting a police van – and rampaging students.

On the other hand, we have seen the widespread emergence of practices that challenge the status quo of both protest and politics – interventions in public space, a vast number of university occupations, the intrusion into the Conservative headquarters, the appearance of a Black bloc, certain forms of radical publishing. In some of these activities, in fact, adolescents, often belonging to what Federico Campagna has called the inner city sub-proletariat and from ethnic minorities, played an important role. If I would have to summarize the outcome of these actions, necessarily reductive, I would say that they have made perceivable the political nature of any relationality per se, but most crucial for our discussion, of spatial ones. This is not a small achievement, if we recapitulate that private property, of which landownership is an originary form, and the security thereof are founding principles of capitalist society and hence of bourgeois democracy. This became painfully evident in the brutal police reactions and excessive criminal convictions. However, to show space to be politically determined reveals also the foundational violence of any ordering intervention. This is, I think – and here I disagree with your optimistic reframing of participation – an important contribution of Miessen’s reformulation of participation. Participation is violent, I am inclined to say, or conflictual, if you prefer. That’s why when participation is employed as a political instrument of inclusion, it also depoliticises itself in the same instance. It determines, at least to an extent, the terms and conditions of participation even or maybe most eminently when this participation is articulated in the form of critique. This conversation and the conditions that allow it is probably the most blatant example. But if this violence is constitutive for any relationality, and I do believe it is, the question is how to organize it.
FV: You mentioned the spatiality of political conflict. Could you elaborate on this further?

MP: I mean, what groups like Arts Against Cuts or The University for Strategic Optimism, the latter in a broader educational context, have shown through their interventions, mainly the hijacking of places, are the numerous connections these places, institutions, entertain to a broader political context, how they are political proper. Staging an orgy at a Sotheby’s auction while funding to Art Schools and institutions is being withdrawn, or holding a lecture in a bank that went bankrupt in the 2008 financial crisis and had to be bailed out with public money, are obvious examples. But it is of course pretty easy to bash bankers receiving million pound bonuses or millionaires buying a Gerhard Richter for a similar price. What has been more interesting, is how these actions have also brought out the political nature of their own contexts. Take again the temporary bank occupation, here not only the policity of the ordinary branch bank was revealed, but also the complex power structures – relations of authority, inclusion and exclusion, etc. – governing a university lecture.

FV: How would you evaluate the ‘success’ of this recent protest movement between a certain instrumentalization on the one hand and emancipatory politics on the other?

MP: These protests were of course not disinterested at all, quite the contrary. With the urban youth participating, the case seems pretty clear – not only are they affected strongest by the cuts to the welfare system, but they might also have, as Moritz Altenried has called it, ‘unfinished business’ with the state authorities. Concerning the current generation of students, it is a bit more complicated. The left-leaning media has made an argument out of the apparent ‘altruism’ of these protests – the increase in tuition fees will not directly affect most of us who are close to finishing their undergraduate education or already pursue postgraduate degrees. But this is a reductive understanding of both the fee issue and the protests. I am rather inclined to follow George Caffentzis’s analysis here. Insofar as the University is being transformed into an education factory, the student is “confronting capital directly” and the widespread protest is a direct result of that. This confrontation obviously continues beyond graduation.

Be this as it may, to return to a point you made earlier, these actions were often quite successful, at least for some time, I think, when they took place in the very environment inhabited by the participants themselves. That is also why it was a mistake of the organized left to
instrumentalize the extensive youth participation as PR while not taking its quite heterogeneous emergence as a social and political phenomenon seriously. It is a political phenomenon, but it is not easily communicable in political registers. Precisely that makes it important.

Here we reach an impasse, which also leads me back to Miessen. Most of these protest forms, even if disturbing the everyday trot or achieving a certain degree of autonomy, in one way or another are integrable into the existing capitalist organization of society. In fact, they are, I have argued elsewhere, already included – through their organizational forms and their modes of articulation – in the very post-Fordist reorganization of education they are opposing. It is telling that they often took on carnevalesque modes of articulation, if we consider its stabilizing character – just think of all those street carnivals arranged by city councils and sponsored by private companies. But even those forms that were not subsumable directly, like the smashed windows of Millbank Tower, are, in the end, merely symbolic. What I mean is that they did not do any real economic damage, nor did they set up viable alternatives. Moreover, as symbolic acts, obviously, they are still part of a symbolic economy and the press coverage such acts regularly receive bespeaks that. I am just waiting for a luxury car manufacturer to make a TV spot capitalizing on the destruction of his shop by a bunch of anarchists. That is why the issue of state institutions as well as the economic organization of society is still absolutely relevant, an issue I feel is neglected by Miessen.

**FV:** The question here is – and I am still hesitant to answer this – whether those actions that you call ‘merely symbolic’ have any impact at all. But I am also hesitant to advocate for ‘real economic damage’. I think that there is currently a huge gap between society and the economy, meaning that there is basically no widespread knowledge about economic process – especially about the financial sector – and also no possibility to participate in decisions concerning the financial sector in our so-called democracy. And besides all the issues that you named in relation to precarious work conditions, cognitive labour and the larger context of a restructuring of educational systems, I would argue that it all feeds back to the financial sector. Even if there would be a broader knowledge of economic knowledge, it would still remain the same economic system. And we also know from other areas, or if you want: systems, which were ‘opened’ in order to allow participation, that they reproduced their own rules and even succeeded in further exploitation. This might also relate to Miessen’s arguments,
but the question still remains on what level and with what goal forms of participation need to emerge.

**MP:** Recently we were discussing the German theorist Joseph Vogl’s new book on political economy. You told me that he had described the book in a discussion as an attempt to popularize basic economic knowledge. Considering what you have said, I wonder if the concept of the ‘uninvited outsider’ could eventually allow for new forms of participation in the decision making processes governing the financial sector. I am thinking of something like an explicitly interested uninvited outsider, who intervenes in the economic decision processes. But this seems pretty unimaginable in the current condition.

**FV:** Yes, Vogl’s book is an attempt to spread or disseminate economic knowledge – although I do not favour populism, it has to be questioned how successful a book can be that is primarily located in a rather exclusive setting of the humanities. This by no means implies that I don’t agree with his project, or would have any suggestions to do it differently. Your formulation of an ‘explicitly interested uninvited outsider’ is very interesting and maybe this is also a good – and reconcilable with Miessen’s arguments! – closing proposition for our dialogue. There is certainly a strength in observing from outside and allowing new forms of participation, but, as I said already earlier, one always has to include oneself (and one’s interests) as part of the issue that one is trying to describe, criticize or intervene in. Something that we have not discussed yet is the – at least: seeming – difference between theory and practice, respectively between activity and passivity. There is this famous discussion between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze from 1972 that we have already talked about a few times. Their dialogue is especially interesting as they do not only give account on their understanding of how intellectuals intervene in society, but above all because they formulate an understanding of theory that does not translate in praxis, but that already is praxis.

**MP:** What they advocate, as I understand it, is a direct confrontation with power where one encounters it: the workplace, the prison, the kindergarten, the university, or for that matter, the art exhibition. Theory is not an analysis, a representation of a really existing reality, nor does it provide solutions. It is rather conceived as a tool box. As such it is context-dependent, even in its initial form, for example as an academic book. Hence, it will differ in each new context. I am, and I guess you share this feeling, quite sympathetic to this conception. But moreover Deleuze and Foucault assume that each of these
independent struggles automatically connects with what they call the workers’ struggle, that it becomes part of this larger struggle. They believe that the foremost task of the existing power structures is to guarantee economic exploitation. Supposedly, the proletariat is the primary object of this exploitation. Power, by its very nature, ties together the diverse conflicts. Questions of representation, they concluded, especially political and intellectual representation, have become obsolete. The workers, prisoners and so forth can speak and act for themselves. But both premises supporting this conclusion have turned out to be problematic. It is true that power is distributed and that it connects, but it is also manifoldly interconnected itself. That is why local struggles can often be contained relatively easily. But more importantly, the link-up to a broader struggle is never automatic. Because inequality is distributed as well, it distorts what Marxists would call the class conflict. That’s why I have used the male form when I was speaking about the workers and prisoners being able to speak for themselves. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has famously analysed this problem in Can the Subaltern Speak? from a post-colonial and feminist perspective, even if we might disagree with her conclusion. But in the discussions around precarity we can see how this issue is still absolutely virulent. And it is of course a problem that has to be answered in some way or another by any conception of radical participation.

ENDNOTES
1 http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/71
2 Publication forthcoming.
5 www.metamute.org/en/content/university_struggles_at_the_end_of_the_edu_deal
Participation; Confrontation; Intrusion; Inclusion; Democracy; Alternative Politics; Agonism; Populism; Consensus;
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL DECISIONS IN PARTICIPATORY ART

Good Censorship; The Ethical Is Easily Confused with the Moral; Empathy; Contemplating Mutuality; Unethical Provocations; The 'Positive';
In the announcement text of the symposium, *Scandalous: A Symposium on Art & Ethics*, that I recently organized for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm,¹ I formulated the following questions: “Recent art scandals and the discussions they are provoking, images of terror and abuse in all kinds of visual culture, as well as highly controversial debates on participatory art projects, are raising fundamental questions, reconsidering the importance of ethical decisions in art and its reception: Is there something like a good censorship? How can we define the fine line between ethics and morality? How far can provocation in art go, before it becomes cynical and abusive? To what extent should ethical decisions become a category in participatory art? What is the relationship between violence and provocative exploitation in popular media images and art?”

This cluster of questions highlights the central importance of ethics in different contexts in the cultural sector. Participatory art projects in particular are built on a whole series of ethical decisions. But for many art critics the ethical has a fusty undertone, which means that the most varied of participatory projects get badly reviewed, often because the ethical is easily confused with the moral.

In the case of art critics who, for instance, defend the work of Santiago Sierra, the moral and the ethical are often mentioned in the same breath, without specifying what is actually meant here. The critics of his work are then reproached, they uphold moral arguments when they attempt to expose the lack of ethical reflection in much of his work. Moral obviously sounds more negative than ethical, and it is more negative, but at the same time there are two different things going on here. While morals follow the laid down set of rules of a specific collective body (for instance the church) and do not allow for any kind of individual or situational deviation, ethical decisions are both situational and subjective. An ethical subject weighs up the criteria of any given situation and develops this into a judgement or an action. Morals are used as a justification for an approach that distinguishes oneself from others, while ethics are based on empathy for the other and the defence of their rights. As Simon Critchley writes in *Infinitely Demanding*, ‘hetero-affectivity’ is the fundamental skill of an ethical subject, that is to say an auto-affection for the fate of other groups or individuals.² This empathy, the understanding of the other and the ability to judge and act in their voice (which also implies a search for ‘Good’ which rejects any kind of cynicism), fundamentally differentiates ethical approaches from moral approaches. Moral action is the blind compliance with a preconceived canon of
rules, which generally feeds off an approach based on discrimination against others.

The moment that artists begin working with other (groups of) people, begin operating in a ‘participatory’ way, then ethical reflections and decisions become an important part of their work. The prerequisites of working on a participatory project include empathy with the position of those taking part, establishing contacts, the collective debate and a readiness to evolve in collaboration with the other participants, rather than carry out the project following a preconceived idea.

The open collective, CAMP, based in Mumbai, are a convincing example of a group of artists who incorporate these elements without becoming dogmatic and stiff and without trying to follow a ‘politically correct’ canon. For the ‘Jerusalem Show’ in 2009 CAMP created the work *The Neighbour Before the House*, in which eight Palestinian families in East Jerusalem film and comment on their immediate surroundings using CCTV cameras installed on their houses. We see houses being seized, neighbours who only step outside their door if they’re armed and soldiers on patrol, and at the same time we hear the stories of the residents.

The opposite is true of the work of Santiago Sierra. In projects like *250cm Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (Havana, 2009), *Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes* (various locations, 2000), or *Person Remunerated for a Period of 360 Consecutive Hours* (during this period the man in question lived behind a brick wall in P.S.1 in New York, 2000) Sierra consciously ignores or negates ethical decisions. While CAMP offered the eight families in Jerusalem a new context and equipment that would allow them to portray their individual situation in an unfamiliar way, Sierra bought a group of people for a few dollars who function as representatives of a social misery that they themselves have not chosen. Using these very people he goes through the motions of showing how they will make their own bodies available for varying degrees of abuse as their last resource for making money. While CAMP are contemplating mutuality, or a lack thereof, on a thematic level in the neighbourhood project in Jerusalem, Sierra is working with unethical provocations. CAMP establishes and analyses relationships between the participants of the art project; Sierra’s art aims to create a (shock) effect in the art viewer, in which the participants in his projects become objectified. In doing so Sierra follows a traditional artistic convention, while in their project CAMP
produce relationships and scrutinise them in terms of their quality on
the thematic level of the work.

In no way does working with ethical questions in art adhere to the
fusty notions of a society of incurable do-gooders, but in contrast to a
general concern that transcends participatory art and comprises the
analysis of all areas of society. Alain Badiou’s demand for a search for
the ‘Good’ can be read in this context: “The Good in artistic action is
the invention of new forms that convey the meaning of the world.”
Badiou’s positive doctrine does not lay the groundwork for a politically
naïve or simply good-natured art, in the sense of some types of com-
community-based artworks, in which the interaction is initiated with the
aim of ‘healing’ a community seen as being socially deprived. Rather
it contains the idea that there is no such thing as a universal concept
of ethics – for instance, a woolly concept of ‘human rights’ in which
the powers that pull the strings of global capitalism can entrench
themselves – but instead only the possibility of dealing with specific
situations. This possibility also exists in art and is here particularly
connected with the possibility of being able to think in new, uncom-
promising and also radical ways. Thus Nikos Papastergiadis – focusing
specifically on integration scenarios resulting from global migration
– sees the necessity of a productive engagement that transcends the
critique of the status quo: “The ethical challenge for art today lies in
the search for positive methods of dealing with questions of mobility,
cultural difference and belonging.” The ‘positive’ is not understood
here as a naïve attempt at making the world a better place, but instead
shows that cynicism and provocation, even in art, merely reflect the
mechanisms of global capitalism and moreover lead nowhere.

ENDNOTES
1 3 December 2010, with Patra Baur & Anette Krauss, Simon Critchley,
Galit Eilat, Ronald Jones and Måns Wrange.
2 “The ethical experience of infinite responsibility at the heart of
subjectivity, [is] a moment of what I called hetero-affectivity prior
to any auto-affection and disturbing any simple claim to auto-
nomous.” Critchley, Simon, Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment,
3 CAMP work as a kind of collaborative project with changing con-
stellations of people. Shaina Anand, Ashok Sukumaran and Nida
Ghouse were involved in the project in Jerusalem discussed here.
4 Badiou, Alain, in: On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou, in:
In such projects, community is conceived in essentialist terms and the participants’ identities reduced to characteristics that they have not personally chosen, such as social exclusion, poverty, HIV infection, criminality, or use of drugs. The aim of giving these socially disadvantaged people a voice and supporting their rights corresponds with Suzi Gablik’s notion of ‘Connective Aesthetics’ as “giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium of expression” and further, “it makes art into a model for connectedness and healing.” Gablik, Suzi, Connective Aesthetics. Art after Individualism, in: Suzanne Lacy Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art, Seattle 1995, pp. 74–87, cit. p. 86.

Designed Especially for the Hunger Artist Using All Recyclable Materials; Several Thousand Posts; We Also Want to Focus Attention on Cutting-Edge Trends in Art; 'Life Art'; The Crowds Have Been Huge for the Last Three Days; Hunger Artists Do Not Intend to Express Resistance of Any Sort; Mingling of the Scents of Asceticism and Consumerism; In Memory of Michael Jackson; Country Z’s School of Hunger Art;
The Hunger Artist reappeared on our radar several years after his original performance. An unexpected storm of controversy swept through society and the internet when some old photographs from the event were posted on the Tianya Virtual Community website. The severely emaciated Hunger Artist Wu Yongfang sits bolt upright, staring directly into the camera. He’s naked except for a white loincloth wound around his waist like Gandhi, leaving almost nothing to the imagination. As we look in through the iron bars that separate him from the audience, we see that the room in which he sits is as austere as a prisoner’s cell, furnished only with a mat and a cot. An exterior view reveals that this ‘prison cell’ is a temporary bamboo hut, perched on the roof of a geometrical three-story modern building. The bamboo adds a fashionable flavor of environmental awareness to the modern structure. From the captions that accompany the photos, we learn that the building houses the real estate offices of Company X, which organized and sponsored the event. The temporary hut, designated the Fasting Room, was designed and constructed especially for the Hunger Artist using all recyclable materials. It’s common knowledge around town that now, years later, Company X has just launched a new marketing campaign for its Free Spirit Leisure Villas, a huge 5000-acre adult-living waterfront development.

The crux of the debate raging online is this. The Hunger Artist’s detractors maintain that although hunger remains a chronic social problem that must be eliminated, the economy of Country Z has been growing steadily and the lives of the people have improved significantly. But if the Hunger Artist persists in displaying images of poverty and backwardness to domestic audiences and the entire world, isn’t he building his artistic success on the backs of the disadvantaged? His supporters, on the other hand, maintain that the Hunger Artist’s actions embody his immense courage, as he risks his life to shock us into confronting reality.

After several thousand posts make the rounds of the Internet, both sides of the debate spontaneously arrive at the same suspicion: Could this controversy just be a new marketing ploy on the part of the real estate company?

“I’ve been planning this event with my curator for a long time. My curator is old friends with Mr. Liang, from Company X’s real estate sales department. Mr. Liang has always had strong opinions about culture, and he wanted to support our creative endeavor by providing us with this venue. I think we’re going to attract even more attention
Waking Up from the nightmare of participation

Wu Yongfang responds to questions from the crowd.

“Is the purpose of the event to raise awareness about poverty?”

“Of course; that goes without saying. But we also want to focus attention on cutting-edge trends in art.”

“Ah, so you want to educate the public about performance art!”

A light bulb seems to go off over the questioner’s head – in Country Z, any work of art that people don’t understand or don’t like is usually referred to as ‘performance art.’

“I know what you mean by performance art, but I prefer to call what I do ‘Life Art’. I use my life force as a medium for creative expression – we still don’t know what the final result will be.”

“Do you know what your physical limitations are? Are you worried about that? Do the limits of the body define the limits of creativity?”

“I’m not worried. You could say that I’m using the creative process to explore the limits of my own willpower.”

An endless stream of people surges towards the ‘prison cell’ perched on the roof of Company X’s real estate office. Wu Yongfang gazes out at them, silent and content. The crowds have been huge for the last three days, much bigger than for any of his previous exhibitions.

Wu Yongfang’s favorite time of day is when light gives way to night. The crowds thin out, and dusk overtakes his small cell. It is a time when limitless possibilities emerge. Silently he stands up, suddenly unsure of where in space his body is located. A hallucinatory mixture of exhaustion and extreme prolonged hunger beguiles him. In the waning light, he seems to see his own seated figure floating before him, like the Zen Master Bodhidharma sunk deep in meditation.

He recalls the moment deep into his fast, after starvation had set in, when a rush of warmth suddenly rose up from his hara, the seat of his life force. Surging to the top of his head, it assured him that his willpower had been fully roused. His eyes scintillate with energy. The audience gazes at him reverently, intensifying the warmth he feels.

The reverence the audience feels for artist is reciprocated by the artist’s desire to illuminate the audience. First he tells them about the difference between therapeutic fasting and Hunger Art. Then he stresses the importance of distinguishing traditional hunger strikers from contemporary hunger artists. Hunger strikers make their living from fasting in public, he explains; they traditionally appear in social and political venues, carrying out a form of passive resistance.
Many Hunger Strike Manifestos that have been passed down through the ages bear witness to this. Hunger artists, on the other hand, do not intend to express resistance of any sort through their public fasting. Rather, they employ the traditional methods of the hunger strike to undertake a contemporary creative process. By reawakening the taste of hunger, something that most people have forgotten – arousing a sense of nostalgia, so to speak – hunger artists stimulate and heighten self-awareness, and provoke intense contemplation of the relationship between self and society.

“When I was little, we lived through three years of natural disaster. We ate anything we could find, even weeds and tree roots, until there was nothing left.” He explains the historical basis of Hunger Art to the crowd.

“Yeah, but at least it was green food.” It’s hard to tell if this young spectator is joking, or is really totally clueless about history.

A group of chattering students is led up by their teacher. Fearfully they regard the Hunger Artist. He immediately has a vision of what the curriculum regarding hunger will be like in the future: Hunger will no longer be a physical experience; rather it will have become a memory, used only to evoke the performances of hunger artists. I realize that in order to reach the pinnacle of my art, I must become completely genuine. “I hate the idea of performing. That’s why I call myself an Artist of Life.”

Despite his explanations, the media insists on using provocative headlines, such as “Hunger Strike at Luxury Development” and “Therapeutic Fasting at Free Spirit Leisure Villas,” when reporting on the event. Of course, the Hunger Artist has no real interest in the relationship between his art and how many units of luxury housing are being sold. He only wants to see his audience. He only hopes that as countless spectators fix him with the reverential gaze, he may leave imprinted on their consciousness the image of a true modern day Bodhidharma.

Interestingly, many people aren’t satisfied with just looking at his body. They also want to stick their noses through the iron bars to try to catch a whiff of his scent. They have concluded that the reason the Hunger Artist smells so healthy is that fasting prevents the consumption of contaminated food.
After the crowd is done viewing the Hunger Artist, they head downstairs to the real estate office, where they are once more immersed in breathless sales pitches for luxury waterfront housing and the endless headaches of the real estate market.

This mingling of the scents of asceticism and consumerism creates a unique artistic experience.

After the Hunger Artist completed the first phase of his event, he announced that he intended to keep going, and test his limits to the utmost.

The organizers were somewhat hesitant. They were very happy with the public response so far, but at the same time they were worried that the Hunger Artist might not be physically up to the challenge, and unforeseen problems might arise. But the Hunger Artist was steadfast in his demand. There was an surge of public opposition to allowing him to continue his fast. But after he underwent a thorough physical examination and signed a renewed waiver of liability in the event of his death, it was finally decided to continue the event.

Within several days, the Hunger Artist felt that he had achieved an unprecedented level of purification. *Maybe in the beginning there was no difference between Hunger Art and hunger strikes. Maybe it was only the process of cultural development that caused them to become two different things. But now, they are being reunited in the crucible of my body to create a new School of Hunger Art.*

In the future, artists of the Hunger School will measure themselves not only by the duration of their hunger, but also by the extent of their social relevance. In this way, they will determine whose work is the most powerful.

No one was really surprised when a strange new phenomenon emerged. A Hunger Art exhibition was mounted to publicize a real estate development called *Free Spirit Leisure Villas*, but in this case, the promotional materials sensationalized the fact that the Hunger Artist was a beautiful woman. Members of the public started to question the organizers’ increasingly strident exploitation of human life for commercial gain, and a number of people started to hold protests in front of the building.
As for Wu Yongfang, after prolonged disputes and negotiations, the organizers of his event forcefully ‘requested’ him to vacate the Fasting Room, and he was transported directly to a local hospital to recuperate. Upon his release from the hospital, he immediately took the organizers to court.

“I spent two decades of my life preparing for this work of art. Unfortunately, I was deliberately prevented from completing my creative process. How many decades does a person have in one lifetime? We are living on the cusp between old and new eras. My situation highlights the fact that even now, our freedom of expression remains severely limited.” After emerging from the courthouse, the Hunger Artist responds to questions from the media. “There’s something else I want to say. In this new age that lies before us, every single person is going to enjoy full freedom of expression. When I hold my next Hunger Art performance, I hope that this prediction will serve as my final words.” As he speaks, he puts a special emphasis on the phrase “my final words,” as if his prediction has already come to pass.

The last time I saw Wu Yongfang was at an entertainment industry event held in memory of Michael Jackson. The theme was ‘Eternal Life’. Even though it was a memorial, the atmosphere wasn’t at all gloomy; in fact, it was a joyous celebration. When Wu Yongfang made an appearance, he was immediately surrounded by hordes of fans. By this time, he had been acclaimed the godfather of Country Z’s School of Hunger Art. As he stood under the spotlights addressing the crowd, the profound import of what he said affected me deeply:

“Michael Jackson had been preparing for his death for a very long time. Why do I say this? He had already experienced the death of his physical body once, twice, countless times. His physical body faded away long ago. It was transfigured into an image. He had been living inside his image for a long time. This final death was merely the realization of his eternal life. It is inevitable that the body will eventually disappear, but the image lives on forever. When his body finally died, I had a sudden realization.” He pauses for a moment under the spotlights, a strange smile appearing on his face. “I realized that he and I have always been comrades in art. We are all comrades … in Hunger Art!” Passionately he raises his glass in a toast: “Come on, everybody! Let’s drink to the brilliance of our comrades in art!”

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URBAN SUBJECTS (SABINE BITTER, JEFF DERKSEN, HELMUT WEBER)

THE SPACES AND TEMPORALITIES
OF DUAL POWER AND
AUTOGESTION IN GRAMOVEN, CARACAS

The Right to the City; Community
Councils; Local Contestations as a
Reconfiguration of Power in Relation
to the State in Venezuela; Dual Power
is Both a Stage and a Contradictory
Alignment; 'Autogestion from Above';
The Constitution Was Brandished
as a Lever that Opened Constituent
Power; The Productive Reading of the
Constituent Masses; A State Wage to
Those Who Were Working on Behalf of
the Revolution;
“Power is not a quantifiable substance held by the State that must be taken out of its hands, but rather a series of social relations among the various classes.” – Nicos Poulantzas

Following the world economic disaster of 2007, neoliberalism, and resistance to it, is being rescaled. Particularly after 2001, the examination of neoliberalism was at the global scale: this coincided with the fading of the discourse of globalization under pressure from critiques of its economic and cultural formations and failures that came, for very different reasons, from all sides of the political spectrum. Despite the warnings about grasping globalization as a unified process, neoliberalism inherited a narrative that stitched together its unevenness into a seamless totality where levels and mediations merged. Neoliberalism was then analyzed as a process and an ideology that was equally embedded into supra-national institutions, the state, and cities. At the level of the state, neoliberalism was credited with further refiguring the welfare state by rolling back state participation in certain areas and by aggressively rolling out neoliberal regulations that increased privatization of public goods (Peck and Tickell).1 Neoliberalism was also credited with reorganizing the relationship of the market to the state, to the point where the state aggressively embedded financialization into daily life (Panitch and Konings).2 Now that neoliberalism is viewed as tottering after a series of crises, waves of resistance and a lack of ideas to perpetuate itself (Smith),3 attention has turned to the ways neoliberalism has drifted down and is consolidated at the urban level, both as policy and as a refinancialization of the urban territory.

At this point, with neoliberalism weakened, and as new forms of resistance take shape, we can also turn to the city as not only the site where neoliberalism is being turned back, but as a scale where the limits of neoliberalism are visible and alternative forms of urban life are taking shape. However, as Henri Lefebvre suggests, “life is not changed magically by a poetic act”4 at the urban level, and resistance to neoliberalism can also be understood as the emergence of forms of urbanism and urban life that propose a more socially and spatially just city. Yet, due to the relationship of neoliberalism to the state, these shifts at the urban level can not separated from the state. Specifically, in Caracas, Venezuela the forms of neighbourhood self-management that have emerged in the wake of the resistance and rejection of neoliberalism at the state level were also enabled by shifts in urban governmentality tied to the national Bolivarian movement. As Dario Azzellini explains in an interview:
“From 1981 ... until 1998 when Chavez came to power nothing was invested in Caracas. They didn’t rebuild anything. Caracas was divided into smaller governments, it wasn’t a city.... They divided the city so that the business people, the wealthy, paid their taxes to a local government. This meant that by far the biggest part of the city, which housed many of the poorest people, didn’t have any money to spend while the rich kept their wealth to themselves and made their parts of the city beautiful.... The rich did not invest anything in the rest of the city. That is why when Chavez came to power he created the alcaldia [municipality] of Caracas. And they have started once again to rebuild the city.”

As a socialist project at the national scale, the political shift in Venezuela has drawn the widest possible range of characterizations – from populist, strongman-led government take-over to a participatory democratic project, from a revolution to mere revisionism, and from a ‘petrocracy’ to a challenge to neoliberalism in the Americas. As George Ciccariello-Maher points out, “Too often, the Bolivarian Revolution currently under way in Venezuela is dismissed by its critics—on the right and left—as a fundamentally statist enterprise.” As an effect of this focus on the national level and on a statist project, changes at the urban scale in Venezuela are often overlooked, or are shadowed by a view that sees President Chavez as disconnected from previous social movements and scales of organizing, acting magically on his own. Within this frame of Chavez as leader (“charismatic”, “populist”, “clownish”, “dangerous”, as commentators as varied as The Washington Post and Slavoj Žižek would have it), these perspectives that focus on Chavez leave no place for the actual agency of Venezuelans and, crucially, leave no space for the forms of self-management that are emerging in Caracas. Framing the debate as pro- and anti-Chavez also drops out resistance to neoliberalism at the state and urban scale.

Yet, these perspectives are quickly troubled by a visit to a Caracas barrio -- a community on the hills on the edge of Caracas -- such as Gramoven, where a Coca-Cola bottling plant was legally expropriated by the state and now is being redeveloped as a centre that will have social housing, a community centre, and a small brick-making factory. At this one urban site, two initiatives of the socio-economic transformation intersect: the worker cooperative program and the Consejo Comunal (community council) movement. In 2004, the government established and funded a nation-wide initiative for workers to self-organize. This spurred the formation of 100,000 worker cooperatives, many of them small-scale, and yet many of them were seen to be a failure: nonetheless, thousands still operate today and do community
work, as they were intended to do. The small-scale brick-making factory, tucked into the shipping and loading area of the old bottling plant, produces concrete blocks which are then bought by the state for free use of the community to expand existing homes or erect new homes in less precarious conditions. Following the encouragement of cooperatives – structural, economic, and cultural encouragement – and the problems of corruption and inefficiency, there was a shift in policy to emphasize community councils. With legislation enacted in 2006, 20,000 community councils formed:

“The community councils choose and design projects in their neighbourhoods that receive financing from state agencies at national, state and municipal levels. Neighbourhood assemblies make all important decisions and elect community council leaders who are all of equal rank. Like the cooperatives, the community councils have provided large numbers of underprivileged Venezuelans with skills and a sense of empowerment”. (Ellner 68).9

Yet the councils move palpably beyond empowerment of urban groups who have been historically excluded from the right to the city, excluded from the right of political participation in the life of the city. In this context, the right to the city, derived from Henri Lefebvre’s argument for a form of Marxist humanism at the level of the city (and strategically arguing with Althusser's structural Marxism), extends beyond a call or cry for spatial access and spatial justice:

“The right to the city, or what Lefebvre also referred to as the right to urban life, is a claim upon society rather than a simple claim to territorial affiliation. For Lefebvre, the urban is not limited to the boundaries of a city, but includes the social system of production. Hence the right to the city is a claim for the recognition of the urban as the (re)producer of social relations of power, and the right to participate in it.”10

At stake are the grounds and forms of social reproduction following a form of colonialism that cared little for the social reproduction of the urban and rural poor: the popularism so often pointed to in Venezuela needs to be understood properly as a reaction to this bad history, as does the shape and rhythms of urban life. Yet, any clean description of the community councils, emphasizing their quantity, misses the manner in which the councils and the projects they initiate are also sites of refiguration of the state, even as the state provides an infrastructure and platform for the councils. In their film Communa
Under Construction, Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler give us scenes of community council members taking state and municipal representatives to task and demanding solutions to things as everyday as garbage collection and traffic control. What is striking in these scenes, however, is not a sense of empowerment, but a contestation based on knowledge and self-management.

But how to understand these local contestations as a reconfiguration of power in relation to the state in Venezuela? Jerry Harris provides a Gramscian model for such transformation in Latin America (focusing on Bolivia and Venezuela): he suggests that the movement from anti-hegemonic movement to counter-hegemonic movement-system “would necessitate a long march though civil society”. Even though Harris sees an “effort...to reappropriate democracy from a restricted model and statist form by means of an expanded and participatory model” at work in Latin America, he characterizes Venezuela, and Chavez, as engaging with “change from the top”. Another view is to invert this model, to see transformation in Venezuela, and Caracas in particular, as a long march through the state by those who were historically denied the right to the state. This has the advantage of not locating change in and through Chavez, nor solely through the state, but in the state as well.

This long march is perhaps easiest to see in Caracas. By scaling down to the contestation of neoliberalism to the urban scale, yet keeping open the relationship of the state to global pervasiveness of neoliberalism, the community councils in neighbourhoods such as Gramoven have a complex structure that operates at several levels: they can be seen both as urban forms of autogestion (self-management), but also as a form of power both aided by and yet contesting the state. As George Ciccariello-Maher argues:

“The consolidation of communal power says much about the role of the state in the Venezuelan revolution. Specifically, what is unique about the Venezuelan situation is the fact that sectors of the state are working actively to dismantle and dissolve the old state apparatus by devolving power to local organs capable of constituting a dual power. Transcending the simplistic debate between taking or opposing state power, a focus on dual power allows us to concentrate on what really matters in Venezuela and elsewhere: the revolutionary transformation of existing repressive structures.”

Ciccariello-Maher raises two important points: the first is the formation of dual power and the second is the forces that act in and through
the state. Historically, dual power, deriving from Lenin and hammered on by Trotsky, is seen as both transitional (Lenin) and self-contradictory (Trotsky). On the ‘peculiar nature of dual power,’ Lenin asserted in 1917 that “The dual power expresses a transitional phase in the revolution’s development...”, while Trotsky (also referring to 1917) sees dual power as a complicated combination of Marxian theory regarding the state: “If the state is an organization of class rule, and a revolution is the overthrow of the ruling class, then the transfer of power from one class to another must necessarily create self-contradictory state conditions, and the first of all in the form of dual power.” Marking the path to the withering away of the state, dual power is both a stage and a contradictory alignment as it is figured by Lenin and Trotsky.

Henri Lefebvre, writing in May 1968, saw the potential for dual power as only an appearance: “To the men associated with institutions – the representatives of the state – dual power is inconceivable and intolerable. They hardly ever refer to it. If they spoke of it, they would empty the concept of its content.” Conversely, a power outside state power is, for Lefebvre, “the most real and active power” which can “shake up a society, or rather make its institutional crisis palpable.” Coincidentally, Lefebvre saw autogestion arise “spontaneously in the ‘empty’ areas of social life – i.e. in the void created by the state...”, yet enduring as “the road toward the transformation of everyday existence.” Through these positions we can begin to see a complex temporality where dual power is a transitional phase while autogestion is both a process and an endpoint. To have them co-exist challenges the model derived from moments in revolutionary history and theory. As Lefebvre puts it in an interview, “A state that proclaims autogestion from above paralyses it by this mere fact and converts it into its opposite.” However, turning to the present moment in Latin America, Stuart Rockefeller, writing about the politics of water in Bolivia, observes a switch in the temporality of dual power as it has taken shape in Cochabamba: “...the dual power situation was not transitional, but an end in itself.”

This tangled temporality does not account for the long moment of dual power taking shape in Venezuela. Amending Lenin’s criteria for dual power, Ciccariello-Maher sees the tension between a state-authored law on communal councils that is designed to transfer power and the distrust or impossibility of “autogestion from above” being opened by Antonio Negri’s categories of constituted and constituent power. In this formation, a structure of dual power uses a constituted power that “relies fundamentally upon the constituent power that enacted it”, a power which lies in the constituent masses: “Chavez is seen as
having *activated constituent power* toward the construction of dual power.\textsuperscript{20} This shift, which Cicariello-Maher locates at the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution, is one of the few examples where the constituted power and constituent power model is not used as a rigid categorization: often analysis of Venezuela will use a top down mode of theorizing the social transformation that rejects a constituent power of the masses because of the existence of constituted power. In one manner this rejects the complexity of the Bolivarian Constitution (to take constituted power literally) and, significantly, it obscures the ways in which the Constitution is activated into constituent power. Temporally, the Constitution is both before and after constituent power. During our research in Caracas in 2003, at the height of social optimism about el proceso, the Constitution was not only a best-seller in the markets of Caracas, but it was brandished as a lever that opened constituent power: yet that power (nor its suffocation) of course does not lie in the text itself, but rather in how that text picks up social meaning through the productive reading of the constituent masses. At a planification meeting we attended, chaired by former Minister of Planification Roland Denis, a citizen from 23 de Enero (a nearby barrio) held up his constitution and, citing particular passages, challenged Denis to provide a state wage to those who were working on behalf of the revolution. This anecdote is not to highlight a singularity, but to illustrate a social literacy that is productive of social meaning, a meaning that is in excess of (but not outside of) a relationship of power figured on open or closed, between action or reaction.\textsuperscript{21} In the present moment in Venezuela, and within an urban framework, dual power and autogestion also complicate the relationship between constituent power and constituted power. And, as Lefebvre would no doubt point out, the spontaneity, the moments and the exchanges of the city do not so neatly fit into such categories, even within a theory or within a process of social change.

This takes us back to Gramoven, where the planning of social reproduction – education, housing, sports, nutrition, etc. – is coordinated through a Consejo Comunal, or a community council. Clinging onto the hillsides on the edge of Caracas, Gramoven has an expansive view of the verdant valley and mountains beyond the city. The informal or vernacular houses are built next to one another in ingenious, if precarious, ways and a great many of them are under renovation. At the top of a hill several army tents, an outdoor kitchen and model home are set up. The home is a prototype that was designed with local knowledge and provides a similar form to the existing houses, but with slight variations in usability and stability. The council helps provide
for the construction of this home in the neighbourhood. In the army tent Captain Flores is taking requests from people for assistance and monetary aid, and there is activity in the kitchen as it nears lunch. Milagros Afonzo, a community organizer describes the activity:

“This is the plan and program Barrio Tricolor in the Eje Gramoven. We have a plan of holistic development ...this is one of the most important programs... which is the fundamental transformation of housing, the neighborhood, and the human being. In this plan, we take care of everything from housing to the specific situation of every citizen that lives inside those houses. How are they doing, if they eat or don’t eat, if they work, if they have kids or not, what is the situation of their family, how can we help them, if they are studying, or if they are not. We don’t only care about concrete, that is not important, what it is important is the human side of it – political growth, collective construction, and we take care of the individual cases in the collective, recognizing that the problem of one is the problem of the other...”

Earlier we had asked community organizer Victor Hererra about the forms of power that have enabled the appropriation of the Coca-Cola bottling plant and the planning for social housing: like many of the people we interviewed, Victor first emphasized the participatory democracy that has opened the political to the people of the barrios, but he also emphasized the transparency of both the national plan and the city plan of Caracas as articulated processes: “What happens is that there is an strategic national plan, which is the organization of the revolutionary government, and all the institutions of the state have to be connected or articulated to that plan. They can’t exist outside that plan.” But as he continues, Victor indicates the relationship between autogestion and dual power: “Yes, and the communal government [communal council] obviously has to be based on the Constitution, the strategic national plan, and the guidelines that our commander Chavez states, in order to exercise popular power.” Popular power passes through both the Constitution and the community councils, and in doing so becomes entangled in a form of dual power. But once regrounded in this way, the potential for dual power is place-based and tied into social reproduction in the city and is no longer fundamentally statist. “Or to put it another way”, as Lefebvre wrote about social transformation, “socialism (the new society, the new life) can only be defined concretely on the level of everyday life, as a system of changes in what is called lived experience. Now, [1947], half a century of historical upheavals have taught us that everyday relations between men [sic] – ‘lived experience’ – change more slowly than the structure
of the State. And in a different way, at a different rate.”25 In Caracas, the spatial politics of autogestion meets the temporality of dual power in the structure of the state, but the rate of change of the state is complexly tied to the rate of change in everyday life.

ENDNOTES

7 For instance see a footnote in Slavoj Žižek’s Against Populist Temptation (Critical Inquiry 32, Spring 2006, p. 557) which aligns with a November 4, 2007 article in The New York Times (The Perils of Plutocracy, Tina Rosenberg) even as Žižek is critiquing Venezuela’s relationship to the U.S.A. See also Stuart Rockefeller, Dual Power in Bolivia: Movement and Government Since the Election in 2005 (Urban Anthropology 36/3, 2007) which gives a detailed overview of dual power in Bolivia even as it denies such a possibility to Venezuela’s ‘urban poor’. Likewise see Jon Beasley-Murray’s characterization of ‘Chavez’s Bolivarian revolution’ as more “retrenchment than opening” in Radical Philosophy (March / April, 2008): these are erasures of the history of social movements in Venezuela, as well as a deflection of the possibility of the urban poor as new social actors (or social actors who only recently have been in a context where their actions were not obstructed).
9 Ibid.
10 Gilbert, Liette and Dikec, Mustafa. Right to the City: Politics of Citizenship. (Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri

11 Azzellini, Dario and Ressler, Oliver Communa Under Construction, 2010.

12 Harris, Jerry Bolivia and Venezuela: the democratic dialectic in new revolutionary movements, Race & Class 49 1 (July 2007): 1-24

13 Ciccariello-Maher, op. cit.


20 Ciccariello-Maher, op. cit.

21 Bitter/Weber’s Living Megastructures (video, 2003) has a detailed interview with Roland Denis.

22 Urban Subjects, But life is not changed magically by a poetic act: autogestion in Gramoven, Caracas, video installation, VIVO, Vancouver, 2011.

23 Op cit.

24 Alberto Toscano recasts dual power as a form of biopolitics; we, however, tend to see the formation of dual power and autogestion in Caracas as more messy, tied into everyday life and its transformation and based in knowledge (constituent knowledge?) from below. However, Toscano does tie biopolitics and welfare together: “Is the contemporary horizon for a recovery and recasting of the theme of dual power a biopolitical one? It is difficult to ignore that whether we are talking about the non-antagonistic forms of participatory dual power in the ‘Porto Alegre’ model, the Zapatista attempt to defend zones for the self-organization of ‘civil society’ against oligarchic repression..., or the attempts to articulate forms of democracy-from-below with national-popular projects in Bolivia and Venezuela, the biopolitical element (understood both in the sophisticated sense of Hardt and Negri, but also in the simple sense of welfare) is prominent.” (Dual Power Revisited: From Civil War

Onboard the Good Fortune;
Envisioned Tribes of Bio-Engineered Fishmen, Gardeners and Monitors;
Unconcerned with the Fate of Earth;
Enjoying a Side of Tuna this Very Moment and Not Participating...;
Scientifictional Speculation into Bubble Worlds; The Situation Was in Fact Extreme; Overthrow of G.A./Concern Contaminated Authority and the Total Liberation of the Moon;
Opal Had Always Seemed like the Widest of Utopias to Deary;
As long as Deary left their infoball on while she read, the Doll was able to access the larger W.I.G. through the implant in his brain. Seated on the smaller relax, he explored in 2D text/image SPOD format, all the better for getting to the heart of things. Surfing came back to him immediately. In no time he had circumvented the for-pay system that attempted to block his access and there was a good chance, 70/30 exactly, in fact, that his research had gone undetected.

The available W.I.G. was of course not current, but the W.I.G. was never exactly current. It couldn’t be. That was one of its peculiarities. On board the Good Fortune it was only stable for a matter of days, and might be updated any moment the ship happened to intercept an infopacket beam sent from an outbound ship or a buoy equipped with reflectorcasters.

Perhaps it had been censored, but the Doll didn’t think so. He investigated the ship they were on. The Good Fortune was a modified old G.A. Pusher. Its large flats hinged enormous combine sails sensitive enough to drink the reflected sun off Uranus on a palladium fusion plant. It was one of the least aerodynamic designs the Doll remembered having seen, a desk chair tumbling chaotically through space. The branching ‘legs’ were distinguished by an oblong G.A. pilot drone, cabins, small farms and habitat cylinders protruding along two extending ‘spines’. The cylinder they were in, the very farthest from the engines, had been prepared to stock delicacies poached from the Oan Bubble. The Good Fortune was headed towards Uranus Station off Titania, the largest Moon in the Uranus system and would arrive within weeks.

The first thing the Doll encountered after a search for ‘Oan Bubbles’ was an ever-young female (WiggrID: m-OanBuBBles) bent over backwards with her thumb stuck in her anus. Assorted spacers were heckling and issuing orders from wherever and whenever they were observing her in the inner system. The Doll wondered if he had watched such things before he had come to the Bubble. Now it meant nothing to him. There was only one other direct hit.

**Oan bubbles: fact or fiction**

A moonlet melted and fueled by a Morituri/Ickles Mark IV mini-sun? An artificially cored gyrating sphere of liquid water hanging in space? An hydro-ecology, supporting mammalian and amphibian life, skeletized with great bones of coral crystal and stationary pockets of breathable atmosphere, immune from Earthside
contamination? Some say such a thing could exist in concealed orbit off Neptune, Uranus or in the Kuipur Belt, the secret offspring of an international effort of collaborating scientists, spacer amateurs and avant-garde fishing unions of the ‘40s.

It was marine biologist Nora Wesley who first postulated “a self-sufficient flow-garden, large enough, with low enough population to constitute a true world for all of its free inhabitants: i.e. predators, plankton, and all between” in the 2130s. The Bubble’s most important inhabitants, at least for the first several generations, would be its humans. Speculating a developing humanity able to genetically alter itself for particular space habitats, the Bubble’s first theorists envisioned tribes of bio-engineered fishmen, gardeners and monitors, each idiosyncratically related to the Bubble’s needs. Wesley’s student Heike Böhringdorf (2101-2144) first formulated the idea of keeping the project separate from System history. For a time she actively sought volunteers willing to undergo memory erasure. The gilled and dorsaled biologist/hunter-gatherers of the Oan Bubble would be cut off from the System for their entire lives, devoted to their own survival, the survival of the community, and the bubble at large, unconcerned with the fate of Earth. “A life of continual fulfillment and struggle,” wrote Böhringdorf, “wherein competition occurs on a level playing field.”

It was in honor of the scientifiction author A. E. Winnegutt that Dr. Böhringdorf added the term ‘Oan’ to the orbital hydrosphere concept put forward by Dr. Wesley and others. In the fantastic weirld Winnegutt conceived in the universe Opal (still going strong in posthumous nodes), the hollow planet is famously revealed as a traveling air-pocket inside a self-propelling bubble, Oa by name, that floats through space gathering water and seeding new hydrospheres – taking in enough mass to eventually approach and farm a black hole.

Funding for the Oan Bubble project, unsurprisingly, first came from Fishing Concerns. Setting up a Luna City Aquarium and embryonics lab, soliciting investment, (along with various DNA and living marine samples) Böhringdorf raised twenty trillion G.A. kredits, so as to one day provide swordfish to adorn the tables of the Necessary Elite in Upper Mars.

Unfortunately Heike Böhringdorf died on a scouting run to the Gas Giants and all the preliminary gear was lost in Space – about
the time swordfish was first introduced on Martian farms. Chances are the Oan Bubble project went the way of all the other failed first-gen Utopias. But no body was ever found; and rumors persist to this day. Who knows? Maybe somewhere out there there’s two mermen enjoying a side of Tuna this very moment and not participating....

The document had viewed only seven thousand times in ten years. Comments were uninteresting. More research showed that Many Winnegutt fans still actively supported scientifictional speculation into bubble worlds, and water-weirlds, whatever they were, were still active. Böhringdorf’s writings were known and her schematics still in print. It was widely believed that though water enough could have been found in various places for a Bubble, the skeleton would have had to be constructed under the harshest conditions and could never come to fruition without heavy transport. Apparently advances in genetics made by enterprising spacers had not yet been fully understood in the inner system. A growth-crystal such as built out of the bubble’s coral was unknown Earthside.

If he could trust the W.I.G., it meant that Oberon had kept quiet. Oberon was prospering, relatively speaking. They had water farms of their own now, with stocks, though this was unknown, seeded from the Bubble. They were rumored to be rough Norwegian-speaking outcasts, the sort of spacers who turned pirate at little more than whim. The G.A. had still never visited.

From what the Doll gathered Space had changed a lot since he’d last heard news from outside. What had it been – a decade? When the Doll had disappeared from history the big question had been whether Earth would survive its current troubles. The big question now, and the Doll grasped it at once, appeared to be whether Space would survive without Earth.

The Doll avoided learning too much about Earth. Earthside humanity and its primitive rituals sickened him. Why leave farms undefended and build walls around your body? The dry idiocy, the insect animality of it. The only thing the Doll knew about the old him, was that he was of double Jamaican descent. Though he was in fact white and orange, the Doll took pride on being a black man. He imagined ancestors who took life for what it really was, despite the injustices of their suffering. Through the poetry of Kamau Braithwaite he’d read on South Pole, he had discovered Caribbean culture and had longed to hear their recorded music. Now the Doll assessed the current situation in space
with the hard minimal bass of early Wailers helping him through. It did not seem at all unfamiliar to him. Deary didn’t seem to notice.

The situation was in fact extreme. Competition to control the G.A. was now the great project of the surviving Concerns. Most of the orbital environments were defunct, plundered or destroyed. The G. A. was threatening to declare emergency martial law on the Moon and the satellites. The ‘mad million’ – the Spacers who had made it up before the elevator fell – were as ready to repel Earth interests as to betray one another. An explosive new movement led by Leah Zitzko, one of the radicals believed to have orchestrated the destruction of the C. Clarke Elevator in ‘33, was now publicly advocating overthrow of G.A./Concern contaminated authority and the total liberation of the Moon.

In space, technological development had occurred in radically interesting directions, many of them newly promising for life in space. But habitats like High Wichita in geosynchronous orbit over Kansas, or Zek’s Tron D, the successful fantasy city of the inner asteroids, were long gone. The last generation of traded computers, the so-called singularities, were showing a tendency for radical difference among themselves and had been gathered up by the G.A. Mirror-buoys and beam satellites left by the G.A. Pioneers of the 21st century scattered the force of the sun at light speed to parts still unsettled as far away as Uranus. But mirror-buoys and beam satellites were easy to disrupt and often broke down. Those who fixed them could not always be trusted. The old problems – energy, spaceflight, water, cosmic rays – were battled by a multitude of ingenious new local inventions, whose workings were fully understood only by the now-absent machines that had designed them. Life went on, of course. Rare metals had failed as the currency, and were scarcer than ever, with stocks divided and maintained on the Moon by G.A. Navy personnel, supporting the old kredit system. But fluctuations in technology and availability were so extreme that it didn’t pay to hold capital that might any season turn valueless. There was a scramble everywhere for food.

Only a year ago a strike had come to a head in Parsons Crater, once the ‘San Francisco of the Moon’. The G.A. actually cut energy to a dome segment supporting seven thousand farmers. Hundreds died. A month later a mysterious rock hit Mars Station at speed enough pulverize it and everybody on it (including a two regiments of G.A. Marines) into atoms. Accidental or not, spacers were a superstitious lot and this destruction was widely looked upon as a cosmic retaliation.
Such was the depressing backdrop of their journey, as the Doll already thought, into Dante. He tried to warn Deary. He went so far as to interrupt her reading.

How absurd he looked in air, she thought. Like an ecstatic swampwolf. His numerous arms gesticulated from a tree-like torso. Purple-black tendrils crisscrossed his doll-face. His beady eyes glared. Knobby hair wound round down from the head to wrap his torso like a robe of thorns. “The System as a whole is deteriorating,” he managed to sign. “It’s a very dangerous situation for the Bubble, and for us personally. We should get a hold of this ship immediately. We can’t let them spread word of our existence.”

“That’s impossible.”

“That hatch leads to a conduit to the Good Fortune’s biosphere. If someone would just visit, I could take the ship. They would never know what hit them.”

“It'll never happen,” she said aloud. She returned to Gates. It hurt to come so near finishing that part of Opal actually authored by Winnegutt. She looked for her place. Opal had always seemed like the widest of Utopias to Deary. Its sheer scope was central to its appeal. The books were laid out according to a map in time and space. You could follow routes that were themselves adventures, and journey from one to the other in any direction (backwards, most fruitfully). But she had left Gates for last, a book that must have been influenced by real life encounters with cephalopods. In the general scheme Gates was no place, the very center of the hollow planet. At the book’s center, presumably, by extension the center of Oa itself, hydrospherical extremes occasion a bizarre flip-flop, where the Mighty Prant’s rage is instantly silent, contained by a squid swifiting against the currents of an outcast Oan Bubble. But the Bubble – A head! What was going on? A head in an entirely different sort of direction? Should she read back? A short-haired youth, or was I a girl, there it is, or was I a girl strapped into the cockpit of a line-tight yacht? Sails plump of triangle and bulging force. Hull beating upon the sluicing table of the seething, leaping brine. Hard-pressed, sliding like a sex across the slippery surface, slapping trailing glistening foam. Outside the Bubble?! Deary thrilled....

ENDNOTES
1 Smyth’s Myths 22.12.2132
ADNAN YILDIZ

THE SUBURBS, A BATTLE OF THE CURATORS, AND A LONG NIGHT

The Song Became Absolutely Challenging; Driving from Dubai to Sharjah; Cheers!; A Fever of Networking and Consuming Social Occasions; A Tent, Seating Area and Tea Service; Including the Audience into the Game Was a Smart Gesture; Dominant Rituals of Contemporary Art Culture; But Raki; Another Form of Entertainment; Different Type of Audience; Lying on Comfortable Pillows;
I had been listening to the same song all day on the repeat button, *The Suburbs* (Arcade Fire, 2010), and when I landed at Dubai Airport it was still running on my headphones. By listening to it, I could feel the teen angst of white trash kids with a little bit of Larry Clark’s erotic impulse, Ken Loach’s social aggression, and Hanif Kureshi’s narrative quality. The company of the song became absolutely challenging when we arrived at the highway running from Dubai to Sharjah. It did not feel like we were moving from one city to another, but was more like we were going to the suburbs from the city center.

Later, the cab driver told me about the rush hours on this highway. Due to the high rents in Dubai, most people who work in Dubai live in Sharjah, just because they can afford better accommodation there. So, I was not wrong in my feelings... They are two different cities or emirates, ruled by different governments, but they are also becoming one city together for many who work in one and sleep in the other. A few days later I met Hassan Sharif in Abu Dhabi when I was visiting his monographic exhibition, and talked about his early works from 1980s. In one of his drawings he shows how he calculated the number of oil drums one needs to drive from Dubai to Sharjah, and also made a sculpture that looks like a pop-art-ish kind of oil drum as a gesture at an example. His vision of calculating this specific distance between the two emirates still survives today, when one looks at how they are socially, economically and historically connected to each other, especially due to their historical relationship and urban development.

For me, this distance was not only composed of time and speed, but also operated as ‘time-out’ to question how my participation, contribution and attendance at an art event were shaped during the opening week of the 10th Sharjah Biennial. The main reason for my visit to the United Arab Emirates was my engagement with the March Meeting, which was also part of the professional program of the biennial that was happening almost at the same time with Art Dubai. Thus many visitors went to both events, moving back and forth between the two emirates. How we scheduled ourselves was related with our lifestyles.

Most of the residents who work in Dubai go to Sharjah in the evening to sleep. Most of us who were connected to the biennial were working in Sharjah and later going to Dubai for social life, just the other way around from how the local labor force is mostly organized there. As a critical observation of the situation that we were all in, the art crowd moved between these cities based on the accessibility of alcohol.
As the travel guide says, Sharjah is a ‘dry emirate’, which means the sale or possession of alcohol within Sharjah is almost entirely forbidden. Most of the biennial program was organized around this social reality. We were given official lifts to the events of Art Dubai, for the parties organized by the art fair, so art people could have free alcoholic drinks. This was the main topic of the art crowd during the opening days of Sharjah Biennial: how to get to Dubai, with whom, for which party... I am aware of the social aspects of art life, and I also enjoy parties and dancing, but I was a bit disappointed about the fact that while there were many people there connected with the region, and it was a good opportunity to talk about what had been happening recently in Middle East, we never really arrived at a moment when things moved into a satisfying social discussion after the structured sessions, because there was always an anxiety in the air about catching the biennial buses to Dubai.

It might sound very dramatic, and the situation was obviously related to a specific context, but at the end of the day, openings as events for making exhibitions public still seem to operate similarly in almost every art context. The professionals are conditioned to be ready with their product for the opening day, and then they meet the art community and personal circles. The regular visitor who is not invited to or expected for the opening comes to the show after the opening, and rarely meets the professionals. Thus they mostly see the information desk, guards, or institutional reps. The intense discussions and ideas that bring the shows together happen during preparation and installation, and this form of production experience is not readily reflected in either the work or the audience.

Openings are mostly celebrations related to Western forms of social gatherings. Cheers! Moreover, they subsequently dominate the perception of the projects, considering how other professionals are involved. Most of the time the celebration becomes the main focus, and the content is mostly missing on occasions when the main discussion is just excluded from the table. During biennials there is a fever of networking and consuming social occasions, to meet new people or refresh contacts. This form of social life among the cultural managers blinds professionals, who can hardly focus on the works presented or envision potential discussions. A biennial like that in Sharjah should have taken its peripheral position as a practical base, to connect the global agenda to a current local context with social and political concerns. This might have opened a way for discussing why no one asked the curators of the show about the censorship issue, and why
Slavs and Tatars,
Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz, 10th Sharjah Biennale, 2011, photograph by Alfredo Rubio.
Slavs and Tatars,
everyone was concerned about the position of the director who was fired by the Sheikh, the city-state’s ruler.

The installation from the collective Slavs and Tatars as part of the 10th Sharjah Biennial might be an inspiration for how the local context and the cultural forms of social gatherings can be adapted into contemporary forms of presentation. As the final station in their ongoing project *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi’ite Showbiz* the collective started from the city’s history of commerce, and created a social environment composed of a tent, seating area and tea service transmitting their research. It was covered with colorful stitched messages, slogans and new aphorisms from the Polish resistance movement and the Iranian revolution, such as “Help the Militia: Beat Yourself Up!” or “Only Solidarity and Patience will secure our victory” – translated into Farsi. Rather than looking like a biennial venue, their spot was immediately filled with locals and children from the area, and provided connection with the local context.

One project that recently happened in Berlin was an interesting example in terms of twisting the idea of opening day and developing another way of communication with the audience. *The Battle of the Curators* at a local gallery called Grimmuseum, in Kreuzberg, Berlin, invited its visitors to vote for the better presentation of the same artist list by two different curators, Aaron Moulton and Carson Chan. During the opening people were looking at the works via two different maps, and trying to guess which curator installed which show, to vote as their favorite. It motivated the audience to deal with the puzzle design, and created an intense circulation that questioned the curatorial approaches. One might criticize the ‘battle’ for its focus: rather than the art works and their content, the curating was the center of attention. The audience will likely remember the names of the curators better than the artists or the works.

The presentation that I assumed to be curated by Carson intentionally positioned a piece at its center, creating the whole narration around it as an architectural gesture, whereas the other (I guess, from Aaron) was trying to keep critical distance from each piece and playing a neutral role in presenting them. In the end, there was no clear position for me to vote for my favorite curatorial work; one dominated the artistic statements by composing a meta-form or meta-language, and the other lacked the power or passion to connect the relationships among the contents. Nevertheless, the scene on the opening night was satisfying in terms of how the audience’s behavior was supposed to change.
Rather than drinking and smoking outside of the gallery, people were moving from one show to the other, and were concerned about the ideas behind the installations. Including the audience in the game was a smart gesture, and also an unexpected way of interacting with the public. Most of the time the viewer is not invited to make direct comments on the works, or not integrated into the process as direct participants or contributors. The idea behind *The Battle of the Curators* provided an opportunity for establishing an alternative relationship with the audience. The audience became a sort of gambler betting on the game, which connects the audience to some rules, regulations, and responsibilities. It was openly proposing to share the values that would be produced by the show. It was more than an opening party.

When I was visiting the Frankfurt Kunstverein as curator in residency, Chus Martinez, who was directing the program at that time, asked me to investigate why the Turkish/Kurdish community seemed to have so little interest in coming to their openings. There had been some attempts to bring them in to the space, but none of these proved particularly successful. Once when I was talking with a Turkish taxi driver in the city I asked him if he knew about the art museums and galleries in Frankfurt. He knew about most of them, but never thought of going because, no matter what was hanging on the walls, “they just drink wine”. As an outsider looking in, that was the only thing happening as the main event. Since he was not into wining, or a social environment of that sort, he never felt like going there.

It was then that I really started to question the roots of the dominant rituals of contemporary art culture from a cultural perspective, in terms of how they function, and by/for whom they are mostly organized. A social critique is also related to how it happens, and the dynamics of its social time. But serving raki would not be a better way to bring the Turkish community to the opening. For instance, Tanas, a privately owned gallery in Berlin that mostly shows artists from Turkey, serves raki during its openings, and it is visibly clear that it does not work there. Apart from the art scene, I haven’t seen any one from the local community. It doesn’t ring a bell with the public to bring in the community, or make it more interesting for regular attenders. It is also against the nature of the drink, since you mostly drink raki when sitting around a table and chatting. This gesture on the part of the gallery strikes me as some kind of Orientalist idea or an exotic fantasy of Turkey.
A recent experience in Stuttgart could also make an interesting contribution to our discussion in terms of how alternative forms of exhibition/presentation can challenge audience behavior. After I started to develop the program for Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, as the new artistic director I was interested in using the opportunity of participating in the big event, Lange Nacht der Museen in Stuttgart to challenge its inter-institutional framework and its impact on the audience. For this event all the art institutions and spaces stay open till late, and the audience circulates among these organizations all night long.

As a result of discussions with the team and reviewing observations from previous years, we came to some open conclusions about the situation. The typical Lange Nacht der Museen audience moves from one place to another in crowds, and really stays only a very short time at each; the groups come into the gallery, scan everything quickly, and leave in minutes. Their expectation were based on the motivation of consuming as much of each art event as possible in the same evening. So, the dilemma was related with another form of entertainment: people who would have been watching TV at home were coming to see the shows, and were moving between art spaces as if they are zapping between TV channels.

As an invited curator, Viktor Neumann from Berlin developed a video-screening program, Our Darkness, that started at 7:00 p.m. and continued till 3:00 in the morning. It was designed in different chapters that focused on conceptions of art and the museum, transformation of the global society and human relationships, social reality and media, body and gender politics and some other topics. The sequence of the video works might almost have been considered as a send-up of the television world, in which the evening news, prime time, films, sports, eroticism, etc., play different roles and have special times, schedules and audience strategies.

The visitors who were coming in groups for the Lange Nacht der Museen were confronted by two screens and the presence of a different type of audience. This audience were lying on comfortable pillows, carefully watching the screens. They looked like they had a different feeling about the space. In this setting, what is offered to the audience is something different than they were expecting; something like what they left at home: TV, since you can never watch all the TV channels at the same time.
Each would remember different moments from the whole performance. As an event aimed at reconstructing the political conscious, the screening either frustrated its audience, who were not able to consume the whole content, or it convinced them to stay till the end. The motivations behind moving in the opposite direction for the local visitor, as opposed to biennial visitor – party monster and social networker all in one – or getting lost in a puzzle that presents a tension like a boxing match called *The Battle of the Curators*, or getting angry with a program that runs the whole night when you expect to turn around some paintings, sculptors and ‘hot chicks’, are endless. The questions become clearer when we also consider how we construct our relationships and propose a dialogue with our audience.

ENDNOTES

1 A non-sweet, anise-flavored spirit popularly consumed in Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Bosnia and other Balkan countries as an apéritif, in particular with seafood and mezze.
Lange Nacht der Museen, Our Darkness video screening by V. Neumann, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 9 April 2011, 7pm-3am.
Entertainment/Control Culture; Public Opinion Is Par Excellence both the Medium and the Message; You Decide; A Mandatory Interactivity – or Rather Interpassivity; Art Becomes Defined as an Empty Site where Meaning Is 'Negotiated' with the Viewers; Cease To Be Consumers and Become Commissioners; Offer More Than What Audiences Already Want; The Confidence to Impose;
“Cybernetic control, generation through models, differential modulation, feedback, question/answer, etc.: this is the new operational configuration,” Jean Baudrillard, the great prophet of our era of participation, wrote in Symbolic Exchange and Death. The system that Baudrillard, with extraordinary prescience, saw emerging in the 1970s – and which we now take for granted – doesn’t work by suppression, or repression, but through participative processes. Baudrillard identified two cultural forms – the referendum-poll and reality TV (in its first incarnation, as the so-called ‘fly on the wall’ documentary) – that would be fused in the early 21st century to produce the dominant mode of entertainment/ control culture. For Baudrillard, the opinion poll didn’t represent or even ‘manipulate’ public opinion, but substituted for it. “We live in a referendum mode precisely because there is no longer any referential.” “Public opinion is par excellence both the medium and the message. The polls informing this opinion are the unceasing imposition of the medium as the message. They thereby belong to the same order of TV as the electronic media, which... are also a perpetual question/answer game, an instrument of perpetual polling.” A reality TV program like Big Brother could not function without this participative polling; its slogan – You Decide – was an ominous indication of the way in which ‘power’ was no longer extrinsic to the television viewer. No longer could this viewer be considered as the passive consumer of spectacle, but was now integrated into the media circuit via their phone or SMS text. In place of passivity, participation: a mandatory interactivity – or rather, interpassivity.

Join the debate. Upload your response. These are the demands incessantly made of us by corporate capital. Its commodities, just like the products of contemporary media, therefore come back to us not as objects imposed upon us but as the emanations of our own disavowed desire. Who is responsible for the commodities that bore us, the entertainment programs that fail to entertain? Not the producers, who are, they tell us, only providing what we – via demographic studies, consumer surveys, feedback – have told them we want. If we want things to improve, we must participate more effectively, more efficiently.

In parallel with these developments, art increasingly retreats from the ‘oppressive’ function of imposing itself on its audience. The strong modernist artist becomes the paradigm of an allegedly superseded cultural arrogance. Art objects are denuded of content; art becomes defined instead as an empty site where meaning is ‘negotiated’ with the viewers, whose participation now becomes integral.
How to break out of this? First, by recognizing that what capital has captured in its interpassive participative circuitries were real egalitarian desires – but the desires for greater involvement were not desires to become more effective consumers. As Dan Hind argues in his recent *The Return of the Public*, the move beyond a web 2.0 media culture of dissolute ‘commenting’ would only be achieved when people cease to be consumers and become commissioners; only then would they be constituted as a public. The shift from consumption to commissioning would mean that we were no longer ‘feeding back’ on processes that we can still only observe and respond to, but that we would be involved in a *project* that was ours. Second, cultural producers must have the courage to offer more than what audiences already want. This entails recovering the confidence to impose things on an audience – for the most powerful desires are desires for what we do not yet know we want. An ‘imposition’ is also a gift – something that we do not negotiate with, but which seduces us, overwhelms us, forces us to reassess what we think we are, and which can inspire us to pursue our own projects.
EVA TUERKS
& MAGNUS NILSSON

And Again;
ASHKAN SEPAHVAND

HE LEFT WITH HIS SIGHT, 
YET HE CANNOT SEE

Emptiness Has a Limit, a Border 
Marking a Possible Beyond; 
If Presence Constitutes Success; Ships 
or Lighthouses?; Three Egyptians and 
one Iranian Occupied an Aftermath; 
I Started Going to the Gym; The Very 
Moment when an Inner Eye Opens; 
A No-Thing; The Thingliness of 
Nothing; Perhaps the Activity of 
Being-Present is Active Inability;
The coffee cup lay overturned on its saucer for around ten minutes as we chatted about this and that and patiently allowed the grounds to settle. It was time. She swiftly picked up the cup and turned it towards her eye for inspection. Empty. She looked inside; normally, when you have your fortune read, the sticky, murky mass of coffee grounds forms globs, trickles and smears that help the fortuneteller in her improvised interpretation. This time there was nothing, everything had spilled out onto the saucer as one unidentifiable, unshapely mocha mass. Around the cup’s rim, the syrupy remnants of the crema clung stubbornly, a foamy latticework pattern resembling pebbled, fine grain sandpaper. Below: the white ceramic of the emptied-out cup, as if coffee had never touched its surface. How to read a fortune when there is nothing to read?

She was quick to point out the curious circle of foam painted around the cup. If the shapes and forms of the coffee grounds are what normally determine the content of the fortuneteller’s analysis, then the emptiness would have to be acknowledged as my current state. But the foam above insinuated that perhaps this emptiness has a limit, a border marking a possible beyond. On the other hand, it also suggested that in order to leave the void, one would have to eventually confront this hazy, undefined environment.

She explained it in a different way: when you’re driving in thick fog, the lack of vision you experience may create an anxious impulse to turn on your brights. If you do so, you’ll quickly notice that you see even less than you could before, blinded by the harsh reflection all around you. This is especially the case when a car drives by with its brights on too, significantly raising the probability of an accident. If, however, you resist the urge to shine light into the fog and instead decide to drive faster, to race through the fog, then you can’t possibly pay attention to the invisible curves and dips of the road. They still remain hidden from your vision, and this fact is no less ameliorated by your impatience to leave everything behind and move on. Once again, an accident is likely to happen. The only choice you have left, the only way you can safely move through this formless, all-pervasive darkness, is to drive slowly and pay extra attention. You have to gently consider what you can and cannot see, as well as what you hear (another car approaching?), what you smell (manure, perhaps deer nearby?), what you sensually apprehend (shadows ahead, is someone crossing the road?), what your body anticipates and knows, in and of
itself. In any other circumstances, you would readily ignore or take
this form of communication for granted. Confronted by the fog, this
tedious exertion of all your sensory perceptions is the only way you can
re-emerge unscathed, and in doing so, you locate yourself.

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This fortuitous coffee cup reading came back to me a few months
ago. As these things usually are, we make of them what we need to in
that moment, and such coincidences cannot be denied or amusedly
snickered at as fleeting alignments with life. It happens that for some
weeks preceding my fateful encounter with that coffee and my tal-
ented friend (whose fortunetelling credentials are astutely amateur),
I had felt myself to be in a deep void. I had just finished a project that
had taken two years to attain its beautifully satisfying closure, the last
phase of which saw an intense living and working routine with dear
and intimate friends, giving sense, meaning and purpose to every day.
Of course, our goal was to reach an end, to see our project realized,
to present it and share it with others: we did, and all of a sudden, it was
finished, the days no longer the same as they had been. Simultaneously,
I had just ended a relationship that had lasted more than two years.
All throughout its course, this relationship gave me strength, stability
and support and yet, I could not shake my confusion as to why, after
seemingly having all, I still could not feel satisfied. Things come to an
end, there is no doubt about that – a fact that feels more and more like
a contradiction when we begin something, with all the excitement,
anticipation and joy a beginning brings.

The problem here, what reading that which is not written in a coffee cup
so delicately articulated, is a banal one in the sense of its obviousness:
the inevitable void after the event. Sometimes, the urge is to charge on-
wards, to resist the pause and immediately move on to other projects,
other applications of attention, new relationships, new fields of discovery.
At other times, a feeling of lack, shortcoming, or mere exhaustion accom-
panies the postpartum condition, leading to an itch, a desire to divert a
possible depression by letting go completely, indulging in life’s more con-
spicuous pleasures. I experienced both. The fog, as so well described by
my fortuneteller, still remained as a hovering loom. The problem posed
a question: at what point does one see the void for what it is, and what
does this perceptual moment lead to? Torn between the pragmatic drive
towards potentiality, that voice that says “don’t stop, don’t stop, don’t
stop”, and the lugubrious revelry of repose, the foot that can’t stop tap-
ing to the beat, I realized that I was denying being present. That is, actual,
contemporary, in a thing that happens to be a no thing. And that isn’t the same thing as the all-too-feared, adamantly avoided ‘nothing’.

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We were sitting, the four of us, next to the sea at night. The waves were strong and solid. We nursed four large mugs of beer, ignoring our location, immersed in conversation with that natural sense of performative ease that tends to appear between near-strangers when all are far from home. We talked about Cairo. One of the more complicated questions the Spring Uprisings posed in relation to the geopolitical dynamics of the region was that of why: why did an uprising in one place succeed and not in another place? What is responsible for this success: is it the people, international interest, internal bureaucratic structures, media networks, or a combination? In fact, what qualifies as ‘success’? What are its signs, when and how are they acknowledged as such? The Egyptian case, we postulated, was perhaps very concerned with conceptualizing success as presence. The presence of people, images, media coverage and world public interest was deemed to have contributed to the success of February 11th. We sensed that here a romantic blind hindsight could easily be created. The Cairene maxim would go something like this: “if you stand your ground long enough, you’ll succeed.” If you are there and stay where you are, you will eventually be here. This would only reconfirm the spectacular notion of ‘revolution’, in the sense of ‘seeing is believing’. If you show yourself, if enough show you, the sight of this show produces an effectual, successful action.

We wondered how such a concept of success-through-presence would challenge but also be challenged by other, relatively recent events in the Middle East: for example, Iran after the presidential elections of 2009 lacked no less of a presence of people on the streets, streaming live visual documentation, social network activity, prolonged durations of journalistic reportage, and international demonstrations of solidarity. And so, what happened there that didn’t happen in Cairo (or the other way around)? If presence constitutes success, then something about the Iranian case would denote ‘failure’; and if we fell into understanding the Egyptian case through this model, perhaps we would simultaneously endanger the possibility of other models of realization being ‘successful’, and potentially missing the more complicated, lesser ‘present’ or ‘visible’ interior affectations and inward processes that led to the Egyptian uprising meeting its immediate demands.
Another question remained: what happens now, in the present? Is success or failure a permanent condition, or is it performatively uttered, naming the event and thus, drawing it to a close? Is there a ‘day after the revolution’, or would it be best to speak of ‘days’ after days, each an actuality? The waves broke the shore, the sea reflecting the navy night, distant flickers of light untraceable: were they ships or lighthouses? In any case, at this moment all of us at the table, three Egyptians and one Iranian, occupied an aftermath: we were in a void.

***

I started going to the gym in January. The timing may give a false impression: this was no New Year’s resolution. Such self-enforced prescriptions are usually doomed to spiral down from initial resolve to a plateau of stale apathy. The coincidence was that along with the New Year, I felt an indescribable sensation to move and feel my body. I wanted to sweat, wanted to build strength, to cultivate endurance. I embraced this ritual like a drug. Especially given my foggy circumstances, the reassurance of labor towards a tangibly imaginable product felt warmly necessary. I found myself removed from the goings on of the outside world. The gym routine fit neatly into a simple sense of order I was ascribing to my daily life, what otherwise appeared to me as uneventful, unsure and unsustainable. It was something to do. What ‘doing’ is it, exactly? I surely wasn’t jumping on to a rigorous muscle-building plan, nor was I really organized or strategic about the combinations of exercises I trained with.

I saw him in the locker room. It felt like a double take, but I can’t say who took it. This wasn’t particularly special; my gym was certainly cruisy, and looking at and around with restrained demonstration of interest (whether sexual or not) was a common occurrence. It was always the beginning of some game, one of osmotic mimicry and feigned spontaneity. It’s how you learn at the gym, by looking, imitating, and doing as if you’ve already done it before. And sometimes flirtation happens to be an additional element in this process. So I decided to play this game, disregarding whether he would be interested or not. I went to the cross-trainer and began my warm up. A few minutes later, he came out and headed for the step machine. He looked. Or I thought he did. All I remember is that I couldn’t really stop myself from looking – normally I wouldn’t fixate so explicitly, but I was drawn to him magnetically. Flushed from a raised heartbeat, I headed over to the mat area where he was already stretching in various poses. I felt quite courageous to take off my shoes and lay down next to him. I began my
post-cardio routine of personal variations on vaguely yogic postures, partial muscle-memories from back when I actually took yoga classes mixed with subjective interpretations of combinations and flows that I mentally felt corresponded. I guess I was a bit self-conscious, because at a certain moment I couldn’t help be distracted and look out of the corner of my eye at him, to see what he was doing, to see whether he was looking at what I was doing.

After I finished my workout, I waited outside the entrance, smoking a cigarette, knowing that he would come out soon. The looking had not been enough to satisfy, I wanted to talk to him, no – I wanted to tell him something. He came out a few minutes later, walked quickly past me and down the steps, I saw him accelerate and move towards the street. I hesitated, then ran after him. After catching him by slight surprise, I told him that his energy, his inner sense of calm and elegance, his control of movement, his balance of tension and relaxation, was beautiful. Afterwards, there wasn’t much to say, an awkward gratitude on his part, a relieved embarrassment on mine.

We saw each other again, coincidentally. And then again, another happenstance. At that point, it just felt right to pursue his company, to find out what kind of a friendship this could become. Since it began with the senses – looking, desiring, imitating, a choreography of attractions – the encounter with him helped me articulate confusions around my relationship to ‘doing’ and ‘not doing’. If the gym, until that point, had simply been a way to do something, what thing was exactly being done, and did I think that otherwise I was doing nothing? To return to that initial mimetic game between us, was it his presence alone or was it me, an inner eye that had opened and was able to not only see him, but to see inside, seeking something for itself? As he and I became friends, I felt more and more the interiority demanded by my experience of the gym. For me, the activity taking place there, though one of creating presence of body against body, was also one of practicing inner visibility, a looking inwards that allowed me to see others by first seeing myself.

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On a late-night Wikipedia dérive I came across some New Age-esque articles about ‘the third eye’. Typical chakra-point, om-padme-om, hippie-stoner ruminations on ‘opening up the crown’, ‘releasing Shekinah’, or ‘expanding consciousness’. As a metaphor for recent experiences, the concept of the third eye felt right, but I felt somehow cheesy for being
attracted to such a wishy-washy pop culture reference. I did notice, however, that the third eye also referenced a gland biologists have taken some time to understand properly: the pineal gland, located smack in the center of the brain. The gland has been shown to primarily regulate the release of a hormone named melatonin, crucial for the proper functioning of our biological clock, of our body’s sensation of night and day. This affects our entire metabolic cycle, as our body needs to maintain a sense of when it should exert its energies and when it should rest.

The affinity of the pineal gland to our eyes is strong. The cells that compose the pineal gland are very similar to those that line the eye’s retina. These are receptor nerve cells, quite sensitive to intensities of light and shade, responsible in the eye for collecting the data from our visual apperceptions and sending them to the brain where a coherent ‘image’ is produced. As I wound my way through the multiple Wikipedia links, I read that recent studies have shown that in fact the pineal gland needs darkness to produce melatonin. This, in turn, is directly related to this third eye’s nerve-based perception of immediate sensory phenomena from the outside world. The pineal gland actively responds to the sensation of darkness by generating the hormone our body needs in order to know when it is time to do what it needs to do as well as to not do, in a mutually reciprocated cycle of actuality and potentiality. I found it particularly interesting that when we are in the darkness of the void, that this is the very moment when an inner eye opens and releases its generative, sustaining energies, in fact ensuring that our bodies will know when the next day has arrived.

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“Thinking takes time”, so a dear teacher of mine once said. “Understanding comes with delay,” said another. Many of the questions I’ve been asking of myself and the world for a while now inevitably lead me back to a little book I was assigned as a student many years ago. I didn’t read it back then, only later, finding myself returning to it in moments of wanderlust or intuition. I guess what makes George Kubler’s The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things important for me is the problem of the problem as a way of thinking about what we do and not do, when we do something and when there is seemingly nothing, and how this fits into a sensation of time as a series of temporary, tentative solutions, strung along like a precious chain. My teacher told me that Kubler wrote the manuscript when he thought he was dying (he didn’t, at least not then and there). Wedged between the heaviness of today and the unsure arrival of tomorrow, the
sensation I gather from reading this book bears all the traces of the void and its demanding interiority that I suppose only someone whose anticipation of an imminent end can give a crystal clear voice to.

In one section of Kubler's book, I encounter a moment of self-reflection that familiarly corresponds to my own condition: “Le passé ne sert qu’à connaître l’actualité. Mais l’actualité m’échappe. Qu’est-ce que c’est donc que l’actualité?” For years this question – the final and capital question of his life – obsessed my teacher Henri Focillon, especially during the black days from 1940 to 1943 when he died in New Haven. The question has been with me ever since, and I am now no closer to the solution of the riddle, unless it be to suggest that the answer is a negation.”

What does Kubler mean by negation? He does not continue by stating what actuality is not; rather, he gives a few – by now often quoted – examples of what actuality is: the darkness between the flashes of a lighthouse, the split-second between the ticks of a watch, ending by saying “it is the interchronic pause when nothing is happening. It is the void between events.” Negation here means the application of a negative concept: nothing, lack, emptiness, the absence of a thing. A no thing. But it is precisely the thingliness of nothing, in the leap of imagination required to imagine nothing, in the inarticulate failure to adequately ‘describe’ nothing, which characterizes the present by a lack of presence. Touching the present fails, giving word to it does as well: imagining it depends on the memory of the immediate past, and yet one can sense it, in the way that sensation exists as a real thing, but no thing at all. I am reminded of how I resisted the present-void at first, thinking that if I turn my metaphoric brights on, I can insist on looking my way around the curved road leading through the blinding fog. Perhaps the activity of being-present is active inability, resting in the dark, responding to problems as they are transmitted by the senses, trusting the relay and the recall. And it’s there where my body begins, with the exuberant realization that it is time to wake up.
A True Invitation to Co-Decide; Kids Sitting in a Merry-Go-Round; Keeping Us Busy; It’s Exhausting; People Who Are Attracted by an Interactive Process; To Take All Possibilities of Democratisation into Consideration; Something Does Not Have To Be Participatory in All Senses to Overcome Traditions;
As we have been taught, the citizens in ancient Rome were kept calm with bread and games. Nowadays for the privileged ones who have enough bread and games to be downloaded, there needs to be a new strategy to make them feel part of the game: participation.

Like every other term, participation is used in many different ways. The offer to participate sometimes means to attend, sometimes to share, but only a rarely is it used as a true invitation to co-decide. Although the latter understanding of participation is the subject of a discourse in politics as well as in the arts, it is hard to find it realized in this precise meaning. Does voting mean having a chance to co-decide in political decisions? Does taking part in an interactive performance mean to co-decide its original intention? What is the difference between being part of something and a participatory action?

Mostly it is the illusion of participation we find ourselves trapped in. More and more opportunities make us believe that we have a say – like kids sitting on a merry-go-round thinking they control its direction. Hand in hand with the market, politics often likes to sing the lullaby of the participating citizen to us, by announcing manipulative referendums, calling on us to post our proposals at special platforms, and otherwise keeping us busy. The same goes for the arts, though perhaps without the same calculation, but maybe with the same concept of ‘participation light’. Is an artwork created by an artists’ collective to be called participatory?

What is actually invented without being based on heritage from the past? And isn’t there a long tradition in the method of producing art works in a process together with peer groups, like the workshops in the Renaissance or in the Baroque?

We all have had good experiences creating, composing or designing whatever without any help by participation. It’s exhausting to explain the many thoughts arising during a brainstorm while they are not yet elaborated. And isn’t it non-essential to discuss with laymen, not implicitly on the topic of art, but the subject your art is dealing with?

In the contemporary discussion of art, participation is mostly meant in the sense of working together with an audience, with people who are attracted by an interactive process. But does the invitation to the audience to play a role within the performance mean they were equally involved into all steps regarding decisions? Not really.
It is indeed a great step forward which is going on within art, to get rid of its 19th century romantic ‘genius creator’ aspect, and to take all the possibilities of democratisation into consideration. But something does not have to be participatory in all senses to overcome traditions. Strategies to improve democracy are desperately needed. Participation could be one strategy, but despite all the praiseworthy efforts it is still in it’s very early stages of development. Especially when the artwork is aimed at social engagement, it addresses a certain target group. Immediately the question of whether they should be involved in decision making or not surfaces.

Don’t we feel bored reading about new trends in art: breaking traditional concepts, thinking about new methods to generate art, or developing their criteria? It’s like good fun at a jolly gathering, which outdoes itself through further excesses, and can always take on new forms until it collapses. Of course, due to the fact that the concept of art is always under socially determined construction, we have to be aware that definitely nothing in art is fixed for all eternity. For this reason asserting the claim that participation is the only true method for upcoming trends is as wrong as denying its possibilities or considerable advantages.

Nevertheless – in the absence of having a voice in society, a vast community has created its own world where everybody who has access can participate. This was made possible through the technology of the internet. And now – alongside other examples which showed us at least attempts at how participation could lead to more democratic solutions – we have had the chance to witness how politically intolerable situations in some Arab states could be changed with the help of the participatory opportunities of communication technologies.

To sum up: you can no more render a judgement on the benefits or advantages of teamwork in general, as you can make an all-inclusive statement about participation in art. Aren’t there lots of different cases, situations and necessities where artists can complement one another? Where the participation of people from outside could be absolutely necessary? To reach your goal, it is as crucial to find the right method as it is to think about the use of aesthetic tools. The little nightmare is that you can find a recipe for methods to get the best practice for it, for your effort or your target.
Beyond Representation

There is something between us and the 'What'; we are left with this or another talking face; more user-friendly form of democratic organization; the whole trash dump called parliament would be cleaned up; democratic capitalism; to be replaced by institutions of presence; the flow of information not the exception but the rule;
Democracies around the world still organize participation based on the technical means of the 19th century. But we do not have to fill out a paper anymore for banking. We are forced to carry a machine readable passport. Soon the police will be able to monitor and identify people in public through face-recognition. The advertising industry creates online profiles of our wishes to facilitate the placement of their ads. Participatory platforms know whom we befriend, what we like and what not.

Only one area in public life, it seems, stubbornly resists the introduction of new techniques and media. This is our so-called democracy. The system of public decision-making operates largely based on technologies known from 2000 years ago, when the democracy was first introduced. We have a parliament, we have parties, we have people talking and engaging in a theatrical display of discussions once in a while.

Every four years or so our state wants to know what we like or dislike. Facebook wants to know it every second. But actually the state does not want to know what we like. There is something between us and the ‘what’, between our opinion and the decision taken. They only want to know whom we like. Instead of voting on an issue we are left with a choice for this or another talking face. Notoriously these faces talk something else before the election than after the election. A bold “yes, we can” turns out to result in “no, we can’t”. But that actually is not the core of the problem. The problem is that they can do that without any risk.

This situation stirs up two major questions. How does it happen that the political sphere is only reluctantly introducing new technologies? I am not talking of parties finally setting up their web-page, but of the replacement of the whole party system by another more – let’s say user-friendly – form of democratic organization.

And the second question: if we would take democracy seriously within the given media possibilities, what could it look like?

The popular mythology with a slightly conspiratory leaning would answer these questions by denouncing the evil politician who enacts a public theater, talks from both sides of his mouth, and in the end serves the interests of big industry. Once the whole trash dump called parliament would be cleaned up and populated by loyal, or at least honest people – but not politicians – the whole mess could be rearranged. This popular mythology relies strongly on the power of single
actors within a given system, as much when it comes to building up a conspiracy, as when it comes to cracking it. It situates the question and its solution on the very basic level of single actors. As if the replacement of our corrupt government by fair, communist, socialist, non-neoliberal, non-populist or whatever representatives would be the key point leading to a change. From the very beginning this approach starts with accepting the given structure and organization of power, and will most likely not lead to much more than the replacement of figures, with the persistence of the underlying structural defects, if not worse.

In contrast, given our backwards model of participation one might rather look for means of repair on a systemic level, and not on the level of mere recipes, opinions and party-politics.

Leaving political mythology beyond requires a bit of analysis. The outlines of these considerations can only be briefly sketched in this paper.

**Why is the political sphere only reluctantly introducing new technologies?**

At the core of our political system stands the idea of representation. Representation asks the voter to cast her vote once every second year. With this ritual a symbolic relation to politics is established and routinely confirmed. It gives nothing other than the mere frame of participation. Having cast a vote, nobody can claim that there was no participation. The very form of democracy was served, even if at the most minimal level conceivable.

Around this minimal intervention of the so-called public one finds a complex hierarchy of political institutions active in the process of decision making. There is no need to name all of them, because it is enough to state once more that these practices of deciding are maintained to a large degree independent from public interference. Of course, from within the political system, a lot of issues are constantly discussed and presented to the public. But one must not forget the most important point – in the end this public has to remain passive.

On the other hand, this passivity of the public does not mean that the parliament and the elected bodies act completely by themselves. It has become a common practice to let other parts of society intervene in their operations. This includes all kinds of non-governmental organizations, but also and mostly the hundreds and thousand of lobbyists surrounding our political institutions.
So, there is a parliamentary and administrative structure involved in making decisions. A very small part of this structure faces elections. The most urgent political issues, the financial politics, is even left to the institution of the central bank, whose democratic legitimization is doubtful, shielded by a triple chain of representatives of representatives of representatives. But we realize more and more that economic decisions do not only concern the maintenance of economic flow, but the financial well-being of the whole population. These decisions are left to experts, says a common claim. What does that mean in reverse? Decisions of that type do not allow for the dirty process of democracy? And, on the other hand, the decisions left to democratic representatives are of minor importance?

Over the last few years, issues surrounding huge amounts of public money being spent never entered the political process, and were basically decided bypassing basic democratic institutions. The only exception seems to have happened in Iceland, were people were asked twice if they agree to pay the bank’s debts, and they resisted twice. Thus, a democratic capitalism would most likely establish a form of finance where the risk-takers eventually take the risk and are not allowed to transfer it to the taxpayer, as happened without any vote in all other so-called developed democracies during in the financial meltdown.

The political sphere seems to be divided into four parts: the institutions of state finance, shielded by a double layer of representation; the institutions of the state, shielded from the public by a single layer; the sphere of monetary interests, given ample access to our representatives though lobbying; and the sovereign people, which is kept in the decision making process because its function has been handed over to representatives.

What could democracy look like given the current media situation?

These is nothing futurist or utopian in envisaging a decision making process that profits from web-based techniques. One needs neither the wisdom nor the stupidity of crowds to build it up. Processes of that type are in place in the financial markets, in huge institutions like the ICANN, or even in platforms like Facebook.

Also, the issue of consensus versus antagonism is not of major importance.
At stake is the very organization of the political process. Organization means the flow of information, the process of decision making, and the type of groups and institutions involved.

To begin with the later. Over the centuries, most of our existing institutions and parties engaged in a self-enforcing political system which basically keeps the political process clear of public involvement. The modes of democratic participation – elections, press, polls – can be read as rituals that on the surface serve the transition of power, but in fact operate as mechanisms to keep public presence at bay.

A process of decision making based on the contemporary media and tools of communication would need to dismantle this system almost completely. All the institutions of representation would need to be replaced by institutions of presence, where whoever is willing can enter the discussion on his/her own volition. The party as the dominant form of organization might survive, but not as an association of representatives, but rather as a strategic grouping around bundles of decisions.

All of this would, of course, happen under the rule of total transparency. The flow of information brought to us by Wikileaks would not be the exception but the rule. As it should most naturally be the case in a democracy, the sovereign, the people, would command the complete flow of information and have it at its disposal. This would render our contemporary way of policy making, which is to a large extent built on a regime of secrecy, quite impossible.

The core issue remains the idea of representation. It needs to be replaced by presence.
Like a Tattoo You Got in Your Teens; Public Sculptures and Monuments; A Monumental Experience; From this 'Being Subject' Towards 'Being Subjected To'; Narratives of Embrace or Clashing; The Politics of the Sculpture; Giving Up on a Dream-State a Bit Too Soon; Merging and Forming Shapes and Occupying Skins and Telling Stories;
Jealous of the fact that you two have got the chance to spend much more time in the past couple years, I embark via this letter. There are some questions and simply a discussion I want to start up with you two here. Considering one of you is in a stately zone (it is after all quite a legal recognition along with other beautiful aspects) and one of you is in a zone where the status quo has been heavily challenged (though probably not so broken after all, or is it only my skepticism?), I do hope we would be able to make another zone for a touch-base, on several things, I feel we might have left at some point in the past years of talking talking talking.

I am currently working on a project where I am trying to tackle the issue of public sculpture. Not as much as what it could or should be, but maybe even more as what it has been and what it is. Recently, Sarah McCrory was telling me that public sculpture is like a tattoo you got in your teens; you might hate or be ashamed of it at your current age, but it still is a relatively permanent mark or representation of what you were, or wanted to be/have. You may choose to erase or destroy it, or leave it there, or learn to live with it in a sense. Far from a teenage night-ending-at-the-wrong-tattoo-parlor, this project is in Utrecht, where, as you’ll see from the map attached, the skin of the city resembles that of an L.A. veteran gang member’s, or a Russian Mafia henchman’s at best (I was just reading this story of a 7-year murder case being solved through a body-mug-shot record of a gang member http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-tattoo-20110422,0,1399043.story).

Obviously one of you worked a lot with this notion of commemoration, and the memorial or the monument (they are one and the same in Turkish Anit, I guess also in Denkmal? Not sure). And there is a clear line between monuments and public sculptures, but I personally don’t know where in the actuality of encountering a sculpture (or having to live with it) that line is drawn, or whether such a line is ever drawn. Robert Musil, in his clearly pre-WWII essay, indicates how invisible monuments are, or rather how they erase the history or memory of the things and people they were set to commemorate. Another Robert, Smithson, in a clearly post-WWII essay says that “Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future.”

Of course neither of them are referring to the same things as I am when I say public sculptures and monuments, but in a sense they also talk about the same thing: the idea of a monument. Jorge Pardo, in a clearly ’90s twist, made this analogy between cinema (“going to the
Fig.1 Google Map of Public artworks and monuments in the city of Utrecht, Gemeente Utrecht.
Fig. 2 Can Altay, *Proposal for Trainee Monument*, 2008.
movies” to be precise) and a monumental experience. A monumen-
tal experience for him is what involves a ceremonial, submissive ac-
tion that functions by means of a continual return. I have previously
tried to tackle this by making proposals for two monuments (Trainee
Monument in Liverpool and Pigeon Monument in Cairo). These were
both an attempt at traversing the relation of a certain audience (who
become subjects to the monument) to their subject (I think a fetish
object, just by being that, becomes a subject). Both were proposals to
do this via repeating that submissive, ceremonial action that involves
a continual return, but ending up with a glorious mess for the public,
as well as a stripping away of the desire and dominance (in the case
of pigeons) and addiction (in both cases) for those more defined and
definitive subjects. At the same time they celebrate the enthusiasm
that allows intense and shared zones for its enthusiasts. Temporary,
possibly Autonomous, Zones.

Here, perhaps the late ’90s and early ’00s attitude still poses some
significant questions. By this I mean projects that range from Olafur
Eliasson’s Green River, to the monuments of Thomas Hirschhorn
(Spinoza, Bataille, et al.). Regarding the Utrecht context, there is a
recent Manfred Pernice project worth checking out. This is Roulette,
where he built rails inside a roundabout; on the rails were concrete
pedestals (designed by Pernice, looking not unlike his many sculp-
tures), and periodically selections of ‘public sculptures’ from around
the city were placed on these pedestals as different constellations,
until through time the compositions get reconfigured to the degree
that it is more or less only the pedestals that remain – now stacked –
becoming the sculpture they are, along with the transformed context
of the roundabout (as it is located in relation to newly built suburbs).
Or how could one not mention the wonderful Clegg & Guttmann take
on public sculpture (Monument for Historical Change - Fragments from
the Basement of History, 2004) in Berlin, just in front of Bar Drei, did I
first see it when we were thrown out from there? It is a monument that
brings together elements from five historical monuments to reach its
form.

Then jumping from this ‘being subject’ towards ‘being subjected to’,
we can perhaps talk about sculptures in public, on the one hand how
they end up there (placing) and on the other how they get to live with
the city infrastructure and the people end up getting to live with them.
My position here is not that of questioning the processes of imposi-
tion or autonomies or oppression or suppression, but more the ‘what
happens’ part of the story of sculptures and monuments in cities.
There is that frequently used Latour phrase of the thing calling for assembly, which is quite inspirational, which the singular object might claim. But there is also all of this abundance of objects and things, themselves forming an assembly.

There are potential narratives of embrace or clashing, ranging from random encounters, to birds shitting on them; from a ceremonial respect to a total refusal or dismissal. These are all simultaneously there. There is the politics of the sculpture, of the making and placing both by the artists and the ‘officials in charge’. And alongside that, there is a territorial marcation at stake (marking, tattooing), especially in a city like Utrecht (which is partly what I am looking at with this project) of how the collection of these sculptures draw boundaries, through time; or similarly how they pierce certain parts of the skin in certain timeframes. After all, no one can claim public art to be innocent; it is clearly the most charged-up even in its most naive form. No one can claim the outcomes to be powerless either, however their relation to concepts and acts of participation is quite limited: the objects themselves participate or maybe comply to political realities and forms of their moments of formation (and ‘placing’), and usually the others (people and living things) need to adhere and adapt to them. So while we are trying to wake up, we might be waking up to another nightmare, or giving up on a dream-state a bit too soon.

I called the project **COHAB: an assembly of spare parts. Cohab** I thought sounding like rehab, but referring to the cohabitation that is for me a fundamental political problem, not just some celebration of having to adhere or adapt. But now, cohabitation is also touching this ‘living with’ sculptures, and the assembly refers to everything that constantly makes up the city or is made up in the process, but also those spare parts like us, like people, or like the sculptures that might also call for and create further assemblies. Or be assembled and re-assembled in different ways, maybe a bit like the tattoos merging and forming shapes and occupying skins and telling stories. So I guess there is some ‘healing’ involved, but some ‘hurting’ too.
Fig. 3 Manfred Pernice, *Roulette*, 2006-2009. Courtesy the artist.
Fig. 4 Clegg & Guttman, Monument for Historical Change - Fragments from the Basement of History, 2004, Courtesy the artists.
JULIA MORITZ

NOTES ON INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE IN SPACES OF CONFLICT

Insisting on It; Perhaps Institutional Critique Is Itself a Question?; The Transnationalization of Institutional Space; Wherever Territorial and Capitalistic Logics Intersect; Opaque or Transparent Criticality; The Only Abnormality in the Fairly Average Town; A Notion of the Political to the Idyllic; Post-Participatory Empowerment of the Community; The Monumental Notion; Created and Dismantled under Global Capitalism;
Whatever happened to Institutional Critique? – James Meyer posed this question in his catalogue essay for an exhibition at American Fine Arts in 1993. Some 18 years later, I am quoting this question, reiterating it, insisting on it. Perhaps Institutional Critique is itself a question – a question mark hovering above the institutions of art, pressing to expose its conflictual conditions?

The institution responds: Over the years and decades, it has adapted its surfaces so as to accommodate the questions. Today, what is known as Institutional Critique faces an ever more inclusive institutional surrounding. The ‘art world’ has expanded not only in terms of multiplying presentation formats, diverse financial support, or the range of artistic and curatorial content, but also in terms of its geographical reach. We are witnessing an increasingly transnational institutional space. And the patterns of circulation contribute as much to the meaning of an artwork, as its content and form.

How do contemporary artistic projects address the transnationalization of institutional space? In order to tackle the geographical dissemination, culturally contingent perception and political renegotiation of art, we have to turn the question of Institutional Critique towards itself: Maintaining its friction and furthering its inquiry, we sharpen our understanding of art and its institutions in geographical places undergoing profound political change and social struggle. These contradictory spaces, I believe, are the new challenge of ‘institutional criticality’.

If questioning, interrogating, destabilizing are among the methodologies at stake, what do these tell us about the object of Institutional Critique? Clearly it must assess a measurable degree of stability. And in fact both of the two current conceptions of the institution seem to agree on this point: institutionalization hinges upon the capacity to affix, control, and naturalize. Michel Foucault’s notion of the institution entailed an all-encompassing disciplinary mechanism that serves particular political purposes of governance. By contrast, Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the social structure of the institution as it manages a certain civic function.

How can the methodologies applied by Institutional Critique be measured according to this distinction? Let’s examine with the old metaphorical couple of knowledge and light – opaque and transparent criticality. As any typology this aims to simplify. The project of transparency seeks to shed explanatory light onto an object. Its inves-
tigatory analysis involves the factual, an earnest endeavor of research and display. Thus, translucent criticality ultimately makes truth claims. Opacity by contrast is a quality of impenetrability, the tactic of obstructing the distinguishing qualities of light while rearranging the place of the other from within. Applying techniques such as mimicry, masquerade or camouflage, opaque criticality thus constitutes a rather poetical practice.

Both of these are powerful models of course. They can be evaluated only with regard to the specific context of critique. Under the rubric of site-specificity, Miwon Kwon has critically discussed the project-based practices of recent artistic positions: she notes that a comparatively small group of artists now travels certain parts of the world in order to deconstruct particular institutional settings – however, their capacity for critical contextualization is corrupted by the lack of time, tight budgets and the different levels of participation found at each location. What constitutes the scarcity of these resources?

A “New Imperialism”, David Harvey claims “arises out of a dialectical relation between territorial and capitalistic logics of power... Each logic throws up contradictions that have to be contained by the other... A basis is here created for uneven geographical developments, geopolitical struggles, and different forms of imperialist politics.” These conflicts are not necessarily elsewhere. The spaces of the new imperialism are scattered all over our transnationalized map. Thus wherever territorial and capitalistic logics intersect to produce their vital asymmetries, artistic practices counter the institutional formations with the specific tactics of opaque or transparent criticality.

Let’s look at an example: When Alfredo Jaar conceived his first piece, the Studies of Happiness, in NineteenEighty for the streets of Santiago, the space of conflict was a very concrete one: It was the urban space of Chile under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, and free speech was greeted with disappearances. Under these conditions Jaar’s dicey homage to Hans Haacke’s ‘MoMA Poll’ of 1970 was inevitably tinged with doubts regarding the possibilities of transparency. When he, two decades later, decided to participate in the public art exhibition ‘Public Safety’ this skepticism continued to resonate – but mingled with a curiosity about the far-off place, the Southern Swedish town of Skoghall.
The only abnormality in the fairly average town was the absence of any exhibition venue – the proposal for a space housing the Skoghall Konsthall was born. With the help of the Skoghall cultural council, Jaar successfully raised the material and financial resources from the mill – the Konsthall could be planned and built completely out of paper from the local paper mill. Simultaneously, Jaar curated the first exhibition to be held there. It featured 15 emerging Swedish artists and was dedicated to the art of paper.

When the Konsthall was inaugurated in 2000 the entire local community gathered on this sunny Saturday for the festive event. Exactly 24 hours later, a fireman accompanied by the artist set the paper pavilion on fire. Despite the protest of the Skoghall people, the fragile structure and exhibition spectacularly burned down in only a few minutes – as was planned with the fire officials beforehand. But the story doesn’t end here. A debate scrutinizing the necessity of an art institution for the small community was sparked – and productively so: the city council agreed on planning a new permanent Konsthall. Not surprisingly, the architect is Alfredo Jaar.

Now, what does that tell us about the transnational challenge of Institutional Critique? One of the reasons why I believe this project is a productive example of institutional criticism that negotiates its own transnational condition is Jaar's awareness of how the fundamental negation of oppositionality introduces a notion of the political to the idyllic town of Skoghall that can be defined as antagonistic – in the well-known terms of Chantal Mouffe. His contribution to Public Safety thus points towards the inconsistencies of the commissioning community, instigating a public art exhibition where no space was ever claimed for the presentation proper of art. But by reflecting the potentialities of an outsider position, Jaar also hints beyond the boundaries of the Southern Swedish town and towards the function of the art institution as a space of exoticist projections.

Choosing the loaded sign of fire, Jaar opens a dense symbolic field reaching from the provocative notion of the burning public sphere to the ambiguous ritual of public burnings. The immolation of the structure produced and donated by the paper mill, the town’s economic and societal soul, also bears an uncanny resemblance to the Swedes’ primeval right to sacrifice the king. In its industrialized context, such as the paper mill town, Jaar's project derives its institution-critical relevance from the linkage of ethnographical reference – such as the
dialectics of worship and waste in sacrifice – to an artistic critique of authority in the contradictory context of late-capitalism.

The art institution as sacrificial object? I take it as a call to reconsidering the anthropological dimensions of institutional criticism, but also of the transformations that these institutions have experienced under neo-liberalism. Rapidly transgressing material boundaries and annihilating values in a glimpse of an eye, the burning Skoghall Konsthall offers an absence where a presence should be invoked. The cherished vernacular of paper that enabled identification from the community was suddenly experienced as loss, its void – as with any other successful sacrifice – to be filled with the hypertrophy of the self: a post-participatory empowerment of the community that is possible only after the self-sacrifice of the conventional concept of the monumental notion of the institution, the very object of Institutional Critique.

Only by immaterializing the cautiously materialized piece can he convert it into the fragile materialization of an actual cultural institution – he question whether to critique the material manifestations of the institution or the immaterial institutional realm, can thus not be a simple one of either-or. Jaar exposes the precariousness of the institution and creates an awareness of the way institutional bodies are constantly created and dismantled under global capitalism. In this regard, the destruction of the Skoghall Konsthall anticipates actual institutional demolitions in the region, such as the Copenhagen Youth House, that (in 2007) led to fire in the streets of Nørrebro in return.

So what has happened to Institutional Critique in Spaces of Conflict? The conditions of uneven geographical development can be productively exposed wherever the logics of territorial and capitalistic power intertwine. ‘Spaces of conflict’ are still mainly ‘conflicts of space’. They involve the representation and thus appropriation of value. The various tactics of opacity and transparency employed have generated complementary modes of institutional criticism that call for further analysis of the spaces of aesthetic display that actively engages the renegotiation of transnational institutional space.

By reconfiguring the concept Institutional Critique towards a geopolitical self-positioning of its artistic practices and hosting institutions we can grasp the impact of social struggle and political change for the very institution of art, and beyond.
“dear markus and nina, first of all thanks for your patience with my contribution. what struck me particularly is our shared attempt of actually operationalizing mouffian political theory and rogoff’s epistemological claim of criticality. drawing from similar mentors and intellectual contexts, it seems these are the stakes of something like ‘our generation’. yet our methodologies are different – and that’s great, because i think they quite complement each other. so what i want to share with you with regard to the postscript to your thesis on participation is actually a prologue to my own thesis on institutional critique and transnationalization. the complementary view here is the one of contemporary art history, an art history that no longer relies on the textualization and thus flattening of everything in order to ‘read’ things as an image, but an ‘art history after new art history’ that productively incorporates spatial discourse towards a ‘geography of art’ with its full geopolitical implications. in a paper at the whitney museum of american art independent studies program conference i have tried to grapple with that methodology. for your book – and inspired by the nOffice manifesto – i experimented with compiling these thoughts into some sort of a fragmentary notepad. let me know if it makes sense. warmly, julia.”


A SHORT PLAN FOR ART INSTITUTIONS POST-PARTICIPATION

Asked To Act Differently; The Formal Constitution of a Viewing Public; Staging Public Democracy; They Offer More of the Same; A Specific Part to Play; Taking Participation Literally; Everyone; Become a Literal Viewer; Scale Up; Dismiss the Objects; Retrain;
The Problem

1

a. Institutions for the arts are changing in form and content, mixing together acts of looking with other experiential methods, in the name of participation.

b. Viewers, once ascribed a relatively steadfast role in the formal hierarchies of the gallery or museum, are now often asked to act differently; to sit, stand, read, eat, move in ways that, superficially, disperse viewing.

c. This dispersal, enacted at various scales and in various densities, is claimed for a new politics – one in which the quasi-disappearance of the author is supposed to clear the way for the emancipation of the viewing subject.

d. But, the subject-object relationship, however dissipated, is not broken. This is largely due to the contradictory relation between the institutional remit of participation within its cultural economic framework, one that is reliant upon – creative of – the formal constitution of a viewing public.

2

a. The construction of a viewing public has a specific democratic history. It is part of democracy. It constitutes the aesthetic and cultural-psychological framework of democracy. A public is necessary on a formal basis to enable systems of democracy to be instated, in the gallery as elsewhere. The public, as the unnamed collective of people, have rights that are determined by their publicness, their identity as viewers of art as of any aesthetico-political scene. The art public is thus a micro-performative embodiment of the public at large. It is, in particular, subservient to public’s regulatory structures.

b. Public art institutions have these functions of staging public democracy (this is both public art and Public Art, inside the gallery or around its locale, etc.)

c. The dissipation of viewing described above, in which in art galleries viewers are asked to act differently, is an extension rather than a rejection on the part of artists and audiences of this staging. In encouraging participation museums and galleries do not offer an alternative, they offer more of the same.

d. Thus, rather than a radical critique of the artwork-viewer, subject-object relation, the fact of participation and engagement in a
Robert Morris,
*Bodyspacemotionthings*,
gallery is a further governmentalisation of democratic hierarchies. The subject is still reminded that she has a specific part to play.

3

This extension of democracy’s governmentalisation through visual culture marks a recognition, perhaps slow, on the part of art institutions, that forms of governance are in themselves changing under the general rubric of liberal democracy. As patterns of work and leisure change, as the temporal-spatial commitments that governed our grandparents’ lives are no longer viably upheld in distributed and immaterial work patterns, so our institutions catch up by providing equally dispersed formats of artistic and curatorial invention. It is thus not simply artists but also institutions that are at the vanguard of this new invention. They provide the spatial coordinates in which we learn new forms of public acting, these meted out to us in the shape of self-reliant, capacity building, choice-heavy relational and networked production.

The Plan:

1 Overdo it.

The logic of current practices of participation in art and its institutions (indeed all forms that use the mode of participatory exhibitionism to variously publicise their wares) moves inexorably towards extinction. This entropy is based on the logical outcome of the continued enhancement and sustenance of participation as both an artistic and political tool within galleries, museums and other specific sites of artistic production. The logic of the production of participation in all fields renders inevitable the eventual destruction of the boundaries that divide any institution from that which is outside its walls, inside from outside. As Debord and Baudrillard proposed, all will be unidentifiable spectacle. As everyone participates, scale and density become immeasurable. If eventually everybody participates there will be no distinction. This would mean taking participation literally in order to render it complete.

2 Everyone an Artist.

3 Everyone an Audience.
March against the higher education cuts, London, November 2010.
As Rancière says, make the subject-object relation indistinct by embracing subjectivity completely. Don’t become an object, don’t get rid of yourself. Become a literal viewer.

4 Scale Up.

Work together at such a large scale that the boundaries of the institution disappear. Really be a Big Society. Take seriously the super-size institution as an opportunity for new legal and fiscal policy making in art and all it touches. Become a Special Economic Zone. Give your institution-state new tax regulations and new border policies. Reinvent economic structures and repurpose democracy, etc.

5 Remove/Refuse the Evidence.

In participation art, as in participatory (in name) democracy, the evidential relation always must remain. The sign of democracy is in the shape and form of an object or an image. Remove the artful staging from the social proposition. Take your participation seriously and dismiss the objects.

6 Retrain.

For how might we continue to hold together the contradiction between the dissolution of the spectator in the name of participation and its shoring up in the name of art’s (cultural, ontological and fiscal) economy?

It is to be noted that the problem is longer and better set out than the plan. With help perhaps I could make the plan longer than the problem.
NIKOLAUS HIRSCH, MICHEL MULLER, CYBERMOHALLA ENSEMBLE

WHEN SOMETHING EXPANDS, IT EATS INTO SOMETHING ELSE

The Temporary and the Permanent as Non-Oppositions; To Produce a Sense of Speculation; So that She or He Thinks of the 'How' Question, Not 'What' or 'Where'; Extend Upwards and Sideways and Continue To Be in Making; Content Will Not Come into It to Come to a Standstill; The Double Tension in Expansion; Adoption/Adaption;
Cybermohalla, a word that updates the Hindi and Urdu ‘mohalla’, meaning ‘neighborhood’, is a network of young researcher-practitioners who work out of self-administered media labs and studios in different urban neighborhoods in Delhi, and was set up by Sarai-CSDS and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education. Since 2001 close to 450 young people have constituted the Cybermohalla network. Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller and the Cybermohalla Ensemble have been collaborating on the Cybermohalla Hub in Delhi since 2007. The following conversation between Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller, Jeebesh Bagchi and the Cybermohalla Ensemble took place at Sarai in Delhi, 2010.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: How can we continue our work on the Cybermohalla Hub? After years of collaborative workshops, discussions, and writing we have built a number of prototypes in museums and biennials around the world, but in Delhi we are still negotiating with the MCD, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, about the construction of the Cybermohalla Hub on a 3 x 6 meter parcel on the north-western periphery of the megacity. Should we give up the aim for consolidated structure and expand the temporary condition which we are already in? Can we think of the temporary and the permanent as non-oppositions, but as one thing in different conditions? Can we work out a movement between the two?

AZRA TABASSUM: We could do something which keeps a doubt between the real and the imagined, a way so that when one sees the Hub and what is in it, one is in doubt about whether it really exists somewhere, or is it an imagination of a place.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: To produce a sense of speculation, which is also what the Hub is: a proposal, a speculation.

LOVE ANAND: Cybermohalla practices are often ‘incomplete’. They are not self-concluding. For instance, even when we make a print publication like a broadsheet, we leave in it an invitation to write, or to converse further about something. It’s the same with the texts we write – they are not conclusions of a thought, but rather give a sense of something ongoing. Similarly, the versions of the Hub can become hosts for others to be in practice, not the conclusion of a process of the making of something. Spaces for our and for others’ continuing adhyayan (thinking and investigating over a long duration). So that when one encounters any version of the Hub, she or he thinks of the ‘how’ question, not ‘what’ or ‘where’.
NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: The Hub could be continuously changing and evolving. Even after its construction it could extend upwards and sideways and continue to be in making.

LOVE ANAND: We could incorporate the travel of the building, from one location to another, from one version to the other, into the space of the building. A weaving together of ‘living’ and ‘moving’. When something expands, it expands into something else.

MICHEL MÜLLER: Also, we have been thinking that we would like all of us to make the building with the artisans who will build it.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: There are ideas from the beginning of our work which are coming back. Initially we had wanted the building to become part of the group’s practice itself, so that it can slowly grow over time with the practitioners making it according to how they want it to grow. Then we realized a certain distribution of labor. Certain types of work, such as foundation work, structural parts and infrastructure require professionals – and other parts allow for a collaborative production.

AZRA TABASSUM: When space is built together, and with the conception that it will expand in all directions, it also implies that content will not come into it to come to a standstill. Instead it will come in to always remain in movement.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: How would we keep things moving? It seems as if we do not want the project to be finished – so how can we continue? By constantly constructing, changing and expanding?

AZRA TABASSUM: Expansion always comes with its contradiction. There is a saying in LNJP (a squatter settlement in Delhi): Expansion is always expansion into something else. So when something expands, it eats into something else, and there is a continuous tension. But inside, there is another saying: break the wall and take the space in. This is the double tension in expansion. So it will be interesting if the Hub creates a different ambiance, where seeing this expandable building, people say instead, “Yes, expand! Expand into my space.” Expansion then becomes an invitation into something, a movement.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: The idea of expansion and of its necessary contradictions and conflicts seems to imply the temporariness of a pavilion.
JEEBESH BAGCHI: This is also why a pavilion/prototype is important. Movement and expansion can be done only if we are making a pavilion/prototype. It would be very difficult to do this in a permanent situation.

LOVE ANAND: This way our sense of the building will be like how we sense our body – where can we put weight, how much weight can we take, how much we can stretch, which part is strong, which is weak etc.

JEEBESH BAGCHI: So the pavilion/prototype also becomes a workshop-like situation to make and think the building.

LAKHMI KOLLI: This building is neither a home nor a shop. It is neither selling anything nor is it a place to reside in. So the way this place builds will be important – people will draw possibilities from it into the spaces they build. The Hub can produce thought for incorporating elements of how space gets built into our lives. Secondly, this experimentation in the present tense – that is, always being in the making – to which we all contribute, also allows for thought on how we build. The Hub gives clarity and an image to this thought and how it can be brought into a building. It allows us to think of the act of building in interesting ways. Connectivity between the different padaaw steps/stages of the Hub’s construction can become more possible in this way.

When I was making the first floor of my house, I wanted a structure like the Stockholm version of the Hub on one of my walls. When I told the mason this, he replied, “Oh, so you want a cupboard”. I clarified that no, the different boxes/shelves are of different sizes. He said, “But it will look cluttered then. It will crowd the room, feel too close to you.” But that was exactly my argument – that I don’t want a wall, don’t want a separation from the outside; rather I want an extension into the world. I also wanted different things on this wall to be in a connection with each other, which this kind of a structure makes possible.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: The structure is actually a masonry technique that allows for a geometrically flexible model. It functions like a 3-D wall paper.

MICHEL MULLER: If the seize of the material changes, the structure changes too.
NIKOLAUS HIRSCH: It can adapt to changing geometries and materials, adapting and exposing the conflict between structure, use and display.

LOVE ANAND: I am also thinking of the idea of adoption/adaption. Supposing the Hub, after it is made, is given to three older women from, say, from my neighborhood, for a week, will they make a home out of it, or something else? That is, if they adopt it for a week, how will they adapt it?

BABLI RAI: If the Hub is made like it is being proposed, it will break the idea of how a building is made and also get incorporated into the daily act of making and building in different neighborhoods. There is no separation here between making and inhabiting.

LOVE ANAND: The non-recognizability of the hub is the first thing, and is very crucial. Because it is non-recognizable, the question we have is not of the building as outside and content as inside.
NOTES ON
COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTION

Art Quantity and Quality Are Not Reducible to Each Other like That; The Freedom to Speak with One Voice and with Many; To Keep the Repertoire of Practical Possibilities Expanded; Messianic Authority; 'We' Wants; Pragmatism Helps; Oedipal Transference; Interpreting the Father; Anxious Productivity; The Force of a Multitude of Individual Obsessions; To Disappoint; To Introduce a New Family Member; To Channel Collective Energies towards an Enjoyment;
The decision to collaborate with others is not a moral but a practical choice. For instance, for a musician to play in a band is first of all a practical possibility rather than a moral issue.

A work produced by one person can speak with (and for) a multitude of voices, just as a group can speak with one voice. Just because there are many, or just one, doesn’t mean you have a multitude or solely an individual. In art quantity and quality are not reducible to each other like that. A higher headcount won’t necessarily give you true polyphony. Any ideological agenda that promotes group production as being inherently different or morally superior denies this basic fact, and therefore usually looses track of everything that is artistic (i.e. fun, engaging, provocative, transformative) about art production, be it solitary or collective. So if there is a quality to be defended, it lies in the freedom to speak with one voice and with many, by oneself and with others, in constellations that become engaging not because they are morally justified, but because they are possible in and relevant for a particular situation – and make life a little more complicated but better in that situation.

However, to realize the practical possibility of working with others today – and to insist on this possibility still being practically viable – does have strong political implications. In the fields of art, music and literature alike the growing demand to professionalize one’s creative practice has not only increased the pressure on the individual to deliver a clearly branded, readily recognizable product, it has also established the role model of the solitary performer as the professional norm. It’s ironic: for a musician to record and perform music, by oneself, using little more than a personal computer, originally implied the freedom to own the means of production and travel easily. Now that this working model has become the norm today, to get someone (a venue, label etc.) to pay for an entire collective to record, perform, travel and live what they do has become progressively more difficult. Believing that we are free to work alone, we tend to overlook the fact that working by oneself is the only option the existing systems of support are still prepared to accommodate. In order to keep the repertoire of practical possibilities broader, it is therefore crucial to (publicly) remind the people who provide support that collective production can still be (and is) a working mode of choice, if this avenue is not to be closed down for good.
So, to power down one’s own equipment once in a while and for a time go and produce in a space where the conditions of production are created, maintained and shared by different people – in terms of a politics of profession – is a political act of reclaiming and sustaining an expanded sense of practical possibilities.

Moreover, attempts to produce collaboratively inevitably touch on the heart of what makes up the experience of the political, quite simply because in them the question of how authority is to be handled within a group of people is always a pressing question. It has to be faced if things are not going to go pear-shaped quickly.

People still like to invoke the utopian notion that a collective can form and act spontaneously, without any need to organize itself around structures of authority. To propagate this ideal, however, practically only means to project the belief in a messianic authority onto the group as a collective subject, rather than on an individual. Experience shows that the force of authority that is thereby temporarily displaced onto the level of shared imagination – “we are the ones” – will sooner or later reappear in re-personalized form in the guise of one or several people in the group contending over who is to say what the ‘we’ wants. Ironically, it usually tends to be the person who initially claimed the power to make the entire group feel like it could embody the messianic promise, who in the end will be the last man standing, effectively reclaiming leadership while denying its existence.

A helpful means of countering the messianic imagination (in all its forms) is to formalize structures of authority in the most pragmatic manner possible. The authority to initiate and terminate a meeting, as well as the task of moderating a discussion and getting people to not just speak but also listen to each other, should be clearly defined as an operative function which someone receives the mandate to embody and execute, in the role of a master of ceremonies or maitre de plaisir. It should then be understood – both by the group who authorizes that mandate as well as by the person who receives it – that the power thereby bestowed on the moderator is only structural, and that the act of bestowing it on someone is solely indicative of the group’s acknowledgement that some such structure should exist, so that the need for messianic, charismatic forms of embodying this power position is suspended. Pragmatism helps to protect basic operative structures from being charged with psychological projections.
To structure authority in a pragmatic fashion however demands considerable self-discipline from everyone involved in the process. Ironically, the likelihood of a collective cooperating together on this level tends to be greater, not smaller, when those who get together are sovereign individuals in their own right, who don’t look for someone to embody power for them, on their behalf, because they know how to do so for themselves and are therefore able to easily relinquish their power position when a pragmatic arrangement permits them to.

Unfortunately, the default mode that groups tend to fall back on when they seek to determine their desires and focus their energies, is that of oedipal transference: to this end, one member of the group is singled out as a father figure. Most often that person has already been designated for this position as such by virtue of the rank (e.g. the project leader or initiator) assigned to him or her within the given institutional framework. In singling out the father figure the group confers upon that person the task of incorporating the general demand for them to be someone and do something. The question what a general audience may expect from the group is thereby transformed into the question what the father figure might want from them. Ostensibly, this makes addressing the question easier. Instead of speculating on the nature of an as yet disembodied demand from future audiences, one can proceed to observe and interpret the actions and reactions of one person only – the designated father figure.

In interpreting the father, the members of the group will, individually or by gossiping among themselves, seek to find out not only what they may be expected to do, but very much also what the standards may be by which they will be judged. The primary force at the heart of the group’s dynamic is then the desire to read the father and figure out what it means to please him – or revolt against him. The energies that the group subsequently generates are strictly contingent on (and constrained within) the constant interpretation of its own workings.

Traditional forms of charismatic tyrannical leadership in the field of ensemble production, in theater and cinema (from Brecht to Fassbinder), rely heavily on this model of oedipal transference. (But it has equally been taken up as a contemporary management technique in purportedly ‘flexibilized’ dynamic working environments.) Traditionally, too, the most insidiously effective strategy to enhance the productivity of a group fixated on interpreting the desire of the father figure, is for that father figure to create an
atmosphere of permanent insecurity. The cruel logic behind this strategy is fairly simple: people who understand what is expected of them are very likely only to deliver just that; they will play it safe, do their jobs, nothing more. People who are perpetually unsure, however, about what will please the authority figure – and what won’t – will remain anxious enough to keep trying out ever new ways of determining and satisfying the opaque demand. A charismatic tyrannical leader who seeks to elicit this kind of anxious productivity (and prevent people from revolting against something they could identify as a clear target) will therefore do all he can to remain difficult to read, for instance by being purposefully inconsistent in the manner in which he rewards and/or criticizes the members of the ensemble, i.e. by picking favorites one moment, only to drop them or cut them down in front of everyone the next moment. This working model can create strong loyalties because everyone involved takes the same journey through hell together, including the authority figure who orchestrates the experience through relentlessly manipulating every single person in the ensemble. (A director like Fassbinder arguably exploited himself as much as everybody else on the cast of his films). Yet, while a strong co-dependency therefore exists between the manipulator and the manipulated, in the end the neurotic machinery of the ensemble is steered by one director and therefore first of all boosts the career of that director. Dependent as single authority figures may be on the collective energies they channel, to leave one setting and move on to another institution tends to be easier for them, because their name and signature opens the doors for them and permits them to recreate similar working conditions in different places.

Without doubt, forms of charismatic tyrannical leadership can unleash incredible dynamics within an ensemble. For anyone, however, who still believes in emancipation as a goal of artistic production, the oedipal model is the worst possible option. In rejecting this model, the internal channeling of a group’s energy through one authority figure therefore has to be counteracted at all cost. Instead, one needs to work towards a situation where every single member in the group recognizes the (outside) demand to be someone and do something as something they need to face directly, on their own terms, and as a group, without prior mediation via the medium of the internal authority figure. Literally, it means for everyone involved to take responsibility for their own desire (instead of transferring that responsibility onto the person in charge).
To facilitate such a process of emancipation is one of the hardest things to do, not least because, again, ironically, the facilitators, by virtue of their central role in shaping the group, will most likely be the ones to be dragged back into precisely the position of the representatives (of outside demands and internal desires) that they seek to abolish.

However, in moments when a group emancipates itself and faces the public without the intermediary of a central authority figure, and performs with the force of a multitude of individual obsessions projected outwards from the multiple hearts of a headless neurotic machine, the outcome is radically liberating: it’s the sheer fun of weird gods at play [e.g. divine moments in the Muppet Show, Monty Python’s Flying Circus, The Selecter performing live...]

On the road to an emancipated collective, the task of interrupting the processes of transference and preventing the establishment of an authority figure as the medium for the group’s self-interpretation may paradoxically, however, end up being the first challenge that the person otherwise designated as the authority figure will have to actively take on. In practice, the first unavoidable step to take is to disappoint the expectations of a group that you should embody the outside expectations for them. To disappoint here means to neither judge nor pick favorites, but to insist on just playing the moderator who deflects and reflects the question “What is desired here? What do we really really want?” back to the group, simply by raising it, again and again and again... The success of that disappointment can only be measured in terms of how complicated it is to recover from it, for people do hold it against a designated authority figure if that figure uses the mandate only to renounce it.

Moreover, a good way to interrupt the cycle of oedipal projection and transference is to diffuse the family logic at the bottom of this process. One way to do so is to introduce a new family member who doesn’t fit into the binary parent/child pattern, let’s say the equivalent of the Scottish gay uncle who suddenly appears at the wedding (as in Four Weddings and a Funeral), or the shamelessly honest grandmother who unapologetically says and does what she wants (as in Dostoevsky’s The Gambler). Such characters then form a third party that operates outside the binary system defined by expectations and the anxiety to interpret and fulfill them. Those from whom no one expects anything are in a unique position to channel collective energies towards an enjoyment that bypasses and exceeds the moral economy of oppressive demands
and guilty attempts to fulfill them. To bond with them and let oneself be inspired by the pleasures they take to do the same, is to enter into a relation that is not governed by the oedipal contract. The one who invites the (equivalent of the) gay uncle or anarchist Granny may still end up in the (bad cop) position of the moderator who must disappoint. Still, the divine fun to be had for all with Granny and the uncle tends to be ample compensation for that. In other words: if all else fails, bring in friends with strange habits. If people won’t play with you, because you were appointed the role of the facilitator of the game, they may still happily go out and play with someone who has no appointed role whatsoever, and then everybody can have a ball. Experience shows that it’s totally worth the experiment!
Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation

Biographies
AKADEMIE C/O

Akademie c/o is a public seminar dealing with questions of spatial production in the Berliner Republik. Spatial production is not perceived here as then addition of aesthetic, economic and constructive elements, but as “giving order to social relations through what is built”. If and when such perspective psychologizes, ideologizes and politically instrumentalizes architecture and spatial production, this is what is intended. Akademie c/o is organized by Arno Brandlhuber, Anna-Catharina Gebbers, Silvan Linden and Christian Posthofen.

CAN ALTAY

Can Altay is an artist living in Istanbul, Turkey. His installations of videos, mappings, books and photographs incorporate different forms of research on the urban environment. Altay studies improvised architectures in the city, as well as hidden structures of support, unauthorized systems of organization and models of co-habitation. He further investigates the production of ideas, and notions of public space through ‘setting a setting’, a body of work where he proposes spaces and constructs for gatherings. The clashes and overlaps between function and meaning, and unpredictable reconfigurations within systems continue to be some of his main interests.

ARNO BRANDLHUBER

Arno Brandlhuber, founder of brandlhuber+ in Berlin. He holds the chair of Architecture and Urban Research at the Academy of Fine Arts, Nuremberg, and directs the Nomadic Masters Program.

FEDERICA BUETI

Federica Bueti was born in Scilla, Italy, in 1982. She lives and works in Berlin. She is an independent writer and curator. Bueti founded and directed the online magazine PIANOmagazine (www.pianomagazine.org), and less/express, commissioned by the American Academy in Rome. She is a founding member and editor-in-chief of ...ment, journal for contemporary culture, art and politics. www.journalment.org. Bueti curated projects including: Wasteful Illuminations, a performance by Tris Vonna-Michell, Marino Marini Museum, Florence; Camere #10 Vocation, RAM, Radio Arte Mobile, Rome, in collaboration with CAC Brétigny/City Museum Lubljiana/De Vleeshal, Middelburg; The Jerusalem Syndrome – Sound Project #1, Al-Ma’mal, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2009, co-curated with Jack Persekian and Nina Möntmann. Bueti has written extensively on contemporary art and related philosophical issues in numerous publications including Surface Tension #4: Manual for the Construction of a sound as device
Angelique Campens is a Belgian-based curator and writer, working for non-profit galleries and public spaces, and one of the correspond-ents for Domus. She was a Whitney Museum of American Art ISP fel-low in New York in 2007-08. Recently she co-curated *based in Berlin*, curated the solo exhibition with Kasper Akhøj at Wiels, Brussels, and she co-curated *Persona in Meno* at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Italy. She was assistant curator for the Belgian Pavilion with the artist Jef Geys for the Venice Biennale 2009. She curated a section in Watou 2009 with Office (Kersten Geers David Van Severen) and Bureau Bas Smets, and co-curated *For Reasons of State* at The Kitchen, New York (2008). Other projects include *Juliaan Lampens* at the Witte Zaal, Ghent, 2009, and *Unknown Pleasures* at the Stadtgalerie, Bern, Switzerland, 2007. She earned her master’s degree in Art History at the University of Ghent.

Eyal Danon is director and head curator of the Israeli Centre for Digital Art, Holon. He curated and co-curated various exhibitions and projects including the *Hilchot Shechnim series*, Liminal Spaces project, *Free Radicals, Weizman Rally*, the *Jessy Cohen* project and more (www.digitalartlab.org.il). He is director and founding member of the AYAM association that operates the project *Autobiography of a City* in Jaffa (www.jaffaproject.org). He is co-editor of the online art, culture and media magazine Maarav (www.maarav.org.il.) and teaches at the Midrasha and Kalisher Schools of Art.

Hu Fang was born in 1970, in China. He is co-founder and artistic director of Vitamin Creative Space in Guangzhou (www.vitamincreativespace.com) and The Pavilion in Beijing (vitamincreativespace.blogspot.com). His daily practice focuses on the process of initiating diverse spatial models through intensive dialogues and collaborations with artists, through the negotiations of independence in the Chinese context in particular, to open up new possibilities of planting ‘species of spaces’ within contemporary art context. He has been involved in various international art projects including Documenta 12 magazines in 2007 as coordinating editor and Yokohama Triennale 2008 as co-curator. Fiction writing is his parallel practice to explore how individuals perceive and try to build up the relation with the world.
His recent novel *Garden of Mirrored Flowers* is co-published by Sternberg Press and Vitamin (www.hufangwrites.com).

**LUIGI FASSI**
Luigi Fassi is the director of ar/ge kunst Galleria Museo in Bolzano, Italy. A 2008-2009 Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York. In 2006 he was curator in residency at NIFCA – Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland. He has organized exhibitions internationally including *Theoretical Practice* at ISCP, New York (2009); *Archaeology of Mind* at the Malmö Konstmuseum, Sweden (2008); and, with Laima Kreivyte, *Baltic Mythologies* for the Third Prague Biennale (2007). His writing has appeared in publications such as Artforum, Domus, Site and Mousse, and he is a co-author of *Time Out of Joint: Recall and Evocation in Recent Art* (Yale University Press, 2009)

**MARK FISHER**
Mark Fisher is the author of *Capitalist Realism* and the editor of *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson* (both Zero, 2009). He writes regularly for Film Quarterly, Frieze, Sight and Sound and The Wire, and he blogs at k-punk.abstractdynamics.org. He teaches at the University of East London, Goldsmiths, University of London and the City Literary Institute, London.

**MARIA FUSCO**
Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer, editor and academic, based in London. *The Mechanical Copula*, her first book of short stories, has recently been published (Sternberg Press, Berlin & New York). Maria is director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London, and is the founder/editor of The Happy Hypocrite (Book Works, London) a semi-annual journal for and about experimental art writing. She devised and organised *Cosey Complex*, a one-day event at the ICA in London, speculating on the possibilities of artists and musician Cosey Fanni Tutti as methodology. She was the inaugural Critic-in-Residence at the Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2008-9) and the inaugural Writer-in-Residence at Whitechapel Gallery, London (2009-10). Maria is currently working on a novel, *Sailor*, about a vervet monkey and a Hi-Power Browning pistol, and on a screenplay with Austrian artist Ursula Mayer for the feature film *Gonda*. www.mariafusco.net

**ANNA-CATHARINA GEBBERS**
Anna-Catharina Gebbers, an independent writer and curator; director and curator of the projectspace Bibliothekswohnung; editor for Polar – magazin für politik, theorie, alltag.
LIAM GILICK
Liam Gillick is an artist based in London and New York. His solo exhibitions include The Wood Way, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2002; A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence, Palais de Tokyo, 2005 and the retrospective project Three Perspectives and a short scenario, Witte de With, Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Zurich and MCA Chicago 2008-2010. A major exhibition of his work opened at the Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in April 2010. In 2006 he co-founded the free art school project uniednationsplaza in Berlin. Liam Gillick has published a number of texts that function in parallel to his artwork. Proxemics (Selected Writings 1988-2006) was published by JRP-Ringier in 2007, alongside the monograph Factories in the Snow by Lilian Haberer (JRP-Ringier). A critical reader titled Meaning Liam Gillick was published by MIT Press (2009). An anthology of his artistic writing titled Allbooks was also published by Book Works, London (2009). In addition he has contributed to many art magazines and journals including Parkett, Frieze, Art Monthly, October and Art Forum. Liam Gillick represented Germany at the Venice Biennale in 2009.

MIKA HANNULA
Mika Hannula, writer, lecturer, curator and critic, lives in Berlin. He is currently professor for artistic research, in the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg. Among his latest publications are: Politics, Identity and Public Space - Critical Reflections In and Through the Practices of Contemporary Art, Expothesis 2009, and Tell It Like It Is - Contemporary Photography and the Lure of the Real, Art Monitor, University of Gothenburg 2011.

STEFAN HEIDENREICH
Stefan Heidenreich was born in 1965 in Biberach/Riss, Germany. He lives in Berlin and works as writer, journalist and theoretician. His books include Was verspricht die Kunst? (The Promises of Art, 1998/paperback 2009), Flipflop. Digitale Kultur (Flipflop. On Digital Culture, 2004) and Mehr Geld (More Money, 2008). He is currently working on the upcoming publication Über Universität (On University, 2011), and teaches at the Architecture Department of the ETH Zürich.

MICHAEL HIRSCH
Michael Hirsch (b. 1966) is a philosopher and political scientist. He lives and works as an independent teacher and writer in Munich. He has taught at various art schools and universities in Germany, and participated in Documenta X (1997) as a member of the Jackson
Pollock Bar (Theory Installations) with the work We Aim to be Amateurs. His publications include: Adorno. Die Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen (The Possibility of the Impossible), German-English, New York/Berlin 2003 (Co-editor); Die zwei Seiten der Entpolitisierung. Zur politischen Theorie der Gegenwart, Stuttgart 2007; Subversion und Widerstand. 10 Thesen über Kunst und Politik, in: Inasethetik Nr. 1 (2009); Der Staat in der Postdemokratie, Stuttgart 2009 (Co-editor); Concrete Utopias of Working in Freedom, in Søren Grammel / Grazer Kunstverein (ed.): The Symbolic Commissioner, New York/Berlin 2010

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH

Nikolaus Hirsch is an architect, and has been the director of the Städelschule and Portikus in Frankfurt since 2010. He has held academic positions at the Architectural Association in London, the Institute for Applied Theater Studies at Gießen University, and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. His work includes the acclaimed Dresden Synagogue, Hinzert Document Center, Bockenheimer Depot Theater (with William Forsythe), Unitednationsplaza (with Anton Vidokle), European Kunsthalle, and numerous structures for exhibitions, such as Bruno Latour's Making Things Public (ZKM) and Indian Highway (Serpentine Gallery). Among his current projects are the Cybermohalla Hub in Delhi and a studio structure for Rirkrit Tiravanija’s The Land. Nikolaus Hirsch has curated ErsatzStadt: Representations of the Urban at Volksbühne Berlin, Cultural Agencies in Istanbul and Time/Bank at the Portikus. He is the author of On Boundaries, Track 17 and Institution Building.

SCHORSCH KAMERUN

Schorsch Kamerun is one of the 14 best people and lives and works in Hamburg and Munich. He is the founder and lead singer of the band Die Goldenen Zitronen and together with Rocko Schamoni runs the renowned Golden Pudel Klub in Hamburg and a theatre music organisation. In the mid-nineties he presented a television series on 3 Sat called Pudel Overnight, that resumed in 2001 with a slightly different format. Schorsch is also an artist in his own right, has produced numerous radio plays for WDR and has staged plays (which he often writes and appears in himself) for the Schauspielhaus Hamburg, the Schauspielhaus Zürich, the Volksbühne Berlin, the Münchner Kammerspiele Munich, the Schauspiel Hannover, the Schauspiel Köln Cologne, Theater Oberhausen, the Thalia Theater, Hamburg, the Ruhrtriennale and the Ruhrfestspiele in the Ruhr, and the Wiener Festwochen Vienna. Recent works (2010) include Abseitsfalle [Offside Trap] (Theater Oberhausen), Vor uns die Sintflut [The Deluge Before
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Us] (Thalia Theater), *Holt mich hier raus (ich bin hier vor der Wand)* [Get Me Out of Here (I'm Here, In Front of the Wall)] (Münchner Kammerspiele). He is a visiting professor at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich (2010/11).

**NINA VALERIE KOLOWRATNIK**

Nina Valerie Kolowratnik is an architect educated at Graz University of Technology and Aalto University in Helsinki. Since 2008 she has been investigating a spatial practice in which the architect interferes in socio-political space as a critical agent, to open up possibilities for change. In the course of this research she has worked with Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti and Eyal Weizman on their project *Decolonizing Architecture (DA)* in Bethlehem and London. Parts of Nina’s thesis, *Kafr ‘Inan – Images of Presence for a Landscape of Absence. A Spatial Re-reading of the Palestinian Refugee Question* (2010) have been exhibited in collaboration with DA at the International Rotterdam Architecture Biennial, the Istanbul Art Biennial, and the University of Exeter in 2009. She is part of the online platform arenaofspeculation.org, an intellectual space of critical debate on the spatial futures of Israel-Palestine. Her most recent articles are published in Graz Architecture Magazine (Springer Wien-NY), darabZINE (Columbia University, NY) and Sedek Magazine (Zochrot, Tel Aviv-Jaffa), all 2011. Currently she is collaborating with Studio Miessen, has been awarded a Fulbright fellowship, and is pursuing the postgraduate program in Critical Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture at Columbia University, NY.

**SILVAN LINDEN**

Silvan Linden, co-founder of Büro für Konstruktivismus in Berlin, editor of *die planung a terv* and a cultural producer in various fields.

**SUHAIL MALIK**

MARKUS MIESSEN

Markus Miessen is an architect and writer. In 2002 he set up Studio Miessen, a collaborative agency for spatial practice and cultural inquiry, and in 2007 he co-founded the London and Berlin-based architectural practice nOffice. In various collaborations, Miessen has published, amongst other titles: *The Nightmare of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2010), *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space* (Sternberg Press, 2009), *East Coast Europe* (Sternberg Press, 2008), *The Violence of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2007), *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices, and Politics in the Middle East* (Bidoun, 2007), *Did Someone Say Participate?* (MIT Press, 2006), and *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Müller+Busmann, 2002). His work has been published and exhibited widely, including at the Lyon, Venice, Performa (NY), Manifesta (Murcia), and Shenzhen Biennials. He has held academic positions at institutions such as the Architectural Association, London (2004–08), the Berlage Institute, Rotterdam (2009–10), the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe (2010-12), HEAD, Geneva (2010-12) and – in October 2011 – will start a new professorship for Critical Spatial Practice at the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main. In 2008, he founded the Winter School Middle East (Dubai/Kuwait). www.studiomiessen.com, www.nOffice.eu, www.winterschoolmiddleeast.org

NINA MÖNTMANN

Nina Möntmann is a curator and Professor of Art Theory and the History of Ideas at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. In 2008/09 she curated the group show *If we can’t get it together. Artists rethinking the (mal)functions of community* (The Power Plant, Toronto, 2008), and in 2009 *The Jerusalem Show: Jerusalem Syndrome* (together with Jack Persekian). As a curator of the New Patrons, the European Platform for an Art of the Civil Society, she is currently curating a project with Harun Farocki in Hamburg. She participated in the long-term Israeli/Palestinian art and research project *Liminal Spaces*, and in 2010 was a research fellow at the Museo de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. Her essays have been published internationally in numerous critical readers and catalogues. Recent publications include the edited volumes *New Communities* (Toronto, Public Books/The Power Plant, 2009) and *Art and Its Institutions* (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

JULIA MORITZ

Julia Moritz is an art historian and curator. Before graduating from Leipzig University she worked at Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig and Kunsthalle Zurich. In 2005 she joined the founding
team of the European Kunsthalle in Cologne, where she co-published *Question of the Day* (with Nicolaus Schafhausen, 2007). Moritz co-organized the German Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale and was Assistant Curator at Manifesta 7 in Fortezza, Italy. As a Critical Studies Fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Studies Program in New York she started her dissertation *Institutional Critique in Spaces of Conflict* that was completed in 2010, publication forthcoming. Her exhibition project *Critical Complicity* (with Lisa Mazza) was shown at Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna and published by Schlebrügge Editor. Currently Moritz lectures in contemporary art history at Lüneburg University, where she is also the curator of the research exhibition *Demanding Supplies* at Kunstraum, the university gallery.

**JAN NAUTA**

Jan Nauta (b. 1982) graduated from the Architectural Association’s Diploma School in 2011, winning the AA Prize. He is the founder (with Scrap Marshall) of the Public Occasion Agency, and independent events bureau. Nauta worked for nOffice in Berlin, designed the Moet technical school in Burkina Faso, and coordinated the Beyond Entropy symposium at the Venice Biennale 2010. At present he works as an architect, writer and organiser.

**MAGNUS NILSSON**

Magnus Nilsson is a registered architect, urban theorist and writer. He is a founding partner of nOffice, a Berlin and London-based practice situated at the crossroads of architecture, art and contemporary discourse. Magnus Nilsson received a Bachelor of Architecture degree with high honours from Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and completed a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University in New York. He has received numerous awards for his work, and the work has been published and exhibited internationally.

**MELANIE O’BRIAN**

Interested in the possibilities of embedded institutional critique, Melanie O’Brien is currently Curator & Head of Programs at The Power Plant, Toronto. From 2004-2010 she was director/curator at Artspeak, Vancouver. O’Brien has organized exhibitions and offsite projects in Vancouver and internationally. She has written extensively and edited numerous publications including *Vancouver Art and Economies* (Arsenal Pulp Press/Artspeak, 2007) and *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism* (Artspeak/Fillip, 2010).
MORTEN PAUL

Morten Paul is currently studying at the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths College, in London. He previously studied German Literature and Philosophy at the University of Konstanz and the National and Kapodestrian University of Athens. Research interests include experimental literature and art, poststructuralist philosophy and history of science. He has published on the German writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and student politics.

DAN PERJOVSCHI


ANDREA PHILLIPS

Andrea Phillips is Reader in Fine Art at the Department of Art, Goldsmiths, University of London, and director of the Doctoral Research Programme. From 2006-2009 she was director of Curating Architecture, a think-tank based in the Art Department that investigated the aesthetic and political relationship between architecture, curating and concepts of public display (www.gold.ac.uk/visual-art/curating-architecture), resulting in an exhibition and publication. Phillips publishes widely in art and architecture journals, artist's monographs and collections on politics, philosophy and contemporary art practice, and speaks internationally on art, architecture, politics, institution-making and publics. Current research projects include the aesthetic formatting of transnational space and its relation to contemporary art, the future and implications of practice-based research, and Building Democracy, a set of publications and discussions that forefront critiques of participation in contemporary art and architecture. Phillips is currently developing a series of international
symposiums for the Dutch Foundation for Public Art, SKOR, and forming a research unit into the Aesthetic and Economic Impact of Contemporary Art, based at Goldsmiths.

**KRISTINA LEE PODESVA**
Kristina Lee Podesva is a Vancouver-based artist, writer, and editor of Fillip. She was the founder of colourschool (2006-2008), a free school dedicated to the speculative and collaborative research of five colours; white, black, red, yellow, and brown. She was also the inaugural artist in residence at the Langara Centre for Art in Public Spaces. Her artwork and writing have appeared in exhibitions, screenings, projects, and publications in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Most recently her work appeared at *No Soul for Sale* at the Tate, London and in the exhibition *Recipes for an Encounter* at the Dorsky Gallery in Long Island City, NY. Her writing has been published in Fillip and Bidoun, as well as in books such as *Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism*, Komma (after Dalton Trumbo’s Johnny Got His Gun), and *100% Vancouver*.

**CHRISTIAN POSTHOFEN**
Christian Posthofen is a philosopher, publisher and bookseller. He is editor of Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek and teaches in the field of applied philosophy.

**PATRICIA REED**
Patricia Reed (b. Ottawa, Canada) is an artist and writer who has participated in several research and residency programs including: CCA Kitakyushu, Japan; Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart; Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada and the CCA Ujazdowski, Warsaw. Her practice reflects on structures of co-habitation, the ways in which we dwell together, and the playing out of disagreement therein. With particular interest in the contingency of systemic ordering, Reed’s work seeks to destabilize reified notions of operability (both actual and symbolic), through artistic and philosophical means. She exhibits internationally, with recent shows at Botkyrka Konsthall, Stockholm; 0047 Projects, Oslo; Limerick Art Gallery, Ireland; Audain Gallery, Vancouver; and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart. As a writer, Reed has contributed numerous publications including: Shifter Magazine, Fillip, Art Papers, C Magazine, Framework: The Finnish Art Review, YYZ Essays, *Cognitive Architecture: From Bio-politics to Noo-politics And The Seasons: They go round and round*. www.aestheticmanagement.com.
DIETER ROELSTRAETE
Dieter Roelstraete is a curator at MuHKA (Antwerp Museum of Contemporary Art) and an editor of Afterall journal. He lives in Berlin.

ASHKAN SEPAHVAND
Ashkan Sepahvand was born in 1984. He has spent a few months in Damascus amongst artists, tourists, and secret agents in a temporarily utopian commune, a summer in Tehran where he fell in love, a year in Beirut where he stared at the sea, thought of comings and goings, someones and no ones, and an autumn in Berlin, collaborating with his dearest friend Natascha on a schoolbook. He and his loved ones search together for places to spend the night, way stations en route between here and there. Currently, he is watching the people, listening for echoes, relaying transmitted signals and sensing that his body provides all the resistance necessary.

MARK VON SCHLEGELL
Mark von Schlegell is author of the science fiction novels Venusia (2005) and Mercury Station (2009) from Semiotext(e), High Wichita (2011) from Matthes & Seitz Verlag, Berlin, and the critical works Realometer (2009) and Dreaming the Mainstream (Fall 2011), from Merve Verlag, Berlin. He writes and publishes regularly in the international art world.

JEREMY TILL
Jeremy Till has been Dean of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster since 2008. His extensive written work includes Flexible Housing (with Tatjana Schneider, Architectural Press 2007) and Architecture Depends (MIT Press 2009), both of which won the RIBA President’s Award for Research. His most recent book is Spatial Agency: other ways of doing architecture, with Nishat Awan and Tatjana Schneider, published by Routledge in summer 2011, with an accompanying website www.spatialagency.net. He is currently leading a major EU research project on scarcity and creativity in the built environment. As an architect, he worked with Sarah Wigglesworth Architects on their pioneering building, 9 Stock Orchard Street (The Straw House and Quilted Office), which has been extensively discussed and won the RIBA Sustainability Prize. In 2006 he curated the British Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale.
EVA TUERKS
After international experience in New York, London and Chicago, Eva Tuerks currently lives and works in Berlin. She works both as an architect and artist. Eva Tuerks received a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, New York, and a Bachelor of Honors at the Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture, Chicago, USA, and visited the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has been internationally exhibited, individually as well as with her practice. She has received numerous awards and her work has been published.

URBAN SUBJECTS
Urban Subjects is a cultural research collective formed in 2004 by Sabine Bitter, Jeff Derksen and Helmut Weber, and based in Vancouver, Canada, and Vienna, Austria. Together they develop interdisciplinary artistic projects focusing on global-urban issues, the texture of cities, and on civic imaginations. They devised and edited the book *Autogestion, or Henri Lefebvre in New Belgrade*, with a previously unpublished manuscript by Lefebvre (Fillip/Sternberg Press, 2009), and collaboratively produced a book with Bik Van der Pol and Alissa Firth-Eagland entitled *Momentarily: Learning from Mega-events* (Western Front, 2011). For WE: Vancouver at the Vancouver Art Gallery they wrote a manifesto concerning the historical endurance of the political imagination of revolution, and a manifesto for the poetry of the future, with geographer Neil Smith. With Cate Rimmer, of the Charles H. Scott Gallery, they are developing an international exhibition on artistic projects related to the urban affects of Olympics and Expos, *Where the World Was: Cities After Global Mega-events*. Currently they are working on a project on new forms of autogestion in relation to the state in Caracas, Venezuela. Urban Subjects do not work on a consensus model.

JAN VERWOERT
Jan Verwoert is a critic and writer on contemporary art and cultural theory, based in Berlin. He is a contributing editor of frieze magazine, and his writing has appeared in various journals, anthologies and monographs. He teaches at the Piet Zwart Institute Rotterdam, the De Appel curatorial program and the Ha’Midrasha School of Art, Tel Aviv. He is the author of *Bas Jan Ader: In Search of the Miraculous* (MIT Press/Afterall Books 2006) and the essay collection *Tell Me What You Want What You Really Really Want* (Sternberg Press/Piet Zwart Institute 2010). He plays bass and sings in La Stampa (Staatsakt/Berlin).
FELIX VOGEL
Felix Vogel is an art historian and curator. He studied art history, media theory and philosophy at the University of Arts and Design Karlsruhe and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Research focuses include garden architecture and the culture of knowledge around 1800, the theory and practice of exhibiting, concepts of authorship, and documentary and historiographical practices in contemporary art and film. Among his most recent curatorial projects are the 4th Bucharest Biennial Handlung. On Producing Possibilities (2010) and The Realism Question at the Rumänska Kulturinstitutet Stockholm (2010). His writings have appeared in various journals, anthologies, catalogues and artist monographs. Vogel taught seminars and workshops at HEAD Genève, Free Academy Bucharest, Universidade de Lisboa and University of Toronto.

ADNAN YILDIZ
Adnan Yildiz is a writer and curator whose major connections are with Istanbul, Stockholm and Berlin. He is the artistic director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart.

PHILLIP ZACH
Phillip Zach (b. 1984) is an artist who currently lives and works in Frankfurt am Main.

WOLFGANG ZINGGL
Wolfgang Zinggl lives in Vienna, Austria, and graduated in art and psychology. During his career he lectured and published at various universities. In 1993 he founded the activist art cooperative WochenKlausur (www.WochenKlausur.at). On invitation from art institutions, WochenKlausur develops concrete proposals aimed at small, effective improvements to socio-political deficiencies. To date it has delivered 31 projects in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, the US, Ireland, Sweden, Macedonia, the UK and The Netherlands. Zinggl was federal curator for contemporary art in Austria (1997-2000), a member of UNESCO’s cultural department (1998-2001) and director of the “Depot”, a venue in Vienna for debates on cultural topics (1997-2004). He has been a member of the Austrian parliament since 2004, and is head of the board of directors of the Museum of Modern Art in Vienna.

TIRDAD ZOLGHADR
Tirdad Zolghadr teaches at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College NY. He writes for frieze magazine and other publications, and last curated the Taipei Biennial with Hongjohn Lin 2010.
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